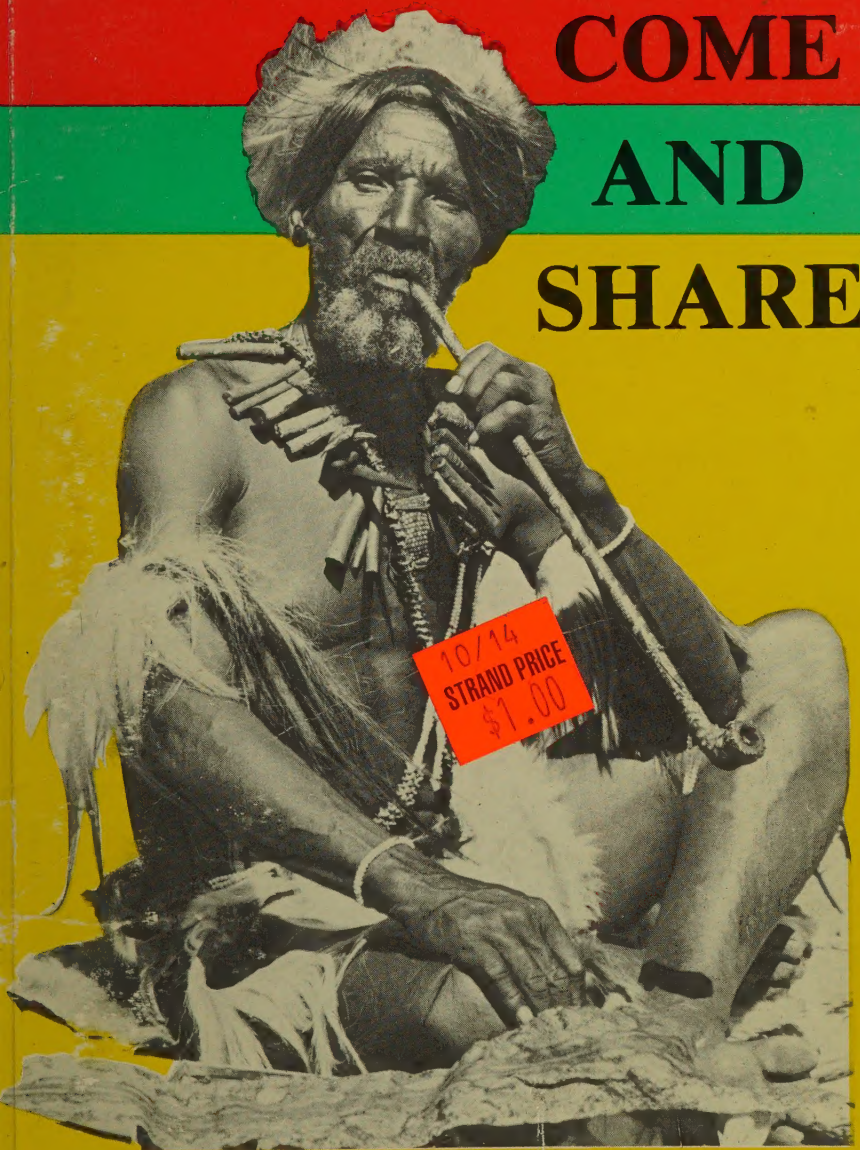


# COME AND SHARE



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**An Introduction to Christian Theology**

**Canaan Banana**



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An Introduction to Christian Theology

Canaan Sodindo Banana



MAMBO PRESS

Zimbabwe



MAMBO PRESS  
Gweru, P.O. Box 772  
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## PREFACE

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My point of departure for doing theology is my experience as an activist in the liberation struggle. It is not an articulation of theology of abstract theories. We come not as mere intellectuals driven by sheer academic curiosity and with a penchant for controversy, niceties and abstractions. We come not as mere theologians lost in the labyrinth of transcendental verses, busy trying to connect, to see the unity and epicentre of a moribund gospel that speaks of the glories of a kingdom to come and man's relationship to it.

My theology consists of a critical analysis of relationships. I try to interpret relationships which are testified by the cross. I observe the cross with a new vision. The cross is a testimony of relationships. The vertical axis of the cross reveals to us the God-Man relationship. It is a relationship characterised by sharing and reciprocity. It is a downward materiality and an upward spirituality communion. The horizontal axis of the cross testifies man's relation to fellow man or man's relationship to the state.

The Christian message seeks to develop, in fact its ultimate concern is to contribute towards a meaningful total transformation of the socio-economic and religio-political life. Humanness is a gift of God--the scriptures uncompromisingly deplore a deliberate negligence of human upliftment. The scriptures have a singular outright destiny for the individualist and apathy ridden people—Baptism by fire. SHARING and DEVELOPMENT make up the scope of this book. I seek to correlate the spark of humanity in us and the scriptures to the contemporary situation. Authentic and real life concerns rehabilitation of the displaced, paying a praxistic attention to the poverty stricken, to the segregated, the marginalised and to the oppressed.

A fruitful, meaningful and enjoyable life is a life of sharing--sharing material, intellectual and spiritual fruits. Authentic human dignity and self actualisation comes best

through SHARING. There is wealth in sharing and there is poverty in self aggrandisement.

My theology is not manufactured from ivory tower or white elephant pinnacles of bourgeoisie individualistic mentality. My theology originates from the ghetto. It emanates from mundane situations of crises, incertitude, an inchoate life and futility, all caused by individualism. We are co-partners with God in his divine redeeming mission. We should realise that we work with God in his continued sustenance and maintenance of real life.

My theology has been criticised as unsystematic but I make no apology. Why should there be systematic theology? Is there systematic agony or systematic hunger?

The colonisation of Zimbabwe in the 1890s, for example, gave rise to an imbalanced sharing of land and power. The African resistance to colonisation was a struggle against an imbalanced sharing. This African struggle took many forms over the years; this eventually led to the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. It is from such a background and experience that I write my theology. That experience is my primary source. Political independence is a development which should not end with the end of celebratory drums. Authentic development and revolution begins at the end of celebratory ululations. Celebrations mark sharing—people "COME AND SHARE" food and experiences in common. At Heroes Acre people "COME AND SHARE" an authentic meaning of life.

My book aims at creating a gainful dialogue with theological students (ministerial candidates), ghetto people, those that hold positions that enable them to have an impact on the destiny of the groping multitudes who look up to them for the right direction and all those interested in getting to grips with the authentication of true humanity in the world.

# INTRODUCTION

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*by Carl F. Hallencreutz, Uppsala*

## **The Legacy of the Alexandria Confession**

We African Christians gathered from all parts of the continent in the General Committee of the All Africa Conference of Churches, praise God for having brought us together in Alexandria, the holy city in which tradition places the martyrdom of St. Mark, the Evangelist.

Therefore God calls us to repentance  
He grants us forgiveness,  
He leads us to confess our faith with joy,  
in the great fellowship of the saints  
throughout the ages:

The Christian Community in Africa gives praise to God for His revelation through Jesus Christ, His Son and His constant presence among His people through the Holy Spirit.

As members of Christ's Church in Africa today, we have become conscious of the fact that we are inheritors of a rich tradition.

Our current concern with issues related to:

- economic justice
- the total liberation of men and women from every form of oppression and exploitation, and
- peace in Africa

as well as our contemporary search for authentic responses to Christ our Lord over the whole of our lives have led us to a deeper understanding of the heritage delivered to us by the Fathers of the Early Church in North Africa.

Our commitment to the struggle for human liberation is one of the ways we confess our faith in an Incarnate God, who loved us so much that He came among us in our own

human form, suffered, was crucified for our redemption and was raised for our justification. Such undeserved grace evokes a response of love and joy that we are seeking to express and to share in language, modes of spirituality, liturgical forms, patterns of mission and structures of organization that belong uniquely to our own cultural context.

This is what the Fathers of the Early Church in North Africa did with the Gospel brought to them by St. Mark. As a result they were able to develop a Christianity that was orthodox and catholic both in its outreach and in its cultural authenticity—and a Church which throughout the ages has endured persecution and martyrdom, and still survives, with renewed strength, until our day.

It is this heritage which inspires us to confess that it is the same Incarnate Christ who is calling us to respond to Him in terms that are authentic, faithful and relevant to the men and women in Africa today. His call is our present and our future. As this future breaks into the present, Christians in Africa have every reason to be joyful. Through the continuing work of Christ, God is charting His Highway of Freedom (Isaiah 40:3-5) from Alexandria to the Cape of Good Hope. By witnessing to the victorious power of the Cross (Romans 8) we Christians in Africa are encouraged to be co-workers with all those who are called by God to participate in His work.

The storms of history have sometimes led us astray. We have been too willing to rush off this Highway into dead-end paths. We have not always kept close round Christ. We have spoken against evil when it was convenient. We have often avoided suffering for the sake of others, thus refusing to follow His example (I Peter 2:21). We have preferred religiosity to listening to what the Holy Spirit might be whispering to us. We have struggled against colonialism and many other evils, and yet have built up again those things which we had torn down (Gal. 2:18). We confess that we have often been too paternalistic towards others. We have often condoned exploitation and oppression by foreigners. When we have condemned these evils we have condoned the

same things by our people. We have turned a blind eye to the structures of injustice in our societies, concentrating on the survival of our churches as institutions. We have been a stumbling block for too many. For these and many other sins, we are sorry and ask God to forgive us.

A full understanding of this forgiveness leaves us no choice but to continue the struggle for the full liberation of all men and women, and of their societies.

We accept that political liberation in Africa, and the Middle East, is part of this liberation. But the enslaving forces and the abuse of human rights in independent Africa point to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of Liberation. Liberation is therefore a CONTINUING STRUGGLE (Lusaka '74).

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, by the power which is at work among us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation evermore! (Ephesians 3:20-21)

(*Mission Trends No 3*, ed. by G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stansky [1978], 132 ff.)

Thus reads the Alexandria Confession, which is a significant milestone in contemporary African theological developments. The Alexandria Confession summarizes the findings of the first major theological encounter of Ancient Oriental Churches in North-Eastern Africa and Protestant member-churches of the All Africa Conference of Churches which took place in the Coptic Saint Mark Cathedral in Alexandria in 1976. Similar encounters have taken place between the Coptic Patriarch and spokesmen for the Roman Catholic Church in Africa.

The Alexandria Confession affirms the apostolic legacy of the Church in Africa. It also highlights the shared ecclesiastical concern for liberation from the bondage of oppression in South Africa and in other parts of Africa.

In terms of varying theological emphases within African Christianity I am inclined to suggest that there are three main trends that converge in the Alexandria Confession.

First of all there is the qualified theology of the Ancient Oriental Churches. For obvious reasons—historical and otherwise there are significant differences in the traditional Christian Spirituality and theological reflection in Egypt and Ethiopia. Basically, however, the theological thrust of the age-old churches in North-Eastern Africa is the same. The predominant emphasis is shaped by the Christological concerns of Cyrillos of Alexandria from the early fifth century, who reiterated and reinforced the intimate union of God and Jesus the Christ. Within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church this Christological legacy is interpreted and meditated on in terms of *tewahedo*.

The second and third theological emphasis which can be detected in the Alexandria Confession from 1976 are African Theology in the strict sense of the word and Black Theology. In the 1970's there was still an argument between these two schools of thought. African Theology in the strict sense explored the cultural and religious heritage of pre-colonial Africa and tried to express Christian convictions in integral dialogue with this heritage. Pioneers were significant African scholars such as Idowu from Nigeria, Mbiti from Kenya, Mulago from Zaire and Setiloane from South Africa. Black Theology on the other hand was inspired by the deliberate way radical Black American Theologians such as James Cone and Geraud Wilmore explored the symbolic significance of Blackness and interpreted the liberating message of the Gospel accordingly. Stephen Biko was an articulate Black Theologian from South Africa.

Both Black Theology and African Theology in the strict sense of the word informed the proceedings in Alexandria and could easily identify with the findings of the historical encounter.

The fourth school of thought within African Christianity is advanced within African Independent Church movements. In the field of ministerial training there had taken place informal contacts between the Coptic Church and

Kimbanguism in Zaire. However the political and ecclesiastical concerns of Mainstream-Christianity, which were expressed in the Alexandria Confession, were not the priorities of Independent Churches. Their way of doing theology continued to be informed more by inspired writings from within individual Independent Churches such as the collection of *Praises of the ama-Nazaretha* from South Africa and Johane Maranke's *New Revelations* from Zimbabwe.

The Alexandria Confession from 1976 is a theological clarion call of the Church in Africa. While recognizing the apostolic legacy of the Church in Africa it deliberately explores the notion of Liberation more particularly when addressing the plight of the Christians in South Africa.

Since 1976 the call for a coherent African Theology of Liberation has been reinforced not least by African theologians who have become involved in the progressive Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. In South Africa the Kairos-document pleads for such a prophetic African Theology of Liberation as the valid alternative to State Theology and Church Theology. Political developments in Ethiopia and in former Portuguese parts of Africa since the mid-1970's have qualified the religious and ideological context for doing theology in Africa.

It is against this broad background that we begin to realize the characteristics of Canaan Banana's theological contribution.

### **Canaan Banana's theological development**

Canaan Banana's personal background is Wesleyan Methodism from Western Zimbabwe. After ministerial and academic training at Epworth United Theological Seminary, Harare, and UNISA, Pretoria, the Rev. Canaan Banana emerged in the new political and ecumenical environment of Southern Rhodesia of the late 1960's as a distinct and independent Methodist pastor in Bulawayo and for a while in Masvingo. Contacts with Dr. Norman Thomas and in the national and regional Urban and Industrial Mission Movement inspired his progressive ministry.

From very early on Canaan Banana gave leadership in the radical ecclesiastical and political cause. Actively involved in the Bulawayo Council of Churches he encouraged the newly formed Rhodesia Council of Churches to rally behind the World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism from 1969. When his own denomination subsequently refuted the controversial WCC decision however, Banana protested and for a while opted out of his Methodist ministry.

On the political side Canaan Banana took an increasingly active part in the ecumenical mobilization against the Smith-Home Settlement Proposal from 1971 and in the formation of the African National Council (ANC) as a new and unifying internal political force. From its inception in December 1971 to the middle of 1973 Banana served as the vice President of the new movement. In 1973, however, he left Rhodesia without proper traveling documents via Botswana to face new political and academic responsibilities in the United States.

This very active period of intense involvement in the development of his country were theologically very formative years for Pastor Banana. His very exciting ecumenical experiences which also included intimate involvement in the cause of the progressive Catholic periodical *Moto*, reinforced his deliberate anti-colonial convictions. He identified the link between the prevailing imperialist order and the Capitalist economic system and opted for Socialism qualified by traditional African collectivism as the necessary option for a future free Zimbabwe. In fact there are interesting parallels between the African Socialisms of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and the able trade unionist Tom Mboya from Kenya on the one hand and the emerging political theology of the young Canaan Banana on the other.

Canaan Banana, thus, had already a distinct theological profile when he faced the increasingly polarized scene in the United States from 1975 onwards. He registered, of course, the new and radical features of Black Theology, which challenged Black Churches in the United States after the

death of Martin Luther King. He also registered with interest the new theological signals from Latin America after the Catholic Bishops Conference in Medellin in 1968. Although he did not identify fully with the characteristic *dependencia*-paradigm, which Gustavo Gutierrez integrated with his theology of liberation, Banana could recognize parallel concerns of his emerging political theology and the new Latin American Theology of Liberation. In his *Theology of Promise* from 1982 Canaan Banana does in fact include more references to the new Latin American theology of liberation than to contemporary items of North American or South African Black Theology.

Banana's most appealing theological left-over from his brief *séjour* in the United States is his collection of theological and political poems which was called *The Gospel according to the Ghetto* when it was first published in 1974. Its nearest Latin American parallel is no doubt the writings of Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaraguan monk, poet and politician. In 1981 there was published an extended edition of *The Gospel according to the Ghetto* in Zimbabwe by Mambo Press-the third edition is just recently published.

Back in his own country from 1975 Canaan Banana had to face the increasing repression of the illegal minority regime. Instead of being allowed to take up theological teaching at Epworth he was detained and restricted to the Bulawayo area. Even so he was able to actively renew his contacts with ANC. Banana was in fact included in the ANC delegation to the Constitutional Conference in Geneva at the end of 1976.

It was during that Conference that Canaan Banana took his crucial decision and crossed the floor. He joined the ZANU(PF) delegation under Robert Mugabe. Back in Zimbabwe he launched the People's Movement as the internal political wing of ZANU(PF). This attempt was crushed, however, and Banana was again taken captive and kept in solitary confinement. He was not released until 1979, when Lord Soames on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in Great Britain resumed control of what was then called

Zimbabwe-Rhodesia during a period of transition to majority rule.

With his fertile ecumenical involvement from the late 1960's to 1973 and with his intense theological and political interactions in the United States from 1973 to 1975 Canaan Banana from 1975 until Independence passed through his third formative phase in the development of his political theology. That was a time marked by solitary confinement, which Banana admits crystalized his thinking further. As Paul Gifford in the first scholarly study of the theology of Canaan Banana quotes from his interview with the then State President: "When you are in solitary confinement you have all the time in the world to reflect on your whole position; why am I here in gaol? What's all this about?" In his recently published diary from the prison Banana illustrates in a most involved way what these reflections contained.

Since Zimbabwe's Independence the continued development of Canaan Banana's theological thought has so far passed through two phases. The first covers the period from April 1980 to December 1987, when the Methodist pastor and former prisoner "and security risk", the Rev. Comrade Canaan Banana, served as State President under the First Constitution of the Independent Republic of Zimbabwe.

In addition to his demanding representative responsibilities as Head of State Canaan Banana from 1980 to 1987 devoted a considerable amount of time and mental energy to expound his theology further by exploring issues in the field of religion and politics with a view to an increased and more relevant Church involvement in the development of Zimbabwe as a sovereign state. In his significant contribution to *Church and State in Zimbabwe* (1988) Paul Gifford has listed no less than 34 substantial sermons or theological addresses by Canaan Banana as State President. In addition there is the publication of three involved books, i.e. the extended *The Gospel according to the Ghetto* from 1981, *Theology of Promise* from 1982, and *Towards a Socialist Ethos* from 1987. In the 1981 edition of *The Gospel according to the Ghetto* there are included some

of Banana's major theological speeches from 1980 to 1981. In the 1990 edition Banana has included some addresses from his visit to sovereign Namibia. In addition Canaan Banana's inaugural address to the Sixth Conference of the International Association of Mission Studies in Harare, 9 January 1985, is published in the Conference volume *Mission Studies 2* (1985). His keynote address *Christianity and the Struggle for Socialism in Zimbabwe Today* at a seminar on Socialism and Religion, Harare, 27 February 1987 is published as a separate volume.

As his theology prior to April 1980 had evolved from within the struggle for Zimbabwe and expressed a sincere search for ecclesiastical and theological relevance, Canaan Banana as State President-cum-theologian saw his primary task being to challenge the churches and not least the Protestant mainstream-churches—to wholeheartedly involve themselves in the grand project of building and developing a free and egalitarian Socialist Zimbabwe. In fact it seems as if the committed Wesleyan Methodist Canaan Banana was particularly entrusted with the task of trying to carry the Protestant churches with him, whilst the Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, and his Deputy, Simon Muzenda, interacted more easily with the Roman Catholic Church and called her to continued relevance.

Church and Socialism, thus, emerged as the main theme in the more elaborate theology of Canaan Banana as the State President. As such it does reflect both similarities and differences with the parallel concerns of radical representatives of Latin American Liberation-theology.

The starting-point is obviously different. Whilst Guitérrez, Segundo, Sobrino and others speak from the underside of history on behalf of the Church of the Poor, Canaan Banana as Head of State speaks from a position of strength. However, he deliberately qualifies that position. His is a government of the povo and he calls the church to be involved as "a Proletarian Church" (cf. *Theology of Promise* (1982), 135-147).

When Canaan Banana as State President elaborates on his view of Socialism and tries to identify the root-causes of

the prevailing unjust social and economic conditions in Independent Zimbabwe which has had to inherit a decidedly dualistic economy from the colonial regime, he can, indeed, like his theological colleagues from Latin America, make use of Marxist tools of analysis. In this regard he does not even shy away from the thorny issue of class-analysis.

However Canaan Banana's use of Marxism is independent and deliberately revisionistic. He understands scientific materialism primarily in pragmatic terms as a rational assessment of proper means to achieve agreed political objectives. Furthermore he admits the inspirational and not just reflective role of religion as a necessary prerequisite for a relevant African Theology of Liberation.

This means that Canaan Banana's view of Socialism is quite involved. In *Theology of Promise*, which is a comprehensive treatise, where Banana explores a lot of subjects from educational policies in new Zimbabwe to Church and State in Zimbabwe and Africa, he illustrates how three main sources inform his political philosophy. In the first place there is traditional African collectivism (*Theology of Promise* [1982], 47-50), secondly there is the impact of ideologues such as Karl Marx and Mao Tse-tung (*ibid.*, 20ff, 76 f. and 122-129); thirdly there is his own understanding of Jesus and his teaching of the Kingdom of God (*ibid.*, 129—133).

Compared to *Theology of Promise* Banana's last major theological contribution when still the State President i.e. *Towards a Socialist Ethos*, is a more straight-forward exposition of his Christian Socialism. In one significant regard he is more articulate when he spells out in this contribution what informs his general interpretative perspective compared to what he actually said in *Theology of Promise*. He is more explicit when he acknowledges the basic African prerequisites for his Socialism and his argument deserves to be quoted:

For us the ethics of collectivism and the African system of the extended family remain the only positive and redemptive force in a world where there is so much paralyzing coldness and insensitivity to the plight of the

marginalized and the dispossessed. African tradition and culture maintain that we are our brother's keeper. No human soul can be regarded as a stranger and an intruder. In fact, African tradition and culture affirm the solidarity of all creation: the animals and birds, the trees and rivers.

There is no wild life in our vocabulary; all life is domestic. We do not talk of colleagues or workmates: we talk of brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, sons and daughters. This is the heart of African culture. We believe that the individual must die in order to find his true self within the context of the collective. John Mbiti puts it even more graphically: "You are because I am, I am because you are, we are because you are, you are because we are" (*Towards a Socialist Ethos* [1987], 12 f.).

In the same way Banana goes on and argues for an integral dialogue of Christian Theology and traditional collectivism in a way which runs parallel to what I early on called African theology in the strict sense (*ibid.*, 17-22).

These illustrations of more involved references in *Towards a Socialist Ethos* to the African background of Canaan Banana's Christian Socialism do not necessarily imply a major change in the general theological orientation of the State President after 1982. Instead they reinforce the African context of Banana's political theology and suggest that the comparative analysis of this theology and radical Latin American Liberation-theologies should not be pressed too far. There seem, in fact, to be more substantial parallels between the State President Canaan Banana's political theology and Mwalimu Nyerere's policy of *ujamaa*. Incidentally the Tanzanian Mwalimu was himself aware of certain structural similarities of his ideological concerns and significant new features in Latin American theology and Church-life after Medellin 1968.

