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African independent church pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation

African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation[117]

By M. L. Daneel

Ever since the beginning of this century African Independent Churches have taken root, proliferated and shown phenomenal growth throughout our continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.[118] Because many of these churches originated through a variety of schismatic processes within western oriented mission churches (either large scale schisms or individual defections), they were often characterized negatively as "separatist," "parasitic," "nativistic" or "sectarian" movements.[119] In Christian terms they were considered either non-Christian movements whose members should be approached as objects of mission or evangelism to be baptized or rebaptized into mission church folds, or marginally Christian because of their alleged syncretism and therefore not properly belonging to the mainstream of Christianity—the so-called "mainline churches."

In contrast to these one-sidedly condemnatory views I wish to point out at the outset that despite obvious limitations (notably the lack of a written theology) and with the exception of those movements that deliberately move away from a Christian position,[120] I consider the AICs on the whole to *be integral to the mainstream of Christianity*. Most of them accept and apply scripture as literally and fundamentally normative. Belief in a triune God, the reign and closeness of a creator father, the saviourhood and mediation of Christ and the pervasive presence of an indwelling Holy Spirit, together with the regular or intermittent practice of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, are common and key features of these churches.[121] Their enacted theology, moreover, represents a sensitive and innovative response to Africa's existential needs and must be seen as a central—if not the most important and authentic part—of African theology. Consistent with this view is the assertion that the AICs constitute an integral and legitimate part of the universal church and that their response to the gospel, their belief systems and missionary strategy are well worth considering in a context such as this conference where the world-wide evangelistic outreach of Christ's church is focal.

One need only consider the current growth and size of some of the AICs to realize their challenging significance. In South Africa alone an estimated 5,000 AICs represent between 30 and 40 percent of the total black population. The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Bishop Lekhanyane, with its millions of adherents all over South Africa, probably is growing faster than

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[118] D.B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968; M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches.* Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987; N.I. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the African Independent Churches and in Biblical Tradition*. London: SPCK, 1985.

[119] H.W. Turner, "A Typology of African Religious Movements," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*., passim; Daneel ibid., p. 28f.

[120] Turner, op. cit., Daneel, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

[121] Daneel, ibid., pp. 223f, 250f.

any other church in the country, the established western-oriented churches included. Among the Northern Sotho-speaking people, for instance, where the ZCC has its headquarters, the growth rates of the various churches in the period 1970-1980 were as follows: Independent Churches 173.8 percent; Roman Catholic Church 83 percent; and Dutch Reformed Church 59.9 percent. Most other churches grew at a rate below the 43.7 percent of the Northern Sotho population growth rate.[122] Among the three groups of churches showing any significant growth, the Independent Churches far outstripped the others.

In Zimbabwe, the Independents in many of the rural areas represent 50 percent or more of the Christian population (see for example the statistical analysis of church growth in the Chingombe chiefdom, Gutu district, in Daneel.)[123] The larger Spirit-type churches, such as the African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke, the Zion Christian Church of Bishop Mutendi and the Ndaza (holy cord) Zionist movement, together have several million adherents. The Kimbanguist Church in Zaire, with its more than eight million members, is the largest Independent Church of the continent. In West Africa the Aladura churches, too, represent a vast and still growing movement.[124]

For classification purposes a distinction can be made between the Pentecostally-oriented, Spirit-type prophetic churches and the so-called "Ethiopian" or non-prophetic groups.[125] Some observers also distinguish a third messianic category, where a prophetic leader usurps the position of Christ and poses as a black messiah.[126] This, however, can be a highly misleading classification. Despite some messianic trends it rarely happens that prominent prophetic leaders deliberately attempt to supersede the mediatorship of Christ by posing as Christ figures.[127] It is more appropriate to speak of iconic leadership[128] in those cases where prophets closely identify with the Christ figure in an attempt to illuminate dramatically and contextually the salvific gospel message.

Significantly, the vast majority of AICs in southern Africa at least, are of the prophetic type. They reveal definite Pentecostal traits, in that the Holy Spirit features prominently in their worship and daily activities. "Jordan" or adult baptism is directly related to the conversion experience. Spirit-induced faith healing and exorcism become focal in Christian living. The Spirit, moreover, is believed to manifest itself through the visions, dreams, prophecies and/or glossolalia of the believers. It follows that numerical growth, geographical expansion and the development of church headquarters at the holy cities—the "Zions," "Moriahs" or "Jerusalems" of Africa - are attributed directly to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Although in many respects this characterization is equally applicable to western pentecostalism, there are essential differences. These should become apparent in my discussion of a few important pneumatological tenets underlying the above-mentioned practices of the Spirit-type AICs. But this is not in the first place a comparative study of western and African pentecostalism. On the contrary, I shall merely sketch briefly the AIC experience of the working

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[122] J.J. Kritzinger, *Die onvoltooide sendingtaak in Lebowa*. Pretoria: Iswen, Univ. of Pretoria, 1982.

[123] M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. II: Ghurch Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment techniques. The Hague: Mouton, 1974, ch. 1.

[124] H.W. Turner, *African Independent Churches*, Vol. I: The Church of the Lord (Aladura). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967; Vol. II: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

[125] Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I: Background and Rise of the Major Movements, chs. 4 and 5; Daneel, Quest, p. 38f.

[126] 9 B.G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 323.

[127] Daneel, *Quest*, p. 189f.

[128] B.G.M. Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 309.

of the Holy Spirit. The admittedly limited pneumatological profile which emerges, both in its historical contextuality and in its relevance for an interpretation of salvation, may present a challenge and/or inspiration for the ongoing missionary task of the universal church.

In probing for the essentials of AIC pneumatology I am engaged as a fellow Independent coming from a Protestant (Dutch Reformed) background. In the course of many years of identification with and participation in the life of the Shona Independent Churches in Zimbabwe I have become part of that movement. Consequently my observations and insights are based mainly on the AICs of Zimbabwe. Special attention will be given to the two largest Spirit-type churches in that part of the world: Bishop Samuel Mutendi's ZCC and Apostle Johane Maranke's vaPostori. As both these founder leaders have already passed away and have been succeeded by their sons, I wish to present this paper in truly African fashion, that is in commemoration of two of the outstanding missionary spirits of our continent. By now they belong to the Christian cloud of witnesses, so their message to the world church is essentially the one they proclaimed so fervently to their followers: salvation in Christ and renewal through the Holy Spirit to the four comers of the earth!

The Holy Spirit as Saviour of humankind

Before they founded their own churches, Bishop Mutendi and Apostle Maranke were members of the Dutch Reformed and Methodist Churches respectively. Both of them were attracted by the Pentecostal features of the Independent Churches they came across,[129] both in South Africa (Mutendi) and Zimbabwe (Maranke). As a result, the work of the Holy Spirit featured prominently in their campaigning activities right from the start. Their ministries were preceded by call-dreams, visions and spells of Spirit-possessed speaking in tongues, which both of them considered to be the visible manifestations of a missionary mandate received directly from God.

