

**THE TENACITY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN VENDA
CHRISTIANITY: A MISSIONAL INVESTIGATION**

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that **The tenacity of African Traditional Religion in Venda Christianity: A missional investigation** is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....
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Date

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Relevance

The lives of millions of Africans have been profoundly changed by their encounters with the Bible and with the God that the Christian missionaries have introduced to them. However, they need clarification of the role that their traditional religion, including aspects such as ancestor veneration, belief in spirits and traditional approaches to healing, should play in their lives.

African Christianity is at a crossroads, since a large number of African Christians in sub-Saharan Africa profess to be Christian, and yet cling tenaciously to their traditional beliefs. This is evident due to the crises that are occurring, in terms of both African individuals and families.

The missionary era has passed, and it is up to the Vhavenda churches to find a way in which to respond to, and ultimately resolve this situation.

1.2. Problem statement

This research is an attempt to identify the factors that have hampered the acceptance of the Christian religion within the cultural context of Vhavenda spirituality. An attempt is made to identify the causes or factors that led to the conflict created by the preaching of the Gospel within the Venda context, which has led to cultural resistance to the communication of the Gospel within the unique setting of Venda spirituality.

The problem to be investigated in this research deals in depth with the failure of the missionaries to recognise factors that either hindered or could have facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel message amongst the Vhavenda.

1.3. Aim of the research

The aim of the study is to facilitate the inculturation of the Christian faith in traditional Venda religion and culture, by trying to understand the present relation between the Christian faith and traditional Venda religion and culture, as it is found in the 'religion of ordinary women and men' in Venda. Peter C. Phan, as quoted by Bevans and Schroeder (2004: 387) has correctly stated that 'inculturation will benefit greatly from a broader appreciation of popular religiosity, the religion of ordinary women and men'.

To understand the present, it is necessary to look back into the history of missions with a different perspective, so to understand how and why the present situation has come to be. Where would the African church be today; indeed, where would modern Africa be today if the missionaries of the past had made a concerted attempt to understand certain fundamental factors of traditional Venda religion and culture?

Such an exploration should help the reader to perceive the present situation more clearly, and thus to be able to deal more constructively with the issues that have manifested.

1.4. Hypothesis

The study investigates the notion that, although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenants of Vhavenda traditional religion, nor the Vhavenda language were given proper consideration.

Had the missionaries made a study of Venda culture, and employed their findings in their mission strategy, there would have been less confusion, and Biblical teachings and practices would have been accepted with greater ease in Venda.

1.5. Methodology

The research operates within two related disciplines: Science of Religion (describing certain phenomena within the traditional Venda culture and religion and the

contemporary Venda churches), and Science of Mission/Missiology (reflecting from a missiological point of view on the impact of the Christian message amongst the Vhavenda people in southern Africa and on the way forward).

The researcher focuses on qualitative studies, employing a phenomenological approach. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) embraced the approach of going 'back to the things themselves', as opposed to building knowledge on theories and opinions. There are different ways in which this credo has been developed, but a basic premise of phenomenology is that the credo 'back to the things themselves' means that the phenomena must be described as they are given, based on concrete experience, and as far as possible without any conceptual preconception or bias (Aydin 2007:6-7).

It is specifically the concrete experience of a large number of Vhavenda Christians, who still uphold their tradition, which is the focus of this study. Their experience is clearly different from the views of most of the white missionaries and Vhavenda Christian leaders. The latter may have problems with many of the beliefs related to the traditional Venda religion, whereas many of the Vhavenda Christians see these as no threat to their new Christian religion. For example: when YEHOVAH is called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, many of the Vhavenda Christians will have no doubt in their minds that the Israelites were in line with African tradition in the veneration of their ancestors, seeing the similarities rather than the differences. Such phenomena are described in this thesis. The focus of the study is not on the missiological reflections, but on the phenomenological descriptions. Missiological reflections will have little value if they are not based on accurate phenomenological descriptions.

The two disciplines are not separated into neat categories. The researcher has, over the years, come to the conclusion that the lived religion of many of the Vhavenda Christians must be taken seriously and must be respected. He has come to share in this experience to some extent, and has tried to describe it in this study, rather than to engage in lengthy theological and exegetical discussions about the experience.

The definition of the phenomenological approach used in this study comes close to the definition of qualitative research as described by Creswell (2014: 228):

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

A qualitative researcher tends to collect data in the field, at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under consideration. This up-close information is gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their contexts; in other words, the researcher has face-to-face interaction with participants.

Qualitative research involves the collection of a variety of empirical materials – in the form of personal experience, introspection, life stories, interviews and observations. It is historical and interactional in nature, and describes routine and problematic moments and their meaning in individuals' lives (Creswell 1998: 15).

In this research, narrative approach is presented as a framework for understanding the subject, narrative analyses are contrasted with other kinds of qualitative analyses, and truth in narratives is considered. Narrative approach is, a life-as-lived (what actually happened), a life-as-experienced (the images, feelings, desires, thoughts and meanings known to the person whose life it is), and a life-as-told (a narrative). Narrative truth is distinguished from other kinds of formal science truths by its emphasis on the life-like, intelligible and plausible story. Spence (1982: 31), indicates that, narrator in a remembering moment strive to achieve the most internally consistent interpretation of the past- in the- present, the experienced present and the anticipated -in- the-present future.

The focus in this study is primarily on the Vhavenda experience. In terms of qualitative research, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a number of respondents in Venda. The interviewees have been carefully selected, coming from

different localities and holding different positions, to present a comprehensive and varied picture of traditional life, culture and religion amongst the Vhavenda people.

The researcher will assess the value and meaning of Vhavenda spirituality within the cultural setting, using the methods of cultural and linguistic interpretation, logical argumentation and critical reflection. Observable details (such as daily time allotment) and more covert aspects (such as taboo behaviour) are more easily observed and interpreted over a long period of time.

The researcher must ensure that ethical boundaries are never crossed. The Vhavenda indigenous culture will be respected as such, and it will be used as a base for contextualisation of the Gospel.

The researcher undertook this study from the vantage point of a participant observer, being an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) in Venda, as well as in dialogue with fellow ministers in the ELCSA and with colleagues from the wider ecumenical community regarding the above-mentioned issues. Schurink (1991: 3) suggests the following:

Participating observation could be described as an unstructured and flexible data collection method, in which the researcher is part of the everyday world of the group or institution. Usually the participant observer is himself connected for quite long period with the group he wants to study. It could be months or years.

It connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the how and whys of human behaviour in the context of a culture and/or community. Such discovery is natural in that all of us have done this repeatedly throughout our lives, learning what it means to be members of our own families, our ethnic and natural cultures, our personal circles and associations. This means not only being a player in a social milieu but also fulfilling the role of researcher. The researcher is able to obtain more detailed and accurate information about the individuals, community, and /or population under study.

Howell (1972: 392-403) states:

In the field do as the locals do, it is important for the researcher to connect or show a connection with the population in order to be accepted as a member of the community. Talking the talk and walking the walk.

The researcher used secondary sources such as books, articles, theses, etc. from the libraries at the University of Pretoria, UNISA, and the University of Venda. Other sources include chapters in textbooks, newspaper articles and journals that were selected and studied.

The information that has been gathered, as well as the conclusions reached in the research, is informed by the researcher's own experience. However, the researcher has endeavoured to be as objective as possible in conducting his research.

1.6. Overview of the research

The research is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the research project. The problem statement is clearly indicated, giving the reasons for instituting this particular investigation. Apart from formulating the problem pertaining to the study, the aim and hypothesis are also presented. The methodology employed in investigating and demonstrating this submission is a qualitative method approach, and a brief explanation of this method is included.

Chapter 2

This chapter portrays the interaction between the missionaries' message and the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Vhavenda, focusing on the context within which the missionaries worked, and the strong belief of the Vhavenda as centred on Nwali. A discussion of the Vhavenda people and background regarding

the Venda religion, society and culture are also provided to establish the setting for the ensuing deliberations.

Chapter 3

This chapter investigates the Christian mission amongst the Vhavenda, history of the coming of the missionaries, as well as of white settlement in Venda. The Berlin Missionary Society, Dutch Reformed Church, Reformed Church (Gerformeerde Kerk), Presbyterian Church, and the Swiss missionaries' acculturation amongst the Vhavenda Christians will also form part of this chapter.

Chapter 4

The chapter deals with the rise of independent churches and their approach to Venda culture. The independent churches came into being because of the failure of the mainstream churches (as established by missionaries) to satisfy the religious needs of their converts.

Chapter 5

This chapter explores the Venda version of Christianity. The Venda belief in God will be discussed as a steppingstone, which has led the Vhavenda to regard Christ as their prime ancestor. The Vhavenda cultural background regarding the respect accorded to the dead, burial rites, Vhavenda Christian funerals, and Christian status of ancestors after burial will be portrayed. The relationship between the living Venda Christian and the living dead will also be discussed.

Chapter 6

This chapter contains research findings, which includes an evaluation, main findings in terms of the hypothesis, a number of recommendations, and challenges to be confronted by the church and mission. Potential areas for future research will also be noted.

CHAPTER 2: TRADITIONAL BELIEFS, CUSTOMS, AND PRACTICES OF THE VHAVENDA

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher seeks to tie together how the introduction of a new religion, namely Christianity and its teachings, by Western missionaries has impacted on the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Vhavenda people. It is important to note that, prior to the introduction of the Christian faith, the Vhavenda people had their own way of communicating with the Supreme Being, which the missionaries called 'God'.

The researcher will attempt at this stage to identify and discuss the factors that may have hampered the acceptance of the Christian faith within Vhavenda spirituality. A key point that is worthy of consideration is as follows: if the missionaries had appropriately identified and contextualised their message of the Gospel, they would not have encountered the resistance they did.

In order to understand the context within which the missionaries worked, and to assess the role they played, it is necessary to study the traditional customs and beliefs of the Vhavenda. The way the missionaries understood (and sometimes misunderstood) these customs and beliefs had a large impact on the success of their work.

2.2. Brief analysis of important concepts

Vhavenda

This term refers to the people in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, usually referred to as Muvenda, which is the singular of Vhavenda. The language spoken is Luvenda.

Nwali/Raluvhimba

God of the earth, in Venda Traditional religion, is responsible for all life (every living thing) on earth (Mashau 2004: 67):

Mwari is said to be the God of fertility, mainly of crops and women. He has both male and female attributes; hence he is regarded as the rain giver. He is closely associated with the Mbire tribe within the Shona tradition. His shrines or ritual headquarters are situated at Matopo hills near Bulawayo, hence he is known as *Mwari weMatonjeni* (the God of the Matopo hills). One of the keepers who served at Matonjeni shrines was a muVenda called Peura.

The Venda equivalent of the name *Matonjeni* was *Matongoni* (Schutte 1978: 121).

Vhuloi

Westerners describe *Vhuloi* as witchcraft; in Venda it refers to invisible, mystical forces and powers in the universe. Certain people have the knowledge and ability to control and use these forces or powers.

The malombo

It does happen that the living dead may reveal themselves through a dead spirit, who could manifest itself as a person, through whom messages or instructions are imparted to the specific family or clan. A person who is possessed by such a spirit is always feared, despite being regarded as conciliatory in his or her action; and becomes honoured by the family, for he or she has acquired power from the ancestors.

A possessed person is a human oracle, through whom the ancestral spirits communicate with the living members of the family. The *malombo* dance takes place over several days and nights; the activity is associated with healing and other supernatural activities. Although music plays a significant role in the *malombo* dance,

it does not precipitate the state of possession, but encourages the possessed to dance faster.

Missionaries and Christianity

These terms refer to Christianity as brought to Africa by missionaries from the northern world.

2.3. Venda region

Venda lies in the northern regions of the Republic of South Africa. The area forms part of the Zoutpansberg territory, and subsequently forms part of the Limpopo province. Zimbabwe lies to the north of Venda.

The Limpopo River (Vhembe) forms the Limpopo border of Venda. However, the Vhavenda have never accepted the Limpopo River as a boundary. Ralushai (1980: 11) reinforces this statement:

The colonial border, the Limpopo (Vhembe river), affected not only the regular movement of the people living on both sides of the river, but also the attitudes of writers, who tended to look on the South African Vhavenda of the Northern Transvaal in terms, i.e. as the Vhavenda of the Northern Transvaal and not as people who for many years had been historically and culturally linked with their neighbours across the border.

This historical evidence indicates that the Limpopo River (Vhembe) was never regarded as a boundary: it was only an artificial colonial border. To the east, Venda shares its borders with Mozambique and the Kruger National Park. A group of the Vhavenda called the Vhanyai, who settled on the eastern slopes of Mount Lombe in Zimbabwe, first occupied Mount Madzivhanombe in the eastern region of Venda. In support of this statement, Benso (1979: 18) states that 'the Vhanyai settled in the Eastern Venda beyond Madzivhanombe'.

Tshimangadzo Mphephu (*Vho Khotsimunene*), the chiefs' younger brother (personal interview, 18/10/2014), confirmed this statement when he explained that the Vhanyai settled at Madzivhanombe under chief Makahane and Neluombe. The ruins of this group can still be easily traced'.

To the west side, Venda goes beyond Muungadi River, and stretches to Hananwa and shares borders with Malebogo. Venda stretches as far as Ga-Sekhukhuni to the south, which is presently occupied by the BaPedis. This in itself reveals that there were two senior chiefs in the Transvaal, who were Ramabulana (Venda) and Sekhukhuni (Pedi). This argument is reinforced further by Benso (1979: 35):

During the middle of the last century, the prominent chiefs in the area, which was later to become the Transvaal, were Ramabulana in Venda and Sekhukhuni in the area of the South of Venda, which was called Vendana by the Vhavenda.

Venda has been known by this name for many years. During the colonial era it was referred to as Venda land, which is incorrect. Venda land is like saying England-land, which is clearly incorrect (Node 1993: 1). The linguistic error has affected other areas, like Basotho land, which correctly speaking should in fact be Lesotho, and the inhabitants should be referred to as Basotho.

Flygare reflects that Venda means 'land' and Vhavenda 'people of Venda' (1899: 10). The inhabitants of the area of Venda are called Vhavenda (plural) and Muvenda (singular). This originated from the name of the place Venda. Historically, the Vhavenda came from Central Africa, from the great lakes of Africa, which the Arabs named Zendzi.

Mathivha is quoted by Nemudzivhadi as saying that the leader of the Vhavenda and the Vhasenzi migrated southwards during roughly the 12th and 13th centuries, and eventually established their homes in the present Vendaland (Nemudzivhadi 1996: 1). Benso (1979: 17) postulates that 'available writings by the Vhavenda themselves have cleared the mystery concerning their origin and migration down the dark continent of Africa.'

Although Mathivha appears to align himself with Benso, historically the first migratory group was composed mainly of the Vhangona, who are also of the Vhavenda group. It is historically incorrect to assume that Vhasenzi and Vhalemba were among the first groups to migrate to this area (Venda) during the 12th and 13th centuries. The last group, which consisted of the Vhasezi and Vhalemba, only made their appearance during the 17th century.

Nemudzivhadi (1974: 2) argues: 'The fact as contained in the pages of Moller-Malan that it is the Vhasenzi and not the Vhavenda who made their appearance in about 1700 confused many white writers including some Vhavenda writers.'

The last group, which consisted of the larger and stronger dynasty, conquered the first group (the Vhangona) and the two assimilated, and thus a homogeneous, strong fabric was formed. Chief Dimbanyika led the last and strong group. Khuba (1994: 25) supports this statement by asserting: 'Historically however, it has been postulated by Dzivhani (1958: 14-16) that the Venda under the first known Venda Chief Dimbanyika moved outwards from Central Africa and settled in Northern Transvaal'.

This in itself is an indication that the Vhavenda were led by one strong traditional leader when they came to this part of the world, but as time went on, they disintegrated into smaller tribal groups, brought about by the death of their leader.

Nemudzivhadi (1997: 25) indicates:

After Dimbanyika's tragic death in a cave at Lwadali, while hunting rock-rabbits, they descended to Nzhelele valley where they established their second capital called Dzata under the leadership of Dyambeu and his son Phophi who was later known as Thohoyandou.

Hence, we have the town called Thohoyandou (Head of the elephant) in Venda. The rule of Thohoyandou, their traditional leader or chief, was regarded as a golden age of monarchy. After his death, his sons established themselves as independent rulers, and thus the decentralisation of the monarchy caused the Vhavenda to have twenty-seven chiefs.

However, they ruled specific tribes while sharing one language. Benso (1979: 23) confirms this statement, explaining that Venda is presently divided into twenty-seven areas, over which twenty-five chiefs and twelve independent headmen have jurisdiction. The chiefs do not rule specific areas or the people who reside there. Moreover, most of these chiefs are cousins, as they stem from a common ancestry.

According to Venda culture, it is very difficult for a commoner to be installed as a chief. Such practice is unacceptable by Venda standards. Thus, there was an important social division in Venda society between commoners (*Vhasiwana*) and the children of chiefs and their descendants (*Vhakololo*). Socially and culturally, the Venda chiefs have been a protective people, many of whom still practice polygamy; they are trying to protect their chieftainship from falling into the hands of commoners. Venda villages, particularly those inhabited by chiefs or headmen, were built on hillsides or hilltops for defensive reasons.

'*Hu ambuwa vhunanga vhukololo a vhuambuwi*' is a Venda proverb that means 'Away from home, high birth does not count. Put differently, the medicine man who crosses a river into foreign territory takes his craft with him, but royal rank cannot be taken abroad.

Villages are built around the *musanda*, or royal residence. Adjacent to the *musanda* is the public meeting place (*khoro*) where visitors are met, and court meetings, dances, and other social events are held. Houses are traditionally wattle and daub constructions with thatched roofs. Several houses are linked together with mud-brick walls and arranged around an open central courtyard with a central fireplace, where the family sits in good weather. Traditionally, homesteads were partitioned off by hedgerows, wooden palisade fences, or stone walls. Most of the older settlements are reminiscent of miniature Great Zimbabwe ruins, with their walls, stone steps, passageways and terraces.

Modern building materials have replaced traditional ones in many instances. Customary homesteads are being replaced by houses of Western design, and settlement layout favours a grid system instead of the haphazard arrangement of the

past. Most villages have access to electricity, piped water, and telephonic communication.

2.4. Language

The language spoken in Venda is called Tshivenda or Luvenda. The majority of Venda speakers live in South Africa, where 'Venda' is an official government language, but there are also speakers of the language in Zimbabwe. The language is unique in South Africa, due to the fact that it cannot be grouped with either Nguni or Sotho languages. It is entirely on its own in terms of etymology, but it is nearest to Shona (Karanga), one of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe. This is supported by Stayt (1931: 9):

The phonesis and phonology of Tshivenda finds its nearest equivalent in the Karanga group, and it is quite sharply distinguished from the Sotho and the Tsonga group in this regard though from the former far more than the latter.

To those who are unfamiliar with Tshivenda, the language appears to be difficult and fast spoken, with the result that it becomes difficult to understand. For the Shona (Karanga) speaking people, however, it does not pose much difficulty. Benso (1979: 24) reinforced this argument as follows:

Their language (Luvenda) for example, is related to that of the tribe of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia finding its closest equivalent in the Kalanga group, where it is sharply distinguished from the language for Sotho and Shangaan – Tsonga.

The language owes its early translation of the Bible to the German missionary, Rev. Schwellnus, of the Berlin Missionary Society. Smith (1970: 225) supports this statement when he says:

By the end of 1923 Schwellnus put the complete New Testament text at the disposal of the society, by which it was published in 1925. The New

Testament in the Vhavenda language was received with gratitude and joy by the Vhavenda of the Northern Transvaal.

This infers that the Berlin Missionary Society brought not only bring the Gospel, but also literature in the Vhavenda language. Khorombi (1996: 42) states: 'The histories of the church and schools in Venda are all so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them; since all this work had been introduced by missionaries'.

2.5. Traditional worldview

It is impossible to understand the impact of mission work on the Vhavenda people without having at least some understanding of the religious beliefs of the people to whom the Gospel was brought. Their beliefs not only influenced their response to the preaching of Christianity, but are still active; and, in some cases, increasing in strength. The Vhavenda people perceive the world in more or less the same way as other blacks in southern Africa.

The Vhavenda, like other indigenous people south of the Sahara, have a strong belief in the spiritworld. As a result, the spirit world remains a focal point of their religious beliefs. The spirits are regarded as those celestial beings that remain in transition, between the living and the living dead.

The belief in the spirit world is an integral part of the Vhavenda worldview. They believe in the world of the dead, who, as spirits, are in constant contact with the living. There are certain locations all over the Venda area that are known to be inhabited by the spirits. In actual fact, every chief has had a forest (*zwitakani*) or mountains in which the spirits of his ancestors are supposed to have abided. Accordingly, many of these places are the actual burial places of the chiefs.

The Vhavenda people believe in ancestral spirits known as *midzimu* in the plural and *Mudzimu* in the singular. The ancestor cult remains central to their belief, so that the relationship with their living dead has much more meaning than their relationship with *Nwali* (West 1976: 91).

When we speak of Venda traditional religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Vendas. It is the religion that resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Venda people, and which is being practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of the Venda people, including individuals who claim to be Christian.

At this point, it is necessary to explain the word 'traditional'. This word means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practised by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated, not as a thing of the past, but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. This is not a 'fossil' religion, or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practised by living men and women.

As a result of modern changes, the traditional religion cannot remain intact, but it is by no means extinct. The declared adherents of the indigenous religion are very conservative, resisting the influence of modernism heralded by the colonial era, including the introduction of Christianity, Western education, Islam and improved medical facilities. They cherish their tradition; they worship with sincerity because their worship is quite meaningful to them; they hold tenaciously to their covenant that binds them together.

This is a religion that is based mainly on oral transmission. It is not written on paper but in people's hearts and minds, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions. It has no founders or reformers like Gautama the Buddha, Asoka, Christ, or Muhammad. It is not the religion of one hero. However, the adherents are loyal worshippers.

It is essential to define religion from a broader spectrum and universal point of view, and then relate it to the Venda spirituality. From a sociological point of view, Bate (2000: 8) recognised that 'it is the society, not the individual, which distinguishes between sacred and profane things'. According to the definition by Bate, religion does not stem from the individual, but from the society as a group of individuals.

Taylor sees it with an anthropological eye when he defines religion as 'belief in spiritual beings' (Bate 2000: 245). According to all these definitions, religion becomes a binding force amongst individuals; it brings such individuals to a state of cohesion.

From an African point of view: 'To Africans, the spiritual world is so real and nearer, its forces intertwining and inspiring the visible world; that whether pagan or Christian, man has to reckon with things invisible to normal insight' (Parrinder 1962: 10). Parrinder further maintains that there is a similarity in all religions, regardless of race. It is a clear indication that religion begins in knowledge, leads in practice, and finally ends up in the worship of God.

The Vhavenda, like any African society, believe in a Supreme Being. However, it should be noted that this belief emanates from family and tribal gods. This belief is clearly indicated by the manner in which the Vhavenda offer sacrifices to their departed ancestors.

The Venda belief system and Venda culture are built on a vibrant mythical belief system, which is reflected in their artistic style. Water is an important theme for the Venda, and there are many sacred sites within their region where the Venda conjure up their ancestral spirits. They believe 'zwidudwane' or water spirits live at the bottom of waterfalls. These beings are only half visible, have only one eye, one leg, and one arm. One half of man can be seen in this world and the other half in the spiritworld. The Venda would take offerings of food to them, because 'zwidudwane' cannot grow things underwater.

One of the most sacred sites for the Venda is Lake Fundudzi, which was formed by a huge landslide in the Zoutpansberg mountain range. Suspicion surrounds the lake, which is fed by the Mutale River, yet does not appear to have an outlet. It is said that you can sometimes hear the *tshikona* sing, although no one appears to be there.

In terms of important characteristics of the Venda worldview, Mashau (2004: 72) indicates that their perception is comprehensive: they view life in totality. This is also based on their view of the cosmos. The cosmos is seen as a hierarchy of power,

each with its own place in the totality, and influencing one another mutually. Van Rooy (1971: 85) confirms this when he indicates that 'God is seen as an inherent part of the totality of power, occupying the top position'. According to the traditional worldview, the lesser powers in the hierarchy, including men, do not have direct access to God.

The ideas of 'limited cosmic good', priority of human relations, and influence of the 'spirits and witchcraft' in the hierarchy play a significant role. Salvation, blessedness and peace depend on whether man is integrated in this totality, and then in his right place (Mashau 2004: 72). The Vhavenda people believe that no misfortune just happens by itself without a cause. They express it by saying: '*A huna tshi no da nga tshothe*'. Consequently, they believe that certain misfortunes are caused by witchcraft. Their life is more oriented to the past, because it connects them with their roots (the ancestors), the origin of their traditions.

There are numerous taboos within the Venda worldview. For example, it is taboo to cry when a person (who is a member of your family) is sick: '*zwi a i la u lila muthu a tshi kho tshila*', which implies that he or she might die.

2.5.1. Venda concept of man

Within the traditional worldview, man is viewed in terms of the whole of his community. This explains why priority is given to communalism or interpersonal relations within the culture of the Vhavenda people. Van Rooy (1978: 9) provides the following proverbs that elucidate the fact that the individual Venda looks at personal value as an integrated part of totality:

- *Muthu ndi muthu nga vhanwe* (a person is a person through other persons).
- *Muthu u bebelwa munwe* (a person is born for the other).
- *A u tswukisi ndila u wothe* (you cannot create a footpath on your own).
- *Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu* (one finger cannot take samp from the pot).

As a result of communalism within the traditional Venda worldview, the ethical codes of an individual are shaped by his or her willingness to concede individual rights for the sake of those of an integrated whole. Characteristics that are valued in Venda culture are friendliness, respect for seniors, willingness to compromise, adaptability, the willingness to share what one has with others, and everything that contributes to smooth interpersonal relations and to avoiding friction between individuals.

2.6. Belief in the Supreme Being

The Vhavenda believed in God, whom they have historically called Nwali, and in the whole area God was commonly known by this name. As a result, the nation could not be regarded as heathen, for it had a religion in which its faith was basically founded. Ranger (1974: 14) quoting Rennie confirms: 'The first Tavhatsindi Chief in Venda is said in oral tradition to have spoken with Nwali'.

Mbiti (1969: 29) indicates that the African conception of God has been as that of a Supreme Being. This is the most minimal and fundamental definition of God, found in all African societies. God is no stranger to African people, and in traditional life, there are no atheists. This idea is summarised in an Ashanti proverb: 'No one shows a child the Supreme Being'. This means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct, and even children know this.

Everything begins with God. The African worldview that explains how everything in the universe came to be in existence makes this belief quite clear. Opoku (1993: 71) indicates that, while everything in the universe had a clear beginning, God has no beginning, and hence the Akan name, '*Tetekwaframo*', meaning 'He who is there now as from ancient times'; this makes it clear that, in African tradition, God has always been in existence and continues to be.

A Pygmy hymn quoted by Mbiti (1969: 34) expresses the same faith:

In the beginning was God,
Today is God,
Tomorrow will be God.

Who can make the image of God?

He has no body,

He is as a world that comes out of your mouth.

That world! It is no more

It is past, and still it lives!

So is God.

African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, in short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories, and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in African traditional societies.

Tempels (1959: 20) indicates that the African people have propagated the purest form of the concept of God, the Supreme Being, and creator of the universe.

Tutu (1978: 366) asserts that the African tradition has a genuine knowledge of God:

It is reassuring to know that one has had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communication with the deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others.

The Vhavenda, like any other African people south of the Sahara, led a religious life long before the missionaries came. Traditional religion imbued their faith in such a way that their daily lives were controlled by religious practices and customs. It is therefore maintained that the Vhavenda, as is the case for all South African tribes, believed in the existence of a Supreme Being.

According to oral tradition, during their movement southwards, the Singo were protected by a drum with magical powers. This drum was known as the *Ngoma-Lungundu*, the drum of Mwari/Nwali. It was said to have been given to the breakaway chief by his father/ancestor, the God/King Mwari. The chief, and through him his people, were greatly feared because of the power of the drum. Provided that

it was continually beaten by the chief during times of threat, it would both protect the people against attack and allow them to defeat their enemies.

The drum struck such fear into the souls of their enemies that they either fled in terror or fell to the ground in a swoon, as in death. At times, the power of the drum was so great that it appeared to play itself. This was because the invisible Mwari himself was playing it (Kirkaldy 2005: 18).

The Vhavenda name for God is Nwali. The manifestation of Nwali in the minds of the Vhavenda made an indelible mark in their hearts. They genuinely believed that Nwali was the only universal God. Evidence for this strong belief is reinforced by the fact that they believed in Nwali even before their migration to the northern Transvaal.

Information can also be drawn from comparing the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the Mashona, who are domiciled in Zimbabwe, and the Vhavenda. They share the same name for their Supreme Being. In Shona the name for God is 'Mwari'; the Mwari referred to here is the *Mwari weMatonjeni* and not *Mwari weDenga*. *Mwari weMatonjeni* has historical links with the Venda people. Accordingly, there are links to and continuation in terms of the past, because even before they migrated to the southern parts of Rhodesia and northern Transvaal, the Venda have been closely associated with the Mbire tribe and regularly sent delegations to the *Matonjeni* shrines (Daneel 1970a: 44).

The Venda equivalent of the name *Matonjeni* was *Matongoni*. Peura, the keeper at *Matongoni* shrines, who was a Muvenda, remarked that the Vhavenda people only run to the shrines when a severe drought has convinced them that Mwari is angry (Daneel 1970a: 53, cf. Van Rooy 1978: 6).

Although the two names are separated by the Limpopo River (Vhembe), which forms a boundary between the Limpopo Province and Zimbabwe, this river was regarded as an artificial colonial boundary, which failed to stop their regular movements to and fro. Their historical and cultural links were not deterred, and consequently they still shared the same Supreme Being.

Historically, the name Mwari for God, as referred to by the Mashona, dates back to time immemorial. It is also associated with religious observances in western Zimbabwe. Ranger (1974: 6) indicates that historical linguistics suggests two origins for the word 'Mwari'. Gutrie shows that the word, or its variants, has pre-Bantu usage, and dates back some 4000 years.

Mwari was ultimately recognised in the state religious system in Zimbabwe: Ranger states that the 'Rozwi confederacy regarded the Mwari cult as a sort of state religious system, which was close to the Mambo rulers' (Ranger 1974: 6). The point of departure, therefore, is that the name Nwali/Mwari dates back to time immemorial. This historical fact implies that the Vhavenda did not regard Nwali or his cult as merely a relic of some far-fetched religion; to them he was a Supreme Being.

He was also called Raluvhimba. To them, the two names referred to the same God, whose attributes were one and the same. Van Rooy (1971: 22) strongly supports this statement when he asserts:

The Venda refers to God as either Raluvhimba or Mwari ...But at present all Vendas when asked about it; state that Raluvhimba and Nwali is one and the same thing.

According to Schapera and Eiselen (1959: 265), the Venda people believe in a supreme or high God called Raluvhimba (Nwali). The name is composed of the prefix 'Ra', which is honorific and perhaps connected with the idea of the 'Father' 'Luvhimba' is an eagle, the bird that soars aloft. It symbolises the great power that travels through the cosmos, using the heavenly phenomena as instruments.

Raluvhimba is connected with the beginning of the world and is supposed to live somewhere in the heavens and to be connected with all astronomical and physical phenomena. A shooting star is Raluvhimba travelling; his voice is heard in the thunder, comets, lightning, meteors, earthquakes, prolonged drought, floods, pests, and epidemics; in fact, all the natural phenomena affecting the people as a whole are revelations of the great God.

In thunderstorms he appears as a great fire near the chief's kraal, whence he booms his desires to the chief in a voice of thunder; this fire always disappears before any person can reach it. At these visitations the chief enters the hut and, addressing Raluvhimba as *Makhulu* (Grandfather), converses with him, the voice of God replying from the thatch of the hut or from a tree nearby. Raluvhimba then passes on in a further clap of thunder.

Occasionally he is angry with the chief and takes revenge on the people by sending them a drought or a flood, or possibly by opening an enormous cage in the heavens and letting loose a swarm of locusts on the land (Stayt 1931: 236).

According to the Vhavenda legends, Nwali manifested himself by appearing from time to time as a great flame on a platform of rock above a certain cave. With the flame came a sound as of clanking irons, on hearing this, the people shouted with joy and their cries were spread throughout the country. The chief mounted to the platform where he called upon Raluvhimba, thanked him for revealing himself, and prayed on behalf of his people for rain, felicity and peace. This analogy of Nwali as grandfather is further endorsed by Munyai (2007: 28) when he quotes the Vhavenda proverb: '*Makhulu ndi tshiulu ri tamba ri tshi gonya*' (Grandfather is an anthill, we climb on it in play).

The Vhavenda had such a strong belief in Nwali that they believed he was the only creator of mankind and the earth. This is the reason why, whenever they had to worship or give glory to Nwali as the Supreme Being, they were often inclined to refer to him as '*Musika vhathu*' (Creator of mankind), which is ample proof that the universe was created out of nothing, or that Nwali has the ability to bring to being something that did not exist previously.

The general belief of the Vhavenda that the earth was created out of nothing does not coincide with Junod's viewpoint, for he concludes that the natives did not understand the concept of creation out of nothing. He asserted that 'they do not understand creation, as the idea of 'creation *ex nihilo*' is not conveyed by the native term, neither does it clearly exist in the Bantu mind...Natives do not bother much about creation' (Junod 1927: 209).

However, Van Rooy (1971: 157) argues that the Vhavenda did understand the word 'creator' and the concept of creation out of nothing, for both occur frequently in the Venda vocabulary: 'There is however a more suitable term *Musiki* from the verb *U sika*...The word *Musiki* (creator) is used in that form in the accepted version of the Apostle creed'. The argument proposed by Van Rooy confirms the fact that Africans did have knowledge of creation out of nothing.

Van Rooy (1976: 6) indicates that the name Nwali mentioned in legend was originally a deified chief. Stayt (1960: 233) disagrees, stating that the Chishona name, Nwari, means begetter or bearer; in our terminology, the creator. This God is not a deified spirit of some remote ancestor. Khorommbi (1996: 28) points out that in their prayers to Him, the Vhavenda say:

Inwi Vho-Makhulu washu...

Na iwe Gole musika vhathu.

(You our ancestor...

Even you, the Creator of humankind).

In some of the songs sung by the youth, Nwali is seen as the creator, for example, *Shango la Venda Nwali o li sikaho vhone madembe e a a sia* (The country of Venda which was created by Nwali sees all the wonders). This in itself is a clear indication that unofficially, in the hearts of the Vhavenda, the name Nwali, the name of the creator God, is still deeply engraved.

There is no tribe anywhere in Africa that is devoid of religion. People may not give adoration to God, but when they are in danger or face possible execution, they often express their fear and anxiety in the following terms: 'Help me God', or 'Save my soul'. This concept is unique to the human race, and distinguishes humanity from all other creatures.

It is unthinkable to consider the conclusion reached by Casalis, who worked amongst the Basotho for many years. His assertion is that the indigenous people never knew anything about God (Casalis 1896: 239-240):

All the natives, whom we have questioned on the subject, have assured us that it never entered their heads that the word earth and sky might be the work of an invisible being!

It is difficult to give credence to such arguments as those advanced by Casalis, for he drew conclusions on the basis of the Basotho's belief, without conducting thorough research or investigation in terms of all indigenous people.

The Vhavenda traditional religion has posited the Supreme Being as Nwali, the creator who presides over the collective community, and who loves and cares for his creation. The Vhavenda believe in the universal Supreme Being who controls the whole cosmos. This assertion coincides with the assertion advanced by Idowu (1973: 12) when he states:

Africa recognized only one God, the Supreme, universal God. Even though she has a picture of him which are of various shades, calls him by various names and approach him in various ways, he nevertheless remains one and the same God, the creator of all.

The observation advanced by Idowu indicates that Africans have a Supreme God who is universally accepted. This idea is in line with the Vhavenda's cultural standards, for they regard Nwali as superlative, unchanging and finally, unsurpassable in his cosmic power.

The Vhavenda used to depend entirely on rain for their livelihood. Everyone survived by tilling their fields. The presence of rain also meant that there would be sufficient water for their livestock. Thus, rain was of great significance to the indigenous people, as there was no other means of making ends meet. It was customary in times of drought for the Vhavenda to turn to Nwali in their search for rain. This would be done in accordance with the normal procedures. The Vhavenda were positively emphatic that, if they paid homage to Nwali for rain, their request would be granted.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Khosi (Chief) Mphephu once sent messengers to ask for rain from Modjadji, the queen rain maker, but without success. He had to

revert back to Nwali, and send his son, Mbulaheni, to Mubvumela at Matombo hills in Zimbabwe. Nwali took vengeance on the Vhavenda and punished them with further severe droughts for consulting foreign powers (Modjadji) in their quest for rain, but eventually rain fell (Stayt 1931: 233). As in the Christian faith, Mwali proved to be a jealous god.

In support of Stayt's argument, Daneel (1973: 449) says that 'Mwari is primarily a God of fertility'. The Vhavenda, like their counterparts the Mashona, believed strongly that Mwali was the provider of rain, and was glorified by the fertility of the land. Nwali's attribute of rain making was a symbol of religious authority and power. This threatened other deities. Nwari was greatly feared because of the power of the drum (Ngoma-Lungundu), and also led the destruction of political order in the Ndebele dynasty, which led Chief Mzilikazi to renounce his faith in Amadlozi and yield to the power of Nwali in his search for rain. Nwali's power pervaded deeply into the Ndebele's faith, with the result that their reliance on their ancestors was obscured by Nwali's powerful intervention.

According to the Vhavenda accepted standards, it would not be proper for an individual to dare approach Nwali in order to request for rain. Such an attempt would have been regarded as an insult to the entire nation. The request for rain is made at national level, where both the community and the traditional leaders make a joint request. On making a request, it is always the duty of the traditional leaders to approach the priests (*Tshifhe*), who are vested with the skills needed for approaching Nwali (Schapera & Eiselen 1959: 265). This in itself is a clear indication that both family and clan ancestors have no power to control or cause the clouds to be saturated with rain.

The Vhavenda believed that rain comes from Nwali who is the begetter of everything. Nwali was also vested with the power of security, for protecting his children from the enemies and from cosmic disasters, such as storms and the outbreak of epidemics. When the Mashona were at war with the Ndebele, the former resorted to consulting Nwali for assistance, and since this coincided with the arrival of whites in Zimbabwe, it was ultimately concluded that Nwali was a great liberator

for rescuing the Mashona from the oppression being inflicted on them by the Ndebele (Ranger 1974: 144).

According to the Vhavenda understanding, Nwali is referred to as God of the Sky (*Mudzimu wa Makoleni*), unlike the family ancestors who are believed to be underground (*Vhafhasi*). Nwali's arrival was preceded by the sudden cracking of thunder up to the sky. The people would look up in the sky while the Vhavenda women would be ululating with joy, welcoming the arrival of Nwali. In 1917, a meteor, which burst during daytime, made such a thunderous noise along the Zoutpansberg mountain range that it prompted the Vhavenda to associate the incident with the arrival of Nwali. Junod (Junod 1921: 209-210) reinforces this statement when he observes:

This story of a spontaneous and collective act of adoration of a Bantu tribe towards its God is most curious, and I wonder if such a demonstration has ever taken place amongst Tsonga or Sotho.

The supreme deity in Vendaland was Raluvhimba, the Father of Holiness or the Holy Father. He was 'the active, all-creating and maintaining god through whom the trees, shrubs, and everything were created and are maintained even now'. He was also known as *Muhali-muhulu* (in other words, the great God). His praise-names were '*Muhali-muhulu, phanda ha ndou, Mukokoto o nga lutombo*'; in other words, 'Bigger, stronger, and mightier than any elephant, indestructible like a rock' (Kirkaldy 2002: 317).

In informal discussions (2003) the late Rev. Martin Moremi (Department of Religious studies, UNIVEN) emphasised that *Muhali* is the name of respect given to a *Khosi*; *Muhulu* means 'great one'. So '*Muhali-muhulu*' means 'great chief'. The existence of Raluvhimba demonstrates the existence of a local belief in a unitary Supreme Being.