As already illustrated Canaan Banana as State President did not just spell out his Christian Socialism in isolation. He also explored ecclesiastical issues in order to challenge

Zimbabwean Christianity to become relevantly involved in the just cause of nation-building. In this ecclesiological pursuit, too, there are certain similarities with contemporary radical Latin American ecclesiology as it is developed in the most advanced form by Leonardo Boff.

Canaan Banana adopted a deliberately functionalist view of the Church as an adequate instrument of relevant social change. He explicitly rejected isolated ecclesiastical empire-building. He elaborated on his view of the Church of the People (*Theology of Promise* [1988], 135-147) and pleaded for authentic Africanization of Church structures (*Towards a Socialist Ethos* [1987], 17-22).

This functionalist ecclesiology corresponds to Canaan Banana's very dynamic and quite optimistic "Vision of Man". In *Theology of Promise* he portrays the potential of humankind dialectically related to the changing social environment of different human communities. For that reason he suggests that it is imperative to remove everything that impedes the development towards a free and just and egalitarian society. The Church is called upon to favour that cause (*Theology of Promise* [1982], 15-22 and 129-133).

In continued theological exchange in Zimbabwe, however, questions have been raised as to whether this optimistic anthropology is sufficient according to more traditional Church theology. Arguments along this line may have negatively affected the more hesitant response from Church leaders to the challenge of the State President.

With the constitutional amendment and introduction of Executive Presidency front January 1st 1988, Canaan Banana terminated his official ministry and handed over his political responsibilities to Robert Mugabe. As Ex-President, who completed his term as public service with dignity, however, he since then preserves a semi-official position in the public life of Zimbabwe.

Having left his former official duties behind him Canaan Banana has been released to devote himself more independently to theological teaching and research. He was early on offered an Honourary Professorship in the Department of Religious Studies Classics and Philosophy of

University of Zimbabwe. He also lectures at Epworth United Theological Seminary thereby facing responsibilities which were anticipated but refuted in 1975. Thus from January 1st 1988 there has begun the second phase in the development of Canaan Banana's theological ministry in Independent Zimbabwe.

In this second phase Professor Banana has not been spared from official responsibilities for the sake of his country. Most significantly he served as the General Editor of *Turmoil and Tenacity. Zimbabwe 1890-1990*, which is the comprehensive commemoration volume of Zimbabwe's struggle for Independence. In addition to his overall editorial responsibilities, which also included the writing of a General Introduction (*Turmoil and Tenacity* [1990], 1-12). Banana submitted a chapter of his own on the role of the Church in the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe, which also draws from the previous research report *Church and State in Zimbabwe* (*ibid.*, 197-210).

More in line with his specific theological objectives Canaan Banana since January 1st 1988 has launched two significant research and educational projects. The first is to explore- parallel to ongoing studies in the University Department of History—the role and contribution of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe to political developments prior to and after Independence. The second is to launch this introduction to Christian Theology.

### **Come and Share in African Theology**

This summary survey of the size and evolution of Canaan Banana's political theology has convincingly proved that with his remarkable experiences from Church and politics, his sharpness of focus and the depth of his existentialist involvement, Professor Banana occupies a position of his own in African Theology. If there is need for a label to classify his theological pursuit the most relevant may be African Theology of Liberation which is true to the Alexandria Confession. It is from within this position that Canaan Banana spells out this introduction to Christian Theology.

There have, of course, been theological treatises advanced previously in the brief—or if you include the Ancient Orthodox traditions the quite long—history of African theology. Though his approach is basically phenomenological Idowo's systematic exposition of various dimensions of the divinity Olodumare of the Yoruba is a theological venture like John Mbiti's ambitious attempts to structure in a coherent way different African concepts of God. It is quite rewarding also to follow how the doyen of Zairian Catholic theology, Father Mulago, pioneered a reinterpretation of Christian theology in terms of *force vital*, or how Charles Nyamiti from Tanzania spells out his African christology in terms of the mediating role of the Ancestors.

However less than more coherent expositions of Christian theology from within an African interpretative context contemporary theological developments in Africa are qualified by the pursuit of two different though most certainly equally important and demanding issues. The first is to explore further—sometimes in an apologetical vein—the preconditions of authentic theological interaction with the traditional religious and cultural legacy. The other is to address and explore involved political and socio-ethical issues from a Christian standpoint. The first of these two additional theological issues is ably pursued by distinguished spokesmen of the African *oikoumene* such as Gabriel Setiloane and John Pobee. The second issue has captured even greater attention. Canaan Banana's political theology as State President provides just one distinct and substantial contribution to that discussion. From the Catholic side the Camerounian J. Éla's plea for the Church of the Poor seems to be the most provocative Catholic input.

So far there are, thus, comparatively few deliberate attempts to provide a coherent exposition of Christian theology from within a distinct African interpretative framework. There are no real African parallels to Kanzo Kitamori's Japanese *Theology of the Pain of God* or Gustavo Guitérrez *Theology of Liberation*.

It is against this background that Canaan Banana's *Come and Share* becomes most significant. Here Professor Banana

takes a step further from the position of political theology that he spelled out as State President. Here there is a deliberate attempt not just to elaborate on the preconditions for doing theology in Africa but to expound Christian theology from within a specific African context.

In the first three chapters Canaan Banana sets the scene and spells out the preconditions of his Christian Theology. Chapter One illustrates the Zimbabwean context where Church and State ten years after Independence interact in the search for an egalitarian society. In Chapter Two Banana provides a concentrated thematic account of the legacy of traditional African Religion, which qualifies the theoretical of his exposition of Christian Theology in Zimbabwe. As Canaan Banana convincingly argues in Chapter Three, this venture from a methodological point of view should be qualified by a deliberate interaction of traditional African mythology and Christian Revelation conveyed in Scripture and tradition. In Chapter Four Banana thus, spells out his Christian Theology of Creation and History against the background of the traditional Shona *Mwedzi* myth.

However as implied in Chapter One traditional African Mythology is only one element in the complex theoretical climate of Independent Zimbabwe. There is also Marxist Socialism and Canaan Banana pursues his arguments further in Chapter Five by allowing Historical Materialism and the Marxist view of the classless society to interact with his Christian Philosophy of History and his assessment of the concrete socio-political implications of the Christian references to the Kingdom of God.

Against this background Canaan Banana moves on to Christology. He interprets in Chapters Six and Seven the ministry and message of Jesus Christ with reference both to the mediating and reconciling role of the Ancestors and to the societal values of Socialism.

In Chapter Eight Professor Banana elaborates further on the functionalist ecclesiology which he advanced and applied critically as State President. His discussion of the Church of the People and authentic indigenization is pursued with reference to the specific resources of the Church as a

sacramental community. Thus he provides a more comprehensive view of the Church than what he was able to do in *Theology of Promise* and *Towards a Social Ethos*. The final Chapter is devoted to Christian Eschatology. Canaan Banana starts off by de-eschatologizing simplistic and other-worldly expectations. He deliberately re-affirms that the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God implies a straight forward call to relevance now. However he moves on in a comprehensively re-eschatological vein by spelling out the Christian understanding of Death and presenting an authentically African interpretation of the returning Christ as *Obuyiswayo*.

Professor Banana humbly classifies his *Come and Share* as an introduction to Christian Theology. There are two implications here. The first is that *Come and Share* is advanced as an introduction for ministerial candidates and under-graduate students who want to better structure their own Christian-theological reflections. The second is more involved: *Come and Share* is an invitation to more profound reflections within the African theological community on how Christian theology shall be expanded further in Africa today and tomorrow.



# 1 Church and State

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## Shared concerns

In this introductory chapter of my book I will look at the position of the Church towards development, its theological reflection and how it is related to the state.

Churches are conscious of the struggle of the oppressed and the marginalised people in third world countries and world wide. They are involved in the campaign for liberation and humanisation of our societies bringing about socio-economic and religio-political changes. During the Medellin Conference in 1968 and later during the Puebla Conference the Latin American Bishops uncompromisingly took a preferential option for the poor.

... It appears to be a time of zeal for full emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, of personal maturity and of collective intergration.

[Medellin,'Introduction'] (1)

The resolution of these Latin American Bishops shows that the church there had a new vision. It visualised the emergence of a new epoch of establishing the anticipated Kingdom of God. Churches world wide are at pains trying to ameliorate deplorable socio-economic and religio-politico quagmires in which communities tread today. The church's theological position is of a critical reflection on a pragmatic process of commitment to redeeming both the oppressors and the victims of oppression. Theologising is time and place specific, the church articulates its theological praxes from concrete contexts.

This understanding logically leads us to now critically examine the vision of the church and its relationship to the state.

Part of the church's role is to reconcile all men and women and to bring them into unison and fellowship with one another across cultural, religious, racial and regional

boundaries. The church has a mission in society, the mission of renewal, reassurance and reaffirmation of basic human rights among the oppressed, the wretched and the marginalised. The church's primary concern therefore is service to humankind and to make an intensification of the preferential option for the poor and the marginalised. The new vision of the church is that concept of militancy. The problems that undermine man's humanity have to be tackled on a wider and multi-dimensional front through the church's new vision. It is a new vision that seeks to bring self-actualisation to

the lowly peasant breaking the clod; the scruffy, greasy worker broken and gagged by fatigue of overwork; the unemployed youth, helplessly hoping for a job that never comes; the parentless vagrant, rummaging through dustbins for crumbly bread and discarded morsels; the emaciated and disabled tramp singing a faint hymnal not to elicit donations... (2)

Gone are the days when churches were far from being at odds with oppressive forces. The times when churches theorised hopes and promises without taking a critical stance and praxes. The church has a strong and positive role to play in national development. It must exercise a prophetic voice and democratise that voice in the sense that it becomes an expression of popular will of its entire membership. The church must have concerns of the people at heart. The concerns of the people are its concerns. The church in relation to programmes of national development ought to ensure regard for the human factor. Authentic development comes through sharing, the theme of sharing is at the very heart of the gospel. This has been seen in the church's contribution to the building of schools, clinics and water borehole projects. These are also concerns of the state. The state aims at bringing meaningful development to the people. The church and the state should complement one another on development through sharing and contribution.

In Zimbabwe, for example, the social and economic stability is being threatened by high rates of unemployment, high numbers of school leavers and landlessness in the

generality of the people. The church is sincerely concerned with the unbalanced sharing of the land. It ought to be equally concerned with the sharing of material, spiritual and intellectual goods. These facts and others hereunder serve to foster a need for a viable relationship between the church and the state.

The relationship between the state and the church in Zimbabwe has been shaped by history. The earliest Christian presence in Zimbabwe was in the form of chaplains who accompanied traders and later colonial administrators to overseas trading posts or colonies. Most of them were drawn from the ranks of Christian orders and missionary societies. Historical critiques like Roger Peaden, Chengetai Zvobgo and Ngwabi Bhebhe record that during colonization some missionaries provided benefits for civilisation to the conquered peoples, for example, education, medical technology and manpower development. It should be noted, however, that the theological basis of this missionary work was laced by racial and imperialistic manoeuvres (3). It provided the realisation of what theologically came to be known as the "white man's burden". A.E. Houseman craftily expressed it in his poem "The White Man's Burden".

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives need;

To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child. ...

Take up the White Man's burden—  
The savage wars of peace—  
Fill full the mouth of famine  
And bid the sickness cease

And when the goal is nearest

The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen folly  
Bring all your hope to naught ... (4)

The poem goes on to show how the white man had a burden of bringing light to "the dark continent", Africa. The poem bears the marks of the claims for the divine commission given by God to the white man to civilise the whole world.

These critics also argue that Christianity denigrated African cultures and African traditions, replacing those with Western values and systems, thus destroying the social fabric of African societies, rendering them pliable to imperial conquest and exploitation by imperialist capital. (5)

The distorted view of Africans had profound effects on the church's role in the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe. (6) In fact, it had an effect on both the Africans and the Europeans because it created an African with a sense of self-rejection and dejection and it created a white with a sense of conceit and self-superiority. The Africans were regarded as primitive, uncivilised and as devoid of the slightest tinge of enlightenment. This denuded the spirit of togetherness and communal sharing which was within the African people. This led the church to adopt an attitude of trying to grant a more meaningful life by emphasising a life of togetherness and sharing. It should be pointed out here that in the case of Zimbabwe the period 1921 to 1970 was dominated by the so-called franchise question for Africans. The church played an important part in the articulation of African participation in the political process. (7) Among the early missionaries, the strongest advocates for African participation in government were the Anglican missionary, Reverend Arthur Cripps, Methodist missionary Reverend John White and Roman Catholic Bishop Donald Lamont. Some of the missionaries went on even to criticise the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Ian Smith's government. In the forefront of this opposition was Bishop Skelton. He was later followed by a number of leaders of other mainstream churches.

It must be noted that by a combination of liberal democracy and evangelical aims, the missions were forerunners in the provision of services in skills training. As I have indicated before, many missionary schools such as M'sume, Manama, Masase and Chegato high schools were built by the Lutheran missionaries. For each of these schools a hospital was built to cater for the medical needs of the people there. The Roman Catholic church established manpower training centres where such courses as secretarial and business studies are taught. It should be noted that most of the nationalist leaders who championed the cause of freedom were products of these missionary institutions. Thus the forces that were to wrest power from the colonial states were in one way or another associated with the church. (8) As has been indicated, this nationalistic enlightenment led to different responses from the missionaries. Spearheading the revolutionary support towards the liberation struggle was the World Council of Churches (WCC). In response to the struggle, the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1970 took a decision to support practically the efforts of the liberation by giving financial and moral support. Of specific mention and significance is the role played by the Roman Catholic Church. The formation of the Catholic Commission of Peace and Justice was a stepping stone towards the development of humanness. In addition, Catholic Bishops wrote pastoral letters which polemically challenged the legitimacy and legality of the Rhodesian regime.

As the situation along the Eastern Highlands border areas deteriorated during the war, many civilians were murdered callously and many other people were displaced. Through the Christian Care, an arm of the Christian Council, the church contributed and provided relief and other services to these communities. It is through these contributions and services that we see the efficacy of sharing. It is a life of sharing which brings self-affirmation, self-actualisation and an affirmation of authentic humanity.

Chief Re kai Tangwena's people went on an uprising against the iniquitous Rhodesian power structures. During

the upheavals, many children were displaced. These children were called the "Matangwena". Several mission schools like the Triashill, St Barbara and St Theresa took care of all these displaced children.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that the church emphasises the idea of sharing so as to edify humanness. We note that the church had an ambivalent position. Officially it had an indifferent and negative response to the settlers, government. The official position of the church as has been discussed, was that of indifference to the government and a protracted concern of the decadents and the needy. Unofficially, some of the white missionaries identified themselves with the whims and aspirations of the people. This created some divisions within the churches because as the struggle advanced people became increasingly conscientised of the need for them to have their share of power. It was not a struggle to obtain and monopolise power, it was a struggle which aimed at bringing about a sharing of power so as to enable the marginalised to have a control of their own destiny. Some sections of the church did not appreciate the political dynamics so they took long to embrace the worthiness of the cause of the struggling masses. As was inevitable, the people's struggle could not be abated. With or without the backing of the church, the struggle continued with increasing intensity and it became clear that the march towards freedom and independence was irreversible.

At independence in 1980, the church had problems of adjustment and acclimatisation with the new social order. The complications lay with the new ideology of Marxist-Leninist theories which was seen as emphasising materialism more than spiritual goods. The other complexity arose from the fear of a one party system and from the fact that the church had enjoyed a long spell of flirtation with colonialism and as I have mentioned in *Towards a Socialist Ethos*, that the church had participated in the designs and machinations of settler colonialism. This state of suspicion and mistrust on the part of the government and the state of timidity and passivity on the part of the church gradually deteriorated to

unacceptable levels. Of particular interest, however, is that the Church formed a formidable front with a genuine desire to embark on human actualising projects.

The policy of reconciliation and the scrapping of the notorious emergency powers by the government was of profound significance to the church. A healthy sense of mutual partnership in developing the nation was created by these government's steps towards a fuller affirmation of humanness. It is of importance to mention also that my position as, both, president of the nation and as a clergyman naturally made a truce which smoothed the relations between the church and the state. This mutual togetherness and the complementarity comes as an important phenomenon in the efforts to deal with the problem of underdevelopment. Robert Mugabe, in the 1985 Election Manifesto states that;

Unity is our first task towards the attainment of a just society where everyone's needs will be met. Zimbabwe will only develop when colour, tribe, sex, language and religion are no longer of consequence in determining how our wealth is to be distributed.

(9)

The above quotation seems to underline the government's liberal open invitation to everyone to play a part in development regardless of religious or political affiliation. The issue of the "Unity Pact"—a long cherished dream signified the dawning of development in its fullest sense. It meant the dawning of a democratic life of freedom, interethnic, intercultural and a life of intersocial sharing and of unimpeded development.

Both the religious groups and the state came together and shared a responsibility of attending to socio-economic and the religio-political problems which beset the workers and the peasants. They both share the responsibility of actualising humanity by keeping an eye on such issues as: Human Rights and democracy, loss of human life as a result of civil wars or as a result of the wanton carnage and brutal callous deaths experienced in South Africa, ecological crises through desertification or negligence in maintaining the environmental resources like air, land, water and vegetation,

the epidemic of unemployment, and the plummeting standards of living.

The church cannot be impervious and indifferent when it sees these pathetic experiences. It should take stock of history. Our failures here, for instance, economic setbacks, have to be frontically combated. The militant voice of the church authorises us to reorder our societies and gear ourselves towards the coming kingdom. The future is in our hands, it should be re-ordered in an endeavour to create the Kingdom of God. This kingdom should be established meticulously bearing in mind that we have borrowed this inheritance and environment from our children.

Political liberation facilitates rapid changes towards establishing the Kingdom of God. It is folly at a stupendous scale to glorify and be content with "flag independence". Authentic liberation is a continuous process whose beginning should be marked by the end of political independence ululations. The church should not stand aloof as a spectator or as an honoured guest, it should emerge as an active participant in this work which was begun by Christ.

This work has to do with humankind; it is about people and for all people for the betterment of life. Christ's Church is not only concerned with the chosen few in the respective churches or denominations, but with the whole of society and brotherhood of man/woman outside the circle of the converted, because all people are God's creation. On this note I have sometime articulated that,

The church has a mission in society, the mission of renewal, reassurance and reaffirmation of basic human rights among the oppressed. As Christians, our primary focus and commission is service to humankind, and our concern is with his liberation from all physical and spiritual impediments that hinder his becoming fully human.

I have also indicated that,

The problems that undermine man's humanity have of necessity, to be tackled on a wider and multi-dimensional front, including the political, social,

economic as well as spiritual front. Therein must the church find its mission and calling. (10)

It is from the above consideration that the relationship of the church and state should be clearly defined. The church should not be an institution apart. Christians and non-Christians must march together in their struggle to better the world. The world should be looked upon as the agenda of the church. John Wesley once said, "I look upon the world as my parish". John Wesley's statement in some way affirms the basic mission of Jesus,

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke, 4:18-19)

Christ associated himself with the downtrodden and those despised by the society. Jesus was born of a modest family and he understood the difficulties of the marginalised through personal experience. Jesus continues to identify himself with the underdogs. The fact that he brings good news to the poor, he tells a rich young ruler to sell his property and give to the poor, he feeds the 4000 and the 5000, he turns water into wine and he mixes with the rank and file. The rest of the mission is filled with the plight of the oppressed.

The church ought to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It needs to probe into the contemporary socio-economic problems of society. This would therefore indirectly mean that the church has come as a power which empowers people to realise their hopes and aspirations.

Since the attainment of independence in 1980, the question of development had been a major concern and activity of the government and the people of Zimbabwe. When we speak of development, we are speaking of sharing material, spiritual and intellectual goods.

## **Theology of Development**

Political maturity is one of the virtues we have to acquire and share. This should bring about democratic tolerance. The civil strife that obtained before the unity accord that impeded development has been replaced by peace, stability and freedom. This is a freedom which allows unimpeded social, cultural, religious and national identity. In the sphere of religion we have seen a development towards looking at the relationship between African traditional religion and Christianity and the movement towards contextualisation of Christianity. The religious or cultural diversity that exists should not be used to promote factionalism and individualism, it should rather be looked upon as "unity in diversity". Development concerns people in a group working together to raise their standard of living or to improve their quality of life or conditions of living. Our theology should not become a perpetual footnote theology of Western theology. We have to develop our own theological guidelines. In the development of this theology, it is very important not to view it as purely an exercise of hallucination or sentimentalisation. Liberation theology must be developed from the grassroots. The material needs of the people in the ghetto must define our theology. The Bible is another source of our theology but we can not be slaves of this sole source,— we must define our own theology which emanates from our own peculiar circumstances. Development concerns people in a given society to improve their quality of life. Defined theologically, it concerns God's people recognising their potential and creativity making the best use of what God had given to them to create a new society, here and now, in which all "may have life and have it abundantly" (John, 10:10). As discussed above, development is a process in which people seek the elimination of all forces that keep humanity in misery, such as sickness and death, poverty and hunger, ignorance and superstition, exploitation and discrimination of people by people. Development is a quest for a new and joyful society and as such, it envisions the emergence of a new humanity, a new heaven and a new earth (11). The second phase of the struggle for liberation

should express itself through the development of a national policy of education that lays emphasis on education with production. It also should seek to express itself through a sound medical and health care programme that will make these facilities accessible to all, of a viable economic and political structure that will make it possible for the individual and the communities to develop themselves and protect the liberties won after a bitter struggle (12).

According to Ambrose Moyo, development should improve the quality of life. It is at this point that the church should join hands with the state to develop. He thus argues that,

... a liberation process, another stage in the struggle for the creation of a just and participatory society. The initiative for such a process must come from the people themselves and it cannot merely be brought about by a massive infusion of capital under the control of foreign agencies. (13)

It should therefore be noted that development concerns the whole human being. It is an effort towards humanisation and as such it is a process in which is manifest God's continuous creativity to bring his entire creation to fruition. The church should thus look for a theology of development.

Prior to independence the majority of the schools, teachers, training colleges, hospitals, clinics and nurses' training schools had been established and were financed by the churches. The churches' participation in development after independence began with reconstruction of the schools, hospitals, clinics and other facilities which had been destroyed during the war. Noticeably, the churches have initiated new programmes and shared their initiatives with government. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe through the Lutheran World Federation, started various water projects (14). It has been noted that the projects started just as a self-help project by communal farmers or dwellers who wanted water for irrigation. This led to initial stages of some co-operatives. Ambrose Moyo notes that,

... examples of the church's active participation include the rehabilitation of former combatants at

Oasis, the Zimbabwe Christian Council and the Lutheran World Federation joint resettlement projects at Kuwadzana, the Majoda Farm (Gwanda) project, the cattle rehabilitation project...(15)

It was after the attainment of political independence that Zimbabwe's masses developed a critical awareness and an ability to compare the actual with the possible, and they are now fully convinced that their future has to be and must be different from the deprivations of yester-years. Yesterday they lived in the anguish of unrealised but quite realisable humanity—and any structures that still prevent that realisation of this possibility must be dismantled.