In the ZCC *Rungano* (the handbook of Mutendi's church) the leader's first important sermon in 1923 in the Bikita district is described as follows:

> He stood up and preached with great power from Luke 3, as he was told to do by the prophets… Many believers were possessed by the Holy Spirit. The people present got frightened and some of them ran away, saying: "That man arouses *zvitebwe* [vengeful spirits which destroy cattle]…Some people laughed when they saw the others getting possessed by the Spirit….From that day Mutendi never stopped preaching the Word of God, and he was greatly strengthened by that same Spirit."[130]

Johane Maranke's visionary spells are recorded in his *Umboo utsva hwavaPostori* (New Revelation of the Apostles). He is said to have received directly from God two books, which he could only understand through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and not through the education he had received at the European mission station. The contents of these books held the message of eternal life (*sadza risingaperi*: lit. porridge, i.e., food, of eternal life), and it is this message of salvation for human beings that became focal in Johane's sermons. In his visions Johane saw himself as a Moses figure, leading his followers from many countries through hostile terrain and fires to a safe, heavenly destination. The host of followers was likened to the sand on the shores of Lake Nyasa in Malawi.[131]

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[129] Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches,* Vol. I, pp. 287f, 315f.

[130] Zion Christian Church History, *Rungano*, p. 19; Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I, p. 294.

[131] AIC Literature, *New Revelation of the Apostles* (*Umboo utsva hwavaPostori*).

The ministries of both these prophetic leaders were characterized by awareness of the lostness and sinfulness of humanity and the urgent need for conversion and baptism as a means of avoiding God's judgement through entry into his kingdom. God himself was the one responsible for drawing people into his kingdom (John 6:44). The Holy Spirit was the main agent directing the judgement prophecies against sinners and unaware ministers in mission churches, the healing miracles in and around baptismal pools or rivers, and the building of new communities of the kingdom. The prominence of and depend- ence on the Spirit are clearly portrayed in the song that the vaPostori of Johane have sung ever since the inception of their church near Mutare in eastern Zimbabwe in 1932:

> Everywhere we see people who do not know Christ,
> They are lost, that is why they sin,
> Our mighty God send the Holy Spirit to those who do not have it.
> God bless Africa and hear our prayers; God bless it!
> Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit!
> Bless us your servants.

In both movements the Holy Spirit provides the full charter for the new church. All the laws and customs of the church, the innovations and deviations from western Christianity, are justified by attributing them directly to the inspiration and command of the Holy Spirit. In a sense therefore the Spirit legitimates the exodus from the religious house of slavery, the reign of the white mission churches. Salvation takes the form of black liberation from foreign institutions where the full benefit of the gifts of the Spirit was allegedly withheld from black converts. The reaction to missions during this first phase of new AIC formation finds its most poignant expression in the allegation that white Christianity dropped the banner of the Holy Spirit and that this banner has now been picked up by Africans, the black, rejected (by whites) house of Ham. Consequently the black race of Africa—the neglected, the poor and the oppressed—are now the exalted and the elect, called by the Holy Spirit to spread the true message of salvation throughout the continent.

How was this to be achieved? Both leaders responded to the challenge by designing their churches as missionary institutions in which the sacrament of holy communion was to become the launching pad from which wave upon wave of Zionist and Apostolic missionaries was sent forth to preach the good news of salvation to their fellow Africans.

Bishop Mutendi developed his church headquarters as a "holy city" where he conducted at least three Paschal celebrations annually, each culminating in holy communion. In preparation for the sacrament Mutendi used to preach about the great commission (Matt. 28:19), encouraging his followers to prepare themselves, like Christ's disciples, to "go forth and make disciples of all the nations." In his treatment of Matthew 28:19, Mutendi seldom dwelt on the actual meaning of the words, "all the nations," and he rarely defined the actual object of missionary endeavour. Instead he gave the text a specific Zionist connotation by relating it to such texts as Isaiah 62:1: "For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest." In addition he would protest against the half-hearted response of some of his followers to the church's mission by citing Romans 11:25, which deals with the hardening of the Israelites' hearts.[132]

Following the climactic celebration of holy communion, the ZCC teams of missionaries would set out on properly planned two to three-week campaigns all over Zimbabwe and sometimes beyond its borders. Meanwhile, the congregation at Zion City engaged in daily

[132] M. L. Daneel, "The Missionary Outreach of African Independent Churches," in *Missionalia*, Vol. 8, 3, 1980, p. 107.

intercession for the campaign. Upon the return of the emissaries their reports on conversions, healings, establishment of new congregations, church growth, etc., were preached to the people at Zion City. Thus the entire church participated actively in a variety of ways in fulfilling its missionary mandate.

Johane Maranke, again, interpreted his calling as an apostle not in terms of building a holy city, but in setting a personal example—together with a band of fellow apostles—as an itinerant missionary. For just over thirty years, from the founding of his church in 1932 until his death in 1963, he travelled—on foot, by ox cart, then by bicycle, and ultimately in a Landrover—preaching the gospel, converting people and establishing new congregations. In his church the annual "Pentecost" ceremony - in commemoration of the Holy Spirit's institution of the movement - became the pivot of spiritual renewal and missionary outreach. Here, too, the ritual of holy communion was the overriding statement on Christ's Saviourhood, triggering waves of Apostolic evangelizing activity. Apart from campaigns throughout Zimbabwe, Johane regularly travelled south as far as the Transvaal, westward to Botswana, east to Mozambique, and north to Zambia, Malawi and way up into Zaire; overall he and his fellow preachers converted and baptized hundreds of thousands of people.[133]

One of the remarkable features of Johane's ministry as a travelling missionary was that it was undertaken on the basis of an agrarian subsistence economy. Budding Apostolic congregations all over Zimbabwe and in the surrounding countries, consisting mainly of relatively poor peasant families in rural areas, supported - both economically and spiritually - what they considered to be the salvific movement of God's Spirit in their midst.

In both Mutendi's *ZCC History* and Johane's *New Revelation* salvation, conversion and baptism into the kingdom in preparation for eternal life (in the sense of the Holy Spirit drawing individual people to repentance), are set against a background of God's imminent judgement. This remains focal in both Zionist and Apostolic evangelistic outreach up to this day. During the 1960s I accompanied some of the ZCC missionaries on their campaigns. Their appeal for individual conversion was direct and blunt. "To those who do not believe God's word," the Rev. Ezekiah proclaimed, "there will be gnashing of teeth on the day of judgement.... My friends, we have not come to put up a show or to show you how to dance, but to warn you of the coming danger... Even love between people on this earth comes to an end. My friends, let us believe what the Bible says in order to be saved ... *Pindukai! Pindukai! Pindukai!* [be converted]."

In Ezekiah's sermons the destructive power of God's judgement was always expressed in terms of the biblical deluge, the destroying sword of Ezekiel 33 or the pit of fire (*gomba romwoto*). Such destruction could only be avoided by seeking shelter in God's kingdom, symbolized in this existence by the Zionist Church and, in the African context, likened to a maize granary (*dura*). The real purpose of ZCC evangelization, then, is to gather people into the *dura raMwari* (the granary of God), where they would be safe from eternal damnation. It is to this end that the missionary activities of Mutendi, the "man of God," and the mighty stir of the Holy Spirit is directed.

Ezekiah's elucidation of the granary concept highlighted the eschatological tension between the partly realized kingdom and the one yet to come. On the one hand there were the this-worldly benefits of church affiliation, and of Zion City as a shelter against racial discrimination, illness, witchcraft, etcetera. On the other hand suffering (for example, the persecution of Zionists) remains, "for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). Ezekiah's frequent use of this latter text to emphasize the apocalyptic, futuristic character of God's kingdom meant that his campaigning sermons—like

[133] Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I, pp. 327-331.

those of his fellow missionaries—centred more on the eschatological "not yet" than on the "already" of God's kingdom.[134]

Here we have a significant indicator that AIC pneumatology, as perceived in the prophetic churches, is not confined to this-worldly salvation, despite strong trends in this direction (see below). Ever since the inception of the two churches under discussion, the good news of their missionary proclamation implicitly upheld the eschatological tension between an incarnate Christ present in the prophetic leader and the work of the Holy Spirit here and now, and the yet to be fulfilled eternal salvation of human beings.

