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ABSTRACT

**ANCESTRAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: A
PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN
FAITH AMONG ADVENTISTS
IN ZIMBABWE**

by

Zebbron Masukume Ncube

Chair: Russell L. Staples

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

A Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: ANCESTRAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: A PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN FAITH AMONG ADVENTISTS IN ZIMBABWE

Name of researcher: Zebron Masukume Ncube

Name and degree of faculty chair: Russell L. Staples, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 1988.

Problem

Every Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Zimbabwe at one time or another has had to deal with a situation where church members consult their ancestors when threatened by sickness, death, misfortune, or a series of tragedies. The Adventist church correctly takes a strong stand against ancestral practices. Despite such a stand the ancestral practices have persisted among many Adventists.

Paradoxically, while church members are given the correct teaching before baptism, many continue to regard the ancestors as the court of appeal in times of crisis. This study is undertaken to understand the nature of this

traditional religion in order to promote Christian faith among Adventists in Zimbabwe.

Method

A description and an analysis of the traditional religion is undertaken through utilization of the already abundant anthropological literature on this religion. An attempt is made to determine the basic tenets of the cult and the meaning the cult has to its adherents. This approach has helped to determine the reasons why many Adventists resort to this cult in times of difficulty. The Epistle to the Hebrews is used to provide answers to the human predicament.

Results

Investigation shows that this religion is operative on three levels: first, the level of Mwari, the high god, who is beyond the reach of individual members of society but who can be approached through mediums during a national crisis; second, the spirit world inhabited by ancestors, alien and avenging spirits; and third, the living members of society among whom the mediums of the spirit world operate. These levels form entities of power from which blessings and curses derive. Hence, the individual in society attempts to acquire, retain, and utilize appropriate powers in order to deal with the human predicament.

Conclusions

This study concludes that an understanding of the

portrayal of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews as creator, sustainer, son, heir, brother, pioneer, forerunner, prophet, priest, and king invalidates the role of the ancestors as an answer to the human predicament.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

ANCESTRAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: A
PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN
FAITH AMONG ADVENTISTS
IN ZIMBABWE

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Zebron Masukume Ncube

June 1988

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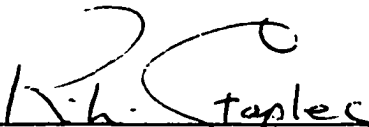
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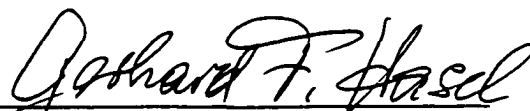
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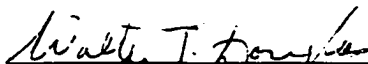
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24 May 1988

Date approved

DEDICATION

To my wife, Peggie, and children, Lindile, Nhlalo, and Nozipho, who endured my devotion to the research and typing of this project report.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is twofold: first, to study ancestral beliefs and practices of contemporary Zimbabwean society which affect Adventist faith and lifestyle in order to develop practical approaches to dealing with such beliefs and practices; second, to derive from the Epistle to the Hebrews an understanding of a Christian way of life as a means of validating the Christian's faith in Jesus Christ in view of ancestral beliefs and practices.

Justification of the Project

Occasionally, Adventist churches in Zimbabwe have to deal with some members who, while believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord, still revert to ancestral spirits to cope with adversities of life. These members are often in a quandary when it comes to relating their Christian faith to such problems as sickness, death, personal loss, infertility, and a series of tragedies. They are inclined to resort to ancestral spirits for an answer to their plight.

Adventist churches are concerned, therefore, that

while some members publicly confess faith in Jesus Christ, privately they still believe in ancestral spirits. These members continue to swing between the Christian gospel and ancestral practices. Simon S. Maimela, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and professor at the University of South Africa, sees this as a general trend in African Christianity. He observes:

The reluctance of Africans to break ties with the African Traditional Religions lies in the fact that they are wedded to an African world-view in which salvation is understood in terms of relief or help in times of trouble in this life. Salvation is thus expressed in such acts as healing, driving away evil spirits, empowerment of the individual self, the promotion of fertility, and success in life's ventures. . . .¹

Those who defect to the cult of the ancestors do so because they are looking for solutions to their present predicament. They feel that Christianity is preoccupied with the distant future. They also feel that it is inadequate to meet their present needs.

There are three reasons which have made this study necessary: (1) religious duplicity among some Adventists in Zimbabwe; (2) reaffirmation of the significance of the ancestors in Zimbabwe today; and (3) appeal by the Trans-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists for churches to study the customs and practices of the people in their territories.

1. The belief in spirits makes people feel

¹Simon S. Maimela, "Salvation in African Traditional Religions," Missionalia 13 (1985):72.

vulnerable to the forces around them and this motivates them to take precautionary measures. There is a Zimbabwean proverb that says "God helps the individual who helps himself." The logic and implication is that one should not trust in God alone but must find extra help elsewhere. The ancestors are believed to provide needed security in a world fraught with dangers.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some Adventists have their feet in two camps. Generally, they believe in Jesus; however, when faced with sickness or misfortune they turn to the powers of the spirit world. This view of survival and self-preservation has often been observed in Africa. Tokunboh Adeyemo, an African theologian and General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), notes that

. . . it is not uncommon these days to find a church attender who will sing praises to Jesus on Sunday . . . but during the week is bowing down to gods and ancestors whom he believes are the only help in time of crisis. To these people it is not a danger and it does not even constitute a theological problem because in their own thinking they have different compartments for different religions for different occasions.¹

I have painful memories of Adventists in Zimbabwe who were looked upon as exemplary Christians but who later renounced their faith due to a series of deaths among members of the family. They gradually gravitated towards the ancestral spirits for protection until they eventually

¹Tokunboh Adeyemo, "The Church of the Future and the Future of the Church," Perception 15 (1979):4.

lost their faith in Jesus Christ. When I was president of one of the missions in Zimbabwe, a pastor requested that he be assigned a campmeeting appointment at his village home area. "My people," he said, "are sinking in ancestral practices even though they are Christians." Their primary concern is to find answers to their daily needs.

2. Zimbabwe has recently emerged from a protracted war against colonialism. The rise of nationalism not only inspired people to appreciate and reaffirm their traditional heritage, it also united them in an appeal to the lion spirit (mhondoro) mediums of Chaminuka, Kaguvi, Nehanda, and others who instigated the first revolution against foreign dominance in the late nineteenth century.

The period 1974-79 was the height of the war against colonial rule in Zimbabwe. Many people turned to the ancestors as their own liberators because they believed that Christianity had failed them. Today one occasionally reads appeals in newspapers in Zimbabwe for the return to traditional beliefs and practices. As a result, many Christians, including some Adventists, defected from the Christian faith to the cult of the ancestors.

The recent reaffirmation of the significance of the ancestors as guardians of the people's well-being has encouraged many people to compromise their commitment to the Christian gospel. This, together with political and nationalistic reaffirmations in various parts of Africa, has

forced many Christians to re-examine the reasons for their faith in Jesus Christ.

3. In 1980 the Trans-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists¹ initiated a study of the customs and practices of the people in the countries comprising its territory. Since Zimbabwe was one of the countries involved, the Zambesi Union² adopted the following Division action:

' . . . To request each Union to study the customs and practices of the people in its area with a view to contributing positively to the growth and development of the Church as an African entity, and that a co-ordinating sub-committee be appointed to integrate the suggestions and concepts that will accrue from each Union. . . . '3

The Division committee voted again to set up a six-member committee and request Solusi College to prepare basic material for the study. Apparently, such material was produced and sent to the Unions for feedback, but only one Union responded. The Division reactivated its previous action by another action one year later:

'The sub-committee on African Culture and Identity has not been successful in obtaining any response from the unions to the document which was circulated for study. Hence

'Voted: to rewrite the document in more readable language for circulation to the unions for their further

¹A Seventh-day Adventist organizational level of church administration for Central and Southern African countries.

²The headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe.

³Quoted in the year-end Minutes of Meetings of the Zambesi Union Mission Committee, meeting of December 18, 1980.

attention along the following guidelines:

1. That each union set up a sub-committee to study the document.
2. That the TAD Ministerial Secretary visit each union early in 1982 to meet with the union sub-committee.
3. That the TAD Ministerial Secretary present the results of union studies to the 1982 Mid-year committee.¹

The Zambesi Union responded by appointing a five-member subcommittee, of which I was a member. For unknown reasons this subcommittee never met and the assignment was never undertaken.

Developments in the Division led to the realignment of departments and personnel. One would surmise that the consolidation of the East Africa and Trans-Africa Divisions into a single unit may have contributed to the stalemate. The assignment still remains to be done. This study takes up the assignment by focusing on ancestral beliefs and practices which affect the Adventist churches in Zimbabwe.

Limitations of the Project

This study discusses the ancestral beliefs and practices which affect Adventists in Zimbabwe. Its purpose is to understand the issue and then develop pastoral skills with which to promote commitment to the Christian faith among Adventists in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has many tribal and sub-tribal groups which make the study of ancestral beliefs and practices an involved endeavor. Hence an attempt is

¹Quoted in the year-end Minutes of Meetings of the Zambesi Union Mission Committee, meeting of December 15, 1981.

made to focus on the general practices which are common to most tribes in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The study is both descriptive and analytical. It is not an empirical anthropological study; however, it draws upon the published and unpublished works of anthropologists as well as on my personal life experience in Zimbabwean society and my observations of Christian practice both in the church and in daily life. The fundamental purpose of this study is to provide answers to ancestor-related beliefs and practices as they impinge upon the experience of Adventist Christians in Zimbabwe.

Overview

Chapter 1 examines the role of the ancestors in providing answers to the human predicament. First, the historical and religious setting of the cult of the ancestors in Zimbabwean society is described. Second, a description of the nature and role of the ancestral, alien, and avenging spirits is made.

Chapter 2 discusses the meaning of these ancestral beliefs and practices to their adherents and offers reasons why some Adventists resort to the cult of the ancestors. A brief summary of the first two chapters appears at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 is a study of the Epistle to the Hebrews

showing how Christ is the answer to the human predicament. This is done by focusing on themes in the Epistle to the Hebrews which portray Christ as One who is pre-existent, incarnate, exalted, prophet, priest, and king. The role of faith is also presented as a theological imperative in the study.

At the end of chapter 3 a summary is made of the discussion of the first three chapters. This summary becomes the basis for the practical aspects of the study which follow in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 provides practical suggestions as to how Adventists can deal with ancestral beliefs and practices without compromising the gospel. A conclusion is drawn at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 5 describes a campmeeting program which I propose to use in addressing the question of the human predicament among Adventists in Zimbabwe. The sermons and Bible studies appear in the appendices of this study.

Definition of Terms

The vernacular terms used in this study are classified below according to two local language groups: Shona and Ndebele. The meanings of the terms are roughly the same, but this classification is given to aid the reader in identifying each term according to the two main vernacular languages used in Zimbabwe. The English meanings are also given for each term.

<u>SHONA</u>	<u>NDEBELE</u>	<u>ENGLISH</u>
hakata	amathambo	devices used for divination
kugadzira	ukubuyisa	ritual for bringing back home the spirit of the deceased
mudzimu	idlozi	an ancestral spirit
Mwari		the Shona high God
n'anga	isanunsi/ inyanga	a diviner-healer
ngozi	uzimu	an avengeful and harmful spirit of the deceased
shavi	ishabi	an alien spirit
svikiro	isangoma	a spirit host (medium)
mhondoro		lion spirits
zvidhoma	imikhobo	ghosts

PART I

THE ANCESTORS, CHRIST, AND THE HUMAN

PREDICAMENT IN ZIMBABWE

CHAPTER I

ANCESTORS AND THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

The Country and the People of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe lies in the south and central part of the continent of Africa. It is landlocked with Zambia to the north, Malawi and Mozambique to the east, Botswana to the west, and South Africa to the south.

Its history is highlighted by three symbolic eras: (1) the pre-colonial period represented by the bushmen's rock paintings and the Great Zimbabwe stone ruins of the Shona confederate states; (2) the colonial period represented by the tomb of Cecil John Rhodes at the Matopo Hills near the historic and religious site of the Mwari cult¹; and (3) the post-colonial period marked by revolution, recovery of traditional roots, and a new awareness of being a part of the international community.

From Migrants to a Nation

The forming of a nation. It is not known exactly when the first people occupied the part of the continent today known as Zimbabwe. Historians conjecture that

¹Robert Blake, A History of Rhodesia (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 6-7.

probably the first people to occupy Zimbabwe were the "tiny, yellow-skinned hunting people" called the bushmen. They are a race that has almost vanished except for a few who live in the Kalahari desert in Botswana. These people left many fine rock paintings, over 2000 of which have so far been discovered.¹

The earliest history of the Bantu-speaking people of Zimbabwe may not be discussed with certainty because very little is known. However, it is generally agreed that about the fifth century A.D. there began a southward migration from the north across the Zambezi River by the Bantu-speaking pastoralists. These people seem to have displaced indigenous bushmen who may have roamed the plateau in search of their subsistency.²

It is believed that the name "Shona" was applied to cover a number of dialect clusters (Kalanga, Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, Manyika, and Ndau) which were traditionally divided.³ The Shona were a part of the Bantu-speaking group that settled in the country when the others moved further south across the Limpopo River. By the eleventh century this group of people had formed two dynasties. The Munhumutapa Empire occupied the territory in

¹Ibid., 6.

²Harold D. Nelson, ed. Zimbabwe: A Country Study (Washington D. C.: American University, 1983), 4.

³Ibid.

the north and east of the country while the Rozwi Empire occupied the south. Intertribal conflicts led to the subdivision of tribes and fragmentation of clans as people moved and resettled.¹

The presence of gold also attracted foreign traders and conflicts developed as the Arab and Portuguese merchants tried to eliminate each other in order to monopolize the trade in gold with various chiefdoms. L. H. Gann points out that the Portuguese tried to penetrate the interior but they encountered resistance from the chiefs. They turned back and focused their attention on Madagascar; later they decided to use "spiritual arms" and entrusted their mission to Father Gonzalo da Silveira, a Portuguese Jesuit.²

In 1505 the Portuguese occupied Sofala (present-day Beira) in the east coast of Mozambique and drove out the Arabs in order to enjoy free access to the goldfields in the interior. They established a network of markets within the Munhumutapa empire. In 1629 they consolidated their trade monopoly by intervening in a Munhumutapa dynastic dispute and installing a king of their choice who promised to expel the Arabs from the interior. For two centuries they

¹Martinus L. Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 1:20.

²L. H. Gann, A History of Southern Rhodesia (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 17-18.

remained the only Europeans in the Munhumutapa Empire.¹

About 1820 there were migrations among the Nguni south of the Limpopo River. These resulted from Tshaka's ascendancy among the Zulu in Natal. In 1822 Mzilikazi led a Ndebele defection from Tshaka in Natal and raided other tribes as he moved north. He also clashed with the Boers who were being pushed up north by the British. Finally around the 1840s he established a Ndebele hegemony in what is today south-western Zimbabwe.²

The Ndebele state was later penetrated and possessed by the British. In 1890 the British took possession of the Shona-occupied territory and incorporated it into a single political unit with the Ndebele state.³ After the 1893 Matebele war and the 1896-7 Shona and Ndebele uprisings, the British ensured permanent settlement in what became Rhodesia. Rhodesia was named after John Cecil Rhodes who was the architect of the British settlement in what is now Zimbabwe.

The British South African Company Administration became the ruling power in the new colony. This administration recognized separate Shona and Ndebele chieftaincies with boundaries clearly marked. The chiefs

¹Nelson, 9-10.

²Ibid., 11-13.

³Marshall W. Murphree, Christianity and the Shona (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 3-4.

were placed on even footing with local control in the hands of the European officials called Native Commissioners.¹

The struggle against colonialism, although seemingly suppressed, never really died down. With the rise of the tide of African nationalism in the 1950s, a concerted effort toward the attainment of majority rule was stepped up in Zimbabwe. The result was the achievement of independence in 1980.

The history of Zimbabwe was a movement from migrant pastoralists in the fifth century A.D. to the formation of an independent multi-racial nation in 1980. It was also a history of religious change as people moved from traditional religious beliefs to Christianity. As different tribal and racial groups interacted socially and politically, they also shared their religious beliefs.

From Mwari Cult to Christianity

Traditional religious beliefs in Zimbabwe have to be understood in the light of the historical developments that took place over centuries of years. First, one must look at traditional beliefs of the Shona who were among the early group of people to occupy Zimbabwe. Second, one must deal with the religion of the Ndebele people who migrated from the south and settled in Zimbabwe. It is at this point that

¹Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 26.

a composite picture of traditional beliefs in Zimbabwe come together as a whole.

Shona traditional religious beliefs. The Great Zimbabwe stone ruins near Masvingo represent an early religious center of the Shona people. These ruins consist of the acropolis with thick granite walls which may have served as an impregnable fortress, the temple with walls thirty-five feet high which may have served as a royal residence, and a conical tower which some scholars believe to be a fertility symbol. These buildings are constructed from granite slabs laid upon each other without mortar or cement.¹

In 1871 Karl Mauch, a German geologist, visited the area and thought it was built by Phoenician artisans under Hebrew influences. The temple was thought to be a copy of the palace where the Queen of Sheba stayed when she visited King Solomon. He thought that Zimbabwe (houses of stone) was the capital of Ophir from which Hiram, the Phoenician ally of the Jewish monarch, sent 420 talents of gold.

