

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES AND THEIR APPROACH TO VENDA CULTURE

This chapter deals with the so-called Independent Churches² in Venda. Independent Churches in this part of the country were championed by the indigenous people, who were formerly members of the historical or mainline churches, which were established by the missionaries. During the colonial era, the Independent Churches were derogatorily called “sects”, a word which indicated that Independent Churches were not acceptable to the pioneers of the mainline churches.

It will be apt and proper to indicate that the Independent Churches came into being because of the failures of mainline churches, to satisfy the religious needs of their converts. In Venda, in particular, the Independent Churches came into formation because of some of the traditional and cultural aspects, which were not sufficiently incorporated into mainline churches. The traditional rituals, were some of the factors which accelerated the schism in the mainline churches. The formation of the Independent Churches was neither influenced by the liberation

² Different names are currently used to designate the so called AICs: African *Independent* Churches; African *Indigenous* Churches; African *Instituted* Churches; African *Initiated* Churches. “Independent” has been chosen in this study to indicate the historic differentiation between the mainline, or Euro-centric churches and the churches that originated without being institutionally bound to the mainline churches.

struggle, as was the case in Zimbabwe, nor by the coming into being of the Ethiopian churches, which started mostly in the urban areas and metropolitan cities.

The purpose of establishing the new movements by the indigenous people, was not a move to ostracise the white missionaries, who introduced Christian religion. The formations of the Independent Churches in Venda were the “signs of the times” indicating that the “train” of Christianity was rather too westernised, and that the Vhavenda felt deprived of their traditional culture. With the result that their beliefs and practices were not interwoven into the Christian religion.

4.1. Healing of the invalid

From a historical point of view, Jesus Christ had a very large contingent following Him all the time during His ministry on earth. The most important reason was, not to hear the Word of God, but to witness miracles when the invalids were healed. Eternal life to them was something far-fetched, as they cherished the present life.

The Indigenous people regarded healing as a physical restoration of the discomfort in the body. The Vhavenda regarded a physical cure as paramount to the life hereafter. According to the Vhavenda, security and protection against evil was of a great significance. When the pioneers of the Independent Churches caused a schism from the mainline churches, they made faith healing the

cornerstone of the Gospel. Mahon was known to practice faith-healing. The indigenous people came on feet and wagons to be healed, and the possessed were healed of the demons (Oosthuizen 1985:45).

The Vhavenda have a strong respect for a traditional healer who has a reputation for healing. They usually go to far away places in search of good traditional healers. To the Vhavenda, therapeutic salvation was regarded as a priority to spiritual salvation. The indigenous Independent Churches rose to power through faith healing. Sundkler supports this statement when he purports that, "In order to rise to leadership, the prophet must above all be a healer" (Sundkler 1961:115). The indigenous leaders of the Independent Churches, realising that the Vhavenda accepted faith-healing as a relief from sorcery and witchcraft, joined the Indigenous Churches as a refuge from the evil ones.

The Vhavenda believe that illness is caused by the evil one as the precipitator of the destabilisation and discomfort in the family circles. The Independent Churches also accept the Vhavenda's perception that some kind of illnesses are caused by witches or the evil one. If, for example, the sick person suffers from high fever, where the person is prone to say anything that causes hallucination in the mind, the conclusion could be drawn, according to Vhavenda cultural background, that the person is bewitched. During the seizures of the sick, priests and the prophets pray for the patient, this is done in such a way that prayer becomes an interrogation, in which the emphasis is laid on removing Thuri

(Polecats) from his body. It was commonly believed that the polecats (Thuri) could take hold of the human being and control his behaviour. Van Rooy, in support of this statement, alleges that, “when a person has high fever he intends to speak senseless things, so it is assumed that he has thuri (U pandela Thuri: Muishond) To chase away the “polecats” (Van Rooy 1964:7), the ministers of Independent Churches regard the action of dispelling the evil spirits as analogous to the incident of the demons, who pleaded with Jesus not to order them into the bottom pit but sought physical refuge between the swine.

The practice of praying for demon-possessed in Independent Churches, is like a reinforcement of faith and confidence bestowed on the Independent Churches. In reality, the mighty acts of God's words and deeds should be accorded to Jesus Christ, who has the power above that of church leaders, including the Bishops.

The ministers of the Independent Churches are inclined to lay emphasis on the name of Jesus that through it, a person would be healed when prayed for. The prayer plays an important role, and thus it becomes a vehicle for the healing process. When the sick have been healed, they are converted and start regarding the church as a refuge from evil spirits. These sentiments are endorsed by Sundkler who says:

“The message of healing is in fact the strongest asset of the Zionist Evangelisation, because of this function both the converted and

unconverted are attracted from the mainline churches to the A.T.C”
(Sundkler 1961:233).

The ministers of the Independent Churches have the time and the pertinent ear to listen to the sick like a traditional healer.

Through the healing sessions, in the Independent Churches, the church is able to show that the congregation cares for its members who are ill. During these sessions, an atmosphere of expectation and confidence is created. It is alleged that the patient is even healed before he is prayed for, because he regards the pastor as a messenger of God.

The pastor is placed in a highly respectable position, in that of a living saint. According to the Vhavenda culture, a person who has been ill for a long time without improvement, has to go out of his home in search of healing in far away places (U bva dzima mudu). No wonder the spiritual leaders of the Independent Churches have big villages, which in most cases are inhabited by patients who await healing sessions. Maboea is in common cause with this statement when he indicates: “The places are referred to as Hospital Jerusalem or Lekganyane’s Zion City” (Maboea 1982:122).

The Vhavenda, like any indigenous people, have a strong belief in drinking medicine to cure their ailments as prescribed by traditional healers. It is

somewhat analogous to the drinking of water, which had been blessed by the spiritual leaders of the Independent Churches. After the blessing process, the patients regard the water as having a curative effect on ailments and they either drink, or wash themselves. "...'Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam.' So the man went and washed his face, and came back seeing" (John 9:7). This biblical reference also confirms that blessed holy water has curative powers, and the Independent Churches anchor their faith on this commandment of Jesus.

The main characterisation of Independent Churches is the healing process, which seems to overshadow both salvation and exegesis of the Gospel message. Oosthuizen argues: "If one has to reduce the A.T.C (African Traditional Church) to one common denominator, the most outstanding phenomenon is healing and thus the most appropriate designation" (Oosthuizen 1985). This implies that, had the historical churches made the church a refuge for salvation and also a healing community to the society around it, their members would not have sought dual memberships. At night, some of the members of the mainline churches do attend the healing session conducted by the Independent Churches and carry water for the purpose of drinking or sprinkling, as a way of dispelling evil spirits. On Sundays they attend services at their mainline churches, and play significant roles as elders of the church.

The Vhavenda do not see a vast difference between the spiritual leaders of the Indigenous Church and a traditional healer, as both take care of their physical

health, and ultimately they are both healers. This statement is reinforced by an article on Magic in the *Sunday Times* which reports:

“Evodia Rametsi is training to be a prophet in the Christian tradition of the Zion apostolic churches. She says she will combine the vocations of sangoma and prophet because she believes there is no contradictions between the two” (*Sunday Times Magazine* 29/06/1997:10).

The Vhavenda regard physical cure as paramount to eternal life, for in the Independent Churches they secure protection against witchcraft. This protection gives the new movements a good foundation on which they anchor. As a result, many new converts join the church for the sake of protection from the evil spirits.

Engenas Lekganyane, the leader of the Zion Christian Church, was regarded as a powerful spiritual leader and his exegesis of the message of the Gospel was accepted as prophesy. As a result, healing received the highest priority during his church services. Lukaimane, in support of this statement, indicates that, “instead of faith alone, Engenas introduced some traditional practices and different ways of faith healing, with the result that healing more often becomes important than spiritual salvation” (Lukhaimane 1980:41).

4.2. Praise and worship

It would not be considered an exaggeration to indicate that the Vhavenda, by tradition, participate in their activities while singing. From a cultural point of view, the Vhavenda are not very fond of melodious songs, but of emotional songs, which are accompanied by the rhythm of instruments, such as drums and mbila (xylophone). This point of view is in line with the argument by Blacking when he says "Venda music is founded not on melody, but on a rhythmical stirring of the whole body, of which singing is but one extension" (Blacking 1974:27). Blacking adds that their music goes with the rhythms which lead the whole body to be set in motion, irrespective of the prevailing circumstances. Movements will be aroused, even though they sing songs of sorrow. In support of the above statement, Maboeba purports that "Traditionally, when Africans worship, they sing and dance together. They have a tendency to become emotionally or spiritually involved in the service" (Maboee 1982:131). Missionaries should have encouraged their converts to express their own feeling in praising God.

The missionaries did not take much consideration of the Vhavenda music background into account. The Lutheran hymnal, which was the first to be published in Venda, has good poetic hymns, but in most cases the emotions are suppressed and restrained. Even though the music is well arranged, the cultural blend is lacking. Webster indicates that in the interior, where churches were developed among pagans, Agbei did not introduce European hymnology, but

began from the first with African music (Webster 1964:131). The indigenous leaders, who led the formation of the Independent Churches in Venda were prompted by the way hymns were sung in the historical churches; they lack the cultural blend of the indigenous people.

The pioneers of the Gospel, missionaries, for instance, are not acknowledged in the songs of praise, whereas according to the indigenous standards, names of great pioneers are made mention of in their singing. Naude reinforces this statement when he says, "To describe God as the God of Engenas is obviously a novel expression of God's identity" (Naude 1995:138). To the Christian fundamentalist, this sounds as if the name of God is lowered, but in the Old Testament God is described as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Traditionally the Vhavenda do not start singing together but there is a person who intones (u sima), and the rest of the people will follow him/her in a way of applauding. In support of this statement, Naude indicates that a young girl serves as choir leader and everybody follows her variations in tempo (Naude 1995:116).

Through singing, the one who intones the hymn is also performing the task of exhortation of the biblical message. For instance, Hymn no. 38 of Nyimbo Dza Pesaleme, is lined thus "Mene thekel", the rest of the congregation applauds by saying "Amen: Amen ho nwaliwa kha luvhondo: Amen. Amen" (It has been

written on the wall). This message from Daniel 5:25 is then imparted to the congregation whilst they sing.

Consequently, the inspiration of the Word of God is developed joyfully. The person who determines the key of the song also brings the sweetness of the music, but above all, the leading singer should be well vested with the interpretation of the scriptures as this responsorial song is another way of proclaiming the Gospel, although to the listeners it may sound monotonous, but to the Vhavenda it is aesthetically acceptable.

The spiritual leader of the Indigenous Churches is also inclined to intone a song, and the rest of the congregation follows in applause. According to the Vhavenda standards, when victory is celebrated, the traditional leader is the one who starts singing and the rest of his subjects follow.

This is done in victory or great achievements (u huvha mihuvho) (songs of praise). When singing such songs of praise the Vhavenda believe that the ancestors are rejoicing with them. Vilikazi, in support, indicates, "It is not surprising that in all Zulu national ceremonies, Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Prince Gideon do most of the leading during the singing of Amahubo songs" (Vilikazi 1986:37-39).

Bishop Tutu made an appeal after dedicating the Church of St Michaels and Angels on the 29th July 1994 at Shayandima in Venda, when he encouraged the congregation to sing the songs of celebration and thanksgiving to make praises by way of ululation (mifhululu) and when the congregation responded, it became such a glorious celebration. Praising God by way of ululation, was unthinkable in the mainline churches.

In praising God, the Independent Churches in Venda are inclined to refer to Jesus as their Nanga (Doctor) who protects them from the evil ones and demons, and thus He is central in the whole cosmos.

The songs of praise are coined out of their understanding of Jesus as their powerful saviour. This point is supported by Naude when he says, "If Nanga is read in relation to Murena (Lord), Mulauli (Controller), Yesu (Jesus) and Murwa Mudzimu (Son of God) the distinctiveness is confirmed. There is no other nanga like this!" (Naude 1995:142).

The indigenous people are free to select the words of their choice in composing hymns of praise. Thus, the ultimate goal of enhancing Jesus as their spiritual healer is achieved. Although, to the Westerner, this may not reach the required tune and tone of the symphony.

The indigenous people have a tendency of being moved by songs and becoming spiritually motivated in the order of worship. From a cultural point of view, Africans do not feel comfortable in a controlled solemn church where emotions are not expressed.

The Vhavenda music from a traditional point of view could be classified on pentatonic scale, which is not standardised music according to western society. Their music could be rated as what could be called folk general music, which is vocal but could be accompanied by traditional instruments like Mbila (xylophone) and drums. The instruments echo the voices of the singers. They are also inclined to clap hands when they play the Tshigombela dance.

In the Independent Churches, the singing is always accompanied by the clapping of hands and the whole church service becomes more colourful for the members of the congregation. mainline churches, who are in line with African music in their churches, loose few of their members to the Independent Churches. Daneel reinforces this statement when he indicates that “the R.C.C (Roman Catholic Church) from the outset had the advantage of being much more colourful and therefore, to the African a more appealing church ritual than the D.R.C (Dutch Reformed Church). It is understandable that the Catholic church’s efforts to accommodate its ritual to Shona tradition has met with success (Daneel 1987:263-264).

It is gratifying to indicate that at the fortieth anniversary celebration of the inception of the Uniting Reformed Church function, held at Tshilidzini on 11.08.1996, Nico Smith, the pioneer and the founder of the mission station, was highly impressed and overjoyed to have taken part in the singing of the choruses and the clapping of hands. The singing was accompanied by organ, which made the church service splendid. The present situation in some of the Uniting Reformed Churches (D.R.C) is in divergence with the opinion advanced by Daneel when he indicated that “most of D.R.C. hymns are sung in the western type....Musical instruments are hardly ever used in the D.R.C. Service” (Daneel 1971:262). Lately, both musical instruments and choruses are being used in most of the mainline churches. As a result, members do feel comfortable as their cultural sentiments are being met. It is indeed of great significance that the indigenous people’s music should be regarded as a matter of relevance and ultimately it becomes a vessel which carries the full meaning of the Gospel, and thus the church music will be actualised to the glory of God.

It is an accepted fact that Indigenous music was not encouraged either in the schools or during church services. The educated and the converted Vhavenda shunned to sing the indigenous songs as a way of worship.

This statement is endorsed by Axelsson when he indicates: “The Africans had been taught to despise their own musical heritage and because of long and deep infiltration of their culture by the mission societies” (Axelsson 1974:93). By

implication, the argument advanced by Axelsson indicates that the Christian religion created a new race, which detested its traditional heritage and accepted Western Culture.

The difference between the indigenous music and the European ideas of music is that in the mainline churches the music sung during church service is calm and solemn, and its rhythm does not lean itself to the movement of the body, whereas in the Independent Churches members feel that they are themselves, as they are free to express their emotions by either clapping the hands or dancing, which is in line with the Vhavenda cultural background.

4.3. Polygamous marriage

The marriage of the Vhavenda, like many Africans South of the Sahara, is portrayed, in many instances, as polygamous.

Men were not obliged to marry more than one wife. According to the Vhavenda culture, polygamy was encouraged by family marital procedures. If a man married a wife of his own choice, who had no family connection with either of his parents, the mother could encourage her son to marry the daughter of her brother, who is a cousin (Muzwala). The Vhavenda tradition, in some instances, is nearer to the Jewish culture. In Genesis (27:46), Rebecca says to Isaac "I am sick and tired of Isaac's wives." Ultimately Jacob had to marry the two daughters

of his own paternal uncle Laban (Genesis 29:15- 16). In most cases, polygamy is accelerated by the wish of the parents.

In the Vhavenda circles, to have many wives enhances the status of the husband, for he is regarded as a wealthy man. His social standing is viewed as being above a monogamist. In support of this argument, Stayt reflects that “every Muvenda desires to possess as many wives as possible” (Stayt 1931:142). In the absence of the husband, the first wife controls the family. She is even accorded the privilege of settling disputes, should they occur within the family.

The younger wives do not resent or abhor their lower positions as second or third wives, instead they are proud to be members of a big family. When the Gospel came to Venda, it found that polygamous marriage was being practised. It is not surprising to note that the Gospel was easily accepted by the youth and the monogamists.

The Vhavenda polygamists wanted to join the church with all their wives, and this caused a great embarrassment to the missionaries, if not a problem, for according to the Vhavenda accepted standards they were regarded as legal wives.

Vilikazi, in cause with this statement, indicates that “for the African polygamy is a marriage and concubinage. All the wives of the polygamist are his full legal

wives” (Vilakazi 1986:20). Vilakazi’s point of view is not in line with Berthoud, who concludes that monogamy is the only correct form of marriage. He remarks that, “if the principle of monogamy is the only right one or just the right one, no relation outside that can be called marriage.” According to the Vhavenda context, polygamy was accepted by the society. The mainline churches appeared to disapprove of polygamy, for it was regarded as immoral. According to the Vhavenda acceptable standards, polygamy was a cultural social practice. As a result, the stigma of illegitimate children in the community was eliminated, for there were few children who were fatherless.

The missionaries could have focused on transforming the indigenous people’s culture as a relevant vessel to present the Gospel. The traditional leaders, who were keen to accept the Gospel were refused baptism as they had many wives. According to tradition, it was unthinkable for a traditional leader to have only one wife.

The Vhavenda pioneers who championed the cause of the formation of Independent Churches, realised that many Vhavenda were being debarred from accepting the Gospel due to the stigma attached to polygamy, while great traditional leaders in the Bible, like David and Solomon who had many wives, were regarded as great exponents of the Word of God Their efforts and contributions in the Holy Scripture were seen to be insurmountable.

The Jews had high respect for the two kings, and they were instrumental in making their followers see the glory of God. Although there were potentially well respected traditional leaders who wanted to embrace the Gospel, the church doors were closed to them.