It is from the above analysis that we note Moyo introducing a "theology of development". To him it is a theology of liberation, for it emerges from within the context of a struggle for freedom from the shackles of poverty, underdevelopment and economic domination by international corporations (16). It is borne out of the people's effort to affirm their dignity and their identity as a people of God and their hope for deliverance from poverty and underdevelopment. Development can be viewed theologically as God's continuous creativity mainly through human beings. It is God working through humanity to create a just social order. According to the Genesis account of the universal creation, it portrays how God continuously resolves the chaos that is between light and darkness (Genesis 1:26-30). Thus the continuous creativity of God is today expressed through human activity in history as people develop or reshape God's original creation in order to meet their needs (17). The church is Christ's representative here on earth (2 Corinthians 5: 20). Like Christ, its mission is to make "all things new", to create new attitudes, new relationships, new values and create a new human being. Therefore Jesus' mission was to create a new order, one which would start here and now, hence his concern for the underdeveloped. The Church and state should thus join forces together in complementarity. The state's sole goal is to develop the nation, Jesus' word affirms that development is both individual and collective, it is both a spiritual and

material development through sharing. The Kingdom of God challenges the believer and the non-believer to render service to the world. The church cannot evade the demand for structural changes and for political and economic participation for the powerless. So the state identifies with the church and the church identifies with the state in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

### **Socialist Ethos**

It is most convenient to focus our attention on the relations which exist among Christianity, Socialism and the State. In the case of Zimbabwe, as has been indicated before, the socialist ideology was chosen by the government. This is explicitly expressed in the ZANU PF Manifesto of 1985.

... to bring about socialism on the basis of a scientific analysis of our situation. Scientific socialism was then set as Zimbabwe's goal ... (18).

Socialism is a human ideology which seeks to advance the living standards of all people and to promote the betterment of society. The church re-assesses critically the implications of the gospels in a new social, political and economic climate. The church's mission is to formulate new theological concepts and practices that relate the people's faith to their everyday problems (19). I emphasise the fact that the church has the opportunity to evolve a theology that encompasses a socialist transformation. It should not be frightened into a state theological paralysis at the mention of the word socialism (20). It should be stated that the concept of a classless society is essentially theological. Christianity is in the midst of the struggle to establish the ideal society where all people live as one and share the meaning of life in common. The church stands by the ideals which Christ stood for— liberation, freedom, sharing, equality and love are authentic ideals which Christ lived for. The church has an obligation of carving out an authentic and a more human environment, an authentic community where indigence and underdevelopment would be but vague memories of a dead past.

I have previously correlated socialism and religion in these terms,

... I want to submit that for me socialism is the legitimate child of Christianity and socialism has everything to do with human destiny. Both share a vision, a vision of a brave new world where man occupies the golden stool of fullness, of justice, of equality and of abundance to speak of Christianity and socialism is to speak of man's struggle today and man's struggle tomorrow for out of the rabble of injustice, and of oppression flowers a brave new world where each's existence is a concern for all, and all for each (21).

Thus if the implementation of the socialist ideology has to succeed, the church and the state should complement each other in an effort to establish the Kingdom of God. We first look at Zimbabwe's experiment with democracy.

Jesus' message seeks to establish a situation whereby all the people share with one another in love, harmony and grace. The poor, the marginalised and the oppressed form a constituency to which Jesus' message is addressed. This constituency of the poor continues to be an important unit to which unity and solidarity, togetherness and sharing should be addressed so as to bring to a cessation their qualms and eventually ameliorating their socio-economic and their religio-politico quandary. In *The Gospel According to the Ghetto* I have argued that the oppressed are their own liberators. Theology genuflects to a God who teaches people how "to demand our share of gold" (22). Individualism is castigated unreservedly. This is a theology of Amos, a theology which rebukes the oppressors and their consumeristic tendencies. Both the church and the state's goal is to safeguard humanness. They both seek to promote peace, love, reconciliation, togetherness, sharing and development.

Having discussed the mutual complementarity of the state and the church in national, spiritual and intellectual development, it is most convenient to focus particular

attention on a theological correlation of the classless society concept to the Kingdom of God.

### **Zimbabwe's Doses of Democracy**

What were the primary and immediate political objectives at Zimbabwe's independence? National unity, peace and stability, were primary and immediate. To achieve these, a government of National Unity was attempted and a policy of reconciliation across racial, tribal, regional and party lines was enunciated. Racial reconciliation was achieved relatively early and with relative ease, although not without a few skirmishes here and there. The 1985 CAZ victory over the Independent Zimbabwe Group (IZG) took many people by surprise, leading to fears that the whites had refused, and in fact, were even biting the hand of reconciliation that had been extended to them. Fortunately, white minority power had become a toothless bulldog and was unable to make any visible cuts in Zimbabwe's body politic.

Reconciliation across ethnic, regional and party lines (all are related) took longer to realise and after a bitter civil strife spanning six years from 1982 to the 22nd of December 1987 when the historic "Unity Accord" was signed.

But notwithstanding the time, lives and emotional stress it took, unity, peace and stability were finally achieved in Zimbabwe. Any healthy mind ought to acknowledge this and celebrate it as a monumental achievement of the past ten years. Even the most pessimistic ought to swallow their pride and salute Zimbabweans for what is no doubt an act of great maturity.

The skeptic can only caution or warn Zimbabweans to be careful because unity, peace and stability (as social phenomena) are neither static nor stable, neither are they final. Conditions of unity, peace and stability, once created (particularly with guns and bullets), have to be constantly nourished and nurtured with tenderness, love, and humility. But of these three, *humility* is the best attitude to adopt.

Another of our primary socio-political goals as enunciated at the beginning of the ten years was that of socialism—the equitable distribution of wealth or resources

in society. Over the past ten years, there has been a discernable reduction of commitment to this goal both in action and in word. Very few people, let alone people in leadership positions, today would pronounce this goal without looking around them before apologising to the masses that "it takes time!" God forbid that Zimbabwe should gather at the capitalist acre to enter socialism into the sepulchre of history.

Of note, though, are the enormous strides made in the areas of education, health care, and, perhaps rural development. On this, some observers have pointed out the gap between life-styles and resources of the leadership and the common folk which have been progressively widening rather than narrowing during the past ten years. "Is it not the purpose of socialism to narrow this gap?" they ask, particularly university students, workers and salient peasants!?

The goal of socialism has by and large remained an extremely expensive slogan over the past ten years. But one shudders at the consequences of the widening gap between the "chefs" and the "povo" in our society, particularly with the ever rising rate of unemployment of the otherwise employable youth.

Another of Zimbabwe's cherished political objectives at the beginning was to guard and maintain independence from foreign influences. There is no doubt that Zimbabwe has maintained (over the past ten years) an image, both at home and abroad, that it is nobody's playground. Zimbabwe has stood firm on matters of principle and has adamantly refused to trade her independence with pieces of silver.

The independent and non-aligned foreign policy over the past ten years has been extremely successful. Zimbabwe has not lost any friends on account of the positions she has taken in international affairs (even notwithstanding the 4th of July Affair in 1986) where US former President Jimmy Carter took exception to Zimbabwe's attack of US Southern Africa foreign policy. Zimbabwe has remained a respected and respectable nation in this region, in Africa, and in the world throughout the ten years. She has maintained this

respectability even during the years of the civil strife in Matebeleland. This strife, however, was beginning to strain and tarnish her image abroad.

While still on this point, one should point out, however, that one would have liked to see Zimbabwe more successful at peace-making in this region than has been the case. Reference is made to the peace efforts in Mozambique, Angola, and perhaps now the ghastly and painful scenes in South Africa. Understandably, there are many constraining factors in these dynamic and fluid situations. But we should not remain aloof or give up trying because peace and stability in the region are so intractably linked to sustained peace and stability in Zimbabwe. One hopes that before long, South Africa will be free and that the whole of Southern Africa may once more enjoy durable peace which has long been denied to her people.

In fact, Zimbabwe cannot prosper in real terms without peace and stability in the region, and in particular to Mozambique and South Africa, her immediate neighbours.

Zimbabwe's experience with democracy over the past ten years has had its ups and downs. There is no denying of the fact that democracy is crucial to the fostering of genuine unity, peace and stability in a nation. It is fundamental to the development of prosperity or society. We have had three general elections during the past ten years, and each of them was held under different sets of circumstances. Let us recreate the circumstances of each of these elections before commenting on the evolving political culture in Zimbabwe.

In 1980 the British, in the person of Lord Soames, were in charge of the administration and conduct of the elections. The countryside was littered with heavily armed assembly points where ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas were separately kept. The Rhodesian security forces were purportedly confined to their barracks. The African majority were nervous in their excitement. The white community was nervous; the internal settlement bunch was nervous; the PF-ZAPU groups was nervous, and ZANU(PF) was also nervous. Indeed, even the British and the frontline states were nervous about the outcome of the election. At times one

wondered whether the campaigning was going to reach polling day. [Enos Nkala, among others, was banned from campaigning by Lord Soames. Campaigning was even prohibited in certain rural areas (Buhera) because of the level of violence]. There were several fatalities during this election. Accusations and counter-accusations of intimidation were commonplace. The media (RBC, RTV, The Herald and Sunday Mail) was accused by the nationalist groups of being grossly in favour of the UANC.

There were two sets of elections: the white roll and the common roll. The white seats were won by the Rhodesian Front unopposed. Some nine parties contested the common roll elections. Immediately after the ZANU(PF) victory there was an exodus of a sizable number of whites. Those who remained were uncertain about their future. Alas, ZANU(PF) and PF-ZAPU were not immune to the prevailing nervous condition of the time. They remained suspicious of each other and of the internal parties as well as the intentions of the white element. So Zimbabwe experienced the ugly civil strife of 1982-87 only to enjoy the ultimate unity that brought the peace on December 22, 1987. Zimbabwe's peace is an expensive one, a piece of diamond achieved over the bodies of her precious citizens.

In 1985 the general elections were held under somewhat different conditions, though many of the differences were in degree than in kind. Lord Soames had now been long gone. The elections were supervised by Zimbabweans as an independent and sovereign people. Conditions of peace now prevailed in most parts of the country except in some parts of rural Matebeleland. Some six political parties contested the common roll elections. The white roll election this time was contested by two parties, CAZ and the IZG. Opposition parties accused the media of excessive bias towards the ruling ZANU(PF).

Although election '85 had some element of violence, the campaign was not as nerve-racking and the outcome as filled with uncertainty and anxiety as the 1980 one. But the violence that we witnessed immediately after the election results were announced had not been anticipated. In fact,

many self-respecting citizens thought it was an unusual way of celebrating victory. People were beaten and families were forced to leave their homes. It was in bad taste.

Election 1990 was somewhat in between that of 1980 and 1985, at least in the level of unnerving excitement and violence generated during the campaign. This time some four political parties contested the elections. There were no separate elections for whites this time. These elections were once again marked by some violence; lives were lost, and many were injured.

Periodic elections constitute an important aspect of democracy in any country. To this extent, these three general elections held over the past ten years are vitally important indicators for Zimbabwe's commitment to democratic processes. In one form or another there is need to continue to have regular, periodic elections. There is nothing as edifying as knowing that one governs with a clean mandate of the people, having beaten opponents in daylight. The opposite of this edifying feeling is fear, a symptom of those who will have distanced themselves from the people.

In democracy, elections are not held for their own sake (just to fulfill a ritual), but to seek or to renew the people's mandate to govern. To what extent this mandate should be genuinely expressed is guided by popular sentiment. Unless this is done there is always an ever-present danger of alienation from the people. Public apathy is often a "lay-by" on the road to alienation. And alienation itself breeds regime resentment.

The survival of Zimbabwe and the only sure recipe for her greatness is the cultivation of a free and tolerant political culture which is the *sine qua non* of democracy. The development of a culture of fear should never be allowed.

The choice that is facing Zimbabwe is a clear one: "To be or not to be" a *de jure* one-party state, or maintenance of the *status quo*? The nature for democracy in Zimbabwe hinges on the choice that is made on this issue. Zimbabwe has been a *de facto* one-party state for the past ten years, and every five years has sought the people's mandate to govern them for the next five years in competition with other parties. That

is as it should be. Competition brings out the excellence in people. "Competitive democracy" is mighty healthy for any country. The retention of the *status quo*, i.e. the multi-party system is the best. No generation has the right to make immutable decisions for future generations, which is what a *de jure* one-party state does. What does Zimbabwe stand to lose if she simply abandoned the one-party slogan!?

Energies should be spent on cultivating a political culture of tolerance in a pluralist society. Development programmes must replace empty slogans.

## Notes

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3. Zimbabwe News, Vol. 17 No. 5, 1986, p.1.
4. Housman A.E., "The White Man's Burden".
5. Banana C.S., *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890-1990*, The College Press, 1989, p.197.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Banana C.S., *The Theology of Promise: the dynamics of self-reliance*, College Press, Harare, 1982.
8. *Ibid*, p.149.
9. ZANU (PF) Election Manifesto, 1985, p.15.
10. Zimbabwe News, *op. cit.* p.2.
11. Moyo A.M., "Theological perspectives on development in Zimbabwe" in *Church and State in Zimbabwe*, p. 386.
12. *Ibid*, p.380.
13. *Ibid*, p.381.
14. *Ibid*, p.382.
15. *Ibid*, p.383.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid*, p.385.
18. ZANU (PF) Election Manifesto, 1985 *op.cit.*, p.15.
19. Banana C.S., *Towards a Socialist Ethos*, p.21.
20. *Ibid*, p.22.

21. Banana C.S., *Christianity and the Struggle for Socialism in Zimbabwe Today*, p.2.
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## 2 The Legacy of African Traditional Religion

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### **Introduction**

Any attempt at a relevant theology in Zimbabwe has to recognise that African traditional religion plays a significant role in Africa. A number of scholars argue that in Africa there is a plurality of religions, they see many religions in Africa. I contest this view because African experiences reflect only one African traditional religion. It is essentially one African traditional religion with some religious-dialectical diversities. African traditional religious practices have a tremendous amount of continental commonality. It is fundamental therefore to understand African traditional religion as a singular or homogeneous belief system which involves relations between the living and the living-timeless.

Religious dialects of African traditional religion surface as a result of diverse cultural approaches, different material resources in diverse contexts and because of diverse and varied cosmogonic needs of different African societies. African traditional religion believes in One Creator, in a singular family unity and in communal solidarity. Belief in witchcraft, appeasement of ancestral spirits and in one ultimate reality are prominent features in African traditional religion. Differences in art, poetry, music and language should not be mistaken as constituting different forms of religions. These are only peripherally differences of one religion. African traditional religion is not an external affair, it is embedded in the individual person, in the individual culture and in the individual society. As E. Bolaji Idowu echoes, uninformed missionaries, anthropologists and historians have propounded distorted definitions of African traditional religion.

### **Eternal Communion with the Living-Timeless**

African traditional society is a community of the living and the living-timeless who have a mutual commerce between

one another. The living and the living-timeless depend on each other for their existence which can not be separated from each other. The living-timeless protect their descendents who in turn offer their gifts and thanks-giving sacrifices.

When examining the eternal communion with the living-timeless, it is important first to explore the concept of time among the Shona/Ndebele people. Second to explore the concept of how death is conceived and treated in traditional African religion in Zimbabwe. Third to explore the ritual related to death and burial, particularly the *kurova guva* ceremony among the Shona. Fourth to explore Christian convictions about death; that death is basically necessary and a result of the vagaries of nature.

Within the African traditional life, the individual is immersed in religious environment, religion permeates the whole of life. To almost every African, the whole life journey is a religious drama. Human kind lives in a religious universe, practically every aspect in the cosmos, every activity, space and time is experienced and expressed religiously. The African person is ontologically linked to nature, fellow men, the ancestors, and to God at all times.

### **a) Concept of Time Among the Shona**

E.G. Parrinder argues that the Africans view time like a snake with the tail in its mouth! John S. Mbiti maintains that to the Africans the question of time is not of academic concern. It is a simple and obvious routine which needs no inquiry.

For them, time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those that are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls into the category of "no time". What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of in or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or potential time (2).



*A frenzied dance following kurova guva ceremony*

Mbiti goes on to contend that the linear concept of time, the Alpha to Omega idea is a purely western concept (3). He argues that if future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they best constitute only potential future time (4). This is also expressed in seasonal changes. Time is conceived as moving backwards and not forwards, for instance, the "departed" re-enter the realm of the living and continue to influence the lives of the living. People set their minds on the future life on the basis of what has occurred.

The Shona language has phrases which point to the fact that at least there is an anticipated future, e.g. "*Misi (mazuva) haifanani*". This means that the nature may be different anywhere anyhow anytime. The proverb "*Natsa kwawabva kwaunoenda usiku*", which in Ndebele goes "*Unganyelemthonjeni*", seeks to advise youths and the old that one should behave properly because the future is rather unpredictable. This illustrates the basic African insight that when you speak of time, you actually speak of people, i.e. the relationship of past, present and future generations. Therefore in the journey of life do good wherever you are in case you find that you want to come back and be welcome. Much more could be said about the African conception of time, about the future in relation to death. Future time or life can best be described as an extension of the present. For the African, the present is in the future and the future is in the present. Therefore life is not complete without children as they represent assurance for the future.

#### **b) Traditional Concept of Death in Zimbabwe**

The Shona and the Ndebele people believe in a future time and a future life. They maintain that after the physical death of the body the soul continues to live. The immortal soul "resurrects" and comes to live again in its community or family. Death is rarely expressed sharply as death. Some blunt and euphemistic words or phrases are used to refer to

<b>SHONA</b>	<b>NDEBELE</b>	<b>ENGLISH DESCRIPTION S/HE:</b>
Watsiya	Usesitshiyile	Has left us. We will catch up with him/her
Watsakatika	Kaseko	Has disappeared, is somewhere.
Watungamira	Ukuggibuka/ Usekhokele	Has gone ahead of us, has proceeded.
Wapfuura	Usedhlule	Has passed on to the next destination ahead of us
Washaika	Utshonile	Has disappeared but will be recovered.
Waenda	Usehambile/ Ugodukile	Has gone ahead of us where we will follow.
Watorwa	Usethethwe	Has been taken away, is therefore somewhere.
Wazorora	Usepumulile	Has rested; is asleep but will reactivate to resume life activities.
<b>OTHER EXPRESSIONS</b>	<b>OTHER EXPRESSIONS</b>	<b>ENGLISH DESCRIPTION</b>
Watila	Usecitshile	Has died.
Wabaya	Usecuyile	Has died.
Wadhuweta	Usemayile/ uvayile	Has died.
Wamavhula	useyekogogunyawo	Has died

death. Life is an endless enterprise. Death is not death; it is a vehicle from the ontology of visible beings to the ontology of the invisible beings. Death is part of life, it is a gateway to eternity, it is a gateway to life in the here-after. LIFE => DEATH => LIFE.

Shona and Ndebele nomenclature, proverbial and metaphorical expressions play an important role in revealing the people's understanding of death, as illustrated in the table overleaf.

The basic idea is that of continuity of life after death. All these words express euphemistically that a person dies physically but there is in every word an element of continuity. In essence, there is no end of life, life, like time is continuous. It should be seen not ranging from Alpha to the eschaton but should be seen as a snake with the tail in its mouth, as Parrinder has it.

The Shona and Ndebele people have a mixed paradoxical attitude towards death. Although death is viewed as a gateway to the next life, they nevertheless do not readily accept its occurrence. The pain of parting with their loved ones in the physical form leads them to speculate upon the cause(s) of their fatal break of their physical ties in their family. Death is never acceptable as inevitable. The Shona and the Ndebele literally do not want their kins to die.

They do not understand "why?" particularly their relative, and why at this moment. Every time is a crucial time. Whether one is very old or very young the question is asked, "why this one and why at this crucial time?" As to how a person died it is accepted and understood but the questions always asked are: "why him/her and why now?" In this way death is a disrupting suspicious phenomenon, unnatural, shocking and dreaded.

On the other hand, there is a paradox in the acknowledgement of a "timely death". After a serious and long illness or a senile age (*kana munhu wodzurwa nendove kumusana*), it is at this time when people may talk of a timely death. Here death is seen as a natural process, as something inevitable and expected. The Zulu say that death is welcome. It comes at the right time, i.e. old age. Among

the Zulu death is not fearful or shocking because it is (the) coming back to life. It is conceived as a means by which God calls back his creation.

There is a sense in which death is viewed as a beginning of a new existence. Death ushers someone into the world of the spirits (called in Shona *Nyikadzimu* or *Kwamupfiganebwe*), a kind of world whose door is closed by a large stone. While the departed person is remembered by name, he is not really dead; he is alive and such a person is what is referred to as a living-timeless. According to the Africans, while the "dead" have no physical force, their power-force is greater and more mysterious as compared to that of the living. Death is a graduation and a gravitation into a new and higher life. The spirit is immortal: "*Chinoora inyama mweya hauori*". This Shona statement means that what perishes is the flesh but the spirit is immortal. This belief is evident in death and burial rituals.

### c) Burial Rituals in Zimbabwe

Death rituals play an important part at an African funeral. When proper ritual procedures are adhered to this helps to create a climate of mutual interdependence, and ensures that there is an eternal community and communion between the living and the living-timeless.

When a person dies, the body of the deceased is ritually washed, it is ritually smeared with oils and is ritually wrapped in a blanket or an animal skin in certain traditional practices. Grave-digging is done ritually. The elder of the family of the deceased goes and marks the place where the grave is to be dug and some solemn words are uttered: "tati tikuradzike pano apa pane madzitateguru ako ...", (We have decided to lay you here, so you can rest alongside your founding fathers...). There is sniffing of snuff and sprinkling it down on the ground. The snuff is sprinkled on the ground as a sign of sharing with the living-timeless.

The stage after the grave has been dug is done ritually. Before the dead is put into the grave some solemn words are uttered. According to tribal custom the dead is buried facing a particular direction The Shoko/Ncube/Phiri (the monkey

totem) people should be buried looking in the sky and the head facing east. In some tribes a medicated peg or spear is planted at the head of the grave so as to chase away witches who may desire to devour the flesh of the deceased. In respect of a bachelor/spinster the deceased is buried with a rat in the belief that he/she will need company.

There is a belief that a person who has been married becomes thirsty after death, and that this thirst can only be quenched with beer. This necessitates the ceremony called *Doro remvura* (5), or *Doro rekuchenura*. This beer, which is brewed three days after burial, is for cleansing the grave diggers and those who carried stones to put onto the grave of the defilement which they could have got during the burying of the deceased. The beer is drunk using the left hand alone. Some beer is poured on the ground, which shows a common sharing and communion with the living-timeless.

*Doro remvura* is symbolic. It does not only serve to cleanse the grave diggers and those who carried stones. Mvura (water) has the capacity to cleanse and here it symbolically cleanses the spirit (soul) of the departed which may be evil-minded. It should be noted that the purported cause of death (*chakadya munhu*) is revealed at this ceremony after ritual washing of hands with beer.