The Spirit as healer and protector

Although the healing ministry of Christ featured strongly in the proclamation and practice of both Zionist and Apostolic churches from the outset, it was only in the 1940s and 1950s that there was a shift of the pneumatological focus. During this period faith-healing colonies were established at Mutendi's Zion City in Bikita and at the homesteads of several Apostolic healers in the vicinity of Johane's headquarters in the Maranke chiefdom. In both instances, the dwindling of mission church influence, the powerful drive towards genuine contextualization of church practice and the amplification and diversification of the main leader's prophetic task through the activities of a host of subordinate prophetic healers operating daily in the healing colonies, contributed to change. Church life started revolving to a large extent around faith healing. Healing interpreted in its widest sense (i.e., not only of physical maladies, but also of the "illness" of oppression, racial discrimination, lack of job opportunities, conflicts between spouses, family members, factions, etc.) became the most potent recruitment instrument in these churches.

Healing and protection against evil forces now manifested more than anything else the pervasive presence of the powerful Spirit of God. Speaking in tongues became the prelude to all prophetic diagnostic sessions, during which the Holy Spirit would reveal to the prophet the cause of the patient's illness. All symbols used during healing rituals—such as holy water, paper, staffs and holy cords—symbolized the power of the Holy Spirit over all destructive forces. "Jordan" baptisms increasingly became purificatory, healing and exorcist sessions, during which the power of the Spirit to expel all evil, was persuasively evident. Witness preaching about successful healing became focal, and in Mutendi's case Zion City started to represent an African Jerusalem in which the triumphal reign of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, permeated every activity. In a sense the Holy Spirit had turned the Black Zion of Africa into a haven for the afflicted, the lost, the poor, the widows, orphans and social misfits.

Increasingly the liturgy of these prophetic churches reflected their preoccupation with healing. The very songs sung during daily prayer, Bible reading and healing sessions challenged all comers to consider God's act of transforming human brokenness into wholeness. At Zion City one frequently hears the following words, sung jubilantly:

Come and see what Jesus does,
Come and see what Moyo [Mutendi] here perfonns.
Come from the East and look
You from the West, come and observe what Zion does.
You who are sick, to Zion for treatment come!
Come and see!
You epileptics, come and be healed,
Come and see what Jesus does.

[134] Daneel, *Missionalia*, pp. 112-113.

The other day we were with him
Last night we were in his sight
Last year we were with him
Even today he's with us
Come and see what Zion does!

A close scrutiny of the *diagnosis* and *therapy* of prophetic healers reveals both parallels with and deviations from traditional divination and healing practices. It is at this level, so crucially important to both healer and patient, that there is continual dialogue between contextualized Christian and traditional African world views. *Here an intuitive and unwritten, yet very real African theology takes shape.* Here, too, AIC pneumatology finds its existentially most meaningful expression.

Diagnosis: All prophetic consultations start with prayer and speaking in tongues, to recognize and establish in the mind of the patient(s) the presence of the Holy Spirit as the source of revelation. Yet to the casual observer the prophet's obvious concern - much like that of the *nganga* (traditional doctor) - with the personal causation of illness (be it ancestral spirits, vengeful spirits or witchcraft) appears to be sufficient evidence of a return to the old order and a warning against syncretism. Significantly, however, *the prophet claims an entirely different source for his extra-perception, namely the Holy Spirit of the Bible*, as opposed to the *nganga* who relies on divinatory slabs (*hakata*), ancestral or *shavi* (alien) spirits for divination. This does not mean that all prophetic claims in the name of the Holy Spirit are valid or genuine. But the prophetic insistence on the direct involvement of the Holy Spirit reflects an
important departure from traditional divination. For prophetic diagnosis, unlike traditional divination, is not aimed at satisfying the demands of the afflicting spirits. Instead, through revelations inspired by the Christian God, the prophet seeks to take the thought world and experience of the patient seriously and to introduce, at an existentially important level, the healing and salvific power of the Christian God.

A sure sign of the Christian prophet's more critical approach, compared to that of the *nganga*, is his general qualification of the afflicting spirit, once it has been identified in terms of traditional conflict patterns, *as a demon or evil spirit which must be opposed*. This is a far cry from the early observations of Sundkler,[135] who suggested that in Zulu Zionism in South Africa the inspiring Angel or Spirit visiting the prophet-healer was in reality the ancestral spirit itself; also the statements of Oosthuizen,[136] who saw prophetic concern with the spirit world as a reversion to ancestor domination at the expense of genuine Christianity. To the Shona Zionist and Apostolic prophet, however, the work of the Holy Spirit excludes any form of ancestor worship or veneration. Compromise solutions are only prescribed in family conflicts when patients are pressurized by non-Christian relatives to produce sacrificial beasts to appease afflicting spirits with legitimate claims in terms of customary law. In such instances the threatening spirit is exorcised by the prophet-healer in the church context, while traditionalist relatives conduct an appeasing ancestral ritual on their own. Thus the liberating power of the Holy Spirit is ritually acknowledged and family conflicts are resolved in order to create the best possible circumstance for successful therapy.

Therapy: After the diagnosis of illness, the similarity between *nganga* and prophetic activity

[135] Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 250.
[136] G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*. London: Hurst, 1968, p. 120.

ceases. Both trace the origin of disease to a disturbed society. Both recognize the disruptive effect of evil powers unleashed in interhuman relations. But they ward off these powers differently. *While the nganga seeks a solution that accedes to the conditions of the spirits, prophetic therapy is based on belief in the liberating power of the Christian God, particularly the Holy Spirit, which surpasses all other powers and is consequently capable of offering protection against them.*

In an attempt to restore disrupted social relations the *nganga* advocates ancestor veneration in the case of neglected ancestors, and the expulsion of evil witchcraft or vengeful *ngozi* spirits through magical rites. To the Zionist and Apostolic prophet the ancestral claim to sacrificial veneration is inadmissible on biblical grounds. Once identified (as an ancestral, alien or witchcraft spirit), the afflicting agent is qualified by the healer-prophet as a demon or *mweya yakaipa* (evil spirit). In true Christian tradition the prophet prescribes only one solution: exorcism of the demon in the name of the triune God! This is done by means of whichever one of a variety of dramatic exorcist rituals is applicable. Sometimes the spirit is virtually "drowned" in Jordan water; or it may be tied down with holy cords or chased away by condemnatory curses. All such activity is designed to vividly demonstrate the Holy Spirit's triumphal power over evil. Even where a compromise solution is found to satisfy non-Christian relatives, the overriding aim of prophetic therapy remains the incorporation of the patient, or preferably the entire family, into the "new community" of Zion or the apostles, which in terms of the healer's convictions offers the best prospects of physical and spiritual security and well-being.