Kraft, in support of this argument, indicates: “the typical result is that thousands of the potentially responsive members of traditional polygamous societies disqualified themselves from becoming Christians” (Kraft 1981:363).

The conceptualisation of polygamy would have yielded great fruits for the Gospel amongst the Vhavenda. From a religious point of view, the Vhavenda believe in the immortality of the dead and are convinced that their various clans will be well restored, as the ancestors will be venerated by a large prosperity, which comes from polygamous family.

According to the Vhavenda custom, if a man died and left a wife and children, to ensure that the widow did not get involved in “adultery” or remain outside the family circles, arrangements were made that the elder brother of the deceased or a closest relative would “inherit” her and continue supporting the family. Kraft indicates that a plurality of wives comes under the “marriages” category, not under the “adultery” category (Kraft 1980:6).

The Vhavenda spiritual indigenous leaders took advantage, brought about by the cultural practice of marrying the additional wife due to the death of a brother as an accepted norm, and polygamists are admitted in the church without restrictions. The tolerance of polygamy was another form of the indigenisation of the Gospel to the Vhavenda as it came to fit in with the traditional fabric of the Vhavenda social system.

The Indigenous Churches took it upon themselves to accept and purify this tradition. They did not discard the practices which the Vhavenda were accustomed to. Amongst the Vhavenda, the polygamist is honoured higher than a monogamist. If the former is debarred from entering the arena of Christianity, it leaves the community with feelings of scorn towards the Gospel.

The polygamists feel more comfortable in the Independent Churches than in mainline churches because they can participate freely. Whereas, according to some churches' policies and disciplines, they may attend church, but with certain restrictions, as in the Dutch Reformed Church. Theron quotes "people who are involved in polygamous marriages can become members of the congregations, but they cannot participate in the sacraments, and cannot be elected to the offices" (Theron 1996:61).

By not participating in either sacraments or activities of the church, polygamists felt that they were not wholly accepted. In the Vhavenda culture, the parents

should not be shunned in public, most especially not in the presence of their children. It thus caused countless conflicts when such parents were prohibited from receiving the sacraments. In divergence to this point of view, as indicated by Theron, Omotoye says, “since having one wife is not included in the Christian creeds ... polygamists should be allowed as full members of the church with the right to take the Holy Communion” (Omotoye 1964:76).

The spiritual leaders of the Indigenous Churches in Venda consider the practice of monogamous marriage as purely western. Their argument is anchored in the Holy Writ, where polygamy was practised in ancient Israel. The Vhavenda do not regard polygamy as a moral sin. No wonder the Indigenous Churches do not say anything about polygamy or the number of wives one should have as a member of their churches. This statement is in line with views advanced by Gerson Dzivhani of the Zion Christian Church in Venda when he indicates that “polygamy is not a sin and should not be seen as a sin. It is one of the practices as far as I know, which has not been amended ... The Z.C.C does not prohibit the practice of polygamy by some of its members” (Dzivhani 1993:20).

The Z.C.C. with its headquarters at Mount Moria, is situated not far away from the University of the North. Its membership is believed to be the largest in South Africa. Polygamy is not an issue in the Zion Christian Church. It is regarded as a social duty for a man to support all his wives equally.

4.4. Royal church leadership

A traditional leader in Vhavenda circles is regarded as a figure of great significance. He is considered to be the head of the area of his jurisdiction, and a representative of the whole tribe. The Headmen (Magota) or sub-chiefs are, in most cases, closely related to him.

The founders of the Independent Churches had a desire to establish new denominations, whose leadership could rest entirely on the shoulders of the leaders, as they regarded themselves self-sufficient in every way. In support of this statement, Stayt confirms that "His subjects treat him with reverence, awe, and humble adoration (Stayt 1931:202). It is not surprising that most of the Indigenous Churches, if not all of them, were established or started by leaders who wanted power or authority and had the need to be self-sufficient in their newly established churches. The members of their congregations became subjects of the spiritual leaders.

There is a Venda expression that says "Khangala mbili a dzi dzuli muina muthihi" (two venomous snakes cannot live in the same hole). This indicates that two people of divergent opinion cannot get along well. The Indigenous spiritual leaders viewed the position of a missionary as no different from that of a traditional leader (chief) who had followers. They, in turn, felt the need to be leaders of their own people. Van Rooy in support of the succession through the

desire for power, indicates that “During the passage of time the Headmen (Petty chiefs) made themselves full fledged chiefs, the succession a customary phenomenon in most of the indigenous circles” (Van Rooy 1964:27).

According to Vhavenda standards succession to any position of responsibility is not that simple; there is a Venda expression, “Vhuhosi a si vhuswa a vhu neiwi, vhu a vhangywa” (chieftainship is not porridge (food) one cannot just be given; one must strive for it). A missionary had to declare himself a traditional leader (chief), in order to have a congregation, according to Vhavenda traditional culture.

Schisms in churches, either from the mainline or Independent Churches, are not of much concern, because traditionally splits are always occurring. Sundkler, in support of this statement, indicates:

“Time and again the Zulu church leader of today, when tackling a threatening crisis of succession in some part of this church, is told by the would-be successors that they are simply following the time-honoured custom of splitting off from the father’s kraal” (Sundkler 1961:168).

In the schism, the Vhavenda would console themselves by the Venda expression that “Mudzimu ndi muthihi, madzina a kereke a fhambana “(There is one God. It is only the names of the denominations which differ). The kingly system had

been engraved in the Vhavenda minds. As a result, it was a forgone conclusion that the missionaries had made themselves traditional leaders (chiefs). People wondered if the missionaries had truly portrayed Jesus to the satisfaction of the indigenous people.

If the Messiah had been portrayed as Prime-Ancestor, the Vhavenda would have accepted Jesus as their Hero - Ancestor, and as their earthly King. No wonder some members of the Independent Churches shifted this title to their spiritual indigenous leaders as *Muphulusi washu* (in Venda) *Mophulosi wa rena* (in Sotho) (our Redeemer). In support of this statement Lukhaimane indicates that "Jesus Christ was such a distant figure that some followers placed Jesus Christ and Engenas (Lekganyane) on the same footing" (Lukhaimane 1980:43) This statement is further endorsed by Kruger when he says:

"Die naam van Christus word gerespekteer, maar staan nie in die middelpunt nie, sy naam neem ongeveer die plek van ou profeet van die Ou Testament soos die Moslems se siening van Christus (Kruger 1971:102).

This is a clear indication that the spiritual indigenous leaders occupied the central place instead of the Redeemer Himself. From a traditional point of view, the break away from mainline churches was clearly caused by charismatic leadership.

The Vhavenda, who were converted to Christianity, came into conflict with the missionaries because there was lack of mutual consultation, unlike in traditional practices, where the running of a church and political matters are highly decentralised, starting from a sub-headman to the traditional leader, who is right at the top. The spiritual leaders of the Independent Churches administer their churches in the same way tribal councils are run, and this gives a wider perspective of consultation.

The founders of the Independent Churches were under the impression that the missionaries were indirectly declaring themselves to be traditional leaders in a foreign land. In support of this argument, Van Butselaar indicates that “Every White, be he a missionary or not, is in the eyes of an African a “hosi”, that means “chief” (Van Butselaar 1988:15). From a Venda cultural standpoint, when homage is paid to the traditional leader, the expression used is “Kha ri luvhe,” which in Christian standards is, “Let us Pray.” It is an accepted practice that when most Zionists in Venda pray, they say “Kha ri luvhe”, instead of saying “khari rabele” (let us pray). This is a foreign idea which has come with the missionaries. In support of this statement, Van Rooy says. “Daardie persoon is verplig om te staan en uit te roep: ‘Khari luvhe’ (laat ons hulding)” (Van Rooy 1964:29). The Vhavenda feel more comfortable in the Independent Churches, for when they worship God, the procedure is not as foreign to them as it is in the missionary orientated churches. “U luvha” (paying homage) is only applicable to a senior person of high respect. The “U luvha” action is properly done when

people, or church members are on their knees. It is an accepted practice that when people pray in the Independent Churches, they are expected to be on their knees.

In some of the mainline churches, according to the Vhavenda accepted norms, one should show respect when speaking to one's seniors. It is unthinkable to speak to God while standing. This argument is reinforced by Tshinyadzo Lidovho (Personal Interview 27/10/97), an elder of the Evangelical Lutheran church, who expressed that members of his household knelt when they conducted family prayers, and he indicated that he felt uncomfortable when he prayed standing in his church as that was their accepted policy. This argument is further endorsed by Obeng, when he shows that, "Kneeling (down) is a sign of respect for the most Supreme Ruler" (Obeng 1988:108).

From an African point of view, it is an accepted practice to express humility by kneeling and this action leads to total submissiveness and surrender to the one to be approached. Customarily it is disrespect to speak to one's senior standing; it shows one is not well-bred.

Usually, traditional leaders are inclined, if not fond of building their houses on high places, which can be seen from far. There is a Venda saying that "ri gonya thavhani" (we are climbing the mountain), which means one is going to the

traditional leader's place. Most of the traditional leader's headquarters are preferably built on conspicuous places.

Bishop Miriri's residence is at the foot of Kokwane Mountain, Bishop Nemalili of Tshiheni, not excluding the Zion City of Bishop Lekganyane, is situated at Mount Moria near Pietersburg. The Zion cities have a centralised headquarters, which is analogous to the traditional leader's place of abode (Musanda).

The outside stations operate as franchises and feeders of the central church. The Zion cities are regarded as sacred cities, and as such, they command respect. From cultural traditional standards, the residence of the traditional leader is always surrounded by closest relatives (Thondo).

The enclosure of the Bishop's residence is composed of church offices, and patients who are waiting for healing sessions. In most cases, the Independent Churches consisted of relatives who would flank the leader of the newly formed Indigenous Church. In support of this argument, Daneel indicates: "In the case of Mutendi the first converts were his own sons and daughters" (Daneel 1971:457).

The new family converts form the nucleus of the community church members. The church leaders appoint office bearers amongst their relatives. The newly formed Independent Church becomes strong, as the foundation is based on relatives.

Should the congregation become large beyond his control, it could be split so as to make room for a relative. Daneel reports Bishop Gavure as saying:

“If one of our congregations become large and the office bearer starts bickering with others he splits it into two congregations. In this respect we resemble the kraal heads who cut up their kraals to the Indigenous leaders, the church is run in the lines of kingship or chieftainship. From a cultural point of view, if there are disputes, or the brothers start bickering with one another, the traditional leader according to cultural standards should silence his brothers by giving them small areas to administer as sub- chiefs and as a result, he will get support from them and eventually from the community as a whole” (Daneel 1987:112).

4.5. Inheritance

According to the Vhavenda culture, the succession to chieftainship, as may be the case with other nations or tribes, is founded on heredity succession. After the death of the traditional leader or the head of the family (father), the leadership would go to one of the sons of the deceased. Stayt, in support of this argument, indicates that “The right to chieftainship is based on heredity, the position descending from father to son” (Stayt 1931:208).

This cultural practice has taken root in the Independent Churches, with the result that when a Bishop vacates his bishopric, his throne is filled by his son, whether he is ecclesiastically orientated or not. It is presumed that the church elders and office bearers would give the son guidance. In support of this argument, Daneel indicates: "Just as the senior son traditionally is installed as ritually efficient on behalf of the family group, for life, the succeeding son of the deceased bishop is expected to hold his inherited bishop ecclesiastical office for life" (Daneel 1982:117). The Indigenous leaders of the Independent Churches as adherents to the Old Testament, base their argument on Numbers 20:26, where Eleazer succeeded his father Aaron as High Priest. The respect the Israelites had for Aaron was bestowed on his son Eleazer, who teamed up with Joshua by helping to lead the Israelites into the promised land.

The strength and unity of the Indigenous Churches relied entirely on the charismatic power of the leader. If he died, the new leader would experience problems to reunite the church. In support of this statement, Crafford indicates that "If another leader arises the unity is broken. It is with objection that this type of unity is referred to as ecumenical. A limited Christology lies at the root of this inadequate ecumenical concept" (Crafford 1982:137). In support of the argument advanced by Crafford, these Independent Churches acclaim the Bishop as their head and saviour; they lose the ecumenicity of the church, for Christ is the only Head of the church. From the discussion, it is evident that the concept of inheritance of leadership in the Indigenous Churches is continuous.

This statement is reinforced by Ravhura (Personal Interview 09/11/1997) at Makonde, who indicated that after the death on 3 January 1989 of Bishop Isaac Ramakulukusha, who was the head of the Rock of Zion Church, his relatives insisted that his son should be appointed bishop. The whole issue posed a problem to the church elders. The church was rescued by the late Bishop's sister who revealed that his second in charge should be consecrated head of the church in case of his death. Ultimately Matthews Nduvheni Ravhura was consecrated Bishop of the church by Bishop Muravha in 1993.

In some instances, the Pioneers or founders of the Independent Churches were prompted by the Vhavenda cultural concept of inheritance. They placed much emphasis on inheritance with the full knowledge that the Bishopric trend would not be broken as it would be from father to son, the dimension emerged from the indigenous traditional practice of chieftainship inheritance.

4.6 Dreams and visions

Dreams and Visions are accepted in the Indigenous Churches as channels of communication. From a cultural point of view the indigenous people place much faith in dreams and visions and believe that dreams direct the dreamer to some significant actions expected of him/her. The argument in this issue is well endorsed by Willoughby when he indicates: "Dreams are regarded as common

channels of divine communication” (Willoughby 1928:90). From time immemorial, it was universally accepted that dreams were sent by the living dead as one way of visitation to their living offspring.

In most cases, the pioneers of the Independent Churches appropriated that, in their dreams, they saw many people dressed in white garments following them. The interpretation of the dreams inspired their followers to follow those leaders who had been shown such marvels.

It is also a common belief amongst the Vhavenda that dreamers are temporarily possessed by the spirits and whatever they dream is another way of being visited by the powers that be. Members of the Independent Churches accord the dream element to a strong factor, which must be either appeased or subdued, with the understanding that dreams have a role to play in the day to day running of the Indigenous Churches.

It is generally accepted by the indigenous people that, if the requests which emanated from dreams are not adhered to, the dreamer would be tormented and have no rest of mind. In mainline churches, dreams are regarded as a normal phenomenon, which comes as a way of recalling what has transpired during the day. As a result they are not of such importance in church circles.

From the Vhavenda cultural background, dreams were never used to satisfy the lust of the dreamer. The outcome of dreams would in most cases be positive and orderly and could meet the social accepted norms of the society, unlike the dream of prophet Mthethwa, quoted by Sundkler, as saying:

“Prophet Mthethwa told the congregation that he had seen in a dream two beds, on one he himself was lying and on the other a young girl from the congregation. The spirit, he said, obviously wanted him to take this girl as a second wife” (Sundkler 1961:274).

In the mainline churches, members feel comfortable, as the interpretation of dreams is not a common practice, as is the case of the Independent Churches. According to the Vhavenda culture, it is uncalled for, for the traditional leader to dream of a wife under the pretext of marrying her. The traditional leader could choose a girl for a wife at the closure of the girls’ “domba”, an initiation school which is mostly for girls. It cannot be denied that the Vhavenda leaders of Independent Churches do not dream such lustful dreams, but it is mostly uncommon in the Venda Culture. The interpretation and acceptance of dreams which cause disorder, discourage the new converts of the Independent Churches and gives credence to the mainline churches.

4.7. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptance of Christianity

From a cultural point of view, the Vhavenda regard physical health of great significance as compared to spiritual salvation.

The Independent Churches have a time set aside for praying for the sick and the invalid. The session is normally conducted after the message is delivered.

The leaders of the church give themselves time to listen to all the bodily complaints from the sick and the needy and hands are laid on them declaring that in the Name of Jesus they would be whole.

Ministers of the Indigenous Churches make use of the traditional practices and beliefs of having faith on medicines either received from traditional healers or local hospitals. Although the patients are prayed for, it is the Indigenous people's practice to take something home to drink. As a result, they feel satisfied if they are given "Holy" water which has been prayed for by the minister.

This argument is reinforced by Erdmuthe Tshikovhi (Personal Interview 09/11/1997), a professional nurse of Shayandima Clinic, who indicated that it had been a general practice of the aged who came to the clinic complaining of minor ailments, to expect medicines to take to their respective homes.

They even go to the extent of saying “A ni nei raba zwayo naa?” (at least give me Raba, referring to Methyl Salicylate or Solarub ointment). The leaders of the Indigenous Churches take advantage of this belief in medicines. They give their patients “Holy” water which is greatly accepted as medicine to cure their ailments. The belief in potions draws many members from the mainline into the Independent Churches.

The mainline churches could have retained their members, if the cultural practices of the indigenous people had been taken into consideration. The Independent Churches use a holistic method of catering for both body and soul. The belief in witchcraft is a dark cloud which impedes genuine faith amongst the indigenous people., This argument is reinforced by Clive when he indicates that “many Africans have been injured for life by this type of “Uroyi”. Even the Shona who are Christians fear this kind of witchcraft” (Clive 1970:50).

The mainline churches should have laid emphasis on the power of Jesus Christ, that He is above all evil practices and that the demons tremble at His sight. Their members would not have yielded to spurious faith, but would have held onto the true living faith.

It is with great interest to note that those missionaries who brought the Gospel coupled with the building of hospitals and health services, drew more members, than missionaries who brought only the Gospel

The Indigenous Churches capitalised on the cultural practices and the Vhavenda beliefs in the power of amulets which were worn around the necks by women, and also form part of the beads (vhulungu). The amulets (malembe) have been handed down as family heirlooms with the main function of protecting one against the evil spirits or sickness.