However, today scholars are convinced that Great Zimbabwe was the work of the ancestors of the Shona-speaking peoples. When the white people came in the 1870s and saw the condition of the Shona tribes, they doubted that this structure, symbolic of a great civilization, was the work of the poor tribes. Archeology now testifies that

¹Blake, 6.

civilizations can decline and rise. This was the case with the Great Zimbabwe civilization.¹

According to Daneel the shrine of the Mwari cult was first located at the Great Zimbabwe and it was shifted to the Matopo Hills in the seventeenth century where the cult was more fully developed.² However, Bucher, on the basis of new archeological evidence, suggests that the Mwari cult is native to the Matopo Hills and that it was spread from there to other regions by the Changamire Mambos, of Rozvi stock, from the middle of the seventeenth century until the Ndebele invasion in the early nineteenth century.³

There is, however, a paradox in the Mwari cult. Mwari is supreme and remote, yet he is located at a particular place,--Njelele near Matojeni,--and can only be approached during a national crisis.⁴ This monotheistic religion has a variety of names for deity--Mwari,⁵ Sororezhou (Head of an elephant), Nyadenga (Owner of the sky), Wokumusoro (One above), Musiki (Creator), Muvumbapasi

¹Ibid., 7.

²Daneel, 4, 20.

³Hubert Bucher, Spirit and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 36.

⁴Nelson, 121.

⁵M. L. Daneel, The God of the Matopo Hills (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1970), 16. The name "Mwali" is still used in Kilimanjaro area of Tanzania and designates God as the "sower."

(Founder of land), Matangakugara (You who settled first)-- all of which have to do with functions rather than with other deities.

Mwari is the name commonly used for deity. The Shona tradition suggests that the name dates back to the time of the Mbire tribe when they migrated from the Tanzania lake region. According to traditional belief Mwari was concerned with the fertility of crops and of women. But then his role expanded to cover tribal and national politics when the Rozwi needed to consolidate their political control over the widely scattered vassals.¹

It is still believed that Mwari is the final but distant authority behind the spectrum of ancestors. He is vaguely defined and less directly involved in people's individual lives than the ancestors. He can be consulted on matters of national importance, primarily the fertility of the Shona country. His other name, "Dzivaguru" (the great pool), suggests his function as rain-giver.

In Shona cosmology Mwari was understood to be beyond and above the human ancestral hierarchies. During a national crisis such as drought or war, he could be approached through the senior lineage ancestors (mhondoro). There is no direct individual approach to Mwari. In the past individuals had to contribute annual fees which were

¹Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 81-82.

forwarded to the shrines for rain-making ceremonies.

For day-to-day living, the ancestors are closer to the people and more effective in meeting individual needs than the remote Mwari. People therefore rely on the family ancestors (midzimu yepamusha) for protection against sickness, death, infertility, and the forces of evil.¹

However, one finds that traditional religious beliefs in Zimbabwe operate on national, tribal, and family levels. At the national level are the rituals and ceremonies associated with the Mwari cult at Matojeni. These rituals have to do with matters of public and national concern such as rain-making, thanksgiving after the harvest, and the unity of the people in the whole territory.

At the tribal level are the senior lineage ancestors. These tribal spirits work in close collaboration with the Mwari cult and could almost fuse into one system. At the family level are the family ancestors who look after the individual interests of the people on a daily basis. This is where Christianity and traditional beliefs frequently interact.

Ndebele traditional religious beliefs. While the Shona had a fairly developed cult centered around Mwari, the Ndebele had their system of worship centered around the ancestral spirits, the king being the chief priest in that system of beliefs. They did not have a clearly defined

¹Ibid., 83-84.

concept of a high god. They referred to him as Nkosi yezulu (King of the sky).

Changes in people's beliefs often result from the coming together of different ethnic groups. This was true of the Shona and the Ndebele religious beliefs.¹ Their worship systems came together in the nineteenth century and amalgamated. As mentioned above, the Ndebele trekked from the South and finally settled in western Zimbabwe.

According to Bhebe the result was

. . . that the Nguni and other ethnic groups included in the Ndebele state began to acquire the notion of an active high god. The fusion took the form of superimposition of Shona beliefs, practices and rituals associated with Mwari, the supreme deity, on the Nguni ones so that the Ndebele religious leaders worshipped their own ancestor spirits as much as they worshipped the Shona god.²

This incorporation of the Mwari cult by the Ndebele predated Christianity and continued after the arrival of the first missionaries in Zimbabwe in 1859. Bhebe suggests that the Ndebele/Shona religious leaders went further and borrowed "ideas from the new faith [Christianity] to elaborate their own systems."³

¹Ngwabi Bhebe, Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe 1859 - 1923 (London: Longman Group, 1979), xi. He suggests that even before Christianity came to Ndebeleland there was already a process of religious change due to the "amalgamating, reshaping, reconstructing and elaborating their beliefs, practices and institutions to meet the demands of their altering political, social and economic environment. . ." (p. 1).

²Ibid., xi-xii.

³Ibid.

The fusion of Nguni religion with the Mwari cult did not displace ancestor worship among the Ndebele. The Mwari cult became a "superstructural layer" with no rigidity between the cults ". . . so that Mwari was consulted as an additional means of divination and as a bringer of rain."¹

Belief in Mwari as rainmaker continues among the Ndebele to this day. In recent years Matebeleland, the area occupied by the Ndebele, has suffered a series of droughts. Spirit mediums (izangoma), diviners (izanunsi), and rain initiators (iwosana) have gone to the shrine at Njelele to beseech Mwari for rain. The drought has been blamed on the neglect and abuse of traditional customs and on shrine visitors wearing inappropriate clothes.²

Shona and Ndebele religious beliefs are now so fused that one cannot readily see a remarkable difference between the two. Social mobility has contributed to the interdependence of one tribe on the other, and Zimbabwe has thus become a single society. For this reason, this study does not pursue the finer details of difference but concerns itself with the general indigenous religious beliefs in so far as they interact with Christianity.

The discussion of these beliefs and practices are reserved for later; now I turn my attention to the

¹Ibid., 22.

²Chronicle reporter, "Mediums predict end of drought," The Chronicle, Bulawayo, November 19, 1987, 1.

transition to Christianity in Zimbabwe.

The coming of Christianity. In 1825 Robert Moffat, of the London Missionary Society, laid out a new station at Kuruman on the Cape frontier. In 1829 he came in contact with Mzilikazi, the Ndebele king, and the two became great friends. Moffat advised Mzilikazi to travel north, away from the Boers.

In spite of this friendship, Mzilikazi neither permitted Moffat to preach in his territory nor allowed his people to convert to Christianity. Mzilikazi feared that Christianity would destroy the social order of the Ndebele tribe.¹

Mzilikazi finally crossed the Limpopo River into western Zimbabwe. At that time, David Livingstone, Moffat's son-in-law, was exploring the interior of Africa and had contacts with the Ndebele king. Gann suggests that Livingstone

. . . aimed at spreading the Gospel in Africa by indirect means. He believed that the geographical, scientific and medical exploration of Africa would in turn open the Continent to 'Commerce and Christianity', to Western economic enterprise and thought; these would eliminate the slave trade and erode paganism, thereby laying the foundations of a Christian continent. . . .²

It becomes obvious then that Christian missions were, in the main, wrapped up in the same package with other European exploits in the African continent.

¹Gann, 40-42.

²Ibid., 42.

Moffat maintained contact with Mzilikazi, and in 1857 he obtained his consent to set up a station in his territory. As a result, conflicts developed between Moffat and the Boers who suspected connivance between Moffat's London Missionary Society and the tribes. The British Government--in order to curtail the trade monopoly of the Boers in the interior--intervened in favor of the missionaries.¹

When Moffat made his third visit to Mzilikazi he met with political commotion. Mzilikazi's people had become wary of the role of the missionary. They had five reasons for this attitude: (1) they feared that missionary penetration would do away with polygamy; (2) they believed Christian teaching was incompatible with their "warlike" way of life; (3) they were afraid the "Boer commandos [the Dutch] would follow in the wake of the Cross"; (4) they heeded Mzilikazi's complaints that the missionaries would not supply him with arms; and (5) they, along with Mzilikazi, asked for impossibly high prices for grain and cattle for meat. Bitter disputes developed, but the missionaries had their way in the end. Consequently, they were allocated land at "Inyati" [Nyati] where 2,000 of Mzilikazi's people lived. This was the first permanent white settlement in what is Zimbabwe today. Even though the local people acquiesced, they decided to let the "teachers,"

¹Ibid., 43.

as the missionaries were called, live in the land but they did not accept the missionaries' way of life.¹

. . . Children could not attend school, adults who became too interested in the new doctrine were surreptitiously banished, with the result that the mission made no headway until white frontiersmen conquered the country. In the meantime the missionaries vainly struggled on for a whole generation.²

This resistance against Christianity resulted because the people felt that their ancestral beliefs were able to meet their needs.³ At the same time they found themselves fighting a battle on two fronts. On one, their socio-political structure was crumbling in the face of colonial rule. On the other, traditional religion was being threatened by Christianity.

Only after the suppression of the Ndebele and Shona uprisings of 1896-7, which resulted in the establishment of colonial rule in Zimbabwe, did Christian missions expanded. Bhebe writes that

. . . the destruction of the Ndebele state led to the removal of the king, who had acted as the chief priest, while the unsuccessful attempts to throw off European domination produced a marked desire among the people to come to terms with Christianity and western technology. But the tenacious hold of beliefs, rituals and practices prevented the African societies from flocking to missions. Consequently, the old people, feeling secure in the old world, encouraged their young ones to accept the missionaries' teachings. . .⁴

¹Ibid., 44.

²Ibid., 45.

³Bhebe, xii.

⁴Ibid.

There was indeed a sense of desperation among the people. In the eyes of many, Christianity had political overtones. Murphree suggests that the Shona accepted Christianity because it was more adaptable to the demands of the new political order than their own traditional religion.¹

Christianity, therefore, seems to have gained ground, historically, at the same time colonial rule took control of the Shona and Ndebele states in Zimbabwe. In less than a century since the white settlement, Christian missions have expanded their work. The following statistical data show the present facts about religion and demography in Zimbabwe:

Population of Zimbabwe	7,546,071 ²
Percentage population in rural areas	74.27% ³
Percentage population in urban areas	25.73%
Major ethnolinguistic groups:	
Shona	66% ⁴
Ndebele	16%

¹Murphree, 9.

²Main Demographic Features of the Population of Zimbabwe: An Advance Report Based on a Ten Percent Sample (Harare: Central Statistics Office, June 1985), 42. Growth rate was 3 percent per annum (p. 39).

³Ibid., 52-55.

⁴David B. Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 768.

Percentage population practicing traditional religions	40% ¹
Percentage of the population who are Christians:	
Shona	65%
Ndebele	13%
Percentage of Adventists who are Shona-speaking	30%
Percentage of Adventists who are Ndebele-speaking	66% ²

According to David Barrett, Zimbabwe is 100 percent evangelized. While Zimbabwe may be known as a Christian country, many Christians still revert to traditional religious beliefs when faced with a crisis in their lives. Nelson points out that

. . . affiliation with a mission church has not precluded participation in indigenous ritual either because a Christian still accepts the significance of such ritual or because participation is considered essential by kin or neighbors.³

Oosthuizen brings out a similar observation regarding Christianity in Africa in general:

. . . The old gods are not yet dead. The old forms, including ancestor worship, have received greater significance since the rise of nationalism, so that festivals associated with the original pre-Christian religion draw thousands. The ancestor cult receives a new emphasis even from Christian leaders. . . .⁴

¹Ibid., 769.

²Ibid., 771. Barrett observed that 90 percent of Adventist members attended church regularly. This is the highest of all denominations in Zimbabwe.

³Nelson, 114..

⁴G. C. Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity in Africa (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1968), 6.

Ndabaningi Sithole explains why Christians in Zimbabwe saw no conflict between Jesus Christ and the ancestors. He tells about Obed Mutezo who was a Christian and belonged to the Methodist Church. According to Mutezo, Jesus was a universal ancestor in charge of universal affairs. The family ancestors were not in competition with Jesus because they were in charge of immediate and personal affairs. The family ancestors reported to Jesus, the universal ancestor. Jesus in turn reported to Mwari, the high God.¹

To the contrary, Sithole's wife, Sarah, had been a Christian in the Methodist Church and later converted to Vapostori² (Apostles). Sarah renounced the ancestors with enthusiasm, as was expected of a convert to the Vapostori. She refused to take medicine prescribed by a n'anga, did not participate in ancestral rituals which the majority of her family performed, and had nothing to do with diviners.³ While the Vapostori offered Sarah the power of the Holy Spirit, the Methodist Church failed to provide Mutezo with a substitute for the belief in ancestors.⁴

A serious consideration of these observations means

¹Ndabaningi Sithole, Obed Mutezo: The Mudzimu Christian Nationalist (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), 104.

²An independent church founded by Johane Maranke.

³Ibid., 94.

⁴Ibid., 9. (Terence Ranger's introductory comments).

that the preaching of the Gospel must take cognizance of the reality of traditional beliefs. The task of Christian missions becomes enormous when Staples states that

. . . a meeting . . . of two religions which have fundamentally different presuppositions and aims must inevitably lead to the distortion of both. . . .¹

It is therefore my concern, having served sixteen years in Adventist ministry in Zimbabwe, that even today there are many Adventists who are still torn between loyalty to the Christian Gospel and the attraction of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Nature of Ancestral Beliefs and Practices

So far, this study shows that at the heart of traditional religious beliefs in Zimbabwe are the Mwari and ancestor cults. Because Mwari is so great and far-removed from direct individual approach, the ancestors provide a very powerful function in this society. Without the mediation of the ancestors, people are vulnerable to evil forces and acts of misfortune. Therefore, traditional religious beliefs and practices revolve on a daily basis around the ancestors.

The ancestors (vadzimu, amadlozi) are an integral

¹Russell L. Staples, "Christianity and the Cult of the Ancestors: Belief and Ritual among the Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa: An Inter-Disciplinary Study Utilizing Anthropological and Theological Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981), 28. He rightly argues that one cannot accommodate selected points of one religion without creating a sense of tension.

part of the spirit world in traditional Zimbabwean society. But traditional religious beliefs in Zimbabwe take into consideration other entities of the spirit world such as alien (shavi) and avenging (ngozi) spirits, the role of the diviner-healers (n'anga), and the fear of witchcraft and sorcery¹. They are all interdependent for the fulfillment of their tasks.² All are an attempt to answer various problems of this life and the life after death.³

A combination of all these elements is what determines how an individual behaves in an encounter with the adversities of life. Christianity must therefore take into account the power of these beliefs since experience shows that few Zimbabweans change their world-view when they become Christians. The need is to understand the nature and meaning of ancestors and their related beliefs and practices in order to promote the Christian faith among Adventists who revert to such practices when faced with a crisis.

One of the characteristic longings of many modern Zimbabweans is to get back to their roots. Occasionally appeals are made for people to get back to the traditions of

¹Monica Wilson, Religion and the Transformation of Society (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1971), 26. See also Staples, 195.

²Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 91-92.

³Ignatius M. Zvarevashe, "Shona Religion," in Shona Customs, ed. Clive and Peggy Killef (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1980), 47.

the past. One such appeal appeared in The Chronicle, the country's second largest newspaper.

If ever there is anything which can bind together a people in peace and harmony, in prosperity or even in a decline, that thing is religion.

It is the roots of a nation and should be kept up to date and original. Without its own religion, a nation is bound to decline, even more so when it follows another's religion.

This is exactly what happened to most of Africa. Our religion was undermined and I believe that is why we are still underdeveloped.

We were christianised [sic.] and made to believe that our religion was inferior, superstitious and demonic, the spirits of our forefathers demons and insignificant and ourselves sinners.

We were so much indoctrinated with this ideology that to pause now and check out the real situation is felt a sin.

I believe Christianity, like anything else, should be judged according to its history, and in the history of Christianity we find all sorts of vile practices.

These include its vital contribution to make the slave trade a success and its motives against other religions--particularly the way it defaces our worship of ancestral spirits.

. . . Jesus went to his own, "but his own received him not".

Of what goodness are we to accept such a one?

It's a pity our people could not write about themselves, otherwise they would have written about even better prophets and performers of miracles.

Chaminuka, for instance, could turn into a pool of water, could nail a wooden peg on a rock, etc., and his prophecies have come true.

. . . Let's get back to our original roots. I have not seen a mopani tree with the roots of an orange tree.¹

An analysis of this article presents a few observations. First, the author correctly sees religion, any religion, as serving the purpose of binding people

¹A Lone Daniel (Pseudonym), "Let us get back to our roots," The Chronicle, Bulawayo, May 10, 1983, 4. Emphasis supplied.

together. This is certainly true of the role played by the ancestors.

Second, the author is not necessarily a pagan. He is possibly a nominal Christian or a former Christian, perhaps one who was educated in mission schools like the majority of the people in Zimbabwe. He shows familiarity with Christianity even though his conclusions are misplaced.