The extent to which therapeutic treatment of this nature enhances the image of *the church as a healing and more specifically as a protective institution* is clearly reflected in the observation of Elias Bope, a young epileptic who was treated for many years in Mutendi's Zion City. He said:

> My cousin and a vengeful [*ngozi*] spirit are conspiring to cause my downfall. I was carried here in a totally debilitated state. That same day I was baptized as a protection against the *ngozi*. The baptismal water [of "Jordan"] was blessed with prayer beforehand to make it more potent for the *ngozi*'s expulsion. At present I drink the hallowed water regularly and undergo the laying on of hands daily. Sometimes during fits of possession [presumably epileptic seizures] Bishop Mutendi treats me with his holy staff, which contains great power. This power [of the Holy Spirit] is from on high. *Here at Moriah I am protected against the ngozi spirit,* and for the time being I remain here, because I am shielded from the destructive attempts of my cousin.[137]

The question is whether this shift of focus in AIC pneumatology does not lead to a one-sided and limited understanding of salvation. It stands to reason that in the prophetic healing colonies salvation can easily be identified with healing, as it includes the restoration of harmony in interpersonal relations, as well as physical and material well-being, in a society marked by conflict, suffering and deprivation. In theological terms this tendency can be described as an overemphasis on this-worldly progress, on a *realized eschatology*. God's kingdom must take on concrete form *here and now*! The Spirit saves and uplifts humankind in this existence through his prophets, the totality of whose activities is a sure sign of God's blessing on his African Zion or apostles.

Several theologians have criticized this trend in the AICs. Mention is often made of a *secularistic* or *materialistic* distortion of eschatology. Oosthuizen,[138] for example, maintained that in all "nativistic" religious movements (which would include the Shona prophetic churches) the

[137] M.L. Daneel, "Charismatic Healing in African Independent Churches," in *Theologia Evangelica*, XVI, 3, 1983.
[138] Oosthuizen, op. cit., p. 96.

objective is material wellbeing—an Africanized utopia in which Christ plays no role and where the black messiah effects health, fertility, and material progress for his disciples. The profoundly felt need for liberation from physical and social suffering makes the message of a future salvation a stumbling block. Full salvation *must* be available *now*. Consequently, according to Martin,[139] the prophetic quest is for healing rather than redemption. In this version of salvation the eschatological tension between the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom lapses. Because the future kingdom is in fact to be taken by force—as Martin and Oosthuizen[140] put it, there is a "seizing" and a "snatching" of the future—the prospect of eternal life and the hope of Christ's second coming is lost.

In my view, however, empirical reality does not warrant such a harsh judgement. The manifestly heavy emphasis on Spirit-inspired realization of God's kingdom in this existence, in the case of the Shona Zionists and apostles, does not lead to a so-called "snatching of the future." The shift of pneumatological focus resulting from the Zionist and Apostolic preoccupation with healing and protection is not absolute. One should rather speak of an extended, more comprehensive and holistic interpretation of salvation, which at no point excludes the kind of conversion or missionary proclamation described above. The themes of a futuristic kingdom and ultimate eternal salvation for individual beings keep recurring in the Zionist and Apostolic sermons preached in their holy cities and healing colonies. Pneumatologically, the work of the Holy Spirit comprises both eternal salvation for a redeemed humanity and a concretely experienced wholeness and well-being in this existence for those who place themselves in faith under his healing care. Hence the good news of eternal salvation is not superseded but acquires concrete and understandable contours through healing in this troubled and broken existence.

The Spirit of justice and liberation

In the prophetic movements the activity of the Holy Spirit has never been conceived of as restricted to spiritual matters or healing. At an early stage Bishop Mutendi entered the political arena by opposing the colonial administration on educational, land and religious issues, for which he was detained several times. To his followers he became a Spirit-led Moses figure, champion of the oppressed. Like Shembe of the Zulu Nazarites in South Africa, Mutendi drew many chiefs and headmen into his church. Through regular advice to these tribal dignitaries and the appointment of Zionist prophets in their tribal courts. the Zionist bishop managed to secure considerable influence in tribal political affairs. During the 1950s and 1960s, many of the Zionist chiefs openly stated that the power of the Holy Spirit, represented by supportive prophets, enabled them to maintain some form of just rule and balance amid the complex and conflicting demands of white colonial rule and the rising tide of black nationalism. They also considered the role of prophetic court counsellors to be crucial for fair trials both in the administration of customary law and in harmonizing these laws with Christian principles in a changing situation.

As a descendant of the royal Rozvi tribe Mutendi, in the context of his impressive "Zion City," also appealed to the sentiments of tribal leaders who had not forgotten the past glories of the once powerful Rozvi dynasty. Mutendi represented the supratribal unity that had once been the backbone of a great nation. In addition to Zionist religious connotations, his popular title ("man of God") had distinct political overtones to many of his followers. Zion City became a safe spiritual anchorage for tribal dignitaries, a place where they could discuss the pressing issues of

[139] M-L. Martin, *The Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in Southern Africa*, Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1964, p. 158.
[140] Martin, ibid., p. 160; Oosthuizen, op. cit., p. 97.

boundary disputes, unruly tribesmen and even intimidation by extremist politicians. Here a message of liberation could be evolved. It was not a message that promised easy solutions or revolutionary change in the political constellation, as if sudden freedom from bondage would be ushered in by divine power. Basically it meant the presence of Mwari in his Spirit, which could liberate chiefs and headmen from fear and anxiety, enabling them to deal more effectively with the issues confronting them.

Just as Christ failed to introduce a messianic order that would satisfy Jewish nationalistic aspirations, Mutendi did not promise another Rozvi confederation or a Zionist empire that would overthrow white rule. But throughout his life he set an example to the chiefs of how one could realistically cooperate with the rulers of the day without loss of dignity and how one could fearlessly resist unjust legislation or action even if it did not always bring about the desired results. *In a sense his Zion City became to the chiefs a halfway house between white local government and African nationalistic factions*, a refuge where they could participate in the subtle resistance of their people to the imposition of foreign influence without entirely jeopardizing their position in relation to the white administration on which they depended financially. Like Isaiah Shembe did for his "Israelites" in South Africa, Bishop Mutendi presented his Zionist followers not with an indifferent, remote deity, but one who, through the power of the Spirit, manifested his involvement in the totality of life (politics in particular) as "a God who walks on feet and who heals with his hands, and who can be known by men, as God who loves and has compassion."[141]

Possibly the most dramatic episode of Spirit involvement in Mutendi's resistance to colonial rule was the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute in Bikita, which came to a head in 1965. Mutendi's Zion City itself was situated in the disputed area and he organized the Rozvi chiefs opposition to the District Commissioner's decision, which favoured a rival Duma chief's claim. Ultimately, when all else had failed, Mutendi sponsored and initiated legal action in the high court against such formidable colonial opponents as the Bikita District Commissioner, the Provincial Commissioner of the then Victoria Province and the Minister of Internal Affairs. The outcome was predictable. Mutendi had become too prominent an adversary to the administration, and the state machinery was set in motion to destroy the Rozvi bishop's power base.

I lived in Zion City at the time. The spiritual mobilization of the entire community during the months of uncertainty and stress while the "man of God" did battle was a moving experience. Sermons became more intense. Regular prayer meetings were held on behalf of those involved in the struggle, and in a host of prophecies the Holy Spirit was considered to give guidance on future action that would lead to justice and liberation. But liberation in this instance did not mean the preservation of Zion City. Liberation meant suffering and loss. Liberation to the "man of God" implied not compromising, overcoming fear, and at the cost of the most prized achievement of a lifetime—a "holy city" symbolizing African achievement—standing up and protesting against impossible odds.