This strong belief in the wearing of amulets around the neck is reinforced by Stayt when he indicates that “every woman after death may have a small iron ring, made from an old Venda hoe, dedicated to her for the habitation of spirits” (Stayt:1931:247). According to the Venda culture, the amulets are believed to have power which was transferred from the deceased parent to a living parent, as Ndindamuvhili (protector of the body). This body protector is not something abstract, but it is something visible.

The star badge issued by the Zion City Church of Lekganyane has a great impact on its members for they cannot start their daily routines without these badges.

Van Rooy, in his assertion, indicates:

“So ‘n amulet word genoem ndindamuvhili (liggaamsbeskermer) wat presies die vernaamste funksie daarvan aandui. Toe ek by een geleentheid so ‘n ster van ‘n inwoner van Siloam Sendingstasie afgeneem het, het hy na ‘n dag of twee verslae by my aangekom en

gekla dat hy nou glad nie meer kan slaap vanweë ernstige ongesteldheid” (Van Rooy 1964:27-28).

According to the belief of the church members who wear the star on their garments it is believed that the power of protection has been transferred from the Bishop or church leaders to the Star badge which ultimately has become a source of power and protection. Had the mainline churches made use of the belief of the indigenous people in amulets, they could have converted many people to Christianity. The Roman Catholic church’s approach of amulets is not much divorced from traditional beliefs, because it accepts traditional belief in amulets.

Khauhelo Mokhorro of Mafiteng in Lesotho (Telephone Interview 24/06/97), indicated that the Novena, which is the set of prayers through the Rosary, is of great help in the lives of Christians for spiritual upliftment. This point of argument is further reinforced by Vatican II:1982, which indicated:

“The Rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite. That when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer, the Rosary is a frequent and favoured manner of praying” (Vatican II 1982:865-866).

It is unthinkable that a Muvenda can see any difference between the Rosary and string of beads including “malembe” (miniature hoes) worn by the Vhavenda, for they are also a string of beads around their necks. It is not surprising that the Roman Catholic Church draws large numbers of members in the rural areas because the wearing of amulets is not harshly discouraged. As a result, the new converts can still have them around their necks without embarrassment.

In the mainline churches, some of the Christians live in two worlds when they go to church services. The amulets are removed, and after services, they again hang the beads (malungu) around their necks. In some cases, when the indigenous people visit the hospitals they remove their amulets to avoid harassment by both nurses and doctors, so that they can be admitted without much confrontation. In support of this argument, Daneel indicates:

“Aware of the missionaries disapproval of the ancestor worship and ‘nanga’ practices, patients often removed amulets or other signs of having visited a ‘nanga’ when they went to the mission hospital”
(Daneel 1971:232).

Although the Indigenous people have received the Gospel, it is not yet sufficient to do away with the African practices and beliefs. It is not an easy thing to throw away their amulets and not be replaced with something concrete, for nature does not allow a vacuum. The Independent Church leaders do not apply the tendency of negation to African practices, but they allow time to take its course. After new

converts have experienced the power of Jesus to be above all principalities, amulets are forsaken without resistance.

The eating of pork was not strictly regarded as a taboo amongst the Vhavenda, but it was totally unacceptable, if not prohibited, for members of the royal family to rear pigs. It is still unthinkable for a Muvenda subject to take a pig to the royal family Khosi (chief) as a token of homage (gift: nduvho). This action would be regarded as a disrespect for a traditional leader.

According to Masindi Mamphiswana (Personal Interview 29/08/97) of Phiphidi, Lucas Thangeni Marole, who was a staunch member of the Lutheran church at Beuster Mission (Maungani), differed with the Rev. Theodore Schwellnus, who requested the latter to help him slaughter a pig. Marole could not accede to the request, so he ultimately broke away from the Lutheran church. Subsequently, he formed the Zion City Apostolic Church in South Africa on 28 August 1923, at Phiphidi in Venda. This argument was further endorsed by professor Mathivha (Personal Interview 15/09/97) of Shayandima, when he indicated that Ramakuela was regarded an outcast by his uncle, Randifaleni Mathivha Seremani, because he had been converted to the Lutheran Church at Mapate Ramakuela. He was regarded as having degraded himself for he would eat pork freely as it was not prohibited by the church. From a cultural background, the Vhavenda do not eat pork as their staple meat.

There is a Venda saying, that “Mukololo na u tshinyala hawe nguluvhe ha li” (No matter how degraded a member of the royal family could be, still he should not eat pork). It is not common to find a butchery selling pork in Venda. Many butchers fear to loose business. Converts in the Independent Churches feel more comfortable in the Independent Churches, as the eating of pork is prohibited outright in the Independent Churches.

Although Marole had established his own Independent Church, he made use of the knowledge acquired in the Lutheran Church whilst he was a member. He wrote novels and hymns which are in use by the Vhavenda.

Marole maintained a good working relationship with the Berlin Missionary, Karel Drescher, who by then was stationed at Beuster Mission.

In 1936, Drescher ordered a church bell from Germany for his friend Marole. The bell was engraved: “Mukosi wa Evangeli shangoni la Venda” (Proclamation of the Gospel in Venda). That church bell is still being used by the Zion City Apostolic Church.

The good relationship between Marole and Drescher facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel as their members never quarrelled with one another. The Rev. Drescher encouraged the Vhavenda to be baptised in their traditional attire. As a

result, he baptised Vho-Nyamasindi Nemaembeni, who was in his thirties, and this action made him unpopular amongst his missionary colleagues.

According to the Vhavenda Culture, marriage is regarded as religious, and also a contract entered into between the two families, not necessarily between the two spouses.

Should the polygamist proceed with the dissolution of a contract of marriage for the sake of getting admission in the church, there would be a disruption in the family circles and the destabilisation of the community. During the New Testament era, the new converts were expected to adapt to the custom of Judaism, which St Paul refuted.

The Vhavenda culture was also a creation by God, for God wanted to make use of their culture. It is not Western culture that made them better Christians. Moila, in support of this, says that “This means that for the missionaries Pedi culture was not only inferior to Western culture but also not worthy to be used by God” (Moila 1987:157). The missionaries should have emphasised that God is embraced by all cultural societies, not one specific Western culture, for Western customs are not inherently above the African customs.

The Indigenous Churches have very few singing competitions amongst their denominations. Some of their members are attracted by the mainline churches

whose choirs are using tonic solfa in their music. This is supported by Michael Ndanduleni Nemukovhani (Personal Interview 11/03/98), the choir conductor of Thohoyandou Lutheran Church, who indicated that the church choir consisted of members from non-Lutheran backgrounds, and from 1987-1997 the choir had been participating in singing competitions staged by ELCSAMO (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Music Organisation) and his choir has won 46 Trophies at Circuit, Diocesan and inter Diocesan levels. Further, he indicated that the Lutheran Church at Kgapane was making use of the expertise of Thanwani who was a member of the ZCC (Zion Christian Church) as choir conductor. His participation in the choir, created a good relationship between the indigenous and the mainline churches and ultimately the acceptance of Christianity was facilitated.

It has been well established, without a doubt, that another factor which prompted the creation of the Indigenous Churches amongst the Vhavenda, was the mode of baptism of new converts into Christianity.

The mainline churches used the baptism of sprinkling, whereas the Indigenous Churches resorted to the mode of immersion. According to the Vhavenda culture, purification is conducted by immersing the whole body in the river. The Vhavenda girls are soaked in water during the puberty circumcision.

Van Warmelo, in support of this statement, indicates:

“U kamisa. Soaked, to make young girls sit in the water of a stream, as part of the vhusa (puberty) rites, so called because the girls are believed to become well developed young women” (Van Warmelo 1937:93).

Pastor Ramulondi (Personal Interview 16/01/98) of the Reformed Presbyterian church, indicated that, although there was no provision made in the constitution of the church to baptise the new converts by way of immersion, he gave the converts the option of either baptism by sprinkling or immersion, and the majority chose immersion.

Unlike in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) where provision is made in the constitution: “Let every adult person and the parents of every child to be baptised have their choice of either immersion sprinkling or pouring” (Adams 1996:487), the Indigenous Churches attract more converts by the mode of immersion, as it is in line with the cultural practice of purification.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICAL, COLONIAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS WHICH HINDERED OR FACILITATED ACCEPTANCE OF CHRISTIANITY

5.1. Traditional leaders

In most areas in this part of Africa, if not all, missionaries were invited by the traditional leaders to go to their areas of jurisdiction. Although the spreading of the Gospel was the main purpose of inviting the missionaries, several other factors encouraged traditional leaders to have missionaries among their people. The social need and education were amongst the most important factors which led to the invitation of the missionaries to such areas.

Most of the missionaries did not know anything about the culture and practices of the indigenous people and as a result, there were some misunderstandings and communication breakdowns between the missionaries and the Vhavenda. This delayed the favourable reception of the Gospel, as the missionaries would have liked, and would have been expected of all the Vhavenda traditional leaders. Chief Makhado was the most intolerant chief towards other religions, for he regarded himself as a priest of his tribe. As a result, missionaries and the white settlement at Schoemansdal were forced to move away from him. After the white

settlement had moved away from Chief Makhado's area, the chief complained, because he could not get the commodities he desired: "Ek kry nooit meer 'n stukke klere of medisyne nie" (Möller-Malan 1959:180) The statement made by Makhado reveals clearly that to him the main purpose of having missionaries in his area, was not to receive the Gospel but to gain social benefits from missionaries in the form of medicine for the cure or healing the sick among his people.

In addition, the traditional leader, was regarded as the religious leader and his political authority was also to be respected. He was imbued with both secular and sacred powers. The approach of the missionaries to the traditional leaders should have been to recognise that the two offices of the traditional leaders were inseparable. According to the Vhavenda culture, traditional leaders derived the power of authority from the Supreme Being through a chain of ancestral heritage.

The missionaries wrongfully perceived the traditional leader as a great opponent of the Gospel, for they were inclined to think that he hindered the acceptance of the Gospel, with the result that some of the church hymns were composed in such a way that they belittled the authority of the traditional leaders. From a classical point of view, some of the hymns encouraged much dissension between the missionaries and the traditional leaders. The Lutheran hymn book *Difela tsa kereke* number 247 in verse 5 it says: "Melao e busang lefaseng e bewa ke dikgosi, ya rena ba re dumetseng e tswa go mopolosi" (The rules which rule the

secular world are made by the traditional leader, those that rule the Christians come from the Saviour) The verse as it stands in its literal meaning undermines the political authority of the traditional leader. By Western standards, the meaning of the verse could be accepted without any difficulty.

According to the indigenous people's way of thinking, the context of the hymn instils an atmosphere of hostility between the traditional leader and his subjects who have embraced the Gospel. For the fact that the traditional leader was not honoured and respected as a leader, the development of the Gospel was ultimately disrupted.

The traditional leader was entitled to summon all his subjects in groups to plough his fields or perform any duty *gratis* and this practice was called "Dzunde" which is only practised by traditional leaders and not commoners. The subjects would work for him without constrain. When the missionaries came into the picture, this practice of "Dzunde" was introduced into the mission stations. In support of this argument, Richter indicates "the rest were to be hired by Merensky under the following conditions: cultivating of arable and for the benefit of missionaries, giving one tenth of the harvest to "den grossen Lehrer" (the great teacher) (Richter:1924:234).

According to the Vhavenda culture, commoners, (or any person) could invite people for 'davha' and not for "dzunde" as the latter was only practised by the

traditional leader. “Davha” was a work party held by one who wanted to have his field weeded quickly. As a result he invites his neighbours, who are then regaled with porridge and meat. If a commoner invited his neighbours for “Dzunde”, that would be in competition with the traditional leader, and such action would necessitate expulsion from the traditional leader’s areas of jurisdiction.

The Vhavenda traditional leaders were disturbed by the fact that their subjects who were converted to Christianity turned to undermine their authority. The Vhavenda culture of showing allegiance to the traditional leader was dwindling away and was fast being replaced by the Christian Western culture. The missionaries were gaining more power than the traditional leaders, to such an extent that serious cases were treated at the mission stations. It is without doubt that the new converts were then justified by keeping the rules sent by the missionary; they were no longer justified by faith. The missionaries had ultimately created the domain of their own.

As has been established, traditional leaders as heads of the tribes were accountable to their subjects both politically and religiously, so it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to dissociate themselves from the services of these offices.

When the missionaries brought the Gospel to the indigenous people, the traditional leaders encouraged their subjects to pay heed to the clarion call

sounded by the missionaries to accept Christianity. Traditional leaders attended church services when invited, as well as church functions such as the dedication of the edifice and many other church activities.

It was unthinkable to get the traditional leader converted and baptised into a Christian religion. There was only the exceptional case, where Chief Makahane, who resided at Thulamela, presently enclaved by the Kruger National Park, was baptised by Rev. Wessman of the Berlin Missionary Society. He was baptised at the age of 78 years. Obviously, he was on his throne as the leader of his people. Van der Merwe in support of this statement says: "Wessman se verkenningstogte het bemoedigende resultate opgelewer ... opperhoof Makhane was die evangelie goedgesind en is op 3 Augustus 1890 gedoop" (Van der Merwe 1984:124). According to missiological records kept by historical churches, there is no place where upon another traditional leader was baptised whilst he was in power, in most cases they were baptised in their youth before they are installed as traditional leaders. The main hindrance in accepting the new religion was that, it would be difficult for him to conduct sacrificial rites as a priest of his tribe. The traditional leaders of the indigenous people were regarded as religious leaders of their subjects, and it would not be easy for them to come before the ancestors as priests any more. In support of this argument Mminele has this to say:

"It is not surprising, therefore that although about three - quarters of the Bapedi Christians in Sekhukhuneland are members of the Lutheran church, it took the Berlin Mission more than a century (1861

- 1974) to have the first fully recognised and powerful Mopedi chief baptised in Sekhukhuneland namely Chief Mampuru” (Mminele 1983:251).

During the 135 years (1863-1998) of the preaching of the Gospel in Venda, there was one traditional leader on record baptised whilst on the throne. In terms of numbers, usually more young people and women had embraced the Gospel. According to the Vhavenda culture, men’s position of leadership in their families is not far removed from that of the traditional leader. It was and still is easier to convert a woman than to convert a man. In support of this statement Aitken indicates that “The uplifting of the people of Vendaland will come only when we are able to bring enlightenment to the homes and families through women” (Aitken 1944:1). From a cultural point of view, a man is the head of the family, for the fact that religious rites of his family clan are under his guidance he could not easily accede to the new religion. According to the Vhavenda culture, there was no major decision a minor or a woman could take concerning a family member without the approval and knowledge of the head of the family. Even when a member of the family was ill, he/she could not be taken to the hospital without the consent of the family head. The affiliation of family members to a church was no exception; the head of the family had to give his sanction to the affiliation. It was more difficult, if not inappropriate, to get members of the royal family to be converted and baptised without the knowledge of the traditional leader. Missionaries were ignorant of this cultural system of obtaining permission or

alerting the superior to the possibility of what was taking place. The indigenous people's protocol "u suma" (is to inform a superior of any event that takes place in the family). In 1864, missionary Merensky crossed swords with Sekhukhune by overlooking this cultural protocol. In support of this incident Moila purports that "Chief Sekhukhune was further angered when he discovered that his principal wife Tlakale had been secretly baptised on November 7, 1864" (Moila 1987:132). The misunderstanding brought about by lack of knowledge of the indigenous people's culture by missionaries, led to the great suffering of the new converts. It appeared, the administration of sacraments of both baptism and the Lords supper were not well understood by the new converts. No wonder when confronted by the traditional leader as to what they had partaken in, they had no defence. The result was that Sekhukhune summoned the traditional healers to administer some herbs to Christians in order to induce them to vomit the blood (wine) which they had taken with the missionary. In support of this statement, Monnig says, "He (Sekhukhune) forced the Christians to drink some medicine which was meant to cause them to vomit the "blood" which it was believed they drank in their secret assemblies with Merensky" (Monnig 1978:25). It should have been the duty of the missionary to have fully nurtured his new converts about the meaning of the Lord's supper. It should have been known that the wine does not change to real blood. According to the Vhavenda culture, the drinking of blood is somewhat repugnant and dreadful.

From a traditional point of view, a traditional leader is the life force of his tribe. The subjects depend on him for security and for protection against invasion by other tribes. Metaphorically, the traditional leader is the monarch of the tribe, who must establish peace and stability in his community. Missionaries who could not interfere with the political powers of the traditional leaders became successful in their mission work. Chief Makhado was a friend to the Rev. Creux of the Swiss Missionary society, with the result that he acted as an arbitrator in times of the deadlock negotiations between Chief Makhado and General Joubert of the Transvaal Government. There was a prevalent belief amongst Berlin Missionaries that Christian advances depended on the destruction of chiefly power of traditional leaders (Delius 1983:109). The destruction of the political powers of the traditional leader, led to the hindrance of the spread of the Gospel amongst the indigenous people. According to the Vhavenda traditional standards, they often say “Khosi ndi khosi nga vhathu” (The chief is a chief because of his subjects). The expression means that, if the authority of the traditional leader were destroyed, his subjects would be scattered everywhere. The respect shown to him was not personal or individualistic; he was respected for the office he held.

It was not an easy task to spread the Gospel without a working knowledge of the traditional practice and modes of the indigenous people. In most cases, missionaries got involved in sensitive and delicate matters of the tribe in the full hope that the outcome would be to the advance to the spreading of the Gospel.

Matters relating to the succession to the chieftainship were sensitive, because only members of the royal family were supposed to participate in such disputes and not commoners. Missionaries hindered the spread of the Gospel by getting involved in the local politics of the tribes they were serving. A particular case, which was not amicably settled in 1940 (according to Venda culture), was presented to the Ralushai commission in 1998. The commission had been instituted by the Premier of the Northern Province, to investigate any disparity which took place during the Apartheid era. The case on hand was between Jonathan the son of Piet and Schoeman (also known as Erick) the son of George. The interference of missionaries and those who wanted to achieve their own interest made the Sinthumule succession in chieftainship a recurring decimal.