Mbiti (1975: 89) maintains that, in some countries, such as Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, and Nigeria, the name of God is often made part of the child's name. This shows how much people associate God with the continuation of life and the birth of children. Thus, for example, we have names like *Byakatonda*, which

means 'for or by the creator' (*Bya+Katonda* – the second word is one of the names for God in Uganda); *Byaruhanga*, which means 'things of or for God' (*Bya+Ruhabga*, the latter being a name for God in Uganda); *Bizimana*, which means 'God knows everything' (*Bizi+Imana*, the last being a name for God in Rwanda and Burundi). Finally, in Nigeria, one finds Yoruba names such as *Olugbenga* (God has uplifted me), *Oluwateniola* (God has laid the mat of wealth), *Temiloluwa* (The Lord is mine) and *Oluwakemi* (God pampers me).

This custom has continued even under Christian influence, and many new religious names are being added, which make use of Christian ideas without necessarily being borrowed foreign names. Thus, for example, we have names like *Tukacungurwaruhanga*, meaning 'we were saved by God' (*Ruhanga* being the name for God in parts of Uganda); *Asimwe*, meaning 'let him (God) be thanked', and so on (Mbiti 1975: 89).

African Christians and Muslims have adopted the custom of using religious names derived from their faiths and sacred books. In the Islamic faith we have names like Mohammed, after the prophet and founder of Islam. In Christianity we have names like Mary, who was the mother of Jesus. We have names like Peter, John, Matthew, James, and so forth, who were the disciples of Jesus. Such naming traditions are following the worldwide custom of using religious names, which is practised by Christians, Muslims and African traditionalists alike. This simply shows how a language becomes part and parcel of a culture, through which Gospel values are expressed.

2.6.1. Nwali shrines

Nwali was accustomed to manifest himself in a unique way and in selected shrines, which could be in groves, caves, or under huge rocks in the different vicinities around Venda. The best known shrine is at Mount Makonde, which is situated in eastern Thohoyandou. The actual location of these Nwali shrines has become a controversial issue amongst researchers. Stayt (1931: 231) mentions one such alleged shrine as being 'a cave at Luvhimbi where Raluvhimba went to manifest himself'. Bhebe, as quoted by Schoffeleers and Mwanza, is in support of Stayt,

purporting: 'Luvhimbi is located in Venda land; it has now ceased to exist'. Schoffeleers and Mwanza (1972) argue that Nwali used to visit Ha-Luvhimba. These assertions might have emanated from the other name for Nwali, Raluvhimba. It must be contended, however, that Nwali never visited Ha-Luvhimba, but rather Mount Makonde, which is 7km west of Ha-Luvhimba (Ralushai 1980: 11).

The Nwali cult at Makonde is not situated far from the Evangelical Lutheran mission station. There are no records in the annals of Mount Makonde history of an attempt made by Lutheran missionaries to search for the truth in this matter. Had such an attempt been made, it would have contributed to a better understanding of the Vhavenda belief in the *Musiki* (Creator).

The Nwali cult at Makonde was established by the Mbedzi group, which is correctly believed to have migrated, with its services of priesthood, from the Matopo hills in Zimbabwe. This argument is asserted by Rennie, as quoted by Ranger, when he writes: 'This early group was responsible for the Venda cult Raluvhimba, the local equivalent of the Nwali cult' (Ranger 1974: 13).

Research has revealed that some of the Nwali sacrificial cults in Zimbabwe were manned by the Vhavenda, who were assisted by their cultural background, to render those services expected by a priest (*Tshifhe*). According to the Vhavenda traditional standards, a priest is a person officiating in sacrificial rites, either for Nwali or for ancestors. 'Peura, the keeper at Matonjeni shrines, who was a Muvenda, remarked that the Vhavenda people only run to the shrines when a severe drought was convinced them that Mwari is angry' (Daneel 1970: 53, cf. Van Rooy 1978: 6). Cobbing goes on to say: 'The first Njelele priests, Jenie and Pinga, were of the Mbedzi Venda. There is significant evidence connecting the Matapo cult with Venda land' (Cobbing 1977: 72-73).

It is worth noting that the Vhavenda, since time immemorial, had an original name and not a borrowed or coined name for a priest. The original name is *Tshifhe*, whereas the other African tribes in South Africa refer to priest as *Moprsta*, from Sotho, and *Umpriste*, from Nguni.

At Mount Makonde, a man by the name of Magwabeni was the last priest (*Tshife*) to transmit messages from Nwali to Chief Ravhura, and ultimately to the Vhavenda as a people. The official who approached Nwali was accorded great respect and was referred to as priest, as he was not connected to family gods but to Nwali himself, who was in charge of the whole cosmos.

There were other sites or cults of Nwali, which he used to visit, such as Mudzivhadi, Madindini a Nwali, and Donwa. All these were halfway stations, since the ultimate destination was Makonde. By cultural observance, the traditional leaders, in whose areas these cults were situated, and who were of the Singo clan, were not allowed to enter. Messages destined for their cults were transmitted through the priest of the Ngona clan, as the Ngona were the first immigrants to settle in Venda.

Ralushai (1980: 1) agrees, stating that 'this is not surprising for Donwa being historically a Ngona area, it was like other known Ngona sites where senior Singo Chiefs could not dare enter'. It was taboo for a Singo chief to enter a shrine situated in a Ngona area, and this practice was upheld for many years until the inception of the Gospel, after which there was free movement. The traditional leaders were not satisfied when their cult was not treated with the respect it deserved.

2.7. Ancestor veneration

It is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the meaning of the word 'ancestor'. The Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines the word ancestor as 'anyone of those people from whom one is descended, one more remote than a grandparent'. By implication, ancestors are people who form part of the genealogy of the family, or the family's predecessors.

Mbiti (1969: 83) describes the ancestors as the departed of up to five generations prior. They are in a different category from that of ordinary spirits. They are still within the *sasa* period; in other words, they are expressed as existing in the present time, the recent past and the near future. The recently departed whose time overlapped with people still here are the *sasa*, or the living dead. They are not wholly dead, for they live on in the memories of those who have survived them. They are in a state of

personal immortality: their process of dying is not yet complete. They are the closest links that humans have with the spirit world.

Some of the things said about the spirits apply also to the living dead: the living dead are bilingual, they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. They are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them.

The two groups are bound together by their common *sasa*; that of the living dead is, however, fast disappearing into the *zamani*. When the last person knowing an ancestor dies, that ancestor leaves the *sasa* for the *zamani*, i.e. the dead. As generalised ancestors, the *zamani* are not forgotten but revered. The living dead are still people, and have not yet become 'things'. They return to their human families from time to time, and share meals with them, however symbolically.

Rev Albert Anane from Ghana, a friend and colleague met at the United Nations Missions in Dafur Sudan (personal interview, 21/12/2015) indicates that *sasa* refers to the events that have just taking place now; *zamani* time overlaps *sasa* time to some extent in the present, but also goes back very far into the past time. It includes the great and famous heroes of the past performing their exploits.

The IMBISA Standing Committee (1996) attempted a short description of an ancestor in African Traditional Religion. It wrote that it is not possible to speak of traditional religion without touching on the subject of ancestors, because they are nowhere and yet everywhere, it is difficult to speak of them comprehensively.

However, an ancestor is:

- A person who died a good death after having faithfully practised and transmitted to his descendants the laws left to him by his ancestors.
- A person who contributed to the continuation of the line by leaving many descendants.

- A person who was a peacemaker, a link that fostered communion between the living and the dead, through sacrifice and prayer.
- A person who is the first-born is a candidate '*par excellence*' to become an ancestor because he is able to maintain the chain of the generation in a long genealogy. The right of the first born is thus an inalienable right.

Ephirim-Donkor (19997: 127) explains an ancestor this way:

To be an ancestor the deceased must first have been an elder, and upon his or her demise become one of the eternal beings. The ancestors are thus a distinct group of eternal saints apart from other spiritual personalities who are also endowed with immortality but are not ancestors.

According to the Vhavenda cultural standards, the ancestors are those people who died at a mature age or as parents. The unmarried and the infants that died could not be accorded the status of ancestry after death, as they had no offspring to minister to.

The ancestors are not on the same level as Nwali, or the Supreme Being, because the ancestors were people who lived, and after death, they were promoted, as assumed by the living, to a position of ancestry.

2.7.1. The functions of the living dead (the ancestors)

Significant dimension in the role played by the ancestors is how they are believed to transmit and safeguard life. The ancestors are models for the living.

The words of Max Seckler, cited in Bujo (1992: 30) are appropriate:

.... Time and history are real, irreversible and unrepeatable. They can be posed the question of the meaning of life. But there is more to it than simply imitating the behaviour of the ancestors. Traditional actions and formulas really bring strength to the living, enabling them to live better in the future.

The recalling of 'the past', effects what it signifies. Health, wealth and the enjoyment of life, may be rooted in the past, but it is the past that has meaning for the present and the future. The present is shaped by the past. Indeed, the final consummation, when all come to their perfection, is already present (Shabangu 2004: 131).

In Venda the word 'ancestor' (*vhadzimu*) refers to the grand parents or parents who have died. *Midzimu*, *ndi musi muthu a tshi tea u thwasa vhunanga*, (it is when a person has a calling to become a traditional healer, they say, *u na midzimu*), after you become a traditional healer, you use *zwidzimu* (tools). In practice, the Vhavenda regard the ancestors as members of the family who died at a mature age that is any person who has begotten children, full grown fathers and mothers. This notion is based on the belief that death is not a total destruction of life, but an entire transcendence of a person.

The Vhavenda regard the ancestors as the livingdead, and this belief creates a close relationship between the dead and the living, which results in personal contact. Setiloane (1986: 17) remarks:

It is my sincere conviction that the question of the ancestors and the livingdead (Badimo), Iminyanga or Amadlozi has been wrongly approached right from the beginning.

The people who first brought it to the notice of the world outside were the missionaries who were definitely biased because they had an alternative agenda and programme of belief to promote. Besides, they came out of a totally different background and a particular experience of spirituality which they came to be advocates of.

According to Setiloane, the pioneers in the field of missionary work lacked any background knowledge of African religion and its meaning. This led to the misunderstanding of words, with the result that they lost their original meaning and context. According to Vhavenda tradition, the ancestor is a departed member of the family who still has close ties with the living.

Steyn (1931: 241) indicates that:

The relationship between an individual and his ancestors is by its very nature essentially a family affair and the spirits are only concerned with the members of their own families. But in the event of any national thanksgiving or calamity the chief ancestors, although actually propitiated by the chiefs' lineage alone, are felt to be associated with all the people.

The Vhavenda, treat the dead with the highest reverence because they have acquired a higher status and are now regarded as '*vhadzimu*' (Singular '*Mudzimu*'). Linguistically, the word '*Mudzimu*' belongs to the mu-vha class of nouns and, in most cases, refers to the personal *Mudzimu-vhadzimu*. This indicates that the ancestors are regarded as the living dead, In Tshivenda a dead man is sometimes referred to as '*munna wa vhane*' (a man who was there or who was with the living), now people have personal memories of him.

Junod (1920: 211) gives an explicit explanation of this:

If the monotheistic notion which found its expression in Raluvhimba is very vague, the ancestor worship of the Ba-Venda is much more concrete, consisting, as it does, in precise rites, the meaning of which is not difficult to detect. The gods are called '*Vhadzimu*' (singular, *Mudzimu*) evidently the same root as the Sotho '*Modimo*'. Every human being becomes a *Mudzimu* at his death

Junod as an expert in Tsonga traditional religion compares the manner of reverence accorded to the ancestors by the Vhavenda and the Tsonga respectively. He is highly impressed by the way the Vhavenda accord respects to their ancestors, pointing out that the Vhavenda are more concrete in their sacrificial rites. He concurs that the deceased are exalted into *vhadzimu* (ancestors) after death. As for the word '*Mudzimu*', the aged could already be referred to as *Mudzimu*. '*Makhulu ndi Mudzimu wanu*' (your grandparent is your god), for instance, is a common expression.

Van Rooy (1970: 139) agrees. He writes that 'even an old person can be referred to as Mudzimu if he is older than anybody else in the vicinity'. This in itself is an indication that the aged were highly respected.

According to Vhavenda culture the aged were also given the status of ancestor. Van Warmelo (1940: 53) even went further, saying: '*Domba ndi Mudzimu*' (Domba is the python dance which is an initiation ritual for girls). Van Warmelo probably meant that the Domba is sacred, for it was usually performed at night and in the early mornings.

The question which now arises is when a person actually becomes an ancestor. Only those who die at a mature age become ancestors. An infant or unmarried person cannot achieve the status of ancestry, as s/he has no offspring to minister to. As a result, there will, in this case, be no interaction between the dead and the living.

A dead father or grandfather becomes a home ancestor, because the circle revolves around family bonds. The tribal ancestors are those who form the greater part of the dominant lineage, which is linked with the political territory wherein the chief is the traditional leader. Wessman (1908: 82) illustrates this point when he indicates that 'there are provincial gods, village gods and sometimes even house gods. In the immediate neighbourhood of the larger kraals of the chiefs, there is a so-called sacred forest where the gods dwell and are not forgotten on special festival occasions'.

Hence, Mudzimu could be associated with both familial and tribal ancestors. It is worth mentioning that the Vhavenda do not regard Nwali as the ancestral spirit assigned or associated with one family or tribe; rather, Nwali is regarded as the universal and supreme creator, and the midzimu are guardians of tribal morality. The ancestors are not really worshipped in the true sense of the word, although they are venerated. The living descendants pay respect to their departed ones, due to the fact that they are now in a position of high office in the world yonder. Therefore, ancestors are representatives of Nwali and act as mediators between them and their living relatives.

Mbiti (1975: 62) clarifies this intermediary function when he says that people feel themselves to be very small in the sight of God. In approaching him they sometimes need the help of someone else, just as in social life it is often the custom to approach someone of high status through someone else. For this reason, some African peoples make use of helpers when approaching God, although they also approach him directly.

Procreation is another function that ancestors are believed to provide to living relatives. Mbiti (1969: 26) maintains that this is related to the concept of personal immortality, which explains the religious significance of marriage in African societies. Unless a person has close relatives to remember him or her when s/he has physically died, then s/he is nobody and simply vanishes out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished. Therefore, it is a duty, religious and ontological, for everyone to get married.

If a man has no children or has only daughters, he will find another wife so that through her, sons may be born, who will survive him and ensure (along with the other livingdead of the family) his personal immortality. Procreation is an absolute way of insuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality. Ancestors ensure such a function and that is why, according to Dyrness (1990: 35) in Sierra Leone, a family would visit a cemetery to tell the ancestors about an impending marriage: Is everything in order? Are the prospects propitious? They pour drink on the ground and scatter cola nuts. If the cola nuts land in a proper way, all will go well.

Daneel (1970: 147-152) maintains that virtually all Shona believe that 'the family spirits protect the family' (*midzimu ya pamusha inorinda musha*). While this protection becomes visible in the attainment of success in all aspects of life, the basic concept here is that the ancestral spirits keep guard at the doors of the family homes during the night. Whenever the evil powers, sorcerers and witches are at their most active and could potentially create a menace, the guardian spirits stand at the door (*kumirapamukova*) to avert the danger. In all such activities God is not abandoned, but researchers need to delve deeper into the context to understand that God is implied. No matter what seems to be taking place on the surface, the ultimate protector of life is God.

In contrast with these positive functions, one must also acknowledge the destructive power of the ancestors. Daneel (1970: 48) indicates that if they are neglected, they can kill (*uraya*), cause grief (*kurwadza*) or inflict trouble (*kunetsa*). Sickness, death and accidents are thus frequently connected with the displeasure of the ancestors. They do not destroy their relatives by direct mortal blows, but they withhold their protective function and expose the family or family member to the power of evil. The opposite pole of *kumirapamukova* is therefore *kuzarura mukova* (to open the door), thus giving the family enemies a free hand. To obtain some measure of security in this existence, regaining the guardian functions of the ancestors is of the utmost importance.

Should one encounter misfortune in his or her life, the Vhavenda people will basically say '*midzimu i a hana*,' meaning that 'the ancestors are not in agreement or are refusing' (Stayt 1931: 230). The Vhavenda people have never doubted the existence of the spirits, who are nearby and interested in the daily activities of their descendants. As with most other Africans, the Vhavenda live in continuous contact with their ancestors. Messages from the ancestors are received through dreams, the causing of sickness, or the periodical revelation of their wishes through a recognised medium. The living are told what is expected of them from the 'other' world.

In their turn, the living relatives address their ancestors in a number of symbolic ways. They may, for example, 'give' the ancestors some food during meals, or engage in private talk with an object – frequently a beer pot or blanket – that represents the ancestors being addressed. In the wider ritual context, a recognised official of the group addresses the ancestral spirits concerned.

Sometimes the *vhadzimu* speaks a clear language during a dream. Whenever serious illness or misadventure has occurred, a traditional 'doctor' (*maine*) is consulted. The *maine*, in his turn, uses divination to discover which spirit is at work and what ritual needs to be performed to put the spirit concerned to rest.

There is a large number of more or less standardised patterns of conflict between ancestors and their kinsmen who are under duress. Infertility, for example, is often maintained to be caused by a matrilineal spirit. This spirit is laying legal claim to a

specific sacrificial animal that has not yet been made available by her in-laws. In short, this means that *mamalo* / *lobola* (cattle for the bride) have not yet been properly delivered, which is required in order for the ancestors to accept the agreement between the parties and bless them with children, hence the curse of infertility.

Lack of success is ascribed to a wandering spirit of a dead person who is dissatisfied because his or her official incorporation in the realm of the ancestors has been unnecessarily delayed by the relatives concerned. The Vhavenda perform the rites of re-integration of the dead into the community of the ancestors after a year or two. The rites are intended to ensure that the communities of the living and the dead are not disrupted. Neglect of such rites can only spell misfortune. It means that the whereabouts of the soul of the deceased is unknown.

Life in the hereafter is more or less a carbon copy of the present. Burial and funeral rites serve, among other things, to send the departed in peace to the spirit world, and to express condolences to the bereaved. Various symbolic practices occur, such as stopping normal activities for a day or more, shaving the head, wearing the colour that symbolises bereavement (black), or extinguishing the fires in the homestead. A problem usually occurs when a departed one does not receive appropriate funeral rites. The Vhavenda usually do everything in their power to bring home the corpse of a family member who might have died far away from home, in order to ensure that the deceased are buried among their own people.

Ravele reinforces this view when he asserts that 'in most cases a Muvenda who dies in an urban area has his remains brought home, and if such attempts fail a sheep is slaughtered and its head is buried to designate the grave as his or hers' (Ravele 1980: 30). The unreal grave is usually meant to appease the spirit of the dead relative, so that it will not be troublesome to the next of kin. The burial of the deceased next to relatives is not only practised by the Vhavenda tribe: it is an accepted African practice that the dead should be accorded an appropriate funeral, otherwise things may not go well. Bones of the dead are to be transferred to an appropriate place for family graves, the most important factor being the communication between the living dead and the living offspring.

This burial custom of the Vhavenda is somewhat similar to that of the Israelites, as both nations are of the opinion that family graves are of great significance. Jacob commanded his sons to bury him with his father's remains in the field of Ephron (Genesis 49: 29-30) and Joseph's bones were carried from Egypt to the Promised Land (Genesis 50: 23-25).

A craftsman by the name of Ndiliso Nedzungani (personal interview, 07/10/2014) indicated that 'the most significant part of the deceased was not the corpse in flesh form, but the bones, which must be well looked after, because in them it is believed there is everlasting life'. It is a very strong Venda belief that an ancestral spirit comes forth from the bones.

A special ceremony that the Zulus call '*ukubuyisa ekhaya*' (the bringing-back home), which is more important than the funeral, is carried out a few months after the burial. The entire family is invited to a feast, where a beast is slaughtered. The ancestors are welcomed into the midst of the people. The clothes for mourning are removed because the deceased is no longer absent, but part of the community. From this point onwards, offerings such as food and beer are put aside for them. Van Niekerk (1996: 8) explains that, because both life and death are perceived as being part of an existential cycle, those who die are in reality still present. Out of this follows the intimate interconnectedness with the ancestors, who are so central to traditional beliefs throughout Africa.

2.7.2. Are the living dead worshipped or venerated?

Africans, unless they have come to internalise the Western view of themselves, strongly resent the suggestion that they 'worship' their ancestors, or *badimo*. They argue that the European word 'worship' does not properly convey the same meaning as 'service' (*tirelo*), which they perform in relation to their ancestors. This service that is rendered is in fact similar to that which is rendered to one's parents while they are living. In Setswana, '*re direla badimo*' means 'we serve the ancestors' (i.e. fulfil all proper duties towards them, provide the ancestors with the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, etc.) In contrast, '*re rapela Modimo*', means 'we pray to Modimo' (Setiloane 1976: 18-19).

The logic of this is that the *badimo* are merely our 'deceased parents'. However, it needs to be noted that parenthood in the African conception is not limited to the physical relationship. It spells authority over another that originates beyond the two parties concerned. It is the responsibility of every individual to fulfill both family and tribal duties, and to maintain peace and stability in the family abode by enforcing discipline wherever it is needed.

The Vhavenda believe that the living and the dead are interdependent, for the one group cannot survive without the aid of the other. As a result, they are often in communication with one another, rather than being separated by the curtain of mortality. Parenthood, even while the parent is living, is an intermediary rank. It is also a channel of force, spanning the various levels of being in this life, across the homes and clans in the total community, village and tribe, as well as the unseen world of *BoModimo* (Divinity) which is strongly inclined to be identified with the underground. *Mosima* (the Abyss) is anything that appears to be endless or immeasurably deep, such as the time and place whence the first people came and to which all go (Shabangu 2004: 151).

The language and context of the terminology used is once again important. It expresses a deeper meaning that can only be captured in this particular culture. Therefore, language becomes a vehicle of thought. If the thought is not properly translated, it may lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation and subsequent 'labelling' of African religion and culture as incompatible with the Gospel message. Mbiti (1969: 26) explains the concept and understanding of ancestor veneration among Africans as follows:

The act of pouring out libation (of beer, milk or water) or giving portions of food to the livingdead, are symbols of communication, fellowship and remembrance. They are the mystical ties that bind the livingdead to their surviving relatives. Therefore, these acts are performed within the family. The oldest member of the family is the one who has the longest *sasa* period and therefore the one who has the longest memory of the departed. He performs or supervises these acts of remembrance on behalf of the entire family, addressing (when the occasion demands it) the symbolic meal to all the

departed (livingdead) of the family, even if only one or two of the departed may be mentioned by name or position (e.g. father, grandfather). There is nothing here about the so-called 'ancestor worship', even if these acts may so seem to outsiders who do not understand the situation.

Ancestors are not worshipped: only venerated (honoured, remembered). In this regard, African Traditional Religion in Venda is identical to other faiths such as Christianity. Therefore, one cannot 'Christianise' the African culture. One can, however, investigate how the Gospel message is embodied in Venda culture. Commenting on the offerings that Africans give to their ancestors, Crafford (1996: 16) argues that it is incorrect to speak of the worship of forefathers. They are not worshipped as gods; they are merely honoured as members of the community, albeit that they are now endowed with higher status and power.

Rev. Wessman (1908: 155) contends that the strong bond binding the Vhavenda and their ancestors is a state of fear and insecurity. By implication, he means that the living not only seek the protection of the ancestors for survival, but also protection *from* them. The Jewish faith forbids the belief that the souls of the dead bring protection, whereas the Vhavenda do not only expect to be protected by the dead, but also fear their influence, as they think the dead might cause them harm. The fear indicated by Wessman is coupled with respect for the livingdead.

According to the Vhavenda culture, fear of senior family members does not mean that one hates them because they might hurt one. Children have respect for their elders and the latter in turn show respect to the ancestors, and they in return show allegiance to the high god, Nwali.

To distinguish between the words 'worship' and 'veneration', consider the definitions published in the Oxford English Dictionary by A.S. Hornby (1994: 995). Worship is defined as 'reverence and respect paid to God', and veneration as 'regard with deep respect'. In other words, the word 'worship', as defined by Hornby, means reverence to the Supreme Being, whereas 'veneration' connotes the respect accorded to an older person by a younger one.

According to Idowu (1973: 186) the ancestors are not really worshipped but venerated. He adds, however, that the veneration accorded to the ancestors is conducted with the strictest reverence.

In fact, the 'dead' who are ancestors are not interpreted as being dead. They are believed to be 'alive' and therefore, they are venerated. Some Christian churches honour those who they deem to be 'saints' in their services. They invoke them in prayers. Some sodalities are named after such saints (St Mary's, St Joseph's, etc). The saints are believed to have been good examples, while they lived and walked on earth, of how we should conduct our lives in the community of faith.

Among many Africans, the most solemn oath is the one made over a grave. Statues and masks are representations of a human and not a divine symbol of the spiritual presence of the ancestors. They are not worshipped, but honoured (Shabangu 2004: 157).

The above-mentioned citations negate the idea that ancestors are worshipped. Scholars need to delve into the cultural aspects of the community and social setting that they study. Instead of condemning African traditional culture and religion, we could appreciate it and realise that it embodies the Gospel message in a unique way.

2.8. Intermediary agents

The word 'veneration' implies that respect is accorded to elders by the young ones. This point of view is further reinforced by Idowu (1973: 186), who firmly believes:

According to the Vhavenda culture, an individual has no right to approach the family ancestors without the knowledge and assistance of members of the family.

The ancestors could be approached when there is a need in the family, or a crisis, or when it has been firmly established that a married woman in the family is barren. In most cases the head of the family or aunt (*Makhadzi*), who has been trained to take charge of such matters, is endowed to take sacrificial responsibility for approaching

the ancestors. Although there are different ceremonial sacrificial offerings, the procedure remains the same. There is the sacrificial ceremony called 'the biting ceremony' (*U luma*), which, in most cases, is conducted before the first fruits and green vegetables are eaten. In Venda circles, a ceremonial sacrifice should be offered to the ancestors, who usher in the celebration of the first fruits. On this occasion the priest/priestess takes charge of the necessary procedure. The ceremony is treated in a dignified manner.

The priestess addresses the living dead as if she were speaking to living human beings. She would say, for example: 'I offer to all of you, and I deprive none amongst you. What remains on the ground belongs to me and the young ones. 'Lastly, she offers to the unknown one (Stayt 1931: 255).

To illustrate this interpretation of addressing the living dead as speaking to the human living, Nana Addo (cited in Bediako 1995: 220) describes the occasion of the 'outdooring' of a new-born baby:

Here is water, our reverend ancestor. We have invited you this morning to come and help us in outdooring your own grandson. As you know, we cannot undertake such an important customary tie without your participation. You are therefore welcome to assume your role as *Abusua Panyin* (head of family) to supervise this rite. *O Busuburu*, on behalf of our ancestors, I am calling you as the clan god to bless this family. We ask for long life and prosperity. We commit this child, about to be named, to your care. Give him long life and let him be a good man to the glory of this family, long life for all the members of the family, blessing to our ancestors.

In all fairness, the name Nwali is never mentioned in the family circle during these offerings.

The sacrificial ceremonies are regarded as being of great significance in Venda circles, in particular the shedding of blood from sacrificial animals, either goats or bullocks. The shedding of blood in terms of sacrificial offering has a long-standing history in African religion, as it has in Judaism.

During the process of sacrificial offering, the objects and the articles that belonged to the departed are also brought out as part of the process, as these are believed to represent the living dead. Men are represented by spears (*mapfumo*), while women are represented by copper rings (*malembe*). These are then called by the relevant individual names of the living dead. Copper rings were usually worn around the necks of women, as a token of remembrance of the parent ancestors. This practice is in agreement with the assertion made by Stayt (1931: 248):

All old objects belonging to the ancestors are regarded by the descendants with a certain feeling of reverence and awe, particularly the old Venda artefacts which, since the European occupation, are no longer made.

Sweet beer (*mpambo*) is poured on the ground as an act of giving to the ancestor. It was believed that the ancestors continued to exist underground, and not up in the sky (*tadulu*); whereas, according to the Gospel, God is believed to be in heaven.

Moila (1987: 76) asserts that, according to the BaPedi, 'from beneath the ground, the dead go to live in heaven (*Legodimong*), and thus they attain supernatural power'. Van Niekerk (1993: 108) has observed:

Black theologians explain that the ancestors are buried in the earth, so that people are intimately linked to their ancestors through the earth. Without that they have no roots and no identity. The cattle kraal is at the centre of the traditional North-Sotho world, because this is where the ancestors lie buried. This gives meaning to cattle dung, and the head of cattle is 'the god with the wet nose'.

It is through the various acts of 'worship' described here that African traditional culture and religion provides people with the feeling that God is close to them, and they to Him. Every cultural practice, however, needs to be taken in context, and the inculturation hermeneutic approach is suggested as appropriate.

Éla (1988: 20) reaches the following conclusion:

If the relationship with the ancestors consists of the belief that the deep communion established among the members of the family is not broken, but is maintained despite and beyond death, then nothing in this relationship is contrary to the Christian faith.

Christian faith encourages the living to remain faithful in the knowledge that the departed 'are with God'. In other words, there are many elements of the Gospel in traditional African culture and religion, just as there are such elements in the Bible. Many observers tend to condemn traditional African culture and religion due to a one-dimensional view of life and of the faith in which they have been raised (Shabangu 2004: 156). People tend to justify only their own religious view of life: their subjectivity blinds them from exploring other philosophies (Shabangu 2004: 156).

According to Venda beliefs, it is only Nwali who is supposed to be up in the sky, and not the ancestors. The concept of the living dead being underground is clearly evident during the sacrificial offering, for instance if an individual had participated in foreign customs, such as circumcision (*murundu*). It is quite common to hear old people say: *Vhafhasi vha do ri mini vha tshi vhona muthu o ralozwitunguloni* (What will those below ground say when they see such an individual who participated in foreign customs?).

The Vhavenda regard sacrificial ceremony as a great and special occasion, a day of rejoicing. It has also become an occasion during which a reunion with relatives takes place, as they come from far and wide to participate.

The sacrificial celebration of the Vhavenda could become an aspect of communal significance that takes place during the festival meal, and it is possible to develop such a meal into a religious and culinary event. It could then become an ideal setting for the Gospel to be interwoven into the local culture of the indigenous people.

2.8.1. Traditional healer

The Vhavenda regard a traditional healer, or medicine man, as a religious person whose main purpose is to find out what the needs of the spiritual ancestors are, and what is expected of the living in terms of service to their departed forebears. Their findings and conclusions reveal the beliefs of Vhavenda traditional culture. They can also find out what has angered the ancestors. Some are even regarded as diagnosticians who can prescribe medicines to cure diseases.

Mbiti (1969: 166) chooses to call them 'specialists', by virtue of their specialised office, knowledge and skill in religious matters. Other terms are used, such as sacred personages, special men, sacred men, or sacred specialists. As will be seen, there are different terms for each of the specialists, and some of these terms overlap, just as the nature and role of some specialists also overlap.

For African societies, the traditional healers are the greatest gift and the most useful source of help. Mbiti (1969: 166) indicates that these are people who suffered most at the hands of European and American writers and speakers, who so often and wrongly called them 'witch doctors' – a term which should be buried and forgotten forever. Every village in Africa has a traditional healer within reach, and he or she is a friend of the community. He or she is accessible to everybody at almost all times. He or she features prevalently at many points in individual and community life.

Nengwenda (personal interview, 09/01/2015), who is a traditional healer, explains:

The problem is the misinterpretation of what a traditional healer is. A traditional healer is not a witch; a traditional healer is pure and does well. People due to their lack of knowledge think witchdoctors and traditional healers are all the same thing and they are not.

The other distinction is that traditional healers use herbs, plants, and some animal skin in the *mushonga* (medicine), whereas witch doctors are said also to use human body parts, meaning that they are sometimes implicated in murder (ritual murder). The traditional healer believes that a persistent physical ailment is often a

manifestation of a spiritual upset, and they first need to address this; they are guided by the ancestors regarding what the physical sickness is and how best to treat it, using traditional medicine. Parrinder (1962: 103) regards the diviner as a specialist who seeks to diagnose diseases or to discover the solutions to problems, by means of inspiration or manipulations of objects through various techniques.

Traditional healing is performed by men and women who have been trained by healers. These trainees often go and stay with a traditional healer for a certain period of time. Many are trained at high altitudes, or near large rivers and lakes where big snakes can be found. These training places also determine the specific strength or powers of the traditional healer (Morekwa 2004: 33).

The ancestors can also choose a person to become a traditional healer. They choose according to the moral behaviour of an individual in the community, and sometimes the person has the gift of traditional healing from birth. In other words, they are naturally skilled in traditional healing. Other people inherit these skills from their parents and relatives who were healers. A person who is destined to become a traditional practitioner will become sick in the form of a mental disorder or chronic ailment from which the person fails to recover. The traditional practitioner shall diagnose the true cause, and later the person shall start dreaming about herbal remedies. Traditional healing is not an open field for everyone.

Mbiti (1969: 167-168) lists some of the activities that the training includes. Candidates acquire knowledge in matters pertaining to the following areas: the medicinal value of herbs, the quality and use of different herbs, leaves, roots, fruits, barks, grasses, and other various objects such as minerals, dead insects, bones, feathers, powders, and smoke from different substances. They are taught about the causes, cure and prevention of diseases and other forms of suffering such as barrenness, failure in undertakings, misfortunes, and poor crop yields, magic, witchcraft, the nature and handling of spirits and the living dead.

Nengwenda (personal interview, 09/01/2015) states that: 'Before starting medical activities, one had to be possessed by the power entrusted by the ancestors in order to have knowledge of the diseases'.

The Vhavenda are convinced that the traditional healers are close to God, from whom they receive wisdom. Any sickness caused by neglect of the ancestors is healed, or cured through rituals of reconciliation and reparation. Sickness caused by the evil ones could be snuffed out. Culprits could be identified in this manner. Stayt, in support of this view, indicates that: 'The Vhavenda attribute nearly all diseases either to the evil influence of the ancestral spirits or to witchcraft' (1931: 267). By implication, Vhavenda social welfare, religion and health are intertwined, and are inseparable, unlike in Western civilisation. The ancestors are regarded as protecting the family's welfare, including health, as perceived by the indigenous people.

According to Vhavenda culture, the traditional healer (*nanga* or *maine*) is not a seer (*mungome*). Seers are regarded as having no social status, unlike traditional healers. The seers are regarded as diviners in Venda circles, and there are very rare in Venda. They are more common amongst the Tsonga people. In most cases, their art of smelling out evil ones or the guilty party is influenced by the group that requires information. It was common practice amongst the Vhavenda to consult the seers immediately after the dead had been buried, in order to establish the cause of death, and who the responsible people were.

Mutavhatsindi (personal interview, 05/12/2014), who is a traditional healer from Hammphago, confirmed that both Christians and non-Christians do come to her for consultations, and that her home is regarded as a clinic by people who travel from far and wide to seek her help. In consulting (*u tungula*) for her patients, the traditional healer Mutavhatsindi never threw bones or dice for divination or to interpret illness, but only sprinkled snuff for the identification of illness and treatment. She also said that some of the traditional healers can tell the person's problem by looking at him or her without using anything. The dreams and visions that they receive from ancestors are important.

It is important to mention that in many cases one finds that such practitioners are using or practising all these kinds of healing. It is also clear that the differences between the various methods are minor. Most of their materials are the same, for instance, herbalists also believe in dreams and visions. Thus, one can describe

these traditional healers as an accessible and readily available health resource within the community, at no expense to the government.

Physical health is crucial for wholeness in African cultures. Health is approached in a holistic way. Africans see illness and calamity as breaking up the wholeness of life, and illness is experienced as a disturbance in the social whole. Therefore, African people are eager to know why certain things which are evil happen to them. The traditional healer ought to be able to tell why a person is sick and what kind of treatment can be given. In almost all cases, there should be somebody who is identified as responsible, and reasons are required. In other words, it is not enough to limit the treatment to the manifest symptoms of the disease. People are eager to lay blame on something or somebody.

Mutavhatsindi (2014) indicates that there are two different causes of an illness or disease. There are illnesses caused by man, and others, which are natural. The natural illness is seen as emanating from the realm of God, and the one caused by man emanates from the spiritual world, instigated by human intentions. Illnesses caused by witchcraft or sorcery are believed to be caused by evildoers.

There are people who are believed to be practising witchcraft and sorcery within the community. They are believed to possess evil spirits, which have the power to perform atrocities in the community. Mutavhatsindi concluded that people should be on their guard against illnesses caused by witchcraft. Modern medicine is believed to be very inadequate for treating an illness caused by witchcraft and sorcery.

Van Niekerk (1996: 34) cites an example of a publication by Gumede (1990), who argues that the role of African traditional healers has become more important, and that more than 80% of black patients first consult traditional healers before knocking at the doors of Western medical practitioners for help. This also confirms that many Africans still look to traditional solutions in many situations.

The term 'witchdoctor', which was commonly used by the missionaries to describe traditional healers, caused repugnance, and thus served as a barrier preventing the acceptance of the Gospel. Van Warmelo (1937: 207), a renowned ethnologist in the

Vhavenda culture, published the phrase '*Uzwifha sa nanga*' (He tells lies like a witchdoctor). This was a derogatory remark, implying that witch doctors could not be depended upon.

There is no doubt that the traditional healers play a very significant role in Vhavenda circles, and are part of their religious beliefs, practices and social welfare. No wonder respect for traditional healers surpasses the respect for a person from a royal family. The traditional leader of the community accords the traditional healer due respect, although the status of the healer is not above that of a traditional leader, respect is due, because the latter's position is both political and religious.

The missionaries saw local religious beliefs, conceptions about *vhuloi* and beliefs in the power of *dzinanga*, *mingome* and other specialists as being manifestations of the power of Satan, or as arising from superstition and duplicity. By their interpretation, a great deal of the blame for the persistence of these beliefs and practices had to be shouldered by the *mahosi*. In missionary analysis, it was only by weakening the power of these living 'idols' of the people that any significant progress could be made in weaning people, turning them from the enslavement of 'darkness' to rebirth in the 'light' of Christianity (Kirkaldy 2002: 364).

The Vhavenda still have their chiefs and their long-established 'witchcraft' customs. For this reason, they remain resistant to the Gospel teachings.

Mbiti (1969: 171) argues that whatever abuses may seem apparent in the activities of the traditional healer, it would be extremely unjust to condemn the profession. Traditional healers are friends, pastors, psychiatrists and doctors of traditional African villages and communities. Even in urban areas, one still finds or hears of traditional doctors. These men and women may even be making a contribution towards the solving of new problems by means of traditional methods. Undoubtedly, careful research into traditional medicine and medical practices will one day yield great benefits for all.

2.8.2. Witchcraft

The terms witch/wizard (*muloi*) is used to describe antisocial beings that practice magic. Such behaviour is not acknowledged in terms of Vhavenda accepted living standards. It is considered to be disruptive to the normal life of individuals and of the family or community as a whole. There are instances where illness could emanate from broken relationships with family ancestors, with whom reconciliation could still be sought. However, illness that could be caused by the evil one is fatal, because its main purpose is to kill a person.

There are epidemic diseases such as measles, which are attributed to nature and not associated with the evil one, but are a natural phenomenon of the cosmos. Afflictions caused by witches are detected by traditional healers, who could prescribe preventive measures.

The belief in witches in Vhavenda circles cannot be ignored. Stayt, in support of this statement, says: 'The implicit belief of the average Muvenda in the reality and power of *muloi* (witches) is amazing' (Stayt 1931: 275).

The indigenous people believe that witches possess the ability and willingness to bring sickness to other people through their secret knowledge of poisonous medicine; alternatively, this could be attributed to the help they receive through witchcraft or evil spirits.

Vhaloi are so feared that when a young man wishes to get married, the main consideration in choosing a wife is that she does not belong to a family of witches. *Vhaloi* are accused of being worse than thieves because they are murderers who kill out of jealousy, hatred, or for revenge. Witches who are offended take revenge by sentencing the offender to death. They kill through *u vuma* (to send), *u milisa* (to make somebody swallow), *u shelela* (to give poisoned food), *u tatshilela* (to be inspired to do evil) and *u pfula* (to prick).

There is not much difference between the Vhavenda and the Batswana in this regard. According to Matjila (2007: 9), the Batswana believe strongly in witchcraft

(*boloi*). Boloi is sometimes practised singly, but more commonly in groups. Old women are often suspects. Since the culprit is a mother or grandmother of a living member of the community, even the traditional doctor, who identifies her, does not reveal her name for fear of disrupting the peace of the community.

The main motives of witchcraft are greed, vengeance and envy. The purpose of a witch is to kill or injure a particular person. The overall aim of bewitching a person is to reduce his or her worth so that he or she becomes lazy and loses interest in work, or to cause a likeable person to become unpleasant.