If the deceased was murdered the spirit may be told here not to be angry with its family members but to punish the offender(s) or murderer(s). The ritual is meant to soothe the spirit of the departed and, among other things, to cushion the feelings of insecurity. Some families will put some personal possessions like pots, plates, perfumes, laces, shoes, axes, knobkerries, spears or clothes of the deceased at the grave for the living-timeless to use. This shows a strong belief in the here-after and the eternal communion with the living-timeless. More of this is revealed in the main ritual called *kurova guva*.

#### d) *Kurova Guva*

*Kurova guva* ritual is also known as *kugadzira/kudzosa mufi* or *Umbuyiso* in Ndebele. *Kurova guva* (to beat the grave). In some cases there are families that will follow this ritual to

its literal sense by actually beating the grave in the belief that this would awaken the asleep and enable him/her to come back home. In some parts of Zimbabwe the term "beating the grave" is not taken literally but merely symbolically and is an occasion when the departed are invited back into the family of the living.

Some people in some parts of Zimbabwe, in place of *kurova guva*, use the term *kugadzira mufi* which implies to "castrate" the dangerous and roaming spirit. *Kudzosa mufi/Umbuyiso* means to bring back, ritually taming the dangerous and roaming spirit. In this practice it is believed that before the spirit is returned or brought back it may wander astray and cause harm to the family.

This ritual is done at least a year after the death of the deceased. Beer is brewed by an old woman who has passed the child-bearing age (*chembere yapedza ura*), with the assistance of a little girl who has not reached the stage/age of puberty. It is believed that such people, who do not menstruate, are undefiled and are the right ones to brew the beer because menstrial blood is believed to be dangerous to the spirits.

The next of kin and neighbours are invited to attend this important ceremony. In the early hours of the morning before the sunrise the next of kin gather on the doorsteps of a kitchen. A he-goat (*gotora*) is brought if the deceased is male, a she-goat (*nhunzvi*) is brought if the deceased is a woman. Snuff and beer are poured on the goat. Other snuff is sprinkled on the ground and beer is also poured on the ground. When the goat shakes its body (though it may happen incidentally) this is taken as acceptance of the libation. The goat is then killed and pieces of meat are roasted and eaten without salt. This ritual eating of unsalted meat is efficacious; it is the *exis-mundi*, the one which connects the family to the ultimate reality. It is believed that they eat the meat together with ancestral spirits. The eating together and a mutual sharing of meat, snuff and beer is a form of communion with the living-timeless. Meat is eaten without salt because salt is believed to be hot and therefore not suitable for the tired soul which has been roaming about

the forests. Moreover, salt is bitter, and the fact that it is not used here shows that the spirit is no longer bitter. This symbolically shows that the spirit is no longer dangerous and wild, it is now tamed. It is through this ritual that the spirit becomes an ancestral spirit. It "resurrects" and comes to look after its family members, just like Jesus who, after his resurrection, gave re-assurance, support and direction to his universal family.

### **Traditional View of Resurrection in Zimbabwe**

The Shona/Ndebele people believe in a different form of resurrection. The ancestral spirits resurrect to look after their family members. They are able to press the grievances, gratitude and praises of humankind to God. In other worlds, they act as envoys, mediating between God and the living. In as much as Jesus in the Christian faith is the vehicle through which Christians approach God, so can it be said that within the African cosmic world the spirits play the role of Jesus. Ancestors are not dead but exist in the spiritual form although they cannot be seen by the physical eye. They have physical traits because they can assume a physical form through their possession of spirit mediums (*masvikiro*).

In African traditional religions "resurrection" assumes unique and peculiar implications, it is not the resurrection of the dead but a re-introduction of the living-timeless into the ranks of the family through spiritual presence. There is another ritual where the name of the ancestor is given to a bull. Beer is brewed and the next of kin are invited to attend the ceremony of *Bira remombe yegono/Bhuru remusha*. In the morning at sunrise the family of the deceased ancestor and the next of kin go to the kraal where family bulls are kept. One bull is chosen, an elder utters solemnly that the ancestor is "put" on the bull. Some beer is poured on the back of the bull. It shakes its body, and this shows acceptance of the ancestor to settle on the bull. Women ululate and men clap hands solemnly. This ritual symbolises a revival or a resurrection. Like the *kurova guva* ceremony, this ceremony is a celebration of victory over death. Henceforth the bull is treated like the grandfather (*sekuru*).

The beast is provided with food and water, in the same manner that food and water would be given to a respected parent or grandfather. The bull can no longer be used for ploughing, neither can it be beaten, as this would constitute disrespect to the person of the one who now resides in this bull, namely the revered ancestor or grandfather.

Another form of immortality and "resurrection" and continuation of life after death is seen in continuation of the individual through procreation, in which case children bear the traits of their progenitors.

The Shona believe that man is literally a family tree, a single branching organism whose existence is continuous through time and whose roots, though out of sight below the earth, may spread further and wider than the visible limbs above (6). At birth a child is seen as looking like his or her ancestor. The child may be called *sekuru* or *tete*. The child may behave like his or her ancestor(s). This shows an agglomeration of an ancestral soul (*mudzimu/idlozi*) to that of the child. A son's life is a prolongation of a father or a grandfather's life.

The Yoruba often consult the oracle to determine which one of the ancestors has returned in a newly born baby (7). This shows that Africans believe in immortality, resurrection and reincarnation. The child is treated like an elder. He or she is treated with great respect and mutuality. This is further evidence of the bonds that bind the living with the living-timeless. The ancestral spirits "resurrect". They return to their human families from time to time and share meals, snuff, beer and ritual cloth. They know and have an interest in what is going on in the family. They can appear through spirit mediums and they are addressed by special names, in the case of the Karanga, the name "*VaChingoma*" for example, is used.

They inquire about family matters and may even warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions. They are guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities. Like Jesus, as mentioned above, ancestors are the best intermediaries between God and the community. They know the needs of

humankind. This mutual reciprocity shows the eternal communion between the living-timeless and humankind.

Traditional African religion, thus, is a live reality on issues of Life and Death. Christian theology therefore has to be pursued in integral dialogue with this traditional legacy. This raises certain basic methodological issues which I have to tackle straightway at this introductory stage.

### Notes

1. Parrinder E.G., *African Traditional Religion*, Sheldon Press, London, 1974, p. 15.
2. Mbiti J. S., *African Traditional Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, 1969, p.17.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Chabudapasi, Taona, T. H., "Three Ceremonies for the Dead", in Clive and Peggy Kileff (eds) *Shona Customs*, Mambo Press, Gweru, 1985, p.63.
6. Taylor, J. V., *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African religion*, S.C.M. Press, London, 1963, p.98.
7. *Ibid.*

# 3 The Language of African Theology

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## The Role of Mythology

Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviour, which does not find its fulfillment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth. (1)

Myths are concerned with meanings. They give meaning to most African societies because they are often taken as sacred history. Mircea Eliade defines myth thus,

... Myth tells how, through deeds of supernatural beings a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the cosmos, or any fragment of reality — an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution ... (2)

From these definitions we learn that particular communities elicit knowledge of how some things began. Myths explain origins of things. Theology is also concerned with the why, whence and how of human and societal life, the basic preconditions and goal of history, ultimate reality and ultimate concerns. Theology cannot be pursued simply within the framework of Western scientific language. There is an additional dimension which has to be explored and explained by means of myth and symbols, although this does not mean that the theologian should leave out necessary preconditions in human communication, that is, to try to be coherent and make sense of the convictions he holds and the arguments he wants to advance. The role of mythology gets particularly significant in African theology, where Christian articulation has to relate to traditional African concepts of life which are preserved and conveyed by means of mythology.

The history of religion has up to now reflected an incredible bias because purity and salvation have been looked at through the spectacle of Christianity. Books and manuscripts written by missionary anthropologists reflect a total negligence and profound relegation of African traditional religion. E Bolaji Idowu points out that African culture and religion were denigrated and were dismissed as heathen, pagan, savage, native, cannibalistic or primitive worship (3). All the African Art, poetry, symbols, and myths were dismissed as the work of the devil. This is clearly demonstrated in the terms "kaffir", "Bobojani", "my boy" which emanate from the presupposition that an African had no identity. This was the arrogance by some of the missionaries and anthropologists. They classified Africans in the same category with the beast of the wild. Some whites loved and respected their pets more than black people. Numerous incidents are retold about how whites dismissed blacks and their cosmological beliefs. For example, some whites believed that the black race originated from the parentage of a Gorilla Utang. In another incident, a white farmer on a rainy day was driving his car, seated with his dog in the front seat whilst a black man sat in the uncovered back of the car. The reason why the white man preferred to sit in front with his dog is because he did not want to sit near blacks in the mistaken belief that they smell like hyenas. Most of the whites conceived blacks as a bunch of primitive food gatherers and cave dwellers. The white man saw himself as burdened to civilise and to bring light to the benighted blackman.

Whites believed that the African was still at an early stage of evolution which had long since been experienced by his own race. Thus for the whites, the stage of evolutionary development evident in the black community was miserable with no concept of time, with primitive belief systems and with rationality based on myths. Virtue, goodness and "civilised" behaviour were perceived to be foreign to the blacks.

This idea gave birth to the system of apartheid which characterised the *modus operandi* (modes of operation) in

many a white domain. White supremacist mythology led these whites to have confidence to dominate the blacks. The harsh regard with which traditional people were held made some Africans have cosmetic personalities, they became Christians by day and became traditionalists by night. As illustrated already in the previous Chapter African traditional religion, like any other religions of the world is inseparable from culture. Most religions are culture-bound, it is a system of life. In most cases religion is made up by many belief activities of the African from dawn to dusk. Mbiti remarks that "Africans are notoriously religious" (4). Religion occupies the language, register, the taboo, hunting, cultivation and general behaviour of Africans, it is evident in proverbial and metaphorical expressions of any speech community either as founding fables or in myths. Religion also covers respect-rules, customs of marriage, birth and burial.

An African can bring himself nearer to the sacred centre by relating myths, such as water myths, hunting myths and myths about creation. This is also true of any religion in this world. This is so because myths are universal and can be understood universally as stories which seek to account for the origin of things.

Every culture has its fund of mythology. It is now commonly accepted that myth can no longer be discounted as mere fabrications of the sterile minds of primitive peoples handed down from generation to generation. In myth there is something of a communal memory of the group as it grappled with questions of its and all human origins, life on this earth, being what is the human person and even the hereafter. Western (Judeo-Christian) heritage derives its inspiration from two sets of mythology, namely: the ancient Greek world and the Hebraic traditions. The Hebraic tradition perhaps because of its ethical nature (long tradition) appears to have exerted a much deeper and more widespread influence, than any other culture, thanks to the advent and spread of Christianity. Myths purporting to explain the "origins of things", including people on earth, abound in Africa. Almost every group of people has its own, so much so that Robert



*Typical entertainment. African traditional dance.*

Moffat (first missionary of the London Missionary Society among the Botswana) discontended them because they were parochial. They have not been taken seriously by educators in the past because the "western" view of Adam and Eve has been accepted as superior and accepted generally by a people of a "dominant" culture.

Through myth we are able to penetrate the inner recesses of a people's soul, and there find answers for many of their peculiar communal behaviours, idiosyncrasies and views about life. In their myth about the "genesis" of things, it is significant that some Africans invariably teach that the first appearance of people was as a group in company. In the myth of the first people coming out from the hole in the ground, it is as a community of men and women, children and animals. Gregariousness is an African characteristic which has been observed by social scientists. The miasma of tribal feeling and identification puzzles many. Even those who have not been raised in a rural setting still catch themselves having the feeling deep down. It seems to work like second nature to them. Similarly, also is the family. The African extended family is a proverbial expression. In an African village or township where people are allowed to settle without the disruption of forced removals one finds that an air of a large family broods over the atmosphere. Every person is related to another. These relationships, "by blood", "by marriage" or by association are emotionally and deep-seated and cherished dearly. This becomes evident when a need arises, like some tragedy (death) or some occasion of joining or union (wedding).

There is a need to appeal sympathetically to the somewhat "lunacy" in any religion in order to understand its myths, culture, art, language and symbols. Many African scholars have called for the need to extend this sympathetic approach to Africa. Noted scholars are Eldowu, Jomo Kenyatta, John Mbiti, L.S. Senghor and K.A. Busia just to mention a few. These write to effect a defensive battle line against the vicious onslaughts done on African culture.

They defend African cultures, African heritage and African essence. African scholars have a general consensus

that Christianity should by all means be contextualised to meet realities in Africa in various aspects such as myths and dreams. This will further the commonly held view that has been articulated by Aschwanden in the following terms,

Western interpretation frequently more interested in their own theories than in their discovery of the real connections—all suffer from the same reality-deficiency, that is, their dependence upon the idea of the unconscious, but which ultimately is more obscured than clarified ... (5)

Myths not regarded as important concepts of African traditional religion, are important in the African people because they revitalise man. Myths re-actualise or relive past primordial times. Myths give the real essence of life, for in myths people experience pristine times of creation. The myth symbolically means a new life or a new creation of the particular people to which the myths refer.

In relevant African theology mythology thus plays a significant role. Re-mythologisation rather than demythologisation is the necessary concern. The issue of mythology has both a formed and more substantial and material side. The formal side has to do with mythology as a relevant language to employ when dealing with the very subject matter theology. But mythology within different religious traditions is not just a language-game. It also contains meaning about or insight into what theology is all about, that is, God and ultimate reality. This certainly is the case in African traditional religion as well as Christianity. This process of conveying content about what theology deals with and the preconditions for that kind of knowledge is what revelation is all about. That is the basic point of reference for any relevant Christian theology. Dreams and Revelations express the same experience. They are both related to theology because they are important sources of theology. Specific attention is now paid to the concept of revelation.

## **Revelation and Experience**

Revelation and experience are important sources of theology. Revelation refers to how God reveals himself to a particular society: how he makes himself known to a particular society and how that society understands God's activities among them. God has not revealed himself to the Israelites alone but to the whole human race, and in various ways. As I have argued already traditional African thinking was mystical. It was bound up with the beginning of things: the creation, the Primeval Age. The myths of the origins of the first Man and the whole cosmos are fundamental in doing theology in Africa. The myths of origin constitute an original revelation which is recurrent in their cultural and historical experiences; in folktales, riddles, proverbs, short stories, songs and festivals.

The Africans express their understanding of God in ontological terms, and this should be a fundamental basis for theologising in Africa. Traditionally, Zimbabweans experienced God's revelation also in natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, caves, rivers, and also in mountains. Also important to note is the fact that in African traditional religions there were no atheists; all members of a particular society belonged to the religion of that society. To the Africans religion encompasses all aspects of life: economic, political, social, cultural and religious. There is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Thus, in formulating a genuine and relevant African theology, these features are of paramount importance, for they show how God reveals himself in the African context. Thus, revelation is not confined to the Israelites alone, nor is biblical revelation the only source for theologising. I will explore more fully in subsequent chapters what these insights contain in terms of Christian Theology.

Relevant theology, thus, should not be divorced from the experiences of the people: past and present and their vision for their future. However, great attention should be focussed on the present, for genuine theology should not be a flight back into the past. The past becomes relevant only when it helps to understand the present and the future.

In theologising one has to analyse the coterminous problems that are prevalent especially unemployment, poverty, disease, hunger, etc., among the majority of our people. Other current issues like economic, political and social injustices as well as corruption and the effects of neo-colonialism equally call for earnest examination and rectification. Surely an authentic theology in Africa today should try to relate the meaning of God in the context of socio-political and economic dynamics that are obtaining.

Furthermore, authentic theology cannot be neutral or paternalistic, rather it should be the voice of the voiceless; reminding our "Caesars" to remember the cross, i.e. service to the nation before the crown. In addressing the contemporary situation socialism provides the necessary hermeneutic tools for analysing the socio-economic and political situation. It is on the crossroads of life: poverty, suffering and disease-stricken where God reveals himself in Zimbabwe today. Thus experience should be based on the contemporary context.

### **Tradition and Scripture**

Scripture as a source of theology here refers to the Bible and tradition refers to the history of the church from the Post-Easter movement through the Apostolic Age, the beginning of early Catholicism, i.e. when the church developed a hierarchical organisation, creeds and a canon, that have survived to the present day. Western theologians regard the Bible (scripture) as the primary source of theology, and on the African continent, there are others like John Mbiti and Edward Fashole-Luke who also argue that scripture is the primary source of theology. In my view scripture should be regarded as a source of theology equal to others. As I have said earlier, all sources of theology are equally important and it is up to the theologian to prove that revelation of God is not a preserve of a particular group of people but that God is capable of revealing himself and of speaking to each and every situation in tones that are relevant to their peculiar circumstances.

A critical analysis of the Bible shows that the Bible contains but a small part of the divine acts of God in human history. One could ask this question, what is the Bible? John 20:30-31 gives us the answer:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ....

From these verses one can argue that the Bible is not complete, for only those things which would make one believe were written. Further, the Bible in its original form was not as it is today. It started as oral tradition, and then was written under the biases of the writers' contexts and interests. Thus the claim that the Bible is the primary source of theology has dangerous shortfalls, hence authentic theology cannot be founded on the Bible alone.

Likewise, tradition, the twin brother of scripture, cannot be regarded as the primary sources of theology also. Western Christianity's main weakness has been its parochialism, particularly its limiting theological reflection to early church doctrines and creeds. No doubt these traditions have been handed down to us clothed in myths and philosophies of Hellenistic-Greek and Hebrew worldviews. Thus these creeds and doctrines are almost irrelevant and meaningless to our context, providing answers to questions which we have not asked, and asking awkward questions about problems of our day. No wonder there is talk of demythologisation in the west today, for in the past they have concentrated so much on dogmatic theology based on scripture and tradition, which was a flight back into the past at the expense of today's concerns.

In the light of the preceding argument why should it not be possible to do theological reflection using sources outside the Bible? Authentic African theology should express itself in the African experience, context and culture. To me theology is a science, a philosophy that tries to interpret society's understanding of God with or without the Bible. Relevant theology cannot be formulated from "scriptura sola", authentic theology is a continuous wrestling between

revelation as expressed in scripture and experience on the one hand and the contemporary praxis of mankind on the other.

However, this analysis should not be misinterpreted to be denigrating the importance of the Bible, for it is the vehicle that links Jesus' revelation THEN to our commitment NOW. However emphasis should be placed on context, especially our contemporary praxis rather than a flight back to the experience of the Post-Easter Jesus movement, whose experience is sometimes irrelevant and meaningless to our context.

The Old Testament is a catalogue of Jewish culture and institutions but Christ transcends cultural barriers. Jesus is in history, yet in a sense he is above it. Cultural values can stand or fall on the weight of their compatibility with Christian or Christ-immutable values. Whilst certain aspects of Biblical traditional or historical records can be compromised on the basis of new revelation, Christ's life-teaching, death on the cross, resurrection, are eternal truths. In other words, Christ's place in the theological reflection is non-negotiable.

## Notes

1. Bergland Axel-Ivar, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*, Hurst and Company, London, 1976, p.169.
2. Eliade Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich Publishers, London, 1963, p.16.
3. E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion, a Definition*, Orbis Books, New York, 1973, pp. 108-120.
4. Mbiti J. S., *African Traditional Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, 1969, p.18.
5. Aschwanden, H. *Symbols of Life*, Mambo Press, Gweru: 1989, p.10.

## 4 From Mwari to the Triune God

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In African Theology there is an intimate interaction between mythology and revelation and experience conveyed and nurtured by the Bible and subsequent Christian traditions. This interaction proves to be particularly fertile when we speak of theology in its most advanced form, i.e. God-talk and communication with the Divine.

There are certainly significant features of God-talk in the legacy of African Traditional Religion. There are experiences of the divine both *per se* and in immediate interaction with humanity within ethnic religions, although these dimensions of theology were overlooked or simply denied in early interactions with Western civilization and Christian missions.

In this chapter I will expound what I find basic in classical Christian theology of the Creator by relating this theology to what is contained in the communication with the Divine that qualifies traditional African religion. I start by introducing a classical Creation-myth from traditional Shona religion.

### **Mwari and Mwedzi**

In his *Aspects of a Shona Novel* from 1983 the Zimbabwean expert on traditional African literature Professor and Ambassador George Kahari reflects on the so called *Mwedzi* myth.<sup>(1)</sup> This traditional Shona Creation-myth shares the following insights into the origin of humankind.

In the beginning *Mwari* (God) created the first man, *Mwedzi*, whom he placed in a pool. He asked to be released into the world for the pool life was boring. He was given a go-ahead after a bitter debate with *Mwari*. *Mwari* had insisted that *Mwedzi* would regret it since the earth was a lonely and desolate place.

After a few days of wandering *Mwedzi* came back to *Mwari* and complained that he wanted a partner to stay with.

He was given *Massasi* (*Nyamasase*=the evening star). The two departed to the earth. In the evening they made a fire to warm their bodies. *Mwedzi* had a medicine horn. He grabbed it and rubbed its oil on his index finger. Suddenly he jumped to the side where *Massasi* was after having remarked that he was capable of jumping to the other side of the furnace.

He touched *Massasi*. She became pregnant. *Massasi* bare trees, grass, cattle and goats and also the herbivores of the forest (abyss). After two years *Mwari* took *Massasi* back to the pools leaving *Mwedzi* lonely. *Mwedzi* petitioned for another wife.

He was given *Murombo*, the morning star. *Mwedzi* repeated the same act and *Murombo* conceived. She gave birth to the first boys and girls, wild carnivores such as the lion and its kind, the civet cat and the snake.

*Murombo* later copulated with the snake. *Murombo* like *Mwedzi* had committed incest. The snake bit *Mwedzi*, who had now assumed the place of sovereign (*Mambo*). He sickened. There was drought, starvation and death. Many people died and *Mwedzi*'s sons consulted *hakata* (i.e. divination bones). They were instructed to perform a ritual. This brought things to normal. *Mwedzi*'s sons also made a burial ritual for both *Mambo* and *Mwedzi*. Things were brought to normal when they chose another King.

This is a very involved and most representative item of traditional Shona Creation-mythology and theology. Before I elaborate more fully on how Christian God-talk transcends this African view of God and the origin of humankind the *Mwedzi* myth deserves more careful scrutiny.

### **Interpretation of the Mwedzi Myth**

From the *Mwedzi* myth we note that the Shona people have a God by the name *Mwari* or simply *Dziwa*. *Mwari* is composed of the noun prefix *mu-* 1 and the noun stem (NS) *ari*. The term *Mwari* therefore means "He who is". Since he is similar to the God of Moses who identified himself as being "he who is", *Mwari* can rightly be equated or translated to God. *Mwari* is associated with creation.