The Government of the day was, in most cases, supplied with poorly researched and distorted information, in order to side step the rightful heir to the throne, in favour of the missionary's candidate. During the Sinthumule disputes of succession Van Warmelo, the son of a missionary, reports: "Thirdly, because Piet is an adulterer with his father's wife and disqualified according to Venda conceptions of decency, and described by Mr van Zyl, who knew him, as "a drunkard a heathen and disobedient son" (Van Warmelo 1940:1).

The Vhavenda leaders could not take the missionaries into their confidence. They regarded them as agents of the government. This point of view is clearly

revealed by the negative report written by the Rev. Wessman about Chief Makhado. Ultimately, the report caused a crisis between Chief Makhado and the government. (Minute No. 55 4485, R11 901 / 95 dated 16 January 1895 addressed to the Native commissioner of Klein Spelenkon has relevance.) No wonder Chief Makhado had no good word for missionaries. Möller-Malan, in support of this statement, says:

“Aan eerw. Hofmeyr stuur hy `n boodskap: ‘Maak dat jy weg kom. Jy en jou sendingstasie is `n gruwel in my oë. Ek wil jou nooit weer sien nie’ ...” (Möller-Malan 1953:180).

That was the heavy worded message sent to Hofmeyr of Goedgedacht by Chief Makhado. The Vhavenda were amongst the last tribes to embrace both education and the Gospel in South Africa. The reason being that their customs and the bond of unity they had with their traditional leaders was unique. As a result both the white settlers and the missionaries could not easily subjugate them (to be under the administration of the colonial rule). The missionaries too, could not make a great impact in spreading the Gospel. This argument was confirmed by Du Plessis when he indicates:

“ ... of all the native tribes, the Vhavenda were able to resist Boer rule the longest, and this resistance was only finally overcome when Magato ‘the lion of the North’ as he was called and his successor Mpefu were subjugated by General Joubert” (Du Plessis 1965:349).

It is not surprising that the Vhavenda were amongst the last tribes in this part of the country to accept both education and the Gospel, the reason being that their traditional leaders could not easily surrender their indigenous religion to the Gospel.

5.2. Colonialism

The missionaries' co-operation with the government of the day posed a problem for the spreading of the Gospel because the indigenous people concluded that a missionary was closely associated with the government of the day. The Vhavenda thought the Gospel brought by the missionary was a powerful instrument intended to disintegrate their cultural practices and customs.

The Vhavenda were of the opinion that, missionaries used the Gospel to minimise the powers and the authority of the traditional leaders. In support of this statement Majeke says, "Allegiance to the missionary undermines allegiance to the chief ... 'They mean to steal our people,' said the chiefs themselves ..." (Majeke 1953:25). The missionaries were no longer viewed as messengers of God but were then compared to magistrates, whose sole purpose was not that of reconciliation and propagating the Gospel but of administering justice under the cloak of colonialism.

The report submitted to the government by the Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Missionary Society exposed him to the Vhavenda as a government agent. It was

indicated in the report that Chief Makhado was intending to lodge an attack on Chief Tshivhase. This incident was clearly indicated in the minutes No.55 1895, 4805, R4807 dated 13 May 1895. The outcome of the meeting between Landrost Munnik and Chief Makhado established beyond doubt that the report submitted by Beuster could not be substantiated (Munnik 1934:145-147). Traditionally Chief Tshivhase regarded Chief Makhado as his elder brother. The Rev. Beuster had sown a seed of mistrust between the two brothers. The Rev. Beuster, who was supposed to be a peace maker, had created enmity between the two brothers, who had great influence over their followers.

The appointment of Albasini, as Government agent under colonial rule, gave him powers and authority over traditional leaders. The move by the government left the traditional leaders powerless. The missionaries were not in favour of Albasin's appointment to that delicate post, as he appeared to be a war monger. Thus, there was tension amongst the indigenous people. As a result, the situation was not healthy for the spread of the Gospel, as the traditional leaders were not in full control of their subjects. Albasini created irreparable damage to the relations between the Vhavenda and the Shangaans. This point of argument was confirmed by Möller-Malan:

“When the news was broken that Albasini was dead, the news was accepted with mixed feelings. For Magwaba or Shangaans it was a cause for great sorrow, for Makhado and his Vendas it was a cause

for rejoicing - was the same Tshiwawa (Albasini) not like a deep thorn in their flesh” (Möller-Malan 1957:176).

The Government's action of appointing Albasini to the particular post of authority without consulting the traditional leaders and their subjects was a great impediment to the acceptance of the Gospel.

It is a well established fact that the Rev. Creux of the Swiss Missionary society maintained a good relationship with Chief Makhado. The missionary was messenger between Chief Makhado and the Government. It is unbelievable that the Rev. Creux could have advised Chief Makhado to turn his back against the Transvaal government and pay homage to the British of the then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Möller-Malan reinforces this statement when she indicates that “If you fear the white people of this country so much, why do you not throw yourself in the arms of the English- the same as Masheshu has done” (Möller-Malan 1953:174). Had Chief Makhado accepted the advice provided by the Rev. Creux, there could have been a crisis, which could have cost human lives.

It was unthinkable for the indigenous people to take the missionaries seriously, while there was great hostility between the whites and the indigenous people. The atmosphere of reverence could not prevail and create fertile soil for germination of the seed of the Gospel amongst the indigenous people. The presence of whites, and everything which went with it, was associated with the

actions of the missionaries. The activities of the whites, whether adversary or good, could not be detached from the missionaries. In support of this argument Maluleke says:

“As we saw in the case of Lesotho, the local people failed to understand why one group of white people could claim to bring them the Good News while another group was bent on killing them and taking their land” (Maluleke 1995:15).

As the pioneers of the Gospel were all whites there was no difference, for the indigenous people, between the white farmers and the missionaries.

During the times of war between the whites and the indigenous people, the missionaries, who were residing in the mission stations with new converts, could not intervene. Instead of creating an atmosphere of reconciliation between the two warring groups, missionaries took sides and supported the whites against the indigenous people. Maluleke in support of this argument says: “Many converts including chiefs and headmen, left the church due to their disappointment with the role of missionaries in the wars (Maluleke 1995:8). The role played by the missionary in forsaking his converts and traditional leaders under his jurisdiction where he was operating, would create an impediment if not an uphill struggle in spreading the Gospel in the same area. According to the Vhavenda standards, an individual, who did not support the traditional leader in times of crisis, was shunned by the whole community.

A few months before the Mphedu-Boer war broke out, the Rev. Wessman was almost killed for his double dealing activities. When the people of Tshakhuma (Lutheran Mission Station) discovered that he had hidden some Boer soldiers in his hut, they surrounded it. The missionary was saved by the timely arrival and intervention of the local traditional leader, Chief Madzivhandila, who ordered the soldiers to leave the area immediately (Ralushai 1994:23). By concealing the soldiers in his hut, his action proved beyond reasonable doubt that the missionary was not sincere in his clarion call. The missionary's role was marked with dualistic perceptions of serving as missionary of the Gospel and a political agent of the colonial rule.

There are instances where missionaries were caught in the cross fire especially by the traditional leaders who also used them as agents in furthering their domain and authority. Chief Moshoeshoe made use of the missionaries for his own purpose in procuring training for his people and placing them on exposed frontiers to act as agents for the expansion of his authority (Saayman 1990:33). When Chief Moshoeshoe and some of the whites, who were residents in his area, formed a regularised friendship, the Gospel was easily spread, as there was then a mutual understanding between the missionary and the indigenous people.

The missionaries were regarded by the indigenous people as colluding with the colonial rule. The indigenous people wanted to see missionaries come out as their advocates for the land, which was taken away from them. Missionaries, consciously or unconsciously, acted as agents of colonial authority. They were simply written off as stooges of the government (Saayman 1990:35) Although missionaries were working in difficult times, in some instances, they tried their utmost best to ease the tension between the indigenous people and the government.

5.3. Social life

Before the coming of the missionaries to Venda, the indigenous people were living communal lives, where they shared in the social needs. During times of drought and famine the little food they had would be shared as a way of showing neighbourliness and solidarity. There is a Venda proverb that says: “Vhana vha muthu vha thukukana thoho ya nzie (children of the same parent share the head of a locust - to eat.). Even though everyone could be recognised as an individual, from a traditional point of view, a person would be regarded and accepted as part of the whole community. The missionaries were under the impression that the solidarity which prevailed amongst the indigenous people was not conducive to accepting the Gospel, as it was not championed by the era of mission work and everything which came with it.

The mission stations were conspicuous oases in the land of traditional leaders, who had no say or authority over their subjects. This had the result that some, who were in conflict with their traditional leaders, left their areas of abode unceremoniously. The new converts accommodated in the mission stations were called (Madzhagani) and they regarded themselves as some what more civilised if not better than those “vhahedeni” (heathens) who were staying and paying allegiance to the traditional leaders. In support of this view Maluleke says:

“for decades the Valdezia mission station has ‘stood apart’ from the surrounding villages, even from those forming part of the old Klipfontein farm. The Xitasi (station) people were made to think (and did indeed think) of themselves as better than those living in the outlying areas” (Maluleke 1995:16).

The converts in the mission stations were adopting the European, Western way of living which showed an individualistic attitude of minding one’s own business. The unconverted relatives were in some instances regarded as “Vhaanda” (those outside) who had little or nothing in common with the Christians.

The Vhavenda Christians who resided in mission stations were encouraged to distance themselves from the unconverted. They were encouraged to have a strong feeling of dislike towards traditional practices and customs. This action, in itself, caused hostility amongst the converts and the unconverted relatives.

Admittedly, some of the indigenous people were forced to flee to the mission stations in order to get protection, as some of the subjects of the traditional leaders were publicly accused of witchcraft or insubordination to the rules which governed the tribal lands. Some of the new converts went to mission stations in order to get education which they could not find anywhere else.

The converts who were residing in the mission stations were anxious to meet those unconverted staying in the tribal lands for the purpose of enjoying themselves in beer drinking and feasting with the so called “heathens”. The visits could be done under cover at night or secretly during the day. Maluleke in support of that incident says “a Mujagani (the converted) would escape to the vhahedeni (unconverted) area to “enjoy” similar “forbidden fruit” before returning to the “Christian station” (Malamulele 1995:16) Both parents and children who were accommodated in the mission stations were some what confined to their residences, as if they were not allowed to witness traditional dance and music, for such activities were strongly condemned and associated with heathen practices. “It is therefore not surprising that though I was born and bred in a tribal area and I had attended community schools up to standard eight, I had to learn traditional music secretly (Ralushai 1994:20). Missionaries never took the traditional customs and practices of the indigenous people as worthwhile. However, it would appear the missionaries were under the perception that, their new converts would revert to their former traditional practices.

Mission stations were somewhat revolutionary in the way they were operating, as they broke the solidarity and the wholeness of the individuals and their tribal community outside the mission stations. Eiselen purports that “man cannot be truly good and happy unless he uses his individual gifts in the service of the community (Schapera & Eiselen 1967:81). The state of affairs hindered the growth of mission work. Christians residing in mission stations could not execute their responsibilities towards their fellow brothers and sisters, who were staying outside the mission stations, whereas missions, should have been regarded as the epoch of redemption and salvation.

The medical technology brought along by the missionaries and those who accompanied them had helped the indigenous people to weaken their belief in superstitions and witchcraft. A word of appreciation made by the traditional leader Mzilikazi to the missionary “you gave medicine to the sick and you have cured my beloved (favourite) wife. All the doctors in the land have been called. They could do nothing” (Gelfand 1977:115). Missionaries assured traditional leaders and their subjects that they cared for their social bodily needs. This assurance created good relations between the missionaries and the indigenous people more specially traditional leaders who had great influence over their subjects.

It is an undeniable fact that the spread of the Gospel to the indigenous people was a priority, but that was coupled with the provision of health services for the

people. It was not an easy task to make the Vhavenda believe that diseases and misfortunes were natural phenomena, because from their cultural background and upbringing, they were convinced that ailments were caused by the evil one.

As time went on, traditional leaders felt it an honour and prestige to have missionaries who would render medical services for their subjects in their areas. Chief Nethengwe, who was suffering from severe tooth-ache, requested the Rev. Wessman to send him medicine which would make the tooth jump out of his mouth without his feeling the slightest pain. When the Rev. Wessman said he had no knowledge of such medicine, Chief Nethengwe became angry with him (Wessman 1908:58). This is an indication that the indigenous people valued the medical services rendered by the missionaries more than anything else. Health services facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel.

The coming of the Gospel to this part of the world encouraged the indigenous people to better their social status, in business and in farming Industries. Although, from a cultural point of view, the Vhavenda were industrious farmers, who could only provide enough for their households. The working class, such as teachers, combined their income with that received from farming and this enabled them to buy tractors, which led to the improvement of farming results.

In the Indigenous Church, denominations such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) members are recruited to join the church in the full hope that their financial

status would be improved. This assertion is confirmed by Daneel when he indicates: "In so far as they do recruit people from the ranks of the poor there are indications that such recruits, though participation in I.C. group lives, are stimulated to improve their own economic positions" (Daneel 1973:180). It was not surprising, therefore, to find that members of the Z.C.C were, in most cases, people running businesses. The poor had great hope that their financial status would improve as time progressed.

From a social point of view, missionaries also had the idea of bringing in Western culture to the indigenous people, in order to promote civilisation in accordance to European standards. Missionaries were determined to change African societies "from lower to higher" (Du Plessis 1965:406). Missionaries were not quite aware that by uplifting the Africans to a higher standard of living, they were breaking down some of the customs, which were regarded as heathenish customs in relation to the new western life.

5.4. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptant of the Gospel

The completed church building of the Berlin Missionary Society at Mukula which was due for dedication in 1932, could not be dedicated because of a misunderstanding between Chief Tshivase and the missionaries. When the day and the time had been set for the dedication of the building, missionaries of the Berlin Mission, Wesphal, Giesekke, Drescher and Wedepahl and the then

superintendent of the church from Pietersburg had been donned in their clerical regalia, choirs and members of the different congregations were singing joyfully outside the church about to be dedicated. The arrival of Chief Rasimphi Tshivhase “British Empire” “Mphaya” with his entourage attracted so much attention that the woman began to ululate to show respect to him and a warm welcome to the august occasion of the dedicating church building. People were happy to see him in their midst. To the bewilderment of everybody, Chief Tshivhase instructed his headman Joel Mphathele Takalani to announce that the dedication could not be held that day. It would have to be held on the day Chief Tshivhase himself would determine. Johannes Silimela (Personal Interview: 24/10/1998) indicated that the Vhavenda procedure of informing, and inviting the chief for such a great occasion had not been properly observed. Unfortunately, the missionary had no jurisdiction over the area where the new church was built, because it was under tribal authority of Headman Takalani of Mukula who had to pledge his allegiance to Chief Tshivhase and not the missionary. As a result, the church could not be officially dedicated without the approval of the chief of the area. There is a Venda saying that “u luvha a huna mapone” (it costs nothing to pay homage to the superiors).

According to the Venda culture the missionary himself should have gone to Chief Tshivhase to inform him officially of the dedication of the church building. It was understood that many chiefs around Venda were invited to the dedication ceremony. For example, Chief Sinthumule, was also present, without the

knowledge of Chief Tshivase. The misunderstanding which led to the cancellation of the dedication of the church building hindered the acceptance of the Gospel.

The Gospel was brought to Venda by various denominations, which were commissioned through various European countries to spread the Good News among the indigenous people. Some missionaries regarded their homelands and their nationalities as superior to other societies. The Rev. Merensky, as quoted by Mminele, said:

“Our fort is not ready but we hope to complete it in a few weeks and then defend ourselves with the help of God against such robbers. Then they will see that here are living Prussians, and not faint - hearted Boers” (Mminele 1983:144)

The statement made by Merensky clearly indicated that Prussians were above other nations with the result that both the powers or strength of the Boers and the indigenous people were underestimated. Merensky should have taken cognisance of the fact that he, as a missionary, was dealing with people of different nationalities, who had to receive their due respect. His attitude towards other nations was not conducive to the acceptance of the Gospel.

Chief Makhado, for one, had a strong character who could cling to his traditional religion with no compromise. As a result, very few missionaries befriended him, except for the Rev. Creux who was Chief Makhado's close friend and adviser.

German missionaries could not make any impact on Makhado in a way of mutual relations.

The Rev. Wessman took advantage of Makhado's ill-relationship with his subjects residing at Malimuwa. To weaken his defence and security he was ultimately poisoned. This argument is supported by Nemudzivhadi when he explains:

“ ... the point of contact here was Tom Kelly who together with the Boers, had been plotting to overthrow Makhado since evacuation of Schoemansdal ... The poison was poured into the bottle of brandy which was reserved for king Makhado only. After drinking the brandy he fell ill and passed away on 3 September 1895” (Nemudzivhadi 1995:439).

The Rev. Wessman hailed Makhado's death as the dawn of colonial rule when he said “the general held the country without the loss of blood for it was in these districts which had asked Makhado to listen to Joubert's advice (Wessman 1908:193). The Vhavenda were astonished at the untimely death of Chief Makhado. To the Vhavenda he was a man who could uphold his traditional customs. Yet to Rev. Wessman, Chief Makhado was an opponent of the Gospel and the colonial rule.

Chief Makhado ruled the Vhavenda of the Soutpansberg for 31 years. Möller-Malan regarded Makhado as the bravest, the strongest of his time and yet the kindest ruler in Venda (Möller-Malan 1957:187). Makhado was the last chief in the Transvaal if not the whole of South Africa to lose his independence.