Sorcerers are also portrayed as tricksters and doers of harm. They go naked, enter houses through closed doors and windows, and delay the recovery of the sick. They enter the cattle kraal and suck the cows' milk so that the yield is insufficient. They may also suck milk from a nursing mother so that there is insufficient milk for the child. When the moon is full, they gather in groups to dance, usually around a tree that is a landmark. They are invisible except to those who have been strengthened with appropriate medicine so as to see them (Matjila 2007: 9).

Boloi

Dilo di dirwang ka kwa dikhurutsheng

Di iketsetswang ke ena Mmampipi

(Magoleng & Motlhake 1969: 8)

Witchcraft

Things done at secret places

Done by the witch herself

In this poem, Magoleng and Motlhake (1969) describe witchcraft as something that is practised secretly. Witches go about their activities at night, when they cannot be seen by anyone.

Witchcraft could be regarded as involuntary and the person practising it may be doing so involuntarily, or have been compelled thereto by the evil spirits of his or her ancestors. Witchcraft is suspected in times of misfortune, illness or death, which are not adequately explained by the Western version of Christianity, or in the case of

illness that does not seem to be responding to Western medicine. For the average person, good or ill fortune is often controlled by his or her immediate ancestors.

When there is trouble or an unexplained death in the family, a diviner (*mungome*) is consulted, the magical divining dice are thrown, and a prognosis is made. In many cases the interpretation will be that one of the ancestors must be appeased, usually through the ritual sacrifice of a black goat for commoners or a sheep for the royals, at the grave of the troublesome ancestor.

A *mungome* usually uses an intricately wooden divining bowl (*ndilo*) to discover witches. Belief in witchcraft is prevalent, even among the educated, and although the killing of witches is considered murder, it occurs regularly. When the diviner is unsuccessful, a witchdoctor (*nanga*) is consulted. Such witchdoctors are thought to have magical powers in addition to divining skills, and can place spells on people, who in turn believe that they could die unless they are cleansed by the *nanga* who cast the original spell.

It is quite common in Vhavenda that if such a person were accused of witchcraft, the person might say innocently, '*Ndi mimuya kana ndi vhadzimu*' (It is the spirits or ancestors). The living have to make sure that they bury their dead relatives in a proper and honourable way so that they may have peace; if they have not been given a proper burial they could trouble the living until the living have performed rituals to appease the dead. Stayt reinforces this statement when he asserts that witches could consciously or subconsciously practice magic, affecting the lives of other people (Stayt 1931: 273).

Boardillon regards witchcraft as a hereditary phenomenon that could be inherited from one's parents. Witches derive satisfaction from practising witchcraft in the same way as a normal person doing a good thing (Boardillon 1991: 178). The belief in witchcraft is so engraved in the minds of the indigenous people that it leads to fear in their daily lives. Mahamba support this opinion when he reports:

As the drums were beaten to celebrate victory over apartheid, it was important to note that drums were used and not a Western symphony orchestra. The

belief in witchcraft also sets itself free thus resulting in the burning of many people! (Mahamba 1994: 2).

In support of Mahamba's statement, the practice and belief in witchcraft precipitated violence in most areas, with Venda being no exception. Neluvhalani confirms that 'in Venda, in the months of January to March 1990 alone no fewer than fifty people accused of witchcraft were burned to death in a gruesome manner' (Neluvhalani 1992: 8).

Belief in witchcraft led to many atrocities in Venda. For example, old people were threatened, people were burned as witches, and families were uprooted from their former places of abode. Children of witches suffered terribly. Some were forced to discontinue their education where they lived; others were forced to disassociate themselves from helpful relatives because of the stigma they now bore.

Ramashidzha (personal interview, 06/01/2001) of Zamenkomste indicates that Khosi Sinthumule the 1st had resolved, with the support of his tribe, to send anyone suspected of practising witchcraft to a secluded area called Muraleni. Even today, the community in that area still bears the stigma of practising witchcraft. Thorpe (1991: 340) indicates that:

The Zulu life view is far more holistic than that of Western oriented societies where religion, work and home are often compartmentalised. The Zulu world is integral, with a supernatural dynamic power pervading all aspects.

If a member refuses to show penance, he or she is either ostracised or stigmatised. Wilson (1980: 75) describes this act as 'witchcraft accusation'. Witchcraft accusation could lead to the expulsion of the individual concerned. Ndwandwe (1982: 214) indicates that among the Zulu, people who were accused of witchcraft were expelled (*bebedingiswa*) from that particular society.

In most cases, when a person is accused of practising witchcraft, the accused admits to the charges laid against him or her, whereas under normal conditions s/he would not admit to the charges. The person will admit to the accusations, due to fear

of the mob, s/he becomes delirious and unconsciously accepts whatever is said against him or her. Vhengani (personal interview, 17/01/2015), admitted that he was taught to bewitch people by his mother before he became a Christian, and used a broom to fly to Tanzania at night.

Although the matter of witchcraft cannot meet the requirements for scientific validity, the fact is that it cannot be totally ignored as a phenomenon. The issue of witchcraft seems to be problematic in the world as a whole. Both occultism and spiritualism are practised in first-world countries. Van Rheenen (1991: 165) reports that in 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a decree against witchcraft. Although the decree could not be passed, the fear and belief of this practice stretches back to the Stone Age and it is still rooted deeply in the minds of the indigenous people.

2.8.3. The *malombo*

A further practice related to pacifying troubled spirits, which was viewed in an extremely negative light by the missionaries, was the *malombo*. According to Kirkaldy (2002: 342-343), on 18 September 1874 Beuster recorded that:

For several days now, by day and by night, I heard the racket of drums, flutes and bells and the yodelling coming from a village. I heard that an idol-worshipping feast was being celebrated there. Today I made my way to the village. I found many people gathered there. They formed a circle around several dancing women.

Four of these women were specially decorated with ostrich plumes and coloured clothes. They were the instigators of the feast. Their forefathers, who were now gods, had come to them, had spoken to them and had taught them all sorts of wonderful things, like to heal sicknesses, to cast spells etc.

I was told they find the cause of the illness through smell and in the same way they find the correct remedy for the illness. There was a frightful din in the yard. From a distance, the drums had sounded deceptively like the rattling of a mill, nearby, one also heard the sounds made by the other instruments. One

did not only beat on the skin of the drum, but also on the wood of which the drum is made.

The drummers raced across their drums with frightful fury, at the same time pulling their faces into the most abhorrent grimaces, their sweat poured down and mingled with the swirling dust. In this way these people experienced a truly devilish spectacle. The actual idols (the four dancing women) tried to maintain a certain amount of dignity, but the dancing of the others, especially of that of the old woman, was too terrible to observe.

I could only speak with the people by shouting. After I had spoken with individuals for a while, I noticed that they did not treat me with hostility, as I had expected at the beginning. I used a moment of silence to walk into the circle and speak to the crowd, I said something like: 'I have come to experience your customs. But what do I see? I see people who are lost, who have left the correct path.'

I pointed at the idolised people and said to them that they were impostors and that the people were deceived by them. The idolised-people had withdrawn a bit, a woman was lying down, and she had danced herself sick. I spoke especially to them, but they did not feel like listening.

According to Beuster's account, these dancing people pretend that they don't eat anything on the day of the dance; they are cared for by gods. They only accept water. However, on asking 'clever boy' what the dancers had eaten beside their staple food, and how many goats they had slaughtered, he was rewarded with the answer: 'They haven't slaughtered any goats yet. But they have other food which they eat with their mealie-pap. This they only eat at night.'

The malombo dance takes place over several days and nights and is accompanied by its own special music. Beyond communication with spiritual beings, the activity is associated with healing and other supernatural activities.

According to Kirkaldy (2002: 345), Stayt and Dederen argued that the cult was of Karanga origin. The spirit *tshilombo* (plural *zwilombo*), which entered the host, was either that of an offended ancestor, sometimes extremely remote, or a troublesome homeless spirit with no genealogical connection with the person whom it entered. Such banished spirits wandered around searching for a host within whom they could seek refuge. In some cases, they could even be the *tshilombo* of foreigners. Although it was generally women who were possessed, on rare occasions men could also suffer this fate.

Possession by a *tshilombo* was often indicated by the afflicted person suffering a prolonged or serious illness. Once this had been diagnosed by a *nanga*, a *malombo* ritual specialist, called the *maine wa tshele*, was called in. According to Nengwenda (personal interview, 09/01/2015) treatment was divided into two phases. During the first, the *maine wa tshele* visited the afflicted person in her home. A drummer who knew the *malombo* beat was summoned and word was sent out to the extended family, especially the woman's relations, and the wider community, stating that she needed their help.

When the drumming began, those people in the community who had previously been possessed would arrive to take an active part in the proceedings. Their comrade was put into a trance by the *maine wa tshele* and made to dance, accompanied by the *maine wa tshele* and those previously possessed people from the district in relays, until she collapsed.

Attempts were made to get the *tshilombo* to identify itself and to state its needs. If it refused to do this, after a short pause, during which she was rubbed with various magical substances, the woman was made to dance to the point of collapse again. This process was repeated, sometimes over a period of a number of days, until the *tshilombo* finally cooperated.

According to Nengwenda, it then spoke in *Tshikaranga*, *Tshivenda*, and a mixture of the two or a language intelligible only to the initiated. If it proved to be a malicious homeless spirit, it was then exorcised, trapped in a stick and thrown into a tree in the forest. It would remain there unless some unfortunate individual touched the stick,

releasing it and becoming possessed in the process. However, in the case of an ancestral spirit, the aim was not to exorcise the *tshilombo* but to persuade it to temporarily occupy the body of the afflicted person and dance in a manner which was not injurious to her health.

Items identified that were demanded by *tshilombo* included clothes, ornaments, ancestral spears or axes (male ritual objects), or various types of cloth. Sometimes these items could not be supplied immediately but a promise was made and they were supplied later, for example, imitation assegais or axes and male garments (a waistcoat, a tie and/or a hat).

In the dance I witnessed, a woman who had previously been possessed was dressed in a white shirt, black trousers a gold waistcoat and a grey felt hat.

The spirit could also demand the sacrifice of a goat. While a woman was possessed by the *tshilombo*, her husband and relations had to treat her with great consideration and respect, saluting her as if she were a *Khosi*. Once possessed, a woman was never the same again. From then on, the spirit would possess her from time to time when it had requests which it wished to be fulfilled, or when it required propitiatory gifts.

Hearing the *malombo* beat played on the drums was also enough to call the spirit to re-enter her and take part in the dancing.

In the second phase, the medium joined a society of *malombo* dancers. This group consisted of previous patients. In addition to assisting the newly possessed, they danced at intervals (annually at least) at the homestead of the eldest *maine wa tshele* in the community or in the royal *khoro*.

Ndou (2000: 141) explains that the area Mutele is situated in Venda and shares borders with Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Children in Venda were forbidden to visit Mutele by their parents for their fear of being possessed, as the *malombo* cult was commonly practised in the area. The Vhavenda proverb is still expressed today, which says, '*Ha-Mutele a ku-endi nwana*' (a child should not visit Mutele). The main

fear was that a child would pick up doctored objects (*zwigwasha*) and be possessed with the spirits.

The early missionaries were active during a period in which foreign spiritual cults were practised, and they were convinced that these cults formed part of the religious beliefs of the Vhavenda. Missionaries could have concluded that the indigenous cultures were identical to each other, and inherently in conflict with the principles of the Gospel. It should be noted that it was difficult to propitiate the needs for these foreign spirits as the Vhavenda could not trace their lineage.

2.8.4. Venda rituals

A rite or ritual is a set procedure for carrying out a religious practice or ceremony. It is a means of communicating something of religious significance, through word, symbol and action. Therefore, a ritual embodies a belief or beliefs. The ritual word is powerful, since it is spoken in seriousness and solemnity, and it is repeated every time that ritual is carried out. The rites are a way of expressing thanks, praise, and appreciation to Nwali. Since there are no sacred books in the Venda religion, it remains an oral culture. It is a living religion that is written into the lives of the people. Shabangu (2004: 164) indicates that:

A lot of the visible demonstration of African religion occurs in rituals. These embody what people believe, what they value, and what they wish to apply in daily life. Through rituals, African people not only act their religion, but also communicate it to younger generations.

There are certain customs and rituals of the Vhavenda people that are rigorously adhered to. I will mention just a few, which are relevant for the study. Dyrness (1990: 35) indicates that: 'We have already come across most of these, they are the rituals performed along the life journey of the individual. They begin during pregnancy'. They continue at birth, naming, and teething, during puberty, at circumcision, at engagement, marriage, childbearing, eldership, old age, death and when one has become one of the living dead (Mbiti 1969: 25). This demonstrates that the life journey of the individual is accompanied by rituals.

The birth of a child is accompanied by its own customs and rituals. It is the custom that after the birth of the child, the child cannot go out of the house for for at least three months, for fear that the baby may contract diseases or be harmed by witchcraft. After the specified time, the child can go out after the ritual of '*u thusa nwana na u sikela dzina la nwana*' or 'helping the child and officially naming the child' has been performed.

Ceremonies are usually accompanied by chanting, singing, music, and dancing. Rites of passage are important, particularly the passage from childhood into adulthood. These are conducted as a series of initiation ceremonies at the age of puberty for boys and girls. Such ceremonies are separate, except for the final one, the *Domba*, in which the sexes come together.

The *Thondo-murundu/mula/hogo* initiation school existed in Venda, and it formed part of the basic education of the Muvenda child. Each Venda boy needed to complete his initiation schooling in order to attain manhood. Elaborate ritual governed the setting up, building and maintenance of the school, under the dictates of a traditional healer. It was a highly secret school where boys were trained in self-discipline, endurance, manners, and tribal etiquette: factors that the society would expect them to demonstrate as adult men (Ndou 1994: 63).

This ceremony is attended by ordinary people but not by members of the royal family. The *murundu* circumcision is considered to be a preparatory stage for boys who are entering manhood and is also perceived as a preventive measure against sexually transmitted diseases. *Murundu* is hosted during winter, in the bush far from the villages.

It is said that after boys have been circumcised, the elders tell them that they have sharpened the 'spear' (the spear refers to the circumcised penis) and with the spear they will be able to strike *thulo* (girls). This means that such boys have permission to have sexual intercourse. This is understood as a way of preparing initiates for the future.

Venda boys were circumcised at the *Murundu* initiation school. Circumcision and Vhahwira customs were introduced by the Northern Sotho, which includes the Ba Roka and Lobedu.

There are four phases of initiation for Venda girls, namely *Musevhetho*, *Vhusha*, *Tshikanda* and *Domba*.

Musevhetho is the initiation rite that prepares girls for puberty (i.e. before the girl starts menstruating). This rite is referred to as *u kwevha*, and it involves elongation of the girl's labia minora, which is sometimes called *sungwi*. The purpose of this initiation among the Tsonga is referred to as *mileve* (i.e. sexual appetiser). This is said to harness women into a fulfilling relationship.

Women who have elongated labia minora are perceived and perceive themselves as having attained a higher level than those who have not. They perceive themselves as having an advantage in terms of making a good marriage, and can sexually satisfy men better than those who have not been elongated. Thus, those who have not been elongated are always ridiculed by those who have, calling them names such as *shuvhuru*.

Musevhetho is also believed to play an important role in reducing early sexual activity amongst young girls and boys. For example, girls who are not virgins are ostracised at the *Musevhetho* initiation school. The practice is believed to encourage girls to abstain from sex and not to lose their virginity before marriage. At these schools, a girl's virginity is checked by the older women. *Musevhetho* plays an important role in preventing teenage pregnancies.

Nemutamvuni (personal interview, 21/10/2014) indicates that the most important part of the proceedings is an operation, which all the initiates must undergo. Children of all ages must attend and quite young children are brought to the ceremony by their mothers. The functions are held in a small hut outside the village known as *nonyana*, which is the spirit of the *Musevhetho*. The boys are sent all around and dance or perform antics for the amusement of the people.

This is a fascinating event, because these boys never speak to any other person, communicating only amongst themselves. The girls often remain in the *nonyana* hut for a day and a night. They will see the spirit and are returned to their homes until they are considered to be sufficiently initiated to warrant the operation.

On the appointment day, they are taken to a secluded place on the river bank, where an old woman performs the operation of cutting the clitoris. At the same time, the girls are branded with a mark on the outside of the thigh. The brand is like two inverted Us joined together, or sometimes it may be two round dots. The brand is seen as a 'password' for the initiate, permitting her to attend when these ceremonies are taking place without being questioned as to whether she qualifies for entry; the brand serves as proof that she has undergone the operation.

After the circumcision ceremonies at the river, the girls should proceed to the kraal of the headman who has sanctioned the proceedings. Hence, the girls are given permission to socialise with the boys who went through *murundu*. The feast begins, with dancing, singing and drinking.

After the festival, the girls are taken to the river bank and smothered with fat and redochre (*luvhundi*), and brought again to the kraal for a few days to rest. They are later returned to the river where they are washed, except for the brand. The senior elders mentoring the new initiates would accompany the girls to their respective homes, where the celebration continues. The senior elders represent tradition and wisdom of the past and their role is to teach and train the initiates.

Vhushais attended to as soon as possible after a girl's first menstruation, and then *Tshikanda* and *Domba* shortly before they are married. During *Vhusha*, girls are introduced to the secret *milayo* laws, meant to prepare them for their future role as wives and mothers.

Tshikanda takes place just before *Domba*. Considerable time is spent practising the *ndayo* dance, which is really more of a physical exercise, to compel the girls to suffer and honour the old ones. The movements reinforce the pattern of seniority.

The *Domba* is the pre-marital initiation, the last one in the life of a Venda girl. The chief or sovereign will call for a *Domba*. Preparations are then undertaken by the families of the girls. This includes gifts for the ruler, clothes and bangles. Historically, girls used to stay with the chief for the entire duration of the initiation school, which could be anywhere between three months and three years. Nowadays girls only spend weekends at the ruler's kraal, due to schooling obligations.

The *Domba* has multiple functions. Girls are taught how to become good wives, plan birth, childbirth, child care, how to treat a husband. All this brings fertility to a new generation. The great *Domba* dance is regularly held in the evenings, from dusk until dawn, around a ritual fire. Girls form a long chain and move in a clockwise direction. The dance symbolised the mystical act of sexual communion, conception, the growth of the features and childbirth. The successive performance of the dance during the months the school was in progress symbolised the building of the foetus(Ndou 1994: 64).

2.8.4.1. *Makhadzi*(aunt) performs the ritual of spitting out water

There are certain rituals for communicating with the ancestors. If an individual is offended by their ancestors and they want to communicate with them, the *Makhadzi* (sister to the head of the lineage) is entrusted with the task of officiating the service of offering to the ancestors, *thevhula*. Traditional beer (*mufhoho*) is offered to the ancestors. The *Makhadzi* performs the ritual of spitting out water (*u phasa madi*). She does so while mentioning the name of the offending spirit, followed by the names of all ancestors, and finishes by mentioning the unknown, 'Na *vheuwe ri sa ni di*', 'And for you who we do not know'.Munyai (2007: 10) indicates that:'A special person, the *Makhadzi* according to Vhavenda custom, always performs the offering of sacrifices. This could be performed by way of giving blessings, such as when a member of the family is undertaking a long journey to far away countries.'

The first grains, green vegetables, the marula and other fruits of the new year, according to the Vhavenda custom, cannot be eaten before the ancestors are informed.Stayt (1931: 225) indicates that the *Makhadzi* offers a prayer:

She says, '*Ndi ni fha nwaha muswa uri ni le ni takale, zwo salaho ndi zwanga na zwiduhulu, zwana na zwone zwile zwi takale-vho*', 'I offer you the first grains of the New Year that you may eat and be happy.'

The offerings made in this manner could originate at family or community level, but at the national level, Nwali is approached, as he is not a family or tribal god but the universal one. According to Stayt (1931: 243, 245):

There are certain objects associated with rituals within the tradition of the Vhavenda people. A sacred bull known as *makhulu*, for grandfather, is regarded as the embodiment of all the ancestral spirits. On the other hand, a female black goat, also known as *makhulu*, is said to represent the ancestor of the mother's lineage. Other objects related to the rituals include river pebbles, spears, copper rings, and sacred stones, *et cetera*.

2.8.5. Music and dance

Various rituals are particular to the Venda and certain aspects are kept secret and not discussed with Westerners. However, it is known that the *Domba* or python dance, conducted at the female coming-of-age ceremony and iconic to the Limpopo region, is usually where the chief chooses a wife. Girls and boys dance fluidly, like a snake, to the beat of a drum, while forming a chain by holding the forearm of the person in front. Once a wife has been chosen a set of courtship and grooming rituals take place over a number of days. According to Ndou (1994:66):

The term *tshikona* originates from the word *u kona* meaning to be able, is traditionally a male dance in which each player has a pipe made out of a special indigenous type of bamboo (a tall tree like tropical or semi-tropical grass having hollow stems with ringed joints) growing only in few places around Sibasa and Thohoyandou (which are rarely existing). Each player has one note to play, which has to be played in turn, in such a way as to build a melody.

The *tshikona* is a royal dance, and each sovereign or chief has his own *tshikona* band. *Tshikona* is played at various occasions such as funerals, weddings or religious ceremonies, and can be considered as the Venda national music/dance, which is particular to Venda in South Africa.

The *tshigombela* is a female dance usually performed by married women. This is a festive dance sometimes played at the same time as *tshikona*. *Tshifhasi* is similar to *tshigombela* but is performed by young unmarried girls (*khomba*), and it is termed a *mutomba* (a game) (Ndou 1994: 65).

The *mbila* (xylophone) is played in the northern parts of South Africa and more particularly by the Venda. It can be described as a keyboard made out of a piece of wood, which is the resonator, with metal blades above (made out of huge nails hammered flat) which form the keys. While the *mbila* is still widely played in Zimbabwe, in South Africa it is only played by a few old people, who sadly notice that most youngsters are uninterested in their own culture and thus are willing to let it die. The playing of the *mbila* is one of the most endangered Venda traditions. The Venda style of playing is quite different from that of Zimbabwe or Mozambique.

Drums are central in Venda culture and there are legends and symbols linked to them. Most sets of drums are kept in the homes of chiefs and headmen, and comprise of one *ngoma*, one *thungwa*, and two or three *mirumba*. Drum sets without the *ngoma* may be found in the homes of certain members of the tribe, such as the traditional doctors who organise and supervise the circumcision schools for girls. Drums are often given personal names. They are always played by women and girls, except in possession dances (*malombo*), when men may play them. Venda drums are considered sacred.

Phalaphala were made from the horns of kudu or sable antelopes and used to call people together for various gatherings (*tshivhidzo*). Each horn produced its own note.

2.9. Factors which affirm or negate Christian religion: Impact on Venda perception of the status of the dead

Sacrificial rituals and offerings to the ancestors act as affirmative factors in terms of the Vhavenda adoption of the Christian religion. The Vhavenda regard their sacrificial rituals as proof of their belief that the living dead are under God's guidance and direction. The indigenous people feel within themselves that by talking and communicating with the living dead they are talking to God, although they believe that God dwells beyond the clouds, whereas the living dead are underground *vhaifhasi* (those below). According to the Vhavenda, God created heaven and earth, and although it is said that heaven is his dwelling place, he can still exercise his authority on earth.

Offering sacrifices to the living dead is a way of appeasing them and satisfying their needs, and by so doing they are designated to their rightful place. The living dead are further regarded as a vessel to convey any requests of the living descendants to the creator. The Vhavenda regard Christian doctrines in terms of their belief in the living dead.

The living dead are in some cases offered sacrifices when a member of the family is ill. Should a person be cured after this performance, the bonds of unity between the living descendants and the living dead are strengthened, but ultimately the healing of their patient is attributed to God and not to the intermediaries. This healing is regarded as an act of reconciliation by God, who brings order, stability and harmony to the whole universe.

Elements such as water are used by the priest (*tshifhe*) when conducting ritual offerings and purification rites. The first missionaries who worked amongst the Vhavenda were not in favour of the incorporation of these elements, and doing so was regarded as heathen, in spite of the fact that 'holy water' is often used for christening and baptism.

If the missionaries of the past had been patient and open-minded enough to study and analyse the sacrificial rites as conducted by the Vhavenda, this would have

acted as a base or stepping stone towards helping the Vhavenda to accept and embrace the final sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ.

It is not surprising that the independent churches are gaining more followers than the mainstream churches; since the former capitalise on the failure of the missionaries who brought the word of God from their own cultural background. The independent churches adapt the traditional religion of the indigenous people and through it they are able to introduce the Gospel of Christ successfully.

2.10. Missional investigation

The Christian Gospel cannot exclude the culture of an indigenous people. Traditional religion is the main component of Venda cosmology. All aspects of Venda cosmology are permeated by religion. For the Venda, therefore, religion is a way of life and cannot be seen as distinct from Vhavenda. The concept of religion, therefore, is interpreted in this research as way of life that needs to interact with Christianity, rather than be uprooted by the Gospel message.

Rev. Westphal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, who was stationed at Khalavha, relates that in 1917 a meteor landed in the middle of the day, making a strange humming sound followed by a thunderous crash. This portent was greeted by the people, not with terror, but with cries of joy. Rev. Westphal could have seized this golden opportunity to speak to the Vhavenda of the mighty acts of the Supreme Being, who could reveal himself through natural phenomena. Schapera made use of this occurrence when he indicated that Nwali (Raluvhimba) was associated and connected with astronomical and physical phenomena (Stayt 1931: 231). This was a good opportunity to evangelise the Vhavenda; Raluvhimba was identified with Mwari (Nwali) whose earthly abode (like Yahweh's) was on Mount Sinai.

The name of an ancestor that was used by the missionaries, Mudzimu, which was used to refer to God, caused confusion and misunderstanding, with the result that the acceptance of the Gospel by the Vhavenda was deterred. In support of this argument, Ralushai (1980:11) provides an illustration:

The early missionaries working on Venda religious translation caused confusion by calling God, Mudzimu, while those working across the border of Zimbabwe used the term Mwari (Shona for Mwari or Nwali) for God. Mudzimu means an ancestral spirit or person possessed by a spirit of his ancestor. Nwali is a Venda and Shona name for Supreme Being.

According to the Vhavenda, the name Mudzimu refers to an ancestor, or living dead, who after death acquires the enhanced status of a family god. When the missionaries used the name Mudzimu for God, they took an uncalculated risk, confusing the concept of ancestors with that of the Supreme Being. The name Mudzimu is incompatible with Nwali (God), as the latter is universally acceptable by the Vhavenda as their only God, not a mere family god (Mudzimu). The first missionaries who translated the Bible into Venda resorted to using the name Mudzimu for the eternal God. As a result, we have '*Yehova ndiMudzimu*' (1Kings 18: 39) or 'Jehovah is God'. Van Rooy purports that the name Mudzimu must have been chosen under the influence of the Pedi term *Modimo*. Missionaries in Venda, Carl Beuster and Erdmann Schwellnus, used the Pedi Bible to conduct their mission work (Van Rooy 1971: 31).

The Vhavenda revision committee for Bible translation could not change the word Mudzimu for Nwali, for it would have caused further confusion and criticism by the present generation, as the name Mudzimu had been in use for a long time. The Biblical commandment says: 'Thou shall have no other gods before me' (*Ndi songo u vhana u na midzimu i sili*). According to Vhavenda cultural standards, if this commandment was interpreted literally, it gave them credence not to bow down to foreign gods, but to their own God (Nwali). This is exactly what the Vhavenda were doing, for they were paying allegiance to their only God (Nwali). Although the Vhavenda venerated their own family gods, Nwali was the universal Supreme Being, accepted by all traditional leaders in Venda and by their subjects.

In the Venda Bible, 'Mudzimu' is written with the initial capital letter, referring to Jehovah, and 'midzimu' (gods) is written in lower case letters, and refers to the other gods or ancestors. The problem with such a distinction is that a capital letter would be noticed when reading, but is indistinguishable in the spoken word.

Rev. Giessekke, who was born in Venda and became a renowned figure for speakers of the Tshivenda language, confirms that Mudzimu is not an appropriate word for referring to God: “Originally Mudzimu means ancestor, Nwali is considered as the most appropriate name referring to God” (Giessekke 1967: 84).

Had the first missionaries opted for the use of Nwali for God, the acceptance of the Gospel could have been facilitated, as the misunderstanding that arose from the use of an ambiguous word (Mudzimu) could have been avoided. The Vhavenda would have been more comfortable, had the word Mudzimu been used to refer to the ancestors and not to God.

St Paul also uses the expression ‘the unknown God’. Perverted as the religion of Athens might have been, he observed that they were still very religious, and that the one deity whom they did not know was the Supreme Being

In both Judaism and Christianity, as in African religions, blood is of great importance during sacrificial offerings. Billy Graham endorses this argument when he says: ‘Judaism and Christianity have been called bloody religions’ (Graham 1969: 20). The main importance of blood as symbol in Christian belief is in connection with Jesus, whose blood was shed on the cross, for the sake of the redemption of mankind. Therefore, missionaries should have made better use of the traditional sacrificial rites involving the shedding of blood, which can be reinterpreted either as a peace offering, or in terms of reconciliation, in preparation for transformation. Earlier missionaries could have portrayed Jesus as the last and complete sacrificial lamb, who died for the whole world. However, new converts were discouraged and even forbidden from venerating their ancestors, and as a result they were obliged to live in two worlds, for they continued to venerate their ancestors in secret.

Van Rooy (1985: 7) supports this argument when he states that “Christianity is the fulfilment of all religion”. This implies that Christianity should not destroy or supplant, but rather contribute that which is lacking in other religions – filling the gaps, so to speak. Missionaries should not have concluded that all that was practised by the indigenous people was superstition, to be thoroughly rejected, without first evaluating such practices and rituals objectively and with an open mind.

Had the first missionaries resorted to the use of Nwali for God, the acceptance of the Gospel could have been facilitated, as the misunderstanding that arose from the use of an ambiguous word (Mudzimu) could have been avoided. The Vhavenda would have been more comfortable, had the word Mudzimu been used to refer to the ancestors and not to God, and the rift between the two worldviews could have been healed. Milingo (1984: 34) indicates that:

Healing means the taking away from a person a disturbance in life, which acts as a deprivation of self-fulfilment and which is considered an unwanted parasite.

In general, the Berlin missionaries in Vendaland believed that the *mahosi* and the *dzinanga* (chiefs and traditional healers) worked together extremely closely. On the one hand, this was to regulate society and relations between the natural and the supernatural. On the other, missionary discourse portrayed the rulers and what they called *Zauberer* as colluding with each other to mislead and exploit the people. While they believed that this was sometimes conscious, the missionaries were nevertheless prepared to concede that (as they saw it) the rulers and (apparently to a lesser extent) the *dzinanga* believed in many of the 'lies' and 'superstitions' of African religion just as much as their people. They were thus unaware, or only partly-conscious, of their role in 'deceiving' their people.

The missionaries also found it impossible to conceal their delight on occasions when what they saw as the scheming of the *dzinanga* backfired on them, with unexpected results. Similarly, on a number of occasions, the missionaries felt able to discern the hand of God in causing the *dzinanga* to fail spectacularly in their efforts to control nature by supernatural means. (Kirkaldy 2002: 349).

Although churches tried their utmost to take a stand against this horrifying situation, it is regrettable to know that some of the so-called Christian ministers were singing the same song as witch hunters. In confirmation of this fact, the 1996 Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft reported (Ralushai, Masingi & Madiba 1996:5):

The young man instead procured a so-called prophet or minister of religion,

the prophet named three future victims of the dark forces which according to him were working in the village.

It is indeed a great disappointment for a minister of religion to have stooped so low as to align himself with those who are still probing in the darkness. The commission, in its findings, further indicated that an African minister of religion at Ben Farm in the Lukekani district of Phalaborwa was alleged to have ordered medicine from Durban so that his church membership could increase. This was probably undertaken after the minister started suspecting certain witches of causing a decline in church membership (Ralushai, Masingi & Madiba 1996: 24). By Christian standards, this minister could have been seen as propagating the Gospel, and would have regarded Christian doctrine as an effective antidote for belief in witchcraft in the community.

Devout congregants are embarrassed when a minister of religion is seen collaborating or supporting witchcraft. The government of the Northern Province was kept on its toes as far as this matter was concerned. At the Evangelical Lutheran Church Rally held at Botlokwa, the Minister of the Executive Council for safety and security indicated (Nthai 1996: 4):

We believe that the church has a special role in combating these senseless witchcraft killings and violence.

The community seems to shun those who are suspected of practising witchcraft, and in most cases people decide to distance themselves from suspects and are even afraid to touch their possessions. Maibelo affirms this argument: 'The practitioners of the craft are feared and held at arm's length as enemies of the society' (Maibelo 1989: 86).

Father Carmichael made use of the opportunity when he found the Basotho conducting their thanks offering according to their own custom (Maboe 1982: 31):

Father Carmichael, having learnt of the cause of the singing and dancing, without more ado, joined in the celebration ... 'I have been informed about why you are feasting here this morning. I wish to join with you in thanking God

for the safe delivery of the child and for the good health of its mother. Let us now kneel down and pray to God for His mercies.'

The approach of Father Carmichael to the Basotho yielded good results: he converted the whole village to Christianity without condemning them, and their traditional thanksgiving offering was transformed into a Christian prayer of thanksgiving.

The Vhavenda may appear to be polytheistic, as was concluded by the first missionaries. However, the truth is that the indigenous people were monotheistically oriented. Their religious belief was anchored on Nwali/Mwari although they had family gods, who from a Biblical point of view would be regarded as 'idols'; but in the Vhavenda traditional understanding they are considered to be 'the living dead'.

The Vhavenda accept Nwali as the creator of humankind (*Musika vhathu*). The name Nwali was never mentioned in propitiation of the family god: his name was always held sacred. The missionaries should have used the sacred name of Nwali for the God of the Gospel. The name Nwali was above criticism or contamination. Instead, they blundered by using the name Mudzimu for the Supreme Being instead of Nwali. In support of this view Van Rooy (1972: 439) indicates that, in the case of ancestral spirits, 'almost none of the attributes of God are present. The family ancestor's functions are none other than those of creating stability in the family, but can in no way act as creator of the cosmos'.

When the Gospel was introduced to the Vhavenda traditional leaders, the leaders of the tribe were dismayed, if not alarmed, by the name Midzimu being used to refer to God. According to Vhavenda religious beliefs, traditional leaders are closer to God than their subjects. Michael Buys, a messenger from the Dutch Reformed mission station in Goedgedacht, confirms this assertion (Moller-Malan 1957: 17):

'Wat wil hy hê?' Het hy aan Michael gevra... 'Hy wil vir jou bid', was Buys se antwoord. 'Vir my bid? Weet hy dan nie dat ek self as godheid intree vir my volk by Nwari (God) nie?' (Moller-Malan 1957: 17).

('What does he want?' he asked Michael... 'He wants to pray for you', was

Buys' answer. 'Pray for me? Doesn't he know that I myself mediate for my people before Nwari (God)?')

The preaching of the Gospel should have been aligned with the indigenous people's traditional beliefs, for Chief (Khosi) Makhado made it plain that he believed in Nwali/Mwari.

It is worth noting that the Vhavenda have no image or emblem that represents Nwali, who by all religious standards is regarded as the Supreme Being, higher than all the ancestors. The indigenous people have various images of their family divinities. They bow down to these images as a gesture of veneration, but should the images become the end in themselves, this could be regarded as idolatry. The missionaries should have taken cognisance of the fact that these divinities were not the Supreme Being, but were venerated as ancestors who acted as divine intermediaries. According to Mudau (1940: 13):

Vhavenda regard the Supreme Being as having the status of a king, being on the highest rung of the ladder. The king administers his functions through his subordinates and down to the grassroots. Nwali was the ancestor God of the Vhavenda and was their first great king who subjected the local peoples along the Zoutpansberg range, where the Vhavenda are settled today.

The personal character of God, as concluded by the indigenous people, is that of the king of kings. From a human point of view He could be the father of the Vhavenda in their land of abode, as He was the father of Israel, and is father of the entire realm. Had the missionaries presented God as the father of all creation, irrespective of culture and tradition, the indigenous people would have embraced the Gospel with far less difficulty.

To have presented Jesus as an ancestor would have implied that not only His human nature was emphasised. The fact that He rose from the dead and is alive reinforces the indigenous people's hope and faith that Jesus is their prime ancestor, who is performing the function of divine mediation on their behalf. Their conflict would have been resolved, since Jesus is greater than any of the ancestors. When

Jesus is viewed from a human perspective, as a descendant of Abraham and a venerable ancestor, He becomes a natural brother to all human beings, irrespective of race or creed. Pauw (1975: 102) indicates that: 'Many African Christians combine a lively awareness of God and the ancestors, God and the ancestors work together'.

It is quite clear that Jesus as a brother ancestor would have enhanced the acceptance of the Gospel by the Vhavenda, primarily due to the fact that he is one of the members of God's holy people who do the work of interceding for the living by communicating on their behalf with God the creator.

In Vhavenda culture, a traditional healer is given a high and respectable status. The Vhavenda regarded the traditional healers as specialists, who could advise the sick, pronouncing whether their illness could be cured by pacification of the ancestors or through some other method. However, traditional healers were treated with contempt by missionaries and colonists, who saw them as witchdoctors. Their disdain had a profoundly negative impact on the indigenous people and thus on their acceptance of the Gospel.

Muvhulawa Siphida (personal interview, 04/02/2015) of Ha-Rambuda Dzimauli, indicated that certain diseases such as haemorrhoids (*nowakhulu*) are easily cured by using the herb known as *Mukuvhazwilu* (*Cassine Transvalensis*). He further indicated that sores are easily cured by using another herb, *Murungwane* (*Xanthoxylum Capensis*). Mabogo (1990: 166) strongly supports this statement when he asserts: 'The plants which give a reddish decoction are commonly used for blood diseases, *Cassine Transvalensis* as a remedy for piles'.

Van Warmelo (1940) had concluded mistakenly that traditional healers were all liars. As a result, some of the indigenous people rejected the Gospel and everything that went with it. In some instances, the traditional healers' homesteads were regarded as the 'throne of Satan', yet they were visited for assistance by both the unconverted and the converted, and the latter were thus forced to live in two worlds.

The Vhavenda had their own way of pacifying troubled spirits, which was the *malombo*. This was viewed in an extremely negative light by the missionaries. They

were considered to be idols, a truly devilish spectacle, a symptom of a people who were lost, who had left the right path – in short, heathens.

The missionaries could have given medical science its rightful place without disregarding the traditional healer's expertise, for it too is of God. Both approaches to life should have been accepted as such. The indigenous people would soon have realised that some medical and emotional illnesses could be treated effectively through the ability of the Christian counsellor as well as by both medical practitioners and traditional healers.

The Vhavenda traditional religion has been transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation. As a result, the propagation of their religion has not hinged on a theologically trained specialist, but on all the members of the community who served as a repository of all knowledge for their children. According to Vhavenda standards, religion cannot be separated from society. The creation or establishment of mission stations for the converted Vhavenda, separating them from their families and relatives who were not converted, gave rise to an impassable gulf of mistrust.

The Vhavenda understandably regarded religious ministers as shepherds of the entire society, irrespective of religious affiliation. The Vhavenda also regarded their traditional religion as revelatory, for both God and the ancestors reveal themselves in nature. To them God does not reveal himself only through the Gospel, but also through dreams and by means of natural spirits.

The religious rituals practised by the Vhavenda could have facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel, for their religion is communal, as it strengthens the social order of their daily lives. It further creates two-way communication between the living and the living dead, and thus reconciliation remains the order of the day.

Maynagh and Harrold (2012: 1559) indicate that "Missiology seeks missional contextual Churches to be Church in settings of ordinary life. It addresses the needs of people in their ordinary lives". God's Spirit is at work in actual cultures" (Niemandt 2012: 8-9).

It seems that since culture is created by those who live it, it should therefore serve their interests. It should be experienced by them as liberative rather than oppressive. According to Sanneh (1989: 36), the receiving culture is the decisive destination of God's salvific promise and as such has an honoured place under the kindness of God. Sanneh attempts to demonstrate through an analysis of the history of Christian mission that while there was an ethnocentric attitude on the part of Jewish Christians, God made his desire that the Gospel be preached to many cultures known primarily through the miracle at Pentecost and then subsequently through other miraculous signs as Gentile individuals and groups came to faith (e.g. Cornelious and his family). The Greek-speaking Gentile culture received the Gospel through vernacular preaching and found that it fit so naturally into their culture that they began to believe that when the Gospel came to these Greek-speakers, it came to its natural home. The result was a resurgence of cultural pride as they allowed the Gospel to shape them.