As the Zionist chiefs and headmen rallied round their leader during a Paschal celebration before the court case, one of them, Chief Ndanga, preached as follows:

> Let those with the strong hearts stand up and stand by his [Mutendi's] side. Let this man build our hearts so that we will be humble people. Africa has started to listen to the voice of Mutendi . . . . Allow this chief sent by God to examine your hearts. Praise him because he works through the spirit of Jesus!

Bishop Mutendi himself on the same occasion called on his followers to be courageous:

> Fear not and do not be offended when people accuse you falsely. He who does

[141] Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 278.

> not stay amongst the proud is blessed. The police and the prophets [i.e., the administration and the church] should first consider the word of God before setting about their tasks, if they want to perform well. In Zechariah 8 God says: "I am back in Zion, the City of Jerusalem, therefore it will not be destroyed any longer." We take these words to support us. This Jerusalem of ours will not be destroyed! Zion is small but strong. It will never die because it belongs to nobody but God.

These were prophetic words, inspired by the Spirit of liberation. Only as the message was translated into the ensuing events at Zion City did its real significance become evident. For it was Mutendi himself who, in the aftermath of bitter defeat, was liberated by the Spirit he propagated from bitterness, indecision and even from his ties with the settlement in Bikita. His vigour in leading a large contingent of Rozvi kinsmen and Zionist followers to settle in a remote area in northern Gokwe, far away from his original sphere of influence, gave real meaning to his publicly declared conviction that Zion would not die, because it belonged to God. Like Moses of old, the aging bishop arranged the exodus of his people. In the course of only a few years another Zion City was erected in the far north of Zimbabwe and the Zion Christian Church, instead of fizzling out, showed an increased growth rate.

During the same period in the late sixties, the apostles of Maranke voiced the mood of black nationalism in even more aggressive anti-white statements than the Zionists. Here the interjections during sermons were not "Peace in Zion" or "Joy be with you all" but, challengingly and stridently, "Peace to us Africans!" and even in some cases "Peace to Africans only!" Feelings of naked resentment surfaced in the repeated accusations that the white race had killed Jesus and that the whites, in their oppression of the blacks, had deliberately repressed the message and benefits of the Holy Spirit.

At the Pentecostal festivities of the vaPostori near Mutare in April 1966, the following messages were preached:

--The true witnesses of Mwari were buried by the Europeans, until God gave them the task of witnessing to us, the apostles of Africa. They killed Jesus and the early apostles because they wanted to eliminate the Church of the Holy Spirit. So God decided to send the Church of the Holy Spirit to our race in Africa. Peace to Africa!

--The houses of Shem and Japheth were blessed long ago. *Now we, the descendants of the house of Ham, are blessed*! We are blessed because the prophecy of Isaiah, "I will send them a leader of their own race," has come true. God sent us black people a leader to do the same things that were done by Moses in Egypt. My brothers, let us obey the message which a black man of Africa has brought us. A donkey does not low like an ox. Therefore we shall not follow the instructions of the Europeans, but of our own black messenger.

Racial bias and concern for a unique supernatural mandate for the Apostolic church, free from white interference, are evident in these sermons. One should remember that they were delivered on the eve of *chimurenga*, the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, when anxiety and uncertainty were rife and intimidation and detentions were becoming more frequent. Basically, the Apostolic preachers aimed at *reassuring* their people. They were using the church as a place to vent their frustrations at white rule and were virtually claiming the work of the Holy Spirit exclusively for their cause of liberation.

It should be noted that the Zionist and Apostolic movements during the 1960s officially maintained a certain aloofness from politically organized violence and subversion. Bishop Mutendi even dissociated the ZCC from the then banned political parties, ZANU and ZAPU. Nevertheless, these churches gave full expression to African nationalist sentiments. *They became the propagators of equality between the races, the dignity of black Africans, and their ability to rule*

themselves. In doing so they sharpened the concept of a just God who sided with the oppressed and who, through his Spirit, could be counted upon to inspire the poor and the dispossessed in their struggle for the lost lands. At this stage, therefore, the prophetic contribution to political liberation, particularly in the rural context, lay in providing what was considered to be a sound, *scripturally based legitimation and justification of the struggle.*

Against this background it is not surprising that Zionist and Apostolic prophets increasingly played a key role at the war front as *chimurenga* escalated in the form of a bush war throughout Zimbabwe in the 1970s. Much like the traditional spirit mediums, who were providing the guerrillas with mystical ancestral guidance, prophets were also moving around with the fighters at the front, prophesying to them in the name of the Holy Spirit about enemy movements and related security matters. Thus the diagnostic and revelatory services of the prophets became a significant factor in the determination of guerrilla strategy as the fighters improvised their tactics from one situation to the next. On the one hand the senior ancestral spirits, as "guardians of the land" (*varidzi venyika*), directed the fighters in their battle for the lost lands through their spirit mediums (*masvikiro*). On the other hand the Holy Spirit, also acting as a kind of "guardian of the land" against the white intruders, was directing the forces of liberation through his emissaries, the Zionist and Apostolic prophets. Much depended on the predilections of Christian and non-Christian guerrilla commanders whether they favoured traditionalist or prophetic guidance. Many of them made use of both, cross-checking the one against the other.

Apart from the "fighter prophets" operating at the front, there were others who stayed at their church headquarters or healing colonies, from where they provided the guerrillas with information, pastoral support, faith-healing services and the like. Stressed or wounded fighters at times lived at healing colonies, or in secret caves nearby, in order to receive regular prophetic treatment.

Possibly the most important *chimurenga* function of some prophets was their assistance in "community-cleansing" operations during *pungwe* meetings. There they had to help the guerrillas to determine who were the sell-outs, the traitors to the cause. Much of this work took place in the traditional idiom of tracing wizards. Invariably collaborators of the Rhodesian army, or villagers involved in attempts to poison or expose guerrilla fighters, were branded *varoyi*. Ritual affirmation of accusations, either through ancestral or Holy Spirit revelations, was required before cleansing, through execution or other forms of punishment, could take place. Thus the Holy Spirit of the prophets was publicly seen to act radically and judgementally against the opponents of *chimurenga*.

The role of prophets in the *pungwe* courts could raise critical questions about arbitrary judgements, executions and the possible misrepresentation of the work of the Holy Spirit. In fairness, however, one should consider that it was in this very context that the Spirit invariably revealed himself to suspect members of the community as a life-giving and protective force. In a number of case studies I have established beyond doubt that prophets were often also instrumental in preventing executions whenever it was apparent that villagers were merely using the *pungwe* to project their prejudices and animosities in order to get rid of people they resented. In cases where wizardry accusations during *pungwe* sessions merely reflected tensions and internal village conflicts, prophets elicited public confessions from suspects, the background to which demonstrated to the guerrillas and village elders that they were not dealing with war offences. In numerous cases suspect villagers were actually ordered to go and live in prophetic healing colonies, where the scrutinizing, revelatory and disciplinary power of the Holy Spirit could, over a period of time, bring the culprits into line with the requirements of society at the time. Hence, by appealing to the ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit, prophets managed to introduce an element of moderation and sanity, often at grave personal risk, into *pungwe* situations where

flaring emotions and the need for revenge in a war-torn society could easily claim innocent lives.