Third, he speaks in defense of the "worship of ancestral spirits." The author is an urbanized individual who still sees relevance in ancestral beliefs and practices. In other words, religion is not just for the rural and country people alone. This certainly is the observation of many. Daneel, for example, states that the influence of the living and the dead is so deeply rooted in Africa that it lives on even in educated African Christians.¹ Staples concurs:

Far from waning away . . . the ancestors have moved to town. In the process they have acquired many new attributes and characteristics and shed many traditional properties and functions. . . .²

Some people suggest that Christianity uprooted people and left them without any cultural continuity or appreciation of their traditional heritage. They see in the cult of the ancestors a means by which their traditional heritage can thrive.

¹Martinus L. Daneel, "The Christian Gospel and the Ancestor Cult," Missionalia 1 (1973): 46.

²Staples, 243.

Who then are the Ancestors?

As a general rule, the ancestors are a spiritual hierarchy residing in the spirit world, having access to spiritual beings and forces, and thought to be separated from but not beyond the reach of the living. They are "a projection of earthly patterns of authority and relationships"¹ which they enjoyed when they were still living. Their integration into the spirit world is believed to equip them with supernatural powers. In Shona worldview, they are all deceased relatives in a family: cousins, brothers, sisters, parents, aunts, uncles, etc. They can belong either to the male or female line of descent.²

Zvarevashe indicates that those who die childless and those who are children cannot be integrated into the spirit world. Therefore, they cannot express their continued existence through their descendants since they have none.³ This explains why being childless brings a sense of shame and encourages divorce or polygamy. Among the list of those who do not qualify as ancestors are barren women, cripples, social drop-outs, those who die away from home, outcasts, and those who incur social disapproval.⁴

¹Staples, 16, 181-182.

²Zvarevashe, in Kileff, 46.

³Ibid., 45.

⁴Aylward Shorter, African Christian Theology (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1975), 126. See also E. Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religions (London: SCM

The ancestors are a part of the spirit world, but they form a distinct class of their own in relation to the rest of the spirits of the deceased. It is generally believed that when a person dies, he becomes a spirit, retains his name, and visits the living.

The paradox is that while the "living-dead" on one hand are considered friends of the living, yet on the other they are not to appear too frequently or else they are resented. They are "wanted and yet not wanted," says Mbiti.¹ David Bosch has pointed out that the spirit-world should not be too far from the people; they will feel exposed, lonely, and discarded. At the same time it should not be too near; they will feel threatened. This is the case with the ancestors also.² They must be distant enough to balance the tension.

Michael Gelfand who did field work among the Manyika in eastern Zimbabwe was told by one of his informants that the vadzimu (ancestors) lived in the air (mhepo). They did not eat or drink.³ When a person died his spirit was said

Press, 1973), 187.

¹John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 83-85. See also page 162.

²David J. Bosch, "The Gospel in African Robes: Toward the Africanization of the Gospel," Unpublished Lecture Notes, Overseas Ministries Study Center, Ventnor, NJ (March 1987), 20.

³Michael Gelfand, The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1977), 26.

to wander about until it was given permission to come back and protect its children.¹

Among the Ndebele it was believed that a person from birth to death lived with a spirit almost equivalent to his shadow (isithunzi). This shadow looked after him and could bring both good and bad things. There was a fine distinction between spirit as power and spirit that passes on to the realm of ancestral spirits.²

The Relationship Between the Living and Their Ancestors

The question whether or not the ancestors are worshipped may never be fully answered. Many African scholars deny the use of "worship" or "veneration" in relation to the ancestors. They rather suggest the term "respect." However, as Daneel observed, this respect is not limited to the mental but also manifests itself by way of sacrifices. In this case it borders on adoration, and thus the use of the term "worship" becomes inescapable.³

It should be noted that the ancestors are not simply remembered or respected in terms of their good deeds when they were alive. There exists a spiritual fellowship

¹Zvarevashe in Kileff, 44.

²Bhebe, 14.

³Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 179-180; Idowu concedes too that the difference between "worship" and "veneration" is a "hair's breath." The human mind does not make the difference (p. 180).

between them and the living. Even if one were to argue that the ancestors are not worshipped, the aspect of communicating with and tapping the resources of the dead cannot be overlooked.

John Kisaka in his dissertation project argues that the ancestors play an important socio-cultural role in African extended families. He suggests that "Africans do not normally worship" the ancestors. His view is that the people "remember, venerate, and respect the names, deeds, memories, places, and events of their dead ones. . . ." ¹ This approach has merit but only in relation to the names, deeds, memories, places, and events. However, Africans go beyond this to believe that the ancestors, because of their social and spiritual status, have powers that need to be tapped in every crisis. The ancestors are thought to directly influence the welfare of the living.

The bringing home of the ancestor spirit is a classic example of an active communication between the deceased and the living. The appeasement ritual (kugadzira, ukubuyisa) brings to rest the spirit of the deceased. The wandering spirit must be appeased and brought home. Participation is essential if the ancestors are to be pleased. Several steps are taken in the performance of this ritual.

¹John Aza Kisaka, "The Adventist Church's Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa" (D. Min. project report, Andrews University, 1979), 37-38.

First, a delegation is sent to a diviner (n'anga) to inquire about the cause of death in order to take corrective and protective measures. In the presence of guests, the spirit of the dead is given beer by pouring it over the grave. The relatives address the spirit and then escort it to its original home. After this ceremony, the wandering spirit becomes an ancestor.

Second, the name of the deceased is transferred to an elder son, grandson, or grand-daughter and becomes an official representative of the departed. This person mediates between the spirit and family members and arranges future rituals.

Third, a communal fellowship among all the relatives, the guests, and the spirit takes place. Meat and beer are shared and consumed. The ancestor is addressed, not to afflict the family with sickness and other misfortunes. This concludes with the distribution of inheritance.¹

Attached to the ancestral spirit is the idea that the medium of this spirit cannot refuse being host because the ancestors want it to be so. It is believed that if an individual chooses to resist this possession, he will die. It is not surprising, therefore, that Christians easily yield to ancestral spirit possession.

It is also believed that a diviner-healer (n'anga)

¹Daneel, Missionalia, 48-51.

is powerless to eradicate this possession. The only alternative is for the chosen one to ask the spirit to select another host among its descendents. For the Christian, this means going through a ritual process which often contradicts Christian standards. In the Catholic tradition, a priest may exorcise the mudzimu spirit.¹

Alien Spirits

Alien spirits do not belong to the same clan, tribe, and ethnic group as their hosts (masvikiro). These are the spirits of the deceased who are unknown to the community in which they have chosen to host. They are often believed to be the spirits of young unmarried individuals who have died.² In this regard, Zvarevashe makes a point that without "mashavi" the Shona religion would be incomplete and frustrating particularly to those who die childless and those who have long sunken into oblivion. Alien spirits should therefore "be seen as a struggle against oblivion and frustration caused by death."³ They can also be the spirits of animals which are thought to impart certain skills to their hosts. A person with a baboon shavi behaves like a baboon--climbs trees, eats nuts or food like a baboon.⁴

¹Zvarevashe in Kileff, 46.

²Bucher, 91.

³In Kileff, 45.

⁴Bucher, 90.

Unlike the ancestral (midzimu) spirits, the alien spirits cannot be brought home by means of a ritual or ceremony, so their only recourse is to roam the bushes, mountains, rivers, and forests. However, in order to express their ego or identity, they seek an outsider (mutorwa) as their host. Such a host becomes ill and appears to be dying. He or she may wander from one hospital to another only to be discharged because the doctors detect no disease. It is at this point that such a person resorts to a diviner-healer (n'anga) and is told that a shavi wants to possess him or her.

If this person wants to be honored as a host, a ceremony is arranged. There is singing, dancing, and the shavi "comes," identifies itself, and seeks permission to express itself. The medium (svikiro) is then said to be provided with talents and abilities such as dancing, hunting, divining, and healing. This shavi also confers on its host the defects of its human life, such as witchcraft, theft, immorality, short temperedness, and other human weaknesses.¹

The consequence of this is that society in general and the medium in particular may tend to justify occurrences of such weaknesses. An habitual thief may tell the judge of the court that this weakness is beyond his control; he is acting under possession by a shavi. It is like a murderer

¹Zvarevashe in Kileff, 46.

who tells the judge that he was under the influence of alcohol and therefore did not know what took place or why it happened.

Adventist churches have had to deal with this problem. On many occasions such members are thought to be the chosen mediums of a particular spirit and encouraged to solicit the help of a diviner-healer. This is usually done privately without the knowledge of the rest of the church members. But in many cases the non-Christians see this double standard and recoil from conversion to Christianity.

Bucher observes that women are usually the victims of this shavi possession. He believes that in societies where this phenomenon exists, women are deprived of power in a male-dominated society. He suggests that men who are subject to strong discrimination in rigidly stratified societies are also affected. Shavi possession, therefore, offers such individuals an opportunity to express inclinations which they would not publicly manifest under normal circumstances. Sometimes, it is observed, possessed women claim male spirits and mimic male roles.¹

In 1986 a predominantly Adventist community had to deal with a phenomenon of hysteria among fifteen girls at a local school. The girls were sent to the hospital, but doctors were unable to control their behavior. One report said that the Provincial Hospital superintendent and a

¹Bucher, 93-94.

psychiatrist with the Ministry of Health both believed

. . . that ZINATHA n'angas could help curb the attacks by administering psychotherapeutic treatment.

Parents of the affected pupils said they would welcome medical and traditional means of treating their children, as long as they were effective.¹

An Adventist farmer and former headmaster at the school was suing some of the villagers for ". . . giving him a bad name by associating him with a disease described by some doctors as mass hysteria. . . ."2

The hysterical behavior persisted until faith healers were called to the school to cast out "demons" from the pupils "through the power of God."³ One week later it was reported:

Armed only with the power of God, a team of evangelists from Bulawayo and Gweru arrived at the school on Wednesday to exorcise the demons. . . .

There were mixed feelings from the parents about the power of God at the end of the sermon. A majority of the parents were confident that the problem was over.

Other parents, however, said they would wait and see.

The acting headmaster . . . said she was confident that the Lord had brought peace to the school.⁴

In my experience with Adventists, it seems that they assume that any protracted sickness which defies conventional medical treatment can easily be attributed to

¹Midlands reporter, "Hysteria Returns after Exam," The Chronicle, Bulawayo, October 16, 1986, 1.

²Ibid., 11.

³Midlands reporter, "Preachers Arrive to Heal Pupils," The Chronicle, Bulawayo, November 1, 1986, 7.

⁴Midlands reporter, "Evangelists Pray at 'Haunted' School," The Chronicle, Bulawayo, November 7, 1986, 13.

either witchcraft or shavi possession, particularly if it shows symptoms of headaches, vomiting, unspecified pain or hysteria.

Avenging spirits

It is generally believed that when a person is murdered, his angry spirit comes back in order to avenge itself on the guilty family. This avenging spirit (ngozi) may also return to its own family if a cruel child may have hated father or mother. People become very anxious when they see several of their members die or if they experience a series of misfortunes. The cause of death or calamities must therefore be determined and protective measures taken. The concerned family solicits the help of the n'anga who tells them that the ngozi is involved. Certain steps are then taken to correct the situation.

If the avenging spirit is determined to be that of a person who died of natural causes, it can be chased away by the n'anga. The n'anga goes to the village, sprinkles medicine on hot ashes, and smoke rises. A goat or a chicken is put inside a hut and left there overnight. In the morning the n'anga brings medicine mixed in soft, thin porridge (bota). Each member of the family dips a fist into the porridge and tells the ngozi to go away because it is unknown. The n'anga and family take the goat or chicken to the bush. The n'anga tells the creature that the bush is now its place; it must not come to the village again.

Medicine is put inside its mouth and the ngozi is told to go into it. The group then returns to the village without looking back.¹

It is very common for people to meet a lonely goat or chicken when they walk through a bush. If they suspect that it had been used for the expulsion of the avenging spirit, they do not take it. Even thieves dread any contact with it for fear of calling upon themselves any possible misfortune.

If the ngozi from a murdered person is determined, the n'anga advises the concerned family to pay compensation to the relatives of the deceased. They must also provide a goat for meat for both families to eat and restore friendship.² The guilty family is treated with medicine that has been thrown on hot ashes and tells the ngozi not to bother them anymore.

Sometimes it happens that a parent dies and his spirit is believed to come back to trouble the family. It may be discovered that one of the children scolded the deceased parent when he or she was alive. The guilty one brings the n'anga. He/she is dressed in rags and given a piece of meat which is again taken away from him/her again and eaten by relatives. The guilty one is driven away by the family who throw sticks at him/her. When the guilty

¹Gelfand, 30.

²Ibid., 30-31.

party leaves the village and wanders off to faraway places, a bag is hung on the neck. Villagers fill the bag with millet which is later used for to brew beer for a special ceremony. When the wanderer finally comes back home among relatives, he/she admits guilt and promises never to commit the offense again.¹

When a series of deaths occur, one after another the living relatives are concerned. It is not uncommon at a burial ceremony to hear utterances of concern:

Last year, within a space of one month, we lost our father and our two uncles. This year we have lost our mother and a brother! What does all this mean?

When people verbalize such concerns, it is easy to guess that the relatives plan to do something about it. Even members of Christian churches easily succumb to family pressure to seek a diviner-healer who will protect the extended family from further incidents of death.

The spirit world is believed to be a source of both good and bad. The midzimu can protect their descendents and at the same time, if ignored or treated disrespectfully, bring illness. The mashavi bring desirable skills to their hosts; but they also impart undesirable defects and weaknesses. The ngozi spirits are dreaded for their indiscriminating vengeance. At the same time they are useful as a means of restoring friendship and true neighborliness. The spirit world is to the people a system

¹Ibid., 31-32.

of checks and balances. It provides a way of coping with forces of evil.

The Practice of Healing

Another aspect of belief and practice associated with the ancestors involves the practice of healing. This is one area that causes considerable confusion among Christians. The question is always whether or not Christians should apply traditional methods of healing.

The problem arises when a sick person goes to a traditional healer who may be dependent upon the spiritual powers of his or her ancestors for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. The problem is compounded by the loose and indiscriminating definition of the term "n'anga" (Shona) or "inyanga" (Ndebele). The West has tended to classify all herbalists, diviners, magicians, and sorcerers under the term "witchdoctor." Even the local people, in general, have not made a clear distinction in the application of the term. Thus confusion has developed in the churches regarding what is appropriate when it comes to sickness and traditional healing.

The term "n'anga" generally encompasses two types of traditional practitioners: the diviner and the herbalist. Both groups are found in rural and urban areas. Westernization has never been able to displace these people, and their role still thrives in all African communities. Diviners determine the cause of illness, misfortune, or any

calamity that befalls individuals and communities. The herbalists, on the other hand, prescribe the treatment or provide the means for eradicating a problem. However, it is very common to find a diviner who is also a healer. This person diagnoses the problem, prescribes the treatment, and provides protective measures to ward off any future uncertainties or social afflictions. Diviner-healers should not be confused with witches who practice destructive medicine or with socerers who cast evil spells on their enemies.

Daneel observes that rarely does a diviner-herbalist or an herbalist claim to practice without some kind of spiritual inspiration. Many diviners give medicines, but many herbalists do not use divination. However, both claim to have some sort of "spiritual inspiration."¹ Many n'angas claim that either the ancestors or the alien spirits (mashavi) or both enable them to interpret the divining device (hakata), to read the divining mirror, or to find the right medicine.² It is here that Christians suggest that it is necessary to sever all contacts with traditional healers.

The role of the n'anga is diversified. Daneel, quoting Gelfand, observes:

European society has no one quite like the nganga, an individual to whom people can turn in every kind of

¹Daneel, Old and New in Shona Independent Churches, 143.

²Ibid., 144.

difficulty. He is a doctor in sickness, a priest in religious matters, a lawyer in legal issues, a policeman in the detection and prevention of crime, a possessor of magical preparations which can increase crops and instil special skills and talents into his clients. He fills a great need in African society, His presence gives assurance in the whole community.¹

Some of these roles have been curtailed by the new political and social order; but the n'anga continues to fill a social need that Western medicine has never been able to provide. He promises to treat infertility and impotence which are a public shame in African society. An n'anga promises the cure of epilepsy, to drive out avenging spirits, and to doctor homesteads against lightning and witches. For this reason, few people find it easy to resist going to an n'anga when things go badly.²

Daneel observes:

It is obvious that both rural and urban communities have ample access to traditionalist diviners and herbalists. An accurate assessment of the extent and the frequency with which Church members visit nganga can only be achieved through the regular attendance of healing ceremonies over a wide area. The impression one gets from occasional observations of nganga treatment is that the majority of vaShona, both Christian and non-Christian, visit the traditional doctors, especially during family crisis. Nganga are so used to treating people from various denominations that they seldom take note of the religious affiliation of the patients. . . .

. . . Mission Church members who consult nganga often state that they only obtain medicine (mushonga) and that they ignore such parts of the prescription as necessitate 'ancestor worship'. Such statements, convincing though they may sound, do not necessarily imply the exclusion of all forms of traditional

¹Ibid.

²Bucher, 113, 115.

religious practices because, having been prescribed by the spiritual adviser par excellence and religious expert, few of the nganga's solutions are totally free from traditional religious implications. A Christian will perhaps refrain from full participation in a traditional ritual prescribed by the nganga, but he may very well make provision for the magical medicaments as will render him immune to the attack of angry midzimu or evil alien spirits. A symptom of inherent acceptance of nganga practices, even in Christian circles, is the apparent lack of scepticism concerning the basic principles of interference and control in human lives, caused by ancestors, alien spirits, sorcerers and witches. Criticism will be directed at the individual nganga, but even then a patient will be reluctant to question the nganga's methods since there is no way of disproving his professed powers.¹

One of the pastors in the mission over which I presided came to seek counsel over a matter that had created a state of confusion in his district (parish). A man who for several years had been a local church leader had become a traditional healer. The members claimed that he got these powers from the ancestral spirits. The man was also registered with the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA)² and wore a pin that identified him with that association. The members of this association usually attribute their healing powers to the spirits.