In this regard Moila (1996: 33) rightly observes, though God is not bound by any human culture, God chooses to operate within or in terms of culture. God does not require that converts abandon most or all of their cultures as concomitant with their conversion to Christianity. God knows very well that the converts cannot escape their culture. What the divine seeks, instead, is 'To cooperate with human beings in the use of their culture for God's glory.

This extract implies that the plurality of cultures would presuppose the plurality of theologies. It seems that God is aware that people of different cultures perceive the divine in different ways because of their different world views. This suggests that no culture is more relevant for the Gospel than others. Maimela (1991: 1) rightly contends: "Inculturation is an attempt to marry Christianity with the African world view, so that Christianity could speak with African idiom and accent". Hence inculturation is indeed a process by which the church in its ministry takes the culture and the experience of the people seriously. It is an attempt to make the local church a valid home for Christ (Maluleke 1994: 48-69). Without inculturation, Christ would be an outsider or a foreigner to people at a given culture. Inculturation would also lead to the development of ministries which respond to the African context. It simply

implies that the church or the Christian faith never exists except as translated into a given culture.

Bosch (1991: 445) indicates that, "Theology is in the process of being contextualised and indigenised". Another significant point about inculturation is the fact that since it is a local process, only local people are its agents. Bosch (1991: 453) therefore rightly observes: "In inculturation, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity". But he also adds that the theologian (missionary) is indispensable for the process because of his expertise. However, the latter does not participate as the one who has all answers but rather as a learner like everybody else. Thus inculturation is only successful where people practise life together".

2.11. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the approach of the missionaries towards the Vhavenda was more scholarly than practical, and had little to do with everyday realities. It appears to have been focused on Western ethnocentricity rather than on the propagation of the Gospel. As a result, it could not fulfil the purpose for which it was intended.

The path travelled by the missionaries in Venda was not a smooth one, but relentless endurance earned them fruits. The fact that the missionaries never despaired is worthy of commendation. As a result, the indigenous people ultimately had access to Jesus as their own and prime ancestor, who is always performing the work of mediation.

It is interesting to note that both Western missionaries and the African people attribute the same nature to the Supreme Being, who in the case of the Vhavenda, is known as Nwali. It may be concluded, therefore, that there is a similar conception of the existence of a 'superpower' across the spectrum of both cultures, albeit approached from different angles. Nwali represents the final and highest power. Although the introduction of the Christian God received a negative response from the

Vhavenda, as a result of conflicting names and the meanings attached to those names, there is at least a common understanding of such names today.

Inculturation goes hand-in-hand with contextualisation; the latter makes the Gospel relevant to the lives of the people by addressing the issues relevant to them, thus providing a sense of hope.

Cultures in contact with one another are bound to influence each other's worldviews. Hence, Christianity as presented to Vhavenda by the missionaries was bound to be influenced by Vhavenda culture; and Vhavenda culture was bound to influence Christianity in turn. It is this interaction that led to the emergence of the Vhavenda version of Christianity.

The 19th century was a time of the Africans as losers, rather than the Europeans as winners. To some degree, these Africans saw their defeat as a defeat of their worldview, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AMONGST THE VHAVENDA

3.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the encounters between Christian missionaries and Tshivenda speakers, as well as the effects of white settlement in what is today a part of Limpopo Province in South Africa (Venda) in the late 19th century.

An attempt will be made to identify the causes and factors that led to the conflict created by the preaching of the Gospel within a Venda context. Regardless of the problems encountered by the missionaries, their contribution should be understood as part of the story concerning the struggle for a Christian culture in Venda. Therefore, this chapter will not only concentrate on the negative aspects of the work carried out by missionaries, but will also look at the positive features of the missionary effort.

3.2. Sojourners and settlers in Venda

Makhado town (Tshitandani) nestles at the foot of the Zoutpansberg mountain range. White settlers arrived here in 1899. The first settlement was aborted, as the greed of colonialists for land and free labour saw King Makhado Ramabulana rout them from Schoemansdal, 17km to the west. King Makhado's palace was at Luatame on Mount Swongozwi, and he defended the kingdom of Vhavenda with his battalions.

It is possible that Portuguese hunters and traders may have entered Vendaland during the 18th century. However, the penetration of people of Western European origin into the Zoutpansberg area is generally considered to have begun in the 19th century. They were largely in search of hunting and grazing (Tempelhoff 1989: 18).

According to Kirkaldy (2002: 64) the first sustained contact between white immigrants and the Vhavenda seems to have occurred between 1810 and 1820. This was when Coenraad de Buys, a hunter and adventurer from the Cape Colony, his black wife, and their children entered the area and were given the land on the outer

regions of Vhavenda-held territory by King Makhado's father, Ravele Mpofo Ramabulana. King Ravele Ramabulana had allowed white settlers to stay at Schoemansdal in 1858.

Schoemansdal was the northernmost point of white encroachment into the rest of South Africa. It was a hive of activity, and a centre of business, where elephant tusks, skins from leopards and lions, dried meat and teak wood were exchanged for gold and other commodities.

Coenraad's sons were also provided with wives from the royal settlement. After Coenraad's wife died, possibly of malaria, he moved on, leaving his sons behind. His movements from then on are unknown. However, some traditions suggest that he went to look for help from the Portuguese in Mozambique and either died there, or settled and remarried there. His sons subsequently settled at Tshikhovhokhovho, near the Blouberg Mountains and the Sand River, on the stands allocated to them by Ravele Mpofo Ramabulana.

As time went on, settlers wanted more and more land. They also wanted the Vhavenda, including the royal princes, to work for them for free. They even wanted to collect tax and in addition to take over the area and map out where King Makhado's area would be, a reserve designating where his jurisdiction would begin and end. King Makhado would have none of it. He told the whites to get off the land and that he did not recognise their rule over Vhavenda.

By 1858, there were between 40 and 50 settlers; by 1861 there were more than seventy families at Schoemansdal. From here on, as tensions grew, whites called for reinforcements from Pretoria. They were given 400 commandos under the leadership of Commandant General Paul Kruger, who later became a leader and hero of the Boers. Their task was to dislodge King Makhado from Luatame and establish unchallenged rule over his area and subjects.

One day, King Makhado's army commander, Funyufunyu, visited his brother who was working for the Boers at Schoemansdal. Funyufunyu witnessed how the Boers were mistreating Vhavenda people at Schoemansdal. The following day, 13 July

1867, the Venda soldiers assembled for the attack. They went down and killed everybody present. The only survivors were two hunters who had gone on an expedition. The destruction of Schoemansdal meant that the regime in Pretoria had lost its hold on Venda. The whites settled in Marabastad, outside Polokwane, and later established the town of Pietersburg.

On 20 November 1869, Paul Kruger, R.A. van Nispen and Commandant D.B. Snyman assembled 80 Vhavenda chiefs and headmen, who were to pledge their loyalty to the white regime. King Makhado boycotted the meeting and refused to abide by its decree. In 1887, General Piet Joubert was sent to try and convince Makhado that his land was too big for the number of people he ruled. King Makhado rejected this; he said his people could not be counted for a census and that his land did not need to be measured as he knew where it started and ended.

The settlers, together with Tsonga-Shangaan men, joined forces with a Portuguese man called Joao Albasini, and once more tried to fight King Makhado, but still they could not dislodge him, even after several fights. This earned King Makhado the nickname 'Bull of the North' and the praise name '*Tshilwavirusiku tsha Ramabulana*' (the night fighter of Ramabulana).

King Makhado died of suspected poisoning (allegedly poisoned at a shop owned by John Cooksley) in September 1895. The Boers grouped and attacked Makhado's son, King Tshilamulela Ramabulana (Mphephu I), in October 1898. However, the Venda army was divided due to squabbles within the royal family. Mphephu was defeated and the Boers took Luatame, while Mphephu fled to Zimbabwe.

When the South African war broke out in 1899, the Vhavenda sided with the English and burned the town. The Boers were defeated and surrendered in 1902. Thus, King Mphephu I came back to Luatame in 1902. The Ramabulana royal family was settled in Dzanani after the 1913 Land Act was passed.

It should be noted that the primary motive for whites settling in this area was not for the purpose of bringing the Gospel to the Vhavenda. Rather, these people had left

the Cape Colony during the Great Trek in search of land and trade. In other words, such settlement was solely for their own benefit.

Moller-Malan (1953: 40) indicates that Coenraad de Buys' family were coloured people, with a reddish-brown complexion. 'They came from the north-west, from the direction of Bechuanaland, and they had fire-sticks with them. Not knowing what else to do, they bowed down to them and called them 'The sons of the gods'.'

Although they were coloureds, the Vhavenda regarded them as whites, because this was their first contact with people of a lighter colour. Ndou (2000:23) elaborates:

The members of the Buys' group were regarded as notorious outlaws, they were greatly appreciated in later years, as they were of great assistance to the missionaries in the spreading of the Gospel, since they stayed with the black people on a permanent basis.

The inclusion of the white settlement in this research will act as a point of reference in terms of certain particular missionary events that took place in Venda. Depending on one's perspective, their presence could be said to have had either a positive or negative influence on the acceptance of the Gospel in Venda.

Following this, between 1836 and 1837, a number of Voortrekker groups temporarily established themselves in the general area. Their first main base was on the western side of the mountain at the salt-pan after which the Soutpansberg is named. Later, they moved to the area surrounding what would become Schoemansdal and the present-day town of Louis Trichardt. They found that the area was abundantly stocked with game for hunting and provided ample pasturage for their cattle (Kirkaldy2002: 65).

King Ramabulana came into contact with the Voortrekker leaders Louis Trichardt and Hendrik Andries Potgieter, and called on them, the Buys brothers and Tlokwa and Pedi warriors for assistance in his succession dispute with his brother, Ramavhoya. Having defeated and strangled his brother with their assistance in late November 1836, he allegedly promised Trichardt and Potgieter access to land in the area, should they desire it.

In support of this statement, Benso (1979: 20) indicates that the arrival of the Voortrekker leaders in 1836 coincided with the struggle for succession between Mpofu's sons, Ramabulana and Ramavhoya.

Although Louis Trichardt's mission was not directly concerned with the spreading of the Gospel, he helped the Vhavenda to uphold their traditional culture by restoring the rightful chief to his throne. The Vhavenda from around Zoutpansberg nicknamed him 'Luvhisi' (Louis). His name will not be forgotten in the history of the chieftains' struggle. Moller-Malan (1953: 12) indicates that, after Luvhisi was gone, Rasithuu Ramabulana decided to hit out at all the smaller chiefs who had begun to fall away from his kingdom.

After this early contact, the Voortrekker leader Andries Hendrik Potgieter and his followers settled in Zoutpansberg in 1848, creating a potential for conflict. Not only were the Vhavenda pressurised to cede a part of their land to the newcomers, they were also forced either to provide them with labour or to pay taxes.

One of the most colourful and powerful settlers who established themselves in the Zoutpansberg was Joao Albasini, a Portuguese citizen who began trading in Portuguese East Africa (at first, primarily in slaves and ivory) in 1831. He was born in 1813; he worked for the Portuguese army as a soldier. He moved to the Zoutpansberg in 1856 and settled in Luonde (Piesangkop), where the Vhavenda were led by Chief Matidza of the Vhakwevho clan (Ndou 2000: 24).

On his arrival, he absorbed the Tsonga-Shangaan groups fleeing from Mozambique as refugees from the war of Soshangane and various other conflicts, as well as the civil war between Mzila and Mawewe in the 1860s. Because of their numbers, and because they were black, his Tsonga-Shangaan followers were forbidden to stay at Zoutpansberg and he based them on the farm Goedewensch at Piesangkop. In 1857, Albasini left Schoemansdal and settled at Goedewensch.

The Shangaan found in Albasini a man with whom they could collude in their struggle for land. He thus contributed to the mistrust between the different tribes in

Zoutpansberg. His chieftainship also contributed to their accepting the Gospel when it was brought by the missionaries. Maluleke (1995: 17) explains:

With him they found some space to be themselves and the military security they needed so badly in the unstable situation of the Northern Transvaal as the Boers sought to take land from the BaPedi and the Vhavenda who had lived in these parts for a long time.

He also served as the Portuguese Vice Consul to the South African Republic from 1863 until 1866, known as 'Juwawa' by the local Tsonga-Shangaan people. Albasini was considered by many to be the 'white chief' of the 'Knobneusen location' (Kirkaldy 2002: 71). Between 1864 and 1867, the settlers, together with the Tsonga-Shangaan, were involved in the battles between Paul Kruger's commandos and the Venda Chief Makhado. To encourage their enlistment, re-enlistment and continued loyalty, they were rewarded with some land, near the town of Schoemansdal, which had formerly belonged to the Vhavenda. They were also given women who had been captured during the engagements.

The appointment of Albasini as a government agent under colonial rule gave him power and authority over traditional leaders. The missionaries were not in favour of Albasini's appointment to this delicate post, as he appeared to be a warmonger. Thus, there was tension amongst the indigenous people. As a result, the situation was not optimal for the spread of the Gospel, as the traditional leaders were not in full control of their subjects. Albasini caused irreparable damage to the relations between the Vhavenda and the Shangaan. This was due to the Shangaan men assisting the Boers to fight King Makhado for land, and led to the two tribes hating each other. Makhado did not want to subject himself to Albasini; hence, the Vhavenda were fighting amongst themselves for the chieftainship, as indicated above.

Albasini died in 1888, and Moller- Malan (1975: 176) elaborates as follows:

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

It is against this background of conflict, labour raiding, shifting alliances and mistrust, as well as the victory over the Boers at Schoemansdal, that missionaries came to operate in Venda.

3.3.Mission work amongst the Vhavenda

3.3.1. Dutch Reformed Church

The first church at Schoemansdal was built in 1851. Until the appointment of the full-time Rev. N.J.Van Warmelo of the Nederduitsche Hervormde or Dutch Reformed Church, services were held by community members and visiting ministers. This church was intended for the exclusive use of the inhabitants of Schoemansdal and their visitors.

The first mission station to be established in the immediate vicinity of Venda was the Dutch Reformed Church station of Goedgedacht, founded among the Buys people, by the Rev. Alexander McKidd in 1863. The land needed to establish the station was given to him by the Lottering brothers, and was on the periphery of the lands claimed by Makhado (Kirkaldy 2002: 92). Makhado as king was administering the land on behalf of the Venda tribe at the time. Cornelius Lottering, a white farmer whose farm was adjacent to the Buys settlement, gave Goedgedacht mission as a gift to the church. Later, an additional portion of Kranspoort was bought from Lottering by McKidd, who used money from his own funds. Malunga (1986: 2) indicates that in 1864, McKidd wrote to the Synodical mission committee as follows: 'The cost of this place which was 450 Ryksdaalders, I willingly paid out of my own pocket and ask not the committee to be at charges therewith'.

The purchase of land by McKidd from Lottering might have reached the ears of Makhado. This in itself could not have been palatable to him. Although no mention was made, it must have been a thorn in his flesh, in terms of Vhavenda customs.

Sotho groups and Tsonga-Shangaan groups also had some claims to authority in the area. After McKidd's death (from 'fever') in the same year, he was succeeded by the missionary Stéfanus Hofmeyr. Having abandoned Goedgedacht because of disturbances caused by the Boer-Mphephu War of 1865, Hofmeyr moved the mission station to the nearby farm of Kranspoort, which had been purchased from the Lotterings by McKidd.

Although the mission had African members, it remained largely Buys-centred. Because of its geographical situation (about 34km of the west of Louis Trichardt in lands that did not fall under the direct control of Vhavenda *mahosi*) and its membership, its activities remained largely peripheral to developments in Venda proper. Hofmeyr and the Berlin missionaries nevertheless maintained a cordial relationship with the indigenous people (Kirkaldy 2002: 94).

There is another claim: that the Berlin missionaries were the first to have had contact with the Vhavenda. It is generally believed that the Berlin missionaries were the first missionaries to introduce Christianity to Venda, but written records indicate that the first missionary to pay attention to this area was McKidd, of the Dutch Reformed Church (Ndou 2000: 26).

As Dutch Reformed Christianity was planted in Transoranje, small congregations north of the Orange River were usually located on the farms of pious farmers who sought to retain contact with the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) which had been long established at the Cape. A few church buildings were built in small towns like Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom, and Rustenburg (Du Plessis 1911: 85).

The first evangelists were Andrew Murray, J.H. Neethling, and P.K. Albertyn, during the 1840s. Farm congregations were established throughout what was to become the Orange Free State, and later beyond the Transvaal. In 1849, 1850 and 1851, Andrew Murray (1828-1917) set up numerous small churches during a series of extensive preaching tours resembling those of the American circuit riders. Following the establishment of the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church) in 1852, The Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) became largely defunct until it

was slowly re-established by the evangelical piety of John Murray and his brother Andrew. In 1857, John Murray was appointed the first professor of theology at the new Theological School and University College in Stellenbosch, and sought the assistance of Hofmeyr and Neethling to launch the Stellenbosch Kweekschool, or theological seminary.

The Dutch Reformed Church embarked on an expedition to the northern part of the country, emanating from a decision made by the Cape Synod of 1857. During this Synod Rev. P.K. Albertyn (Calendon), J.H. Neethling (Prince Albert), N.J. Hofmeyr (Calvinia), and Andrew Murray (born in Graaff Reinet) were appointed to form a mission committee, which was assigned the task of examining the possibility of expanding the Gospel to the north.

Andrew Murray

Murray was born on 9 May 1928 in Graaf Reinet, South Africa. At the age of ten, he was sent to school in Scotland, and after college he went to Holland to study theology. As a result of the teachings of his father, his uncle (the Rev. John Murray), and many others whom he met during his schooling, the young man developed a very strong foundation of faith, prayer, worship, love for the lost, and above all the attitude that Jesus Christ should be the centre of one's existence. Ordained at the age of 20, Andrew returned to South Africa and started ministering to the Dutch Farmers. In 1860 he became a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church at Worcester. Later he would be part of the Keswick Movement, and minister in the Dutch Reformed Church of Wellington from 1871 to 1906.

Andrew Murray grew up in a house that not only acknowledged the importance and necessity of missions but gave active support to the missionary effort, irrespective of denomination. Eleven pastors from Scotland, led by Andrew Murray Senior, heralded a new era. Andrew Murray's father was appointed to the frontier parish of Graaff Reinet, and he married Maria Stegmann of Cape Town on the way to his frontier congregation.

The Synod of 1847 had recognised the necessity of adopting 'strenuous measures for the extension of the kingdom of our saviour, within as well as without the colony' (Du Plessis 1965: 284), and so had appointed a 'committee for the Missionary Cause' to tackle serious deficiencies in the life of the church.

After ten years of existence, however, the committee could only present the disheartening report that there were no men, there was no money, and thus that they could make very little difference. During the preceding five years they had received a mere £1050 in contributions, of which £700 had been spent in the missionary effort. These meagre results left Murray and his evangelical missionary-minded colleagues, J.H. Neethling and N.J. Hofmeyr, deeply dissatisfied.

Fired with enthusiasm they proposed that the Synod at last put into action the decision it had taken ten years previously and commence a missionary undertaking somewhere north of the Vaal River, 'if possible on the confine of the congregation of Lydenburg'. Somewhat taken back by the forcefulness with which the suggestion was put, the Synod, however, agreed to allow the three men who had made the proposal, together with Ds. P.K. Albertyn, to form a Committee entrusted with carrying out the task (Neethling 1975: 60-61).

It is ironic that this very Synod, which decided to act on Murray's suggestion and undertake its first foreign mission to the black tribes of the Transvaal, also voted to organise separate congregations for black Dutch Reformed members. The issue of joint worship and communion service was hotly debated by two opposing parties: those from the rural areas, who were against any form of equality between white and black people; and those who refused to acknowledge or permit any division in the church.

Rev Andrew Murray Senior proposed a compromise:

[W]hile the Synod considered it desirable and scriptural that the converted heathen be incorporated into the existing congregations whenever possible, where this principle, because of weakness of some members hindered the

furtherance of the cause of Christ among the heathen, the heathen should be allowed to carry out their Christian privileges in a separate building (Neethling 1975: 62).

In order that the church could get started with its mission work, Murray was prepared to import earnest-minded men from wherever they could be obtained. The initial need was met in 1861 with the arrival in South Africa (as a result of Dr Robertson's effort) of two missionaries, the Scottish Alexander McKidd and the Swiss Henry Gonin. In April 1862, Murray set out with the new missionaries to find suitable mission sites north of the Vaal. The foreign mission work of the Dutch Reformed Church had begun (Neethling 1975: 63).

The main impetus behind this first missionary expedition was the revival of 1860. The result was an immediate new concern regarding the spread of the Gospel amongst the heathen. Numerous auxiliary missionary societies sprang up in the reawakened congregations, and Murray rejoiced over the 'farmer who is to accompany us (on the Transvaal expedition), who is selling his farm for £1500 that he may devote himself to mission work as a layman. The first African Boer that has done such a thing. A proof I trust that the Revival has been of God' (Neethling 1975: 63).

The revival marked an important development in Murray's understanding of mission work, and as a result in his undertaking for the church. Murray's emphasis on the fact that the missionary problem was in fact a personal one began to emerge at this point. His view was that, if any believer abides in Christ, then fruit, much fruit, must be the inevitable result.

Characteristic of Murray's approach to the mission and the work of the church was his continued assertion that the believer looks beyond himself and that the church looks beyond itself, to the needs of those without Christ. Murray stressed the importance of the mission to the heathen blacks, heathen browns, heathen English and also heathen Dutch. He became a renowned author, an international evangelist, and the moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church; furthermore, he established the African Institute, which sent forth hundreds of missionaries throughout Africa. Murray

also pioneered women's education in South Africa and established the Huguenot College for training Christian teachers. The mission of the Dutch Reformed Church exploded, with mission stations being established in Mashonaland, Matabeleland, Bechuanaland, Nyasaland, Nigeria and Sudan. Du Plessis (1911: 265) indicates:

At the same time the newly constituted committee entrusted him with the duty of finding missionaries who could proceed to the heathen, and thus inaugurate the foreign mission enterprise of the church. Two men volunteered for this week, Henry Gonin, a Swiss (he faithfully served at Paul Kuruger's farm near Rustenburg until his death in 1911), and Alexander McKidd a Scotsman. They arrived at the Cape in 1861, with their arrival the Foreign Mission work may be considered fairly launched.

Alexander McKidd

McKidd was born on 8 March 1821 at Milbank, Thurso, in Scotland. In March 1842 he obtained an M.A. degree from King's College, Aberdeen. He came from a humble background.

Dr Robertson, who was entrusted with the task of recruiting missionaries for the Dutch Reformed Church from Scotland, approached McKidd, who volunteered willingly to take up the challenge. In 1861 McKidd arrived in Cape Town. Paul Kruger, then president of the Transvaal, had already agreed in principle to the request made by Murray:

Mr Kruger says that when God gave him a new heart, it was as if he wanted the birds and the trees and everything to help him praise his saviour, and so he could not bear that there should be any poor black people not knowing and loving the saviour whom he loved (Maree 1962: 32).

The president of the Transvaal had no objection to the missionaries proclaiming the Gospel amongst the indigenous people. However, the responsibility rested with the chiefs to invite the missionaries to work in the areas of their jurisdiction.

McKidd got married to Hess Busman at the age of 41. The solemnisation was conducted by Rev. Murray in Bloemfontein. After their marriage the new couple returned to Rustenberg, where through the mediation of Cornelius Lottering they received an invitation to do mission work in the Zoutpansberg. McKidd proceeded to the Zoutpansberg on the 13th of May 1863. On arrival he was accommodated by the family of the Lotterings, who were not far from the white settlement at Schoemansdal. He immediately got involved in his assignment of bringing the Gospel to the people who attended his first message on the 24th of May 1863 (Ndou 2000: 29).

According to Maree (1962: 49) after his first address, McKidd explained:

There it was that, for the first time, we had the privilege of speaking to the real congregation of Kaffir, there were about 300, I think, present, not one of whom I believe had ever before heard of Christ and him crucified. It was a solemn occasion for them and also for us.

On this occasion, Michael Buys acted as an interpreter. McKidd's personal vocation had now truly been established. He was to be a Gospel proponent in a land which had been lying fallow for many years. He was really devoted to his task, and as a Gospel pioneer he was to bring Good News, which should have been coupled with the culture of the indigenous people.

According to Vhavenda custom, McKidd should have paid a casual visit to Chief Makhado, who was the leader of the largest local group in the Zoutpansberg. Malunga (1986:2) confirms this statement:

Apart from the Buys people, there were three black tribes in and around the station of Goedgedacht. The largest group was the Venda under Chief Makhado. The Venda group was the largest and occupied the Northern portion of the Zoutpansberg.

It was not correct for the chief's subjects to gather around McKidd without his knowledge. According to Vhavenda custom, the traditional leader should be

recognised as a political leader. Any person who wanted to pay homage could visit the chief's abode personally after proper channels of protocol had been observed. However, Chief Makhado preferred personal contact. MacKidd should have approached Chief Makhado for the land to establish his mission station; this action in itself would have created a good working relationship between the two men. Shaw (1860: 394) explains:

The lands, however, had been granted by the chiefs to the society (mission) and confirmed by the government, and certainly they must in all equity be regarded as fairly its property. The missionary should have acknowledged the traditional leader, as a friend and co-worker, and this relationship would have made it more convenient for the assiduous missionary to work without any hindrance.

On 20 October 1683, Rev. McKidd established a school, which was accommodated in one of the huts of Buys' children. Mrs McKidd taught the children hymns at the newly established school, and this heralded the beginning of organised education in the area.

In spite of problems and criticism from some of the indigenous people, Mrs McKidd went ahead with tuition. At that time the Vhavenda expected their boys to look after the cattle. There is a Venda expression '*Ni do la tshikolo naa?*' (Will you eat school?), but as time went on, the new converts became serious and very keen learners.

The issue of land to the Vhavenda is a very sensitive one, and a chief takes pride in the possession of land, whether it is occupied or not. When Chief Rasithuu Ramabulana, the father of Makhado, gave land to the white settlement, he gave it to them reluctantly. Moller-Malan (1953: 26) indicates:

Like Luvhisi (Louis Trichardt), the people of Enderekke also built water-furrows to irrigate their gardens, it being the dry season. Rasithuu listened with alarm when he was told that these people had brought all kinds of fruit

trees which they were planting now. Were they then going to remain here forever?

It is a well established fact that Cornelius Lottering gave Goedgedacht Farm as a gift to McKidd, who further bought an additional portion, which was later called Kranspoort, from the same owner. This transaction caused the resentment of the traditional leader:

Perplexity and regret are more conspicuous by the fact that the farms were bought from strangers and not from the traditional leaders who were the owners of the land (Ndou 1993: 20).

The relationship between Buys and the Ramabulanas was strengthened by the bond of marriage. Some of the Buys family had married Vhavenda girls, some of whom were even from the Ramabulana royal family. These marriages gave them status, and as relatives they also had free access to the traditional leader's place of abode without much ado. Ndou (2000: 23) elaborates:

Although the grandson of Ramabulana was coloured, he had Vhavenda royal blood in his veins, as a result an ox was slaughtered for him, because he had visited his grandmother (Ramabulana). Michael Buys and his colleagues were not regarded as strangers any longer, but as sons-in-law (*vhakwasha* or *vhaduhulu*) and as relatives. The late Chief Patrick Mphephu upheld the family relationship with the Buys of Mara until his untimely death in 1987. Mphephu was still respected by the Buys as his brothers-in-law.

A common factor that caused conflict between the missionaries and the indigenous people was that the traditional leaders wanted to uphold their status and were not to be addressed or to be preached to by commoners (*vhasiwana*). In support of this statement, Malunga (1986: 7) states: 'How could a chief allow himself to be lectured to from the pulpit by a commoner (evangelist) who was his subject?' According to Vhavenda culture, the traditional leader is also a priest (*tshifhe*), and he is the one who handles religious matters.

Stéfanus Hofmeyr

Kirkaldy (2002: 94) describes the beginning of Hofmeyr's tenure in Schoemansdal as follows:

Rev. Hofmeyr took over from Rev. McKidd. In an interesting aside on the attitude of the Schoemansdalers to the mission, Hofmeyr would later record that, at the time of his arrival, the Boer attitude towards missionaries was distinctly unfavourable. His predecessor had been threatened with physical violence by two farmers armed with sjamboks. He himself had suffered ostracism because of his vocation. He had often had to outspan in the market square of Schoemansdal, eating and sleeping alone in his wagon, since nobody would have him in their house.

Once again, the missionary of Goedgedacht could not read the signs of ongoing hostility from the chief and his councillors, who were no longer in favour of the increasing number of whites at Schoemansdal. However, Chief Makhado was not very worried, because he was on good terms with the white settlers. Moller-Malan (1953: 152) indicated the general sentiments when he reported:

It will be better if these white people could just go away, said Katsikatsi (Madzhie) regent to Makhado the young chief. They are forever troubling us, wanting us to work for them all the time. Also they are full of pride. They do not know the difference between the Ramabulana and the common folk. To them we are alike except for the chief.

The white settlers at Schoemansdal and the missionaries who lived there did not grasp the cultural background of the Vhavenda. According to Vhavenda tradition, the members of the household of the royal family and the commoners do not have the same status; '*vhakololo*' are members of the royal family, whereas the commoners are called '*vhalanda*'. No wonder Katsikatsi complained that the *vhakololo* were not being accorded the respect that was due to them. This caused tension, and a general misunderstanding resulted. Chief Makhado even went to the extent of indicating that the missionary at Goedgedacht should leave first. Moller-Malan (1953:

149) indicates that the chief, wishing to spare his friends, said, 'Let the missionary go first', for he did not like people who wanted to pray for him. This atmosphere hindered the acceptance of the Gospel. Rev. Hofmeyr was not ready to leave the mission, as the settlers at Schoemansdal advised. He had to move to a farm called Noemdraai, where a new mission station was later established, called Bethesda.

According to Ndou (2000: 36), in January 1871 Hofmeyr went back to Goedgedachtand and rebuilt the mission station. He eventually won the support of the local population. He was a cheerful and courageous man. Hofmeyr was an ideal missionary, patient, with a deep insight into the meaning of the scriptures, and abounding love for his fellowman, whether black or white. Through his efforts, a significant number, from both the Buys clan and the indigenous people, were converted to Christianity. In 1878, 114 people were baptised (62 adults and 52 children).

In June 1889, Hofmeyr visited the Cape colony. On his return, he was accompanied by a young minister called Jan Pieter De Villiers. He was assigned to Mara station as a pastor. Unfortunately, the young pastor was not impressed with the standard of living and the cultural background of the people he was to work with. In August 1890, Rev. Hofmeyr made an effort to improve the situation by sending two evangelists to enquire from Chief Makhado whether it was not yet time to have an evangelist at his place of abode. The chief remained adamant in his refusal. Still, Hofmeyr sent Solomon Maseoana (Nemasiwana), a man who was born in the chief's area, but had fled during the conflict with the white settlers.

This approach was not correct according to Vhavenda custom. Hofmeyr should have visited the chief himself as a way of paying homage. It was also difficult for the chief to accept being addressed by a commoner. The fact that Rev. Hofmeyr had spent 29 years of his mission work in the Zoutpansberg, without converting Chief Makhado and his household, was heartbreaking for the missionary. Moller-Mallan (1953: 77-80) confirms this:

It broke his heart that his message of salvation had no impression on Makhado. Particularly when he received the message of the chief: 'You and your mission are in my way'.

Hofmeyr was perturbed and perplexed by the fact that his efforts met with no success, even though he had made several attempts to convert Makhado to the Christian religion. He failed to realise that for a traditional leader to forsake his traditional religion, in which he was a priest and the political head, was not so simple. It is small wonder that the missionaries' attempts to baptise the traditional leaders were met with contempt.

John Daneel

Hofmeyr died in July 1905, and was buried at Kranspoort Mission. Ndou (2000: 39-40) narrates the events that followed:

The work was taken over by his son-in-law, Rev. John Daneel, who had joined him 1898. Daneel cared for both spirit and the body of his new converts. He contributed greatly to the development of education. Within a short time, he established schools at Kranspoort, Gogobole and Messina, and also acted as a superintendent for these schools

A clinic was also erected for both Christians and non-Christians at Kranspoort, and a qualified nurse was employed to look after the daily medical needs of the local people. The district nurse from Louis Trichardt visited the clinic once a week (Malunga 1986: 14). This was a great development brought about by Rev. Daneel. It was another way of spreading the Gospel, because he helped all people, without regard for denominational affiliations.

He resolved to demarcate Kranspoort into three zones. Those who were converted to Christianity were to be placed at Kranspoort Mission station, and those who had not accepted Christianity were placed in other zones. The mission work did proceed very smoothly, due to hostilities between the Christians and non-Christians who shared extended family members. The decision to subdivide created a problem and

had enormous potential to spark enmity between these two groups. Malunga(1986:15) explains:

During this period the farm Kranspoort was subdivided into three zones, namely, Patmos, Kudetja, and the mission station. The first two zones were occupied by the non-Christians while the mission station was meant only for black Christians. The Christians looked down upon the non-Christians who adhered to traditions which were regarded as outdated. The non-Christians scoffed at the Christians for abandoning their tribal traditions and customs in favour of an alien practice.

This separation of the people became a revolutionary factor, which implied the breaking up of the solidarity of the indigenous people and the community at large. The new state of affairs at the mission station enticed the Christians not to have anything to do with their fellow people, but rather to shun them as heathens and barbarians. Family relations were cut off. Mission stations appeared to be breaking down the power and the authority of the chiefs. According to Majeke (1953: 25): 'Allegiance to the missionary undermined allegiance to the chief'. Christians in the mission station were missing the point by forgetting that they belonged to the universal church, whose aim was to evangelise or share Christian fellowship with all of their brothers and sisters.

Daneel, who was regarded as a man of wisdom and sympathy, died on 16 July 1949 in Cape Town after a long illness, and was buried at Stellenbosch.

Lucas Van der Merwe

Rev. Lucas Cornelius Van der Merwe was inducted as missionary of Kranspoort on 27 October 1946. The number of converts was 800; he found that the station was in a state of disrepair. Van der Merwe, his wife Violet Johana, and the inhabitants of Kranspoort embarked on a successful joint effort to repair the station (Ndou 2000: 43) which led to great improvements.

The good mission which was carried out by Van der Merwe was hindered by the rules and regulations governing the Kranspoort Mission, which were not adhered to as expected. Malunga (1986: 44) indicates:

Only confessing Christians could be buried with the missionaries in the consecrated cemetery at Kranspoort. Non-Christians were to be buried separately in the unconsecrated cemetery.

Van der Merwe did not understand the indigenous people, or their cultural background regarding the respect accorded to the dead and burial rites. According to Vhavenda tradition, family members/close relatives are never separated at death, and are to be buried in the same vicinity. The idea of burying the dead in separate graveyards, as practised by this missionary at Kraansport was unacceptable to the indigenous people. According to Venda tradition, the deceased should be buried following the full rituals of the specific clan, and the dead should be laid to rest next to relatives who have already passed away.

Nico Smith

According to Ndou (2000: 45), Rev. Nico Smith established the Dutch Reformed mission at Tshisaulu, in the Tshivhase area. Only 10% of the black people in the homelands accepted Christianity. Rev. Smith and his wife, Dr Ellen Faul, a medical practitioner, took it upon themselves to do mission in work in Venda.

Church members and their relatives had mixed feelings about Nico Smith's plan to leave his white congregation in order to move to Venda. DeSaintonge (1989: 71) indicates:

Beyers Naude gave them his heartfelt approval, the congregation was stunned, not just at losing him, but at the thought of him wasting his talents on the black people, and Ellen's mother went into an instant depression.

Nico Smith's motto was that 'the Lord will provide', and eventually they arrived in Venda in August 1956. They were accommodated in two rondavels without

windows. Nonetheless, they were well received, along with their baby. Johannes Netshikulwe became Nico's right hand. He was an interpreter and an advisor regarding Venda culture.

Nico Smith started with his mission church service while his wife opened a clinic in a rondavel, where minor ailments were treated. News spread that a doctor had arrived. People came in numbers to get help, and although Ellen Faul was not trained as a veterinary surgeon, to the Vhavenda she was a doctor and that was that. As a result, people came to her for help even with their livestock. De Saintonge (1989: 76) describes one such incident:

On their first morning they woke up to find an old man sitting on their doorstep. He said he'd come because he'd heard there was a doctor in the house and could she come and help his cow. The cow had swallowed a mango and it got stuck in its gullet.

Ellen Faul's approach to the Vhavenda was outstanding, because she could act as both veterinarian and medical practitioner in order to assist the people who were seeking help. During her clinic visits, she went to the extent of inviting the local traditional healers, in order to hear their opinion regarding the treatment of diseases. She would explain her Western ways of treatment. Thus, the traditional healers realised that Ellen Faul was not a threat to them.

Patients who could not obtain a satisfactory cure from the traditional healers flocked to the hospital for further treatment. They started queuing for treatment for all types of ailments, from infectious diseases to infertility. The medical assistance offered by Ellen Faul acted as bait for new converts, who were ready to accept the Gospel without much hesitation. People came to be healed, both spiritually and physically.

However, Nico Smith was confronted with a financial problem, as his funds could not adequately cover the developments related to his mission work. He made requests for funds from potential sponsors, and money came in from different sources. The Department of Health approved the construction of a T.B. hospital, with a department subsidy of R14.00 for every R2.00 raised from other sources (Ndou 2000:

47). Donations were received from organisations and individuals for the new mission work. The medical services were highly appreciated by the indigenous people.

Nico Smith conducted his church service in a temporary building and went from hut to hut doing house visits (huisbesoek). He realised and admitted that he did not understand or have any respect for Vhavenda culture. Eventually, he discovered that he was preaching about God whom the Vhavenda had known since time immemorial. De Saintonge quotes the remarks made by Johannes Netshikuwe, who was Smith's interpreter:

You are telling them what they already know, said Johannes, they already believe in God who created the earth, and they still believe that he is ruling this world... Why should they come to hear you telling them what they already know (De Saintonge 1989: 79).

Nico Smith started to present Jesus Christ in terms of his mighty acts of healing the sick and casting out evil spirits. The Vhavenda listened attentively because they wanted to know of this great man Jesus who could cure their ailing bodies. The new approach bore good fruits. The first person to be baptised was an old man called Muthago from Muledane, who confessed as follows: 'If what you say is true', he said, 'and Jesus is the king of this world, and I belong to him, then I must come to him' (Ndou 2000: 48).

When the new converts realised that Jesus was the king of the world, they felt secure against all other evil forces. According to Vhavenda culture, kingship is regarded with great significance. The Vhavenda Christians regard God as a mighty king over all ancestors. Nico Smith was in line with the Vhavenda culture when he proclaimed Jesus as king.

It is gratifying to recount the dedication of the newly completed church at Tshilidzini on 12 November 1960: Nico Smith had the pleasure of requesting his first baptised convert, Muthago, to accept the privilege of unveiling a cornerstone with the inscription: 'Khangulu 12/11/60. Jesu Kristo Murena'. To Muthago and other members of the congregation, this was a great honour.

According to Vhavenda culture, women may not look men directly in the eyes. They are expected to look down while a man is speaking or addressing them. Hence, sitting on chairs or in church pews with men was unthinkable. They would rather kneel on the floor or on a mat (*vho gwadama*). It was an embarrassment to Nico Smith to see women sitting with their backs to the pulpit.

De Saintonge (1989: 81) quotes Smith:

‘I can still remember that first morning’, he said. ‘About sixty women turned up, most of them had never been to a church in their lives. Some were sitting on the benches with their backs on the pulpit.’

Nico Smith had good working relations with the local traditional leaders. A big church was established at Chief Netshimbupfe’s (Shiel farm) area. He managed to gain the trust of King Davhana Nesengani, who was the chief of the area. This was the breakthrough for Nico Smith, as the chief also encouraged his household to become members of the church. Churches were also built in the area of Chief Nelwamondo and Chief Ramovha of Mulenzhe. According to Ndou (2000: 50):

The hospital, under the management of Ellen Faul, progressed very well; it had twenty beds and obtained a considerable reputation, for it had already started training local girls.