Judging by these prophetic activities one surmises that the pneumatology evolved by the Spirit-type churches during *chimurenga* was one of a warring Spirit, deeply immersed in a just cause, inspiring the fighting cadres to overthrow the oppressive rule of an alien enemy, as well as do combat with the enemy within their ranks, which could devastate innocent lives if left unchecked. During the war the theology of liberation—unwritten, yet spontaneously enacted by the Independents—led to a closer identification of the concepts of salvation and political liberation. Yet the quest for political and socio-economic liberation at no point obscured the prophetic vision of God's saviourhood in terms of eternal life. Whereas the perception and experience of the Spirit's direct involvement in the achievement of peace and improved living conditions in this existence were certainly broadened and deepened, this did not obscure the good news of future salvation. On the contrary, the indications are that during the liberation struggle numerous AICs intensified their quest for conversion and eternal life. Quite a number of guerrilla fighters and people who sought refuge in the prophetic healing colonies were actually evangelized by the prophets whose assistance they sought. To such converts prophetic Spirit manifestations certainly meant both liberation from unjust rule and individual salvation, the culmination of which still lay in the future.

Despite religious revival and church growth during the war years, there were also signs of retrogression. Paradoxically, intensified concern with a liberating Spirit was in many instances countered by a submerged or diminished Christology in both AICs and mainline churches. The reason for this was that a renaissance of traditional religion caused many of the bush fighters to oppose Christianity. Some of their units destroyed or closed down church buildings. They saw Jesus as the white man's god, the epitome of oppressive rule. Consequently they operated under the slogan, *Pasi na Jesu!* (down with Jesus!). Many of the church leaders and congregations who continued to profess their faith in Jesus Christ publicly had their Bibles and vestments burnt by the guerrillas. Some were martyred, while others were forced to go underground. Many church leaders today frankly admit that during the war years they continued to preach about Mwari the Father, the one God who was known in Africa long before Christianity came, and that they prophesied or acted in the Spirit; but that they seldom spoke about Christ for fear of being branded traitors to the cause. The war years therefore present us with a chequered picture that defies easy generalization; but a picture which, for all its complexity, does not erase the predominant image of God's liberating Spirit operating in his black prophets throughout the war.

The earthkeeping Spirit

In the post-Independence period in Zimbabwe, starting in 1980, the AICs increasingly turned their attention to development projects. Fambidzano, the ecumenical council of Independent Churches (present membership about ninety churches) raised funds for quite a number of churches to erect community development and vocational training centres, to develop small-scale industries such as carpentry and clothing manufacture, and engage in agricultural and water projects. Here, too, the Independents saw the Holy Spirit featuring prominently, in this instance inspiring socio-economic progress. Having delivered his people from political bondage, the Holy Spirit was now increasingly seen as the liberator from poverty and economic despair, as one intimately involved, through the Fambidzano and other churches, in nation building. Development projects and even educational training centres at AIC headquarters—such as the multi-million dollar college that Bishop Nehemia Mutendi (son and successor of the late Samuel Mutendi) erected at Zion City—increasingly became the hallmarks of God's blessing on his people. This was not an entirely new development. It was rather a broadening of a

pneumatological trend already manifest earlier, namely that the Holy Spirit's function as healer and life giver holistically encompassed everything relating to human well-being. The Spirit was also the healer and protector of crops. Through a host of symbolic, supplicatory rites the Spirit could be persuaded by the faithful to safeguard or multiply their agricultural produce.

As was argued before, the perception of salvation undergirding this pneumatology does not exclude faith in a redemptive future for believers, or a heavenly eternity beyond this existence. Nevertheless, a strong focus on this-worldly salvation, which includes Spirit-led improvement of the quality of this life—whether in terms of spiritual, cultural or socio-economic progress—is unmistakable. A pragmatic anthropocentric trend is also discernible. After all, it is human beings who are saved, individuals who make progress through schools, community development centres and agricultural projects, and oppressed people who are liberated from unjust rule. The totality of creation is indeed holistically considered, as the prophetic appeal to God for good rains, bumper crops and prolific cattle breeding indicates. But pragmatism leads to exploitation! And African holism does not of necessity imply a world-view that altruistically incorporates all of creation in the humanly perceived salvific work of God. So in the AICs—as elsewhere in the world church—human self-centredness and the tendency to emphasize a personalized soteriology at the expense of the cosmic dimension of salvation easily lead to a triumphalist attitude; one which plays down human stewardship over all of nature, prioritizes human liberation and, by implication, promotes unjust and destructive over-exploitation of a suffering creation. In a sense therefore the AICs, notwithstanding their peasant environment and holistically contextualized liturgies, share with the rest of Christianity a limited and incomplete perception of the grace of God; a grace that encompasses the entire creation as a gift from God. All of us together have somehow proved unworthy of this gift and we must all confess that "the ruin of nature and the denial of God go hand in hand, because both over-exalt human beings."[142]

It is against this background that we of the AICs in Zimbabwe are endeavouring to reinterpret and develop a praxis-related pneumatology on the basis of existing belief systems. For example, while seeing the Holy Spirit as saviour, healer and liberator, we are moving away from a predominantly personalized and therefore exploitive soteriology towards a more universal, cosmic and—by implication—altruistic approach that proclaims and promotes *justice, peace and salvation for all of creation*. Such a comprehensive pneumatology, one hopes, will characterize AIC theological trends in the 1990s and beyond.[143] The main difference from the historical pneumatological trends described above is that some of the incentive for change derives from external, more specifically western-related sources, such as my own participation in the AICs concerned. In other words, western theologies of the environment or of ecological liberation (for example, those of Moltmann, Carmody and Granberg-Michaelson) are being reinterpreted, adapted and blended with AIC prophetic praxis in a mutually enriching learning process, instead of all development being determined solely by spontaneous prophetic praxis as in the past. In this respect, ecumenical interaction is complementing prophetic contextuality and exclusivism, underscoring in the process AIC recognition of their integral relatedness to the universal church. This realization, however, does not detract from the fact that current developments in pneumatology still basically reflect the local church's response to deeply felt needs or crises, as happened during the liberation struggle. In this instance, peasants in the

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[142] J. Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Towards a New Christian Theology of Nature*, Ramsey, NY: Paulist Press, 1983, p. 79.

[143] M.L. Daneel, "Towards a Sacramental Theology of the Environment in African Independent Churches," in '*Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft,* 1, 1991, passim.

communal areas are increasingly faced with overpopulation, overgrazing of lands, soil erosion, diminishing crop returns on overextended soils, deforestation and the related problems of desertification, scarcity of firewood and spoilt water resources.

How do the prophetic movements respond to this crisis? In my opinion the prophets are starting to conceive of and respond to the Holy Spirit as the *earthkeeping Spirit*. Increasingly the guidance of the Spirit appears to point to the healing and restoration of nature as a vitally important part of his salvific work. As this conviction grows—an experience that I share with and propagate amongst the AIC prophets—the churches are being mobilized into ecologically liberating action.

I shall attempt to sketch briefly the current profile of such action and some of the more pertinent theological convictions behind it.

First of all, the prophets have been critically watching and assessing the conservationist work of AZTREC (Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), a body consisting of traditionalist spirit mediums, chiefs and ZANLA ex-combatants. Founded in 1988 as a sister organization of an institute (ZIRRCON - Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) of which I am the director, AZTREC aims at extending *chimurenga* from the socio-political arena to ecological conservation—tree planting, wildlife conservation and the protection of water resources. As happened during the struggle for political independence, the implementation of projects to liberate nature from destruction is inspired by the guardian ancestors of the land and the traditional oracular deity, Mwari. At present the prime objective is afforestation of communal lands where the threat of desertification is greatest.