In an interview, the man attributed the gift of healing to God who, through dreams (not spirits), gave insights to the treatment of various diseases. He even

¹Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 146-147.

²This is a single national organization of traditional healers which was organized on July 12, 1980 by the Minister of Health. Prior to independence in 1980 Zimbabwe had various small traditional healers' associations.

justified himself by implicating one of the pastors who, after having gone from one hospital to another, finally came to him and received healing. However, the pastor indicated that the healer was not associated with ZINATHA at the time of his consultation with him. The healer claimed his membership in ZINATHA was necessary as it was a governmental requirement, just like the medical association of physicians in conventional medicine. Thus the question arises--Where does one draw the line between what is Christian and what is not?

Hexham and Poewe report that S. G. Lee, in his studies of hundreds of Zulus in South Africa, found that before individuals became diviners, they had a variety of primal experiences which included numerous visual and auditory hallucinations. About 15 percent had a history of minor possession, hallucinations, dreams, etc. About 17 percent had diseases attributed to sorcery. The difference between those who merely consulted diviners and those who actually became diviners was determined by the severity of the condition. Chronic sufferers went through a rigorous, six-month-long initiation and converted from client to diviner in order to have their problems solved.¹

Studies also show that at the heart of many

¹Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, Understanding Cults and New Religions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 62; J. Beatie and J. Middleton, eds., Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa (New York: Africana, 1969), 128-155.

independent religious movements lie primal experiences of dreams, visions, voices, spiritual healings, a sense of presence, notions of destiny, sightings of ghosts, and other spiritual phenomena.¹ There is, therefore, a degree of commonality between independent religious movements and traditional religious beliefs and practices involving divination and healing. But the methods used for healing are totally different.

In my ministry I have observed that Christians who became sick and were suspected of having possession symptoms either went to the traditional diviner-healers or joined Independent Churches of the Spirit for healing. The diviner-healers would either attempt to drive out or induce the illness. Inducement meant domesticating the possession illness and initiating the individual into the ranks of diviner-healers to facilitate coping with suffering. Christians have opted many times for this route because they fear they might die if they do not seek a diviner. The Churches of the Spirit were able to control the abnormal behavior by either co-opting such individuals into the ranks of prophet and healer or simply by faith healing. The whole experience seemed to be therapeutic to the sufferers.

Erika Bourguignon observed that African separatist churches in South Africa have integrated some of the elements of the traditional-trance cults. The Zulu believe

¹Ibid., 60.

that possession is from the Holy Ghost but the curing of this phenomenon is by diviners.¹ In traditional belief and practice, possession illness and its cure constitutes a religious initiation by diviners. In this case a manifestation that would have been very disruptive to the sufferer and the society is turned into a social asset rather than a liability.² It is harnessed and made into an experience of personality growth and reorganization.

Fear of Witchcraft and Sorcery

There is no clear-cut distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. Both witchcraft and sorcery are considered anti-social and destructive, and are designed to harm one's enemies by means of medicines or by casting spells.³ Generally, any person who exhibits anti-social behavior (anger, hate, envy, greed) is said to have witchcraft (uroyi, ukuthakatha).

There are different kinds of witches: (1) hereditary witches who operate at night under a shavi, (2) sorcerers of the afternoon who act of their own volition and cast spells on their enemies, (3) witches who revive the medicine practices of their dead forebears, and (4) witches who

¹Erika Bourguignon, Possession (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp Publisher, 1976), 58-59.

²Ibid., 9

³Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 156-157.

willingly accept witchcraft medicine and rub it in their bodies by incision.¹

Women are generally accused of witchcraft and men of sorcery. It is believed that in order for a witch to enter a victim's house at night, she must have a knowledge of the victim's totems and the names of the deceased ancestors so as to approach them with a request.² The belief is that the witch must first of all secure the approval of the victim's protecting ancestral spirits so they will open the door to allow entrance into the house at night.

There are three ways by which witchcraft is believed to take place: (1) by the application of real poison or medicine to the food; (2) by causing the victim's legs to be trapped or disordered by means of a sharp object which is placed in his path; and (3) by casting spells, throwing medicines, or using lightning to harm somebody distant.³

The witch is said to put medicine in her fingernails and this she throws into the food of an unsuspecting victim. In the case of traps, spells, and lightning, a witch may perform a ritual in which the victim's clan names are mentioned so that the medicine does not affect the wrong person. It is also believed that witches ride on the backs of hyenas at night. The witch may also elect to send ghosts

¹Ibid., 160.

²Ibid., 163.

³Ibid., 165-166.

(zvidhoma, imikhobo) into the victim's house.¹

Sorcery is an aspect of witchcraft that is believed and feared. Sorcery is generally an expression of a grievance.² It is believed that a sorcerer can harm his enemy by using magic. The victim may be disfigured or may get sick. This belief is very common among workers who compete for promotion or who want to maintain their jobs. They believe that if they lose their job, it is because the enemy has bewitched them. If ones get sick too frequently, someone else wants the job.

In order to prevent these misfortunes, one may consult a diviner-healer to strengthen and protect him/herself. Some may even attempt to retaliate against their suspected enemies. It is not uncommon to find Christians who wear fetishes (intebe) around their waists to ward off evil forces. Even infants, as soon as they are born, wear these devices to ward off evil.

The belief in witchcraft as anti-social behavior also encourages people to use magic as its control.³ Hexham and Poewe observe that

. . . witchcraft beliefs, although scientifically false, follow a recognizable logic. Once the logic of

¹Zvarevashe in Killef, 48.

²E. Thomas Lawson, Religions of Africa (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 23. Lawson discusses the Zulu religious tradition which shares commonality with that of the Ndebele in Zimbabwe.

³Murphree, 59.

witchcraft is understood, a person can predict the reactions of the people who believe in it. . .¹

It is therefore important to accept its reality in terms of symptoms and belief in order to understand why people act the way they do.

Death and Mortuary Ceremonies

In traditional society an individual defines himself as a member of a lineage, exists as a member of society, and owes everything to his ancestors. He/she is never separated from these entities while he is alive; therefore, it is believed, one is not separated from them in death. In death the being disappears but continues to live in a reality relative to the lineage, society, and the spirit world.² When death occurs, it is followed by a sequence of ceremonies which differ from clan to clan but which have elements that are common to all.

When a person dies, relatives gather and mourning begins. The members of the community converge at the home of the deceased. Every adult in the nearby villages is expected to attend. All do not have to come at the same time, but total absence invokes suspicion and disfavor in the community. In Africa, one does not have to know the

¹Hexham and Poewe, 14.

²Jacques Maquet, Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, trans. Joan R. Rayfield (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 61, 65.

deceased to attend his funeral. As long as one lives in the nearby community he/she is expected to attend because life and death are community experiences.

There is reciprocal wailing by the blood relatives¹ as well as by the guests, especially the women. Many dash themselves against walls, roll on the ground, and cry as they utter their frustrations and complaints over the loss. The body usually lies in the house until most of the blood relatives have arrived. In two to three days the burial may begin. The body is prepared for burial by wrapping it with pieces of cloth. The head of the family chooses the burial site and the men start digging.

Mandaza points out that among the Shona, if the father dies and a "shadow" appears when the corpse is being wrapped, it means that he has refused the cloth from the son because of some wrong committed against him. The nature of this "shadow" is not clear, although the people believe it is real. The son is expected to make things right or he may face some misfortune in the future. If the "shadow" appears when the body is being carried for burial, it means that something was left undone or done wrong. In this case, a n'anga is consulted immediately and the "shadow" disappears. The body is placed on the bier and taken for burial.²

¹Dominic M. Mandaza, "Traditional ceremonies which persist," in Killef, 54.

²Ibid., 54-56.

After the burial, all the people except the old men of the clan leave; the old men remain by the grave. In certain situations, they spend two to three days watching the grave in case witches come to do mischief. By "prayer" they hand over the spirit of the dead to the ancestors: "Here is your person whom you have taken from us. We now hand him to you, welcome him in the spirit world and also look after us who are left behind."¹ The old ones return to the homestead and sprinkle medicine in the house of the dead to make it habitable for the living.

Among the Ndebele, ritual washings take place after the burial and before the people enter the homestead. It is believed that the person's death pervades his nearest living relatives. As a result, death can spread to the neighbors and even to livestock. It is necessary after the burial to call a diviner-healer to cleanse and purify them.²

Tribes may differ in the number of ceremonies they perform following a person's death, but the bringing-home ceremony is common to all and is of major importance. This ceremony brings back home of the wandering spirit of the deceased; it usually takes place one year after the burial. This ceremony, as described earlier in this study,³ involves the presentation and consecration of the animal (ox, sheep,

¹Ibid., 56.

²Bhebe, 15.

³See above pages 34-35.

goat) to the ancestors, the address to the ancestors by reciting their praise names and worthy deeds and giving reasons for the sacrifice, the killing of the animal and communal eating of the meat which is shared with the ancestors, and the distribution of property among the blood relatives.¹

When addressing the spirit of the deceased, the relative in charge pours beer over the grave and calls out:

We call upon you to come home and protect us, especially your children. From today onwards you are no longer in the forest but we called you to come into your home. If you need anything tell us gently but do not visit us in anger.²

After this, the mudzimu is accepted and incorporated into the line of the ancestors. This mudzimu can now express its ego and existence through its descendents.

Summary

An attempt is made in this chapter to describe the traditional religion of the people of Zimbabwe. The practice of the Christian faith in Zimbabwe takes place within the traditional milieu of religious beliefs and practices which Christianity, particularly Adventism, must face and deal with. These religious beliefs and practices involve the Mwari and ancestor cults, the alien and avenging spirits, divination and healing practices, the fear of

¹Staples, 187-188.

²Zvarevashe in Killef, 44-45.

witchcraft and sorcery, and the rituals and ceremonies.

These beliefs and practices often show up in the lives of those who have converted to Christianity. They are part of a world-view that usually expresses itself even after one's conversion to Christianity. These beliefs and practices also suggest the course of action an individual might take when faced with a crisis in his life. Thus these traditional beliefs and rituals play an important function in providing meaning to life in the community.

Chapter 2 picks up the discussion on the meaning of these beliefs and practices to the adherents of the traditional religion.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF ANCESTRAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The ancestor cult and its related beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe are meant to answer the questions of human existence. Human existence is problematic and unpredictable since it is always threatened by the forces of evil. Illness, death, misfortune, the ill will of one's neighbors, and other forces of evil need to be held in check and not get out of control.

Society is also aware of its own limitations to cope with different forces that affect human existence. The individual in society realizes that in order to cope with such forces one needs power.¹ This is where the religion of the ancestor cult supplies the answers to the concerns of human existence. It is a religion that revolves around the quest for power--how to acquire and retain power for protection and prevention against the forces of evil.²

As a result of the liberation war in Zimbabwe, many schools, shops, and clinics were destroyed. Life became

¹"Power" is understood to be the ability to keep negative forces of the spirit world and their human agents in check.

²Bucher, 15.

very difficult for people, especially those living in rural areas. Following independence in 1980, the government engaged in a program of reconstruction to resuscitate life and living conditions in rural areas. One old woman was asked: "What would you like your government to do for you in your area?" Her reply was:

Let the government send diviners to our place so that they can hunt down all the witches in this area. We have suffered for a long time.¹

When asked again: "What else would you like your government to do for you?" She reiterated the need for the government to get rid of all the witches in her area. She could not see beyond the problem of witches. As far as she was concerned, witchcraft was a major issue in her life. The reconstruction of schools, water projects, shops, and clinics were not a priority to her at that point. All she needed was power to keep the forces of evil in check.

This woman probably did not reflect the thinking of all the people in her community at that time. But her remarks do illustrate the fact that people look at life differently and have different concerns.

The Function of Ancestral Beliefs and Practices

Ancestral beliefs and practices, first of all, provide an explanation of evil and become a means of coping

¹Reported in the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation television interview in 1980.

with it. The people believe that minor misfortunes are a sign from friendly powers seeking appeasement. Serious misfortunes are interpreted as being due to moral wrong done by the individual or by the community.¹

These people believe things do not just happen without a cause. Misfortunes come because people have done wrong, people ignored important cultural traditions, or enemy forces are at work. To simply suggest that a person is sick because germs have attacked him is to beg the question: "Who sent those germs and why did they attack me and not somebody else?" For the traditional religionist, germs may be a tool in the hands of some power which must be determined and dealt with.

Second, ancestral beliefs and practices provide an understanding of events in the lives of the adherents. People believe that social events are affected by personal decisions. That is, events are caused by the designs of the personal spirits because of their position in the hierarchy of ancestors.² What takes place in life is designed by the powers that control the welfare of the people. When things go wrong, society believes that the powers in control have determined it to be so. They in turn must find out why it

¹Gordon L. Chavunduka, The Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (Harare: C. T. M. Litho Pvt., 1984), 20.

²M. F. C. Bourdillon, "Traditional Religion in Shona Society" in A. J. Dachs, ed., Christianity South of the Zambezi (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1973), 22.

happened and how to reverse the situation.

Third, this religion has to do with the acquisition and retention of power. In these beliefs and practices power is wielded by tangible persons and invisible entities. Power is seen as having personal traits. It is the property of certain people and yet it also manifests itself in the form of spirits. Power is operative beyond and behind the visible and invisible nature of things.¹

Ancestral beliefs and practices serve the function of providing communication with such powers as control the welfare and well-being of the people. Such communication becomes possible through rituals and ceremonies.² This is why participation in family and community rituals and ceremonies is essential. These rituals provide contact with the sources of power that the people so much need.

Therefore, it is important for an outsider to understand how this power is conceptualized by those who believe in ancestral practices. The individual in the community understands that in order to achieve total well-being one must maintain a friendly relationship with positive entities of power in the spirit world or in human society. At the same time, the negative forces need to be kept in check. The evil that comes from Mwari or from the family spirit is often understood in terms of disciplinary

¹Bucher, 189.

²Chavunduka, 19.

action and not in terms of a destructive purpose. The diagram in fig. 1 helps to summarize and illustrate the relationship between the community and the different entities of power in the spirit world and in society.

THE COMMUNITY AND THE
ENTITIES OF POWER

Mwari (high god)
(good and evil)¹

<u>Territorial and family spirits</u>	<u>Alien spirits</u>	<u>Avenging spirits</u>
(good and evil)	(good and evil)	(evil)

Individual/Community		
Diviners Healers Mediums	illness death misfortune	Witches and Sorcerers

Fig. 1 Chart showing the entities of power and their relationships.

¹The evil that is meted out by Mwari and family ancestors against the living descendents is to be understood in terms of disciplinary judgment designed to maintain traditional relationships.

Conceptualization of Power

Power is understood and categorized according to the various entities and elements of the traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Power in the Mwari cult. Since Mwari, the high god, is remote, he is not normally required to explain events that affect the lives of individuals in the community.¹ What this means is that an individual is left to find another source of power for his daily needs. The Mwari cult is important only in terms of offering a broader spiritual reference which accommodates all the unrelated peoples. It offers a neutral base which unites the people through the performance of rain rituals at the shrines.

When there is a common disaster which affects people on a broader scale than just people of the same tribe or lineage, rituals at the Mwari shrine are performed. It is understood that when Mwari acts he exhibits his powers in universal terms. He blesses and punishes people as a collective unit. For this reason, the people, scattered and unrelated, have a common denominator. They share the same prosperity when things go well and the same punishment when things go wrong. This means that when there is a good harvest at the end of the season, a thanksgiving ceremony to the high god is made. When there is drought, a rain ritual

¹Bourdillon in Dachs, 22.

has to be performed by the people. But the management of life's enemies on a day-to-day basis revolves around other powers.

Power in territorial (tribal) spirits. The territorial spirits (mhondoro) and the subsequent chiefs are the owners of the land. They are guardians over the people and over the land.¹ Misfortunes and disasters are seen as punishment from them. For that reason they have to be treated respectfully if people are to prosper.

When misfortune takes place, the people believe that the territorial spirits have been annoyed because of their departure from African customs, disbelief in the spirits, doubting the n'anga's word, disrespect to sacred places, and of the committing of incest within the tribe.² Therefore, this level of power is a constant reminder that people must not forget their past heritage.

There are certain days (chisi) dedicated to the territorial spirit guardians. These were traditionally determined by the phases of the moon. Today they fall on a designated day of the week. On such days there is no plowing in the spirit's domain.³ Confrontation sometimes develops between Christians and adherents of ancestral beliefs. Christians who ignore these special days are

¹Bucher, 190.

²Gelfand, 60-61.

³Ibid., 296.

accused of ignoring the owners of the land and of being responsible for droughts and other social problems.

Power in spirit mediums. The spirit mediums function as representatives of the territorial spirits. Their role is to control and maintain the balance of power between the visible and the invisible nature of things. They are active in the installation of chiefs, in possession manifestations, and in rituals. They also play the major function of resisting Western influences, including Christianity. These mediums were active in instigating nationalism.