According to the indigenous people’s beliefs, when the traditional healer has cured a patient of his or her ailment, a gift called *tshidzimu* (which is a present to a traditional healer, or fee given after consultation) must be given as a token of appreciation. When the doctors at the mission clinic assisted an infertile woman, Mamaila Rasenga, to fall pregnant and give birth, her husband, Mkhachane Rasenga, a traditional healer, was so excited that he brought a cow to the hospital as a token of appreciation for the doctor who had assisted his wife. The latter refused the gift.

During Nico Smith’s seven years of ministry in Venda, he established about 23 outpost mission stations. The clinic started by his wife grew into a large training hospital. Ellen Faul took it upon herself to educate the indigenous people in primary

health care. People suffering from serious diseases, such as tuberculosis, were sent to the hospital by their relatives without delay, and some of the traditional leaders confessed to Ellen Faul that usually, such a disease took a long time to heal.

The establishment of the hospital was a blessing for the indigenous people. Nico and Ellen succeeded in fulfilling their calling, although they did not leave their names on the hospital building as founders. The hospital was named 'Tshilidzini' (the place of mercy) by the Vhavenda (Ndou 2000: 51).

Seven years after his arrival, Nico Smith left Venda for Pretoria, where he spent three years working at the headquarters of the Dutch Reformed Church, died of a heart attack in June 2010. Thereafter, he was appointed as Professor of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. Accompanied by Ellen, he moved back to Pretoria and began preaching in Mamelodi in 1982, and in 1985 the couple moved into the township itself: They were the first whites officially permitted by the government to live in a black township, in an era where apartheid laws rigorously segregated residential areas, schools, hospitals and public amenities.

After decades of good works as a champion of human rights, Smith died of a heart attack at the age of 81 on 19 June 2010. His sense of justice was what drove him to feel that all people should have access to equal opportunities.

Louis Swanepoel

Rev. Swanepoel started working at the Tshilidzini congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1967. He was conversant in the Sesotho language, and this served as a base for him to learn Tshivenda. Within a short time, he could preach in Tshivenda without difficulty. He was assisted by the evangelists Neluheni and Foroma, who were in charge of the wards Lwamondo and Manamani, Tsianda and Lwenzhe respectively.

These evangelists assisted in conducting catechism lessons for new converts. Swanepoel worked in close cooperation with the Department of Education, and with

financial aid from the church he helped upgrade Lwenzhe High School. The church donated the school's domestic science block, the library and the hall.

Swanepoel built churches at Manavhela, Nngwekhulu and Mulenzhe. He went to the extent of building a church close to Chief Davhana's place of abode. Chief Davhana, who was commonly called king, was an associate of President Paul Kruger.

By building a church next to the chief's abode, Swanepoel had hoped that members of the royal family would be encouraged to attend church services. He did not realise that it is more difficult to convert the royals than it is to convert the commoners (Ndou 2000: 52). The church built by Rev. Swanepoel for Chief Davhana was deserted and ultimately closed down; its members joined the new charismatic churches.

Simon Mudindivhathu Murovhi was nurtured by Rev. Swanepoel; in 1969 he was an acting principal of the Tshilidzini special school for the handicapped. Rev. Swanepoel was instrumental in the establishment of the school, which succeeded in uplifting the conditions of the disabled people in Venda. He left the Tshilidzini mission in 1973.

Faure Louw

Louw arrived in Venda in January 1958 at the invitation of Chief Mphaphuli. Two years later, a mere five people had confessed their faith. However, after five years the congregation at Nthume boasted 77 members. The first thing Louw did upon his arrival was to learn the local language, Tshivenda. He was assisted by Rev. Mudau and they both followed in the footsteps of their predecessors by conducting house visits. Rev. Louw used to travel on foot from house to house at Khumbe, praying for both Christians and non-converts (Crafford 1982: 346-347).

Rev. Ndou (personal interview, 23/04/2014) indicated that 'Rev. Louw's mission work in Venda, South Africa was in a state of political unrest, and the Dutch Reformed Church at Tshilidzini was gutted by fire about 26 June 1976'.

Rev. Louw, through God's mercy, had a premonition that led him to advise the church Board to take out insurance on the church building. Mbeu bookshop, which was run by the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kirk), was also set ablaze during the same period of unrest. There was a general feeling that the church was set on fire because it was associated with the government of the day.

Rev. Attie Van Niekerk was stationed in Venda from 1978 until 1983 (Crafford 1982: 346). In the 80s there was a small element of contextualisation: Louw and Van Niekerk were involved with Lutheran ministers such as T.S. Farisani, A.M. Mahamba and Tshifhiwa Muofhe, who died in prison.

Wilhelm Van Deventer

Rev. Louw left Venda on 5 January 1982, after being expelled for political reasons, and was succeeded by Wilhelm Van Deventer, the first Dutch Reformed Church minister who lived amongst the Vhavenda as part of the community.

Van Deventer attended meetings called by the local headman, Makhumbane, since he was part of the community. He was exposed to the Vhavenda and their cultural practices on a daily basis. Indigenisation was mostly undertaken by providing literature in Venda (Bible translation, Nyimbo, Hosana), but little was done regarding the bridging of the gap between Western and Venda customs. By the end of 20th century missionary era, Van Niekerk (2009) indicates that:

The Dutch Reformed Church mission work of that time combined Christian faith and modernism. It consisted of Evangelism (preaching), church planting, mission hospitals, centres for handicapped, a few training centres, etc. Little attention was given to problems emanating from traditional African culture, in the expectation that they would disappear with modernisation and conversion to Christianity. Western civilisation was therefore seen as the visible expression of the Christian faith.

3.3.2. Berlin Missionary Society

The arrival of the Berlin missionaries transformed the situation in which Christians, and even followers of African religion, operated. It also raised questions about the nature of the mission society, the kind of people that the missionaries were, and the kind of training that they received.

The Berlin Mission Society (as it was known from 1908) was founded by a group of Prussian notables on 29 February 1824 as a society to promote evangelical (or Protestant) missions among the heathen. The first meeting took place in the apartment of Morritz August von Bethmann-Hollweg, who would later become the Prussian Minister for Culture. Included among the founders, and subsequent committees of the organisation, were military officers, lawyers, government officials and theologians (Kirkaldy 2002: 166).

When the society was founded, none of its founders held an official position in the hierarchy of the church, as with many other mission societies at the time of its foundation. It was thus an interdenominational, voluntary organisation tied to no established church.

Missionaries from the Berlin Mission would later establish themselves in the heartland of Venda, in areas under the direct control of local *mahosi*. They began to feel their way into the Zoutpansberg area and tentatively began to think about establishing themselves in Venda.

A visit to *Khosi* Madzivhe, by Mission-Inspector Charles Murray of the Dutch Reformed Church in mid-1865, had been followed by a journey of exploration by Brothers Merensky, Grützer, Trümpelmann, and Köhler from the Berlin Mission Society in September 1869. Included in this journey was a meeting with Madzivhe himself (Kirkaldy 2002: 95).

In October 1870, Brother Buyer, at Blauberg mission station, the closest Berlin mission station to the Zoutpansberg, undertook an investigative journey to what he identified as the Vhavenda in the east of the Zoutpansberg. His main aim was to

meet with Chief Tshivhase, so as to sound him out about the possibility of starting a mission station on his land. However, he had to give up the attempt, as large areas were cut off by flooding as a result of extremely heavy rains. In May 1871, missionaries Grützner, Buyer and Beuster visited Makhado to discuss opening a mission station on his land. They realised it was he, rather than Madzivhe, who was one of the great *mahosi* of Venda. At this meeting Makhado managed to sustain their hopes of being given land for a mission station.

Just under a year later, in March 1872, Beuster and Stech started a mission station in the lands of Chief Mutle, a vassal of Sekhukhune. However, within a few days of its opening, and allegedly 'much to Mutle's sincere regret', Sekhukhune ordered that they stop work and leave his country. They returned to Botshabelo, and soon after that they made their way to Tshivhase, who accommodated them and gave them permission to start a new station there (Kirkaldy 2002: 97). Chief Tshivhase had an unshakeable belief in traditional religion, but he invited the missionaries to preach and teach. He did this, not particularly because he was interested in the new Christian religion, but because the presence of a missionary in a chief's area of jurisdiction was regarded an honour. The establishment of schools was a further consideration, as was the prospective supply of weapons.

The founding of the first station was followed by the establishment of Ga-Matzebandela (later called Tshakhuma) in the lands of Chief Madzivhandila, by Dr Erdmann Schweltnus, in May 1874. Although Madzivhandila was in fact an independent ruler, the missionaries at first incorrectly identified him as a vassal of Makhado.

Three years after the foundation of this station, in July 1877, a station named Georgenholtz was established in the lands of Chief Makwarela Mphaphuli. The first missionary to be stationed there was Klaas Koen, a 'born Hottentot', who had received some of his schooling and his theological training in Germany.

Carl Beuster

Rev. Beuster was born on 7 July 1844 in Liebenwalde. He joined the mission in 1865 and was sent to South Africa on 24 June 1870. Beuster, the first missionary to go to the Tshivhase area accompanied by his colleagues, used a successful method of symbolic interactionism by acknowledging Chief Makhado's rightful status.

On 8 November 1872, missionaries arrived at a place called Maungani in the Tshivhase area. Rev. Grütner and Buyer went back to Matlala, where they were stationed. Rev. Beuster received a warm welcome from Chief Tshivhase, who was very keen for the missionaries to work amongst his people. Without wasting any time, they started constructing a mission station. Buildings for accommodation were erected within a short space of a time.

Mathivha (1985: 41-42) indicates that: 'It was through his influence that Chief Ligeigise Tshivhase, as early as 1870, started to seek for missionaries to preach and teach amongst his people'. The main problem was communication, but as he had a basic speaking knowledge of Sotho he was able to learn Tshivenda without difficulty (Kirkaldy 2002: 174).

Rev. McKidd and Hofmeyr were using Setswana books. This approach did not make a good impression on Chief Makhado, because he wanted to be addressed in his own language.

Besuter and Stech were informed that there was a man who was proclaiming the same Gospel as they were. This man took it upon himself to visit them. He arrived at Maungani on Christmas day in 1872. He introduced himself as Johannes Mutshaeni, who had been baptised in the same faith by the Wesleyan mission. According to Mathivha (1985: 41-42), Mutshaeni was a Muvenda Christian pioneer, whose name can be found in the records as the first Muvenda Christian:

Johannes Mutshaeni (Malindi Neluheni) was born at Tshiheni, an area due west of lake Fundudzi. Like many Vendas Johannes heard of Kimberley and

wandered south to the diamond fields. He wandered south-east into Natal where he was baptised by James Alison of the Wesley Mission.

Beuster proved an inspired choice as head of the station at Ha-Tshivhase, where he remained until his death on 5 November 1901. From the time that he was first stationed there, he began translating the mission liturgy into Tshivenda. He also played a major role in producing the first reader for school use, Luther's Small Catechism, and the rudiments of the Venda hymnbook (Kirkaldy 2002:175).

In 1892, Beuster produced a Tshivenda translation of Old and New Testament Bible stories. Beuster also put together a collection of insects, so that through science could also profit through his work. Rev. Beuster is regarded as one of the best amongst the missionaries at the Berlin Mission. He has left a footprint in the fields of both education and Christianity. He established a school, which was run by his step-daughter, Marrician.

According to Khorombi (2001: 51), 'Rev. Beuster has without doubt contributed more than any other missionary to the upliftment of the Vhavenda people educationally and spiritually'. Nemudzivhadi (1991: 105), in his unpublished speech delivered during the dedication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mbilwi, said the following:

Mufunzi Beuster o vha a tshi dalela misanda o namela bere, huno arali a wana tshikona tsho tangana, na ene o vha a tshi mona na khoro o di namela bere a tshi khou tshina. Musi tshikona tshi tshi khauwa a thoma u amba Fhungo la Mudzimu. (Rev. Beuster used to visit the chiefs' kraals on horseback. If he found the *tshikona* dance in progress he would, while still on horseback, join in the dance. After the *tshikona* dance had abated, he would then start preaching the Word of God.)

It was quite appropriate for Beuster to have waited until the *tshikona* had abated, and this was a clear indication that he had respect for the Vhavenda culture. After he joined in the *tshikona* dance, the chief gave him a hearing and thus the Gospel proclaimed.

When Beuster realised great qualities possessed by Mutshaeni, he decided to send this Muvenda pioneer for further training in the field of pastoral and mission work. Arrangements were made for him to be admitted to Umgungundlovu Bible continuation class in Pietermaritzburg.

Mutshaeni was ordained as an evangelist, and with all the authority and knowledge he had obtained from Bible School, Mutshaeni started to proclaim the Gospel of God. He started by establishing mission outposts, such as Tshamanyatsha, Khalavha and Mandala. He also made a great impact at Tshakhuma on members of his clan, such as the Madimas and Neluheni, who were close to Chief Madzivhandila. He thus played a role in influencing the chief (Ndou 2000: 61).

Chief Madzivhandila reacted immediately when he heard that Rev. Beuster and Mutshaeni were doing good work in Chief Tshivhase's area. He concluded that the missionaries had managed to win the hearts and minds of the people. He set off with his delegation to visit Rev. Beuster at Maungani to try and persuade him to establish a mission station at his own place, Tshakhuma.

The chiefs, as the traditional leaders, invited the missionaries into their lands; mission work during this time was not imposed on the indigenous people. While the chief advocated this positive step, their subjects appreciated the move taken by their leaders. The request made by Chief Madzivhandila gave Beuster a mandate to negotiate with the Berlin Missionary Society for a missionary to be sent to Tshakhuma.

From 14 February 1893 until his death, Beuster was the Berlin Society Vice-Superintendent of the Northern Districts of the Northern Transvaal. Beuster was a pioneer of the Venda mission, and the era from 1872-1901 bears the imprint of his character. Throughout the whole of Venda, which he so often traversed on his extensive Gospel tours, his name is well known.

At Tshivhase, it was he who laid the foundations on which his successors could continue to build. In one exhortation to his congregation, he said: 'Whoever of you

shall refuse to listen to the missionaries who will come to you after me and takes no heed of the teachings of the Gospel, will be guilty before God' (Kirkaldy 2002: 176).

Carl Stech

Stech was born on 29 June 1844 in Quedlinburg. He seems to have been an illegitimate child and his mother died when he was young. Before joining the mission, he worked for a trader in glass and porcelain goods.

Stech seems to have had a reputation for wildness, and the Mission Society had its doubts about him before they sent him out. He was sent to a Christian institute for a further year after he had completed his studies (Kirkaldy 2002: 176).

He was sent to South Africa on 5 March 1872. Stech was first stationed at Botshabelo and Ga-Matlala. His posting to Ha-Tshivhase and his transfer to Blaauwburg in November 1873 have already been discussed. 1875, Stech married Emile Meineke, born in 1848.

Stech produced a memorandum requesting that he be recalled to Germany, because his wife's health was poor. Stech was then pensioned off. However, in response to complaints received, Superintendent Krause had an interview with Christine Fisher, who had formerly worked as a childminder for the Stech family. During the course of this interview, it emerged that she had had an affair with Stech. She had fallen pregnant and had then attempted, unsuccessfully, to induce an abortion (Kirkaldy 2002: 177). When the baby was born, Fisher drowned it. Stech had been away at Synod at the time of the birth. Upon his return, he and his wife sent Fisher away. The missionary also told her to lie about the paternity of the child. As a result of this investigation, Stech was expelled from the mission.

Erdmann Schwellnus

Schwellnus was born on 2 December 1841 at Lutkomanscheit bei Schakuhnen in Lithuania. His father was a farmer. Believing that he had a calling, and because he hated drunkenness and gambling, he joined the mission in 1866.

After arriving in South Africa at the end of 1872, Schweltnus spent his first months at Botshabelo, learning Northern Sotho while teaching at the local school. He moved to Ha-Tshivhase in November 1873 and was with Beuster for about six months before starting a new mission station at Tshakhuma on 14 May 1874. Again, his obvious talent for languages and his ability to speak Northern Sotho had helped him to pick up quite a lot of Tshivenda in the first six months of his stay. He did not use an interpreter when he preached for the first time at Tshakhuma (Kirkaldy 2002: 178).

The chief encouraged his subjects to help the missionary build both his house and the church. He established a school in 1875. He made friends with Chief Maphuphe from Lwamondo, who sent four of his sons to attend the school. Schweltnus also started with catechism classes for baptism, and in 1877 his first ceremony of baptism was conducted. In the same year, Rev. Beuster baptised Mutshaeni's wife, Johanna. Unfortunately, Johannes Mutshaeni did not witness the baptism of his wife, having died in 1876.

At first the relationship between traditional leaders and the missionaries augured well. However, as time went on, traditional leaders ceased to have full trust in the missionaries, because there was a feeling that the missionaries' paramount aim was to take the land from locals, and not to proclaim the Gospel (Ndou 2000: 63).

Beuster did not make any attempt to buy land for missionary purposes, whereas with his counterpart at Tshakhuma, the opposite was the case. Schweltnus bought land from a trader called Watt, though in fact the land belonged to Chief Madzivhandila, who had cordially invited him to do mission work in his area of jurisdiction.

According to Mathivha (1885: 258), 'Schweltnus bought the farm at Tshakhuma in the name of the Berlin Mission from trader Watt'. It is indeed regrettable that the purchase of land by the missionaries led to racial friction amongst the traditional leaders and the missionaries, who were assigned to proclaim the Gospel. Even at present, traditional leaders are still not free to surrender their land for the purpose of private ownership.

Otto Klatt, Beuster's successor at Ha-Tshivhase, was transferred to Gertrudsburg. Schwellnus was then made missionary in charge at Ha-Tshivhase, working alongside his son Theodor. One of their first tasks was to rebuild the mission station further up the hill, which they renamed Beuster.

The third missionary from the Berlin Missionary Society went to the land of Chief Ranwedzi Mphaphuli. Makwarela mentioned that the presence of the missionary in their midst would enhance the status of the chief as well as that of his subjects. After careful consideration of the reasons provided by Makwarela, the chief acceded to the request. Ultimately, the missionaries were invited to work in Chief Mphaphuli's area. A local land owner and his daughter donated money for the spreading of the Gospel in Chief Mphaphuli's area (Ndou 2000: 65). Schwellnus died at Georgenholtz, which was named for this benevolent landowner, on 6 May 1910. He was buried next to his wife at Beuster.

Klaas Koen

Rev. Koen was born at Haarlem in the Cape Colony on 22 May 1852, the son of Piet Koen. He served first as an elder and later the preacher of the small Christian community there.

According to Ndou (2000: 66) on 26 July 1877, a mission station was established at Tshifudi (present-day Mavhola parish), next to where Makwarela stayed (Gaba village). The mission station was named Georgenholtz. The first missionary to man the newly established station was Rev. Klaas Koen, who was first stationed at the Anhalt Schmidt Berlin Mission in the Cape Colony.

Johannes Madima, the first convert at Tshakhuma mission, was sent to the newly established mission station at Mavhola to assist Rev. Koen. By 1879 five people were baptised, amongst them Joseph Radema, the brother of Makwarela, and Tshishonga Lalumbe, who was given the new name of Nathaniel Lalumbe.

According to Vhavenda culture, the name given to a child has a meaning: one could be named after a great grandparent, or it may remind parents of an event, which

happened prior to the birth. For example, the author's name 'Aludzulwi' means 'unstayable', as the researcher was born when his family was experiencing challenges.

Makwarela's greatest disappointment was to be refused baptism, because he had many wives. According to Mathivha (1986: 55-56), he was very disappointed when the missionary refused to baptise him because he was not prepared to abandon his many wives. This hindered him from accepting the Gospel, despite Makwarela persuading his father to accept missionaries.

The newly converted Nathaniel Lalumbe and Johannes Madima worked hard to assist Rev. Koen. He made use of these two Vhavenda pioneers to spread the Gospel; he was not wholly accepted because he did not have a wife. According to Vhavenda culture any single young person is not taken seriously, and is still regarded a child, because they cannot discuss family needs and problems.

Kirkaldy (2002: 180) indicates that, with Koen's death on 10 February 1883, Dietrich Baumhöfner was left in charge of the station (Old Georgenholtz). At Koen's funeral, Beuster preached from John 11: 3 in the church. After a pause during which the congregation dug the grave, Beuster read Revelation 7: 13-14 at the graveside.

Not only was Koen's wife distraught and Beuster deeply saddened, but reportedly, many of the Christians and even the non-converts were weeping. As the body was conveyed to its final resting place, the funeral hymn '*Kha ri yeni*' (Let me go) was sung:

Let me go, let me go
That I may see my
Jesus
My heart is filled with
Longing
To hold onto him in
Eternity
And to stand before
His Throne

In the opinion of the mission, not only did Koen have 'all the keenness of youth'; he was also 'highly talented'. Sadly, within a few short weeks, Baumhöfner succumbed to malaria and died. A convert by the name of Franz Maluleke took charge of the mission station under the guidance of Rev. Beuster, who was stationed at Maungani (Kirkaldy 2002: 222).

Johann Meister

On 18 April 1890, Meister joined Schwellnus at Tshakhuma as a non-ordained probationary missionary. He served there until 6 July 1891, when he was sent to assist Beuster at Ha-Tshivhase. Before this, he had already accompanied Beuster on a mission journey, and had also been sent to help Wessman at Georgenholtz when needed.

Serving as Beuster's assistant, over and above his normal tasks at the station and accompanying Beuster on his journeys, he assisted the missionary in his attempts to negotiate peace in the wars involving Makwarela Mphaphuli and Tshivhase, in treating those injured in these battles, and in attempting to secure better treatment for prisoners. He was also sent out with native assistants on preaching journeys (Kirkaldy 2002: 181).

Ludwig Giesekke

On 18 May 1906 the newly appointed missionary to Georgenholtz (Mavhola) transferred the station far away from Mavhola to Ha-Luvhimbi (present-day Georgenholtz) in order to avoid the threat of malaria. Rev. Giesekke was assisted by his brother-in-law, Rev. Schwellnus.

Mrs Giesekke was instrumental in her husband's success, since she was born in Venda (at the Tshakhuma mission), and was regarded as *Vho-Makhadzi* (Aunt). She performed the duties of a midwife in a small clinic, and also helped the people greatly during an outbreak of measles.

According to Ndou (2000: 68), during the Giesecke's stay at Georgenholtz, both the school and church work progressed well until he was transferred to Tshakhuma.

Stephanus Makhado Masiagwala

In 1904 Rev. Ernst Friedrich Godtschling was transferred to Botshabelo Seminary School. He was succeeded by Rev. Carl August Otto Klatt, who also worked hard to improve the mission station. In 1914 Rev. Otto Klatt was recalled, and a Muvenda pioneer replaced him (Kirkaldy 2002: 85).

This was the first time in history that a Muvenda was to replace a white missionary and to carry the same status, not as an evangelist but as an ordained pastor. Rev. Masiagwala was nurtured by Rev. Beuster at Maungani.

Masiagwala was first trained as a teacher and in June 1907 was ordained at Tshakhuma as pastor, and became the first Muvenda teacher. He established new mission outposts at Shondoni, Lukau, Dzimauli and Dzamba.

It was indeed a blessing to have had a person from the royal house proclaiming the Gospel, because he knew all the cultural practices pertaining to the indigenous people. He spoke with authority and his listeners gave him a fair hearing. Mminele (1983: 248) supports this argument through the following statement: 'one can just imagine what a strong effect the return of the Muvenda chief, Chief Makhado (Masiagwala) had on his tribe'.

Masiagwala died in 1948 at Georgenholtz, during his retirement. The ordination of Masiagwala had opened doors for the inflow of the local people, who felt called to be preachers. It was through him that the Berlin Missionary Society brought the Gospel to traditional leaders such as Chief Rambuda at Dzimauli, and Chief Nethengwe. Rev. Masiagwala was a great asset to mission work.

Nicodimus Masekela

In 1947 Nicodimus Masekela, who was a teacher at Tshakhuma and the son of Paul Masekela, the founder of the Berlin Mission Station at Tshiozwi in the Sinthumule area, was ordained as a minister. Masekela was transferred to Maungani in 1952 to serve as both a teacher and a minister.

According to Ndou (2000: 73), African ministers did not perceive any problems regarding children attending circumcision and initiation schools, because this was part of the people's cultural heritage. As a result, Rev. Masekela never suspended or excommunicated any child who attended these schools.

3.3.3. Swiss missionaries

The Swiss missionaries first came to the northern part of what came to be called the Transvaal in 1873. The Paris Evangelical Mission Society in Lesotho decided to expand the Gospel as far as the Northern Transvaal. Adolph Mabilo was in charge of the expedition, and was accompanied by Paul Berthoud.

According to Ndou (2000: 74) the expedition ultimately arrived at the foot of the Zoutpansberg mountains, where they found a Dutch Reformed mission station under Rev. Hofmeyr, who was stationed at Goedgedacht. Hofmeyr gave them a warm reception. When they enquired about mission work in that part of the country, Hofmeyr advised them to go east to a place called Spelonken, where there were people who had not yet received the Gospel. Junod (1933: 67) recounts the conversation as follows: 'He told them of a people living in the east in a part known as the Spelonken, called 'Knobneusen' by the Boers.'

Because the faces and noses of these people were tattooed, the elders of Hofmeyr's church warned that they were thieves and liars, and added that their language was almost impossible to learn. They advised the missionaries not to have anything to do with them. To this, Mabilo answered, 'These are just the men we are looking for, didn't Jesus come to look for and save the lost?'

This enmity, which was first created by Albasini, caused a gulf between the Tsonga (Shangaans) and the other tribes, because they were regarded as 'Soldiers of Albasini'. No wonder the elders of the Dutch Reformed Church discouraged the Swiss missionaries from taking the Gospel to them.

Nevertheless, when at last they arrived at Spelonken they were given a friendly reception by Joao Albasini and the Tsongas (Shangaans). They established a mission station amongst the Tsonga people. The missionaries were cordially welcomed and the Shangaans urged them not to abandon their mission work. They eventually returned to Lesotho with renewed zeal and encouragement.

On 9 July 1875, two young missionaries named Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud arrived at Spelonken, where they found themselves in solitude, because of the lack of contact with colleagues and relatives. They were welcomed back by the evangelist Eliakim with open arms.

Arrangements were quickly made with a man by the name of Watt, for the purchase of his farm at Klipfontein. The trade of land also complicated relations with traditional leaders, because farms were being sold by strangers (such as Watt) to the missionaries for the purpose of establishing mission stations. According to Ndou (2000: 76) the same Mr Watt sold land to Rev. Schwellnus at Tshakhuma. Customarily and traditionally, the land belongs to the local people.

The first problem that the missionaries encountered with the Tsonga-Shangaan was poor communication; they were under the impression that all black people in the Northern Transvaal spoke the same language.

Their first mission station and farm was established at Lwaleni in 1875. The Swiss missionaries renamed the place from Klipfontein to Valdezia. Valdezia is derived from the Swiss 'Vaud', which is where the missionaries came from. The Swiss created a clinic and the Valdezia Primary School in 1888, which laid the foundation for future Tsonga elites.

The small Valdezia Clinic was a forerunner of Elim hospital. Elim mission station was established in 1879. The mission farm of Kurulen was later established nearby. In continuation of their earlier medical work, the missionaries would establish Elim hospital in 1879 (Kirkaldy 2002: 100).

The 'Valdezia Ward' at Elim hospital was officially opened in 1975, on the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the Swiss mission station, by the Gazankulu government. The missionaries who started the Valdezia mission station are the same missionaries who started Elim hospital.

At Valdezia, Tsonga people were referred as '*Magwamba*' by the Venda people; the Venda also called the Tsonga language '*Tshigwamba*'. The Pedi in the south called them '*Makoepa*' and their language '*Sekoepa*'. The Swiss missionaries adopted the Venda racial slurs; however, Henri-Alexandre Junod and Rev. Ernest Creux correctly named the language 'Xitsonga' and the speakers 'Vatsonga' or just Tsonga.

Ndou (2000: 77) indicates that the Swiss were becoming popular with the whites, and the medical services rendered by Paul Berthoud could but add to their esteem and gratitude, helping to break down prejudice between the Boers and the Swiss missionaries.

During the conflict between Chief Makhado and the Pretoria government, General Joubert was assigned to a military expedition against Chief Makhado. The government made use of the Shangaan army. The black Christians also formed a contingent against Makhado.

General Joubert and Chief Makhado were ready to enter a peace treaty in March 1883. General Joubert requested Rev. Creux to negotiate a peace treaty between Makhado and the Boers. The work of reconciliation should have been assigned to the Berlin missionaries, as they arrived earlier in this region. Unfortunately, the Berlin missionaries were not on good terms with Chief Makhado. Chief Makhado regarded them as agents of the government. Instead of creating an atmosphere of reconciliation between warring groups, these missionaries took sides and supported the whites against the indigenous people. Junod (1933: 38) explains:

When Makhado recognised Rev. Creux his friend, he calmed down. 'Ah! Why do they not appoint you as magistrate! If they had sent a Boer in your place war would have broken out long ago.'

The efforts by the missionaries led to the first baptismal ceremony being held at Valdezia on 4 October 1876. Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Mission, during his visit to Valdezia, mentioned that he had spent six years at Maungani (Sibasa) mission station but had not baptised one convert. Traditionally the Vhavenda are more conservative than the Tsongas (Shangaan).

Rev. Creux moved away from Valdezia in 1878 to a place called Shehe. He established a Swiss Mission Station called Elim. Rev. Creux established a good working relationship with both the Tsonga (Shangaan) and the Vhavenda traditional leaders. Halala (1986: 47) states:

After the establishment of Elim Mission Station Rev. Creux went as far as Mlamula, Nthabalala, and Mashamba in the Zoutpansberg district to teach the Tsonga (Shangaan) people the Word of God.

The Swiss Missionaries were greatly encouraged when Chief Ndjakandjaka, who stayed near Waterfall in the vicinity of the Elim mission, converted to the Christian religion. The conversion of the chief enabled the Swiss to cultivate good relationships with both the Vatsonga and the Vhavenda. Junod (1933: 41) confirms this by stating:

The conversion of this Chief caused tremendous joy to Creux, and for all the churches of all missionaries who preceded the Swiss Missionaries, there is no instance where a Muvenda chief confessed and was baptized as it was the case with Chief Ndjakandjaka.

For the Vhavenda it was never a simple task to embrace a new religion, because traditionally they adopted an attitude of 'wait and see' (*u lindela wa vhona kana, u tanzwa mato wa vhona*). The chief is the head of tribe, the father of his people and the sacred living representative of their far-off ancestors. He is the hub of their

universe, the life of the community, and religious, social and economic matters all revolve around him.

The good work done by the Swiss in Venda and the Zoutpansberg will not be forgotten. The building of Lemana High School and Training School at Elim was received favourably and contributed greatly to the success of the mission station. Similarly, the establishment of Elim hospital, which renders medical services to the sick and also functions as a training school for nurses and female missionaries is of great importance for teaching and social work. The Swiss Mission further built up Tsonga pride when they changed the name of the church to the Tsonga Presbyterian church in 1960.

3.3.4. Reformed Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church was established with the provision of a hospital at Gooldville in 1902, under the leadership of McDonald (Munyai 2007: 18). The church was commonly called The Bantu Presbyterian Church, though it was not an indigenous church.

Ravhudzulo (1992: 11) says that, according to Nissen, there were two reasons why the Bantu Presbyterian Church was formed. First, the missionaries of the United Free Church of Scotland wanted to allow a native church to develop on its own under the auspices of the European missionaries, until such time that the native church was mature enough to be wholly independent. Second, this would make the native people feel more at home.

On 20 August 1905, McDonald was ordained a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Burnshill mission, at what was then known as the presbytery of Kafraria. He was appointed to establish a mission station in Venda. He left Burnshill Church without knowing anything of the land to which he was going. He arrived at the Presbyterian mission station called Donhill, near Pietersburg, present-day Polokwane.

According to Ndou (2000: 86) McDonald was accompanied by Rev. W. Mphamba from Donhill mission station. They arrived at the place called Ha-Makhuvha on 16 September 1905. McDonald was welcomed by Julius Mulamula, who had been preaching the Gospel in the area. However, Mr Mulamula had had very little success. The Vhavenda were not impressed by the manner in which he preached to them, and his use of the Xhosa language. Failing to convert the Vhavenda, he invited the Shangaans to settle in the vicinity.

McDonald was not satisfied with the small group of Shangaans gathered by Mulamula, for he wanted to preach to the whole community. The language problem was a great hindrance in this regard. When McDonald detected this handicap he found himself an interpreter and the Vhavenda became interested in the Gospel. McDonald moved the mission station from Ha-Makhuvha to Mathithi in the area of the headman Mphigalale Tshikhovhokhovho. The mission station was called Gooldville. The Shangaan families also moved away and followed McDonald.

Evangelist Lucas Makoale was sent to Venda by Rev. Mpamba from Donhill mission station in order to assist McDonald. Makoale was well trained in the discipline of the Presbyterian Church, and was an asset to McDonald. McDonald started a school in a new area with the children who moved away from Ha-Makhuvha. Most of them were Tsongas (Shangaans) (Ndou 2000: 89).

The Vhavenda girls were not encouraged to attend school; the late Tshinakaho Mabonyane, the researcher's mother (personal interview, 04/01/1996) indicated that all her friends were teachers, but she did not go to school because her parents told her that 'the school makes a girl run mad' (*tshikolo tshi a pengisa*).

Jacob Mabidzha was amongst the first Venda pioneers to work as an evangelist under the Presbyterian Church. He was assigned to establish an outpost at Muhuyu, with the assistance of his wife Ester; they involved themselves in both the school and church services, and the community was helped greatly. The Vhavenda traditional leaders had a good working relationship with McDonald, who was nicknamed 'Madonoro'. Because he did not turn his mission station into a farm, he was regarded as a good missionary (Ndou 2000: 90).

McDonald was also assisted by his wife, who was a professional nurse, and the indigenous people benefited from her clinic. McDonald encouraged Chief Tshivhase to make use of the medical facilities provided at the clinic.

The small clinic started at Gooldville mission station developed into a hospital called Donald Frazer hospital. On 14 June 1931, McDonald left Gooldville for Scotland after 26 years of mission service amongst the Vhavenda. The indigenous people extended their grateful appreciation for the faithful service he and his wife had rendered.

In 1933 Dr Robert, D. Aitken, a South African, replaced Dr Lamont, who had been at the clinic since 1930. He had the skills of a physician and a missionary. Aitken (1944: 10) states:

I had come to Gouldville not only as a doctor, but as a missionary, and on my first Sunday I preached to the native congregation from words in the book of Nehemiah, 'Come and let us build up the walls of Jerusalem'.

3.3.5. Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerk*)

In 1928 the Gerformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church) established a mission at Ha-Matshisevhe, which was later moved to Siloam, where a hospital was built (Munyai 2007: 18). The Reformed Church in Venda was established by Rev. Pieter Bos, who was originally a book-keeper by profession. However, he was ordained in accordance with a provision made in the church order. According to Van Rooy (1975: 2) 'a person of outstanding gifts can be ordained without a full seminary training'.

In 1910, Rev. Bos arrived at the foot of the Zoutpansberg mountains, where he settled on a farm called Uniondale and was assisted by Moutlwatse, an evangelist. He was heartily welcomed by the families of Manus Moshapo and Ephraim Chuma.

Ndou (2000: 95) indicates that Rev. Bos started preaching the Gospel with Matlakala as his interpreter, who was conversant in Afrikaans. The Gospel fell onto fertile soil, and headman Matshisevhe was also baptised.

Mrs Bos was blessed with twins. This was a good lesson for the Vhavenda in the area, since, according to Vhavenda culture this was taboo, as only one infant should have survived. Rev. Bos died in 1923.

In 1928, Rev. Hugo Du Plessis arrived at Uniondale, but proceeded to start a new mission station at Siloam in the Nzhelele area. Matlakala assisted as an evangelist together with two interpreters. In 1929, Jim Thalifhi Machaba was baptised, and in 1936 he was sent to Shanzha as an evangelist. His father could not be baptised as he was a traditional healer with more than one wife.

In 1939, the young Machaba established new mission outposts at Vhurivhuri, Lambani and Makuya. The evangelist Madzhabada was sent to Tshamulungwi. These evangelists did tremendous work amongst their people. The Vhavenda culture and practices could not hinder the acceptance of the Gospel, as the evangelists understood the cultural background of the indigenous people.

A mission station was also established at De-hoop by Rev. Erasmus, who did not stay long as he was accidentally shot and killed during a hunting expedition. He was replaced by Rev. Louw, who also did not stay long, and was moved to Siloam to replace Rev. Du Plessis. Rev. Du Plessis was moved to Dube, and later on to Hammanskraal to start a seminary school (Ndou 2000: 97).

Rev. Koos Van Rooy was assigned to Siloam in 1957, and without wasting any time he started to learn the local language. He established new mission outposts at Tshilidzini, Mahunguwi, Tswera, and Lamvi. He had no communication problem and this helped him to understand the Venda culture better. He even went so far as to translate the New Testament and the Psalms.

The converts were under the care of the indigenous minister, who had no problem with the Vhavenda culture. The Reformed Church went on to establish mission outposts across almost all of Venda.

3.4. Missional investigation

Idowu (1973: 87) says the following:

Before we had foreign investigators to give the world an idea of what the religious beliefs of the Africans looked like, there were theorists who have never been in Africa but who regarded it as the 'Dark continent' where people had no idea of God and where the devil in all his abysmal, grotesque and forbidden features, armed to the teeth and with horns complete, held sway.

These theorists had fantastic tales to tell about Africa. One such tale was recorded in a Berlin journal, which Leo Frobenius (1913: xii) read before he ever visited Africa to see things for himself. Among other things, he states:

Before the introduction of genuine faith and higher standards of culture by the Arabs, the natives had neither political organisation nor strictly speaking any religion. Therefore, in examining the pre-Muhammadan condition of the Negro races, we confine ourselves to the description of their crude fetishism, their brutal and often cannibal customs, their vulgar and repulsive idols and their squalid homes.

Similar to this was the dialogue that took place between Smith (1961: 1), who had gone out as a missionary to Africa, and Ludwig, an eminent biographer. When Ludwig got to know that Smith was in Africa as a missionary he was surprised, and he asked, 'How can untutored Africans comprehend God? Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing'.

These two quotations show the ignorance, prejudice and arrogance of these theorists. They did not know, and they never confessed their ignorance, about Africa

and Africans. Hence Idowu (1973: 88) describes this period as one of ignorance and false certainty in the study of African traditional religion.

The presence of missionaries on the frontier ensured that a direct clash and interchange between missionaries and African culture took place; both sides were looking at areas of similarity, as well as conflict, between African people and missionary worldviews.

Nonetheless, African and missionary worldviews had much in common. Both groups believed in a Supreme Being. Where they differed was in their conception of the role that God played in history and in nature. For Africans, God was too great, too near, to be known directly. For the missionaries, God was a personal God whose will could be discerned by his subjects. He worked through human agents to whom he had given a mind to master.

For those who survived the first stage, some of the chiefs allowed, or even urged, the missionaries to set up mission stations in their territory. The Vhavenda began to participate in the life of the stations, some by settling there, others by coming intermittently to attend school or church. The Vhavenda affiliated themselves with the church, either through publicly attested conversion, or through baptism, or both.

Many missionaries did not even attempt to understand the cultural background of the Vhavenda. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Gospel was not accepted by those such as Chief Makhado. Another obstacle on the path to conversion was that converts were dissuaded from maintaining family ties with their unconverted relatives at the mission stations. Those who were converted had to request permission from the missionary in order to visit their unconverted relatives who were still residing in tribal areas. This restriction was seen as unnatural and disrespectful to the indigenous people, who placed great value on the bonds of family and the respect that ought to be accorded to one's parents. Thus, the result was tension and conflict.

The missionaries were not aware that circumcision school (*murundu*) was not originally part of Venda culture. By acculturation, it was assimilated into Venda culture. In support of this statement Rabothata (1991: 49) states: 'Songs for initiation

for boys are those of the Northern Sotho'. The researcher himself is in agreement with Rabothata; as a Venda he also attended circumcision school, and most of the songs that are sung and laws that are pronounced are in Sotho. This argument is further reinforced by Van Warmelo (1937: 175) when he confirms that *murundu* was adopted from Sotho and Tsonga neighbours and was never originally a true Venda custom, nor could it be so considered today.

The missionaries dismissed the practices of circumcision without hearing from parents whether permission had been granted by them or not. Monning (1978: 112) confirms this statement:

As the missions are all opposed to the institution of initiation, most Christians do not allow their children to attend, but a large number of Christian boys nevertheless do attend against the wishes of their parents.