The indigenous people could not take the missionaries seriously, because they could not play the role of reconciliation, but instead, took sides with the colonists at the expense of the indigenous people whom they were supposed to convert into the new religion. In support of this statement Pakendorf said “where there was an armed conflict the Berlin Missionaries invariably sided with the Boers and frequently exhorted their followers to abstain from any militant activity against the white rulers (Pakendorf 1997:259).

The missionaries were inclined to show discrimination against children who came from outside the mission stations, who were regarded as heathens and were treated as such. These derogatory remarks were reflected in the Tshakhuma's school log book of January 1913 “This increase is due to the fact that at the beginning of the year, heathen children came to school and the enrolment rose to 150 pupils.” The word “Heathen” was not and could not be accepted by the indigenous people. When those words were used to refer to the unconverted, it did not sound pleasant but was regarded as a terrible insult, which would not have been expected of people who claimed to have brought Good News.

One would have expected them to have heeded the memorable words of the great missionary Paul when he said: “Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you” (Ephesians 4:29).

When the Swiss Missionary Society came to this part of the country it settled at Lwalani, an area under the jurisdiction of Chief Mashau. Although the Swiss Missionaries were working among the Venda chiefs, it was a gentleman's agreement that the area South of the Luvuvhu River be under the denomination of the Swiss Missionary Society, which resulted in Tsonga being used in schools and churches as a medium of instruction. It was also a gentleman's agreement for the Swiss to work in that area. Ralushai says that “according to Bishop Uwe ULM of the Lutheran church, it was only a gentleman's agreement between the Swiss Mission and the Berlin Mission Society that the Swiss Mission should operate South of the river Luvuvhu” (Ralushai 1994:10). The Swiss Missionaries were under the impression that they were to evangelise the Batsonga in the language of communication, which was Tsonga. However, the Vhavenda who lived in the area were not happy that Tsonga was to be used in all transactions. The Vhavenda chiefs resented the imposition of the Tsonga language in their areas. They regarded the Tsonga language as a language of refugees (vhafhalali) (Ralushai 1994:10).

Samuel E Moeti (Telephone Interview 18/7/1998), who is a sitting member of the South African Parliament (African National Council), indicated that, in 1955, when he was teaching at Barota school he was severely reprimanded by the lady missionary, Rev. Martin, for praying in Tshivenda in an area where the medium of communication was Tsonga. Moeti further mentioned that, when the Swiss Mission changed its name to the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, he left the church because according to him the church was serving a specific ethnic group. In support of that argument Maluleke purports that “from the earliest period S.M.S.A missionaries in South Africa referred their “mission” first as Kereke ya Bathonga (Church of the Bathonga) later as ntsombano wa tikereke ta buthonga” (Maluleke 1995).

In 1960, when it was officially declared that the Swiss Mission had changed its name to Tsonga Presbyterian, most of the Vhavenda members who were converted under the banner of the Swiss Mission began to distance themselves from the Tsonga Presbyterian Church. The change of the name Swiss Mission to the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, and the use of the Tsonga language in Venda speaking areas unfortunately delineated fertile ground for ethnic cleansing which took place in 1969. Both the Vhavenda and the VhaTsonga were unwilling and ruthlessly moved by the South African Government in compliance with the legislation of the apartheid regime.

At Mashamba, for instance, the Vhavenda speaking members of the then Swiss Mission Church had joined the Evangelical Lutheran, and the Reformed Presbyterian Churches, in which services were conducted in Tshivenda. The Swiss Mission church building had been left unoccupied at Mashamba. The Swiss Mission building at Masia is presently used by the Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church). The removal of the Tsonga speaking members in Venda areas brought about the collapse of both the Tsonga Presbyterian Church and Tsonga as a language of communication, to such an extent that even the Tsonga hymnals are no longer in use.

Though the Rev. Hofmeyr could not make a great impact on either Chief Makhado or his son Mphephu, regarding the spread of Gospel, he acted as a conciliatory figure during the Mphephu war. Headmen Lishivha, Tshiangamela, Kharivhe and Madzhie were given shelter by the Dutch Reformed missionaries at Kranspoort. The Rev. Hofmeyr even went further to negotiate with the Boer Commandant General for the release of these headmen, as they were regarded as prisoners of war (Nemudzivhadi 1997:146). The Rev. Hofmeyr played a significant role in the mediation, even though the war between Mphephu and the Boers had led to a bitter acrimony. The missionary acted as a mediator and peace bringer to the area that would otherwise have turned into a war area.

That good action of mediation demonstrated by the Rev. Hofmeyr made the headmen and the subjects realise that there was one missionary who promoted

peace, even during difficult times, and could support the needy in times of difficulties for the good of mankind.

Even though the missionaries eradicated some of the customs and practices of the indigenous people, some missionaries were considerate enough to return some customs, as they were convinced that such customs would not inhibit the people from accepting the Gospel. The custom of paying “lobola” to the girls’ parents, for instance, was not discouraged. It came to be understood that the paying of a dowry “lobola” was a way of strengthening the bond of family relations between the two families. In most instances, missionaries did not interfere in such practices. In support of that argument Merensky indicated that “all the remaining tribal customs which made life pleasant for the people in their homes and courtyards should not be discouraged for it had nothing specifically bad” (Merensky 1899: 133). A Muvenda woman would even boast to her troublesome husband (indicating to him) that “Ndo malwa nga lunanga lwa Ndou kani?” (Have I then been married with an ivory?). This expression indicated that, if the husband became impossible to live with, her parents could reimburse the money which was paid as dowry “lobola”, in itself an indication that marriage disputes could be reversed according to the traditional settlements. The missionaries took every precaution so as not to disturb the traditional customs of payment of dowry to the girls’ parents., Their role was to solemnise the marriage according to the Christian rites and not interfere in the local practices, in the hope

that the indigenous people would learn the Christian way of life as time progressed.

The Bapedi Lutheran Church was established at Fondwe in 1919 by Joseph Mutshaeni, who had severed ties with the Berlin Missionary Society even though he had served for some time as an Evangelist of the Lutheran Church. Joseph Mutshaeni was ordained as Pastor of the Bapedi Lutheran Church. He established congregations in areas like Vuvha, Ha-Madala, Sinthumule, Tshitandani and Ha-Makhuvha. Because it was a new movement pioneered by a Muvenda, the people joined in numbers. As time went on, the Vhavenda converts did not like the name “Bapedi” Lutheran Church with the results that most of its members joined other denominations, which did not associate themselves with a specific ethnic group. Bishop of the Bapedi Lutheran Church, the Rev. Johannes Mutshaeni (Personal Interview), indicated that the name “Bapedi” was causing a grave concern among the church members who were not Bapedi, and the whole church was contemplating doing away with the name Bapedi Lutheran Church as it was realised that the name was undoubtedly hindering the acceptance of the Gospel because it sounded discriminatory against other tribes, even though it had never been so said.

The Bapedi Lutheran Church progressed very well in the Sekhukhune area, because the Bapedi nationals regarded it as their own church. Rev. Winter, who was instrumental in the formation of the Bapedi Lutheran Church, after he had

severed ties with the Berlin Missionary Society, was ultimately expelled from the church because he was not a Mopedi. In support of this statement, Verryn explains:

“The African subsequently voted him out of office as a leader because he was, in their opinion not a Mopedi. The Bapedi Lutheran Church was associated with the Pedis. The association of the church with the Pedis hindered the other nationals from accepting the Gospel however much they wanted to be converted to the new religion but the abstraction was the question of ethnicity” (Verryn 1982:58).

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION

6.1. Definition of Mission

In this chapter, two instruments are used to evaluate the success of mission in its operation in the area of Venda and South Africa as a whole. The two instruments are used because they best analyse the positive and negative motives of the missionaries:

- a. The *definition of Mission*, as proposed by JJ Kritzinger.
- b. The *analysis of missionary motives*, as presented by HL Pretorius.

Du Preez defines the multi-dimensional module. He treats ten dimensions (cf. Kritzinger 1988:34), whereas Kritzinger resorted to only three dimensions for practical reasons. Although it is more general to speak of the three dimensional project, I find it more appropriate to include *Leitourgia* as a fourth dimension, since it is the pivot of missions, if not of the Christian Gospel as a whole.

Kritzinger gives a splendid illustration of a pair of scissors, where each blade of the scissors represents the “work” (*Kerygma*) and the “deed” (*Diakonia*) and fastened by a pin, “fellowship” (*Koinonia*) (Kritzinger 1985:35). In no way should

the liturgical (*Leitourgia*) dimension be left out, because it acts like an ignition to all three the dimensions, putting them in the correct perspective. Through liturgy, the church gives glory to God by way of praising Him in word and deed.

If we regarded the four above mentioned dimensions as of equal value, we would not be in any danger of sacrificing the one at the expense of the other, and as a result no conflict would exist amongst the dimensions treated in this discussion.

6.2. Proclamation (Kerygma)

An evaluation will be made to see how the missionaries dealt with the concept of proclamation (*Kerygma*) of the Word, how successful their proclamation was, which led to the invitation to the Vhavenda to accept the Gospel. It will also be assessed whether there were some cultural practices that hindered the proclamation of the Christian message.

6.2.1. God

It is well-known that the missionaries, who first proclaimed the Gospel in Venda, had a serious problem with the name “Nwali”, which was used by the Vhavenda to indicate the Supreme Being. The use of the name “Nwali” was totally rejected

by the early missionaries in Venda, because, to them, Nwali was a pagan god or an idol.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the early missionaries used the name “Mudzimu” to indicate the Supreme Being. One contributing factor was the translation of “Modimo” from Sesotho to “Mudzimu” in Venda by the Rev. P.E. Schwellnus. The Vhavenda regarded “Mudzimu” as a family god and not as the Supreme Being.

The Rev. Hofmeyr of the Dutch Reformed Church never made an attempt to translate “Modimo” to “Mudzimu”, as he made use of only the Sesotho Bible. His congregation was composed of Basotho and Venda speaking people, although the Vhavenda were in the majority.

The Rev. DW Giesekke differed from his uncle, Rev. P.E. Schwellnus, the Venda Bible translator, when he says that Mudzimu means an ancestor (family god). According to Giesekke, “Nwali” could be considered as the most appropriate name for God (1967:84). The Rev. Du Plessis of the Reformed Church, who had made a study of the Vhavenda tradition and practices, reinforces the argument advanced by Giesekke where he categorically indicates: “Nwali word beskou as die Skepper en hoogste wese” (Du Plessis 1940:99). When the Independent Churches started, most of their ministers referred to God as “Nwali”.

The Shona of Zimbabwe are related linguistically to the Vhavenda. The missionaries in Zimbabwe use Mwari\Nwali to indicate God. The Shona and the Vhavenda, who reside in Zimbabwe, are diametrically opposed to the use of the name “Mudzimu” for God. In support of this argument, Prof Fortune reveals that there are certain places in Zimbabwe where denominations use the name “Mwari” instead of “Mudzimu”. In Manyikaland, where the Anglicans have worked from 1898, and the Methodists have worked from 1905, and the Roman Catholics have worked from 1910, all of them use Mwari for God (Fortune 1973:7).

One may ask why there was that confusion. It was simply because of the emphasis in denominationalism: each denomination worked independently, and therefore they were not in a position to reach consensus on biblical terminology. It is important to note that the Venda Bible has been in use for quite sometime (published in 1938), and hardly any changes have been made to it; not even to the first edition of the Venda Bible, which was published in 1998,³ which is very similar to the 1938 publication. The term “Mudzimu” for God has been accepted as authentic. As a result, the Vhavenda Christians regard “Mudzimu” as God, the Supreme Being, while the unconverted regard “Mudzimu” as one of the family ancestors, thus bringing about a confusion within the same tribe.

³ To be distinguished from the first translation of the Venda Bible which appeared for the first time in 1938.

Had the first missionaries who brought the Gospel to this part of the world adopted the approach of their counterparts in Zimbabwe the name “Nwali” for the Supreme Being would have facilitated the spread of the Christian Gospel message faster than it actually did. In support of this statement, Beach says, “The action undertaken by the missionaries in Zimbabwe for not discarding the use of the name “Mwari” led to the spread of the Gospel faster in areas where it had been in frequent use” (Beach 1980:248).

6.2.2. The person of Jesus

The Missionaries presented Jesus to the Vhavenda as the Son of God. the approach was not understood well by the indigenous people. Further, Jesus was portrayed as the saviour of the whole world, who came into the world to redeem people from their sins. Unfortunately, redemption from sins was not that important to the Vhavenda.

The Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Mission Society presented Jesus as the Saviour and King, who was above the Vhavenda King Thoho-ya-ndou (Grundler 1877:15). The Vhavenda gave him a hearing, realising that if Jesus commanded more power than that of an earthly king, he would have to be extra-ordinary. Therefore, He was worth their recognising his authority.

When Rev. Nico Smith proclaimed that Jesus was the greatest healer and at the same time, King of Kings, he drew a lot of attention from his listeners. By portraying Jesus as the King of Kings, and the human lineage of the Son of David, these statement earned him fruits in his Gospel message. (De Saintonge 1989:81). What was of great significance, was the power of Jesus to heal the sick and bring comfort to the destitute.

The missionaries dealt with Jesus Christ from a human-divine perspective, while the Vhavenda portrayed him through his relationship with them as their Prime-ancestor. The relationship emanates from the death of Jesus as an initiation to ancestry.

From a cultural point of view, Jesus is regarded by the Vhavenda as a mediator, because he had regular access to God through prayer. As a result, God is inclined to answer His requests for the sake of mankind. Jesus made it categorically clear that “He who has sent me is with me” (John 8:29). The resurrection could have brought about the accomplishment of his qualities like that of an African ancestor. Christ’s ancestral activity is mediative (Nyamiti 1984:33). From a cultural point of view, the Vhavenda would have associated themselves with such a great and powerful ancestor who had broken the enmity between God and man. Christ is mainly ancestor or elder Brother. The Bapedi perceive Christ as the Prime-ancestor (Moila 1987:85). The Vhavenda shares

borders with the Pedi, and for this reason it is no wonder that their acceptance of Jesus as Prime-ancestor is similar.

Dissenting arguments could be raised, indicating that Jesus, as a brother-ancestor, implicates the losing of His divinity.

The missionaries could have made the Vhavenda realise that Jesus is their Prime-ancestor, who fights to liberate them from sin, and ultimately, setting them free from the yoke of oppression from the powers that be.

The Missionaries could have realised that Jesus Christ is never in competition with the ancestors. The ancestors are so cultured and mannered that they give way to his authority.

The question should be raised whether it would have been better if the Christian message were not introduced as totally different, but had rather made more use of traditional religion to express its message.

6.2.3. Ancestral veneration

As it has been indicated in this thesis, the original aim of the missionaries was to proclaim the Gospel and not to rob the Vhavenda of their cultural beliefs and practices; it was to purify them without causing discord. As time went on, the

original policy was not adhered to as the missionaries favoured drastic changes for the Vhavenda regarding their ancestral veneration.

The Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Missionary Society adopted the method of symbolic interactionism, which enabled him to reach the Vhavenda during their veneration process. Instead of discouraging them, he joined the “Tshikona” dance on his horse back. When the “Tshikona” dance had stopped, he proclaimed the Gospel. Both the traditional leader and his subjects listened very attentively. The Rev. Beuster’s action clearly indicates that the culture of the society could be used as a vessel through which the Gospel could be poured and be proclaimed.

During the drought season, the Vhavenda would always participate in sacrificial rituals for rain to their ancestors, called “Bando la Mvula”. Chief Sinthumule declared that the 25th September of each year should be a prayer day for rain in his area. Both the mainline and Independent Churches participated in this cultural practice, which has been inculturated into a Christian practice. The Vhavenda rituals of “Bando la Mvula” has now been integrated into Christian practices.

From a religious point of view, the Vhavenda do not regard the veneration of the ancestors as an end in itself, but only as a channel and witness of human continuity after death. The Vhavenda believe, sincerely, in the commandment

“Honour thy Father and thy Mother”. The honour is not only practised during the life span of the parents while alive, but must be continued forever, as it should be, in accordance to the biblical context.

The Vhavenda find it strange, if not unthinkable, that they cannot address God, as the God of Makhado or Tshivhase, their former great traditional leaders, who established great kingdoms during their reign.

In biblical terms we speak of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This in itself is not a worship of those ancestors but purely a veneration of the highest order of those great-men of Israel.

The Independent Churches, unlike mainline churches, found it easier to find followers in Venda, as they accepted many traditional Venda practices. It is not every practice within the Vhavenda culture which could be inculturated into the Christian religion, for it is impossible to convert the devil into Christianity.

6.2.4. Sin

It was certainly not an easy matter for the missionaries of all denominations to explain how sin came to be, except for Adam’s fall in Genesis 3:1. The Venda Bible does not make it explicit for the Muvenda to admit guilt as sin, from a cultural point of view. The point at issue discouraged the missionaries, who had

taught the Vhavenda converts about the knowledge of sin and its consequences, yet the Vhavenda consciences remained clean and innocent.

According to Vhavenda culture, it was unthinkable for a person to wrong the Supreme Being. It was believed that one could only anger the family ancestors or members of the society. It was not surprising that it became difficult for the Rev. Hofmeyr to persuade Chief Makhado to accept Christianity, the latter categorically indicated that he was the priest of Nwali the Supreme Being. Van Rooy in support of this argument says, “Many missionaries are driven to the edge of despair when Christians still state with a clear conscience ‘A thina zwivhi’ I have no sins” (Van Rooy 1971:187). To the Muvenda it was unheard of that a missionary could pray for the forgiveness of sins, which were not committed by the Vhavenda themselves.