Power in ancestral spirits. The ancestors are frightening and benevolent at the same time. They are offended if ignored, especially when people do not perform regular ceremonies and rituals. They are vindictive to those who do wrong and kind to those who recognize their authority. Since they operate through a lineage structure, they help to vitalize and perpetuate that structure. Hence, they are a very powerful means of projecting and extending the social system beyond the realm of the living.

The ancestors operate through the structural levels of society--levels which go beyond the realm of the living. They offer a permanent and important linkage with all entities which control human existence. Monica Wilson suggests that the cult of the ancestors "reflects a lively sense that kinsmen are members one of another in time and

space. . . . Responsibility is recognized both to the dead and the unborn."¹ The chart in fig. 2 illustrates how the social structure relates to the ancestors.

THE ANCESTORS AND THE
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Mwari

Territorial Spirits
(Lion spirits)

Spirit Mediums and Chiefs - ancestors

Headmen and Kraalheads - ancestors

Family - ancestors

Fig. 2. Relationships of ancestors to social structure.

The ancestors are not only a factor of social cohesion,² but more than that they directly influence social behavior. Dead loved ones are "brought home." Rites and ceremonies are carried out when one member of the family is believed to be possessed. Ancestors are contacted when one wants to get a job, and when he gets it, he says, "Abadala bangihambele phambili" (The ancestors have paved a way for me). Bosch states: "The migrant laborer who goes to

¹Wilson, Religion and the Transformation of Society, 137.

²Ibid., 43.

Johannesburg from Mozambique, Lesotho or Transkei finds that he needs his ancestors even more in an alien world fraught with danger on all sides."¹

When a woman wants a child the resources of the ancestors are solicited. The spirit of a woman's mother or maternal grandmother is said to affect the woman's procreative powers. Hence it is important to maintain lineage and ancestral links, not just on a social level but also on a spiritual level. The people believe that angered spirits (vadzimu/amadlozi) can kill, hurt, or unleash destructive powers against anyone of the members of the family.²

David Bosch has characterized the place of the ancestors in Southern Africa by using a ship metaphor. The ocean is God (or spirit world). The ship itself is the social structure. The crew are the community. The crow's nest, as part of the ship and not of the ocean, represents the ancestors. They are considered a part of the community but, at the same time, they exist in another realm. Because of their commanding position they can tell the crew to

¹Bosch, 8. He observes that Christians operate on two levels--publicly Christian and privately ancestral.

²Daneel, Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, 92, 95. A survey carried out by Daneel in Chingombe and Fort Victoria (Masvingo) showed a remarkable belief in ancestor protection and vindictiveness. Many of these people belonged to missions and independent churches (p. 96).

change course slightly in order to move out of a storm.¹ They skillfully guide the people through all calamities that threaten their survival, but only if all remain in their assigned places and preserve the existing order (traditions and social structures).

Accordingly, in Shona religion the ancestors protect their descendents. Even when they are scattered all over the world, the vadzimu are supposed to care for and protect their own children. They are active at the time of marriage, at divorce proceedings, and at the birth of a child.² They are involved in all rites of passage, practically in every fabric of human existence.

An adherent prays to his ancestors before taking an unfamiliar journey. A girl preparing for marriage solicits the blessing of the ancestors. A family with problems and a son who leaves home to look for a job in the city consult the ancestors.³

The ancestors are a court of appeal. When tragedy strikes and misfortunes occur, the adherent appeals to the ancestors for protection. Ancestors provide a means of understanding and of coping with the uncertainties of life.

Power in avenging spirits. Because avenging spirits are vindictive powers, they play the role of influencing

¹Bosch, 12-13.

²Zvarevashe in Kileff, 46-47.

³Gelfand, 92.

morality and encouraging unity among the people. A person avoids murdering another because he is afraid that that person's spirit may come back as an avenging spirit and the whole family may suffer as a result. People are compelled, therefore, to treat strangers kindly.

Power in alien spirits. Belief in alien spirits serves a number of purposes: 1. It is an attempt to enter the realm of the unknown powers which are believed to wander in the bush. The spirit powers of deceased strangers and of animals are known to confer upon their hosts luck, success, and skills. This provides society with a possibility of accounting for why some people are more prosperous, skillful, and better than others.

2. These spirits are a means of coping with negative influences or anti-social behavior such as witchcraft. Any anti-social behavior which cannot be resolved can be attributed to alien spirits.

3. Belief in shavi spirits helps people cope with foreign influences and newly arriving facts of life. For example, it is believed that if a stranger dies in the area, the spirit of that stranger always wants to express its ego through mediums of the region. It is therefore believed that the possession-trance and ritual are a means of accommodating and coping with the invading influence.¹

4. Those who die childless, who do not qualify as

¹Bucher, 194.

ancestors, and who cannot be brought home ritually are also accommodated in this belief about shavi possession. Since those who die childless cannot qualify as ancestors, an alternative is sought to keep them from sinking into oblivion. The shavi belief is an attempt to keep their memories alive.

Why Adventists Resort to Ancestral Beliefs and Practices

Adventists, like the rest of society in Zimbabwe, are concerned about survival in a world that is fraught with death, illness, misfortune, and the forces of evil.

One sees among Adventists in Zimbabwe continued interaction between cognitive belief and the way that belief should be practiced, particularly in the setting of the attraction of ancestral beliefs and practices. Very often a contradiction exists between belief and lifestyle. These Adventist members strongly believe in the all-powerful God. However, when members encounter problems which are perceived as coming from the spirits, and the church offers no Christian ritual to care for the situation, they seek an alternative. The concern for survival amidst negative forces which threaten life seems to override the practice of the Christian faith. They are tempted to tap the alternative powers which they believe are able to take care of an immediate problem. The resulting theological contradiction is often ignored.

Illness and Death

Many Adventists do not believe in ancestral practices as a way of life; however, when faced with complex problems or when under social pressure, they may resort to these practices simply as a short-term measure--just to get the immediate problem out of the way.

In such cases, the Christian faith is maintained as a way of life until one gets to the point where one's life is seriously threatened by forces of evil or by the anti-social behavior of one's neighbor. At that point, one may take the special precaution of consulting a diviner-healer. While some Adventists believe strongly that Jesus Christ is all-powerful, yet subconsciously they are not willing to take a chance. In spite of their belief in God's care and protection, they still feel vulnerable to the powers of evil. They reason, after all, that "God helps the individual who helps himself."

Many Adventists generally believe that the powers of the spirit world and the anti-social behavior of the neighbors may directly influence human lives. Sickness and death are not always caused by infectious germs. In their view, germs have a role to play, but the spirits and their human agents have a role to play also. This means that when sickness or death occurs, it must be categorized into possible causes and solutions.

The idea that infectious germs cause illnesses is

strong among Christians, but germs are not the only cause. Causes of illness appear to fall into three categories: germs, spirits, and one's neighbors. The cause of illness or death also determines the nature of the remedy. If it is believed that germs are the cause, the patient may go to the hospital. However, if spirits or one's neighbors are thought to be the cause, a Christian may privately seek a diviner-healer. In all these options, an Adventist Christian may still offer prayer to God, but because of a strong desire to ward off enemy forces or to thwart any recurrence of misfortune, some Adventists call a spirit medium or diviner-healer to doctor their homesteads.

Childlessness

The stress on fertility expresses an important aspect of the life of a small group. Through procreation lineage is enhanced.¹ The birth of a child is celebrated because the margin between life and death is narrow due to tragedies and epidemics which threaten survival.

Being childless in a marriage often causes concern for the couple, the extended family, and the community. The childless woman, on one hand, feels insecure and inadequate in her marriage because she is not able to provide children to her husband's family; on the other hand, she is not fully accepted by the husband's family. Due to this social

¹Maquet, 62-63.

distance she may go through some psychosomatic spells of illness and thus be forced to seek a diviner-healer.

The husband may also try to prove his potency either by having a child with another woman or becoming a polygamist. In many cases Adventist families have literally encouraged such childless men to get other wives for the sake of having children and prolonging their lineage. The childless couple may be encouraged to perform a ritual to the ancestors for the sake of having a child.

The desire for children is often so strong that some parents advise their daughters to have children out of wedlock. This happens when the parents believe the daughter's failure to get married is due to misfortune (umnyama). A sense of shame and social rejection propels childless individuals to consult the ancestral spirits and diviner-healers whom they believe are able to make them fertile. This requires the performance of a ritual.

Social Pressure

Witch-hunting, although proscribed by the government of Zimbabwe, has persisted. When the community experiences an out-break of illness or a series of deaths associated with a common cause, witch-hunting seems to them to be a necessary step. This is done to identify the one who caused the illness, since such a person could be the closest member of the family or community. The witch is identified and then told to leave the area. This means bringing into the

community a diviner-healer from a distant place to come and "smell out" the culprit.

The kraalhead or headman calls all the people within his jurisdiction to come to the diviner to be examined. Those who resist are stigmatized as witches and have to leave the area. Due to this kind of social pressure, some Adventists have capitulated and participated in divination rituals.

Visited by the Deceased

Many Adventists have testified that their deceased relatives visit them when they sleep at night. The deceased are said to communicate messages to their living descendants. This communication is often not appreciated because the people believe it to be a prelude to misfortune or tragedy.

Some people become ill and attribute the cause of the illness to the visiting spirits. It is believed that this kind of illness cannot be treated by the doctors at the hospital. Many times the doctors tell these people to go home and perform a therapeutic ritual to their ancestors if they want to get well. They look for a diviner and perform a prescribed ritual; usually this is done privately without the knowledge of rest of the church members.

One must conclude, therefore, that concern for personal survival in this life and the fear of being isolated from one's community are the central causes which

lead Adventists to resort to ancestral beliefs and practices.

Summary

In these two chapters an attempt has been made to describe the nature and to explain the meaning of ancestral beliefs and practices in order to show why some Adventists are tempted to resort to such practices. The discussion so far leads to three conclusions:

1. The traditional belief that Mwari is so remote that he cannot be directly approached by an individual member of the community seems to permeate the Christian's view of God. Christians believe in a transcendent God but subconsciously doubt his immanence. Thus there often exists a creative tension between God's transcendence and immanence which needs to be understood and utilized to the believer's advantage. Associated with this problem is the question as to why the Christian's God of love permits suffering among his children.

2. Ancestral beliefs and practices are elements of a religion that thrives in the daily life of the people. To the people, these beliefs and practices serve as a means of coping with problems of life because people are in danger of, and threatened by, physical misfortune or spiritual obstacles which must be removed. For this reason, people look for power in their religion in order to cope with their predicament in this life. It is expected, therefore, that

religion must answer the questions of this life.

Accordingly, people who convert to Christianity expect that their new religion will pass this acid test as well.

3. The Adventist church in Zimbabwe is faced with the theological challenge of dealing with a situation where two world-views interact and impinge on the lifestyle of the members. Since the church has tended to emphasize the future more than the present, it has left a vacuum in people's lives. These people are faced with practical problems of daily life and are tempted to resort to their traditions for answers. The church needs to demonstrate that the Christian gospel can meet their needs.

In the light of these observations, the discussion that follows seeks to provide some answers as to how a Christian can find security and meaning in a world fraught with all kinds of problems.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST AND THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT IN HEBREWS

The Purpose of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Spiritual Profile of Its Recipients

From the biblical point of view, the human predicament stems from the fact that man is born in sin and continues to be under its bondage. In his existential unease, man attempts to approach deity as a solution to his predicament.¹ To the Jew who is concerned about bridging the gap between God and man, and to the Greek whose question is how to reach reality, the Epistle to the Hebrews provides the answer: "In Christ the search is over."²

This epistle not only tells about the life and work of Christ on earth but also tells about his work in heaven. For this reason, it is a book for our time. What Andreasen declared years ago may rightly apply to the Adventists in Zimbabwe with reference to the book of Hebrews:

This book has been long neglected by the people of God. We rightly place stress on Christ as our high priest, yet there is a tendency to neglect the only book in

¹William G. Johnsson, In Absolute Confidence (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 100.

²William Barclay, Epistle to the Hebrews (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 63.

which this work is emphasized. . . .¹

This study so far has shown that while many Adventists in Zimbabwe believe in Christ intellectually, yet in practice they evidence an element of doubt concerning God's power to deal with the forces of evil. The distance between God and man seems to be unbridged and, as a result, many believers cringe under a sense of fear and vulnerability in view of evil and suffering.

While the Epistle to the Hebrews does not directly address the issue of ancestral beliefs and practices, yet its central message does answer the questions of life. In a lecture discussion about the ancestors, Professor David Bosch referred to the anthropologist Eugene Nida who once said:

Don't try to solve the problem of the ancestors. Preach Christ and the ancestors will move to their proper places.²

It is logical that the Epistle to the Hebrews is used to address the issue under consideration because its message is for people who look back to their past traditions.

Purpose of the Epistle

The main purpose of the epistle is to show that the

¹M. L. Andreasen, The Book of Hebrews (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 19.

²In his lecture series on "The Gospel in African Robes: Toward the Africanization of the Gospel," at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, Ventnor, N. J., March 1987.

understanding of the true significance of Jesus Christ makes Christianity absolute in terms of meeting the needs of humanity and in universal scope. For this reason, turning away from the Christian faith to any other way is ruled out.¹ The recipients of the epistle were Jewish Christians who, after accepting Christianity, were going back to their former Judaism. The author of Hebrews warns against the danger of looking back and ignoring salvation in Jesus Christ. He reminds them that what they now possess in Christ is comparatively better. If they turn away from Christ and go back to an inadequate substitute and a proven failure, not only will they lose everything,² but will also be punished.

There is a parallel between the Jewish Christians for whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was written and the Adventist Christians in Zimbabwe who turn to their former religious traditions. It is this parallel that makes the message of Hebrews applicable to the problem of ancestral beliefs and practices among Adventists in Zimbabwe.

The epistle serves a practical need--to warn the readers of the danger of unbelief and to exhort them to faithfulness. The author utilizes theological arguments in

¹Donald A. Hagner, Hebrews (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), xxii-iii.

²Donald Guthrie, in Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible, ed. David and Pat Alexander (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 626.

order to help them to stand firm in faith and to lead them to a fuller understanding of the truth for which they are being called to suffer.¹

In Hebrews, as in the Pauline writings, one sees an interplay between theology and exhortation which forms the structure of the book. The author uses doctrine as a basis for his pastoral admonitions. He presents Christ's superiority and finality, His exaltation, the fulfillment of the old covenant and the establishment of the new covenant, and the universal significance of faith. On this basis he calls upon the believers to pay more careful attention (2:1-4), to fix their thoughts on Jesus (3:1), to hold firmly to the faith (4:14-16), to draw near to God (10:19-39), to throw away everything that hinders (12:1-25), and to continue to love each other as members of the community of faith (13:1-25).

Spiritual Profile of the Recipients

The author of Hebrews does not warn people against what is not happening. He warns them against what he sees happening. The nature of these warnings and admonitions gives one insight as to the spiritual profile of the recipients. They had been Christians for some time (2:4; 5:12); they suffered and endured affliction in the early

¹Howard Clark Kee and Franklin W. Young, Understanding the New Testament (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 417.

days of their faith (10:32-34); but now they have become weary in the Christian way--drifting and neglecting the faith (2:1-2; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:15-17); they were in a situation of unbelief and unfaithfulness (3:2-4), and they have not grown into maturity as Christians (5:11-14).

These were Christians who had deep appreciation for their Hebrew roots and were wavering between Christianity and Judaism.¹ The author explains Christ's relationship to all that had gone before in the religious history of Israel. He does not depreciate their rich heritage but wants them to know the fact that in Christ they now have a new, superior, and more excellent way.²

It was not easy for first-century Jews to change the customs of centuries. God had instructed Moses to build a temple and also honored its dedication. Their forebears had offered sacrifices in the temple and God had accepted their worship. Thus it was easy to rationalize the continuity of Judaism. The transition to Christianity was difficult in that

. . . the change had to be accomplished through the leadership of men [Paul, Peter, etc] who, in the estimation of most of the people, did not rank with

¹W. S. Campbell points to the fact that the interpretation of Hebrews differs depending on whether the author is seen as contrasting Christianity with Judaism or with some Jewish-Gnostic heresy. See "Christianity and Judaism: Continuity and Discontinuity," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 8 (April 1984): 54.

²Herbert W. Chilstrom, Hebrews: A New & Better Way (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 8.

those who had instituted the customs. . . .¹

In Heb 1:1-2 the author of Hebrews makes an effort to show that the great leaders of the past were not mistaken. God led them and spoke through them. The author wants the believers to know that Jesus is the climactic means of the revelation of God.

The author's argument develops within the framework of the Old Testament which is the religious frame of reference for his readers. He interprets the Old Testament in the light of the new revelation in Christ and exhort the readers to a specific action. He does this by making good use of the idea that in the Christian way, because of who Jesus is and what he has done, things are "better" than in the way to which the readers may have been tempted to revert.² While arguing for better things in Jesus Christ, the author addresses people who in their human frailty are easily frightened when they see themselves as targets of a hostile world.³

The Epistle to the Hebrews is for people who swing back and forth between two compelling traditions: Judaism

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-57), 7:395.

²Leon Morris, New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 307.