The missionaries resorted to punishing or excommunicating children who had taken part in circumcision rites. Often, such rituals were practised without the missionaries' awareness. Hardly any black ministers excommunicated people for attending circumcision schools. Missionaries would have done well in the eyes of the indigenous people if they had followed a policy of transformation rather than disparagement of the culture.

Presently, the desire for youth to go to circumcision school is diminishing, because those who are traditionally knowledgeable in this regard are difficult to find. Boys are admitted in large numbers into local hospitals for circumcision. It does happen though, that after circumcision by medical doctors, the youth proceed to the traditional circumcision schools to learn moral codes and songs relevant to the schools, so that they should not be despised by their peers. Pitjje (1950: 13) explains that 'songs are sung which are intended to make the boys despise boyish and childish things and look forward to becoming men'.

Many missionaries made use of their own culture as a vehicle to proclaim the Gospel. In support of this argument, Katoke (1984: 7) explains that, if a Lutheran

missionary came from Germany, the converted were expected to accept the German doctrine of Lutheranism.

The Vhavenda regarded land as an issue of great significance. The traditional leader is the guardian of tribal land on behalf of his subjects and the ancestors. Land cannot be surrendered easily, or sold for commercial purposes. Nemudzivhadi (1997: 15) states that, according to Venda tradition, land does not belong to an ordinary person or nation but to the chief. It is a property inherited from his forefathers.

John Watt sold land to missionaries. Tshakhuma was sold to the Berlin Mission when Schwellnus was a missionary at Tshakhuma. Lwaleni (Valdezia) was sold to the Swiss Mission under the missionaries Creux and Berthoud. Thus, the habit of turning mission stations into farms became an issue for the traditional leaders.

Some of the Christian hymns became an embarrassment to the traditional leaders, such as a verse in 'Difela tsa kereke' or hymn 251 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which says: '*Ba ba botileng Marena. Ba botile ba hwang*' (Those who trust traditional leaders, rely on those who die) '*Tlang re boke Jesu, ye aphalang me a busang*' (Come let us trust Jesus who is living and should be trusted). In this hymn, the comparison between Jesus and the traditional leaders should not be made, as Jesus is God and is thus far above traditional leaders. In fact, the traditional leaders are his creation. This hymn, if sung in the presence of traditional leaders, would make them feel uncomfortable, degraded and demoralised instead of being uplifted spiritually.

It is without doubt that the missionaries did commendable work in this part of Africa. For instance, in 1876, Beuster started the first Bible translation with the aid of the evangelist Johannes Mutshaeni. They translated the Gospel according to St John, the Epistles of John and the Psalms. Beuster went on to construct Venda literature.

The translating of the whole Bible into Luvenda was a task undertaken by the Schwellnus and his son. The Vhavenda expressed great appreciation for this gigantic contribution made by the missionaries. Smith (1970: 225) confirms that the

Vhavenda expressed great appreciation to the Bible Society for providing them with the Bible in their own language.

According to Vhavenda culture, human twins were ominous. There is a Venda expression that says: '*Muthu ha bebi mafhata sa mbudzi*' (A person should not bear twins like a goat). Should such an unfortunate birth occur, one infant would be put to death, so that one would survive. The correct Venda name for twins is '*mafhata*' and always referred to animal twins and not to human twins. It is gratifying to observe that twins are now welcomed by both the converted and the unconverted Vhavenda. The church enlightened the indigenous people to the fact that twins are a gift and a blessing from God and not a curse, as was originally believed.

In Vhavenda culture, the disabled were not given any special treatment to improve or develop their skills; they were not commonly even seen in public. Much has been accomplished by the Dutch Reformed Church in the improving unbearable conditions of the disabled, so as to help them to fend for themselves. The establishment of the school for the handicapped led to the acceptance of the Gospel. Even the impaired felt inspired to praise the Lord in their own way. Job opportunities for the handicapped were created by that special school. Mission work has brought joy where there would otherwise have been perpetual misery.

From the 19th century onwards, Mbiti (1975: 28) maintains that Christianity had spread in every direction, so that by now many African people have heard the Christian message, and many millions of Africans have accepted the Christian faith. We often find Christianity and African religion coexisting side by side. In many ways (such as by being accommodative to foreigners) African religion prepared the way for the conversion of people to Christianity.

A large number of African Christians in sub-Saharan Africa profess to be Christians, yet cling tenaciously to their traditional beliefs. Traditional religion still forms the basis of African culture and manifests itself in every sphere of life. This implies that in the heart of an African, there arises a juxtaposition, due to the fact that African Traditional Religion is inseparable from the daily life of an African.

Mbiti (1975: 30) also confirms that conversion does not mean that one has abandoned all the former religious ideas and traditions. Why do Africans cling to their traditional culture? Why do some Africans still practice this culture in the privacy of their homes, especially when it is condemned by some interpreters and preachers of the Gospel message as not being in accordance with their teachings? Could the Gospel ever be truly enshrined in such African traditional culture and religion?

The missionaries might have intended to use the Gospel message to negate Vhavenda traditional religion and culture. Dyrness (1990: 37) noted a dilemma that was posed by two conflicting realities within the Christian church in Africa:

- The persistent (and growing) influence of traditional religious beliefs and,
- The uncompromising teaching of the missionaries that these 'things' (African cultural beliefs) are part of the world of sin and darkness and must be repudiated/rejected.

If Jesus is alive today, having risen from the dead, how do we make him and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals? What does the Christian life mean in the African socio-cultural context?

During the period of colonialism, African culture came under tremendous attack by some missionary individuals and bodies. Much of African culture in all its forms was altered or supplanted by the more vigorous and technically advanced forms of colonising Western culture, backed by whichever political power dominated at that time, in any particular area (Baffa 1978: 294). Ndwandwe (1982: 4) indicates that when the missionaries brought the Bible to Africa, it was part of 'a package deal'. The implication is that the missionaries, who were responsible for the proclamation of the Biblical message, were also instruments in the hands of colonisers. Colonisation hindered the acceptance of the Gospel, as missionaries were viewed as paying allegiance to the government of the day.

Mofokeng (1988: 34) succinctly expresses the view held by many black Africans: when the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The

white man said to us, 'Let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.

Consequently, the Gospel has been perceived as foreign in general and Western in particular. People have rejected it not because they reject the lordship of Christ, but because conversion has often meant a denial of their cultural heritage and social ties, which were condemned as the work of Satan (Maimela 1985: 64).

Another reason for the rejection of the Gospel lies in the cultural superiority and great condescension that many missionaries demonstrated towards indigenous people (Bosch 1991: 291; Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994: xiv). They saw themselves as agents sent to bring true faith to the heathens and to save their souls from darkness and eternal death (Maimela 1985: 647). Dzobo (1988: 23-28) affirms that the missionaries to Africa were attempting to create Christian societies by eradicating existing cultures. European churches are now more accommodating towards other cultures. He concludes that for evangelisation to dictate what culture should be is wrong. African culture tries to 'concretise' the Gospel message in the daily lives of its practitioners.

Relations between missionaries from different mission societies, and between missionaries and government, can be ambiguous, ambivalent or even hostile. In some cases, interdenominational ties between mission societies have transcended national boundaries. Thus, looking at the situation on the ground, not only did these missionaries have no monolithic 'culture' to impose, they also did not have the power or the right to impose themselves or the ideologies that they brought upon the local people (Kirkaldy 2002: 26)

3.5. Conclusion

It has been established that the transmission of the Gospel message to the Vhavenda was closely aligned with Western culture. Most of the Lutheran missionaries, for instance, came from Germany; it was not so easy for the Vhavenda to be assimilated into German culture in order to be accepted into Christianity.

European culture was conveyed as part of the Gospel message. It was used as a 'vehicle' to convey the Gospel message, and Vhavenda traditional culture was simply dismissed as being incompatible. This was mainly because the Venda context was not properly examined and analysed.

The Vhavenda have always had strong ties to their ancestors, and the missionaries committed a near fatal error by using the name Mudzimu for God, instead of Nwali, which is used by the Vhavenda to refer to the Supreme Being.

The isolation of the people at the mission stations became a revolutionary factor, which implied the breaking up of the solidarity of the indigenous people and the community at large. Converts were pressured into shunning their heathen and uncivilised relatives, and thus family relations were cruelly severed. Mission stations appeared to be breaking down the power and authority of local chiefs. Christians in the mission stations seemed to have forgotten that they belonged to the universal church, whose aim was both to evangelise and to share Christian fellowship with their brothers and sisters of all races and tribes.

The researcher suggests the use of an inculturation hermeneutic, a method that requires the analysis of the culture and context of the recipients of the Gospel message (in this case, the Venda). This method also demands that the messenger of the Gospel message does not only 'take the message' to recipients while disregarding the culture of the indigenous people. He or she also learns from and about the new context.

For example, Dr Ellen Faul's approach to the Vhavenda was outstanding. During her clinic visits, she asked the opinion of traditional healers regarding the treatment of diseases. She would also explain her Western ways of treatment to them. Thus, they realised that Ellen Faul was not a threat to them. Similarly, Carol, the wife of Rev. Attie Van Niekerk, adopted the approach of addressing the local women by using the respectful prefix 'Vho' (Van Niekerk 1994: 60). This approach allowed for her to be easily accepted by the indigenous people.

Ndou (2000: 243) indicates that the Rev. Van Deventer of the Tshilidzini Mission Station made a commendable change by moving out from the mission residence, and living among residences of Tshisaulu, where he attended tribal and civic meetings, and participated in the activities of the village. This action earned him a good reputation, and the Dutch Reformed Church, which until then had been commonly associated with apartheid, was accepted.

The Rev. Van Rooy of the Reformed Church decided that his children should be given Tshivenda names. This action facilitated a harmonious relationship with the indigenous people.

The building of schools was also received favourably and contributed greatly to the success of the mission stations. The good work done by the missionaries in Venda as a whole will not vanish unrecognised.

Having examined Christian missions amongst the Vhavenda in the late 19th century, the researcher now turns to the establishment of Independent Churches and their approach to Venda culture. These movements endeavour to fulfil the people's socio-cultural needs, which appear to have been neglected due to colonisation and the rise of European Christianity.

CHAPTER 4: THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES AND THEIR APPROACH TO VENDA CULTURE

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher seeks to answer some of the questions raised in the problem statement, by exploring the factors that led to the emergence of independent churches amongst the Vhavenda people. It is plausible that the independent churches came into being because of the failure of the mainstream churches, to satisfy the religious needs of their converts. In Venda in particular, the independent churches arose because of certain traditional and cultural aspects, which were not sufficiently incorporated in mainstream churches. When missionaries from Europe and America came to preach the Gospel in Africa, they and the colonisers in general brought with them Western values, dismissing traditional religious values and African culture as inferior and primitive, even demonic. This meant that to be a Christian one needed to renounce one's culture and to embrace the white man's culture. As such, Christianity was preached from the cultural context of the preacher, or 'mission by diffusion'.

Traditional rituals accelerated the schism in the mainstream churches. The formation of the independent churches was influenced neither by the liberation struggle, as was the case in Zimbabwe, nor by the coming into being of the Ethiopian churches, which started mostly in urban areas.

The indigenous people's purpose in establishing the new movements was not to ostracise the white missionaries, who introduced Christianity. The formation of the indigenous churches in Venda was a 'sign of the times' indicating that Christianity was too foreign, and that the Vhavenda felt deprived of their traditional culture, since their beliefs and practices were not interwoven in the Christian religion (Ndou 2000: 162). The spread of independent churches in Venda reveals that there are church members who are searching for answers to various spiritual questions.

The preaching of the Gospel did not touch on many facets of African life, and its adherents did not hear, comprehend or relate to the Venda. Mushayavanhu (2013:

105) indicates that the Gospel was and still is (*munya*) sterile. It is essentially a list of rules. There is no attempt to show that one's daily work is also a form of worship. The Gospel of 'soul salvation instead of salvation of the entire man' is being shunned in favour of the African Independent Church, which addresses such needs and fill the gap.

The Zionist type of worship is still expanding quite tremendously. The coexistence of African Traditional Religion side by side with Christianity has been a major contributing factor toward the development of Zionist syncretic religion. African Traditional Religion will continue to be practised by the people whose lives and beliefs are attached to traditional culture. This is most evident in the sphere of illness, for which the church simply had no message, and it was precisely this vacuum that was later filled by African Independent Churches with their message of deliverance, dealing with the whole human being.

Before the rise of the African Independent Churches (AICs) there had been a silent, as yet inarticulate yearning for a religion that could embrace all of life and would fill the whole day, every day. African Independent Churches addressed social, political, and economic implications.

The African Independent Churches are pragmatic with regard to contextualising Christianity in African culture. They are practical and down to earth in their beliefs, doctrine and responses to the problems of their African congregations. They preach a brand of Christianity that is deeply rooted in African traditional culture and flexible enough to respond to the local people's needs. The worldview of the members is taken into consideration in their beliefs, such as in the forces of evil, malevolent spirits, witches and wizards. They also engage in interpretation of dreams and visions. Their solutions to problems are varied, including rituals, exorcism, prayer, fasting, and bathing in flowing streams or rivers.

4.2. African Independent Churches: background

Venda society has been characterised by a wave of religious renewal, in which African Independent Churches began to grow and develop in response to people's quest for a revived African culture. These movements endeavour to fulfil the people's social-cultural needs that are thought to have suffered neglect with the advent of colonisation and European Christianity. In this regard, the African Independent Churches aim at rejuvenating original religious practices that acknowledge African people's culture. Froise and Hendriks (2000: 76) indicate that their success and rapid growth is one of the principal features of 20th century South African Christianity.

Hayes (nd: 1-2) identified the most conspicuous problem that characterises the discussion African Independent Churches as reflected in the name itself. He examines what the 'I' stands for. Some people insist it should be 'independent' or 'instituted' or 'indigenous'. Some researchers prioritise 'African Independent Churches', rather than 'Native Separatist Churches', which is obviously tainted with vestiges of colonialism. An African Independent Church is a Christian Church, independently started in Africa, by Africans and not by missionaries.

Each African Independent Church has its peculiar and unique set of reasons that have contributed to its emergence and development within its own national and local setting, and in spite of similarities, causes cannot be seen to be universal. Hastings (1994: 493) explains that: 'As a whole, however, this movement can be located in the wide context of the rapid spread of Christianity in Africa during the late nineteenth and twentieth century.'

Some characteristics of African Independent Churches are that they represent a place of refuge, that they are a protest against mainstream Christianity and are in pursuit of a 'cultural renaissance', that their faith is centred on the Holy Spirit whose thrust is 'continuity and change'; they combine an African traditional religious worldview with Christianity. Sharp categorisation is problematic because these churches are dynamic.

Often these churches are the result of a process of acculturation of traditional African beliefs and Protestant Christianity, and have split from their parent churches. Daneel (1987: 140) has observed that the terms used to describe the African Independent Churches depend to a great extent on the premises of the researcher and the field of study. For instance, some political scientists refer to them as resistance movements, while some missiologists use terms like sectarian, syncretism, messianic or prophetic movements.

According to Daneel (1987), such terms carry a negative connotation and often put the African Independent Churches at the risk of being labelled as not 'genuine'. The author is aware that there are several variations of the abbreviation AIC. For the sake of consistency, AICs in this chapter refer to African indigenous/initiated (prophetic) Churches, prevalently known as the 'praying churches', because these terms emphasise the creative initiative of African Christians in establishing and developing their own churches. African indigenous or African initiated churches, unlike Ethiopian churches, did not disengage from the mission churches. Rather, they became apparent as a movement of the Holy Spirit. Turner (1979: 92) defined the African Independent Church as a church 'which has been founded in Africa, by Africans, and primarily for Africans'.

Much as this writer agrees, however, that the forebears of the AICs are Africans, he shares the sentiments of Oduro (2002: 17), who asserts that it is inadequate to assume that they were founded 'primarily for Africans', as if churches founded by Westerners in the west were primarily for Westerners.

Oduro (2002: 17) defines African Initiated Churches as congregations and/or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans.

Barrett (1968: 50) explains that 'independency' in African churches is: the formation and existence within a community unit, temporarily or permanently, of any organised religious movement within a district name and membership, even as small as a single organised congregation, which claims the Christian in that it acknowledges

Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has either separated by secession from a mission church or an existing independent church, or has been founded outside the mission churches as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership.

While the term 'African' is appropriate given that these Christian groupings formed in Africa, AICs differ from one to the next. Not all African cultural systems are the same: regional variations occur among western, eastern, and southern Africans and the AICs will reflect these. Nonetheless, Africans tend to share a belief that ancestral spirits interact with the living (a belief also shared by many Asian people).

The official term for these churches when they emerged, as Sundkler (1961: 18) confirms, was Native Separatist Churches, to imply that they were mere splinter groups that had split from the mainstream missionary churches. This term, as Sundkler observes, was not widely accepted, especially among South Africans, because 'native' was an offensive label for blacks in South Africa during the period of apartheid. Later researchers and writers were to adopt the term African Independent Churches (Kilonzo, 2010). The various AICs also differ widely in their organisational forms.

Some authors have described some indigenous churches as Ethiopian sects. This is because the churches are believed to have been founded only for political reasons: that is, they established these churches in order to demonstrate their rejection of European leadership while keeping to the shape and pattern of the established church from which they seceded (Daneel 1970: 10). For this reason, Ethiopian or African churches are very similar to the churches from which they emerged. For example, they usually practice infant baptism, read set liturgies, wear European clerical vestments (often black) and are less enthusiastic or emotional in their services than prophetic-healing churches. They tend to be less prescriptive regarding food taboos, the use of medicine and consumption of alcohol. Generally, as Sundkler (1961: 54) explains, their 'church organisation and Bible interpretation are largely copied from the patterns of the Protestant mission churches from which they have seceded'. Sometimes they even include the church's generic name in the church title, thus reflecting their origins: Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran, and so on (Anderson 1992: 126-127).

Ethiopianism implies indigenous initiative with no support from a foreign country whatsoever, whether financial or otherwise. This quasi-nationalist initiative is probably based on an allusion to Psalm 68: 31, which reads in part: 'Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch her hands to God' (Ayandele 1966: 177). Most of the leaders of this movement were black. Ethiopia's political kingdom dates back to biblical times (cf Isaiah 18: 1; Jeremiah 13: 23, 38: 7ff, Acts 8: 26, 39). Ethiopia is usually referred to as Cush in the Old Testament, and formed part of southern Egypt and Sudan at that time.

The term 'Zionism' has been used primarily to describe charismatic African churches. West (1975: 16) summarised the difference between Sundkler's two AIC types by saying that 'Ethiopian churches' were those which had seceded from mission churches for political reasons, and which 'remained patterned on their parent churches'.

America also sent missionaries to South Africa. The representatives were faith healers who attracted a considerable number of African people. This marked the beginning of the American independent movement known as the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion. This was founded by the American faith healer, John Alexander Dowie, in 1896 (Chidester 1992).

Dowie's work developed rapidly after he had acquired a piece of land on Lake Michigan in Canada. This is where he established a Zion City. This city was declared a sacred place of religious healing. Some of the daily activities included regular prayers and healing services. Members of the movement were prohibited from smoking, drinking and eating pork. These are some of the activities and practices that are common with most faith-healing movements.

The researcher is inclined to believe that the American church movements that are found in black townships today are probably a product of Dowie's teaching. In fact, they are mushrooming in towns and adjacent townships. The leading movement that emerged during the 1990s is the Universal Church in the Kingdom of God. Its membership is increasing rapidly. The movement does not have permanent venues;

rather, its congregants are accommodated in old town buildings. In townships in particular, they erect tents with loud speakers on top of the roof. These temporary structures are placed at strategic points where it is easier to attract the public. Membership is drawn from local mission churches. Services are conducted mainly at night in order to cater for the working community.

What attracts people to these movements more than anything else is the promise of salvation despite any problems they may be experiencing. Poverty, unemployment, uncertainty, distrust, and sorcery are some common problems. Those who flock to these movements feel as if the prayers and sermons of the traditional churches are too long and tedious (Pewa 1997: 43).

Zionists are a Pentecostal, apostolic movement, stressing the influence of the Holy Spirit and of divine healing, and combining both African and European cultural elements. This is the largest grouping of African Independent Churches. Examples are the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and Amanazareth (Shembe) in southern Africa. The theology in these churches is generally less precisely formulated than in European mission-founded churches, and often the differences in belief systems, liturgy and prophetic healing practices are considerable. The basis for these churches is one of definite theological pre-suppositions found more in the practice of their Christianity than in formal dogma.

Like Pentecostals in the west, there is an emphasis on healing, although the methods of obtaining healing differ. Western Pentecostals generally practise 'laying on of hands' or prayer for the sick. This will usually be accompanied in prophet-healing churches by the use of various symbolic objects such as blessed water, ropes, staffs, papers, ash and so on. This constitutes one of the more obvious differences between Western Pentecostals and prophet-healing churches. There are, however, also strong taboos prohibiting alcohol, tobacco and (especially) pork.

Furthermore, the attitude to traditional practices, particularly the ancestor cult and polygamy, is generally far more ambivalent than in Western churches. Although prophet-healing churches differ fundamentally from Western forms of Pentecostalism, because of their emphasis on the centrality of the Holy Spirit in faith

and (especially) in practice, they may also be termed 'African Pentecostal'. The term 'Pentecostal' is taken from the Day of Pentecost experience of Acts 2: 4 (Anderson 1992: 2-6). The believers in Jerusalem were all 'filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability'. This experience of being 'filled' with the spirit or 'baptised' with the Holy Spirit distinguishes Pentecostal church members from other church members. The Pentecostal movement believes that glossolalia (the gift of tongues) is an indication of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Cox (1996: 246) more recently referred to the use of this term by Hollenweger (1972: 149) to describe prophet-healing churches as 'the African expression of the worldwide pentecostal movement'.

These churches include the Assemblies of God, which is the biggest classical Pentecostal church among blacks in South Africa (Anderson 1992: 17), as well as the Apostolic Faith mission and the Full Gospel Church. In South Africa, these churches (with the exception of the Assemblies of God) have 'daughter churches' modelled after them.

The term 'African Pentecostal' is used rather widely to include the Pentecostal mission churches (e.g. the Apostolic Faith Mission), the newly Independent African Pentecostal churches in Venda (e.g. the Charis Missionary Church, Calvary Christian Church, Rhema Kingdom Life Centre) and the indigenous Pentecostal-type churches (including the Zionist and Apostolic churches). African initiated churches and African instituted churches are terms which avoid these difficulties by simply indicating that these many different kinds of churches were initiated by Africans, and not by Europeans.

Turner (1979: 83-86) indicates that some of the African religious movements are specifically not Christian, such as those Turner defined as revitalisation movements, which have deliberately sought to revitalise traditional African religious practices. An example of these movements would be the church of the ancestors in Malawi. There are those that can be termed *Hebraist*, because they consider themselves to be the Old Testament people of God, but are not predominantly Christian. The difficulty is that some of these movements do consider themselves Christian, and so one

wonders by what criteria they are categorised. This is another example of the dangers of categorisation.

4.3. Religious factor

Among the various theories that have been posited to account for the emergence of African Independent Churches, the religious factor features prominently. Although it is difficult – if not impossible – to make an arbitrary distinction between religious factors and social-political and economic factors, the general position of those who advocate religious causative factors, is to consider African Independent Churches primarily as a new religious movement responding to neglected religious needs. Turner (1967: 371-372) stresses the religious nature of these churches, arguing that they provide security, fellowship and spiritual guidance in the midst of crumbling traditional structures and the influx of foreign religious groups.

Religious factors are usually based upon a traditional critique of Western missions in Africa as having failed to meet the cultural and religious needs of Africans. The inability (or unwillingness) of Western missionaries to appropriate Christ particularly and Christianity generally into the Venda context in a way that was meaningful and affirmative of Venda culture, constituted a major reason for the resistance to Western Christianity.

Barrett (1968: 154, 184) believes that reaction to European missions was the common cause for the emergence of African Independent Churches across the continent, and maintains that Western missions had exhibited a 'failure in love' in their attitudes toward African people. However, it was not just their insensitivity to Venda culture that caused this apparent reaction to their message; it was also related to the African cosmological outlook. An example of this was the church's contempt for witchcraft, *malombo*, and traditional healing. For the Vhavenda, this constituted a real and imminent threat against which they needed to be protected.

Bosch (1973) further argued that the white missionaries often proclaimed a superficial and impoverished Gospel, the preaching of the Word and the catechism, he maintained, did not touch on many facets of the life or struggle of the African.

When Oosthuizen (1968: 7) studied the African Independent Churches, he put forward the idea that the deepest motive of many independent movements has been religious. One of the essential points is the transfer of the 'opposition to white authority' to the spiritual and ecclesiastical plane, which could be made effective only by reconstructing the African communities under African leadership. Reflecting on this leads to the real truth of the position in Vhavenda, where there were misunderstandings about discipline (people disciplined for drinking African brewed beer, while white people went free when they partook of clear beer), ineffective catechism and reluctance to encourage indigenous leadership, or lack of opportunities being created for the laity to serve. Catechism material and its approach, which denounced the local customs and limited promotion of local ministers, justifies the creation of schisms to a greater extent and hence the formation and growth of African Independent Churches (Mushayavanhu 2013: 103).

The inability of Western mission churches to grasp the salvatory needs of the Vhavenda was most clearly expressed in the area of illness. The missionaries, by and large, condemned traditional healing practices, and the provision of Western medicine through hospitals and clinics was in short supply for the needs of the expanding Christian community throughout the country (Beckmann 1975: 24). Here, the church simply had no message to share and provided inadequate alternatives, which, therefore, left a vacuum aptly filled by a proliferation of faith-healing prophets.

4.4. The value of the vernacular heritage in African Independent Churches

From the outset, African Independent Churches have considered themselves to be Christian churches in a continuous line of succession along with those biblical characters that had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, attempts to isolate them from the wider Christian community were taken very seriously.

The Bible played a key role in the legitimising of their practices and teachings, which for the most part were interpreted literally; church teachings and declarations of faith, were, therefore, often accompanied with an array of spiritual support. Barrett (1968: 127) indicates that scriptural translation is a significant contributing factor toward the

development of African Indigenous churches. He states that 'an event of fundamental importance in the life of the tribe took place': the Holy Scriptures were translated and published in the tribe's own language. The era of translation gave the indigenous people access to an independent source of reference within the context of their own society.

Bediako (1995: 61-62) indicates that the ability to hear and to express the message in one's own language must lie at the heart of all authentic religious encounters with the divine realm. According to him, God speaks to men and women always in the vernacular and the Christian faith is culturally infinitely translatable. The African initiated churches are among the churches that have pioneered this indigenous response. The vernacular serves as a bridge to the traditional worldview, and without making use of the vernacular, the African worldview is completely eroded.

There is probably no more important single explanation for the massive presence of Christianity on the African continent than the availability of the scriptures in many African languages. The most important function that vernacular scripture played was enabling the African Christians to distinguish between what was taught by the missionaries and what was taught in the scriptures. The scriptures translated into the vernacular became an independent standard of reference and it soon became apparent that much of what was taught by missionaries was more a reflection of their own cultural baggage than actual biblical doctrine.

Particularly striking was the agreement between the African worldview and that of the Old Testament. Although the missionaries, as good Protestants, believed in the centrality of the Bible, they were not accustomed to making the connections or seeing the continuity between the Biblical context and the contemporary one, something which the Africans were discovering for themselves.

Beckmann (1975: 24) indicates that the translation of the Bible into the vernacular was also a factor in the new process of growing self-awareness. People whose culture had been undermined were nevertheless important enough to have the Bible, the Word of God, in their own mother tongue. The impact of the Bible was so significant that many of the indigenous church leaders modelled their leadership

style and imagery on Old Testament prophetic figures, of whom many were probably already familiar figures in Africa before Christianity arrived.

Bosch (1973: 33ff) cited nine factors for the rise of the African Independent Churches, including poor communication, superficial impoverished Gospel, black and white relationships, disillusionment, denominationalism, translation of the Bible into local languages, and traditional structure, amongst others, and the researcher

Poor communication was and still is a cardinal cause of the birth of schisms. As a result of the failure to communicate and understand the local people, there was little understanding of their belief in witchcraft and evil spirits. Missionaries labelled it 'childish'. They also ignored the role which ritual ceremonies and symbols can fulfil. They dismissed the emotions of the local people as something from the lower orders. As a result, the Gospel began to sound a negative note for many of the Vhavenda, who perceived nothing more than a new set of taboos.

4.5. Faith healing

The largest group of Christians in South Africa belong to churches that focus on healing in one form or another. Historically divided into African Independent Churches and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, these churches are best considered together, since they respond to common human needs that are mediated through different cultural approaches (Froise & Hendriks 2000: 60-65). We refer to them as coping-healing churches in order not to pre-empt an assessment of the healing they offer (Bate 1999: 4).

Jesus 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.

Sickness and healing are integral to human existence. The same is true of religion, especially when it is understood in the way Geertz (1973: 90) presents it. It is also a fact that in most parts of the world, religion and healing are inextricably linked (Sullivan 1987: 226). Buddah was portrayed as a healer in his teaching on

impermanence and mediation. Zoroaster used techniques of divine cure to overcome sickness resulting from the influence of evil. Jahweh says 'I am the Lord your healer' (Exodus 15: 26). Jesus was a healer through signs and wonders. In Islam the *Qur'an* and *hadith* express healing as coming from God. Indeed, the *Qur'an* refers to itself as a cure (10: 57). In African Traditional Religion and culture, traditional healers mediate healing through the influence of ancestors (Sullivan 1987: 226).

African Independent Churches were established because Christianity in its European form, as a religion limited to the transcendent, could not provide a recipe for healing, unlike African religion: healing in these churches is given first priority. They believe strongly in the healing power of Jesus Christ, such that some do not allow their members to contact medical practitioners at hospitals and clinics. Morekwa (2004: 59) indicates that people are flocking to them, even those from the mainstream churches. They also exorcise evil spirits; another thing that makes them very popular is that their approach to healing is holistic. In order to be a pastor or bishop or prophet, theological education is not important; what is important is to possess healing powers, to be able to heal through prayers and to interpret visions, dreams and prophecies.

Indeed, sickness is by far the most common reason given for attending African Independent Churches. Testimonies of healing and miracles are heard from many. In quite a number of cases those concerned claim that they first went to the hospitals, and/or consulted traditional healers. They then resorted to an indigenous church when the foreign physicians and herbalists failed them.

In several African Independent Churches, special days (usually Wednesday and Friday) are set aside for healing purposes. In quite a few, healing services are conducted everyday. Sometimes, the invalid is expected to stay in the church, in the 'faith homes' nearby, or in some apartment in the Pastorium while receiving treatment. In some churches, the spiritual or faith homes serve as clinics and maternity centres for pregnant women (Ayegboyin 1977).

The indigenous people regarded healing as a physical restoration of the body, thereby alleviating discomfort. The Vhavenda regarded a physical cure as

paramount to the life hereafter. According to the Vhavenda, security and protection against evil was of great significance.

When the pioneers of the independent churches went their own way, they made faith healing the cornerstone of the Gospel. They stressed spiritual healing and Christianity that addresses human needs and concerns in a concrete way. Mahon was known to practice faith healing. The indigenous people came on foot and in wagons to be healed, and the possessed were freed from their demons (Oosthuizen 1985: 45).

The Vhavenda have a strong respect for the traditional healer who has a reputation for healing. They usually travel to faraway places in search of good traditional healers. To the Vhavenda, therapeutic treatment of diseases (*ulafha malwadze*) was regarded as a priority for spiritual salvation. There are certain basic aspects of life that the Vhavenda find oppressive and from which they seek relief or salvation (*utshidzwa*), such as the anxiety which originates from everyday problems and the anxiety which is born of the fear of evil spirits and malicious persons, witches and sorcerers.

The indigenous independent churches rose to power through faith. Sundkler (1961: 115) supports this statement: 'In order to rise to leadership, the prophet must above all be a healer.' The indigenous leaders, 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.

One of the most controversial and complex aspects of Pentecostal healing is what has come to be known as 'deliverance'. A dominant interpretation is that the powers and forces of darkness govern sickness. Because of spiritual warfare there exists a direct connection between illness and demonic powers. In this approach healing is expressed through deliverance, which can be seen as a form of exorcism. If the person is not 'possessed', he or she can be 'oppressed' by demons that inflict and enforce a whole range of emotional and psychological maladies and sinful habits that are difficult to break. Sickness can even be related to an ancestral curse. These

demonic ailments must be called out in order to obtain spiritual cleansing and development (Louw 2008: 60).

The Vhavenda believe that illness is caused by the evil one as the precipitator of destabilisation and discomfort in family circles. The independent churches also accept the Vhavenda's perception that some illnesses are caused by witches or the evil one. If, for example, the sick person suffers from a high fever, where the person is prone to say strange things as a result of hallucination, the conclusion could be drawn that the person is bewitched.

During the seizures of the sick, priests and prophets pray for the patient, in such a way that prayer becomes an interrogation, in which the emphasis is laid on removing polecats (*thuri*) from the body. It was commonly believed that these polecats could take hold of the human being and control his or her behaviour. Van Rooy (1964: 7) in alleges that: 'When a person has high fever he intends to speak senseless things, so it is assumed that he has *thuri*, to chase away the Polecats (*Upandela thuri*).'

Ministers in independent churches regard the action of dispelling the evil spirits as analogous to the biblical incident of the demons who pleaded with Jesus not to order them into the bottom pit, seeking physical refuge among the swine. The act of praying to end demonpossession in indigenous churches serves to reinforce faith and confidence bestowed on the independent churches. In reality, the mighty acts of God's word and deeds should be accorded to Jesus Christ, who has power above that of any human religious leader.

The ministers in the independent churches are inclined to lay emphasis on the name of Jesus, and that through His name a person can be healed. 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, which are seen as the source of the sickness. These sentiments are endorsed by Sundkler (1961: 233) who says: 'The message of healing is in fact the strongest asset of the Zionist Evangelization, because of this function; both the converted and unconverted are attracted from the mainline to the African Traditional Church.'

Through healing sessions, the independent churches are 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 s/he is prayed for, because s/he regards the pastor as a messenger of God. The pastor is placed in a highly respected position, as that of a living saint. According to Vhavenda culture, a person who has been ill for a long time without improvement has to go in search of healing in faraway places (*u bva dzima mudi*). Consequently, the spiritual leaders of indigenous churches are surrounded by big villages, which in most cases are inhabited by patients who await healing sessions.

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 that has 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 it or use it to wash themselves.

'Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam, so the man went and washed his face, and come back seeing' (John 9: 7). This Biblical reference also confirms that blessed holy water has curative power, and the independent churches anchor their faith on this commandment of Jesus.

The healing process seems to overshadow both salvation and exegesis of the Gospel message. Oosthuizen (1985: 50) argues: 'If one has to reduce the African Traditional Church to one common denominator, the most outstanding phenomenon is healing.' This implies that, despite traditional churches portraying the church as a refuge for salvation and also a healing community for the society, the members of the mainstream churches still attend the healing sessions conducted by the independent churches and carry water for the purpose of drinking and sprinkling, as a way of dispelling evil spirits.

The Vhavenda do not see a vast difference between the spiritual leader of the indigenous church and a traditional healer, as both take care of their physical health, and ultimately they are both healers. In this regard, Morekwa (2004: 60) indicates:

Faith is very important at this point. Illness is taken as a test. In other words, God can put man to test by allowing sickness. People who come for healing are told to believe strongly in God in order to receive healing. Healers found that these churches are given power by the Holy Spirit to treat physical diseases and cast away evil spirits from patients.

The Zion of Bethlehem Apostolic Church's Bishop Tshivhonammbi of Vhufuli (personal interview, 09/11/2014) explains that healing ceremonies involve a union of a patient, extended family, and departed ones. This church uses water for healing. This water, which is consecrated, is used by people in their daily activities, for example, for the blessing of the new house, car and livestock.

Water plays a vital role during the healing rituals. Sometimes they sprinkle it on painful parts of the patient's body. Oil is applied after sprinkling. The water is mixed with certain herbs or medicine depending on what the spirit is revealing to the prophet or the pastor. In Venda, most African Independent Churches mix the healing water with *sewacho* (ashes from animal sacrifices or trees). This is followed by prayers; thereafter, the patient can drink it.

Bishop Tshivhonammbi (2014) indicates that they also practise what is called 'induced vomiting' (*u phaladza*). Water is boiled and left to cool down a little bit. Then salt and vinegar are added to this water. The pastor will pray over this water and the patient drinks this until he or she starts vomiting.

Osthuizen (1988: 170) indicates that: 'There are also ritual baths where a patient takes a bath in the water mixed with *sewacho* which is made of cow dung and sometimes salt.' This depends on the spiritual significance of the element for the pastor or prophet. Baptism is also used as a form of healing. The Holy Spirit is the only one that can reveal whether a patient can be healed through baptism.

Another method of healing found in these churches is healing by wool string. The string is tied around the waist, neck, legs and arms of a person depending on what the spirit has revealed to the healer. These strings serve as protectors or guards against evil powers caused by witchcraft. They can also bring luck to people in their daily social activities.

According to Morekwa (2004: 62) African Independent Churches also use some ordinary items during healing. This includes commercially produced petroleum jelly, which is prayed over together with some *muti* or traditional medicine. Nevertheless, the spirit is still the one who reveals to the healer that the patient should be sent to the hospital or to the traditional practitioner for treatment, or what kind of traditional medicine can heal the patient. The prophet is the one performing the healing. In most cases the prophet starts first by preaching about Christ as a healer during the worship service, and thereafter healing activity can proceed. Jesus Christ emerges in the African world as the one who cares, protects, restores, and banishes fear.

The African Independent Churches accommodate the traditional way of healing within their Christian beliefs. They are popular because they are churches in the true sense of the word; they are hospitals and they are social welfare institutions (Oosthuizen 1992: 48). Many people are joining these churches for nothing else except for healing purposes. Of course, after they receive help, they automatically become members. If one enquires of these members why they joined the African Independent Church, the most common reply is: 'For a long time, I was sick. I tried all sorts of treatments but without results. I received the advice to go to such-and-such a prophet. I did that and now I am better. Praise the Lord.'

It is clear that these churches have a great influence today on our continent. In Venda, people used to visit these churches only for the purpose of healing. If a person does not want to join, he or she will just pay a visit. The members, on the other hand, are treated and healed for free.

Other factors have also contributed to the growth of the Zion Christian Church. Sibanyoni (personal interview, 27/05/2015), a member of Bronkhorstspuit Zion Christian Church, said that the church was able to help them to overcome serious

emotional and domestic problems. As in the case of healing, the resolution of these problems rests largely on the ability of the prophet or church leader to effect a remedy through prayer and faith in the power of God.

Ligege (personal interview, 27/05/2015), a member of Tshivhilwi Zion Christian Church, explained that his wife had been sick for a long time and had tried diviners, medical doctors, and other prophets, all to no avail. Then his mother appeared to him in a vision and said that he should go to the Zion Christian Church. He went there, they healed his wife, and that is why he still goes there.

Lukhaimane (1980: 63) indicates that healing was the reason for 80% of Engenas Lekganyane's followers joining the church. It was a faith healing and 'a miracle-performing church (*ke kereke ya Mehlolo*)'.

In the ZCC the prophets are people of immense importance. They are the messengers who hear from God and proclaim his will to the people. They are seers, people who have divine power to 'see' the revelations of God pertaining to the complaint of the enquirer, especially sickness. Like diviners, they are usually expected to 'see' the complaints before they are uttered by the sufferers.

One of the most common answers given by ZCC members to the question: 'What is a prophet?' is as follows: 'The prophet is a person who 'sees' what sickness is troubling you, what is the reason for it, and how it may be healed.' Nesengani (personal interview, 05/12/2014) a member of Mpheni ZCC, indicates that:

A prophet reveals someone's problems when you go to him. He will be able to tell deep secrets about my condition when I am sick. I should therefore not tell him what I am suffering from; he must be able to tell me exactly what I am undergoing and give me the remedy to heal the sickness troubling me.

The prophet is somebody who helps people when they are sick. They are ones who must pray for and dispense the holy water and other symbolic healing objects as the need arises. They are also people who are expected to give direction and counsel for all kinds of problems. In some instances, prophets are people who are believed to

declare the will of the ancestors, and are expected to be available to fulfil his prophetic function at any time. Nesengani (2014) elaborates as follows:

The prophet will usually manifest some sign that the spirit has taken control, the prophet snorted, cried, whistled, panted, jerked and contorted their bodies in different ways. Some bent over as they walked, wringing their hands behind their backs. Others were completely silent and behaved 'normally'; sometimes the prophet clapped the hands together to get someone's attention and then pointed with the hands together in a praying posture.