He is the creator of the universe. He created man and gave it authority to rule. Man was created in the image of *Mwari* and he automatically became a co-partner of *Mwari* in the act of creation. This explains why he was given the medicine horn. The phenomenon of the medicine horn also reflects the fact that creation is an on-going process since plants and animals continue to multiply their species. The myth also connotes the fact that the Shona God creates out of something, he creates out of *hono* (male) and *hadzi* (female). This shows that the Shona believe that all history is influenced by God. The concept of time has a reference to past-present and future. Time is looked at as cyclical. Africans look into the past to get a meaning for the present.

As other myths the *Mwedzi* myth has an aetiological purpose. It serves to explain that whenever drought occurs people ascribe it to sin. Drought is thought to be caused by incest, arson and murder. In order to avert it, people consult *hakata*. These instruct them to perform a ritual. In the case of rain, a rain-making ritual is performed. The ceremonies are directed to *Mwari* God. Ancestors are requested to relay requests to God.

We give you this beer and snuff ... you Zvousiku, Nyamazha, Kumbaira relay our request to your seniors to tell their seniors until the request reaches the creator ...

The chain of ancestors is infinite. It is the ancestors who know the end in the spiritual world. In the myth related above, the ultimate reality is *Mwari* or *Dziwa* and is known by several other names.

African traditional religion has a lot of art. African primal communities were by and large illiterate but illiteracy does not necessarily spell ignorance or dullness. This traditional art survived from generation to generation through memory and storytelling. Some of the myths were embodied in folk-lore. From this folk-lore people elicited moral teachings. This was important because it created harmonious relations in the society. We therefore cannot, with impunity and a

clear conscience ignore or write-off African experience before the advent but allow it to enrich its own experience. There should be a profound and mutual relationship between religions so as to broaden and deepen our understanding of God and humanity.

### **Christian Qualifications**

As already noted myths give meaning to traditional African life systems. This also holds in other societies. For example in the Hebrew tradition there is the myth of creation of Adam and Eve, the myth of Noah's Ark and myths surrounding deaths of great people like Moses and Elisha. In the Shona and Ndebele people myths enable one to understand cosmological concepts, philosophy and religious practices of the people. The origin of life, the origin of a tribe, marriage, language, burial and death, hunting styles, dressing style and worship are all actualised in myths.

This is very important to recognize and utilize when expanding what is implied in Christian Convictions about the triune God and the Creation.

As hinted at already the Hebrew tradition as conveyed in the Old Testament speaks in mythical language when it refers to God and the origin of humankind and the world at large. There are profound similarities in the basic truth-claims implied in the traditional Hebrew and Shona name of God. Both *Jahve* and *Mwari* mean "he who is". This implies that God is seen to be the very basis and precondition of what is, i.e. God is the source of existence.

Compared to the *Mwedzi* myth, however, creation mythology in the Old Testament decidedly moves further in reinforcing the divine initiative and the divine activity in the Creation, which here means both the very beginning and the continued process which we call history. It is the Triune God that is the Creator. This is the Christian conviction which has been further elaborated on in the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, i.e. God creates on his own without any means such as *hono* and *hadzi* as is the case in the *Mwedzi* myth.

Another significant difference between and Shona mythology of *Mwari* and his Creation on the one hand, and

the parallel Creation myths in Gen. 1:2-4 and Gen 2:4-14 and the elaboration of these, for instance in the Psalms on the other, is that the Bible affirms that the creation is good and continues to be good even after the disobedience and fall of humankind.

As is the case in the *Mwedzi* myth humankind according to the Bible is recognized a central and decisive place in creation and history. Humankind, however, is not the partner with God in the Creation in the technical sense. Humanity is supportive and is entrusted with the great task of being the steward of the creation which God has achieved once and which he continues to uphold (Gen 1:26-30 and 2:20).

It is in the responsible role of steward of God's good creation that humankind plays a decisive role in world history. Humankind transgressed the boundaries set for the steward and wanted to become God (Gen 3:1-7). This means that there is an immediate moral qualification of the biblical and Christian understanding of the relationship of God with humankind within the framework of Classical theology of Creation. It is this relationship which is defined theologically in terms of Law and Gospel and the human quest for salvation and atonement. In this understanding of creation humankind, as such, is not seen as the ultimate cause of drought and other forms of deviant evils which threaten human life in community.

Contemplating the root-causes of evil, thus, Biblical theology gradually elaborates a dualistic cosmology. The basic conviction that the creation is good from the very beginning and continues to be such is preserved. In actual fact this conviction is reinforced in New Testament references to Christ the Son involved with God the Father in the creation and preservation of the World through the Spirit (Gen 1:2, John 1:1-5 and 9-14, Col 1:16 and Ef 1:10 on Christ as the ultimate principle of World History). At the same time there is recognized in mythological language the disintegrating effects of the evil one (Gen 3:1 and 4; cf the critical role of the snake in the *Mwedzi* myth).

On this biblical basis Christian theologians have been challenged to articulate a coherent theology of History, which takes the disintegrating and deviant forces seriously and at the same time maintains and further elaborates the conviction of the Triune God as the Lord of History. The most involved attempt to advance such a Christian Philosophy of History was long back made by the most decisive African theologian of his time. I am thinking of Bishop Augustine of Hippo Regis in contemporary Tunisia, who in his major work from the early fifth century *De Civitate Dei* (On the City of God) defined the dialectic of history in terms of a cosmological confrontation of the city of God and the worldly city, which also allowed a recognition of contradictions in the Church.(2) We will keep St Augustine's insights in mind when we later on explore Christian ecclesiology.

## Notes

1. Kahari, G., *Aspects of the Shona Novel*, Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare 1983.
2. See further Hallencreutz, C.F., From Julius Africanus to Augustine the African: A Forgotten Link in Early African Theology, *Zambesia*, (XV), 1988, 1-26.

## 5 The Classless Society and the Kingdom of God

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The background set above does imply that even if traditional African religion provides an enduring legacy which challenges Christian theology to reconsider its traditional methodology, this religious heritage is not the only theoretical counterpart to Christianity, when it gets to grips with existentialist and societal issues in contemporary Zimbabwe. There is also Marxist Socialism.

Integral to my general argument I will therefore at this stage explore certain issues in the dialectic interaction of Marxism with Christianity. In the first place I will in the light of so called Historical Materialism elaborate further on my references at the end of the previous chapter to the Christian preference for a dialectical philosophy of history. Secondly I will explore possible convergences of the Christian view of the Kingdom of God, which I have already alluded to in my first chapter, and the Marxist understanding of a classless society. Thirdly I will highlight some issues which confront Christians and Marxists alike in the continued struggle for an egalitarian Zimbabwe.

### **Dynamics and Dimensions of History**

At first there seems to be a completely unreconciled conflict of Christian and Marxist interpretations of history. On the Marxist side there is Historical Materialism, whilst on the Christian side as we have already noted there is a quite dramatic understanding of history which allows for both theological and mythological dimensions.

Historical Materialism is a qualified view of history. At this point three primary motifs should be briefly registered. In the first place primary attention is given by Historical Materialism to economic class-conflicts and the search of the oppressed and exploited to gain fully human and participatory sharing in the life of society as the predominant factors in historical development. Secondly Historical

Materialism holds that contradictions on the basic economic level of society are reflected in the institutional superstructure and inform both political and religious life. Thirdly history is seen as a dialectical process which has as its overall objective the achievement of an egalitarian and classless society.

As a philosophy of history Historical Materialism is very precise in trying to identify what really matters in order to achieve social and economic change. Christian philosophy of history is more general and attaches greater significance to the moral dialectic implied in the divine-human interaction. Historical Materialism thus speaks more decidedly in societal and economic terms.

However there is a worthwhile dialogical undertaking to try and define in how far the Marxist view of the dialectic of history in actual fact converges with a dialectical Christian interpretation of history. Such an assignment demands an element of demythologisation on the part of the Christian when trying to establish the more concrete historical implications in any given situation of the theological and mythological dimensions involved in the Christian.

A second controversial issue in the interaction of Christianity and Marxism concerns the means and methods for achieving social change. Involved in the problem is among other things the loaded question of revolutionary violence.

In the Zimbabwean context both Christians and Marxists can look back at experiences gained in the Liberation war, when defining how agreed objectives should be achieved in the continued struggle.

Reflecting on these experiences I will at this point reinforce the following two points: when I speak of Scientific Socialism I mean a search for an egalitarian and just society which adapts rational analysis of the adequate means to reach the agreed political goals. Secondly I see a necessary interaction between economic and social change.

Socialism, thus, aims at creating a social order devoid of class-divisions. The Marxist socio-economic conception portrays a cogency of analysis which reassures the segregated, the marginalised and the oppressed workers of

an inevitable dawning of a classless society. Socialism, like Christianity, seeks to eradicate the inhuman and abhorrent class system which is a creation by the notorious capitalist system. Marx equates capitalism to sin because capitalism syphons all the excess value from the periphery to the metropolis. In capitalism there are shocking paradoxical extremes of poverty and opulence; degradation and pauperism and dependency and domination. This, sharp paradoxical aura sharpens class antagonisms. The Marxist models of liberation, that is, the proletariat and the peasantry embark on a revolution through which a classless society can be established and the Christian principles of love, togetherness, unity and sharing experiences and all goods of life can bring about a classless society.

This argument has brought us to the crux of the matter: in how far is there convergence and overlap of the Marxist idea of the classless society and the Christian view of the Kingdom of God?

### **Converging concerns?**

As hinted at already the goal of the Marxist is to create a classless society. The most fundamental theme for the Marxists' programme of salvation is the theme of equal sharing. Sharing is deified as it is the one and best means by which the real essence of humanity can be actualised. This is also the case with the Christian conceptualisation of society. A true Christian society is marked by a struggle towards the establishment of an ideal society where love, togetherness and sharing reign supreme. Christianity projects future developments as a continuation of what qualifies history. The future lies in our hands, we are the makers of the Kingdom of God.

Intimately related in this way to the Marxist concern for the classless society the message of the coming of the Kingdom of God (eschatology) takes on new significance in two ways; it challenges the believer to render services to the world. The ideal Kingdom of God does not just come, it is worked for. Utopia only dawns when people exercise authentic humanity. Authentic humanity is seen when people

gather together and share intellectual, spiritual and material possessions in common. This is the essence of true self-redemptive action under the guidance of Jesus Christ. The mere futuristic concept of the Kingdom of God has given birth to irresponsible, lax and life-negating Christians. The expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God leads the believer to a disenchanting attitude to all secular programmes of salvation. God's action in history has revealed beyond all rational doubt that the human person is an agent of God. People are the maker of the Kingdom of God through love, togetherness and sharing. The demand for social and economic justice at local, national and international levels, -- the microscopic and macroscopic--dimensions point to the need for the creation of a classless society. The yearning for a classless society discloses God's action. To reconcile and share with neighbours is to live in the Kingdom of God. Congregations are signs of a new creation which seek to dismantle the class system.

The Christian ethos is that which seeks to establish a society which affirms human dignity, justice and freedom upon the ashes of the diabolic class system. I have pointed out in *Towards a Socialist Ethos* that,

the Gospel of Jesus is an effervescent and vibrant recipe for revolutionary transformation, and those who profess to be Christians should be agents for change... (1).

The Kingdom of God thus, does not remain a pipe dream. Ours is not a theology of otherworldly eschatological hopes. Christianity came into being out of Jesus' liberating message of the imminent Kingdom of God and the Apostles liberating message of the resurrection from the yoke of the capitalist class system into a liberated classless society.

The concept of a classless society is essentially theological. We are all one society through the baptism of Christ. We aim to form a society where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, neither rich nor poor, neither the downtrodden, nor the privileged (Galatians 3: 27-29). Christianity aims to create the Kingdom of God whose society is devoid of the iniquitous class system. It is an

inarguable fact that Socialism and Christianity have no fundamental differences.

The concept of sharing and the creation of a classless society in the Kingdom of God can be marred seriously by ethnic animalistic practices like tribalism, racism, sexism, regionalism and nepotism, which in short corresponds to what St Augustine called the worldly city. Speaking in more political terms there is the issue of misuse of power, which dehumanizes the oppressor more than it does the victim.

Positive and, alas, negative relations develop within any given social group and are essential to our understanding of the society as a whole. Freedom, responsibility, skill etc. acquire real meaning only in terms of the relations of people in society. A society develops socially and economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with their environment. It should be pointed out or noted here that even from the earliest historical times mankind found it convenient and necessary to come together in groups to hunt and for the sake of survival. At present we are called to be partners in a continued struggle for an egalitarian society. Therefore we have to be specific and identify obstacles to overcome.

## **Issues to be faced together**

### **a) Tribalism**

Tribalism is that state of being where one's relationship with others is governed by blood ties, and kith and kin sentiments. It is that instinct that seeks to serve one's own group without regard to the welfare of other groups. Tribalism is an irrational philosophy that thrives upon emotions regardless of the consequences to the individual and to other groups from whom he isolates himself. In other words it is that law of the jungle which believes in the solidarity and survival of the clan.

Tribalism, in many African countries has wittingly superceded racism and is a potential danger to the sacred values of equality based on merit and is undoubtedly

destined to succeed apartheid as a new force of discontent, destabilisation, underdevelopment and destruction.

### **i/ Political**

Tribalism is a political disease. It is contagious and to a large measure responsible for the political blunders and civil unrests, civil wars, economic ruin that has bedeviled many an African country. Many leaders on the continent surround themselves with homeboys in the mistaken belief that the loyalty of the so-called homeboys, sometimes seemingly blind, will ensure their security and long lease of leadership. The uncritical reports that they get from some of the boys usually give the leaders a false picture of mass support and of their satisfaction with government performance.

It would be prudent on the part of African leaders to remember that their mandate to govern is not a tribal mandate but a national one. Genuine security can only be guaranteed if the leaders cease to fear certain sections of the nation but repose confidence in all people regardless of their ethnic identity. It is only when people believe that appointments, for example, to positions of responsibility are based on merit that they will place their total confidence and respect in the leadership. It is when development resources are distributed equitably to all areas of the country that the government will continue to enjoy popular support. In short, national rather than tribal loyalty is fundamental to peace, progress and prosperity for all of the people.

### **ii/Economic**

There are many factors that are responsible for the poor economic performance of many African countries, both on the external and internal fronts. On the domestic front, notwithstanding shortages of foreign currency and the slow process of industrialisation, trading monopoly by transnational corporations, there is however, one area that is of major concern, the area of deployment of our human resources. There are cases of rampant tribalism and nepotism in the recruitment of personnel in the various sectors of the economy of a good number of African countries.

Whilst there are cries of lack of skilled manpower, it is ironic that many qualified individuals will be deprived of a job in preference to a non-qualified but one with connections with management or at the highest level. If tribal affinity is allowed to supercede proficiency this can only result in high inefficiency, low productivity and raise corruption to unacceptable levels.

### **b) Regionalism**

Regionalism as a strategy of decentralisation and designed to improve administration and determination of peculiar needs of a given area is a positive and wholesome practice. But regionalism perceived in political, ideological and sectarian terms, that is to say, if politicians, from a particular region would want to mobilise people of the region with the purpose of building a political power base, this would no doubt undermine not only the long term interest of the region itself, but the sacred sense of national identity.

The strength of the region does not lie in its sense of individual identity but in its quest to contribute creatively both in terms of new ideas and in sharing its achievements with the rest of the country. Super development of one region invariably leads to underdevelopment of other regions, whilst underdevelopment of any region leads to the underdevelopment of all regions. What is needed therefore is not to promote a spirit of competition between regions but rather that of mutual interdependence. Such a phenomenon is only possible when leaders with a national consciousness emerge. It is incumbent upon all those on whom fate has consigned the responsibility of guiding the affairs of nations and peoples to act as national leaders and not tribal headboys who determine national priorities on the basis of emotional pressures or factors rather than rationally diagnosing the peculiar needs of each area and cause or argue for the need to allocate resources in accordance with the developmental requirements of each and every region.

At a national level, care must be taken to avoid the danger of behaving in a manner that renders one as a village or regional representative of people from his own area.

Cases are known where if one happens to be privileged to head a government department or for that matter a department in any sector of national life one is biased towards fellows from his/her own village without regard to qualifications. Such practices do not only engender hostility among various ethnic groups in a given country, but even of greater importance, are detrimental to the progress and efficient management of the country's meager resources.

Regional politics is known to contain the seeds of disintegration of society and in extreme cases is the major cause of tribal wars, some of which result in demands for, or in actual secession.

### c) Racism

At its first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the World Council of Churches stated that:

Churches should call society away from prejudice based upon race or colour and from practices of discrimination and segregation as denials of justice and human dignity. The churches should take a firm and vigorous stand against governments that practice racial discrimination, through local action in cooperation with churches in other lands and through international institutions. (2)

Of all the heresies and scandals that have characterised the history of human relations, racism reigns supreme. In racism skin colour is used as a tool for racial segregation. Those who believe in racial supremacy perceive themselves as biologically pure, genetically and intellectually superior to other races. They believe they are predestined by God to dominate, to enslave or subjugate or even to eradicate other groups/races which it deems to be inferior or nonentities.

White racism is by far the most dangerous form of racism, because through it social, economic and political power structures have been organised and defended, structures that are responsible for untold misery, suffering and death of scores of peoples in the developing world. In such cases racism is an instrument of domination which secures political, economic and cultural privileges for whites

and makes second class human beings of black and coloured peoples. Thus the 1969 Declaration of Canterbury says "Combating racism must entail a redistribution of social, economic, political and cultural power from the powerful to the powerless" (3).

#### d) Sexism

Sexism is to do with male/female relationships in the world. It is part of the intricate web of oppression in which most women live. Thus feminists complain that the male dominated pattern of culture and social organisation oppress women in society. It should be noted that women do form a legitimate part of the human community and are beings who are to be benevolently listened to; because they can contribute to central issues. It is deemed necessary to attempt to build a community in which a person can function as a human being, helped rather than hampered by his or her sex. Men and women should know their place and play their role ungrudgingly and none should feel suffocated by societies, definition of femininity or masculinity. To overcome sexism both in theory and practice demands joint action on the part of women and men, not only in a conference taking up that challenge but wherever sexism appears in other areas of emphasis.

People must get rid of the racist, sexist, regionalistic, tribalistic and nepotistic mentality, for these are vices that are detrimental to and incompatible with human and economic development. It is of paramount importance that our lives or conduct be characterised by sharing, justice, equity and a spirit of oneness and fraternity that transcends tribal, sexual, regional and family boundaries.

#### Notes

1. Banana C.S., *Towards a Socialist Ethos*, The College Press, Harare, 1987, p.17.
2. Moltmann J., *The Experiment Hope*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975, p.131.
3. Mutambirwa, J. *South Africa the Sanctions Mission*, Zed Books Ltd, London and New Jersey, 1989, p.17

# 6 Jesus—the Messiah and Ancestor

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## Introduction

In the previous chapter I have been very specific when elaborating on what the Christian view of the Kingdom of God contains in terms of an integral dialogue with the Marxist notion of the classless society. In this way I have illustrated what is implied in the historical mission of the Church and of individual Christians at this very juncture and with a view to the ultimate goal of history.

In Christian theology, however, there is more to the talk about the Kingdom of God as this is the focal point in the message of Jesus and has to be seen in the light of his ministry as the Messiah, the Christ. In this explanation I therefore at this stage proceed to Christology. First of all a brief comment is due concerning the very concept of Messiah.

The title "Messiah" came from the background of Judaism and the Old Testament and it literally means "the anointed one", which stood for the king of Israel. The Messiah came to be understood as a promised ideal king who would deliver the nation from slavery and rule in righteousness. This Messianic expectation led to a this-worldly interpretation of Christ as the Lord of the Jewish social, moral and political life.

Jesus Christ is the key-person in the salvation history taken in its broadest cosmological context. A look at his ministry shows the dialectics between remarkable claims of authority and expression of power that he makes as exalted Lord. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18). On the other hand he illustrates compelling expressions of humility, like when he washed the feet of his disciples as if he was a servant (John 13:5). The passion and the cross are a supreme example of Christ's humiliation and a gateway to his exaltation as king and Lord. Jesus was indeed, very deliberately, a strange messiah: he appears to have rejected the role of a political liberator of a

colonised people but became the king of the world who reconciles and restores humanity to God.

This chapter seeks not only to show that Jesus is the universal Messiah, but to interpret his messiahship within the African context. In this respect one finds a dialectic relationship between Jesus and the concept of ancestorship in the African cosmology. I shall specifically draw examples from the Shona-Ndebele traditional religions of Zimbabwe.

### **Jesus the Messiah and the Kingdom of God**

Jesus Christ's centrality in salvation history is evidenced by his message and ministry. It was his humiliating death on the cross and the subsequent resurrection that revealed that he is the ultimate and universal Messiah, yet all these events are addressed in the Judeo-Hellenistic cosmology, thus making little or no significance to the African Christian.

Nobody doubts that the Jesus of history was a teacher but to understand the function and message of his teaching properly, we need to consider them against the background of his other activities in the context of his ministry as a whole. Besides being a rabbi Jesus was also a physician of the body and mind and an exorcist as well. He healed physical ills and disabilities and also exorcised evil spirits. In these mighty deeds, Jesus was not only heralding the coming of the Kingdom of God, but revealing his messiahship.

Before going any further, it may be important to expound on Jesus' view of the Kingdom of God as found in his message and ministry. Jesus understood the Kingdom of God differently from his contemporaries. Some Jews thought of it in political-religious terms, and dreamt that on its inauguration Israel would be vindicated and all other nations would be conquered by God and serve under Israel. Yet others thought of it in terms of apocalyptic imagery when God would intervene in human history in the future and act as the divine monarch to all the nations. Thus the Jews anticipated a king or Messiah who would usher in a period of Jewish independence and sovereignty over other nations.

However, Jesus appears to have repudiated the role of political liberator. To reconquer Jerusalem or to challenge the powers that be, the authority of Herod, let alone that of Caesar, was not on Jesus' agenda. Neither did he anticipate an apocalyptic Kingdom of God. He initiated another kind of future when he was born in Bethlehem.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was a present reality, in the here and now. He viewed it in his healing and exorcising, he located it in this world in his fight against evil instead of in a mythical arena outside of this world. As he envisaged it, in the Kingdom of God there are no thrones, no courtiers, no clashing of hosts, no chariots, no swords, etc. In their place we encounter the landscapes, work tools, and inhabitants of the Galilean country and its lakeside life. His parables tell us about the kind of kingdom he envisaged: The Kingdom of God is like a field in which a man sowed good seed and when he went away the other came and sowed weeds (Matthew 13:24ff.; Mark 4:3ff.); the kingdom is like a vineyard in which day labourers are treated fairly and generously (Matthew 20:1-16); it belongs to the poor, to the little children, the humble and the trusting (Matthew 13:33f. 18: 3-4; Luke 3:20-21, 6:20).

Thus for Jesus the Kingdom of God was to be experienced in the here and now, as evidenced by his message and ministry, especially the healings and exorcisms. This view of life by Jesus has direct relevance to the Shona-Ndebele cosmology.