It is unfortunate that in the 1st edition of the Venda Bible published in 1998, still, the true meaning of sin was not explicitly translated to mean sin in the proper sense of the word, but wrong doing: “U khakha” in Luke 15:21 “I have sinned against God and against you” (Ndo khakhela wa Tadulu na Vhone). The true meaning of the term “sin” as it is, is obscure here and rather misleading. Therefore, it is not simple for the Muvenda to understand the true meaning of sin and its implications. The Bible translators should have reassessed the term in its biblical context.

In order to make the Vhavenda understand the origin of the true meaning of sin and its implications, the missionaries could have used the Venda expression which says, “Muri u vhavhaho u bva tsindeni” (The bitter tree grows out of the trunk). The trunk is bitter, so the rest of the tree (fruits) must also be sour. As sin came by one person Adam, the first ancestor, so the rest of the human race has inherited the sinful nature of Adam.

The Missionaries could have made it clear to the Vhavenda that, as they were made of the same matter as Adam, they were also prone to rebel against God. By so doing, they would be committing sin for which they would need the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

6.2.5. Comprehensive Gospel

The approach to the missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel could have included all that a person should know in order to have a strong and unmistakable faith in God, in order to be exemplary to the non believers. Unfortunately, there were many biblical ideas that were unclear.

Almost all the missionaries created mission stations, in which all the converts were accommodated in order to separate them from belligerent relatives, who had not yet accepted the Christian message. This separation obviously created the impression that Christians were regarded better people than non-Christians.

This view was not good, because it was thought of, as ostracism within the same area.

The Rev. van Deventer of the Tshilidzini Mission Station made a commendable change by moving out from the mission residence, and living among the residences of Tshisahulu, where he attended tribal and civic meetings, and participated in the activities of the village. This action earned him a good reputation and his Dutch Reformed Church, which was commonly associated with apartheid was accepted as a result, and presently has a good following.

The Rev. van Rooy of the Reformed Church decided that his children should be given Tshivenda names and they are Mulalo, Mashudu, Tshilidzi and Matodzi. This action adopted by Rev. van Rooy, giving his children Tshivenda names, created a harmonious relationship with the indigenous people, resulting in him being regarded as neither isolated nor a foreigner.

Carol, the wife of Rev. Attie van Niekerk, who was stationed at Nthume Mission Station, adopted the approach of addressing the local women by prefixing "Vho" Vho-Denge, Vho - Tshinakaho (Van Niekerk 1994:60). This approach by the Van Niekerk family towards the local people earned them fruitful results, being easily accepted by the indigenous people. During the apartheid era, white people used to address black people by using the first names e.g. Denga, Tshinakaho, Maria without the prefix, "Vho", which indicates less respect for whoever is spoken to.

The divisions brought about by the Christian religion, where people were placed according to categories, like mission stations as residence for the missionaries and their converts (zwtasini), and the tribal land for the traditional leaders and the so-called heathens. The separation was regarded by the Vhavenda as an act of alienation from the Kingdom of God.

At present, mission stations are not reserved only for the converted, and graveyards are no longer sub-divided between the converted and the non-converted. The Vhavenda are more community orientated than Westerners realise. The Vhavenda believe that God's people stay together as a community, to share whatever they have. One could call this an admirable oneness of a people, which, in a way, could be attributed to Christian influence, where the converted were taught about the brotherhood of mankind, regardless of race nation or location.

As a matter of fact, the missionaries of all denominations that came to evangelise Venda ought to be thankful to God for the changes that have come to this part of Africa, despite attempts made by some of them to separate the converted from the unconverted. They hoped that they were encouraging separation of the good from the bad. The missionaries, who must have thought their separating people would facilitate the spread of the Gospel, were unaware that it was hindering the acceptance of Christian message.

6.2.6. Polygamy

One of the rather vexing questions the missionaries had to face in many African countries, was that of polygamy and Venda was no exception regarding this question.

The Rev. Berthoud of the Swiss Missionary Society, accepted monogamy as the only acceptable form of marriage in Christian circles, and any relationship outside monogamy was regarded as no marriage at all. This argument in itself concluded that the polygamist had no chance of joining the church.

In the Dutch Reformed Church and the Berlin Missionary Society the polygamists could be accepted as members of the church, but could not partake in the Holy Communion, nor be elected to a church office.

In 1879, Makwarela, the son of chief Mphaphuli, was refused baptism by the Rev. Koen of the Berlin Missionary Society, because he had several wives as was the custom. It is interesting to note that Makwarela persuaded his father to invite the missionaries, yet he himself was debarred from participating in church activities.

The Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) received the post-conversion polygamist with all his wives. He was accepted as a full member with no limitations, provided he did not marry another wife.

Rev. DW Giesekke of the Berlin Missionary Society, in the early seventies, greatly surprised the church elders of Tshisaulu Congregation when he served Ephrahim Ramawa with the Holy Communion while he was a polygamist. The Rev. Giesekke had no problem with Venda culture, as he was born and bred in Venda.

In the Independent Churches polygamy is not an issue. The polygamists feel more comfortable and participate freely as full members of the church without restrictions.

The Rev. Mahamba of the Evangelical Lutheran Church quoted the resolution adopted in 1969 by the mainline churches as well as Pentecostal churches, which indicates that polygamy should not be considered illegal, but rather should be allowed to die a natural death, as it is waning out (Mahamba 1990:6).

The Missionaries in tackling the problem of polygamy could have sought a minimal change instead of advocating cultural changes among the Vhavenda. Emphasis could have been placed on cultural conversion to Jesus Christ as their Lord. The Missionaries focused too much attention on polygamy, which resulted

in becoming a central issue of changing a person's cultural faith to the Christian religion.

The church could have been more realistic in terms of those people who were living in a polygamous marriage before they were converted. They would not have regarded themselves as outcasts the way it became. The church could further have made more effort to counsel and not to shunning their company, as if they were already doomed.

Presently, most of the mainline churches in Venda have reversed their policies, and are now admitting the polygamist in church circles, to take part actively without any restrictions. Perhaps the reason could be that spiritual leaders are now indigenous, and some of the ministers were born and bred in polygamous families.

6.2.7. Colleagues

The missionaries concluded that the spread of the Gospel under the indigenous people was a joint venture, therefore the laity were encouraged to assist them in far-away places.

The Rev. Hofmeyr, made use of the knowledge of Michael Buys, who was immensely knowledgeable about the culture of the Vhavenda, especially since he was related to the Ramabulana dynasty by marriage.

The Rev. Beuster sent Johannes Mutshaeni to Umqungundlovu in Pietermaritzburg, where he was trained and ordained as an Evangelist. Mutshaeni established preaching points as far afield as Madala. He helped the Rev. Beuster to translate some of the Gospels from Sesotho to Venda.

The Rev. Stephanus Makhado Masiagwala, who was the first Muvenda Minister of the Berlin Mission, was ordained in 1907. He made a tremendous contribution to the spreading of the Gospel. The Vhavenda culture was no hindrance to him, as he knew all the cultural practises of the indigenous people.

The Evangelist, Nathaniel Tshishonga Lalumbe, persuaded chief Makahane to receive the Gospel. He accepted Jesus as Lord, and was ultimately baptised by the Rev. Wessman.

The Evangelists made a giant step in the field of missionary work and education. The missionary baptised and confirmed those who knew their catechism lessons very well, having been taught by the Evangelists.

Very few missionary societies made provision for the remuneration of their evangelists, with the result that they could not afford to support their families satisfactorily. Provision could have been made by the relevant missionary societies to pay sufficient stipends to their evangelists, who would in turn have done their work of evangelising their areas more enthusiastically than they probably did.

6.2.8. *The missionaries' wives*

While the missionaries were out proclaiming the Gospel in the villages, their wives were also involved in the development and the upliftment of the indigenous women, in the areas where their husbands were operating.

It is known that Mrs Daneel of Kranspoort Mission encouraged the women who resided at the mission station to clean their yards and plant flowers. When inspection was conducted, it was found that Mrs Daneel's yard was not clean enough, and she was ultimately fined: "Mev Daneel was self een keer beboet omdat haar erf nie skoon genoeg was nie" (Maree 1962:190) Mrs Giesekke of Mavhola (Georgenholtz) conducted knitting, as well as baking lessons, for the women in her area. That in itself was an encouragement to the women. Mrs Giesekke had no problem with the Vhavenda culture as she was born during 1894 in the area. Mrs Giesekke worked in close collaboration with the Women's World Day of Prayer. In 1951 she translated the German programs into various

languages, which were distributed to the Lutheran churches in South Africa. Although the Lutheran church still acts as spearhead, all churches, in respect of denomination, participate in the World Women Day of Prayer - its theme for the year 2000 is Tali Tha Kumi. A portion of the proceeds received on the World Women Prayer Day is usually sent to the Bible Society of South Africa, to assist in the distribution of Bibles.

Mrs R.C van Rooy of Iyani Mission Station conducted literacy classes which led to the development of the literacy book *Navhani*, which is still in circulation at present. The efforts by Mrs van Rooy has helped the people to develop their reading skills.

The effort displayed by the missionaries' wives should not go unnoticed, they have encouraged the Vhavenda women to improve their standards of living.

Dr Ellen Faul, who accompanied her husband, the Rev. Nico Smith of the Dutch Reformed Church, started with medical services at Tshisahulu in 1957. Afterwards, a hospital called Tshilidzini was established. Dr Faul took it upon herself to improve the medical services to the people. The hospital has developed into a training institution for nurses, and it has given birth to the Nursing College of Venda. Presently, the hospital has been given the status of a Regional Referral Hospital for the Northern Region.

6.3. Diakonia

The second dimension of mission, is that of *Diakonia*, the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by faithful service, converting the message of God's love for the world into acts of love. The question to be answered is: To what extent have the missionaries among the Vhavenda succeeded in the *diakonial* dimension of their missionary work in Venda?

It appears that a lack of knowledge of the Venda culture seems to have been detrimental to the church's *Diakonia* in Venda, on individual, congregational and on community levels. Each missionary had a different approach and encountered the cultural problems differently, also in terms of the *Diakonia*.

6.3.1. Individual healing

The services rendered by almost all the mainline churches were backed by medical services. In some cases, the pioneers of the Gospel were missionary doctors and that facilitated the spread of the Gospel to a large extent.

Healing played a significant role among the Vhavenda, if not among the indigenous people as a whole.

It was and still is an accepted fact, that mainline churches suffered a severe setback, by losing some of their members who moved to the Independent Churches in search of healing. It is not surprising that even during the ministry of Jesus there were some followers who wanted to be healed and experience miracles performed.

From the Vhavenda cultural point of view, the traditional healers get their healing power by way of mediating with the ancestors. It is therefore not surprising that ministers of the Independent Churches lay emphasis on the dispelling of evil spirits. It is always said “Nga dzina la Yesu ri pandela mimuya mivhi” (In the name of Jesus we chase away the evil spirits). The healing administered by the Independent Churches induces the patients to have faith in the power of Jesus.

It is time, that the mainline churches could also consider a ministry of healing. The laying of hands on the sick is not alien, but biblical. This power of healing was given to the apostles, and eventually passed on to the missionaries and the ministers of religion: “Is there any among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church and let them pray over him” (James 5:13-14). It has been established that the Vhavenda regarded physical healing as paramount to salvation. It should be the duty of the ministers of religion to make Christians understand, not to separate the physical from the spiritual, they should realise that Jesus Christ is the Lord over the body and spirit.

The church, irrespective of denomination, could also include the healing ministry in its church service programme. In this way there would be less dissenters from the mainline churches to the Independent Churches searching for healing. The ideals of *Diakonia*, which are the services of the church, would be well fulfilled and there would be stability in churches.

6.3.2. Church community

The church did not only focus attention on the preaching of the Christian message as a top priority. Since the Gospel of Jesus Christ is also concerned with uplifting the needs of the people everywhere, of both the poverty stricken and the destitute. The poverty stricken people looked up to the church in the hope of receiving assistance to supplement their insufficient daily bread.

In the early nineteen seventies the Dutch Reformed Church took it upon herself to alleviate the situation of the poverty stricken areas by creating job opportunities, which helped the people to gain independence. Maluleke indicates that Kritzinger points out that the church reached the poor by establishing several factories and workshops in order to create work opportunities for the unrooted people (Maluleke 1997:164). The step undertaken reflected the good service rendered by the church.

The Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) had also embarked on the scheme of looking after the poor (Armsorg). Financial aid and clothes were often received

from Holland to cater for the needs. Unfortunately, the task of distribution of the hand-outs was entrusted to the Evangelists who distributed Mealie-Meal and clothes to their so-called converts. The missionaries were under the impression that they had many converts, but when they visited the so-called new converts they hid themselves because they did not want to come into contact with the missionaries (Rev. Netshitangani, Personal Interview: 22/09/1999). The same manner of distributing second-hand clothes was adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran churches as they often received material aids from Germany.

The missionaries did not consider the fact that hand-outs, which were received, were short-lived. The church could have designed development programmes whereby the people would have helped themselves to become self-sufficient instead of depending on hand-outs.

The holistic development and income generation programme facilitated by the Dutch Reformed Church called CAN (Church Act in Need) has piloted the literacy training (LITSA), and projects such as food gardens.

The church could train people and help them understand their needs and rights. In the course of time people within the church could carry out liberating activities, which would eventually keep their local communities free from exploitation. Development is the creation of spiritual and material conditions which enable

humanity to be best (Nyerere 1987:59). Development means increased pride in human dignity.

It would be incomplete if mention were not made of the fact that there are fruit trees of different varieties in almost every garden situated in mission stations. The efforts made by the missionaries cannot be left unnoticed, where they encouraged the Vhavenda to plant fruit trees. Presently some of the fruits are being sold at the local markets along the road sides.

6.3.3. *The broader community*

6.3.3.1. *Schools*

The praiseworthy work done by the missionaries in the field of education in Venda and the Zoutpansberg as a whole will always be remembered. In some areas the missionaries and traditional leaders entered joint ventures to establish schools wherever there was a need. Nowadays, every headman has a high school in his area.

Although missionaries were faced with the problem of encouraging the Vhavenda girls to go to schools, the parents had a fear of losing dowry (lobola). There was a Venda expression that “Nwana wa musidzana a dzhena tshikolo u a penga” (The school makes the girl run mad). Despite all the problems, the Vhavenda

girls were ultimately educated, and few of them were given good appointments in the public sphere. For example, one is currently an Inspector in the Department of Education, and another holds the position of Deputy Minister in the national parliament of South Africa.

6.3.3.2. *Hospitals*

The establishment of hospitals greatly improved the health conditions in Venda, and saved many lives.

According to the Vhavenda culture, twins of human beings were not welcome. The missionaries came across many such cases and saved the lives of such twins. Dorah and Fritz Tshatsinde were the first such twins to be rescued in 1908. According to the Vhavenda culture, the birth of twins was ominous. Nowadays it is a blessing and joy to have a set of twins.

The Vhavenda dread the amputation of a limb. They would rather die with a gangrenous leg than to have it amputated. The reason was that they were afraid of going to the land of the living dead maimed. Through counselling and persuasion by the missionaries and doctors, the situation is currently different. Today there are countable amputees living happily and normally in Venda, through the efforts of the doctors by teaching primary health care to the indigenous people.

Some of the missionary doctors discredited traditional healers and discouraged their converts from consulting them when needs arose. Medical doctors could have followed the approach adopted by Dr Ellen Faul by promoting the primary health care, in addition to taking a middle course line by not debarring the patients from visiting traditional healers.

6.3.3.3. Community projects

The Dutch Reformed Church, through its development arm CAN (Church Aid in Need), started with the construction of community-based projects, such as pre-schools and day-care facilities. The stand adopted by the church elevated the position of the disadvantaged to a higher educational standard. This was brought about by making optimal use of the local resources available within the communities. The assistance given by the church offered opportunities to people who were mostly unemployed.

The Roman Catholic Church, with its establishment called St Joseph Community Centre at Laatsgevonden, which the Vhavenda commonly called “Muromani” (Catholic Centre), helped the indigenous people with health services and sewing facilities for women. After the death of Sister Matthews, who was in charge of the centre, everything came to a standstill. The Catholic Mission could have

regarded the development of the people as an awakening process for without that awakening the people would not have anything at all.

In order to lighten the work, the Vhavenda resorted to their cultural method “Davha” (Joint working Party), that resulted in the increase of working together for the development of Venda. The missionaries could have adopted the cultural method, which would have encouraged the people to participate more seriously in the effort of making themselves self-sufficient. “Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu”(one finger cannot take boiled mealies from the pot). By working together a great achievement was made.

6.3.4. The relationship with the traditional leaders

The establishment of the good working relationships with the traditional leaders taught the missionaries many lessons, often in difficult conditions.

Not all the missionaries took the cultural role of the traditional leaders into consideration. Traditional leaders had a dual role to play, that of priests and political leaders of their tribe. It was not surprising that chief Mampuru of Ga-Sekhukhuni was only baptised in 1974, after a century long struggle by the Berlin Mission Society. That in itself revealed that the culture of the indigenous people caused a delay into the spread of the Gospel.

The missionaries, who did not interfere with the political set up of the traditional leaders, were regarded as friends and advisers of the traditional leaders. The Rev. Creux of the Swiss Missionary Society was a great friend of Chief Makhado, whereas both missionaries Hofmeyr and Schwellnus could not associate with him easily, with the result that chief Makhado's sons attended school at Elim instead Kranspoort or Tshakhuma. The Rev. Creux was the only missionary who was accepted by Chief Makhado to act as an arbitrator between him and General Joubert at the times of negotiations.