Prophesying is an essential aspect of ministry in the ZCC. As Daneel (1988: 25) puts it: 'It is the accepted way in which the Holy Spirit reveals his will for a specific situation.' In these churches, it is taken for granted that this form of communication between God and man is the essence of Christianity (Daneel 1988: 27).

One of the main features of every day ZCC life is the belief in what Lukhaimane (1980: 62) calls 'faithhealing', which he defines as the use of 'sanctified papers, *khuthane* (blue cloths on clothes), copper wires, strings which people had to use as protectives or healing instruments'. Divine healing, which he defines as healing through the laying on of hands, is 'the ordinary healing method which is common in all Zionist or Pentecostal churches' (Lukhaimane 1980: 63-64). The laying on of hands, accompanied (sometimes) by anointing with oil, is the usual method practised in Pentecostal churches today.

The principal method of healing is through the healing service. In those churches inspired by the Pentecostal tradition this usually takes the form of an 'altar call' in which those who wish to be healed are encouraged to come forward to be healed by prayer of the healer. This occurs after a period of emotional arousal, which is achieved through music, the sermon and prayer (Bate 1999: 21-24). In all the services that the researcher attended, both in English and in Venda, a direct call was made to God, to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit to heal the person from sickness. In many cases some response to this call, experienced as healing, was reported.

As with traditional healing methods, a patient must expel the 'death' that is in the stomach in order to be healed. The vomiting is believed to get rid of not only physical sickness but of spiritual defilement as well. The water is seen to represent cleansing and purification from evil, sin, sickness and ritual pollution, concepts carried over from traditional thought. This belief in holy water is prominent in almost all indigenous Pentecostal churches, one notable exception being the IPC. The ZCC also uses special tea and coffee made for healing purposes, labelled (in Sotho) *tea ya bophelo* (the tea of life).

However, there are some African Independent Churches which claim that in their healing they do not use charms and magic, but pronounce healing in the name of Jesus Christ who overcome all evils, principalities and cosmic powers (Morekwa 2004: 64).

4.6. Freedom of worship

One of the fascinating features of African Independent Churches is their so-called free mode of worship. The African naturally enjoys a more demonstrative form of worship in contrast to the supposedly dull liturgy of the mission churches. Africans during worship do not behave like Europeans, in terms of singing and posture. Dancing and clapping were considered demonic by the early missionaries, and those who did this were expelled from the church. Worship was formalised, which did not help the true spirit of Christianity.

Kilonzo (2010) indicates that Christianity as brought to the Africans by the missionaries was thought to be an 'eye-opener' to the 'savage' Africans. It came along with 'medicine of the white man', and education of the 'uncivilised Africans'. This form of Christianity was then likened to a three-legged stool, providing a place of worship, school and hospital for the converts.

It was only the converts who enjoyed these amenities. In most missionary founded churches, the system of worship was inflexible and the services followed a prescribed procedure as dictated by the mother churches abroad. Africans were

evangelised to adhere to these forms of worship, though some still retained their ancestral and indigenous beliefs and practices.

The indigenous people have a tendency to be moved by songs, thereby becoming spiritually motivated. From a cultural point of view, Africans do not feel comfortable in a controlled, solemn atmosphere where emotions are not expressed (Ndou 2000: 172).

Pewa (1997: 2) indicates that the Zionist churches have a unique tradition rooted in African Traditional Religion. In trying to search for an African identity and culture, the Zionists as well as other African Independent Churches have begun to explore the resources of indigenous music and dance. The Africanisation of hymns is one of the ways in which indigenisation is practised. For example, the rhythm of the Western hymn does not evoke dancing. However, clapping and drumming in the African way changes the hymn into something worth dancing to. Dancing and singing together is a symbol of unity and solidarity, and thus the Zionists use dancing to fight evil.

Zionists have contributed a great deal to the process of revitalisation of traditional ideas and practices. They have resisted the profound influences of the missionaries. The hymn was originally used as a tool to instil Christian doctrine and Western cultural domination. Hence, the emergence of independent churches was a blessing for both African traditional musical heritage and African traditional religion.

Vhavenda music could be classified on the pentatonic scale, which is not standardised music according to Western society. Their music could be seen as general folk 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 instruments, sing, or dance.

The missionaries thought that the African ways of worshipping were barbaric and so tried to eliminate them. Africans had therefore to abandon their kind of religious music, dance and places of worship, including the shrines (Kilonzo 2010). Today, African Independent Churches have created a space for more fascinating and

exciting forms of worship, which include singing, clapping, dancing and stamping of the feet. Most of the songs have traditional lyrics. Usually, they are evocations and sometimes spontaneous compositions accompanied with the ringing of bells, drumming and the use of other native musical instruments.

These churches use African music, dance and traditional instruments as a way of expressing the lost glory of their traditional religions. In some instances, they fuse this music with modern technology to ensure their survival, in terms of membership, and especially to attract the younger generation.

Another aspect of their mode of worship, which is a result of their more relaxed, exciting liturgy, is that members are fully involved in the whole service from the beginning to the end. The individual, in the words of Ayandele (1966: 388-389), is 'a heart and soul participant in the service and not the passive members who allow only the clergy and the key officials to be *dramatis personae*'.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, after dedicating the church of St Michaels and Angels on the 29th of July 1994 at Shayandima in Venda, encouraged the congregation to sing the songs of celebration and thanksgiving by way of ululation (*mifhululu*), and when the congregation responded, it became a glorious celebration. Praising God by way of ululation was unthinkable in traditional worship. In AICs, singing is always accompanied by the clapping of hands and the whole church service becomes more colourful for the members of the congregation.

Mainstream churches that allow for African music in their worship lose few of their members to the independent churches. Daneel (1987: 263-264) reinforces this statement as follows:

The 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 Dutch Reformed Church. It is understandable that the Catholic churches' effort to accommodate its ritual to Shona tradition has met with success.

Johnson-Hill (2008: 26) explains that singing, which introduces people into worship, is a sure way of welcoming the Holy Spirit. They claim to meditate on the songs, which transports them to the spiritual world where one can speak in tongues. Furthermore, the oneness of the worshippers is realised when the Holy Spirit descends upon them to communicate with them. This is evidenced by the spiritualpossession described as sweeping through the church and transporting members to the spiritual world to communicate with God in a language that is 'foreign' to second and third parties.They believe through this, the spirit-filled worshipper is able to see visions and receive gifts such as those of prophesy and healing.

Lischner (1958: 52) appreciates the role that music and dance played in the lives of 'our ancestors' and this is no different inmodern Africans:

Thousands of years ago, our remote ancestors danced, sang, worshipped and prayed to their gods. The words, music, and movement were used to communicate withGod who was warm and close to his people.

4.7. Polygamous marriage

The missionaries 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 in itself meant that a polygamist had no chance of joining the church. Ndou (2000: 245) relates an incident in this regard:

In 1879, Makwarela, the Son of Mphaphuli, was refused baptism by the Rev Koen of the Berlin Missionary, because he had several wives as was the custom.

Inindependent churches, polygamy is not an issue. The polygamists feel more comfortable and participate freely as full members of the church without restrictions.The Old Testament was of particular interest in terms of polygamy, because it resonated with much of what was important within an African outlook on life: the importance of fertility and sexuality, the place of ancestors, polygamous

practice, the importance of land and a host of other cultural and religious similarities (Daneel 1987: 84-85). It was, above all, surprising to see the practice of polygamy recounted in the Bible, which the missionaries fought hard to eradicate by imposing strict prohibitions on members (Barrett 1968: 117).

Most of the African Independent Churches do not see polygamy as a violation of religious principle. Therefore, they allow polygamists the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and their children are not excommunicated due to initiation schools, and enjoy the right of baptism as well.

The marriage traditions of the Vhavenda, like many Africans south of the Sahara, is portrayed, in many instances, as polygamous. Polygamy takes various forms. For example, one form is 'pologamy', in which a man has more than one wife concurrently. The second form is 'consecutive polygamy, in which a man takes more than one wife in sequence' (Breckenridge 2008: 67). According to 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*).

Furthermore, in the Venda culture childlessness is considered a calamity, and one of the most important aspects of marriage is procreation, more especially if a woman gives birth to a male child. Another issue is that sexual compatibility or the lack thereof, which means that if a man does not derive sexual satisfaction from his wife, he is most likely to take another wife.

According to 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 circle, arrangements were made that the elder brother of the deceased or a close relative would inherit her and continue supporting the family. This was usually the brother of the deceased husband, and if the deceased husband had no brothers, the family would choose one of the late husband's cousins from the paternal side (Mailu 1988: 12-13).

Vhavenda tradition, in some instances, is similar to Jewish culture. In Genesis 27: 46, Rebecca says to Isaac: 'I am sick and tired of Esau'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.

According to Genesis 16 and 21, Abraham had more than one wife. This was due to the fact that Sarah (his first wife) was barren. After Sarah, he took a second wife, Hagar, who was not really considered as a wife, but rather a concubine. After the death of Sarah, he took another wife, Qeturah. Abraham was following the traditional customs of that time (De Vaux 1965: 24).

According to the Code of Hammurabi, which dates back to 1772 BC, a husband could only take a second wife if the first one was barren, and he would lose this right if the wife herself gave him a slave as a concubine. On the other hand, the husband could take a concubine himself even if his wife had given him a child, but he could not take another concubine, unless the first concubine was barren (De Vaux 1965: 24).

A concubine would also not have the same rights as a wife. In the 15th century BC, in the region of Kirkur (ancient Arrapkha), the same custom applied, but the barren wife was obliged to provide a concubine for her husband. In these instances, one may conclude that there was relative monogamy; as there was not more than one lawful wife. Nevertheless, in the Old Testament, there are also instances where these customs were not followed. For example, in Genesis 29-30, Jacob married the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, who both had the status of lawful wives (De Vaux 1965: 24). At the end of the second millennium BC, according to the Assyrian code of law, an *esirtu* (Assyrian concubine) could gain the status of lawful wife, if her husband chose to give her that status.

The man was allowed to have as many *esirtus* or wives as he wanted. According to De Vaux, later, during the time of Judges and the monarchy in Israel, this law was 'misused'. For example, Gideon (Judges 8: 30-31) had many wives and one *esirtu*. Later, the Talmud restricted the number of wives that should be taken by a man: for an ordinary man, it was four, and for kings, it was eighteen. During that time, it was only the royalty who could afford to have many wives. A man could still only take

more than one wife if the first one was barren, or had given him only daughters (De Vaux 1965: 25).

Throughout the history of the church, the issue of polygamy has always been debated among theologians and in the church. For example, Augustine argued that polygamy was not contrary to the natural law, and that it was not wrong, as long as its purpose was the multiplication of humankind (Hillman 1975: 185). On the other hand, the Protestant reformers, such as John Calvin, argued that the natural law prohibited polygamy because polygamy was a hindrance of peace within families. Martin Luther, one of the reformers who had a different view from that of John Calvin, argued that monogamous marriage was not possible in every situation, and that the laws of Moses did not prohibit polygamy. Therefore, a Christian man was at liberty to have more than one wife (Hillman 1975: 185).

After the reformation period, there was little discussion on the issue of polygamy, until the 19th century, during the missionary period in Africa. During this time, the common rule within the church was that a polygamous man that wished to be converted to Christianity should abandon all his wives, except for the first one. This was a pastoral challenge in the church. All mission authorities maintained that polygamy was contradictory to the teaching of Christianity, and they enforced monogamous marriage. They refused to baptise those who were in a polygamous marriage (Hillman 1975: 186).

The mission's response to polygamy in Africa led to the formation of African Independent Churches, for example, the Nazarine Baptist Church (founded by Isaiah Shembe in South Africa), and many more. The founders of these churches were polygamists themselves. Some Africans, who still wanted to maintain their polygamous marriages, left the mission churches and became members of these African Independent Churches.

In Vhavenda, to have many wives enhances the status of the husband, for he is regarded as a wealthy man. In other words, for man, polygamy is seen as a sign of wealth and prestige in the Venda culture. His social standing is viewed as being above that of a monogamist.

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, many polygamists wanted to join the church with all their wives, and this caused great embarrassment to the missionaries, for according to Vhavenda standards they were all regarded as legal wives. Vilakazi (1986: 20) confirms this as follows: 'For the African, polygamy is a marriage and not concubine.'

The missionaries should 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 formation of independent churches realised that many Vhavenda were being barred 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, and their efforts and contributions in the Holy Scripture were seen to be insurmountable.

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

The tolerance of polygamy was another form of the indigenisation of the Gospel, falling within the traditional fabric of the Vhavenda social system. Polygamists feel more comfortable in the independent churches because they can participate freely. However, according to some church's policy and discipline, they may attend church, but with certain restrictions, such as those found in the Lutheran Church. Theron (1996: 61) confirms this as follows:

People, who are involved in polygamous marriages, can become members of the congregations. They cannot participate in the sacraments, and cannot be elected to the offices.

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 it becoming a central issue in terms of changing a person's cultural faith and converting to the Christian religion. The church could have been more realistic regarding those people who were living in a polygamous marriage before they were converted. Rather than shunning them as doomed outcasts, the church could have made more effort to counsel them.

4.8. Kingly church leadership and inheritance

There is a Venda expression that says: '*Vhuhosi a si vhuswa a vhu neiwi, vhu a vhangywa*' (chieftainship is not porridge (food): one cannot just be given it, one must strive for it). In other words, according to Vhavenda standards, succession to any position of responsibility is not that simple.

Most African Independent Churches are initiated by charismatic leaders. The unity of the church in the initial stages of the founder's life revolves around him or her. The leader embodies the office of the king and judge, the prophet, the priest, the baptiser, the healer. As the movement grows bigger and bigger the charismatic leader will develop hierarchical structures and s/he will appoint others to help him or her, and in most cases close relatives are catapulted into the echelons of power in the church by the leader himself/herself. These churches tend to become family churches due to the nature of the first converts who are normally close to the family (Daneel 1988: 40).

This has been the case in the origin and development of many African Independent Churches of the spiritual type, such as the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange, ZCC, Nazarine Baptist Church of Shembe and others. The power in these

messianic churches resides in the founder (Daneel 1988: 110): he or she commands unquestioned authority amongst the thousands of followers who believe in his or her mission. Problems of secession and succession normally begin after the death of the founder.

For example, in the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange, Johane Marange died of illness in 1963 (Hastings 1979: 182). Johane did not appoint anyone to succeed him. This was so because his sons and relatives would have killed each other for the leadership and the inheritance of his estate. When the prophet became ill, there were rumours that Simon Mushati and Gwati, who was the general secretary of the church, had bewitched him so that they could take over the leadership of the church (Daneel 1971: 335).

The spiritual leaders of the independent churches administer their churches in the same way in which tribal councils are run. The founders of independent churches were under the impression that the missionaries were indirectly declaring themselves to be traditional leaders in a foreign land.

Ndou (2000: 185) states that: 'Bishop Miriri's residence is at the foot of Kokwane Mountain, Bishop Nematlile of Tshiheni, not excluding the Zion City of Bishop Lekganyane, is situated at Mount Morea near Pietersburg. The Zion Cities have a centralised headquarters, which is analogous to the traditional leader's place of abode (*musanda*).' 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 the closest relatives (*thondo*). In some instances, the pioneers or founders of the African 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 passed from father to son. This was due to the indigenous traditional practice of chieftainship inheritance (Ndou 2000: 188). There is no security of church property in this regard, as people resort to the traditional law of inheritance, where the eldest son in the family takes over the estate of deceased father.

African Independent Churches were founded by charismatic people who commanded unquestioned loyalty during their lifetimes. The death of the leader was

normally followed by several schisms. Daneel (1988: 79) has thus observed that African Independent Churches rely on traditional law, which is not codified but is subject to manipulation by elders in order to safeguard their interests in the church. Tradition can be misinterpreted or adjusted to suit certain interests. It is dictated by those who still remember how leadership succession and inheritance were carried out in the past. Where people no longer remember, they are likely to innovate in order to bypass the gap in memory. The indigenous leaders of the independent churches, as adherents of 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 allied himself with Joshua to help lead the Israelites into the promised land.

4.9. Prophetic visions

Dreaming is one of the important aspects of African traditional religion, especially for the Venda people. Dreams are treated with great reverence, because they are believed to be a direct medium of communication between the living and the ancestors. Zionists believe in both the Almighty God and the ancestors.

A prophet is consulted in cases where the dream cannot be interpreted by the person concerned. This distinguishes Zionist churches from Ethiopian and Messianic Churches. The prophet, in this case, does not replace Christ to become the so-called 'black Christ or black Messiah' but he leads his church through powers of *U Moya* (Holy Spirit) which are bestowed upon him. Pewa (1997: 29) indicates that:

In traditional religion, dreaming is one of the several ways in which the spirits reveal themselves or their needs to men. It may happen that a person, who is troubled by dreams, consults with a Zionist healer. Many dreams are interpreted in opposites. It may happen that a dream of death may signify joy, whereas a dream of wedding may signify a bad luck or taboo.

It is generally accepted by the Vhavenda people that, if the requests which emanate from dreams are not adhered to, the dreamer will be tormented and will have no peace of mind. In contrast, dreams are regarded as a normal phenomenon in

Western culture, with no religious or spiritual significance. Ndou (2000: 189) indicates that:

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.

In the indigenous African churches, there exist different prophetic personages. These include prophets, prophetesses, visionaries, dreamers and the spirit-possessed. They address the existential problems of members and non-members of their respective churches. In some instances, some of their clients are not even Christians. The prophets in these churches are consulted for problems ranging from barrenness, sickness, and insecurity to explanations of difficult issues. These problems are often addressed in the context of trances, dreams, visions and spirit possession.

In the church that was visited by the researcher (personal interview, 09/11/2014), the Zion Bethlehem Apostolic Church at Vhufuli, the prophets are often consulted for different problems and also to inquire about vital issues like marriage and business plans. The prophet is expected to give direction in such situations. Answers and solutions to people's problems are revealed in a trance state, by means of visual and auditory dreams. Through these phenomena, the prophet is usually informed regarding the form of ritual to be performed in order to solve or alleviate a problem. This function of the prophet is similar to that which is performed by the diviner in traditional Venda society.

Some prophets in the church carry out a diagnosis while dreaming. While this method is very similar to that of some traditional *nangas*, the prophets insist that the Holy Spirit alone guides their dreams. While the diviners (*midzimu*) are instrumental in their diagnosis, the prophets claim to be under the aegis of the Holy Spirit alone when they give their diagnosis.

One can possibly perceive a certain parallel between the attitudes of members of the indigenous churches and the role that visions play in these churches, and the conception of and attitude towards the traditional Venda divination system. Dream becomes the new means of performing their roles. In the light of this, it can therefore be said that what has changed in these churches is more to do with the sources, channels and nature of revelation, rather than in the attitude toward it (Adogame 2001: 190-191).

4.11. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that indigenous churches resolve the conflicts that have arisen between traditional African religion and the religion of the missionaries.

Something interesting about the evangelisation of the Venda converts is that, on the one hand, there were some converts who abstained completely from African traditional beliefs and practices in favour of the Christian faith. On the other hand, there were some converts who accepted the Christian faith but also retained and adhered to their African traditional beliefs and customs. The Zionists churches fall under the latter category.

In terms of the origins of religious doctrines, historically, there are no absolute beginnings. The prevailing idea in this chapter is the conviction that the formation of the independent churches was not a move to ostracise or exclude anyone. The white missionaries brought the Gospel to the indigenous people, but could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the indigenous people, from a cultural point of view. The African Independent Churches do not regard mainstream churches as standard ideal, and do not find their own norms in early Christianity.

In seeking to define their own vision, the founders of African Independent Churches created vibrant indigenous churches, self-reliant, born and nurtured within African culture and living out the Gospel with relevance to their own particular contexts. Reflecting on their struggles in the light of the scriptures, the founders developed a way of life and faith that was not articulated in books of theology. Instead, it was to be found in 'songs, stories, forms of worship, dance, church uniforms, flags, and names,

concepts of evil, and the practice of exorcism, traditions and narratives of preaching and prayer, in dreams interpretations and prophecies, and in understanding of healing and salvation' (Padwick 2003: 39).

The African Independent Churches' movement can also be seen as the struggle of the indigenous people to reassert their significance as humans, which they knew well before their culture was disrupted by the impact of Western culture. The African Independent Churches restore this sense of purpose. They often say to members: 'Feel at home, we are in our church, and we govern ourselves.'

The next chapter will examine the Vhavenda version of Christianity, and the experience of simultaneously believing in God of the Bible and still clinging to traditional religious convictions and experiences, so as to find out whether the continued belief in the latter weakens or strengthens their belief in the former.

CHAPTER 5: TOWARD A VHAVENDA VERSION OF CHRISTIANITY

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the focus will be on Christianity within the context of the Vhavenda clan. The researcher will seek to analytically present the Vhavenda version of Christianity as compared to the missionary concept, or in a general sense as an African versus a Western perspective of Christianity.

Respect accorded to the dead and burial rites play a significant role in Venda culture. The Christian eschatology does differ from the traditional Venda belief, in a very important instance: while 'eternal life' for the Vhavenda means reaching back into the past, joining the living dead whose lives are behind us, the Christian message reaches into the future, the coming of Jesus Christ, the promise of a new heaven and earth. The first missionaries who came to Venda dismissed traditional belief in the life hereafter as evil or heathen. The researcher will provide a systematic analysis of how the Vhavenda perceived life hereafter according to their own cultural experience.

This chapter also discusses the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the chief ancestor of all ancestors. Various beliefs will be compared in order to clarify different views of Christianity. This section of the research attempts to address the unique challenges and opportunities the African cultural context presents in terms of the articulation of the Gospel.

Bujo (1992: 27) maintains that 'in their ancestors, Africans find wisdom and the future of life'. This refers to ancestors in themselves, as our 'natural' ancestors, so to speak, and not as possible rivals of Christ, who is of interest to us.

By making room among the 'living dead' for the Lord, the judge of both the living and the dead, it becomes more evident how the ancestors relate to Jesus Christ, and He to them. Ancestors, even in their realm of spiritual existence, remain in African understanding essentially human just like ourselves, though with a sharing in the essence of BoModimo (Divinity) (Setiolane 1976: 17-18).

The researcher will then close this chapter by discussing the Christian status of ancestors after burial.

5.2. Belief in God

It has been clearly shown in the previous chapters that the Vhavenda version of Christianity was not in line with that of the missionaries. The Venda Christian faith is definitely informed and coloured by their traditional religion. Setiloane (1986: 32) states that: 'No religion can be cut off from the cultural roots of people. Therefore, Christianity must also take root in the cultural context of Africa.' As God revealed Himself to the Hebrews as Jahweh, he is being revealed to the Venda as Nwali.

The religious experiences of people of different cultures are, however, experiences of the one and only Divinity. This makes African Traditional Religion a valid source for theology. If Nwali is the same God of the Bible, what happens with Christ? Setiloane answers: 'African Theology sees the God of Jesus Christ as the same one and only source: *Nwali, Umvelingangi (Mdaliwezintozonke), Modimo, Lesa, Qamata* of African Traditional Religion' (Setiloane 1986: 32).

Venda traditionalists believe, as an integral part of their worldview, in a Supreme Being. This Supreme Being 'is no stranger' (Mbiti: 1969: 29), and he looms large in the consciousness of people. The notions of and beliefs about God as they are expressed in his names, attributes, activities and through the worship he receives reflect the Venda awareness of God.

The Vhavenda understood the Christian God or God of the Bible in terms of the traditional concept of Nwali as a creator of the universe. Among Vhavenda Christians, Nwali is regarded as the one who ensures their survival in this world. Vhavenda Christians regard God as the Father. This is evident in the prayers of the independent churches, where they say *Khotsi Ramaanda* (Father the Almighty).

By implication God is respected and upheld as a living person, as the Vhavenda address him as '*Khotsi wa tadulu*' (Father who is in heaven) as in the Lord's Prayer. Harm was unquestionably done by the pioneering missionaries in Venda

when the name Nwalifor God was neglected. The concept of a Supreme God was of fundamental significance to the indigenous people (Munyai 2007: 124).

There are other Venda religious elements that are not incompatible with the Bible. Such elements made it easier for Africans to understand the Biblical message.

The belief in a Supreme Being who is creator and preserver of the universe, immanent and transcendent, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent is not so far removed from the Biblical view of God. As *dues otiosus*, the Supreme Being is not particularly defined and Christian elements can easily be added to traditional ones. Another positive element is the holistic understanding of life and the view that religion is a way of life and not only a neglected element thereof.

As the missionaries associated Nwali with heathen oracles of some kind, it was indeed very difficult for them to persuade the Vhavenda to accept Christianity. As an example, one can cite the case of Chief Makhado. A conversation between Chief Makhado and Michael Buys revealed clearly that Makhado regarded himself as a believer in Nwali and therefore not as a heathen. The Dutch Reformed Church Missionary consequently failed to persuade Makhado to accept the new religion. Another factor which worsened the situation was the use of the name Mudzimu with reference to God.

Setiloane (1986: 35) clearly chose a monistic view of God as Divinity, energy, and source of life, which is contradictory to the theist view of a personal God who fully revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. For Setiloane the Divinity of Christ is to be understood as *u kuthwasa*, the way in which a spirit or divinity takes possession of a human being. This implies that the divine pre-existence of Christ cannot be accepted. He only became divine when the spirit of God took possession of him.

Setiloane (1986) gives the following definition of African Theology: 'It is an attempt to verbalise African reflection about Divinity from the perspective of African grassroots, background and culture.' The problem with this definition is that it makes traditional religion the primary source and the Bible a secondary one. Ultimately, it is not God as revealed in the Bible but the God of traditional religion.

The Vhavenda Christians believing in God as the Supreme Being can easily identify Him with the Jahweh of Israel. They have believed in Him since before the dawn of Christianity:

Before the advent of Christianity, the Vhavenda believed in a Supreme Being, *Nwali*, who had created all things and can be compared to the Hebrew Jahweh (Benso 1979: 34)

For Vhavenda Christians, God could be referred to by three names: Khuzwane, Raluvhimba and Nwali, and these posed a few problems for them when they were converted to the new Christian religion. The Vhavenda believed in a God who was not remote from His people. The God they believed in walked and travelled with His people during their migration from Central Africa to what is Venda today. The Vhavenda's faith in Nwali was reinforced by the miracles performed by the *ngoma-lungundu* (sacred drum) which they carried along in their exodus from their place of origin.

According to Mudau (1940: 10) *ngoma-lungundu* was the sacred drum of the Vhasenzi, who had brought it with them from the north, from *matongoni* or 'the graves'. Their king was feared by all his people, for he could work miracles with the drum of the gods. Mudau, a devoted Christian and member of the Lutheran church, evidently believed that *ngoma-lungundu* could work miracles and protect the Vhavenda against the enemies they came across on their journey.

As previously mentioned, the liberating actions of Jahweh, who acted as a warrior to destroy the enemies of Israel, convinced the Jews that He was a caring God. This coincides with the Vhavenda's view of Nwali. The Vhavenda regarded Nwali as their earthly king who could give instructions and directives like the God of Israel. Mudau (1940: 10) indicates the following:

Fear nothing, everything will go well. The important thing is Ngoma-Lungundu, which will help you greatly. Whenever enemies trouble you, beat the rainmaking drum, and everything that lives will be seized with fear and fall

down as in death, excepting you yourselves. In this way all the country will fear to undertake anything against you, because you are my grandchildren.

The Vhavenda Christians who still uphold their tradition see this as posing no threat to their new Christian religion. The Vhavenda Christians do not see any difference between their migratory journey from Central Africa to Venda under the guidance of Nwali and that of the Israelites during their Biblical Exodus from Egypt. They still claim that the God who created the universe and rules in Venda and elsewhere is the same God who promised to save the Israelites and give them a land.

The Vhavenda Christians are convinced that God is in control of history; He changes political leaders, and liberates those who are oppressed. Older Vhavenda believe that God is the great manager of all, and it is their God who identifies with them. The younger generation, however, are sceptical about the Biblical God, whom they regard as the God of the whites (Khorommbi 2001: 57). In Venda the missionaries were confronted with a syncretised traditional concept of God. The inception of Mudzimu (originally meaning an ancestral spirit) and its use in the Tshivenda Bible did a disservice to the earlier name of Nwali. Mudzimu is now the commonly accepted name for the Christian God. However, the traditional African initiated churches prefer to use the name of Nwali in their prayers.

The Vhavenda Christians do not view God as an idea or thing; they regard Him as one who is involved in the affairs of the world, and who keeps it running. He did not make the world to abandon it. He cares for what He has created.

The livingdead are not regarded by the Vhavenda as gods, but they are under the supervision of God. Although the missionaries of old belittled Vhavenda ancestors and poured scorn on their idolatry, calling it futile and powerless, the Vhavenda Christians regard God as a mighty king over all ancestors, who must be appeased either by means of prayer or offerings.

5.3. Christ, the prime ancestor

Mbiti (1971: 153) states the following:

The understanding of African Christianity is that since Jesus died and was seen by some walking the streets of Jerusalem, He is regarded as living dead. When Jesus died on the cross He went to meet others. Those who accept Jesus and partook in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are to be joined with the spiritual world. Water baptism is symbolised as death- the sacramental death when baptising a person is regarded as the doorway into the New Testament world of the Spirit.

Mbiti further explains that the saints commune with God and the whole of heaven. The Christian practice of sharing the Eucharist, eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood, is regarded to be the same as Africans sharing their meal with the ancestors. It is therefore not surprising that some Vhavenda regard Jesus as the prime ancestor. Maluleke (1994: 57) elaborates as follows:

In Africa, Christ is a healer, liberator, ancestor, mediator, elder brother, head and master of initiation and the black Messiah. Christ, by virtue of his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension into spirit-power, is seen as the Supreme ancestor by some theologians.

Maboe (1982: 9) cites a Basotho fable, which portrays Christ as an ancestor, one who would be perfectly acceptable to the indigenous people of Venda:

Senkatana chose to die leaning against one of those wooden poles. Why? He was a leader, protector and sustainer of his subjects by always seeing to their well-being. The Cross of Christ, made of wood, has been of great importance in the salvation of mankind'.

Senkatana is depicted as a hero, and a great sustainer of his people, like Christ who undertook the work of reconciliation, and the redemption of mankind. The work of reconciliation is performed by a person who once lived with the people, and experienced all their social needs. Chief Senkatana felt pity for his subjects and as a result he was prepared to die for them. Maboe (1982: 9) argues that potential Basotho converts should have been approached by the missionaries in this manner:

They would have then addressed the Basotho as follows: For as we arrived among you from our own countries we found you relating the fable of Moshayanyama Senkatana to your children around the evening fires. The same Moshayanyama Senkatana, we declare unto you as Christ. The Son of God born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit, a king and deliverer of mankind from sin.

Had the first missionaries who brought the new religion to the indigenous people adopted the approach used by St Paul at Athens, starting from the known gods as worshipped by the local people before proceeding to the unknown one, Christ would probably have been well received as the Son of God, the prime ancestor and the redeemer of mankind.

As explained in Chapter two, a person who attains the status of an ancestor should have left offspring behind and have been of a mature age. Christ is accepted as an ancestor because he was a hero and king of kings; as a result, he superseded all the ancestors. According to Afeke & Verster (2004: 47) Jesus is seen as 'the Supreme ancestor'. Some even go further and say 'Jesus is the greatest of all ancestors'. Since a person according to African Traditional Religion becomes an ancestor after death, this qualifies him to be an ancestor.

In the Vhavenda culture and tradition a man who liberated and protected his people was accorded the status of '*muhal*' (the brave one, or hero). This term was eventually used as a laudatory epithet for a chief (*khosi*). The chiefs are also regarded as the ancestors of their tribe. If the missionaries had adopted a positive approach by portraying Christ as the Vhavenda prime ancestor, the Vhavenda would have easily accepted him as the son of God and their redeemer.

The missionaries, however, failed to use this concept as their point of departure. It is a well-known principle that a good teacher should take students from the known to the unknown. The kingdom of the ancestors would have formed a good basis for the kingdom of Christ, and the Vhavenda would readily have accepted Jesus as the ruler of the ancestors.

The ancestors will always be in the minds of Vhavenda Christians, and they have always formed part of their daily lives. The matter of the ancestors was poorly handled by the pioneering missionaries. They associated the veneration of the living dead with idolatry. In reality, whenever an African speaks of the offering to the ancestors, he or she refers to personal contact. The living dead is a person who once lived and cared for his or her family and community. The ancestors are what the Vhavenda Christians regard as fathers and mothers who once fended for their offspring.

The Hebrew tradition also advocated respect for the ancestors: when Jahweh revealed himself to Moses, he indicated to him that he was the God of his forefathers: 'You must tell the Israelites that it is YEHOVAH the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who has sent you to them' (Exodus 3: 15).

It can be stated without doubt that the Israelites were in line with African tradition in the veneration of their ancestors. When Moses discovered that Jahweh was the God of his forefathers, Abraham and his lineage, who were the departed ones, who stood in close proximity to the living God, he was convinced that the living God had revealed himself to him.

Undeniably the power of the living dead is indelibly impressed on the hearts of Vhavenda Christians. It does not matter how educated or committed to the Christian faith one is, when good fortune seems to be exhausted, the living dead are consulted. The living dead can turn good fortune into bad fortune when they feel neglected, so that bad fortune is often attributed to the torment of the living dead. To ward off the tormenting spirits of the living dead is a common practice amongst most of the Vhavenda, if not all. This reveals that, to the Vhavenda, the ancestors are living people who should not be disturbed but should always be left in peace. Many people try to ensure that the ancestors are kept as far away as possible.

It is therefore not surprising that one sees in many obituary notices the phrase 'sleep well' or 'rest in peace' (*vha edele, vha tshimbile, vha wele nga mulalo*). According to Vhavenda Christians, the deceased is undertaking a journey – no wonder he is given such messages of farewell.

The point at issue now is how Jesus Christ is viewed in the context of the ancestors. The Vhavenda Christians regard him as the prime ancestor, for he supersedes the ancestors in all respects. It would have been of great significance had the missionaries introduced Jesus as the prime ancestor. Historically they would have been correct, because he lived with the people as a human being. The approach adopted by the missionaries regarding ancestors is questioned by Maboe (1982: 26-27), who indicates that:

It is quite plain here that had the missionaries realised and understood the Basotho view on family life, they would have had no difficulty in comprehending the role of the *badimo*, and thereby being able to introduce the Great Intercessor and Mediator Christ, the Son of God, for there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2: 5-6). The Basotho, if approached on these lines, would respond wonderfully to the Christ who functions as the true mediator superseding even the *badimo*.

This statement is alarming, if not terrifying, for the missionaries' denial of Jesus as the prime ancestor is a challenge confronting the Vhavenda Christians. As long as the indigenous theologians continue along this line, the confusion will remain and Christians will find themselves belonging nowhere. The question here is one of understanding the correct meaning of the word 'ancestors'. The missionaries ought to have been conscious of the indigenous people's traditional religion, which could have been transformed into Christianity. The fact that the Vhavenda are human beings whom Christ died for, should have been taken into consideration.

Van Rooy (1971: 87) takes a divergent view, and has no room for the recognition of the ancestors. Neither does he make an attempt to use it as a scaffolding to build Christianity from the basis of African Traditional Religion. According to him, 'Africans cannot understand Christ from a knowledge of ancestrality'. He indicates that:

Worship or communication with ancestors tends to supersede Christ as mediator and render his priestly office meaningless, as has been

demonstrated many times in Christian communities which practice the veneration of saints ...Africans cannot accept Christ alongside the ancestor spirits.

Much harm is done when local customs and traditional beliefs are not taken into consideration. Van Rooy does not take into consideration the fact that African society is a single entity and continues as a unit which is aware of all its members, the ones who are living and the livingdead.

Moila (1987: 85) confirms the belief that Jesus is the prime ancestor:

God is the single unique entity and the bearer of all moral characteristics expected of human beings. He is the only source and giver of power. God rules both the living and the dead and his kingdom combines the two. Since God is unapproachable to the living, the dead are the only means through which they can approach him. Thus the Pedi perceive Christ as the prime ancestor; He is not God.

In support of Moila's point of view, it may be mentioned that Christ is revealed as the prime ancestor in the historical events which were commonly narrated to the communities who lived in New Testament times. Similarly, the Vhavenda Christians, though perhaps operating from a religiously pluralistic point of view, still claim that Jesus Christ is the prime ancestor who operates in Venda as elsewhere and that he is accepted as the creator and liberator.

Another aspect which makes Jesus so easily accepted as the prime ancestor, is the fact of his humanity, which is clearly illustrated by his human mother, his physical emotions, and his need for sleep and food. His extraordinary power and wisdom qualifies him for the status of prime ancestor. While on earth, he did great things that normal human beings would never have done. His power superseded that of all other ancestors before and after his death.

5.4. Belief in the Holy Spirit

The idea of the Holy Spirit in the minds of the Vhavenda is somewhat vague. They speak of '*Muya wa Mudzimu*' as the spirit of God. Their belief in the spirit of God was not in line with the perception of the Holy Spirit as viewed by the missionaries. As a result, the missionaries concluded that the idea of the spirit of God was unknown to the Vhavenda.

According to Vhavenda tradition a medicine man does not derive his power of healing from his own wisdom. He is imbued with the spirit of God. Maboe (1982: 12) confirms this, saying: 'A serious study of *Mosotho* medical practitioner or medicine man as he is usually called is a good exposition of how the Basotho thought of the Holy Spirit of God.' This is another indication that the Basotho, like the Vhavenda, believed that the medicine man was always in contact with the living dead who in turn acted as mediators with the living God. The medicine man believed that he was guided by the spirit of God to heal the sick.

The foundation was well prepared for the missionaries to have expanded on the knowledge and the authority of the spirit of God, when they introduced the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. Established churches, however, condemned the consultation of traditional healers or traditional medicine men or so-called witchdoctors. The Vhavenda Christians of the past consulted medicine men secretly, but nowadays church members consult them whenever it is necessary, without any fear, for they do not see any conflict. They believe that a medicine man works with the spirit of God. In support of this, Maboe (1982: 12) says:

The respect given to the doctor was far more than that given to the chief. He was regarded as a servant of God, a link between man and the *badimo* who were intercessors between man and God. A present day priest still wields more respect than the chief in a Basotho Christian community.

This is because he is a doctor of the soul. That a medicine man is more respected than royalty is supported by the Vhavenda saying: '*Vhukololo a vhuambuwi hu ambuwa vhunanga*' (The medicine man's craft can ford a river, but not royal rank).

This means that when abroad, a man is honoured for his ability, and not for his rank at home.

The Vhavenda Christians incorporate practices and beliefs from their indigenous culture and traditions into their religious views and thereby add relevance to their understanding of the Holy Spirit as a dimension of the Trinity, while discarding the evil spirits and demons as manifestations of the spirit of God. Vhavenda Christians believe that the devil has a host of evil spirits, which can deceive the children of God and mislead them. This idea is well clarified in I Timothy 4: 1: 'Now the spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from their faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.'

It has been established that Africans who adhere to traditional religions are convinced that their livingdead have now attained a high status. The missionaries should have made use of this belief as a point of departure to introduce Christ as the ultimate ancestor.

5.5. Death is not regarded as total annihilation

Lufu ndi muratho kana dambuwo (death is a bridge). To the Vhavenda death is not a total annihilation; rather, it is regarded as a bridge by means of which one crosses to the world yonder. Mbiti (1970: 264) states that African people believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter. After the burial rituals have been performed, it is not the end; the dead are not totally buried and forgotten, and the living keep in contact with them. Death, therefore, is viewed and accepted as a graduation from a poor state to a better state in the presence of the Supreme Being.

This is similar to the Swazi belief that death is not the end of life: if someone was a good person while alive, he or she would continue being good and assist his or her descendants in the spiritual world of the ancestors. It is believed that he or she would be in a better position to intercede with God on behalf of the family. The dead are still members of the family and are involved in family matters (Buthelezi 2011: 74).