The Shona and Ndebele people believe in life in the here and now, and talking of an eschatological Kingdom of God is actually meaningless to them; it is garbage. The interesting point to note here is the role of Jesus as healer, exorcist and preacher, in which activities he revealed his messiahship. In his capacity as a healer and exorcist, Jesus was a medicine-man in his own culture (the so-called witchdoctor by Western sociologists). Jesus also practiced divination, but unlike the African divine-healer (n'anga), he was not a bone-thrasher. In this respect a comparison of Jesus' healings and exorcisms might help us to understand this messianic aspect of Jesus in the African context.



*N'anga (traditional healer)  
in contemplation*

## Jesus as *N'anga*

The role of the *n'anga* in society is one of integrated healing at all levels, that is, healing as related to or consequent upon a process of revelation. A critical analysis of Jesus' healings shows that Jesus imitated the mumbo-jumbo of contemporary diviners and healers. In his day, saliva was frequently used by diviner-healers as a vehicle for healing. In Mark 7:34 we are told that Jesus touched the tongue of the deaf mute, having spat on his fingers, and the patient was made well. In another incident, he also mixed mud with his own spittle in order to heal a blind man (John 19:6).

Thus, like traditional healers, Jesus usually touched or manipulated the affected part of the body. At times he allowed healing power to pass through his clothes, as is also alleged of ancient healers (cf. Mark 5:27-29). Jesus often instructed his disciples to use oil in healing and it seems from the story of the Good Samaritan that it constituted a sample dressing for wounds (Mark 6:12-13; Luke 10:34). Finally, the characteristic gesture of laying hands upon the sick was so common among healers as to be a synonym for healing itself. In Jesus' day, causes of diseases were often attributed to spirits, for they had not yet known that certain diseases are caused by infection, that is, by bacteria or viruses.

The essential question we need to ask ourselves here is: How far does the role of the *n'anga* help us to comprehend the messianic role of Jesus himself as a healer. As mentioned above, Jesus viewed his healings as a means of inaugurating the Kingdom of God. Curing the sick was a sign of a more fundamental restoration of health and wholeness, of forgiveness and reconciliation which typifies God's reign.

The role of the *n'anga*, especially in Shona-Ndebele traditional religion, is to restore health and wholeness. So can't this be seen as the reign of God also? Should not Christianity baptize some aspects of traditional healing? If the work of the *n'anga* is the work of the devil as the white missionaries believed, why are the people healed? The Shona and Ndebele view illness as the work of evil spirits, so can the devil destroy his own fortress? Surely Christians

should consider going back to the despised and degraded *n'anga* to find answers to many of the questions being asked today about healing and see how compatible they may be with the teaching and witness of Christ.

If the historical Christ used some of the techniques of the popular healers and exorcists of his day, would he not do the same if he came to Africa?. Jesus experienced his messiahship on the here and now basis, so when white missionaries portrayed Jesus as an eschatological figure they did not only make him difficult for the Africans to comprehend, but also meaningless. Thus, many Christians have turned to independent churches and Evangelical Pentecostal churches due to their dissatisfaction with the main-line churches' approach to healing and exorcism and their gnosticism towards the area of psychic and emotional needs of the people. This leads to the alienation and emotional distress which adversely affect physical health. However, it should be pointed out that independent and Pentecostal churches have not provided all answers to all spiritual problems and diseases, hence the need to go back to the *n'anga* who might have the answer and help heal the patients thereby furthering the reign of the Kingdom of God.

### **Christ as Our Ancestor**

The other major role of Jesus as Messiah is that of mediating between God and the people. For this reason Jesus has two natures: human and divine. In this respect it should be noted that in the Shona-Ndebele world view the Judeo-Christian conception of the eschatological son of God who shall come at the parousia is difficult to comprehend and makes the whole notion of Christ's mediatorship meaningless and nonsensical. In the Shona-Ndebele world view, mediation between God and the people is the role of the ancestors who also act through spirit mediums. So Christians should try and find out what aspects of spirit mediums are compatible with the teaching and witness of Jesus. Thus, to make the mediatorship of Jesus more meaningful to the Shona-Ndebele people, it is of paramount importance to complement Jesus Christ in the context of ancestorship.

In order to make a more comprehensive analysis of bringing Christ in the context of ancestorship, it is deemed imperative to first understand the Shona-Ndebele people's conception of ancestorship. According to Nyamiti, ancestorship is characterised by five main elements: natural relationship, supernatural status, mediation, title to regular sacred communication with one's earthly relatives and exemplarity. There is brother ancestorship that exists between a dead individual and his/her brothers or sisters in the nuclear family. Of great importance is the role of national spirit mediums who mediate for the whole nation like Nehanda and Chaminuka, great national *mhondoros* of the 19th century. This kind of ancestorship bears closest analogy to the role of Christ as our ancestor and mediator. Christians believe that Christ's mediatorship brings about reconciliation and good relations between them and God, so do the Shona-Ndebele believe about their national spirit mediums.

We can trace Christ's ancestorship to us, primarily to our common originality. That is to say, we are brothers through our Adamite origin (1). In this respect Christ's messiahship and ancestorship become meaningful to us. Nyamiti points out that Christ's ancestorship is also grounded on his supernatural status. The supernatural status of the ancestors endows them with the superhuman powers and qualities that enable them to mediate between God and the people. In the same vein the supernatural status of Christ enables him to mediate between God and the people. In Shona-Ndebele religions, ancestors are models of behaviour, the living descendants try to imitate their ancestors in daily moral conduct. In the same line of thought Paul tells his Corinthian congregation to be imitators of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Thus, Christ is also a model of conduct to his living brethren.

The Shona-Ndebele people perform frequent rituals and prayers to their ancestors to solicit various blessings from God. In like manner, Christians also perform regular communications in the form of rituals and prayers to God through Christ, for example the eucharist as a means of receiving God's grace and blessings. If we contextualise

Christology in this respect it would be more relevant to the Shona-Ndebele people, for it takes into consideration their myths, traditions and world-view.

Among the supernatural powers ascribed to ancestors is their capacity or capability to heal bodily ailments. Ancestors are regarded as guardians of the living at family and tribal levels. They look after the health and well-being of their living descendants. It is therefore appropriate and absolutely necessary to examine Jesus' healing ministry in relation to his ancestorship. The Gospels portray the historical ministry of Jesus as a redemptive mission to restore the original peace and harmony broken by the sinful separation between humankind and God, which brought about disease, death and evil possession. Hence in combating these evils Jesus was fulfilling his soteriological and ancestral mission; to re-establish the original harmonious condition of humankind by defeating the acts of the devil (2). As we have seen, he did this through miracles, raising the dead and exorcisms (cf. Luke 7:1-16; John 11:lff.; Mark 1:23-26, 5:25ff). There are striking parallels between Christ's healing formation and that of the ancestors.

Christ's healings were efficacious signs of his salvation. They manifested his messiahship, ancestorship and also his mediatory role. Thus Christ's messiahship and ancestorship are found primarily in his role as the chief mediator between God and the living descendants. However, there is some distinction to be drawn between Christ's ancestorship and that of the spirit mediums, for Christ's messianic salvation is also grounded in his expression of love for the whole of humanity, whereas that of the ancestors in Shona-Ndebele cosmology is limited to living kins and fold only—there is no universality here. Moreover, Jesus' self sacrificial death on the cross is an expression of universal love and reconciliation unlike in the Shona-Ndebele notion of ancestors. Therefore my argument here is that Jesus should be co-opted into the Shona-Ndebele cosmology as the most senior national spirit medium who transcends territorial boundaries in his mediumship and ancestorship, notwithstanding the problems of lineage.

Although in both cases there is an element of mediation between God and the people, in the case of Christ's it is not just a matter of restoring communication with God as it was in the beginning. As a mediator, Christ sacrificed himself to provide the basis for reconciliation between God and humankind and indeed, between conflicting interests within humankind. Thus, Christ qualifies for the role of the spirit medium and calls his people to a sacrificial ministry. This is evident in his teaching as a market theologian as we shall see in the next chapter.

## Notes

1. Nyamiti, C. *Christ Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Mambo Press, Gweru, 1984, p.19.
2. *Ibid*, p.55.

# 7 The Legacy of Jesus—The Market-Theologian

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## Jesus' Public Ministry

What does it mean to talk of Jesus as a market-theologian? This may be a genuine question although the answer may seem very obvious. It is; or it seems simple because one can simply say a market-theologian is a theologian who practices or sells his theology at, around or in the midst of the market place. This can surely be true of Jesus since he more often than not is reported preaching or teaching at the market place. Almost all the gospel writers have something on this, of Jesus reportedly going through market places (cf. Matthew 21:12).

The foregoing description implies a literal interpretation of Jesus as the "market-theologian". Now let us metaphorically ask one fundamental question: What do we mean by "market"? A market is a place where people from all walks of life converge. It is cosmopolitan. It is the theatre of the poor, those of low or no income as opposed to the metropolis. It must be pointed out however that whilst the market place is predominantly patronised by the low income people, none-the-less this does not preclude a sprinkling of all other social groups. The market place is very public, it is a place where members of the public get their resources and/or commodities. This place is visited frequently, in fact on a daily basis. It is a place which people are familiar with.

Upon the basis of the meaning of "market" it can be rightly said that Jesus was a "market-theologian" in the metaphorical sense. This assertion should be looked at in the light of Biblical narratives from which internal evidence can be drawn. Just as a market is a public place, we find that Jesus was a public figure. He revealed and did not disclose; he spoke and did not talk at; he ministered in public and did not administer; he appealed but did not command. However, in order not to confuse the public and create wrong expectations, he had to withdraw when they wanted to

exploit his services for too limited ends. As the universal messiah who talked in public as a "market- theologian" Jesus taught in such a way that his message contains normative signals both to church and society for the restoration of humanity and the world even today.

Like the Old Testament prophets before him, who were public figures, Jesus stood crystally clear as a public figure. He was a great prophet of the New Testament, a popular and public leader. Strictly speaking, there was nothing of fundamental importance that was private about Jesus' mission, save the "messianic secret", the argument that Jesus did not want people to know about his messiahship, lest his opponents would kill him before he accomplished his mission.

We have seen that a market place caters for the whole cross-section of the population. Likewise, when a prophet ("prophet" here shall be understood to be synonymous with "theologian") emerges, he is to benefit all—the rich and the poor. Jesus of Nazareth's message for all was characterised by his vehement attack on social injustices, social and moral decadence, religious orthodoxy and the general corruption of religious leaders like the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes (cf. Matthew 23). Nobody was left out, everyone was his target. Political leaders, the business people and workers alike had relevant lessons brought to their doorsteps. Hence Christ was the source and lifeline of the whole community.

There are quite a number of things which Jesus did which we can cite to reinforce the claim that he was a man of the people. One can talk about public kerygmatic deliberations like the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:20ff.). His public healings, casting out of demons and many other miracles reinforce this point. Through his plausible oracles and parables, Jesus proclaimed good tidings to the poor, and called them to observe proper conduct in the community.

Jesus was unlike the Pharisees, the separatists who believed they possessed the truth and had monopoly of it. They considered the shepherds, the outcasts or underdogs

and people of the land as incorrigibles. For example, for the tax collector to think of repaying all the people he had cheated (e.g. Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10) was quite impossible. Therefore repentance became a very remote idea to them. But Jesus the great prophet and theologian from Nazareth actually intermingled with these very people who were considered as social reprobates in order to instil hope in them, instead of roundly condemning them as the Pharisees advocated. Thus Jesus' call to repentance included all, and in particular he admonished his listeners to repent from self-righteousness.

Repentance was put on the market and, as we know, a market is a place where one can obtain something new (as well as old). Noteworthy here is the fact that when people went to Jesus they got a new teaching and a new life. He taught with great authority and wisdom, to the amazement of the great teachers of the Torah (Mark 6:2-3; Luke 4:36).

Jesus had a fundamental message for the poor. But who were the poor, about whom Jesus was so concerned? The poor are those socially underprivileged, the have-nots, those who have a material "lack" or rather those who lack economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of the name. These are the poor materially. There are also the poor spiritually, and the notion of spiritual poverty is ambiguous. Often this is taken as an inner attitude of unattachment to the goods of this world. So the poor in spirit are those whose religious lives are not well catered for. So in this case the poor are not necessarily those who lack the material goods but those not attached to them, even if they do have them. Thus, a rich person can be spiritually poor, and a poor person can be opulent at heart (1). But it should be pointed out that when one's material condition is unhealthy and uncondusive for existence the spiritual cannot be better, therefore, Christians should not necessarily give material poverty a positive value and harp upon preaching the virtues of poverty, considering that poverty is a human and religious scandal which must be eradicated from the face of the earth.

Thus, in the revival ministry of Jesus the rich were called to have a sense of sharing and brotherhood and assist the

needy, as emphasised, for example, by the story of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30).

### **Jesus and the Poor**

Even though the poor were considered outcasts and dehumanised people by their well-to-do contemporaries, Jesus, with his theology thriving at the local theological market, assured them that God was on their side: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20; cf. Matthew 5:3); one of Jesus' first beatitudes giving a prominent place or a front seat in the Kingdom of God. The very people who are down-trodden are the inhabitants of God's Kingdom—the present reality (realised or inaugurated eschatology) and a futuristic sense (anticipated eschatology). Inaugurated eschatology (in the person of Jesus) involves an immediate liberation of the poor, the legitimate heirs of the Kingdom of God provided their faith is rooted in him. Where the poor are, there God is to be found, for he is the God of the poor and the oppressed, the degraded and dehumanised in society.

Jesus' message was for the people and consequently, he had to reach out to the people in the countryside and at market places. His message was not at all synagogic and had nothing to do with the legalistic and formalistic liturgies in the synagogues. "The son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The lost were not to be found in the synagogues although ironically there were many there, but in the countryside. The Galilean theologian proclaimed good news to the poor and the lost. But what is good news? To answer this question let us take the example of a people's army involved in a battle. The people's fate is dependent upon the outcome of that battle. They remain impatient, anxious and in suspense until a messenger comes with the news. If it is victory that would be good news, if not, bad. Therefore good news is what people are pleased to hear and indeed what they need to hear. So when Jesus came as God's messenger to the people, the poor realised that he had good news for them and became hopeful realising that God was on their side.

Jesus' movement was religious from its inception but could not escape being interpreted as messianic in the political sense, given what he said and did. His association with zealots could not go unnoticed because the zealots were well known for their militancy. The fact that Jesus was labelled "... King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37) has more political undertones latent in it than sheer mockery or derision. The current of messianic fever amongst the contemporary Jewish circles was so strong that if one argues that Jesus frustrated the Jewish expectations by not fulfilling them, he could be very close to reality.

In a certain incident the Jews asked him whether they should continue paying taxes to Caesar or not (Matthew 22:15ff.). Jesus' answer to this question was shrewd, diplomatic and ambiguous. He did not say "yes" or "no", for either answer would put him in jeopardy. If he had said "yes" he was going to lose the support of the nationalists, and if he had forbidden them the Roman government was going to charge him with treason and the nationalists could probably have asked for a rebellion programme against the Romans. As a result he replied, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21), a rather neutral answer that made it difficult for his disciples to entangle him in his speech.

### **Jesus and the Political Order**

Jesus seems to have been very patriotic but the question of whether he was a typical nationalist or not cannot be exhausted here. His reference to Herod as "that fox" needs closer and critical assessment (Luke 13:3-33). This reference implies that his attitude toward Herod was not all that pacific; it was inimical or sour. Jesus however, was a good citizen who taught his followers to render to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God. Now, the marginal question would be, why his crucifixion at the hands of the Romans?

Jesus' success as a "market-theologian" is evident in his accusation by the Jews:

We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying he himself is Christ a king (Luke 23:2).

Does the quotation above reveal the true feeling of Jesus about payment of taxes? Which account should one believe?

His success can also be seen in the continuation of his ministry; the disciples themselves becoming "market-theologians", following in the footsteps of their master. It is important to note that Jesus' message was full of originality; he never carried scriptures with him. He drew his imagery from folklore, wisdom and popular traditions, for example, parables pertaining to agricultural activities (cf. Luke 8: parable of the sower). Thus Jesus was a market-theologian par excellence.

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus is recorded as having entered the synagogue on a Sabbath, and when given the scripture to read, had proceeded to unroll the scroll and found a portion from the book of Isaiah where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

This passage Jesus read at the beginning of his ministry, can be taken as his inaugural manifesto and there can be no better way of epitomising the scandalous proportions that poverty has reached in the contemporary situation in Africa. In our attempt to address ourselves squarely to the reality of the hopelessness in some quarters in the African continent it might be efficacious and expedient to borrow from Gustavo Gutierrez's essay appropriately entitled "Theology from the underside of history" in which he says that in recent years it has seemed more and more clear to many Christians that if the church wishes to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ, it must be aware of itself from underneath, form among the poor of this world, into communion with the misery, injustice, struggles and hopes of the wretched of the earth—for of such is the Kingdom of God.

To be born, to be reborn, as a church from below, from among the populace, today means to die, in a concrete history of oppression and complicity with oppression. In this ecclesiological approach, which takes up one of the central themes of the Bible, Jesus Christ is seen as the poor one identified with the oppressed and plundered of this world. Here new parts open wide, for this is what is called the underside of history. John Sobrino has also spoken with reference to the ecclesiological newness of the church of the poor; of the resurrection of the true church, which is the subject of the next chapter.

**Note:**

1. Gutierrez G., *A Theology of Liberation*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1974, pp.163-4.

# 8 The People's Church

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After Christ, the key-figure in the history of salvation becomes the church, the invisible means by which God continues both the creation and salvific concern for humankind. Although the New Testament word for the church, that is, *ekklesia*, equals the elected ones, that is, the continuity of the chosen people of the Old Testament, the English word "Church" is directly derived from the Greek word for the Lord, i.e. *Chyrios*, and does basically mean those who belong to the Lord, which indeed conveys the intimate relation between Christ and his Church. (The word "Christians", of course, is derived from Christ, and means those who belong to Christ [cf. Acts 11:26]).

The most pregnant Biblical imagery illustrating this intimate relationship is that of St. Paul when he speaks in I Corinthians 12:12-27 of the church as the body of Christ, where Christ himself is the head. Let us first deal with the church as a fellowship or religious community, that is, *koinonia*, then we will speak of the mission of the church under the heading, *Leitourgia*, i.e. corporate service to God and humanity, and then illustrate the real resources of the church under the loaded term *charismata*, i.e. the gifts of divine grace.

## ***Koinonia* (Community)**

The Greek word *Koinonia* means partnership, contribution, or help. It means sharing in spiritual fellowship. "Fellowship" and "communion" are translated by two words which mean *koinonia*. The key idea is that of partnership, possessing things in common, a belonging in common to community with the knowledge of the Lord (1).

... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and fellowship with the father and with his son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3).

*Koinonia* can also be described as a joint participation of a community with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this way Christians participate in salvation, they participate jointly with God, with common natures, common likes and common dislikes. The cup and the bread are common elements shared in communion among saints. *Koinonia* embraces fellowship of Christians, a feeling of togetherness and a feeling of forming a family unit. This is where every member feels accepted and everyone knows and has fellowship with each other. There is a common relationship among the members as they come for services in love and good health. The church is a fellowship or religious community whose mission is to cooperate service to God and humanity. Though Christ is the key figure, after him the church is the visible means whereby God is praised and glorified for his continuous acts of creation and soteriological concerns. The church is therefore a fundamental Christian institution.

#### a) Eucharist/Holy Communion

The word communion, as elaborated above comes from the Greek word *Koinonia* which means sharing together. It is the sharing of bread and wine by fellow Christian members who were baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Communion emphasises one Christ, one baptism and one God for all people when they have fellowship and share in common what they own. As Gutierrez says, it is a memorial of Christ and a thanksgiving which presupposes an ever-renewed acceptance of the meaning of Jesus' life. It is a feast, a celebration of the joy that the church desires and seeks to share (2). The Holy Communion or eucharist was instituted during a meal and for the Jews a meal in common was a sign of fellowship. The eucharist also has its eschatological element or character, for it is something that we do "until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26), so that there is not only remembrance, but anticipation of the messianic banquet (cf. Mark 2:19, 10:35-40; Matthew 22:1-10, 25:10; Luke 14:16-24, 22:30). It is also believed that Jesus will be present in these fellowships.

Cheslyn Jones contends that the eucharist establishes a fellowship between Christians and Christ. The eucharist, he says, is the central occasion for the communion of the people (3). There are many pregnant biblical texts which are a witness to the church as a religious fellowship:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45).

These verses show beyond doubt a witness of some common fellowship and sharing among the Christians. This shows early Christian communism. Galatians 3:28 is an equal witness which shows an early Christian democracy and impartiality:

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.

Salvation is related to the view of the church as a corporate unity. There is a strong sense of corporate communion conditioning the experience of the individual member concerning soteriology in relation to the church. In I Corinthians 10 there is table fellowship. The methods of distribution and partaking of bread and wine vary throughout the history of the church. Different denominations use different methods.

The Lord's supper is another kind of fellowship as can be seen in the verse below:

When you meet together it is not the Lord's supper that you eat, for in eating each one goes ahead with his own meal and one is hungry and another is drunk. (1 Corinthians 11:20).

This verse refers to the individualism and attacks classism which was being practiced by the Corinthian congregation in the fellowship meetings. The author (Paul) supports Marxism in the Christian family. The poor and the wealthy should sit together and share what they have in common.

Many more verses can be cited: Philippians 1:5, 2:1, 3:10; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14, 8:4,13:14; 1 Corinthians 11:24. These verses show that there was a common communion, common activity and common sharing in Jesus Christ. All the common sharing commemorate Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, and of the four thousand (Mark 6:35-44; Matthew 15:32-38). It also commemorates Jesus' eating and sharing with the tax collectors and sinners, whom he did not despise.

The Lord's supper is therefore a day celebrated in joy and not in sorrow. Albeit it was an ordinary meal, it was a deep expression of fellowship between Jesus and his disciples. During his ministry Jesus often had fellowship meals with, for example, sinners and tax collectors (cf. Mark 1:29-31,14:3; Luke 7:36,11:37,14:1; John 2:1-11), and the Last Supper with his disciples was an extension of these fellowship meals. Thus, we find Jesus being described in Matthew 11:19 as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (cf. Luke 8:1-3, 24:33; Mark 6:32-44, 8:14; John 4:8, 31, 21:12). This was significant for Jesus and his contemporaries because table fellowship was a guarantee of peace, trust and brotherhood, and meant a sharing of one's life.

As James Dunn rightly points out, Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners was his way of proclaiming God's salvation and assurance of forgiveness, which was marked by openness, and not by exclusiveness (4). In other words, Jesus' fellowship meals were invitations to grace, and not cultic rituals or ceremonies for an inner group which separated them from their fellows. So the Last Supper which Jesus enjoyed with "the twelve" was the final expression of the communal fellowship which had been an integral part of his ministry. The meal was eaten in Jerusalem, at night in an upper room, and not in a synagogue (cf. Luke 22:9-13). Participation by the first Christians in daily fellowship meals (Acts 2:42, 46) can be seen as the continuation of Jesus' fellowship meals, for they

believed that he (Jesus) was present in their midst (cf. Luke 24:30f, 35; John 21:12-14; Acts 1:4; Revelation 3:20).