During the misunderstanding between the traditional leaders and Government, the missionaries were caught in the cross-fire because whichever side they took they could be blamed by either party. The missionaries as the servants of God should have stood for justice, but conscientiously or unconsciously, the missionaries supported the government of the day. As a result the Vhavenda regarded them as stooges of the oppressive government.

At Tshakhuma Mission the Rev. P.E Schwellnus was fond of calling the people of the area, irrespective of whether they were a mission resident or not, to plough his field gratis. The action taken by the missionary caused a misunderstanding between the traditional leader of the area and the missionary. According to the Vhavenda culture it is only the traditional leader whose field (Dzunde) could be ploughed gratis.

However it would not be fair to conclude that the missionaries failed in everything they undertook. It must be noted with appreciation that there were good, positive actions which they did for the indigenous people. The Rev. Hofmeyr acted as a conciliatory figure in giving shelter to the headmen of Chief Mphephu during the Mphephu war of 1899. The good gesture demonstrated by the Rev. Hofmeyr convinced the Vhavenda from that area that a missionary was a person of peace and reconciliation.

The Rev. Wessman was highly commended for the effort he made to baptise Chief Makahane as early as 1890. The step taken by that missionary was commendable indeed, as it was necessary to work with the traditional leaders, if success was to be attained in the proclamation of the Gospel.

The involvement of Louis Trichardt, the leader of Albany Party, in assisting Chief Ramabulana to assume his rightful throne, which had been usurped by Ramavhoya, was applauded and appreciated by the Vhavenda. He was commonly known as “Luvhisi” (Louis). Had Louis Trichardt not participated in the restoration of the rightful heir to the throne, the Ramabulana dynasty would have lost its rightful position. Louis Trichardt’s actions was in line with the Vhavenda traditional practice pertaining to the succession of the chieftainship of the tribe.

6.3.5. Land issues

The purchase of land by the missionaries from land traders led to the problems of inter-racial misunderstanding between the missionaries and the indigenous people. It was surprising, if not unthinkable, to note that both Tshakhuma of the Berlin Mission and Valdezia of the Swiss Mission were bought from the same Mr Watt in more or less the same year. Junod reinforces this statement when he says, "The Scotsman, Watt having sold his farm to the newcomers naturally left his house for them. Mrs Creux and Mrs Berthoud each made a sketch of those dwellings" (Junod 1933:10). It cannot be easily reconciled, because on arrival the missionaries were allocated land for missionary purposes by the traditional leaders.

The purchasing of land and farming activities of the missionaries were not conducive to the missionaries fulfilling their mission task. It was difficult to distinguish between the missionaries and the commercial farmers, and on the other hand, the experienced disrespect, mostly unconscious and due to not knowing better, regarding these matters, created mistrust and negatively influenced the relations between the traditional leaders and the missionaries.

The Rev. Mc Donald of the Reformed Presbyterian Church was regarded as a good missionary, and a friend of chief Tshivhase because he never made an attempt to turn a mission station into a farm. Chief Tshivhase expressed that

“Madonoro (Mc Donald) was a rightful missionary because he did not take away my land and my people” (Mc Donald 1962:193-194).

According to the Vhavenda culture, land belonged to the tribal ancestors. As a result, the traditional leader was a custodian of the land on behalf of the ancestors. Therefore, he could not readily give it away lest he fell out of favour with the living dead. The missionaries could have persuaded and enlightened the traditional leaders through the Gospel that the land belonged to God, who was far above the tribal ancestors, and He would be pleased if the land could be utilised to his glory and to the benefits of his creatures.

The indigenous people concluded that the missionaries had formed an alliance with the Government to seize land from them by racist legislation, which was nothing else than a fraudulent procedure.

6.3.6. *Economical empowerment*

The Berlin Missionary Society, unlike other denominations, did not encourage their members to be involved in business, as a way of financial upliftment and rendering services to the community. Instead, Indian traders were given trading lease agreements to establish stores to serve the community in the mission stations.

The Swiss Mission, unlike the other denominations, which operated in Venda encouraged its converts to purchase personal private farms for their own agricultural farming developments. People such as Ramaite, Marivate, Phaswana, Matoko, Mageza, Nghatsane, Tlakula, Makaukau, Mashau, Mahawane, Saundy, John Ash and Muthambi, are still in possession of their farms, which were acquired through the influence of missionaries.

When the Swiss Mission ended their missionary work at Elim (Waterval) and Valdezia (Klipfontein) mission stations, the mission farms were surrendered to the indigenous people, to further their activities for the spread of the Gospel and development of the farms.

It is regrettable to indicate that instead of the Dutch Reformed Church handing over the farm to the Kranspoort community as a gesture of good relationship and sharing, the matter ended up in the Randburg Court. Judges Dodson and J.J. Moloto, and Plewman (assessor) pronounced judgement on 10 December 1999 that the farm Kranspoort No.46 L S should be restored to the Kranspoort community. The indigenous people won the controversy over the land issue (claim case No LCC 26\98 against the Dutch Reformed Church).

The action taken by the church towards its converts in terms of sharing land that belonged to the Vhavenda traditionally, created some doubts and ill-feelings about the missionaries. The church did not realise that *Koinonia* was another way

of generous sharing of what one had instead of grabbing all that he could because that would only show self-centredness a characteristic that would be contrary to the principles of Christian fellowship.

6.4. Koinonia

6.4.1. Building up of the church

Koinonia, the fellowship of believers and the establishment of the vibrant churches in the community, where people share the togetherness in building up the true faith and brotherliness, constitutes the third dimension of mission. In *Koinonia* there is the generous sharing as opposed to the spirit of ego-centricity. The community of believers shared their belongings with the less advantaged, and this action ultimately bound the people together and to the Triune God.

6.4.1.1. Sharing of meals

In the research that was conducted, it came to light that there were very few isolated cases where the Berlin missionaries invited members of their congregation to share meals with them at the same table. In the case of the Dutch Reformed Church the missionaries position was quite clear, because, especially after 1948, it was not an easy matter for them to deviate from the

apartheid policy, which was a national policy and were bound by culture to support it. The analogy given by the Rev. Nico Smith clearly indicates that for blacks and whites to eat together, was like a stork and a fox eating from the same container, “In this way I tried to tell them that we were foxes and storks and we just could not eat together” (De Saintonge 1989:84). With the Swiss missionaries the position was different. Members of the consistory, as well as members of the congregation, were invited by the missionaries to have communal meals. The stand adopted by the Swiss missionaries succeeded in reflecting that Christianity is a religion which knows no isolation. When the Rev. A.F. Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church practised the principles of *Koinonia*, by associating with the oppressed, the Venda Government ordered him to leave Venda forthwith.

6.4.1.2. Church services

Immediately after church services, the missionaries were in the habit of walking away to their houses in order to have their regular lunch. After church services, the Vhavenda converts would appear reluctant to return to their respective homes. They would linger a while as if they were not satisfied in meeting one another. The missionaries could have shared in fellowship, which would have indicated to their congregations that they were impelled by the love of God to be where they were serving. There was a common expression that “Muthu ndi muthu nga munwe (a person is a person through other persons). To mature in

Christian fellowship, church members always needed to keep in close contact with one another. One characteristic of *Koinonia* was that the missionaries were expected to mingle with members of their congregations freely for healthy informal communication, irrespective of age or social status but in good relationship.

6.4.2. Ecumenical relations

Ecumenical relations were entered by different churches, to unify the body of Christ, with the primary aim of preventing disunity, which could hinder the spread of the Gospel. At ecumenical meetings doctrinal traditions were not emphasised, for if doctrinal differences became an issue, the ecumenical meetings would end up furthering disunity amongst the churches.

When missionaries went to Venda, each denomination was focussing attention on a specific group of people.

When Hofmeyr went to Goedgedacht, he was convinced that he was going to work amongst the Basotho and the Buys family. It was not surprising that he made use of Afrikaans and Sesotho as a means of communication. The Vhavenda, who were in the majority, were not catered for (Malunga 1986:2).

The Berlin Missionary Society and the Swiss Mission Society made an unofficial agreement, which resolved that the Swiss Society should operate South of the river Luvuvhu and the Berlin Society, north of the river. The imposition of both Sesotho and Tsonga on the Venda nationals, caused some resentment in receiving the Gospel.

Each denomination discouraged its converts from attending schools of other denominations, which was a drastic measure for the people of the same area. This lack of ecumenism embarrassed the indigenous people, who were expecting to see unity among the different denominations.

In the early seventies, the Rev. Fobbe of the Berlin Missionary Society held ecumenical meetings irrespective of denomination, ministers of Independent Churches were also welcomed.

These ecumenical meetings posed a problem to some of the missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church, who would not associate freely with the black ministers. The Rev. Nico Smith was embarrassed when they were expected to have meals with the black ministers at the same table, and that resulted in Mrs Fobbe, as the hostess, separating the Rev. Nico Smith from the rest of the ministers. De Saintonge reinforced this argument when she indicates: "The German pastor's wife in whose home this took place noticed Nico's distress and said, 'Don't worry Mr Smith I have laid a place for you in my husband's study' ..." (De Saintonge

1989:84). The action taken by the Rev. Nico Smith revealed a denominational separation along racial lines. This lack of unity amongst the churches weakened the ecumenical relationship and ultimately led to the division of the body of Christ, which should not have happened, if people who claimed to have been sent were sincere about their calling.

In the late seventies the vacancies that were left by the missionaries in the different denominations, were filled as the indigenous spiritual leaders of different denominations revived the ecumenical meetings. Ndou (the author) was elected chairperson of the formed Interdenominational Ministers Association, consisting of over a hundred denominations of both mainline and Independent Churches. At present there are ecumenical associations in nearly every magisterial area in Venda.

Independent Churches have the opportunity to join the North Transvaal Council of Churches, which is the ecumenical umbrella body of the Province. Since its inception, the ecumenical movement in the Northern Province has tried to take issues, such as family life, to put back the moral of learning in schools, reduce crime and advance the creation of good relationships between churches irrespective of denominational affiliation.

6.5. Leitourgia

According to Kritzinger (1994:38) the Greek term *Leitourgia* deals mainly with the public service rendered to God, especially through worship. This service, then, could be rendered directly or indirectly to God, as through serving fellow human beings. Liturgical and diaconal services could be distinguished, but are not to be separated.

Kritzinger also indicates that where diaconal service is the essential expression of the sacrificial compassion and solidarity of Christians with the suffering and the oppressed, liturgical service, on the other hand, is the expression of the Christian desire to praise and worship God for whom He is (Kritzinger 1994:38).

Christian worship, according to Kritzinger, “is an inherent dimension of the worship we owe God simply for who He is” (Kritzinger 1994:38). The liturgical dimension thus serves to place the distinguished dimensions of mission into perspective.

The specific question, pertaining to this study on the missionaries in Venda, is: To what extent did the missionaries, not only offer their praise to God through their toil and labour over many years, but also contribute to establishing a dynamic, relevant and contextual liturgical tradition among the Vhavenda?

6.5.1. Western style of worship

The western style of worship in the mainline churches did not make a good impression on the indigenous people. The reason was that the style of worship was too solemn for their liking, lacking the rhythm to which they were accustomed. The liturgy thus did not appeal to the emotions of the Vhavenda.

The two published hymnals *Nyimbo dza Vhatendi* by the Berlin Missionary Society and *Hosanna in Venda* by the Dutch Reformed Church are of high standard as provision was even made of tonic solfa. The hymns were melodious from a western point of view. The missionaries produced western styles of music, while the Vhavenda were more interested in singing spontaneous choruses.

The mainline churches had an advantage of recruiting the youth to participate in the church singing competitions. Hymns were sung in tonic solfa in the mainline churches, unlike in the Independent Churches, where choruses were sung by way of repetitions.

Both the missionaries and the educationalists did not encourage the schools and churches to make use of indigenous music as a way of praise. The hymns set in a western style did not encourage the Vhavenda converts to move their bodies in a joyful manner, as is in accordance with the Vhavenda culture.

It was an undeniable fact that, from a traditional point of view, the Vhavenda if not most of the indigenous people did not feel comfortable in the mainline churches where emotions were not expressed.

It was not easy to encourage the illiterate to join in the praise and worship in western style. The mother of Mary Mutheiwana (Personal Interview 19\02\2000) indicated that she could not join her in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.C) because it was embarrassing for her to read from a hymn book as she was unable to read.

Presently, some of the mainline churches in Venda have resorted to the cultural way of arousing the people's emotions. The Rev. Nico Smith attended a church service at Tshilidzini Uniting Reformed church on 11 August 1996, he joined in singing the choruses and the clapping of hands, something he would not have allowed during his missionary service many years previously at the same church.

Culturally, the traditional healer before starting with the process of healing his patients, he was first possessed by the spirit of the ancestors. It is therefore not surprising, when the ministers of the Independent Churches feel that they must be guided by the spirit of God during praise and worship. They base their argument on John 4:24.

The missionaries could have encouraged the Vhavenda converts to express their inner feelings as a way of praising God, according to their own culture.

6.5.2. Baptism

Most of the mainline churches resorted to the mode of sprinkling when administering baptism. This mode of baptism was not in line with the Vhavenda way of purification, which involved immersion signifying the cleansing of defilement.

It was not surprising that the Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Missionary Society only managed to baptise two converts in four years, while the Rev. Creux of the Swiss Mission baptised 80 converts, including chief Ndjakandjaka in three years. In 1878, alone, the Rev. Hofmeyr of Dutch Reformed Church baptised 114. These indications reveal that the Vhavenda were too conservative to succumb to the Christian religion.

The Vhavenda usually thought that baptism, from their cultural background was another manner of cleansing. It is not surprising that baptism by sprinkling was not taken seriously, especially because, according to the Vhavenda culture, purification was conducted through means of immersion or “putting (u kamisa) the whole body under water”.

The churches should have given their converts the right to decide whether they preferred the sprinkling or immersion as a mode of baptism. The confusion, and the movement of members from the mainline churches to the Independent Churches would have been reduced greatly, as baptism would have been a matter of choice made by the converts. Purification would have been transformed from immersion, and the new understanding of baptism, in terms of purification would have been inculcated into the Christian understanding of baptism.

It has been well established in the foregoing discussions that the missionaries, who were born and bred in South Africa, had a better understanding of the indigenous people's culture, than those who came from outside the country. It was not surprising that the Rev. Hofmeyr of the Dutch Reformed Church had the highest number of converts. The Rev. Koen, a coloured person from the Cape, of the Berlin Missionary Society, succeeded in baptising chief Makahane.

6.5.3. Communion services

In communion services, the Lord is praised and worshipped. In almost all mainline churches the communion is conducted in more or less the same manner.

Had the missionaries taken the Vhavenda sacrificial rituals to the ancestors either for thanksgiving or for the harvest into consideration, the communion service would not have been as foreign an idea as it was understood to be.

As it has been indicated in the previous chapters, the Vhavenda made use of the “Thungu” (chalice) to contain unrestrained beer to offer to the ancestors. There was no reason why the missionaries could not make use of Thungu (chalice) to contain wine, which symbolised the blood of Jesus.

The Vhavenda central point of veneration to the ancestors could be transformed into the Christian ceremony of the communion service. This transformation could ultimately have led to inculturation into the Christian religion. Jesus Christ made it clear that, he had not come to destroy “the African traditional religion but to fulfil it” (cf: Matt. 5:17).

The foregoing discussion confirms that there is no reason why the Vhavenda ritual ceremonies of thanksgiving after the harvest (Mavhuya Haya) could not be transformed into the Christian celebrations, coupled with jubilation, as part of *Leitourgia*, which could be consequently be realised as giving glory and praise to Jesus Christ.

Apart from giving glory to Jesus during the communion service, it could also have been a moment of sharing family friendship, as it was a time when a common

meal was shared with relatives and friends. Although the sacrifice to the ancestors was deeply engraved in the hearts of the Vhavenda, the inculturation would have made them understand the true and proper meaning of the body and blood of Jesus, which was shared for them on the cross.

6.5.4. Circumcision

Most of the mainline churches regarded the act of circumcision for boys, and initiation schools for girls as unacceptable. The missionaries did not know that circumcision to the Vhavenda was an integral part of their culture, instead, it should have been contextualised by including it in church activities.

The missionaries could have made the Vhavenda realise that the unhygienic use of the same blade for the cutting of foreskins of several initiates would expose the boys to various diseases, such as Aids. To avoid such risks of contracting diseases, medical doctors could have been used.

Initiation schools could have been inculturated into the church. For instance, a group of boys could have been taken on camping seminars or revivals, during which the rules pertaining to manhood, from the Vhavenda cultural point of view could have been taught. Exposure to both African values and Christian moral codes would have made them feel that they had gone through the rituals of circumcision.

The problem of circumcision, which posed a problem to Christianity, could have been amicably resolved through inculturation. Initiation schools could have compared favourably to catechism classes in its preparation for confirmation to full church membership. Catechism could still be taught at a fireside during the camp and ultimately the graduation could be conducted in church.

It is interesting to note that in some areas of South Africa, the ministers of religion are consulted before the initiates are send off for circumcision. For example, Phahlana of Queenstown (Personal Interview 14/11/1999) indicated that his son, Siyabulela, had to fly from the United States of America in order to attend a circumcision school in 1997 in the Eastern Cape. He further indicated that his son had to get blessings from his Anglican priest as a means of intercessory prayers, before receiving admission to the circumcision school. That action taken by the Anglican priest was a clear indication that some of the indigenous people's customs could be acceptable to denominations, while some other denominations condemn circumcision. These other denominations would encourage their converts to have no connection with those who had been circumcised without realising that circumcision opens the doors to manhood, and acceptance by peers, who has gone through the rituals of circumcision.