³William L. Lane, Call to Commitment: Responding to the Message of Hebrews (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 23.

and Christianity. The author presents Christ as the pre-existent, incarnate, and exalted one who bridges the gap between the transcendent world and the tangible world of man. In this sense, the epistle has relevance for Christians who doubt the close presence of God in their daily life.

Theological Understanding of the Person and Work of Christ

According to Heb 1:1-3 God has spoken by one "through whom he made the universe," who "provided purification for sins," and who "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."¹ Here are found three themes which help define and summarize who Jesus is and what He has done. These themes have to do with the pre-existence of Christ, His incarnation, and His exaltation.

Directly related to these themes is another set of themes which portray Christ as prophet, priest, and king. For the purposes of this study, these two sets of themes have been grouped in pairs, because they appear to run concurrently here and elsewhere in the epistle. The message of Hebrews is anchored on these themes which are introduced at the beginning of the book. They serve as the basis for the author's pastoral exhortations.

¹Texts quoted in this study are taken from the New International Version, 1978 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

Christ: Pre-existent
and Prophet

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens by suggesting that God has never detached Himself from His creation. He has used various ways to communicate with man in the past. In the last days He has spoken by one who is a Son. Then the author goes on to explain who the Son is and what He has done. This is what adds weight to the author's appeal for commitment to Jesus Christ.

Heir of all things. The author of Hebrews states that God has spoken by one "whom he appointed heir of all things" (1:2). The status of Jesus in relation to creation is that of an heir. The term "heir" entails sonship and inheritance. It points to the dignity, authority, and greatness of Christ. He has the dignity of an heir in the whole universe. It portrays Jesus as the Son of one who owns creation.¹ In God's eternal plan, Jesus Christ was appointed heir of this world and the world to come. He therefore rightfully inherits everything the Father possesses.

In traditional life in Zimbabwe, an heir to chieftainship is given all respect and honor from birth as if he were already a chief. He gets the honor because he is the son of a chief and an heir to chieftainship. The author

¹Morris, New Testament Theology, 302. See also Leon Morris, Hebrews: Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 19.

of Hebrews wants his readers to realize that the one in whom they are called upon to put their trust is none other than the owner of everything. He owns the universe and is the head of the human race.¹ To turn away from such a one is to lose everything.

Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Jesus Christ is presented as God's agent in the creation of the universe (1:2). He is also Sustainer of "all things by his powerful word" (1:3). Christ is portrayed here as one who existed before the ages and therefore above all creation. He created the universe. Kistemaker suggests that the term "universe" is comprehensive and includes the entire created order--the created world in all its fullness (cosmos)-- all the stars and planets, the earth and its history throughout the ages.²

Christ did not create and then leave creation to run its own course. There is a sense of destiny in creation. Christ continues to maintain, manage, and control His creation. The Greek word *φέρω* in vs. 3 means "to bear" or "to carry." It suggests movement with a sense of purpose and guidance. It embraces the idea of purposeful working and planning. It is therefore a dynamic term indicating that the universe is moving toward a definite

¹Andreasen, 47.

²Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 29.

goal. The epistle shows that Christ is in control. He sustains the universe and has a plan and carries it out.¹

In Hebrews, believers are made to understand that God has never intended to withdraw from His creation, nor from His people, in particular. In Jesus, God carries the universe along and takes it to its goal. The Christ who created also sustains His creation. He created and continues to care for his creation. For this reason, Christians can have a sense of destiny. Christ is in charge of their lives.

One who is Son. The author of Hebrews tells his readers that it has been God's desire and initiative to make Himself known to His people. In the past He used the prophets to make His word known to the people. Their forefathers in the Old Testament were instruments of God's revelation. However, the coming of Christ inaugurated a superior revelation because Christ is the Son of God (1:1-2). Jesus Christ is the "radiance" [ἀπαύλασμα] of God's glory and the exact representation [Χαρακτῆρ] of his being" (1:3).

The term "son," humanly speaking, does not point to equality with parent. It usually signifies descent. However, as Johnsson suggests, in Hebrews the reference to Jesus as Son of God points to the surpassing dignity of Christ. What God is, Christ is. "Son" is an eternal

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 7:397.

designation which indicates the oneness of nature between the Father and the Son and does not refer to origin or descent.¹

In God's continuing revelation of Himself, He has finally spoken to man by one who is equal to Himself. The unique relationship of Christ the Father qualifies Him as a better mediator than the Levitical priests in the Old Testament times (a contrast which he shows later). Through Christ God the Father has spoken with finality.

The revelation through the prophets which was fragmentary, partial, and temporary² (not inferior) came to its completeness and finality in Jesus Christ. The superiority of Christ as prophet (one through whom God speaks) lies in His relationship with God as Son. In this sense, Jesus is portrayed as a superior prophet whose word is final in its authority. God has spoken by one who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Heir of all things. Simply put, the transcendent God has come down to His creation and made himself known. He can no longer be seen as a far-off Deity, like Mwari in the Shona religion, completely detached from His people.

In Zimbabwean society, diviners and spirit mediums

¹William G. Johnsson, Habakkuk, Hebrews: Blessed Assurance (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 63-64.

²Barclay, 63-64; See also F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 3.

have played the role of spokespersons for the ancestors and Mwari himself. They have been understood as channels of revelation in that sense. In Hebrews, their role becomes inadequate and unnecessary since God has spoken by one who created and continues to sustain all things. Christ is not one of the intermediaries; He is the only link between deity and humanity.

One greater than angels and Moses. Having stated that God has spoken by Jesus who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Heir of all things, the author takes a further step to present Jesus as one who is superior to angels (1:4-14; 2:9) and Moses (3:1-6).

In the incarnation (2:9), Christ is said to occupy a status which is lower than that of angels, a status which He did not have before. The point being made here is that even though the Creator took the role of a servant when He became man, in His pre-existence He is greater than angels. The author makes the same point again in 7:3 where Melchizedek is portrayed like the Son of God, suggesting that Christ antedated Melchizedek. Thus the angels are subordinate to the Son and are called upon to worship the Son (1:6).

The contrast between Christ and angels has significance to the readers of the epistle. Barclay makes an important observation that the author was writing at a time when people were haunted by the transcendence and

otherness of God. They sought for intermediaries between God and humanity.

. . . Every nation had its angel; every man and every child had his angel; every natural force, the winds and the rain and the fire, had its angel. So all-pervading had this doctrine of angels become that it could be said that 'every blade of grass has its angel.'¹

Not only does the author emphasize the supremacy of Christ over the angels, he also encourages his readers by telling them that the angels are "ministering spirits" to those who are to inherit salvation (1:14). This has far-reaching implications, particularly to those who are haunted by the transcendence of God and appear vulnerable in this hostile world.

The author makes the point that believers are never wholly defenseless in a hostile world. On one hand, the author highlights the role of Christ as mediator between God and the human race; on the other, he wants his readers to know that angels, although unseen, are a resource in the life of a Christian. Lane observes:

. . . The arena of their [angels] service is a world in which powers hostile to God seek to disrupt the unfolding purposes of God. Without the spiritual assistance that God has provided through angels we could not sustain our commitment to the Son.²

Believers are encouraged by the fact that God takes constant thoughtfulness over His people in their situation. Angels are assigned to them by God because He is aware of

¹Barclay, 64-65.

²Lane, 37.

their need to be protected from the unseen forces of evil. The place of ancestors as guardians of people's welfare is done away with because God has made better provisions for His people through the ministry of Christ and of angels.

The high place Moses held in Israel is used by the author to emphasize the supremacy of Christ (3:1-6).

Despite the high place Moses had among the Jews, he is presented as a servant of Christ. Morris observes that in rabbinic literature the Jews thought that Moses was greater than the angels. God had given him the law which, for the Jew, was the greatest thing that had happened in the history of the world. Thus the Jews could not conceive of anyone being greater than Moses.¹

The author points out that Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house, but Christ was Son over the house (3:5-6). In saying this, the author does not at all deny or denigrate the greatness of Moses. In order to highlight the supremacy of Christ, the author compares and contrasts Him with Moses whose role as leader in Israel was highly exalted. In that capacity Moses is a servant while Christ is seen as the Son.

In a culture where high distinction is made between master and servant, the son of the master is always greater than the servant. This is so because the son is considered heir to the father's estate. By portraying Moses as type

¹Morris, New Testament Theology, 303.

and Christ as antitype, the author wants to encourage believers to keep their minds fixed upon Jesus Christ the one Moses represented. They should look beyond the servant (Moses) to the Savior (Christ).

Christ: Incarnate
and Priest

Another theme that is brought out in Hebrews is that which portrays Christ in terms of incarnation and priesthood. Not only is Christ the pre-existent Creator, He is also God in the flesh--one who dwells and identifies with His people. The author strikes a balance here between the transcendence and immanence of God. The believers are to realize that while God is sovereign and transcendent, He has made Himself accessible to His people through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus came in the flesh.

Solidarity with the human race. According to Heb 2:10-18, the humanity of Christ was so genuine that He was not ashamed to call believers "brothers" (vs. 11). Heppenstall points out that Christ demonstrated his eternal solidarity with the human race by remaining "the living Son of man even as He sits upon the throne of God."¹ The oneness of Christ with the human race is so emphasized in this epistle that it cannot be denied. The author shows that even Christ's life and suffering help to confirm His

¹Edward Heppenstall, Our High Priest (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1972), 30.

humanity and identity with the human race.

He was made "perfect through suffering" (2:10). The experience of suffering which He underwent showed Him to be obedient (5:8-9). He was tempted in all respects like we are (4:15; 7:26). The reality of temptation is emphasized here. Jesus took human nature in order to defeat him who held the human race in bondage (2:14).

Jesus is our "brother" (2:17); He shared the same flesh and blood and the same reality of suffering with humanity. Morris observes that the name "Jesus" is used nine times in the epistle--each time to emphasize Christ's humanity. Also nine times he uses the name "Christ" to point out the fact that His place is with God and humanity.¹ The believers who were already suffering for Christ are not without adequate help.²

Christ encountered hostility and put up with opposition from sinful human beings just as we do (12:3). The events of the cross demonstrated His identity with humanity (12:2; 13:13). He shared the same human origins by coming from the tribe of Judah (7:14). He survived through prayer as we do in this hostile world (5:7-10). He was not simply "play-acting" in His prayers; they were a real cry

¹Morris, New Testament Theology, 304.

²Thomas G. Smothers, "A Superior Model: Hebrews 4:14-7:28," Review and Expositor 82 (1985): 340.

for strength to face temptation and suffering.¹ Christ exercised faith just as humankind needs to (2:13).

The Christians in Zimbabwe who feel threatened by a sense of defenselessness against the forces of evil are assured here that Jesus is the bridge between the transcendent God and human race in its predicament. In Heb 1:1-3 the author has already told the believers that God is not silent; He speaks. Now also, God is not absent; He is present with His people. When Christ took humanity, He shared in humanity's sense of defenselessness.² He understands people's situation. As champion, He shows solidarity with humanity in its struggles.³

A better high priest. In 1:3 an introduction is made that God has spoken by one who "provided purification for sins." This idea is picked up and developed in 4:14-7:28 by portraying Christ as a better high priest than the Levitical priests. Understood against the religious background of the Jews, the priesthood provided access to God through the role of the high priest, especially on the Day of Atonement. The high priest, in that sense, was a

¹Geoffrey W. Grognon, What the Bible Teaches about Jesus (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale Publishing House, 1979), 29.

²Compare with Matt. 27:46. Jesus cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

³Lane, 52.

security against national calamity and personal misfortune.¹

In 4:14-16 Christ's priesthood is portrayed as the foundation for Christian loyalty and optimism, especially when viewed against the wilderness experience of Israel and their unbelief (3:7-4:10). As Israel journeyed to the Promised Land, so are believers on their way to the greater promised land. As the journey was hard for Israel so it is for the believers in Christ. As Israel was tempted to return to Egypt, so Christians are tempted to go back to their former ways. Going back is not the answer. Having Jesus as one who is identified with God and with them, the believers now have a greater and more effective way of approaching God.² The author then goes on to invite the believers to come boldly to God through Jesus.

In 4:14-7:28 the author compares and contrasts Christ's work with that of the Levitical priesthood. The priesthood of Christ is different from that of the Levitical order. The Levitical priests were appointed by God to offer sacrifices; Christ was appointed by God to offer a sacrifice (5:1). His was a sufficient and final sacrifice. The Levitical priests were beset by their own sins, and so they first had to offer sacrifices for their own sins and then for the people (5:2-3). However, Christ was tempted in all

¹Harold S. Songer, "A Superior Priesthood: Hebrews 4:14-7:28," Review and Expositor 82 (Summer 1985): 345.

²D. S. Russell, From Early Judaism to Early Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 78.

respects like all men are but He never sinned. He can therefore sympathize with man's weakness and give help in time of need (4:14-16).

The superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham and the Levitical priesthood which descended from Abraham shows that perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood; otherwise the other order of priesthood of Melchizedek would not have been necessary (7:11). The priesthood of Melchizedek symbolically foreshadowed that of Christ.¹ The stress in Hebrews is on Christ's priesthood rather than that of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is brought into the picture simply to help one to understand Christ's priesthood a little better.

According to the author of Hebrews, Christ's priesthood has the guarantee of changelessness in it. It continues forever (7:25-26). God has sworn that it will not change. It cannot be superseded and is absolutely permanent (7:20-22). The believers are therefore encouraged by the fact that their destiny is held in the hands of a priest who is God's Son and who continues forever.

A traditional Zimbabwean relies on the family ancestors for his personal and daily needs. He believes that these ancestors are much closer to him than Mwari (the traditional deity). Private petitions are made to the family ancestors who are believed either to transmit these

¹Kee and Young, 424.

petitions to Mwari through the senior lineage ancestors (mhondoro) or to act on the petitions themselves.¹

Some scholars have noted a parallel between the role of the ancestors as intermediaries and that of Christ as mediator between God and the human race. While this parallel exists, the Epistle to the Hebrews makes reliance on the ancestors both an inadequate and unnecessary substitute. The supremacy of Christ as high priest automatically invalidates any other type of intermediary.

Christ dealt finally with the power of sin. In Heb 9:1-14 the author of Hebrews describes the earthly sanctuary with its ineffectual priesthood and sacrifices. The minor details are not the author's concern (9:5). Major features which are important for interpretation are the two inner tents. The outer of the two (Holy Place) was open to all classes of priests, though not open to the people. In the inner tent (Holy of Holies), only the high priest was allowed to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement (9:7). This great occasion, as far as the author is concerned, is representative of the whole Levitical system of sacrifices. His argument is that these animal sacrifices could only effect ritual cleansing (9:10); but none of these sacrifices could perfect the conscience (9:9).² However, Christ

¹Daneel, Old and New in Shona Independent Churches, 83.

²Kee and Young, 426.

offered Himself a sacrifice which was perfectly and permanently efficacious. It was a once-for-all sacrifice (7:27; 10:12). He put away sin through a sacrifice of Himself (9:26).

By this one offering (9:28) Christ has perfected "forever those who are being made holy" (10:14). Therefore, there is no more offering for sin (10:18). This emphasizes the finality of the sacrifice and the efficacy of the blood of Christ. In the old system the worshipper could perform the outward requirements and still have no peace of soul or assurance of acceptance with God (9:9,14).¹ Now personal faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice can provide peace of soul.² The author of Hebrews demonstrates that the coming of the Son of God inaugurated a salvation that was both effectual and final in terms of dealing with the power of sin.

Johnsson observes that the use of "defilement" and "purgation" in Heb 9-10 implies the religious idea of power. He states that the author of Hebrews expresses this idea of power in terms like "defilement" (negative power), "blood" (the medium), and "purgation" (positive power):

. . . As defilement is a state of negative power, so purgation is that of positive power, with blood coming to view as the medium extraordinary between the two. We may express this change as that from death to life, or from disorder to order, so that blood is viewed also as

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 7:451.

²Ibid., 454.

potent life-power and ordering means.¹

Johnsson adds:

The argument of Hebrews thus revolves around the idea of relative powers. It is in such light that the leitmotif 'better blood' is explicable. What the author is arguing for is the power of Christ's blood vis-a'-vis the blood of animals. . . .²

The power of the blood of Christ has now established a new community--"a community of the purged into which one has entered."³ Belonging to this community has extraordinary benefits. Believers live under a present realization and assurance of total cleansing from sin. They have a foretaste of future participation in the heavenly community. Thus being a Christian implies moving from the defiled world to the community of those who have been cleansed from sin. The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts anyone of the believers not to separate himself from this community of faith (10:24-25). This epistle emphasizes a sense of community which Christians should enjoy on the basis of their cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ.

When individuals become Christians, they surrender themselves to a new power, the lordship of Christ. They are also incorporated into the community of faith and become identified with it. All believers thus fall under the

¹William G. Johnsson, "Defilement and Purgation in the Book of Hebrews," (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1973), 431.

²Ibid. (Emphasis is that of the author).

³Ibid., 432-433.

lordship of Jesus Christ. The lordship of Christ does away with the ancestors; hence, to revert to them when one is facing problems of life is to surrender to an inadequate substitute. The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts such believers to put their trust in Jesus Christ and to remain in the community of His lordship because they have been cleansed from sin and protected against its power.