It is against this background that it becomes important to assert that the way the eucharist is being practiced by most Christians today is in a way a distortion of its original meaning. Most of today's Christian denominations confine the eucharist exclusively to those who are baptized and are considered holy. The eucharist is also confined "within the church walls", and bread and wine continue to be the sole elements of the sacrament. It must be recalled and borne in mind, that the Lord's Last Supper, which Christians commemorate, was not held in a church or synagogue but in the upper room in somebody's house; and the bread and wine which Jesus and his disciples used were common meals, or traditional diet of the day.

Since the elements of bread and wine used today at the Holy Communion are a replica of what Jesus and his disciples used for their Last Supper, elements that constituted the traditional diet of the Jews, why can't each and every society consider the use of elements of its local diet to which the people are accustomed, as substitutes for bread and wine? So the argument is that we try to contextualise the eucharist and consider using, for example, in the case of Zimbabwe, *sadza* and *maheu* as possible elements at the eucharist, instead of bread and wine which are not so indigenous in our African tradition. *Sadza* would be substituted for bread and *maheu* for wine.

#### **b) The decathedralisation of the Eucharist**

Christians should feel free to enjoy the eucharist even at a fellow church member's habitation instead of confining it to the chapel or cathedral. There is need to decathedralise the eucharist, that is, not to make it a ritual of the chapel but that every meal we partake should be an expression of our communion with Christ and with one another. This would deepen and broaden our understanding of the eucharist and enrich our Christian experience. If the eucharist should maintain its original essence of sharing meals, of fellowship and fraternity, Christians should not put a barrier or



*Fair lady — preparing corn for sadza  
and maheu*

barricade between themselves and the non-Christians to debar the latter from partaking in it, for, as we have seen above, Jesus more often than not dined with tax collectors and sinners, albeit this was condemned and scandalised by the Pharisees as sacrilegious. This would be nothing new and there won't be anything erroneous since it would be going back to the practice of the early Christian community. After all, the eucharist or holy communion is an act of worship and anybody who feels like joining should be welcome.

The marks of the new community in the book of Acts are described as obedience to the teaching of the apostles, a common fellowship, eucharistic celebration and prayer meetings. A sense of awe prevailed in face of signs of divine power working through the apostles and voluntary sharing of possessions was practiced. The church is the centre of all communion activity. The hall-mark of Christian fellowship is joyfulness of patent sincerity among fellow members. Fellowship is rooted in the personhood of Christ. By faith in what Christ is and what he has done men and women of all races and every social class are offered the opportunity to become the inheritors of the promise made to Abraham and to our forefathers. By faith and baptism they become part of Christ and part of each other caught up in the family of God.

Church communion can be related to Marxism or Socialism and to African traditional religious practices. Marxism calls for a socialist communion through an equal distribution of wealth. Marxist communion calls for equity, egalitarianism and fraternity in the community. Socialism has emphasis on international class solidarity made concrete in local relations of production. Socialistic communion and fellowship as well as African traditional communism and fellowship can be used as a basis upon which to build a deeper understanding of Christian communion and fellowship.

In African traditional religions the emphasis is on the local and ethnic community which, however, transcends particularly time and space in the experience of communion with the "living-timeless". J. S. Mbiti points out very

accurately that the acts of pouring out libation (beer, water, milk, snuff) or giving portions of food to the living-timeless are symbols of communion or fellowship and remembrance of the departed elders (5).

There are mystical ties that bind the living-timeless to their surviving relatives. Therefore these rituals are performed within the family. Often it is the oldest member of the family who performs the ritual although such priestly responsibilities could be undertaken by any member of the family to whom the family may assign to perform such sacred functions on behalf of the family. Even though one or two of the ancestors (*vadzimu*) may be mentioned by name or status, for example, "*Vasekuru, tete, titariseiwo*" (Grandfather, aunt, please care for us) the spirits have no personal communication with human families. In some societies, however, the ancestral spirits speak through a spirit medium (*svikiro*), or through a cave like in the Matopo Hills where the Mwari voice is believed to speak from a cave.

Like Jesus, the ancestral spirits become intermediaries between God and society. Libation is done to appease the ancestral spirits who are believed to be acting under orders of the Almighty (*Nyadenga/umvelinqangi*). To get the good will of the cosmic forces, ritual offerings called libations are normally carried out. Beer is poured out on the grave or at home. This is accompanied by the putting of snuff on the ground. Some people would not drink water or beer or eat food without pouring or putting a bit of it on the ground for ancestors. This communion with the living-timeless is a form of covenant between the living and the living-timeless where the living-timeless guarantee the living material prosperity, whilst the living guarantee the living-timeless spiritual obedience.

In Shona society there is always interdependence between people from birth to the hereafter. From childhood, a Shona person is taught to share all that he/she has with relatives and friends. A mother may give her child a boiled mealie cob, a piece of boiled pumpkin or some other food and tell him/her to give half to his/her brother or sister. This

is repeated until it becomes a strong habit to the extent that it becomes difficult for the child to eat anything without sharing it with a relative. Thus we find that even a married man with a family still maintains or keeps this spirit of sharing. For example, when his wife brews beer he invites his closest relatives and neighbours and they sip together, and usually a few pots of beer are left over for the family (*chomusha*) to enjoy when the guests are gone.

Other forms of fellowship and communion in the traditional Shona life are seen from youngsters (adolescence) when the youths of a village gather together in partnership for *madzamira/mahumbwe/amadlwana* (role playing). They gather at night when there is moonlight (*jenaguru*) and share food in common. *Humwe/nhimbelilima* (communal work) is another form of fellowship and communion among the Shona/Ndebele. At this *jakwara* people of a village come together and do some work for a particular member, either ploughing, weeding or fencing the fields. They are bound together by a common purpose, common ancestors, and a common culture. It is the effort of their collective ancestors in this communion and fellowship which gives them impetus and propels them to work with renewed vigour, believing that their ancestors are not only watching them but are in fact sharing in their work. Ritual dances like *majukwa*, *shangara* and *doro remukwerera* are part of this communion and fellowship.

However, Christian ecclesiology tries to balance both local contextuality and world wide Catholicity but there is no agreement as to the structural expression of this balance. On the one hand we have Papalism and on the other we have extreme congregationalism but it is better to opt for a healthy middle position between these two extremes. This will be true for hinting at as to the minimum requirement for sound Christian corporate worship with coherence in time and space, and the recognition of relevant inculturation in different contexts. However, this Christian community is not an end in itself. It is a people's church called to respond to the various pressing needs of the society.



*Urging the svikiro (spirit medium)  
to speak out*

## ***Leitourgia* (Liturgy)**

Liturgy is the name that has been used ever since the days of the apostles to describe the act of taking part in the solemn corporate worship of God by the "priestly" society (1 Peter 2:5) of Christians, who are the body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church is a religious community where liturgy forms an important part of its worship.

Liturgy is the term that covers generally all that worship which is officially organised by the church, and which is open to and offered by, or in the name of, all who are members of the church. It distinguishes this from the personal prayers of the individual Christians who make up the church and even from the common prayers of selected or voluntary groups within the church, e.g. guilds or societies.

### **a) Corporate worship**

In the course of time the term liturgy has come to be applied particularly to the performance of that rite which was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ to the peculiar and distinctive worship of those who should be his own, and which has ever since been the heart and core of Christian worship and Christian living—the eucharist or breaking of bread and drinking of wine (the cup). The blessed bread is broken that it may be shared so that the plural society is made into a singular society, that is to say made one body; the blessed cup is delivered that it may be "partaking" of the blood of Christ (6). This partaking is of the deepest meaning of the rite that those who take part are thereby united indissolubly with one another and with all who are Christ's because each participant is thereby united with him.

Cheslyn Jones points out that liturgical services are not private functions but are public celebrations of the church, which is a sacrament unity. At the practical level all liturgical rites are arranged for the participation of the community. Rite, he says is comprised of symbolic actions which enable people to relate to each other (e.g. to kiss, to have hand shakes, to hug and sit together and share experiences in common) as one social community (7). One can become part of it or enter more deeply into its life.

From a sociological point of view, for a true and amicable community, there must be a face-to-face relationship. For the Christians this means that the members of the church are persons bound together by faith and love. In principle the Christians are already related to one another. In the worshipping community this relationship is deepened and enhanced by liturgy.

Jones, however, puts it clearly that "liturgy" does not lend itself to definition, but if one is to be attempted, it could be stated as follows: it is the communal celebration by the church, which is Christ's body and in which he, with the Holy Spirit, is active in the pascal mystery. Through this celebration which is by its very nature Christ-sacramental, the high priest of the community makes present and available to men and women of today the reality of his salvation (8). This is where the Bishop or Celebrant performs services of God to the public. Presbyters assist the Bishops/Celebrant as the deacons and sub-deacons prepare and distribute the eucharistic elements of bread and wine. The readers read the gospel, the acolytes carry lights, door keepers open and shut doors and the rest of the faithful respond to the service in faith.

### **b) The Wider Connotation**

The use of the word in the New Testament will now be examined. In the Gospel of Luke the rich young man who wondered what he could do to secure himself a place in the Kingdom of God was told by Jesus to go and sell what he had and give to the poor. This clearly underlines the fact that worship is not a mere spiritual act but the way we conduct ourselves in business enterprises and in all our human relationships must be an expression of worship.

And when Jesus heard it he said to him, "One thing you still lack, sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me". (Luke 4:22).

This verse certainly conveys a reference to worship. If we look at Hebrews 10:11 we find that the word liturgy has a much more comprehensive and profound meaning:

And even priests stand daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down...

Here the word is more loaded, it involves sacrifice in a ritual sense. Paul, however, can use the word as a means of summary of the apostolic ministry. In Philippians 2:17 he says:

Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

This same idea is expressed in Romans 12:1. In 2 Corinthians 9:12 Paul refers to the collection for the poor congregation as a liturgy. The word, thus can be conveyed as a relevant ministry which involves both worship, i.e. service to God and sacrificial living, i.e. ministry for and with the poor. The word combines worship, thanksgiving, blessing of food (cf. Acts 27:35), sacrifice and a proclamation of the ministry to the poor and the despised. Liturgy therefore gives wholeness to corporate worship through the restoration and enrichment of traditional ceremonies (9).

### **c) Authentic African Expressions of Worship**

African Christians cannot consent with a purely legalistic Christian practice. There could be no communication between the pastor and the Shona or Ndebele congregation. The African poet Okot p'Bitek has satirised this situation in the following words:

The things they shout I don't  
understand. They shout anyhow;  
They shout like mad people.  
The padre shouts words you  
cannot understand ... (10)

In African traditional religions there is a multi-faceted reality where there are distinct conceptual divergences. There is a clear awareness of the high God, *Mwari* or *Umlimu* and the possible communication with him through spirit mediums and oracles. There is also an awareness of the



*Traditional Weaving and Pottery*

symbolic character of nature, a kind of profound ecological awareness, and of the corporate aspect of life within the extended family. Communion praxes differ according to conditions in ethnic groups.

To the Africans, ancestors are seen as people, the living-timeless charged with divinity. *Mwari/Mlimu* (God) is also not a dormant god lying prostrate in purgatory awaiting the consummation of his kingdom in the distant future; He is alive, actively regulating the lives of the living and the living-timeless. The community gathers together just like in the Christian liturgy.

The social ties binding the African to his extended family and clan have always been stronger than the forces of separation that divide members of different denominations. The important family or clan occasions like births, marriages, funerals, clan festivals, ritual dances like *majukwa*, *shangwa*, *mutoro/inxwala* all bring together in one place of worship relatives and neighbours with different confessional backgrounds. At these gatherings people never ask whether you are Catholic or Protestant, what is of paramount importance to them is that the occasion provides a rare opportunity to share either in the joys or sorrows that befall a family or neighbourhood. The key understanding of African customs and institutions in relation to liturgy is to look at the whole community and unity of the tribe, the clan and the whole nation. This is shown in family and clan gatherings which are officiated by the eldest member of the clan or such member that may be called upon to undertake this priestly task.

Like the Bishop, the presbyter or deacons, the eldest member of the clan (*sahwira*) and *vazukuru* (cousins) play significant roles in these sacred gatherings. The sacred and symbolic unsalted meat, eaten at the *kurova guva/umbuyiso* ceremony (explained in the next chapter), the snuff and the poured out libation is no less than the sacred and symbolic bread and wine. The handing on of this life, the sharing in this one life is the first link which unites members of the community of the living and the living-timeless. As in the Christian perspective, the African community extends from

the family or clan to the whole village where the sense of communion is governed by love and togetherness.

The meaning of liturgy should not be limited to its conventional definition which refers to the faithful within the confines of church buildings. Liturgy must, of necessity transcend the human barriers which are often a result of our own religious orthodoxy. There is a sense in which the whole of life must be a worshipping pilgrimage. In its broader meaning, liturgy must encompass all human activity, i.e. the way we think, the way we talk, the way we act or behave, the way we look, the way we laugh, the way we eat, the way we walk, the way we dream, the way we work and the way we do everything can be and is indeed liturgical. What people do is a form of worship, either of themselves, of technology, of power, or of God.

Like in the eucharist, there is need to decentralise worship and take it to workshop floors, to all social gatherings. Let no effort be spared in reaching out to all the people, so that the church will become truly a global village.

Christianity makes much of life-together and relationships between persons and peoples (1 Corinthians 13—the agape love idea, cf. John 4:29; James 2:1-13). All this teaching, derived and based on the teaching of the Old Testament prophets about the care of the widow and the orphan corroborates in many ways the underlying principles of African beliefs. There is no doubt that this is the soft spot that opened the door for the Christian missionaries to win the people to accept their teaching because they were in fact verbalising values, truisms and concerns which were right at the base and root of their understanding of being.

The missionaries themselves witnessed this on many occasions when they attempted to assess the character of some of these people whom they had already judged, labelled and dismissed as savage and barbarous. Says Moffat of Africander, a Koi:

He wept with those who wept, for wherever he heard of a case of distress thither his sympathies were directed. He was ever on the alert stretching out a helping hand to the widow and the fatherless.

Here then is a God-given foundation already for a dynamic, infinitely effective understanding of what the Christianity of Jesus and the New Testament is all about, that is, doing Christian theology out of the African context.

Aylward Shorter argues that certain traditional beliefs and practices are perfectly compatible with those of Christianity. He says what the African needs more is liturgical adaption of ideas and the undiluted gospel message than rituals. The church has to create liturgical rites which are in harmony with the African mentality, rather than attempt to take over and adapt "ancient, pagan" rites. Innovation may be necessary, and perhaps even the preservation of certain foreign cultural forms, concepts and values that are compatible with the indigenous culture. But these must be well integrated and articulated for the enrichment of the growth and development of faith among the indigenous peoples (11).

The ecclesiology of salvation has developed the image of a church of the poor, to be understood not only in the sense that it must be a poor church in order to fulfil its mission, nor mainly in the sense that the church must be preoccupied with the poor and be for the poor, but in the sense that it must understand itself and act from the poor. The response is relatively simple at the Theological level. The spirit of Jesus is in the poor and, with them as his point of departure; he re-creates the whole church. For this profound reason it is important to understand that the church of the poor is not a church for the poor but a church that must be formed on the basis of the poor and that must find in them the principle of its structure, organisation and mission. This means that the poor are the authentic theological source for understanding Christian truth and practice and therefore the subject and the constitution of the church.

The poor are a theological locus, not in the classical sense of a source for attaining the truth of faith, but in the dynamic sense of a place where there is manifested in a special way the presence of the God of Jesus Christ to begin with, a hidden and disconcerting presence which then becomes a prophetic presence in that it makes a proclamation



*Collective food preparation  
- self-reliance*

and a denunciation and finally, an apocalyptic presence, in that it demands the end of the time of oppression and prepares for the irruption of a new time: a place where the discipleship of Jesus—in accordance with Matthew 25 becomes more urgent, and where therefore deeper reflection in faith and in authentic Christian Theology is made possible.

The ecclesiology of salvation also speaks of a "church which grows out of the people". The church arises, in other words, it rises, or rises again, or renews itself from the people by the power of the spirit. The movement from above always precedes the movement from below; nor is this meant to be the affirmation of an anarchical democracy which manifests itself in the African context with the hierarchy which does not preclude the Ministers and the faithful, it is meant rather to stress the process of renewal which should manifest itself in Africa of a church which is close to the people.

The very essence of the soul and the heart of African spirituality becomes incarnate among ordinary people, and in this way makes itself poorer, more brotherly, more prophetic, more stamped by the values of the kingdom. The church grows out of the people by making itself the "Church of the poor."

#### **d) Liturgy of the People's Church**

The problem of the "People's Church", the church born of the people, has various aspects. The first obstacle is readily surmounted if it is interpreted as a church that is trying to incarnate itself in the ranks of the common people on this continent, and that therefore arises out of their response in faith to the Lord. This rules out the seeming denial of a basic truth: i.e. that the church always arises from a first initiative "from above", from the spirit who raises it up and from the Lord who convokes it. Nevertheless the appellation seems to be quite unfortunate, the "People's Church" seems to be something distinct from some "other church"—the latter being identified with the "Official" or "Institutional" church and accused of being "Alienating". This suggests a division

within the bosom of the church and seems to deny the hierarchy's functions.

The ecclesiology has thus been called on to make itself more precise. The "People's Church" cannot be formed as an alternative church to the institutional church because the epithet "People's" here does not have a theological value but an ecclesiological one, as in the case of an expression like "National Church" or alternative to the institutions church but that part of the one institutional church. The one the people of God have chosen and live out is the preferential option for the poor and practices a liberating evangelisation. So the "People's Church" does not represent a narrowing but a broadening of the universality of the church but the church as the people of God taking specific historical form in the situation of Africa, even if there are clearly tensions and contradictions, not in the institutional church *per se*, but in a certain way of being the church.

There is a certain tension, and sometimes opposition, between a type of church that prolongs its incarnation in the ruling bourgeois culture, with the interests vested in this, and this creative new type of church which is taking flesh in the popular culture changing, championing the cause of the people and therefore, rightly calling itself a popular church.

The facts that are being tested in the African church—the participation of believers in the struggle for liberation, the preferential option for the poor in the part of the church, the renewal of the communities from the poor, also have consequences for the structure of the church's ministry. The current ecclesiastical system could be characterised as "institutional fossilisation".

The new reality of the basic communities is characterised by fire elements: they arise from the grassroots; they are born from the word of God; they realise a new way of being the church in terms of community and brotherhood; they celebrate faith and life. This is bringing about a shift in the axis of the church: from a church linked to the ruling class to a church linked to the people and the lower classes (and in this sense a popular church); from a church which acts in a biased way as a factor of conservation and legitimation to a

church which has opted for liberation; from a colonial church for the oppressed to a liberated church of the poor, with the poor; from a hierarchial church in which all the power is concentrated in the hierarchy, to a pneumatological church according to which every Christian has or is bearer of his or her charisma.

In short, ecclesiology of liberation is a critical ecclesiology which above all puts in question the economic and socio-cultural conditions of the life of the church that is the life of the people; and as a militant ecclesiology to this degree, takes shape as the ecclesiological theory of the practices of liberation of the African Christian people. The African has to be the author and master of his/her destiny. The status of a hostage, or captive has to be relegated to the archives of a painful but disowned history.

### ***Charismata* (Gifts of Grace)**

*Charismata* is a Greek word which literally refers to the "gifts of grace". However, in the church today the word has been reduced to meaning gifts of the Holy Spirit, like speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy. However, the meaning of the Greek word transcends this simplistic reduction of the word.

The word *charismata* should be understood as the power of the church. Thus, as such, the word should be understood in a broader context in relation to other Greek words: *kerygma* (preaching), *diakonia* (service), and *koinonia* (fellowship). In the New Testament perspective the church has essentially three functions, viz. preaching, service and fellowship. Thus, such rites and rituals as baptism, liturgy, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting of tongues, preaching and fellowship, are all embraced in these three words.

#### **a) Gifts of Grace of the Corporate Community**

Starting with preaching as a power of the church, hence a charisma, one only needs to draw parallels or examples from the Pauline churches. Preaching was a central rite in the church, especially if we take into consideration the Pauline

communities we find there were men and women who were gifted with the charisma to preach. But not all of them of course were preachers. Some had different gifts. Thus, Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (ch. 14) explains that the distribution of gifts of spirit to individual church members is like parts of the body—head, hand, stomach, mouth, ear, eye, leg etc. None of them is less important than others. Hence reducing the gifts of spirit to prophecy and speaking in tongues is not only limiting the importance of charismata as parts of the body but simplistic and fraudulent. If the church is composed of prophets and those who speak in tongues only, the question arises; who then would be the preacher, the interpreter of the tongues and the celebrant of the Holy Communion? Thus kerygma, being a central and important feature of the church, is also a gift of spirit to those who are able to preach.

Another central aspect of the church is service (*diakonia*). In this respect those who serve as distributors of the Holy Communion, healers, prophets, deacons /deaconesses and interpreters of tongues possess the gifts of grace to perform those duties. Those who baptise also fall into this category. Thus, prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, baptism and holy communion are also invaluable gifts of grace.

Another important charismata in the church is *koinonia* (fellowship). This fellowship is expressed in the common belongingness among church members. It is also demonstrated in the act of baptism, when an individual is brought into the status of being with the community of Christians. He/she becomes a comrade among comrades. Fellowship is also expressed in the breaking of bread or Holy Communion when table fellowship among Christians brings them together in an atmosphere of comradeship in the community. The *charismata* should be understood in the context of preaching, service and fellowship in the church.

A reduction of *charismata* to neither of these is erroneous and incompatible with the Greek notion of the word. Gifts of spirit or grace should be seen as individual components of the body. Neither part claims to be superior, for they

function in harmony and cooperation. Thus the church should view gifts of grace in this respect and act in love, harmony and peace, expressing the fellowship and comradeship shown in the analogy of parts of the body.

However, there seems to me to be an additional—and, indeed, very African dimension of *charismata* which is not yet sufficiently recognized. I am thinking of dreams as gifts of grace.

### b) Dreams as Gifts of Grace

In any religious tradition, the divine manifests itself through different channels, such as, a spirit medium, a diviner, an animal, a bird or an ordinary human being when asleep. The divine can also manifest itself through visions. Dreams are sometimes recollections of our experiences. Some rare dreams are dramatised, in the process of dreaming the dreamer actually performs dramatic actions of his or her dreams.

To any African reader of the Bible references to dreams are very appealing. Let me dwell on just three significant examples.

In Acts Chapter 10 on the conversion of Cornelius both Cornelius and Peter saw visions. In the vision, Cornelius was instructed to send men to Simon Peter at Joppa. Peter also saw a vision at the sixth hour of the day. He was instructed to allow Gentiles among his congregation in a symbolic vision. It was a vision against the discrimination of the Gentiles. The command reads, “Rise Peter, kill and eat” (5:13).