At AZTREC's initiative several nurseries have been developed in Masvingo Province. Since 1988 more indigenous seedlings have been grown than ever before in Zimbabwe. Mobilization of rural communities has resulted in the planting of 5,000 trees in 1988, 150,000 trees in 1989 and more than 500,000 during the 1990/91 rainy season. Rural committees were formed by peasant villagers to take responsibility for all the woodlots: planting ceremonies, fencing, watering of trees, protective measures and so on. Thus the largest earthkeeping movement in Zimbabwe was developed at grassroots level over a relatively short period of time—its success deriving from ecological commitment rooted in traditional religion and philosophy.

Not to be outdone by AZTREC, yet taking their cue from AZTREC activities, the AICs have recently formed the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC). Some thirty-five churches have already joined. A constitution has been drafted and an executive, with a salaried general secretary, is already in charge. The new movement has similar ecological objectives to AZTREC, the main difference being that earthkeeping activities are based on Christian principles evolved in the AIC context.

A situation has therefore developed in which ZIRRCON, besides being the nerve centre, provides funding, policy-making and organizational services for two sister organizations—the one traditional, the other Christian, but both aimed at the liberation or restoration of nature in terms of their respective religious traditions. Attempts are made to establish meaningful interaction between AZTREC and AAEC at all levels, resulting in sustained interfaith dialogue on common religio-ecological goals.

In the second place, the immediate practical consequence of forming the AAEC has been the development of several church nurseries for exotic, fruit and indigenous trees at or near prophetic church headquarters. Plans for large-scale tree-planting operations by participant churches during the next rainy season are already underway. The unfolding "battle of the trees" in the churches is being interpreted in prophetic circles as the movement of the earthkeeping Spirit, who aims at healing the land by clothing the earth once again with life-restoring vegetation

(*kufukidza nyika*, to clothe the earth). This battle takes the form of prophets diagnosing the illness of mother earth in terms of human greed and ecological offences, and prescribing a therapy of Christian renewal and commitment, manifested in earthkeeping action. As this ecological side of the healer and protector Spirit emerges, the wider cosmic dimensions of salvation also gain prominence. This inevitably adds a new perspective to the AIC understanding of the good news of Christ's Saviourhood, so ardently proclaimed during evangelistic and missionary campaigns. For it is in Spirit-led tree-planting activities that the churches are announcing the reign of Christ, to whom belongs "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18); a reign that liberates and heals not only human beings but all of creation.

Third, attempts are made to develop, for and with the AICs, a written theology of the environment. Their characteristic theology enacted in dance, song and prophetic revelations is being complemented by a somewhat more organized, reflective and written record. In this field the Rev. Ruben Marinda and Solomon Zvanaka, both Zionist leaders holding advanced theological qualifications and key positions in ZIRRCON and the AAEC, are assisting me with the drafting of conscientization courses for training programmes in religion and ecology.

Fourth, western and AIC theological insights blend in the context of course development and teaching. At this level new trinitarian perspectives are being worked out and incorporated into training materials. Thus Jürgen Moltmann's emphasis on God's immanence in creation provides an important guideline for a new theology of ecology. He says:

> God is not merely the Creator of the world. He is also the Spirit of the universe. Through the powers and potentialities of the Spirit, the Creator indwells the creatures He has made, animates them, holds them in life, and leads them into the future of His kingdom.[144]

Moltmann' s views correlate closely with the convictions of the late Bishop Samuel Mutendi, who preached about the biblical Mwari as a creator truly present and totally involved in all of creation—in a peasant society as the God of the farmers and their crops. Through ZCC rituals to bless the seed to be sown and the implements to be used in the fields, etcetera, Mutendi managed to bring the remote oracular deity (Mwari of the Matopo hills), traditionally approachable only to a few select cultic officials, into daily peasant life. His was already a theology of ecology, albeit focused on seasonal cattle and crop farming. By combining Moltmann's ideas with some of Mutendi's rituals we relate the pervading presence of Mwari, the immanent creator, to a long-term ecological strategy. At this point the message is: Indeed, recognize Mwari as the one who blesses and germinates the seeds for the coming season! But let him also be the God of the seedlings nurtured in church nurseries and the God of tree crops in plantations that will not only provide the building materials and firewood for coming generations, but will also clothe the earth for its own sake.

In the fifth and last place, an attempt is made to reflect on AIC pneumatology and to draw the consequences for church praxis. Special attention is given to *the Spirit's ecological healing activity in relation to the sacraments*. Here, too, the centrality of the Spirit in prophetic earthkeeping corresponds with current theological notions in the western world. In his trinitarian interpretation of creation Moltmann, for instance, deliberately chooses to concentrate on the third person. He argues that all divine activity is pneumatic in its manifestation. It is always the Spirit who brings the activity of the Son to its goal. The cosmic Spirit he refers to has no relation to Stoic pantheism. It remains God's Spirit acting in this world in the differential modes of *creating, preserving, renewing and consummating* life. Thus he comes to his basic assertion:

> Creation in the Spirit is the theological concept which corresponds best to the

[144] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. London: SCM Press, 1985, p. 14.

> ecological doctrine of creation we are looking for and need today. With this concept we are cutting loose the theological doctrine of creation from the age of subjectivity and the mechanistic domination of the world, and are leading it in the direction in which we have to look for the future of an ecological world-community.[145]
>
> Through the Spirit we are bound together with the natural environment. This association is a system comprising human beings and nature. We might describe it as a spiritual ecosystem. Through the Spirit, human societies as part systems are bound up with the ecosystem "earth" (*Gaia*). So human beings are participants and sub-systems of the cosmic life-system, and the divine Spirit that lives in it.[146]

Moltmann's views are entirely relevant to current ecological concerns of the prophetic AICs. His idiom may be alien and the context of his appeal may be mainly the academic west and the threat of modem industrialization to our planet. Yet the AIC prophets of Africa will agree with his emphasis on the need to establish an ecological world community and in their own way express the conviction that only through the indwelling of the Spirit can such a goal be realized. In some respects the AIC prophets probably understand and experience the life-giving power of the outpoured and ever present Spirit better than Moltmann and other western-oriented theologians like myself do. Their intuition was shaped by their forefathers, who sensed as well as any Old Testament sage that the spirit (*mweya*) imparted by God the creator (*musiki*) was the source of all life. This intuition ultimately blossomed in an all-absorbing and most persuasive testimony to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit (*Mweya Mutsvene)* in the Spirit-type churches, especially in their healing colonies. And now the extension in prophetic praxis of the healing power of the Spirit from the specifically human condition to the entire "cosmic life-system" (to use Moltmann's words) is becoming manifest in the AIC sacraments.

Conversion and sin are being ritually reinterpreted in the sacramental context of baptism and the eucharist. It is in preparation for baptism that the prophetic leader emphasizes the need for radical public rejection of sin under the guidance of the Spirit. Ecologically conscientized prophets now reveal that the Spirit expects novices not only to confess their moral sins in disturbed interpersonal relations, but also their ecological sins: chopping down of trees without planting any in return, overgrazing and neglecting to make contour ridges, thereby causing soil erosion, etcetera - in other words admitting to human greed and exploitation of the good earth, taking it for granted without nurturing it or reverencing it in return. At "Jordan" (any river, called Jordan for the duration of the baptismal ceremony) it makes sense to the newly converted to confess ecological guilt, where the barren treeless plains, the ever deepening erosion gulleys, the denuded river banks and the clouds of dust testifying to wind erosion, are clearly in evidence. Here the prophet has a unique opportunity to instruct converts that crossing the river Jordan into a new life implies more than individual incorporation into the body of Christ and the prospect of salvation in heaven. It also requires the new convert's commitment to help restore creation and to engage in ecological stewardship, in recognition of God's grace and in selfless service to the generations yet to come.