The distinguished dimensions of mission help to understand the missionaries' approaches to mission, where their shortfalls and strengths lay. It was found that,

in temporary terms, had the missionaries to Venda had a better understanding of and sensitivity towards the cultural heritage of the Vhavenda, and incorporated various aspects into the mission dimensions, *Leitourgia*, *Diakonia*, *Koinonia*, and *Kerygma*, they would have had a far more fruitful mission. Related, though, is the whole consideration of the missionaries' motives for entering the mission field in Venda.

6.6. Motives of missionaries

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that various missions, which were operating in Venda, were sent by their home countries as well by different missionary societies. It is quiet appropriate to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of the missionaries who brought the Gospel to Venda. It should be established whether it was worthwhile for the missionaries to have taken all the trouble, sacrifice and financial involvement in their different endeavours. Another matter, which should be looked into is the biblical motives, and thus by way of contrast, highlight both ulterior and sound motives (Pretorius 1987:174). The approach adopted by Pretorius will act as a guide when assessing the work of the missionaries in Venda. The missionary activities will be judged against the background laid down by Smit. He categorised the motives into sound and ulterior motives. The sound motives are those which can pass the true test as set out in the Holy Scriptures and can contribute to the clarion call of God for the spread of the Gospel. Although the ulterior motives are always coupled with the

sound motives, the former will be detected by their ulterior aim and achievement. In this discussion the sound motives will be categorise as positive and the ulterior as negative motives.

6.6.1. Positive Motives

The positive motives are those which can stand the test of the compliance with the requirements of the Scriptures. The mission will be tested whether it has given the correct answer, as determined by the clarion call of the missions as assigned by God.

6.6.1.1. The kingdom motive

The kingdom motive indicates God's primary and original plan with his world, Venda inclusive. "Your kingdom come", is a reference of God's spiritual Kingdom, which the missionaries endeavoured to proclaim. This motive further portrays God as the Revelatory to his creatures. The Vhavenda accepted the Kingdom of God as more valuable than anything else. The missionaries unreservedly proclaimed the kingdom, and presented Jesus as the saviour. Although to the Vhavenda, Jesus saves them in their daily pressing needs, that means here and now. The Vhavenda were ready, prepared to welcome the kingdom of God, provided justice prevailed between all races, and not as a means of subjugating the Vhavenda, and rob them of their land.

6.6.1.2. Ecclesiological Motive

The Ecclesiological motive is closely related to the Kingdom motive. A missionary who serves the King also serves the Body of Christ, making the self available for the planting and building up of the church, and is moved towards the intensive and extensive growth of the church (Smit 1970:176). The missionary is motivated by Jesus' own statement of His church-building purpose in Matthew's Gospel: "On this foundation I will build my church" (16:18).

Looking back, it is significant to note that a strong ecclesiological motive under the missionaries in Venda could be detected. The building up of the Indigenous Churches remained of uppermost importance to the missionaries of all denominations.

6.6.1.3. The obedience motive

Jesus' command to his disciples had no compromise: "Listen I am sending you" (John 20:21). The royal command given by Jesus Christ to the apostles to do missionary work was extended to the missionaries who left their countries in obedience to the command. The missionaries needed to take notice of the fact that although they had answered a clarion call of obedience, the indigenous people through the guidance of the spirit of God, also longed for the coming of

the Gospel. As a result, most missionaries were invited by the indigenous people as a way of response to the obedience motive.

6.6.1.4. Love and compassion as motives

This motive indicates that, although people were rebellious against God, He had unreserved love and compassion for his creation through Jesus Christ. The confession made by Paul reveals that the love of Christ in him compels him to proclaim the Good News (2 Corinthians 5:14). Love and compassion are the elements of mission. God's love and compassion, which is well revealed in Jesus, urged the missionaries to take up missionary work to Venda. Although there were health hazards in Venda, as the area was rife with malaria which took the lives of missionaries and members of their household. Still, they were never dissuaded from their good course. The love of God was born in the hearts of the missionaries, their eyes were blinded from seeing any obstacle which could have hindered the extension of the Word of God to the outsiders.

6.6.2. Negative Motives

The under mentioned negative motives played a major role in the missionary enterprise, which reveals that most of their motives were not biblical and were more secular than they would admit.

6.6.2.1. *Imperialism*

Under the imperial rule, Christianity was identified with the state, and the membership of a society, and not as an act to personal faith. Some of the missions received political backing from the government. In support of this argument, Bavinck states, "Success in the arms were for (Carl the Great) of the same time success for Christianity" (Bavinck 1960:29). During the 16th century the state was working in close collaboration, and in some instances sent out missionaries from their respective states to Africa in order to extend their political power under the cloak of religion.

The same happened in Venda. The Missionaries from Rome were instructed to propagate the Roman Catholic Church wherever they went. During the Mphephu war of 1899, the Berlin Missionaries invariably sided with the Boers and influenced some Vhavenda chiefs not to support Chief Mphephu in his struggle against the Boer command.

When decolonialisation came to an end, and when the missionary schools were surrendered to the Government the motives of colonialism were exposed and financial support was stopped. As a result the missions and the schools suffered, as they were then regarded as community institutions.

6.6.2.3. *Paternalism*

Paternalism and imperialism are closely related to each other. It is a well established fact that it was the colonial policy to give assistance and aid in the form of the establishment of schools and hospitals. These were good services, which were introduced during the era of missions, but were ultimately associated with the colonial rule.

When the time came for colonialism to be parted from, the relationship was strained between missions and the Government of the day. When missionaries were recalled by their countries of origin, they still wanted to interfere and that was regarded as a form paternalism.

The hospitals and schools were built without the involvement of the Vhavenda. Missionaries were ignorant of the Venda expression, which says, “Fhuri la u newa a lina khobvu” (The pumpkin given as a present has no juice). The Vhavenda preferred to enter a joint venture when any project was initiated for them, that they could claim ownership in the project. This argument is supported by Rev. van Deventer of the Uniting Reformed Church at Tshilidzini (Personal Interview 13/04/1997). He indicated that he received a letter from one of his out-post stations, informing him that the window panes of his church were broken and that he must come and replace them. This is a clear indication that church

buildings were associated with the missionaries and not with the members of the congregations.

The indigenous people could have taken over the administration of their churches, and not depended so strongly on the so called “mother churches”. The expression “mother churches” promoted a feeling of continual interference by the churches who sent the missionaries, which ultimately resulted in paternalism. Presently, the Vhavenda regard church buildings as their own, and in many cases are extending existing buildings and are erecting new churches in such a manner that they comply favourably with the modern standards.

6.6.2.4. The debt motive

The missionary societies, drawn by the conscience of Christian guilt, which burnt in their hearts, made a confession indirectly, admitting that Africa has been left alone, ailing and groaning. The slave trade and exploitation by the powers that be, prompted the missionary societies to feel desirous, and thus they embarked on a plan to send missionaries to dark Africa, as it was commonly known.

Rev. Nico Smith, who established the mission station of the Dutch Reformed Church at Tshilidzini, was prompted by the Tomlinson Report of 1956, which indicated that only ten percent of the people who lived in the homelands were Christians. It is really unthinkable when it is thought that the white settlers,

predominantly claiming to be Christian, who arrived in South Africa in and after 1652, had made such little effort to Christianise the indigenous people.

It is therefore not surprising that Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs, granted land of fifteen acres for the establishment of a mission station and hospital to the Rev. Nico Smith within a short time of making the request. The arrangements were made in three days (De Saintonge 1989 :70). Sponsors sent money from different sources. As a result, the Tshilidzini Hospital was built within a short time, as a sign of making up the lost time of developing the area.

The fact cannot be denied, that the colonists and the powers that were felt convinced that they were indebted to God for the infliction imposed on the inhabitants of Venda and South Africa as whole.

6.6.2.5. Cultural or development motives

During the 18th and the 19th centuries, there was a common concept that the Westerners regarded their culture as more developed than other cultures. When the missionaries came to Venda they thus assumed that their “higher culture” had met a “lower culture”. They regarded their culture and civilisation to be on a higher level than that of the indigenous people. Missionaries regarded the education and civilisation of the pagans as their primary assignment, along with

the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel, therefore, was presented to the Vhavenda with the aim of also rooting out paganism in the area.

When the missionaries viewed the Vhavenda's veneration of the living dead, the conclusion was made that the devil was in action in a disguised manner.

From a Jewish perspective in the early church, if one was to become a Christian, one had to go through the Jewish culture. It took the church in Jerusalem quite some time to accept gentiles as they were. The Jewish culture was regarded as higher than that of other cultures.

The missionaries concluded that their home cultures should be used as a vehicle to proclaim the Gospel. For instance, German missionaries expected the Vhavenda converts to adopt German Lutheranism. The Vhavenda became sensitive, and as a result, this negative motive was strongly resented. Missionaries could have accepted the Vhavenda in terms of the Vhavenda culture. Cultural practices could have prepared a base for the acceptance of the Gospel, but rather, the unbecoming attitude of the missionaries obstructed the way to acceptance of the Gospel; and left a suspicion on the minds of the Vhavenda.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1. Summary of all chapters

A summary of all the chapters in this thesis is given as indicated below.

Chapter one: In this chapter the problem posed for this study was formulated. The problem investigated dealt in depth with the failure of the missionaries to identify factors which hindered or could have facilitated the hearing of the Gospel message amongst the Vhavenda. The primary aim of the study was to look into the factors that hindered the wholesale acceptance of the Christian religion by the Vhavenda, focusing primarily on the work conducted by the pioneers who brought the Christian religion to the Vhavenda. This study argued that, although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenants of Vhavenda traditional religion, nor the Venda language, were given proper consideration. Had the missionaries made a study of Venda culture, and employed their findings in their mission strategy, there would undoubtedly have been less confusion, as cultural customs and practices would have been interpreted correctly, and ultimately the spreading Gospel would have been accepted with greater ease in Venda.

Chapter two: An outline was given of the coming of the missionaries to Venda. The Gospel was brought by different denominations, with their various approaches to the Vhavenda culture and their practices.

Chapter three: The traditional belief, customs and practices which were prevalent in Venda society were defined. Strong emphasis was also placed on the fact that the Vhavenda believed in “Nwali”, as their Supreme Being, who was acknowledge by whole society before the introduction of Christianity. According to the Vhavenda belief and understanding, Nwali was not an ancestor (Mudzimu; family god) but the creator of mankind (Musika vathu).

Chapter four: Factors which gave rise to the Independent Churches were outlined. In this chapter, it was argued that the formation of Independent Churches was not a move to ostracise anyone.

The white missionaries brought the Gospel to the indigenous people, but some of the mainline churches could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the indigenous people, from a cultural point of view. The Vhavenda religious beliefs were inculturated into Christianity by the Independent Churches.

Chapter five: An indication was made, that when traditional leaders invited the missionaries to their areas, their main motivation was not the evangelisation of their societies, but rather, the traditional leaders wanted to enhance their status

as political heads, and to be provided with social needs by the missionaries. Colonisation hindered the acceptance of the Gospel as missionaries were viewed as paying allegiance to the government of the day.

Chapter six: An evaluation was presented of the missionaries' enterprises in Venda, taking an understanding of all the requirements of the theological dimensions of missions into consideration. Missionary motives were evaluated against the background of positive and negative aspects.

Chapter seven: Apart from presenting a summary of the different chapters, chapter 7 offers recommendations, and points out challenges to the church and mission. as well as indicating areas for future research. This is done after the main findings of this study, and an evaluation of the hypothesis is presented.

7.2. Main findings and evaluation of the hypothesis

The hypothesis of this thesis stated that the lack of identification of the problems that hindered the immediate acceptance of Christianity in Venda delayed the spread of Gospel considerably, because the missionaries did not understand the Venda culture. They assumed that all would go well with mission enterprise, without taking the Vhavenda traditional culture and practices into consideration.

It has been revealed in this thesis that, although the Vhavenda had strong communication with their family living-dead (ancestors), Nwali was regarded as their Supreme Being, who was the creator of the universe and was worshipped everywhere. The ancestors were also held in high esteem, because of their role in the lives of the living. The Vhavenda, in a true sense, believed that the ancestors were entirely under Nwali's (God) supervision.

It has been portrayed in this study that the Gospel and the anthropological analyses are interwoven. Anthropology supplies information on Vhavenda cultural practices and beliefs, which could lead the Vhavenda to understanding the Kingdom of God. The missionaries were unmindful of the fact that by focusing too strongly on the eradication of the Vhavenda customs and practices, they were hindering the Gospel from penetrating the hearts of the Vhavenda.

A clear indication has been made in this study that the indigenous people accorded Jesus Christ with a status of the Prime-Ancestor, because his powers superseded those of family ancestors. His ultimate work is to redeem people from their sins and burdens, and thus in his humility he had opened the door for the Vhavenda to enjoy eternal life.

The study viewed the Vhavenda who accepted the Gospel as Christians, who embraced the Kingdom of God with their own culture, and accepted the required Christian principles without the Vhavenda forfeiting their traditional culture.

The study has made it clear that Vhavenda new converts who moved to the mission stations included individuals who were running away from the practice of witchcraft. This argument is confirmed by Smith, when he indicates that “in the Christian village, there are no witches, and the witches have no power where the pagans say, ‘as soon as a witch becomes a Christian, his witchcraft is extinguished’ ...” (Smith 1851:89-95). It has been clearly indicated in this thesis that the Vhavenda who had not received Christ, are still subject to the fear of witches and evil forces either caused by natural phenomenon or otherwise. The Vhavenda should be made to believe that Jesus Christ liberates people from both internal fear and the external enslavement of natural events.

Had the missionaries accepted some of the Vhavenda cultural practices, the Independent Churches would not have mushroomed in the manner they did. Most of the Independent Churches resort to the mode of baptism by immersion and this is in line with the indigenous people’s way of purification from defilement (u kamisa).

The Missionaries were of the opinion that the indigenous people’s culture would give way to the Western culture, in order to pave the way for the new religion. Most of the Lutheran missionaries, for instance, came from Germany, it was not so easy for the Vhavenda to be assimilated into the German culture in order to be accepted into Christianity.

7.3. Recommendations

7.3.1. Challenges to the church and mission

The Church should not ignore African culture of the indigenous people nor its practices, for these practices make an impact on the indigenous people for a long time, and they were part of their way of life.

Transformation, as a course of action, should take place amongst the ministers of religion, the laity and the exponents of African traditional religion. The coming together could encourage each group to get involved in the discussion of how the process of inculturation could be carried out. It should be realised that human weakness compels the people in both camps to be afraid of changes because, for example, they thought that their beliefs would be thrown overboard. The need for a workable concerted effort is of great significance.

In Jesus Christ, God transforms the Vhavenda to be accepted as co-workers in the kingdom of God. The Vhavenda traditional culture and practices should be transformed in such a manner that the Vhavenda culture is not ignored by the acceptance of the Christian religion.

Both the missionaries and the colonists in the past did not make sufficient research to enable them to work amongst the Vhavenda.

The African culture should be nurtured so that it could have due honour and respect, thus encouraging the spread of Christianity. In the past, sadly, it was ignored, in the interest of imposing the acceptance of Christianity on the indigenous people. It should be an accepted fact that there is a difference between Christianity and Western Culture. The Vhavenda culture, too, could be used as a vessel to facilitate the acceptance of Christianity.

This thesis further argues that veneration of the living dead does not weaken one's faith in the biblical God, as some of the theologians and the missionaries had concluded. Jesus is above the ancestors, for he rules the whole universe and not a particular clan or tribe.

It would be of assistance to both the church and the indigenous people if the doctrine of the Trinity were researched from a cultural point of view. The indigenous people regard Jesus as the Prime Ancestor and not only as the Son of God. The Holy Ghost is not easily acknowledged as a member of the Trinity.

It is worth mentioning that the research which was undertaken by the Rev. Wessman of the Berlin Missionary Society concluded that some traditional healers were correct in their examination: "We were surprised when the herbalists after having taken some medicine, told us all the facts of the case under examination in every detail and with absolute correctness" (Wessman

1908:93). Subsequently the Rev. Wessman discovered that there was some truth in what the traditional healers were saying.

The missionaries and the elders of the church should not be impressed by the influx of the new members who join the church. Concentration should not be on the external, whereas the very hearts are not possessed by Christ. The church should be realistic. As a result, customs would be enculturated into Christianity when the change of hearts take place.

It should be made clear that Christianity could be received in own geographical environment and in own cultural situation. It should also be taken into consideration that there is no culture which regards itself as purely and totally Christian, for all cultures need to be redeemed.

Both the independent and the historical churches have a role to play in the ecumenical movement. The two should be convinced that they were not separated by Christ, but by human beings in furthering their own social needs. The missionaries should adapt a strategy of peaceful co-existence whilst still carrying on the mission work.

Traditional festivities, such as the planting and thanksgiving ceremonies (Mavhuya haya) should be christianised for the glory of God. Sunday, for

instance was the day on which the sun-god received prayers and sacrifices but later it was used to celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7.4. Areas for future research

Research programmes should be designed to investigate some of the traditional customs which are still in practice during and after the funeral service, for example, the slaughtering of the beasts and the washing of hands when coming back from the grave. After such traditional rituals are investigated, thus inculturation can take place when all the fields have been exhausted.

The mainline churches conclude that the ancestors were false gods and always in competition with the Almighty God. Research could be conducted to investigate the role of ancestors in relation to God, but not in isolation from the indigenous people's point of view.

Inculturation should take place in a conducive atmosphere of sharing. The pastors and laity should facilitate the creation of the workshops wherein aspects of the culture could be discussed.

Investigation should be made to establish whether the Vhavenda had a concept of the Supreme Being (God) prior to the arrival of the missionaries. If God existed for the whole world, he must have existed for the Vhavenda as well. It would be

of assistance to both the church and indigenous people if research is made on the doctrine of trinity from a cultural point of view.

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