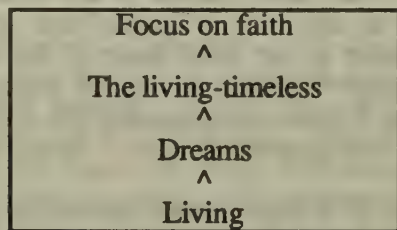
In 1 Samuel 27:8 Saul is also reported to get his plight solved through mystic revelations. Genesis 28 records a famous dream of Jacob whereby the latter was promised that he was to have many descendants. In verse 12—14 a promise between God and Jacob was made. This later became the covenant between God and the Children of Israel. This dream was to be a re-enactment of the creation myth in Genesis whereby God is said to have created the world.

An African, like his white counterpart, experiences dreams through which he is informed about his misfortune,

future, present and the causation of the past events. Africans dream of things known to them like trees, animals, vegetation and the living-timeless. These symbolise facts of life with a basis on life experiences. In these dreams, some of the myths are re-enacted. Arguing in this line Axel-Ivar Berglund has this to say: "Dreams show mythology as an experienced reality" (12).

Dreams are essentially an avenue of communication between the living and the living-timeless. Through dreams the spiritual world manifests itself to the physical world in a very concrete way. One may dream of a beloved one. Dreams may also present a metaphysical world to the dreamer, for example, a person can dream of talking with his parents who died some time ago. In a dream one may really experience the dead father as if he was alive. The father-son relationship will be experienced in a pragmatic manner as if spirit and the dreaming son were awake and living. Axel-Ivar Berglund puts this clearly when he writes thus, "Through dreams shades become very real, intimate and concrete" (p. 98).

The diagram below shows the essence of dreams in an African life experience and world view.



The diagram denotes that ancestors are not an end in themselves. They are means towards an end. They are analogous to a transmitter, through them messages are passed to the Supreme Being. Among the Shona, the Supreme Being is *Mwari*, whilst among the Ndebele the same ontological reality is perceived as *Unkulunkulu*. *Mwari* is directly connected with the ancestors.

Africans feel ignored by their ancestors when they experience dreamless nights for days. Shona people feel that lack of dreams will be an expression of the anger of the ancestors hence the fear. Africans feel that their ancestors should keep on informing them what the spiritual world has in store for them because to an African the world constitutes the living and the departed elders. The phrase "departed elders" suggests that even though they will be in graves the "dead" progenitors will still retain their stools as family advisors and "guardians of the land". Their essence lies in their continual will to advise the living through dreams, visions *et cetera*.

In dreams people may be warned of coming danger. Usually dreams associated with fire connote misfortune. If people experience such fierce dreams they quickly go to the diviner who will diagnose the misfortune further and then cure it. Such dangerous dreams involving the whole clan are usually dreamt by elders in that community. Certain types of dreams are associated with certain groups of people.

The young will also dream of whether they will succeed in their daily ventures such as courtship. This is reminiscent of Christianity which encourages one to pray so that he or she will experience a revelation. It is also believed that one can dream of his future prospects, gamblers dream of whether they will win or not. The Shona believe that when a gambler dreams catching scaly fish with his fishing line or net, he will be assured of winning. If one dreams of catching a slippery fish such as the muddy fish, luck will not be on his side. He will boycott the contest. The slippery skin of the fish is believed to symbolise that luck will "slip off" from his "grip".

Elderly people may even dream of a naked (nude) person invading their premises. This person would be evil and in most cases he will be associated with witchcraft.

Farmers also dream of success or failure of their farming season. In the Bible, Joseph is said to have dreamt about drought when he was shown seven fat cows and another seven weak ones which fed on the fat ones. Among the Shona when a farmer dreams of green vegetation it means that season will be characterised by high yields.



*An elder consulting a svikiro*

Women also experience their special kind of dreams which usually have a bearing on their motherly role. Arguing in this line Axel-Ivar Bergland has this to say, "Women are said to dream extensively during their first months of pregnancy. They carefully note these dreams, for the outcome of the pregnancy as well as the sex of the expected child is announced through the dreams" (p.99). It is also observed that such revelations come from the spirit of the father since the genealogy of the Zulu/Ndebele and Shona people is traced through the father.

Women can also dream about the welfare of their children in far away places such as work places and universities. A certain young Shona man Kudzai testified how his mother's dream was linked to reality. The mother dreamt when a male line gave keys to Garikai her other son. He accepted the keys and employed them to open an iron door. The door was stiff and difficult. She saw his struggle and she shed tears. He finally managed. He entered and started walking following a narrow passage until she saw him arrive. This day became realistic when within days Garikai came home safely from the war of liberation in 1980.

One also observes that through dreams ancestors can also warn of an impending judgement following the breach of an interdiction. Among the Shona people the judgement is usually manifested in the form of drought or pestilence. Three mortal sins are arson, murder and incest. Usually the interpretation of dreams relating to such serious issues requires the expertise of elderly people. However everyday dreams are interpreted by their opposites, for example, if a huntsman dreams of an unsuccessful hunt, he will be assured of a successful hunt.

Against this background there should come as no surprise that African readers of the Bible are encouraged when they find that the Bible as well speaks of dreams as a means of communication with the Divine and living-timeless, when the Bible recognizes dreams as reassuring gifts of grace. Many African ministerial candidates from early on in African Church history until the

present can refer to the Bible and affirm that they have been called to holy service in a dream.

This may be the best illustration of dreams as *charismata*. A vocation to the ministry which is mediated in a dream is a gift of grace which calls the individual to serve within a community, where neither part should claim to be superior, for they all function in harmony and cooperation as a proper People's Church.

### Notes

1. Guierrez G., *A Theology of Liberation*, S.C.M. Press Ltd London, 1974, p.148.
2. Jones C., *The Study of Liturgy*, p.33.
3. Dunn J.D.G., *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, S.C.M. Press Ltd, London, 1977, p.162.
4. Mbiti J.S., *African Traditional Religious and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, 1969, p.26.
5. Dix G., *The Shape of Liturgy*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1964, p.1.
6. Jones C. et al., *The Study of Liturgy*, O.U.P. London, 1967, pp.215-245.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Jasper R.C.D., *A Dictionary of Liturgy*, O.U.P., London, 1967, pp.215-245.
9. p'Bitek O., "The song of Lawino", in A.W.F. Shorter (ed.; *African Culture and the Christian Church*, Orbis Books, New York, 1974.
10. *Ibid.*, p.70.
11. Berglund Axel-Ivar, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*, Hurst and Company, London 1976, p.169.

## 9 Theology of Promise

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The final chapter of my introduction to Christian theology will be devoted to eschatology. In Christian theology eschatology is a loaded concept. It deals with ultimate reality and not just the end in a chronological or futuristic sense.

While it is an obligation of the People's Church to activate eschatological hope among the despairing, we should guard against the danger of using such hope as a tranquiliser that warms the tea-pot without providing the tea, that warms the heart without filling the stomach. Eschatological hope must not be an end in itself, it must be a means towards the fulfillment of a desired end, a ladder or vehicle that must carry God's children to the promised land of material and spiritual prosperity, it must lead to fulfillment, self-actualisation and self-reliance. But eschatological hope also deals with the future and what takes place at the end of time when history is completed and meets eternity, i.e. the consummation of history and the dispensation of an eternal order.

By exploring these dimensions, Christian eschatology shares concerns which are touched upon in African traditional religion as well as in socialism. In African traditional religion there are motives, explored in mythological language, which can be transcribed in terms of eternal return to how it was in the beginning. Communication with the living-timeless is a means of facilitating this return.

In socialism we have instead the defiant and hopeful view of the future which is qualified by the Marxist idea of a classless society. Utopia is not exactly mythology but explores and interprets the future, which certainly allows for laws and order but which exceeds pure scientific language.

It is, thus, from within a context which is qualified by traditional African Religion and Marxist Socialism, that I explore what is contained in Christian eschatology. First of

all I have to de-eschatologize vain and other-worldly expectations of "pie-in-the-sky".

### **The Call to Relevance Now**

Like Jesus, we need to have compassion for the starving millions, for those who are humiliated and rejected; for the billions of the future who will suffer because of the way we live today; those who have been consigned to a life of perpetual servitude. To make the worldly values of money, possessions, prestige, status, privilege, power, race, class etc. our supreme values, is to have nothing in common with Jesus.

The Bible always tells us that authentic worship is possible only if it is the locus of the healing of the sick and the raising of the fallen. Isaiah advocates the liberation of the oppressed and the defense of the rights of widows and orphans (Isaiah 1:10-17; cf. Hosea 6:6).

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6-7).

The Old Testament prophets always denounced the inequitable distribution of goods and the inequality of the society of their times. A society risks its existence if it fails to observe justice for all (cf. Amos 2:6-7; 5:11). Isaiah denounces the concentration of property in the hands of a minority:

Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, and you who are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. (Isaiah 5:8; cf. Micah 2:1-2).

Amos accuses the ruling classes of Samaria's capital of cramming their palaces full of wealth by violence and oppression (Amos 3:9-10) and Jeremiah condemns King Jehoiakim for having exploited the labour of his fellow citizens:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages. (Jeremiah 22:13)

The promised land where righteousness and justice flow is still beyond our grasp. The promises of the past have found their incarnation in Jesus alone but for humanity and the world their realisation has not yet taken place in the broad daylight of our current history (1), hence the need to hasten the advent of the new creation by all possible human efforts toward more justice and freedom in the world.

The Christian task is to allow the human being to be reborn to a life of freedom and communion. Injustice and inequity, inequality and the perversion of justice, swell beyond all bounds in society today. Men and women are being forced to live on their knees; they cry and thirst for liberty and justice but they find none, they struggle to recover the strength buried in the dust of their humiliation — to break the chains of poverty and misery, disease and ignorance that keep them prostrate in the dust-bins of history. As J. Moltmann puts it, a society which offers people no chance to define their future for themselves becomes a closed society and an inwardly and outwardly oppressive and killing society (2).

As I have already affirmed it is imperative to instill hope into the despairing masses. Hope is as important to human life as is faith and love. Hope anchors faith as a perception of our world to our world; it strengthens love as an evaluation of our world, and sustains active commitment to the causes we adopt (3). Hope should not be confused with knowledge; it is not a kind of prescience because it is characteristically unable to describe the lengths, depths or heights to which it moves us. But hope cannot be reduced to mere wishful thinking.

For Christian theology to talk about hope without relating it to the struggle of the oppressed for freedom in history is for it to sanction the structures of oppression, which deprive the oppressed of their dignity. To hope is not merely to plan the future, hope is more than the anticipation

of freedom; hope for the future does not emerge from a vacuum. We hope for what we do not see and actively wait for it with patient endurance (Romans 8:24-25). We do not hope for that which already exists, or for that which cannot be, and we strongly believe in the realisation of our hope sooner or later ("*Tariro hainyadzisi*"), so goes the Shona saying. This means that hope cannot fail us.

The Kingdom of God should be realised here and now, through socialist revolution or transformation. An appeal goes out to the churches to commit themselves to national development by active co-operation with their progressive governments, and to actively side with those who are suffering from oppression and poverty and who are exploited by their rulers, as in the case of the black people in South Africa who are denied basic human rights in their own land by a ruling white minority government. It should be remembered that the struggle for a true humanity is essentially a Christian struggle for the dignity of everybody made in the image of God. It is necessary to believe in a theology of "orthopraxis" - right action or praxis rather than simply "orthodoxy" — right belief or teaching, and ensure that the hungry are fed, the unemployed are employed, the oppressed and exploited are emancipated.

Having, thus, placed Christian eschatology in its proper social and economic framework I can now go on and re-eschatologize Christian expectations of the future. I will first of all relate the traditional African concepts of Life and Death and Communication with the Living-Timeless, which I spelled out in Chapter Two, to Christian convictions about Death and Life Eternal.

### **Christian Convictions about Death**

Christians hold the view that death is natural and an expected event. They maintain the belief that death is basically a necessary and an unavoidable consequence of the vagaries of nature. As such there is nothing strange and mysterious about death although it is a sad disruption of longstanding human relationships. For the faithful, death is regarded as a beginning of a new and higher level of life. There is indeed

life after death in Christianity, as we also find in the African traditional conception. Access to eternal life and riches of life after death is not self evident. Eternal life is dependent upon an invitation to repentance from Christ and the nature of response one makes to the invitation.

The belief that Jesus Christ died and resurrected on the third day is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. It was the resurrection of Christ which gave the apostles, who on his arrest "all forsook him and fled" (Mark 14:50) the renewal of faith which enabled them to preach the gospel without fear. Resurrection became the basic theme of the apostles (cf. Acts 2: 22-36; 1 Peter 1:3). The fact that Jesus appeared to a number of people after his death (cf. Luke 24:34, 36; John 20:19; Matthew 28:16) points to an "objective resurrection in which Christ's body no longer remained in the tomb".(4)

The Christian conviction is that life after death is dependent upon Christ. For one has to profess faith in Jesus Christ, and accept him as Lord and saviour. On the occasion of the death of Lazarus, Jesus assured Martha, Lazarus' sister that:

I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. (John 11:25-26).

In John 14:6 Jesus says that:

I am the way, and the truth and the life, no-one comes to the father, but by me.

These verses show that in Christianity eternity comes through union with Christ. This eternal union extends to the Kingdom of God. Christianity teaches that if one has no Christ one will have no life after death but will be relegated into the dungeons of eternal anguish in hell. "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (1 John 5:12).

From the preceding Christian position it is quite evident that the qualification of entering into the eternal life is different from the African traditional point of view. Even the

resurrection of Jesus is different from the kind of "African traditional resurrection" we have analysed above.

According to the scriptures, Jesus resurrected in physical form and was seen by many people for forty days (Luke 24:1-49). Jesus appeared to the Christian family and he walked with his disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-29), discussing, guiding and directing; he had an evening meal with the disciples (Luke 24:30-32—Holy Communion) and the last commission (Luke 24:44—You are my witnesses). Jesus comes back to empower, protect, guide and direct his Christian family and the outcasts:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8).

This gives faith and hope to Christians.

Another interesting feature is that Jesus does not have any mediums to possess in the conventional sense. An interesting difference between Jesus' resurrection and that of the living-timeless is that while Jesus' body resurrected from the dead, the living-timeless do not resurrect in the physical but spiritual sense. However, in respect of the presence of the Holy Spirit there would appear some parallel with the spiritual presence of the living timeless although the living-timeless would not claim privy to the trinity. The parousia can be related to the coming back of ancestral spirits:

This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11 ).

This shows there was an anticipated re-union with Jesus, just as ancestors are anticipated to reunite with their families. This idea is also expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 where Paul writes that "God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep...". The verse expresses an anticipated re-union with the dead.

It is a conviction of the eschatological: re-union and communion with the dead. As discussed above, this also is experienced in the African traditional religions; there is also a

communion with the living-timeless as the one anticipated by Christians.

The resurrection of Christ offers two immense innovations to African thought. The idea that there is life for the dead, as well as power; and the idea that their present state is not the end of the story. Communion with the departed can now mean fellowship with essentially living persons with whom we look forward to a more intense life than we can now imagine, to which the resurrection of Jesus has already opened the road. Death has deprived them of no more than sleeping does (5). Life after death is seen as restoration of what was in the beginning.

### **Jesus as *Obuyiswayo***

Christian convictions about Death, thus, are quite involved. They contain concrete claims as regards Life Eternal. These truth-claims, too, are qualified by Christ. I have already anticipated what is involved in Christian references to the Second Coming of Christ.

As hinted at in Chapter Two the Ndebele and Shona ceremonies of *Umbuyiso* and *Kurova guva* respectively contain significant dimensions which can provide the basis for an adequate African interpretation of this decisive eschatological event. There is both a short-term and a long-term perspective involved.

The short-term perspective has to do with Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who facilitates the communication of Christ with His Church and who provides the graceful substance of the Charismata. The long-term perspective is even more eschatological and qualifies the doctrine of the last things—the Consummation of the Kingdom of God on earth in the not too distant future.

Soon after Jesus had left the scene, there was a strong belief in his imminent return and the establishment of a just and righteous order. Christians perceive the events surrounding Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection as representing a glorious victory over death and the forces of evil. The power of life over death is a very central teaching in Christian faith.

Resurrection as a concrete manifestation of life after death is not a strange concept among Africans. As argued before, Africans view life as a continuum, a continuous reality; hence when somebody "dies" he or she is re-admitted into the ranks of the living. There is a sense therefore in which *Umbuyiso/Kurova guva* can become a means of interpreting the Concept of the second Coming of Christ.

In the practise of the Christian faith one gets the impression that once one dies one is divorced from the land of the living and joins the Holy ones in some distant land. What the ceremonies of *Umbuyiso* and *Kurova guva* provide is a challenge for Christians to activate their contact not just with Christ but maintain an active link and an active communion with the living and the living-timeless.

Another important aspect of the *Umbuyiso* and *Kurova guva* ceremony is that all members of the family participate without qualification unlike Christian ceremonies where only those who profess faith in Christ are entitled to participate.

Africans understand God to be a God of all, the just and the unjust, the good and the not so good. Their all-inclusive form of worship can indeed enrich a Christian faith which regrettably through human folly and through fear of the unknown quantity tends to be made to discriminate against certain sections of the community.

In addition to the all-inclusive nature of African worship, there is a very strong sense of the integration of creation and the supernatural focus. The advance of eschatology or realised eschatology therefore means that we must embark upon the process of de-eschatologisation of eschatology in order to re-eschatologise it properly. The emphasis on the re-eschatologisation of eschatology is an attempt to affirm the incarnation of Christ and the dispensation of the Kingdom of God in our midst and in our time. Eschatology is also perceived in terms of the victorious and triumphant return of the living-timeless to the community of the living. In the case of Christ, his return would imply the overthrow of unjust political, social and economic orders in the redemption of creation. In this sense the Kingdom is not perceived purely in spiritual terms but in material transformation as well.

The return of Christ therefore marks the restoration of creation, the rebuilding of the ancient ruins (Isaiah 61), the resurrection of the fallen creatures and creation. The Christ, who acted with God "when all things were made" (John 1:3), is the One, in whom everything in heaven and on earth will be gathered together (Eph 1:10). He will come back as the *Obuyiswayo* of His Church and His World.

## Notes

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5. *Ibid.*, pp.165f.

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# Glossary

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*Majukwa/Shangara/inxwala* - Shona/Ndebele dances to mark special ceremonies such as celebrating first fruits, births, marriages, etc.

*Sahwira* — Shona expression describing ritual friend.

*Vazukuru/Abazukulu* - Shona/Ndebele names for nieces and nephews.

*Vasekuru/ubabamkhulu* - Shona/Ndebele names for grandfather.

*tete/ubabakazi* - Shona/Ndebele names for aunt.

*Nyikadzimu/Kwamupfiganebwe* - the world of the spirits.

*Svikiro/isangoma* - Ndebele/Shona names for spirit medium.

*Doro rekuchenura/Doro remvura* - beer used for cleansing grave diggers and stone carriers.

*Misi/mazuva haifani* - days are not the same.

*Chakadya munhu* - disclosure of cause of death following ceremony of washing hands.

*Kugadzira/kudzora mufi* — same as *Kurova guva/umbuyiso*.

*Chembere yapera ura* - an old lady who has passed reproduction age.

*Bira remombe yegono/Buru remusha* - ceremony marking the placing of the spirit of the deceased on a particular subject such as an ox.

*Natsa kwawabva kwaunoenda usiku/unganyeli emthonjeni* - Shona/Ndebele don't antagonise hosts lest you would be forced to return to their home.

*Umvelinqangi/Unkulunkulu/Mwari/Nyadenga* - Ndebele/Shona names for God.

*Mwedzi* - (literally means moon) - name used to describe the first man created by God (Biblical equivalent of Adam).

*Masasi (Nyamasase)* - the evening star - name used to describe the first female created by God (Biblical equivalent of Eve).

*Mudzimulidlozi* - Shona/Ndebele names for ancestor.

*Kurova guva/Umbuyiso* — Shona/Ndebele (initiation ceremony) ceremony to re-admit the deceased member of the family into the ranks of the living.

*n'anga/inyanganga* — Shona/Ndebele names for traditional herbalist.

*Nhunzvi/hadzi* - (she goat) goat slaughtered at a cleansing ceremony following death of deceased male.

*Chembere/isalukazi* - Shona/Ndebele names describing a woman of advanced age.

*harahwa/ixhegu* - Shona/Ndebele names describing a man of advanced age.

*abvezera/oseluphele* - Shona/Ndebele names -- same as above.

*Madzamira/mahumbwe/amandlwane* - (role playing) games by children imitating adult life.

*Jakwara/Nhimbe/ilima* - (work parties) cooperate effort by the communities.



**Canaan Sodindo Banana**

Canaan Sodindo Banana was born on March 5th 1936 at Esiphezini, in the Essexvale District. He went to Mzinyati Mission and Tegwani High School. He attended Epworth Theological College from 1960-1962. In 1972, he went to Kasai Industrial Centre in Japan, then to the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC, U.S.A., where he obtained a Masters in Theological Studies. In 1979, he received a BA (Hons) in Theology from the University of South Africa; LLD (Hon. University of Zimbabwe); LLD (Hon. American University).

His career has been wide-ranging: from Methodist Schools Manager, Principal, visiting Chaplain, Chairman of Bulawayo Council of Churches, to member of the Advisory Committee of the World Council of Churches. He was founder member of the African National Council in 1971, and he became its first Vice-President. In 1972 the Rhodesian Police impounded his passport and forbade him from entering police stations on the grounds that he might incite members of the police force.

He left for U.S.A., where he became chaplain at the American University in Washington DC from 1973-75. When he returned to Rhodesia in 1975, he was arrested for going out of the country without travel documents. He was released in 1976 and restricted to his home area. He was later released to attend the Geneva Conference as part of Bishop Muzorewa's delegation, but he joined the ZANU (PF) team.

In January 1977 he was arrested and detained at Gatooma Prison, then he was moved to Wha Wha detention camp in May 1978, to be released in November 1979.

At independence, he became the first President of Zimbabwe. He was Chancellor, University of Zimbabwe,

1983-1988. He led the World Council of Churches (WCC), Eminent Church Persons on sanctions against South Africa in January 1989 and was co-chairman of the UN Panel of Eminent Persons conducting public hearings on the operations of transnational corporations in South Africa, September 1989. Currently, he is Professor of Classics, Religious Studies and Philosophy, at the University of Zimbabwe. He is a journalist, author and poet.













As State President from April 1980 to January 1988 Canaan Banana in theological treatises and substantial speeches challenged Zimbabwean Christianity to become relevantly involved in nation building and socialist transformation. As Honorary Professor and Lecturer in Theology from February 1988 he has further developed his Christian Theology.

**COME AND SHARE** is the invitation of Professor Banana to "Theological Students (ministerial candidates), ghetto people, those that hold positions that enable them to have an impact on the groping multitudes" to articulate and apply their Christian convictions in a religious and social environment which is qualified by the legacy of traditional African Religion and Marxist Socialism.