To many Independents baptism is also a healing ceremony, in which the life-giving water of "Jordan," filled by the Spirit, is drunk by baptisands for individual cleansing and curative purposes. In this respect the ceremony offers a unique opportunity for interpreting the Spirit as healer both of the people and of the land. In that case the drinking of Jordan water symbolizes not just the baptisands' healing or salvation, but their identification with desecrated mother earth

[145] Ibid., p. 112.
[146] Ibid., p. 18.

and their participation in cosmic healing. The focus then shifts from private, personal benefit by the Holy Spirit's healing powers to a statement of solidarity with all creation and an affirmation of new commitment, through individual conversion, to the healing and restoration of nature.

In most of the Spirit-type churches the eucharist is preceded by an even more dramatic public confession of sin than happens at baptism. Johane Maranke' s vaPostori spend an entire night performing a massive preparatory cleansing ritual. Thousands of participants run around huge fires shouting their offences out loud. Then they pass the symbolic gates of heaven, each consisting of twelve prophets standing in pairs. All sins must be confessed at the gates, as the Holy Spirit, through the prophets, detects all hidden sins, from adultery to wizardry. The unrepentant are disqualified from participating in the sacrament. Some of the prophets involved in the AAEC tree-planting programme have started to combat ecological sins. Offences that lead to a shortage of firewood, soil erosion and poor crops are increasingly branded as a form of *uroyi* (wizardry) - the most serious of all sins, as it threatens human existence and life itself. I anticipate that unrepentant ecological wizards will in years to come find themselves debarred at the Zionist and Apostolic gates from participation in the eucharist. Through the earthkeeping Spirit the AAEC prophets already know who such *varoyi* are: the ones in the resettlement schemes who prejudice the common good by chopping down as many trees as they can for a quick profit from selling firewood, those who refuse to accept the principle that firewood can only be used by those who plant the trees that supply it; the resisters of government conservationist measures and of the chiefs' prohibition of chopping down trees in the holy groves of the ancestors, and the destroyers of river banks.

In addition to such reinterpretation of conversion and sin in the sacramental context, our theologizing in the earthkeeping churches includes a strong plea that in an ecologically ravaged environment each church should conduct at least one *tree-planting eucharist* annually. This would be one of the most relevant and convincing ways of publicly witnessing to Christ's reign over all creation and ritually acknowledging human involvement in its realization. It would be another way of agreeing with Granberg-Michaelson[147] that God's gift of grace received through the bread and wine cannot be treasured and held within our own selves. Instead, we are liberated to pour out our lives for the sake of Christ's reign over all creation, incorporating into our concern for internal, individual spirituality the ministry of global sanctification.

A tree-planting eucharist is one of the most powerful ways of saying that Christ's good news not only liberates and saves human beings, but also heals and protects nature where it agonizingly awaits redemption. Thus the missionary task acquires a wider dimension and sacramental empowerment. For mission, seen in this perspective, entails both evangelistic outreach and environmental restoration.

In the AAEC churches, where the eucharist is already linked with tree planting, the realization is dawning that sacramental participation in the body of Christ inspires both spiritual growth and ecological responsibility. Under the guidance of the earthkeeping Spirit the cosmological inferences of Colossians 1:15-20—"in Christ all things hold together"—are being drawn in a profound manner.

Such sacramental activity excludes the pretence that we, the earthkeepers, are the saviours of creation, for that we can never be. But, as believers we are erecting not only symbolic but concrete signposts of life-giving hope in a creation suffering while it awaits redemption. For, as Duchrow and Liedke[148] 31 correctly state:

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[147] W. Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality - The Call to Redeem Life on Earth*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984, p. 136.

[148] U. Duchrow & G. Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace*. Geneva: wee

> Spirit-endowed beings do not save creation, but creation looks to us. The way that we cope with its suffering shows how much hope there is for creation. When we increase the suffering of creation its hope sinks. When we sharpen the conflict between human beings and nature, and also the conflict between humans, then creation lapses into resignation. When, instead, in solidarity with nature and our fellow human beings, we reduce suffering, then the hope of creation awakes into new life.

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We have now traced some of the major characteristics of AIC pneumatology as it emerged in response to distinct historical phases and ecclesiastical developments in Zimbabwe. In the process we have gained an impression of how a section of the world church has interpreted and experienced the movement and guidance of God's Spirit in its midst. We have also noted different emphases in the related concepts of salvation.

Of great significance is the fact that the richness of the Spirit's involvement and presence in the movements concerned was never obscured by prophetic preoccupation with historically and contextually determined issues at a given historical time. As I have pointed out, the prophets' involvement in the political liberation struggle and the concomitant image of the Holy Spirit as liberator of the oppressed—in spite of a temporarily weakened Christology—in no way quenched their missionary spirit or zeal for individual conversions and the propagation of eternal salvation in the present yet still coming kingdom of God. Likewise, the current response of the AICs to the Spirit as earthkeeper and the resultant widening perspective on salvation as extending to all creation, instead of overriding evangelistic outreach in the traditional sense, is incorporated into and enriches the individual conversion experience. It enhances the hope in the future fulfilment of salvation.

In a sense the earthkeeping venture is part of an ongoing and comprehensive conversion process of the entire church. Thus engaged, the church is actually carrying out an expanded missionary mandate: proclaiming through its Spirit-led life and work that the good news of salvation, of God's grace, extends to all of creation. Salvation here and now, manifest in the Black Jerusalems and Holy Cities in this existence—in terms of healing, liberation and earthkeeping—in no way "snatches the future" but meaningfully concretizes the dominion of Christ over heaven and earth and maintains the eschatological tension between the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom.

In this respect, the prophetic movements are enacting their own unique liberation theologies, without falling into the pitfall of reducing the message of salvation exclusively to a this-worldly programme of liberation from socio-political oppression or poverty. They also avoid the pitfall of reducing the good news to one-sided future salvation of souls through their holistic interpretation of the Holy Spirit's comprehensive involvement in all of life. Thereby they escape the western classifications of "liberationist," "evangelical," "charismatic" or "ecumenical." Instead, they encompass all these distinctions and many more, as they uninhibitedly read the scriptures and intuitively feel for the Holy Spirit's guidance in Africa. Herein lies their challenge to the world church as it ponders both vision and strategy for a renewed evangelistic thrust.

Together with them we pray:

Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit,
Bless us, your servants.

Publications, 1989, p. 64.

M. L. Daneel Full Bibliography[149]

Organizations Founded

1991 – The Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC), a grassroots environmental and tree-planting movement composed of 180 African-Independent denominations.
1988 – The Association of Zimbabewan Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), a grassroots traditionalist earthkeeping and tree-planting movement composed of traditional chiefs, spirit mediums, headmen, etc.
1984--2000 – Founder and Director of the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCON), composed of departments of research, ecology, development programs, women's desk, youth desk, wildlife, theological education by extension, finance and administration.
1972-1981 – Founder and Director of the African Independent Church Conference (Fambidzano), an ecumenical movement of independent churches for theological training and community development, founded in the midst of Zimbabwe's liberation war and now the oldest ecumenical movement of AICs in Zimbabwe. At its peak 600 students enrolled at 40 extension centers annually.

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