Christ mediates a better covenant. The meaning of the phrase "within the veil" in 6:19 and 10:20 seems to indicate the place where Jesus is ministering, where the hope of the covenant people is centered, and from whence the covenant blessings are dispersed. In this sense, "within the veil" seems to point to the sanctuary as a whole.¹ It refers to the place where the Forerunner has entered and where one must follow by faith.²

Along with the idea of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is the new covenant theme which the author discusses in 8:1-13. The author's point is that Christians can find strength and power for Christian living because the reality of God is not beyond their reach. Believers who are anxious about the future and who feel vulnerable to the forces of evil need not give up their faith in God because He daily cares for them. There is a

¹George E. Rice, "Within Which Veil?" Ministry (June 1987): 20-21.

²Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 489.

new covenant because there is a new priesthood (7:22; 8:6).
The two go together.¹

There is an unusual use of terminology in Heb 8 with reference to the covenant. The usual Greek word for "covenant" is *βουθήκη*. But this word does not appear in the New Testament, neither does the author of Hebrews use it. Instead he uses the word *διαθήκη* which normally refers to "will" or "testament". The word *βουθήκη* refers to two parties working out terms of agreement and then assenting to those terms. The word describes a treaty, a bargain, or an agreement between two parties who enter on equal terms. Obviously this would not be a suitable word for the author of Hebrews to use in describing what happened when God made a covenant. It was God who laid down the terms, and Israel accepted them without negotiation. Hence the word *διαθήκη* was preferred to *βουθήκη* as a better rendering of the Hebrew word for "covenant".²

The author wishes to stress the fact that the initiative lies with God. Man can only accept or refuse the offer and its terms. Jesus stands between two estranged parties and brings reconciliation. He is the Mediator of a "better covenant" (7:22; 8:6) which was enacted on "better promises." The author quotes Jer 31:31-34 which is a

¹W. H. Griffith Thomas, Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 104.

²Morris, New Testament Theology, 307.

prophecy that God's law would be in the hearts of His people and God would remember their sins no more (10:16-17) because they would be in the new covenant relationship (8:12).

Among many African societies, blood has always played an important part as a symbol of reconciliation between equal but estranged parties. When two people hated each other and did not talk to each other for a number of years, it necessitated a third party to bring the two together. This third party usually was a neutral person who acted as peacemaker. When peace was reached and the two parties accepted each other, a goat was killed. The parties had to eat the same piece of meat. This sealed the agreement and assured the public that the parties had entered mutual agreement. Until they shared the piece of meat, there was no guarantee or concrete assurance that the parties would live up to their word.

Apart from the fact that God and man are not equal parties to the covenant, the blood of Jesus Christ plays a significant role in reconciling the human race to God. With Jesus as the surety (sponsor, guarantor) of a "better covenant," the believers would keep the law as an inward experience. They would have a relationship with God that would not depend on man's promises. Because of Christ's revelation of God, His ministry on earth, His sacrifice on the cross, and His ministry in heaven, God and man are reconciled.

The power of the new covenant brings with it four blessings: (1) the law will be an inward experience, not simply written on stone (vs. 10); (2) the people will be possessed by God as his own, thus bringing union between God and man (vs. 10); (3) the people will have a full knowledge of God (vs. 11); and (4) the covenant promises entire forgiveness of sins (vs. 12). Thus the new covenant offers a deeper revelation of God, a higher privilege of fellowship with God, a fuller knowledge of God, and a greater blessing in which sins are forgiven and forgotten.¹ This is its power.

Christ: Exalted and King

At the very beginning of the epistle the exalted Son is introduced (1:3). He is seated in lieu of His completion of His work of redemption. In 8:1 the author introduces the new covenant by reminding his readers again that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Also in 12:2, prior to the passage on discipline, the author describes Jesus as the "author and perfecter of our faith" who is seated "down at the right hand of the throne of God." He is the exalted King.

King Christ occupies a supreme place of power.

Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." This sitting down of Christ follows

¹Thomas, 105.

the purification of sins. It therefore follows a redemptive sequence. "Sat down at the right hand" is symbolic language which signifies a privilege granted to a highly honored person.

The Son now has the authority to rule His worldwide kingdom on earth and is enthroned above all spiritual powers.¹ This idea is echoed in Rom 8:34 where the apostle Paul sees Jesus sitting at the right hand of God and interceding for humanity. In Phil 2:9-11 God has given the Son a name that is above every name and all creation is called upon to worship Him.

The sitting down of Jesus at the right hand of the throne has great significance for the believer. Andreasen notes:

. . . 'Sat down' does not here denote the mere act of sitting, but is a formal seating, as in an inauguration or installation into office. It is a word of delegated power; of investiture with authority; a formal acknowledgment of the right to exercise office; a coronation. It marks the beginning of activity, not the end. . . .²

Jesus therefore occupies a supreme place of power. The believer's quest for power to survive in this world finds its meaning in Jesus who sits at God's throne. He "is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (7:25).

He pioneered the way. Associated with the idea of

¹Kistemaker, p. 31.

²Andreasen, 60.

the exaltation of Christ is the affirmation that He pioneered the way. In 2:10 Jesus is described as the pioneer [*ἄρχηγός*] of salvation. This word describes one who takes the lead in anything and becomes an example. In classical Greek the word was used for the head or progenitor of a Greek clan or of heroes.¹

The author of Hebrews calls Christ the *ἄρχηγός* of salvation and faith. Through His incarnation and death, it became possible for the human race to be brought to glory. To explain the meaning of this term, Barclay uses an analogy of a shipwreck. The *ἄρχηγός* is someone who takes a rope and swims ashore with it so that others may follow along the rope that leads to safety. The one who goes ahead with the rope does it at the risk of his life in order for others to follow.² In the same way, Jesus blazed the trail so that believers may follow Him to safety. By His death and resurrection, victory for God's people is assured and the powers of death and the devil are destroyed (2:14).³

Similarly, Jesus is portrayed as the forerunner (*πρόδρομος*) who has gone into the heavenly sanctuary to effect humans' approach to God (6:20). In classical Greek, a *πρόδρομος* was one who went ahead to ensure safety for

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 7:404.

²Barclay, p. 74.

³Russell, 98.

others.¹ The word described the scouts who were sent ahead to see that the way ahead was safe for the main body of the army. The word also described a ship which went ahead to see that it was safe for the main squadron to sail on.

In Hebrews the word is applied to Jesus as One who has pioneered the way. He has gone before humanity to God's presence and they follow after Him. The purpose of the author is to show that access to God is open because He is the "brother" who has gone ahead to make it possible for others to follow. Those who follow Jesus by faith "receive the benefits of His mediation on their behalf."²

Faith: An Imperative in Hebrews

The high Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews serves as the basis for the author's pastoral appeal to the believers. After showing who Jesus is and what He has done, the author makes an appeal. He moves from the "what" to the "therefore" as an appeal to the believers to respond in faith.

The believer's faith in Jesus Christ is a dominating imperative in Hebrews. The author's call for faith rests upon his theological teaching that access to God is open for the believer because Jesus, who is one with us, now sits at the right hand of God's throne. The call for action

¹Ibid., 75.

²White, The Great Controversy, 430.

follows: "Let us hold firmly to the faith which we possess" (4:14). Thus believers are bidden to approach the throne of grace with confidence because their needs will be met in time (4:16). The believers are exhorted to practice in their lives what the author has been teaching.

The meaning of the word "faith" in Hebrews is to be understood in the light of the author's general appeal. In 10:19-39 the author calls upon the believers to worship God in the full assurance of faith. He invites them to draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, to hold fast their Christian hope, and to stir up one another in love and good works (vss. 19-25). Believers are here invited to make their confessed faith in ministry of Christ in heaven practical. They are to hold fast their confession of hope. Hope is that which is promised and is to be realized as a result of Christ's priestly ministry in heaven. Faith sustains this hope. Thus faith and hope go together. The believers are to have the capacity to endure because of their faith relationship with the unseen world.¹ In Christ, they have access to a stable reality which gives them steadfastness (vss. 32-39).

The Way of Faith

Chapter 11 provides the foundation for the appeal to

¹James W. Thompson, The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 66.

the church to endure through suffering. This chapter opens with a general statement about faith and then it describes the heroes whose lives were a witness to that faith. Here the believers are presented with a roll call of heroes who led the way of faith even when it resulted in persecution.

In 11:1-4 faith is defined as the assurance of what is hoped for and the conviction of being led by what is not seen. Through faith one knows the world is made out of things that do not appear. Reality is not found in the phenomenal world but in the transcendent and future world. Scholars observe some kind of Philonic world-view. For Philo, as for the author of Hebrews, faith means detachment from the world and reliance on God who is the final cause. The man of faith, according to Philo, finds his security in the heavenly world rather than in the perceptible world (earth).¹

Philip Hughes observes that the comparison of the earthly and heavenly things in Hebrews is similar to the idealism of Plato and his followers. They believed that all "earthly entities correspond and are fashioned according to their specific heavenly prototype."² Hughes observes that Platonism had an influence on Alexandrian philosophy-- including that of Philo who spoke of an earthly and a

¹Ibid., 53-61.

²Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 282.

heavenly sanctuary. Accordingly, Hughes observes, it cannot be denied that the author of Hebrews gives much attention to the earthly as copy of the heavenly reality.

The difference, however, is that the author of Hebrews does this in order to provide a soteriological perspective of the relationship between the earthly and the heavenly worlds. He is not simply philosophizing. His purpose is to apply the teaching to a practical situation of the believers.¹ In that sense, the dualism in the Epistle to the Hebrews is different from that of Platonic idealism.

The author of Hebrews differs with Plato and Philo in that he is not speculating about the metaphysical universe but is concerned about the soteriological significance of the heavenly things for fallen humanity. He wishes to emphasize the achievement in Christ of eternal reconciliation which the Levitical priesthood could not achieve.²

African thought is different from Platonic philosophy because it is centered around the present. It is centered around events that have taken place. The spirit world is only a means of providing answers to perplexing events in life. The spirit world may be seen either as a source of blessing or as a threat to humanity. The living are not at all aiming at a life beyond in the spirit world.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 294.

In 11:4-38 the author commends the heroes of faith for seeking the heavenly realities. Their faith is portrayed as a trusting response to God's word and his promises. Faith here takes the dimension of hope (vss. 4-22). Believers are upward-looking. They continue to trust God even when everything is against them. Thus believers are called upon to follow the example of men and women who risked their lives, who suffered and died in faith (vss. 23-38).

Being a faithful follower of Jesus does not necessarily exempt one from trials and suffering. In fact, being a Christian sets one against a host of enemies of darkness. Faith, therefore, is not only a grasp of transcendent realities but also is understood in terms of patient endurance.

James and Evelyn Whitehead have graphically portrayed the kind of faith believers must have in a relationship with God. They suggest that in order to achieve a "mature stance in faith" believers "need an assertive adult relationship with God." This kind of relationship searches and challenges "God's ambiguous presence in our lives."¹ Jacob's wrestling with God is a good example of this kind of faith relationship (Gen 32).

Ellen G. White affirms:

¹James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, Method in Ministry (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1980), 91.

. . . A religious experience is attained only through conflict, through disappointment, through severe discipline of self, through earnest prayer. Living faith must grasp the promises unflinchingly, and then many may come from close communion with God with shining faces, saying, as did Jacob: 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'¹

Accordingly, as in Hebrews, believers need the faith and the courage to struggle "to the breaking of the day." They should not give up their faith in the face of suffering.

Another passage in which faith is called for in Christian living is 12:18-24. Here, the worshipper is called upon to come near and worship God. One finds here an assurance of the possibility of direct contact with God who meets personal needs. The experience of Israel at Sinai is here brought into view by way of contrast with the Christian's relationship to God. The Sinai covenant and the worship system mediated by Moses were characterized by fear and terror (vs. 21). It was also characterized by distance of the believer from God; God was faroff.

However, under the new covenant mediated by Christ, there is access to God. Jesus Christ has brought fellowship between God and man. The author of Hebrews is here speaking to people who were troubled because they no longer had the priesthood that gave them access to God. He assures them that Christ is present in authentic worship (vss. 22-24). Even though here on earth, the believer can experience the

¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 4:444.

presence of Christ and of heaven itself.¹ Thus the believers do not need to fear the forces of the evil one.

Summary

This study so far has attempted to discuss and understand the message of the Epistle to the Hebrews, particularly its Christology, and to allow it to witness to Adventist believers in Zimbabwe who face the temptation to resort to their traditional religious heritage. Both the adherents of ancestral beliefs and practices and of the Christian faith come to their religion with certain presuppositions, particularly the way that religion answers the questions of life. While both groups understand "salvation" as survival from a danger that threatens man in this life, yet there are differences between the two.

For African traditional religionists, salvation has to do with personal survival in this life. Danger is that which threatens man in this life as an individual and also as a member of a group. It is believed this danger can be illness, death, misfortune, or tragedy which comes as punishment from Mwari or the ancestral spirits. This punishment is meted against them because they have ignored traditional teachings, failed to appeal to sacred powers by performing certain ceremonies, or disregarded certain rules of conduct. Danger is also seen as the work of hostile

¹Peter Rhea Jones, "A Superior Life: Hebrews 12:3-13:25," Review and Expositor 82 (Summer 1985): 397.

forces or anti-social activities of one's neighbors. This being the case, a man seeks relief from his present predicament by appeasing and tapping powers of the spirit world. Staples observes that even "motivation for religious action rises from the urgency of human need."¹ For the African traditional religionist survival in this life, and not the future life is a major concern.

For the Christian, the Epistle to the Hebrews presents a different and comprehensive world-view. The epistle does not down-play or negate people's concern for survival in this life. It affirms the transitory nature of humanity, recognizes the reality of sufferings, and justifies the pursuit of happiness in this life. However, the epistle goes beyond this by directing Christians to the future. Christianity is not judged so much by the degree to which it solves the problems of this life, but by the extent to which it sustains one's faith and hope despite the negative forces. God indeed wants humanity to have quality life now and immortality ultimately; however, he puts more stress on the ultimate.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ, Creator and Sustainer of all things, has made power available because access to God is now a possibility for every one. President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia is a very religious man. He is reported to have said that too many Christians have

¹Staples, 20.

little idea of the power they have in their hands, referring to the power of religion. He has likened church life in Africa to a "great engine pounding away but driving at nothing." He then made a moving testimony:

'For me, God is more a presence than a philosophical concept. I am aware even in solitude, that I am not alone; that my cries for help or comfort or strength are heard.'¹

In Hebrews one is not confronted by the silence of God but by God who has spoken and continues to speak. Hence comes the pastoral plea: "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks . . . from heaven" (12:25). People are presented with Jesus Christ who understands their perils and cares. He is the ἀρχηγός who identifies with them and has released humanity from the fear of death. Believers, therefore, do not enter the arena alone. They have a "Champion" who lives forever to make intercession for them.

Jesus who is superior to angels must certainly be superior to ancestral spirits. Jesus who is superior to Moses, a great leader in Israel, must certainly be superior to human leadership. As a "better priest" Jesus is more adequate to meet one's needs than diviners, priests, and priestesses at the Mwari cult. His "better sacrifice" reconciles man to his Creator and to his fellowman and is therefore more efficacious than rituals in the "bringing-home" ceremony in traditional society in Zimbabwe. Jesus

¹All Africa Conference of Churches Newsletter 4 (May 1978): 1.

has no parallel or counterpart even with cosmic deities and intermediaries in African religions. He deals with sin in the human heart, thus cleansing the conscience and bringing peace to the soul.

According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, the believers need not live in fear or reject God (2:14-15).

This is the condition of the unredeemed. Millions are in bondage to sin and are longing for deliverance. They fear the present; they fear the future; they fear life; they fear death. Is there any hope or comfort or deliverance? The answer is that Christ has destroyed the power of Satan, has abolished death, and has delivered, and will deliver, them from the fears that have bound them.¹

This epistle underscores the fact that Christianity is a religion of confidence² as opposed to a life of anxiety about the forces of evil in ancestral beliefs and practices. Christians are safe in the Christ who, in His transcendence and immanence, sustains the universe.

Edward Heppenstall summarizes the focus of the Christian faith:

. . . The Christian faith steadfastly affirms belief in that sacred shrine of the sanctuary where God reigns and rules. Here, the past, present, and future are tied together by the purpose of God, which spans both time and eternity.³

Thus Christians should live a disciplined life of faith.

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 7:407.

²LaVonne Neff, Ron Beers, Bruce Barton, Linda Taylor, Dave Veerman, and Jim Galvin, eds., Practical Christianity (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 202.

³Heppenstall, 18.

PART II
PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO ANCESTRAL BELIEFS
AND PRACTICES IN ZIMBABWE

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH AND THE ANCESTRAL PRACTICES

The Dilemma of the Christian Church

One of the major concerns in mission has always been the cross-cultural communication of the gospel, both at home and abroad. The concern has centered on how to communicate the Christian faith to people whose culture and religion differ from that of the communicator of the gospel. In Africa this concern has been heightened by the factor of traditional religions, especially the element of ancestral beliefs and practices.