Kim (1999: 61) concurs when he argues that, in terms of ancestor worship, death is considered to be a summons to the hereafter and is accompanied by a death messenger from the hereafter. In other words, the deceased person is believed to continue to exist just as he or she did in this world. Mbiti (1971: 62) indicates that:

The basic notion of the next world is found in all African societies, as far as one knows. It is the hereafter beyond physical death. This is pictured exclusively in materialistic terms which make that world more or less a carbon copy of the present.

According to Mbiti, the life hereafter is to some extent a duplication of the present life. Spirits of those who died long ago are the most numerous and no one remembers who most of them were. People still believe that such spirits must exist in the visible world. Myths and legends recall some of them as tribal, national or clan founders.

On the whole, people fear and dislike the spirits of those who died long ago, mainly because they are unknown spirits and therefore strangers to the living. Stayt (1960: 240) indicates that ancestral spirits *ormidzimu* (singular *mudzimu*) have many idiosyncrasies, and if they think that they have been slighted by their descendants, they take revenge by bringing misfortune to them. Consequently, they are more feared than loved. The Vhavenda have a fundamental conception of the inherent good of most worldly things. All trouble is associated with the evil of witchcraft or jealousy and spitefulness of their ancestors.

The Vhavenda are concerned with what takes place now. In short, time is considered as a two-dimensional phenomenon with a long past, and a dynamic present. 'It is therefore not surprising that in their daily activities people were concerned with their departed living dead to be informed of activities of the living descendants' (Munyai 2007: 91).

Mbiti (1969: 83) describes the ancestors as the departed up to five generations back. They are in a different category from that of ordinary spirits. They are still within the Sasa period: they are expressed as being in the present time, the recent past and

the near future. The recently departed whose time overlapped with people still here are the *Sasa*, or the living dead. They are not wholly dead, for they live on in the memories of the living, having everlasting fame, remembered throughout time. They are the closest links that humans have with the spirit world.

Shabangu (2004: 121) indicates that these are the spirits with which African people are most concerned. It is through the living dead that the spirit world becomes personal to them. They are still part of their families, and people have personal memories of them. Some of the qualities attributed to spirits apply also to the living dead. But the living dead are bilingual beings. They speak the language of the men, with whom they lived until recently, and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically.

The two groups are bound together by their common *Sasa*. The living dead are, however, fast disappearing into the *Zamani*: when the last person who knew an ancestor dies, that ancestor leaves the *Sasa* for the *Zamani*, the dead. As generalised ancestors, the *Zamani* are not forgotten, but revered. The living dead are still people, and have not yet become 'things'. They return to their human families from time to time, and share meals with them, however symbolically.

Sasa refers to the events that have just taken place; *Zamani* time overlaps *Sasa* time to some extent in the present, but also goes back very far into the past. It includes the great and famous heroes of the past who performed memorable exploits.

The Vhavenda believe that the livingdead are in a strong relationship with them, for they see what is going on with their living descendants. According to Vhavenda culture and traditional belief in the life hereafter, an individual cannot invest goods in this life in the hope of drawing interest in the life hereafter.

The killing of the chiefs'favourites in Venda culture (*zwileli*) shortly after his death confirms this view, for as they were his servants or subjects on earth, they should continue serving him in the next world. It goes without saying that their status remains the same in the next world. Munyai (2007: 93) indicates that:

Those who are rich on earth will be rich in the new world while those who are poor will still remain poor in the world yonder. This indicates that economic and political status on earth and in the next world of the living dead remains the same.

Landman (1969: 596) indicates that 'the practice of dressing the dead in his best robes and with ornaments is alluded to 1Samuel 28: 4. The early Hebrew kings had their crowns and sceptres buried with them, as well as expensive ornaments and jewels'. Following this example, the Vhavenda Christian traditionalists bury their dead fully clothed, and to them, the clothes accompany the deceased to the next world. If the deceased is a man of status, his body or coffin is still wrapped in the skin of a bull.

At the funeral service of Piet Thanyani Dzivhani, who was buried on 2 November 1991, the younger brother placed a walking stick on the coffin and it was buried with him. To the Vhavenda Christian there was no problem, although it was an embarrassment to the young officiating deacon of the church (Munyai 2007: 85-86).

As a matter of fact, the belief of the Vhavenda in the life hereafter is somewhat similar to the belief of the early Egyptians. The Egyptians believed that the deceased would experience hunger in the world beyond the grave, and it was quite customary for the deceased to be buried with food so as to prevent this.

The Vhavenda Christians may be strongly committed to the principles of Christianity, but deep down they still believe that the dead are alive somewhere beyond the grave. Ndou (1993: 101) reports that:

At the funeral service conducted by Rev. A.K. Masehela at Gouldville Presbyterian Church on 9 October 1987, the representative of the AME Church, Mrs Mulaudzi in her speech of condolence mentioned that, 'the deceased Elinah Mushaisano NemaKonde is seeing us where she is, and she is overjoyed to be buried in such a good Christian service'. Although this view is not common to all, it is a clear indication that the Vhavenda Christian has no problem regarding the traditional view of life hereafter.

The unshakeable belief of Africans in the powers of their ancestors is in most cases unquestionable; they believe that their ancestors have great concern for their living descendants. Chakanza (2004: 7) indicates that:

Duties towards God and the ancestors (include) observance of ancestral customs, funeral, rites of passage, and offering sacrifices to the ancestors, traditional dances, perpetuation of names of the ancestors.

This notion became more conspicuous during the war of liberation in Zimbabwe. The people of that country put their trust in their ancestor, Nehanda, and they were convinced that this ancestor was in control of the war, and he was always consulted for advice and guidance. This is confirmed by Lan (1985: 217-218) who says:

The ancestor who received the most attention and the greatest praise was Ambuya Nehanda, the Mhondore whose mediums had participated both in the first liberation struggle, the rebellion of 1896, and the second.

This statement by implication indicates how the bond with the ancestors was conceptualised by liberation movements in Zimbabwe. The living dead instil the spirit of patriotism into the lives of their living descendants. Mr Mugabe used to swear by his ancestor Ambuya Nehanda; Mugabe's swearing by the name of the ancestor is a clear indication that Africans are convinced that the livingdead are of great assistance to them. Thus, they believe in both the mighty acts of their ancestors and the tenets of Christian religion without the former posing a threat to the latter. According to Rev Schneider: 'Ancestors are much nearer to the people's hearts than the Supreme Being' (Maboe 1982: 25).

The Shembe church, for example, makes no secret of the fact that it endorses the *Ukubuyisa* ceremony, which is the ceremony performed by the Zulus to integrate the spirit of the deceased person into Zulu society (Munyai 2000: 10). Oothuizen (1992: 87) makes it clear that Zulu Christians turn to their ancestors more readily than to Christ for solutions concerning practical issues in daily life.

It may be deduced, from the above statements made by Rev Schneider, Munyai and Oosthuizen, that the Supreme Being cannot be approached directly, not because the living dead obscure God, but because the ancestors are nearer. They perform the work of intermediaries between the living and God.

The living dead are believed to be the spirits that matter most at the family level because they are still considered part of their families. Mbiti (1991: 77) indicates that they are believed to live close to the homes in which they lived when they were alive. They are still believed to show an interest in their surviving families, and in return their families remember them by pouring some of their drinks and leaving some food for them from time to time. The living dead may also visit their surviving relatives in dreams or visions, or even openly, to make their wishes known.

On the whole, the living spirits of the dead are believed to be benevolent towards their families as long as they are remembered and treated properly. This belief is prevalent among the Vhavenda. Even when previously considered a bad person, the deceased is always treated reverently (Khorommbi 2001: 65). Contact with Christianity has affected the Vhavenda concepts of life and death, making it difficult at times to recapture their original beliefs.

In certain parts of Venda, people observed the *lufumbukavha* ceremony. This ceremony is observed for a young boy who dies before he is given a wife. It is believed that if he is not pacified, he may become a source of endless trouble to his lineage. Stayt (1960: 242) explains the ceremony as follows:

He is given an old used hoe handle, '*gulelwa*', with a cotton string tied near the hole, to symbolise a wife, the string being her waist band and the hole the female genitalia. A girl, never the deceased man's sister, fixes this symbol at a fork in the path in a well-cleared open space where the young man's spirit can clearly see it, with the handle pointing towards him as he approaches his old village. The handle is fixed with four pegs; two are knocked in the ground to make him forget. When the handle is properly fixed, a woman, of the dead man's lineage, generally the *Makhadzi* pours beer into the hole of the hoe

saying: 'Today we have found you a wife, the wife is here. Do not worry us anymore. If you are annoyed with us, come here.'

This ends the ceremony and the spirit of the young man is said to be satisfied forever. A similar rite is conducted for a girl who dies unmarried, having reached puberty. Such girl is called *luphofu* (the blind one) as she has died without any knowledge of sexual life. A peg is driven through the hole in the hoe handle, which is provided for the comfort of her spirit, to symbolise the male organ. The two rites are identical.

5.6. Vhavenda Christian funerals

The Vhavenda Christian funeral has shifted from the usual traditional funerals. The burial service in Venda culture was treated as a very private matter, and only the closest adult relatives and neighbours attended the service. The rest of the people would rather come to offer their condolences after the burial service. They could come two days or a week after the burial services '*u da u imela*' (to come and pay their respects).

The Vhavenda Christian funerals of today are different, especially those which take place in urban areas. Short devotional prayers are conducted in the evening during the week, before the funeral services, which are usually held on Saturdays. These evening prayer services are a means of consoling the bereaved. On the Friday before the funeral, someone will conduct night vigil services. A short devotional service is usually conducted at the home of the deceased.

On the day of the funeral the corpse will be fetched from the mortuary and brought to the home of the deceased so that it can rest for a while before it is taken to the graveyard for burial services. This practice of giving the deceased rest is a long-standing tradition, which Christianity has failed to break. *Mufu u aawedzwa* (The deceased should be rested).

According to the Vhavenda the deceased is not dead; thus he or she must rest at his home as a last tribute to his relatives and the bereaved. The bereaved, especially

the relatives, will file past the coffin (which is partly opened to reveal the head of the deceased). The viewing of the face of the deceased is known as *u tovhowa*. The procession to the graveyard should also incorporate resting places, to give the deceased a rest before arrival at the burial place. In 2001, this researcher experienced such a practice, where the Roman Catholic Priest who conducted a burial service for a member of his congregation, at Manavhela Village (Ha-Kutama), requested that the pall-bearers stop and rest on the way to the graveyard. Some Vhavenda Protestant theologians viewed this action with scorn, for they could not understand the action adopted by the priest. For the Vhavenda this was not a matter of concern, as it has been the practice from time immemorial. It is therefore not surprising that they welcomed the action taken by the priest.

Some of the messages read from the wreaths would indicate that the deceased is not dead but undertaking a journey to a place yonder. Other messages would likely read as follows: 'Prepare accommodation for us, we are also following you', (*Ni ri lugisele madzulo, na rine ri do ni tevhela*). The reading of the words on the cards and flowers should be interpreted as a way of comforting the bereaved and addressing the shock caused by death. In some cases, the aim is misdirected, since some people want their presence to be felt when their messages from the wreaths and cards are read. Zide (1984: 112) supports this argument:

It was also established that in many cases the people present at the funeral that had sent, cards, letters, etc. anxiously waited for these to be read out. In many cases people are more concerned about this than consoling the bereaved family. This concern to hear their messages read has partly come about because funerals are today social events in contrast to the very personal and family atmosphere that existed in the olden days.

Funerals of late they have lost their true meaning. They have been turned into social gatherings, with the result that sometimes, a proper funeral atmosphere is absent. In fact, the way in which some funerals are conducted resembles wedding parties, except for the fact that there is some solemnity in the faces of the bereaved.

The bereaved family and women present sprinkle earth in the grave while the men fill the grave with shovels. This act of sprinkling of the soil with hands is a way of bidding the deceased farewell. If it happens that the deceased still has traditional ties with his relatives, the *makhadzi* (aunt) will come forward to complete the traditional burial rituals. This action may embarrass some officiating ministers of the Christian religion, but the Vhavenda Christians will not be surprised by her action, as it is an accepted practice amongst the Vhavenda.

When everything is over, all the people who were at the graveyard are expected to go to the deceased's home. Although Vhavenda Christians are convinced that death is a necessary end, the concept of purification after burial services is still embedded in their minds. The people will wash their hands, even those who never took an active part in covering the grave.

One source, Gombani (personal interview, 11/05/2007) stated: 'If you don't wash your hands death will occur at your home.' Some are under the impression that they wash their hands in preparation for what they are about to eat, as generally food is served after funerals, but traditionally the Vhavenda do not eat at funerals, as there is no cooking. '*Tshikuni tsho dzima*' (the splinter has gone off). The act of washing one's hands after a burial is confirmed by Maboe (1982: 34):

From the graveyard all mourners are expected to go to the home of the deceased to wash their hands, men and women using different basins, so as to purify themselves from the contamination caused by death. Two female informants, both Christians, (45 and 49 years) of Maphumulo Village near Stanger (Durban) mentioned that in some cases people are so Westernised that they use soap for washing their hands.

Both Christians and non-Christians still observe the practice of washing hands after a funeral service. It is a widely accepted custom.

5.7. Christian status of ancestors after burial

The Vhavenda understanding of the status of the ancestor from a Christian point of view is evident from the burial services practised by Vhavenda Christians. The erection of tombstones is becoming a common practice in Venda. Samuel Nedzamba (personal interview, 04/07/2014) an active member of the church, indicated to the researcher that 'erecting a tombstone for the departed, it is to appease the spirit of the deceased'.

When speeches are made during the unveiling of these tombstones, one often hears the speakers say: 'You have appeased the spirit of the deceased, and you will have blessings from now on'. The problem at this juncture is not with Vhavenda Christians but with the officiating minister. The deceased who has now attained higher status by being an ancestor will be satisfied with the work performed by the living.

An ordained Minister of the Methodist church (one of the researcher's sources) once found himself taking part in the thanksgiving offerings. Early in the morning members of his church offered sacrifices at the grave of the deceased, who was buried with Christian rites. After this, the minister was invited to officiate at a devotional service at home, after which he enjoyed a meal with them. Maboe (1982: 34), in support of this practice, indicates that:

The Basotho, finding no wrong in their sacrifices, still carry on with it, though under a different cloak in order to mislead the church. They now call it 'Tafole' (Table or better still, 'party'). Moreover, the priests or ministers often join these parties. When this happens, the Basotho Christians laugh in their sleeves to see men who condemn *PhaBadimo* as heathen, now feasting and drinking happily.

5.8. Conclusion

To the Vhavenda death is not a total annihilation, and is regarded as a bridge by means of which one crosses to the world yonder. Ancestors are much nearer to the people's hearts than the Supreme Being. It was also established in this chapter that

the Vhavenda version of Christianity was not in line with that of the missionaries. The Vhavenda version of the Christian faith is definitely informed and coloured by their traditional religion. No religion can be cut off from the cultural roots of a people. Therefore, Christianity must also take root in the cultural context of Africa.

It was established that the missionary version of Christianity accepted by Africans can be described as hypocritical because many African Christians still patronise African indigenous religion, especially in times of emergency. This means that the influence of African indigenous religion is still strong, especially in times of crisis.

If the missionaries of the past had been patient and open-minded enough to study and analyse the sacrificial rites as conducted by the Vhavenda, this would have acted as a base or stepping stone towards helping the Vhavenda to accept and embrace the final sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1. Recapitulation

This research has dealt in depth with the failure of the missionaries to recognise factors that hindered the acceptance of the Gospel message amongst the Vhavenda. An attempt was made to identify the causes or factors that led to the conflict created by the preaching of the Gospel within a Venda context. The Vhavenda traditional culture was simply dismissed as being incompatible with the Gospel message. This was mainly because the Venda context was not properly examined and analysed.

Many missionaries made use of their own culture as a vehicle to proclaim the Gospel. In support of this argument, Katoke (1984: 7) indicated that 'if a Lutheran missionary came from Germany the converted were expected to accept the German type of Lutheranism'.

This research argued that although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenets 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 accepted with greater ease in Venda.

Chapter 2 established the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Vhavenda. The Vhavenda, like any other African people south of the Sahara, led a religious life long before the missionaries came. Traditional religion imbued their faith in such a way that their daily lives were dictated by religious practices and customs.

It is therefore maintained that the Vhavenda, like the other South African tribes, believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, whom they called Nwali before the advent and expansion of Christianity. As a result, the nation could not be regarded as heathen, for it had a religion in which its faith was basically founded. To the

Vhavenda Nwali was the creator of the universe, and cared for his people by meeting all their needs.

According to the Vhavenda belief, Nwali was not an ancestor (*Mudzimu*), but the creator of mankind (*Musika vhathu*). Nwali referred to God of the sky (*Mudzimu wa makoleni*), the great God (*muhali-muhulu*). His praise names were, '*Muhali-muhulu, phanda ha Ndou, Mukokoto o nga lutombo*', or 'Bigger, stronger, and mightier than any elephant, indestructible like a rock'.

The Vhavenda did understand the concept of creator or creation out of nothing, for it occurs frequently in the Venda vocabulary. *Musiki* from the verb *U sika*. The word *Musiki* (Creator) is used in that form in the accepted version of the Apostles' Creed.

It was noted that their worldview is different from that of the west, but closer to that of the Bible. At the same time, trying to change a people's worldview without fully understanding it can be very difficult. This is what the missionaries attempted to do. In many ways, then, people became Christians without renouncing some of the beliefs that were considered contrary to the Bible as it was taught by the missionaries.

The Vhavenda drew a clear distinction between their ancestors and Christ. Ancestors are therefore not even competitors with Christ, who is the Son of God. It was established that the functions of the ancestors include mediation, protection, procreation, destruction, communication, lack of success and sickness. These have been explained, as they affected harmonious communal existence. It may be concluded, therefore, that there is a similar idea of the existence of a super power across the spectrum of both cultures, albeit approached differently.

Chapter 3 provided a chronological study of Christian mission work amongst the Vhavenda. The Vhavenda rejected the Gospel, not because they reject the lordship of Christ, but because conversion often meant a denial of their cultural heritage and social ties. According to Vhavenda standards, religion cannot be separated from society.

It was established that the main reasons for the failure are attributed to the fact that the missionaries neglected the traditional religion that they found in place and condemned it as the work of Satan, without any salvic value. Another reason lies in the cultural superiority and great condescension that they showed towards the indigenous people. They saw themselves as agents sent to bring true faith to the heathens and to save their souls from darkness and eternal death.

When the traditional leaders invited the missionaries to their lands, their main motivation was not the evangelisation of their societies; these traditional leaders wanted to enhance their status as political heads, and to be provided with social services by the missionaries. Colonisation hindered the acceptance of the Gospel as missionaries were viewed as paying allegiance to the government of the day.

This chapter did not only concentrate on the negative side of the mission work, but also looked at the good results of the missionary effort. The Gospel was brought by different denominations, with their various approaches to the Vhavenda culture and practices. The researcher suggested the use of an inculturation hermeneutic, a method that requires the analysis of the culture and context of the recipients of the Gospel message (Venda). This method also demands that the messenger of the Gospel message does not only 'take the message' to recipients while disregarding the culture of the indigenous people. He or she should also learn from the new situation.

The building of schools was received favourably and contributed greatly to the success of the mission stations. The good work done by the missionaries in Venda as a whole will not vanish unrecognised. The establishment of Elim hospital, Tshilidzini hospital, Tshilidzini special school for the handicapped, Siloam hospital, Donald Frazer hospital, Nthume/Hayani hospital and Mbeu bookshop, are notable examples of the good deeds accomplished by the missionaries.

The establishment of independent churches and their approach to Venda culture was also investigated in Chapter 4. The purpose of establishing the new movements by the indigenous people was not a move to ostracise anyone. An African Independent Church is a Christian church, independently started in Africa, by

Africans. It was argued that the founders of the African Independent Churches created vibrant indigenous churches, which were self-reliant, born and nurtured within African culture and living out the Gospel with relevance in their own particular context.

The spread of independent churches in Venda reveals that there are church members who are searching for answers to various spiritual questions. It was argued that some of the mainstream churches could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the indigenous people. The Bible played a key role in the legitimising of their practices and teachings, which for the most part were interpreted literally.

African Independent Churches began to grow and develop in response to people's quest for a renewal of African culture. These movements endeavour to fulfil the people's social-cultural needs, which are thought to have been neglected with the advent of colonisation and European Christianity.

African Independent Churches are in pursuit of a 'cultural renaissance', and their faith is centred on the Holy Spirit, whose thrust is 'continuity and change'. They combine an African traditional religious worldview with Christianity.

Chapter 5 explained that the missionaries did not understand the indigenous people's cultural background regarding the respect accorded to the dead and burial rites, whereas the Vhavenda did not dismiss their belief in and understanding of life hereafter when they received Christianity. They became Christians although they still adhered to the Vhavenda culture and religion.

6.2. Main findings and evaluation of the hypothesis

It has been demonstrated that the missionaries operated under certain assumptions. Venda society was believed to have been left behind in the process of development. It needed civilisation and religion for it to catch up with the outside world; local people were believed to have no religion or culture at all. The traces of religious and cultural experiences among them were dismissed as mere paganism.

It should have been of extreme importance to the missionaries to understand and appreciate the traditional Venda religion, and thus the Christian faith should have been received without much ado.

It has been clearly shown that, if a human being is not accorded full respect and dignity, without racial prejudices, the Christian faith will be in danger and consequently it may end up becoming irrelevant.

The missionaries were a product of their own era. They did not study African Traditional Religion to deepen the people's understanding of God. Because of their ignorance and negative attitude, they believed that the Vhavenda did not have a word for God. The use of the name *Nwali* was totally rejected by the missionaries in Venda. The missionaries regarded *Nwali* as a pagan god or an idol.

It is important to note that the Vhavenda Bible has been in use for quite sometime, and since the first edition of the Venda Bible, which was published in 1998, hardly any changes have been made. 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 confusion within the same tribe.

The missionaries saw local religious beliefs, conceptions about *Vhuloi* and beliefs in the power of *dzinanga*, *mingome* and other specialists as being manifestations of the power of Satan or as arising from superstition. Some of these points are covered in the *Nyimbo dza Vhatendi* (Hymn book) 38:

Shango la Venda midzimu ya kale ndi swiswi
Ro phuphudzika ri tshi nga dzinngu dzi sa liswi
Hee Vhavenda
Ri pfi: Vha fela nnda
Ngeno Mutshidzi e hone

(Translation: Land of the Vhavenda, your ancient gods are darkness
We group in darkness like sheep without a shepherd
You Vhavenda

We will be called without the Saviour
Even though the saviour is around)

By Midzimu ya kale (ancient gods) the writer probably means ancestors. To call people's ancestors 'darkness' is to disrespect their history. The problem here was that the missionaries thought that the Vhavenda worshipped their dead ancestors. It is clear from this research that the Vhavenda simply pay homage to them. The Vhavenda culture never says that a person has died, but rather he or she has departed, has passed on. To the Vhavenda death is not regarded as total annihilation. Therefore, the dead are treated with respect.

The missionaries were unmindful of the fact that, by focusing too strongly on the eradication of Vhavenda customs and practices, they were hampering the Gospel from penetrating the hearts of the Vhavenda. Undeniably, the power of the living dead is indelibly impressed on the hearts of Vhavenda Christians. It does not matter how educated or committed to the Christian faith one is, when good fortune seems to be exhausted, the living dead are consulted. Jesus is seen by the Vhavenda Christians as the prime ancestor, and many traditional concepts and legends concerning the ancestors may serve to help Africans to understand the role that Jesus Christ, Son of God, has played and still plays in reconciling us to God.

Nünberger (2007: 14) indicates that: "Ancestors are deemed 'real' because their existential impact on the living is pervasive and decisive. Their reality is not located in their vitality, however but in their authority. Authority depends on power, so they are ascribed greater power than they had when still alive. A bearer of authority, ancestors depend on being remembered, honoured, and obeyed by their offspring. They are not subject to time and space. They are everywhere all the time".

It has been revealed that salvation in the traditional African setting includes getting answers for problems and overcoming the agent of evil and the hard realities of life. The influence of the missionaries had over the indigenous cultural Venda people, meant that they started not to see or understand things in the same way as they had previously.

The separation of the people at the mission station became a revolutionary factor, which implied the breaking up of the solidarity of the indigenous people and the community at large. The new state of affairs at the mission station enticed the Christians not to have anything to do with their fellow people, but rather to shun them as heathen and uncivilised. Family relations were cut off. Mission stations appeared to be breaking down the power and authority of chiefs. Christians in the mission station were missing a point by forgetting that they belonged to the universal church, whose aim was to evangelise or share the Christian fellowship with their brothers and sisters.

The Rev. Van Deventer of the Tshilidzini Mission Station made a commendable change by moving out from the mission residence, and living among the residents of Tshisahulu, where he attended tribal and civic meetings, and participated in the activities of the village. This action earned him a good reputation. Rev. Van Rooy decided that his children should be given Tshivenda names. 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 their names with 'Vho'. This approach led to their being easily accepted by the indigenous people.

It should be made clear that Christianity ought to be received in accordance with the geographical environment and cultural situation. It should also be taken into consideration that there is no culture that regards itself as purely and totally Christian, for all cultures need to be redeemed. Traditional festivities such as 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 in Roman culture, but later it was used to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is clear that this view accepts a total integration of ancestor veneration with the church.

Most of the independent churches resort to the mode of baptism by immersion and this is in line with the indigenous people's ritual for purification from defilement (*u kamisa*). Had the missionaries accepted some of the Vhavenda cultural practices, the independent churches would not have mushroomed in the manner they have.

6.3. Recommendations

6.3.1. *Christianity versus Venda culture*

The Christian Gospel cannot exclude the culture of the indigenous people. In short, however, traditional religion is the main component of Venda cosmology.

Nürnberg (2007: 16) indicates that:

“It is the kind of religion that is found in Africa other than, and prior to Christianity. One could also speak of African ‘original’ religion. However, the basic assumptions of the original African view of reality are not left behind when people convert to Christianity or join the churches for other reasons”.

All aspects of Venda cosmology are permeated by religion. For the Vhavenda, therefore, religion is a way of life and cannot be uprooted from daily life. The concept of religion, therefore, needs to interact with Christianity rather than replaced by the Gospel message. Sadly, this was ignored in the interests of imposing Christianity on the indigenous people. It should be accepted 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.

The missionaries and the elders of the church should not be overly impressed by the influx of new members who join the church. Churches may appear to grow, while the hearts of congregants are not possessed by Christ. The church should be realistic. Tribal customs will eventually be enculturated into Christianity when a change of heart takes place.

It is not surprising that the independent churches are gaining more followers than the mainstream churches; the reason is that the former capitalise on the failure of the missionaries who brought the word of God from their own cultural background.

Sanneh (1989: 55) indicates that: “Translatability plays a role in religious change by providing a popular base of appeal and by supplying the text for reform and renewal”. It is the *Missio Dei* that allowed translation to enlarge the boundaries of the new Christian audience. The *Kerygmatic* preaching of the apostles, and certainly of Jews, at first took the Hebrew Scriptures as the limit of salvific promise, through the fulfilment of that promise breached that limit.

In mission, the Church applied this insight by recognizing all cultures and the languages in which they are embodied as lawful in God’s eyes, making it possible to render God’s word into other languages without reservation (Sanneh 1989:55). The experience of the early Church’s missionary activity set a pattern that would be repeated throughout the Church’s life as it sought to spread the Gospel. As the Gospel was spread to Northern Europe and later to Asia, the Americas, and Africa, advocated a conversion tied to cultural conformity (especially linguistic) and Christians who valued a conversion that allowed for a unique cultural expression of their new faith, especially in their native tongue.

Sanneh demonstrates that it is not the transmission of the message that is central, but the local acceptance and adoption of the Good News in local language and categories of interpretation. In the course of his argument he also shows that the Gospel cannot be otherwise, for it is the nature of grace to translate the message into local thought forms and thus be transformed by the local categories.

The essence of how the Gospel relates to cultures lies in its ‘translatibility’, Sanneh argues, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but the records of his life are in Greek. At each stage of translation, missionaries tend to demand that hearers learn their own civilised ways along with the Gospel. But the nature of that message mitigates against this cultural presumption, so that when the Gospel has been translated, indigenous people find biblical support for their own independence from their missionaries.

6.3.2. To churches

It is vital for churches to study the context and environment in which they operate, especially the culture in which the message is preached, before one begins to evangelise. Church leaders must note that each community is unique and as such should be treated with reverence and utmost care.

The church must learn to share the available space with the existing religions found in the area being evangelised. Missionaries should avoid thinking for and imposing things on the inhabitants, rather trying to persuade them to listen of their own volition.

Bible studies should be intensified and leaders should allow the scriptures speak to them (communicants), with them, and through them at all times. Ministers of the word and pastors should avoid distancing themselves from the parishioners, lest the whole process collapse. Rather, they should live with them and be the light to the community, move manses or parsonages into the community instead of staying on the church premises, and attend community activities.

The church must attract rather than shun, condemn and judge people. Most of all it should be prepared to adapt, change and move with the times when reforming. It is the duty of each minister to prepare congregants to debate at all levels, giving priority to training and equipping human resources. In meetings, sermons should use the common language, which can be understood by everyone at all times.

Christian should endeavour to put into practice the tolerance and respect they preach, by tolerating and respecting other religious faiths. Abimbola (2005: 36), the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria, proposed that in order to produce a better understanding of and regard for other religions, all practitioners 'must be taught the elements of their own religion as well as those of other faiths in their country'.

The church should study traditional African beliefs. Traditional African culture is not all bad; as in all cultures, there are positive factors that have held the culture

together, and negative factors which have degraded the human personality. The churches should become involved in a serious dialogue regarding the traditional worldview and the continuing revelation of Jesus Christ through the scriptures.

Religious practitioners need to have an informed knowledge of the beliefs of other faiths, and of the similarities all religious groups share as human communities that struggle in different ways to deal with the basic issues (Ucko, Venema & Hentsch 2006: 37). It is crucial to have a predisposition for understanding every person, analysing every system and recognising what is right; however, this does not at all mean losing certitude about one's own faith or weakening the principles of morality.

The researcher thinks that there is a need for the church in Venda to bring change in its approach to mission work and to be inclusive in nature, embracing all instruments ideas and even ways of worship in the services. This will bring about a radical transformation of the whole church, advocating for a new way of conscientising the church in Venda regarding the need to look after itself, in the way it evangelises and cares for its members, to avoid an exodus to the African Independent Churches. Many are seeking the help or advice from African Independent Churches after leaving a mainstream church service. This spiritual poverty has caused people to shun mainstream churches.

6.3.3. Worship

Traditional worship entails more foreign concepts and components than that of the African Independent Churches. The order of services, like holy communion, baptism, marriage, confirmation and burial are mere translations from the Western church.

In worship, people express the presence of God, dependence on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, fellowship, and the celebration of life along with the whole of creation. Worship should warm people's hearts and meet their needs. For some members of the missionary churches, worship falls short of their expectations and they move to the appealing African Independent Church under the local tree. This is demonstrated by the ever growing number of members who visit independent churches for healing and prophecy, who constantly attend Pentecostal denominations and attempt to

introduce Pentecostal forms of worship in the church, and who go back to African traditional religions in times of crisis.

6.3.4. Dialogue

Bevans and Schroeder (2004: 378-379) regard dialogue as the norm of every form of mission, because Christian mission is participation in the mission of God, and God's being and action is dialogical. At the same time, they state: 'In no way does dialogue *replace* proclamation or the necessity of an invitation to Christian conversion.' For this reason, they talk of 'prophetic dialogue'. Further study is needed on the way that the concept of prophetic dialogue could help to shape Venda Christianity.

Bevans and Schroeder (2004: 380, 381) also describe different ways in which the presence of grace outside of explicit knowledge and faith in Christ has been understood. While the missionaries followed the *exclusivist* or *replacement* model, this researcher tended towards the *fulfilment* model, since this researcher believes that the Christian faith is implicitly present behind or in Venda religion, and can bring Venda religion to full completion through belief in Christ.

Lack of dialogue has led to a very popular but wrong assumption that all which is African is evil or bad while all which is Western is Christian and good. Dialogue between Christianity and other religions in Venda needs to be entered into without delay. Without dialogue the conxtualisation, inculturation and localisation of Christianity in Venda will never be complete. Tension will continue to exist in the fields of Christianity and traditional burial rites, Christianity and traditional marriages, Christianity and ancestors as well as traditional healing. Tension in these areas can only be removed or minimised through dialogue. Above all there is great tension between ministers competing for a congregation or leadership positions, which has also created unnecessary suspicion, and hence division arises.

6.3.5. The transformation of lifestyle for a new missionary era

Bevans and Schroeder (2004: 383) regard 'the dialogue of life' as the foundation for any other kind of dialogue. The interaction between Christian faith and Venda

religion takes place every day where people of all convictions go about their daily lives. In the Venda context, lifestyle is strongly influenced by religion, and thus more research into the way that the Christian faith can help to shape life-giving practices very important.

Van Niekerk (2009) indicates that the alignment between mission and modernism, in opposition to traditional African culture, must be left behind as part of a previous era, on theological and practical grounds (the church should never completely identify itself with any culture, and modernism has proved not to be the solution for Africa).

In the new era our challenge is to design a lifestyle based on Christian values, which should take up elements of both Western modern culture, and traditional African culture, weaving these into a greater pattern. This ideal presents an alternative to the current ideal of modernism.

The missionaries of the 20th century provided opportunities for some teachers and many medical workers. The designing of new lifestyle patterns provides opportunities for literally every Christian, as individuals, or joining hands with others in more organised projects.

The search for new lifestyle patterns on our continent, where old and new cultures are pushing against each other in almost every house and community, must be one of the most exciting, interesting and meaningful challenges for young people anywhere in the world today. A new type of missionary is needed, one who builds on the foundations on the previous. One obvious unfinished task is to have the Christian confession take shape in a new lifestyle.

6.4. Areas for future research

Africans are religious in all aspects of life; hence failure in any sphere of life demands a religious answer. The missionaries have tended to ignore some of the crucial cultural and religious issues that an African worshipper faces, such as cleansing rituals to integrate the deceased's spirit into ancestorship.

Research programmes should be designed to investigate some of the traditional customs still in practice during and after the funeral service, for example *u tibula tshitombo* (unveiling of a tombstone), the slaughtering of a beast and the washing of hands when coming back from the grave, and the cutting of hair. After such traditional rituals are investigated, inculturation can take place when all fields have been exhausted.

There is a heated debate about the modern alternative of cremation of the body. It is a very emotive issue and merits careful study, research and dialogue.

It would be of assistance to both the church and indigenous people if research was instigated on the doctrine of the Trinity from a cultural point of view.

The Pentecostals put their emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The danger that also threatens the Pentecostals, however, just as the mainstream churches kept the Bible and doctrine hostage inside the church, the Pentecostals may, in a sense, keep the spirit hostage in the church.

It seems that missionary methods do determine the extent to which churches are able to become relevant in the lives of individuals and the communities in which they exist. In this regard it should be remembered that it is not the church that 'undertakes' missions. The Christian mission was, is and always will be the *missio Dei* by allowing the Holy Spirit to continuously renew and revitalise missionary methods. In this way, all churches will be participating in the liberating mission of God, becoming God's Good News to the world by becoming God's incarnated love for the sake of the world.

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SUMMARY

The approach of the missionaries towards the Vhavenda was more scholarly than practical, and had little to do with everyday realities. It appears to have been focused on Western ethnocentricity rather than on the propagation of the Gospel. As a result, it could not fulfil the purpose for which it was intended.

In Africa, as everywhere else in the world, the interpretation of the Gospel message takes place in a particular and unique context. This means that, in the practice of theology, one should take into account not only the spirit and the Gospel message, but also the culture of the people to whom the message is being communicated.

This research deals in depth with the failure of the missionaries to recognise factors that either hampered or could have facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel message in Venda culture.

Furthermore, it aims to probe into strongholds of ancestral veneration that have helped to sustain the beliefs of the Vhavenda. Ancestors, because of their authority and power, are said to intervene in the affairs of their descendants, and to provide meaning, values and protection. In short, they respond to the spiritual needs of their descendants. Ancestors appear to occupy the centre stage in lieu of Christ.

During this research, it became clear that a large number of Vhavenda profess to be Christians, and yet cling tenaciously to their traditional beliefs. This is evident in crisis situations that are occurring, in terms of both individuals and families. This implies that in the heart of an African Christian, there arises a juxtaposition, due to the fact that African traditional religion is inseparable from daily life for these people.

Traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Vhavenda are examined. Some of these features pertain to attributes of God and ancestral veneration, and the African concept of salvation. Evidence from a variety of scholars indicates that Africans never *worship* ancestors, in the strict sense of the word. The cultural practices that Africans perform aim at demonstrating their faith in God. They are symbolic in nature.

It is interesting to note that both Western missionaries and the African people attribute the same nature to the Supreme Being, who in the case of the Vhavenda, is known as Nwali. It may be concluded, therefore, that there is a similar conception of the existence of a 'superpower' across the spectrum of both cultures, albeit approached from different angles. Nwali represents the final and highest power. Although the introduction of the Christian God received a negative response from the Vhavenda, as a result of conflicting names and the meanings attached to those names, there is at least a common understanding of such names today.

The prevailing idea behind the formation of the African Independent Churches was not intended as a move to ostracise anyone. The white missionaries brought the Gospel to the indigenous people, but some of the mainstream churches could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the indigenous people. The African Independent Churches do not regard these mainstream churches as standard or ideal, and do not find their own norms in early Christianity. The African Independent Churches restore a sense of purpose; they often say things such as 'feel at home, we are in our church, we govern ourselves'.

The church should study traditional African beliefs. Traditional African culture is not all bad; neither is everything good. As in all cultures, there are positive factors that have held the culture together, and there are negative factors that degrade human dignity. It should be made clear that Christianity should be received in alignment with one's geographical context and environment, and in accordance with one's cultural situation.

The African concept of salvation is another feature that has been investigated in this paper. Salvation is approached holistically, that is, the healths of the human body as well as the spirit are perceived to be inseparable.

If the missionaries of the past had been patient and open-minded enough to study and analyse the sacrificial rites as conducted by the Vhavenda, this would have acted as a base or steppingstone towards helping the Vhavenda to accept and embrace the final sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ.

The researcher further explains that it is therefore not surprising that some Vhavenda regard Jesus as the prime ancestor, healer, liberator, mediator, elder brother and master of initiation. The researcher is compelled to conclude that *lufu ndi muratho kana dambuwo* (death is a bridge). To the Vhavenda, death is not a total annihilation, but is regarded as a bridge by means of which one crosses to the next world.

APPENDIX

Interviews

Bishop T.J.	The Zion Bethlehem Apostolic Church, 09/11/2014
Gombani M.	Traditional healer, 21/05/2007
Ligege N.W.	Tshivhilwi ZCC, 27/05/2015
Mabonyane T. (deceased)	Dzimauli, 04/01/1996
Makwarela R.	Zamenkonste, 03/01/2015
Mamphiswana B.	Phiphidi Lutheran Church elder, 18/01/2012
Mashimbwe B.P.	Tshivhazwaulu Lutheran Church elder, 30/06/2015
Mhephu T.	Vuvha, from the royal family, 18/10/2014
Mulaudzi S.	Tshakhuma, Church elder, 29/10/2011
Munengwane P. (deceased)	Headman (Gota), 12/10/2007
Mutanyu I. (deceased)	Zimbabwe, Roman Catholic Father, 16/09/2009
Mutavhatsindi T.	Traditional healer, 15/12/2014
Nedzamba S.	Ha-Mulima, 04/07/2014
Nedzungani N.	Malavuwa, craftsman 07/10/2014
Nemukovhani M.	Tohoyandou Lutheran Choir member, 10/04/2012
Nemutamvuni J.	Girls' initiation school traditional man, 21/10/2014
Nemutavhanani M.	Tshibvumo, 03/10/2015
Nengwenda H.	Traditional healer, 09/01/2015
Nesengani T.	Mpheni ZCC, 05/12/2014
Ramashidzha	Zamenkomste, 06/01/2001
Rev. Anane A.	Dafur, Sudan, 21/12/2015
Rev. Moremi M. (deceased)	University of Venda, 2003
Rev. Ndou L.P.	Makwarela Dutch Reformed Church, 23/04/2014
Rev. Ramulondi M.	Presbyterian Church, 14/06/2008
Sbanyoni M.T	Bronkhorstspuit ZCC, 27/04/2015
Shirindi Z.	Professional nurse, 12/04/2012
Siphida M.	Dzimauli, 04/02/2015
Vhengani P.	17 /01/2015