Christianity came to Africa over a century ago; yet even in the 1980s missions are still battling with traditional religious beliefs, not only among the unconverted but also among those who belong to the Christian community of faith. This is one of the major dilemmas in African Christianity. Many Christians have not completely broken off ties with their traditional religious beliefs and practices. An attempt to harmonize the African way of life with that of Christianity has continued. Adrian Hastings even suggests that ". . . a type of institutional schizophrenia was built up between two overlapping

comprehensive models of behaviour. . . ."1 Terence Ranger observes that Christianity in Africa is a "mere veneer over traditionalism."2 He adds:

. . . For either the Bakongo or the Shona it is almost impossible to think of society either repudiating Christianity in the name of traditionalism or repudiating traditionalism in the name of Christianity. . . .3

Ranger concludes that Africans in Zimbabwe

. . . live in a situation of religious pluralism. The old monopolistic spheres have broken down; Africans no longer have to be a Methodist; or an Anglican or a Seventh Day Adventist [sic.] in order to obtain an education or to enter a hospital. Africans can choose among a variety of Christian churches and sects; a variety of indigenous movements; a variety of secular ideologies. . . .4

What this observation suggests is that while religious institutions are structurally divided and separate at the top, yet the members of these religious structures tend to move freely to and fro along the spectrum at the bottom. Mission church leaders may emphasize doctrinal and structural differences in their respective denominations, but the members will disregard these boundaries by switching to whichever denomination or even traditional religion which

¹Adrian Hastings, African Christianity (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 39.

²Terence Ranger, "The Churches, the Nationalist State and African Religion," in Christianity in Independent Africa, ed. Edward Fashole'-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hastings, and Godwin Tasie, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 487.

³Ibid., 489.

⁴Ibid., 501.

meets their felt needs. This was the reason why Obed Mutezo commented to Ndabaningi Sithole that denominations were simply various ways of approaching God. What counted was worshipping God in "spirit and in truth."¹ According to Mutezo,

. . . Christianity is mainly the Western interpretation of the teachings of Jesus which the African Christian must interpret for himself in order to serve his deeper religious and ethical needs felt in the inmost fibre of his being.²

Several missionary approaches have been applied as means of making the gospel speak to the needs of the African; however, the phenomenon of the ancestors has continued to confront the Christian church. Scholars, some of whom are concerned Africans, believe that Christianity in Africa never addressed the issues that confronted the daily life of the people. The missionaries failed to understand the traditional religion and its impact upon the people. It was assumed that the mere condemnation of traditional beliefs and practices would produce faithful Christians.

The discussion that follows addresses some of the different approaches the churches have taken in dealing with traditional beliefs and practices.

Syncretistic Approach

There are those who have taken the position that

¹Sithole, 108.

²Ibid.

ancestral beliefs must be accommodated and accepted within the framework of Christian beliefs. This approach is taken by the Roman Catholic Church, especially by Father Kumbirai of Zimbabwe, and allows a degree of concordance between Christianity and ancestral beliefs and practices.¹ This approach appears to have encouraged the practice of traditional beliefs among Christians because it does not require a radical break from such practices.

Rationalistic Approach

The rationalistic approach rejects ideas regarding an objective world of spirits. The spirit world is interpreted merely as subjective illusion or superstition. It is believed that in time these beliefs will disappear as people are educated.² The supernatural is played-down or glossed over.³ Those who use this approach reject any use of dialogical method between traditional religions and Christianity.⁴

Hexham and Poewe suggest that the Western mind assumes that sensible and intelligent people believe things because they have proved to be true, that the world operates

¹Gideon Thom, "A Reformed Perspective on African Belief in Ancestors," Missionalia 1 (August 1973): 73.

²Ibid., 74.

³J. V. Taylor, The Primal Vision (London: SCM, 1965), 21.

⁴See Staples, 212, 275-276.

in terms of reason, that there is only one objective truth, and that one can determine that truth by employing inductive, deductive, or abductive reasoning. Consequently, Christian thought tends to follow the approach of rejecting "other ways of building symbolic universes as irrational."¹

Pietistic-Escapist Attitude

The pietistic-escapist approach seeks to solve all problems by resigning them to the Holy Spirit. It suggests that all one needs to do is preach the gospel and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.² This approach tends to create a theological vacuum in the sense that it does not engage itself in the context of the message.

The people are left vulnerable to their philosophical environment, constantly living in fear that the negative forces of the spirit world will invade their lives. Hence, any failure to confront the problem or to provide counter protection from the spirits has tended to perpetuate the underground practice of the religion for personal survival.

Accommodation and Openness Approach

Because Christianity today is faced with the reality of religious pluralism in all societies, accommodation as a method tries to make the Christian message relevant and real

¹Hexham and Poewe, 16.

²Thom, 74-75.

in a concrete situation. This approach accommodates into the Christian religious practices aspects of traditional heritage which are considered of value. While doing so, it may run the risk of obscuring the uniqueness of the gospel. Being satisfied with superficial similarities between traditional beliefs and Christianity, accommodation may create a crisis of identity in the Christian message.¹ Coward observes that the desire of Christianity to show itself relevant and open may lead to a "crisis of identity."² He demonstrates this by the New Testament community which attempted to become open to Judaism, Greek, and Roman world. The result was the possibility of Christianity (1) losing its Christological distinctiveness in its encounter with Judaism, (2) losing its monotheistic distinctiveness among the Gentiles, (3) losing its identity as a historical religion among gnostic groups, and (4) falling into idolatry and syncretism among Graeco-Roman cults.

These dangers suggest that Christianity will always run the risk of being changed in its dialogue with other religions. Being by nature a missionary religion, Christianity cannot withdraw from the dialogue with other religions in order to preserve its distinctiveness.

¹Staples, 278, 290.

²Harold Coward, Pluralism: Challenges to World Religions (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 19-20.

Individual Accountability

One other missionary approach has to do with the emphasis and stress on individual accountability in terms of conversion, salvation, and discipleship. In Africa, this approach has resulted in down-playing the communal experience of the people so that there has been a "temptation to fill the void with clandestine celebrations"¹ which offer a sense of fellowship and togetherness.

Christianity has not provided the needed communal support system or Christian ritual to allow people to survive in times of perplexity and personal loss. When people accept the gospel, they are uprooted from their intimate cultural ties and transplanted into a new community which concerns itself with the individual. When these people encounter stressful experiences they revert to their communal rituals for self-actualization and a sense of belonging.

The diversity of outlook

There is diversity of opinion among African Christian scholars as to the way they interpret the interaction between the Christian gospel and traditional religions in Africa. Their diverse perspectives demonstrate that Western missionaries are not alone in this dilemma concerning Christianity and traditional beliefs and

¹Staples, 213-215.

practices in Africa. The diversity of interpretation of issues affecting African Christianity by theologians often creates confusion in the minds of Christian believers.

Simon S. Maimela sums up his conclusions regarding traditional religions in Africa as follows:

. . . The conclusion that I have been forced to come to is that there is indeed a salvation in those religions, which are genuine channels of God's redemptive activity in response to the sins and problems Africans experience and find oppressive, and from which they yearn for salvation. In saying this, I am aware that I am suggesting that there is indeed salvation outside the historical church through African Traditional Religions for their adherents. As a Christian fully committed to the Christian faith and biblical witness, it was not quite possible for me to reach the conclusion that God does not save adherents of African Traditional Religions apart and in spite of those religions. For in pursuit of truth, no matter where it leads us, it is equally not possible for me to dismiss the sacred traditions of African beliefs and customs, which have been handed down over many generations, as mere aberrations, superstitions, and the work of Satan among African 'pagans'. . . .¹

He goes on to say that awareness

. . . that African Traditional religions must be accepted and respected as the normal divinely given means for the salvation of the African humanity is going to be a bitter pill for Christians to swallow. . . .²

Maimela suggests that Christians can accept the validity of these religions without watering down the Christian faith because as outsiders they are least qualified to judge "what those religions claim they offer their adherents." He concludes:

¹Maimela, 74.

²Ibid., 75.

. . . Rather than feel threatened by the admission that God saves people outside the historical church, we should praise our Creator for not hiding the divine truth from any section of humanity. So we should leave it to God to sift through and destroy what is evil in all human religious attempts at making sense of our life, because God will never be defeated by sin and corruptive elements in our religions.¹

To suggest that Christians "should leave it to God to sift and destroy what is evil" in religion is to disqualify them from theological engagement and render them passive participants in religious life. The Christian religion is a missionary religion which calls people from other religions to Jesus Christ. To accomplish this task, Christians must reflect on their faith and practice and on the religious traditions of those they are attempting to reach with the Gospel. Certainly, God has the final say regarding the salvation of all people, but Christians must also make decisions pertaining to their religious practice and that of the adherents of other religions.

The question of the salvation of the individual in any religion must be left with God; but at the same time Christians should proclaim the excellence of Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord. There is no salvation outside Jesus Christ. Other religions have something of value to society; however, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, salvation is in Jesus Christ. The task of Christianity is to communicate the supremacy of Christ. Anything else is an

¹Ibid.

inadequate substitute. Taking such a position does not necessarily mean that the task of evangelization is easy. In fact, it makes evangelism difficult because human nature tries to protect its traditional heritage against any crusading outside influence.

Any serious observer of African Christianity should agree with Ngindu Mushete (Zaire) who calls for African theology to take note of Africans, their culture, religion, and civilization. Aware that past reflections on African Christianity have been done by Western missionaries, Mushete calls upon the "right Africans" to ponder Christianity and its truth in their own terms. The aim of African theology should be to

. . . accept and value the cultural and religious experience of the African peoples, and . . . attempt to reply to the questions raised by African society and its contemporary world.¹

He concludes by saying that

. . . One clear fact has obviously escaped western humanity for a long time. It is that there is not one world but many, not one history but many, not one theology but many, not one space or milieu but many that are different and perhaps even antagonistic.²

Mushete rightly suggests that Christians in Africa should take it upon themselves to understand the implications of the Christian gospel for their concrete and

¹Ngindu Mushete, "The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics," in African Theology En Route, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 27.

²Ibid., 32.

traditional religious experience. This is necessary if Christianity is to become meaningfully assimilated in the traditional life of the people in Africa.

An extreme view of how some Africans relate to Christianity and traditional religions is that of Gabriel M. Setiloane (Botswana) who asserts that Africans have inherited from their ancestors a higher view of Divinity than the Western theological and Christian world. When asked the question: "Why are you in the Christian fold and not in African traditional religions?" his answer was:

The question as to why we are still in the Christian fold can be answered in different ways. For myself, first, I am like someone who has been bewitched, and I find it difficult to shake off the Christian witchcraft with which I have been captured. I cannot say I rationalize my position by taking the view that to be Christian I do not have to endorse every detail of western Christian theology. . . .¹

As far as Setiloane is concerned, Christianity is one among many alternatives. The danger with this position is that it relativizes Christianity by making it one of the options. Setiloane also assumes that the African traditional concepts of God were flawless when he stated that Africans have had a higher view of God than that which Western Christianity had to offer. He fails, however, to realize that even in African traditional religions there was a diversity of conceptions of deity. The question would be which of the African traditions had a correct view of deity?

¹Gabriel M. Setiloane, "Where Are We in African Theology?" in Appiah-Kubi and Torres, 64.

The Bible as the source of God's revelation loses its authority in Setiloane's view.

Byang H. Kato, in his book Theological Pitfalls in Africa, reacts to contemporary trends in African theology. He is concerned about confusion over the meaning of salvation and over syncretistic universalism which suggests that people will be saved whether or not they believe in Christ. He observes that the withdrawal of foreign missionaries from Africa has led to syncretistic universalism. He also sees the tendency to "magnify all that is African, especially in cultural and religious heritage."¹

Kato deplores the tendency to baptize some of the old practices and make equivalents of heathen practices.

. . . The defunct gods of African traditional religions are now rearing their heads. . . .

. . . There are indications that African Christians may even be called upon to pour libation before a political leader instead of serving the unique Lord Jesus Christ.²

Elsewhere in his writings, Kato makes similar observations and an impassioned plea for Africans to watch out against syncretistic universalism.³

¹Byang H. Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), 12-13.

²Ibid., 173.

³Idem, "Evangelization and Culture," Perception 12 (April 1978): 1-7; idem, "The Theology of Eternal Salvation," Perception 14 (October, 1978): 1-8; idem, "Christianity as an African Religion," Perception 16 (May 1979): 1-6.

Another commentator on African Christianity is Timothy Njoya who sees a break from both traditional religions and Western Christianity. According to Njoya, the "conversion experience" should be seen "as liberation from both paganism and western Christianity."¹

He makes the point that because Africans were broken away from their traditions and at the same time did not espouse Western traditions, their Christian experience (conversion) has been free from traditionalism. He suggests that African Christianity has persisted with conversion experience to make itself relevant in time and space:

. . . The greatest advantage of African Christianity was that it lacked an inventory of saints, martyrs, pianos, catechisms and theologians with whom to identify itself. It therefore kept touch with conversion experience as the only source of legitimacy. . . .²

Njoya suggests that the African Christian has renounced his ancestors, not because the missionaries have forced him to do so but because his traditions have become irrelevant to his survival. The African did not renounce his ancestors in order to accept the cults of Calvin and Pius ". . . but needed freedom from all forms of mental containers. . ."³ At the same time he argues that

¹Timothy Murere Njoya, "Dynamics of Change In African Christianity: African Theology Through Historical and Socio-Political Change," 2 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976), 1:17.

²Ibid., 38.

³Ibid., 43.

. . . Missionaries demanded that Africans should renounce their own traditional identity, not in order to resurrect it in a new form, but in order to make them European. They wanted to convert Africans from one tradition to another as if conversion was the abandonment of one African ancestral object in exchange for another European ancestral object.¹

Njoya bases his conclusions upon his observations of the revival among the churches in East Africa. These churches experienced a revival of an alternative pattern of Christianity which rejected the traditionalism of the West and also African traditional beliefs and practices. His observation, therefore, is that of a church in Africa that has developed a new identity of its own.

The diversity of outlook on Christianity and African traditional beliefs and practices is not necessarily a by-product of missionary failure. It is, however, a symptom of a dilemma within a Christian church which finds itself in the midst of a traditional and nationalistic society in Africa. Admittedly, the churches in Africa take seriously the proclamation of the Christian gospel; however, the challenge has been to find appropriate ways of expressing this gospel in the setting of the traditional life of the African people.

A Comprehensive Approach to
Traditional Beliefs
and Practices

One cannot endorse all the opinions that the African

¹Ibid., 82.

theologians espouse and push for. Neither can one deny the fact that Christians in Africa need to reflect on their faith in relation to their own Africa experience. They need to interpret their cultural issues in light of the Bible. This means that they should be guided by certain principles of theological reflection for "orthodox" Christianity to prevail. This applies also to the issue of ancestral beliefs and practices. Understanding should always precede criticism and judgment; at the same time critical theological reflections have to be made in relation to traditional practices.

In this vein, Staples warns:

Theology cannot give up its critical stance because it seeks to engage the African situation. It would seem to be essential that it turn its sharpest tools inward upon its own traditions before it engages with the African tradition. On the other hand the African tradition must be subjected to equally serious criticism. . . .¹

Theological Guidelines for Africa

The contemporary attempts to make the Christian message relevant to the needs of the African should be guided by four principles in order to safeguard Christianity from losing its witness in Africa.

1. There should be a strong affirmation of historical Christianity which makes Christ² the point of

¹Staples, 303.

²John S. Pobee, Toward an African Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 28-32.

departure in the discussion of traditional beliefs and practices in Africa. Admittedly, only those who firmly believe in Jesus Christ are able to interact with other traditions without compromising the basic Christian ideals. The aim should be to preserve the purity of the Gospel while making it meaningful to those who understand the world differently.

2. There must be reflection on the implications of the Christ event for people of other world-views. The acceptance of the gospel does not leave the people the same. The gospel demands some changes and adjustments in people's lives. It also creates a necessary crisis in the way people perceive reality. At the same time the gospel should clarify that crisis so that a change may result in seeing the world in a new light (2 Cor 5:17).

3. Theology as a discipline must help people to regard their own world-view in the light of a Christocentric world-view. As Pauw observed in the Eastern Cape and the Transkei, the Xhosa Christians held a Christian world-view in which God was seen as Creator and Father, Jesus as Savior who died on the cross, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God, Satan as God's enemy and tempter, and angels and demons as existing in the heavenly world. These Christians also held a traditional world-view in which the dead ancestors visited the homestead to either bless or curse their living descendents. They believed in witches and sorcerers who

were ordinary human beings. These witches and sorcerers could be one's fellow church members.¹ Such a dualistic world-view is also typical of what one would find among Christians in Zimbabwe. One observes two traditions being held concurrently by those who are Christians.

Theology as a tool should help such Christians move from myth (an important part of religion) to the world of the Bible (history) so that they can develop a sense of history. It must summarize faith and make it intelligible, coherent, and consistent. This means that theologians themselves must participate in the life of the community in order to understand it.

Eugene Nida suggests three ways in which the Christian message should apply to the people of a receptor culture: (a) it must be a message of all the life because ". . . there is no place which can be rightfully excluded from the all-embracing demands of the Lordship of Jesus Christ"; (b) it must permit the Holy Spirit to work out in lives those forms of Christian expression which are in accordance with their distinctive qualities; and (c) it must be understood in terms of the only way of life which the people know (their own way of life).²

¹B. A. Pauw, Christianity and Xhosa Tradition (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975), 56-57. He calls the church world-view the "great tradition" and the traditional world-view the "little tradition" (p. 58).

²Nida, 23.

When people come to the point where Christianity is assimilated into their lifestyle and becomes the motivating principle for their behavior, then Christianity has become a part of their culture and not a foreign institution. Sam U. Eriwo shows that Christianity, if rightfully presented and appropriated, can be considered an indivisible part of people's culture.

. . . For, after all, Christianity has been with us for over a hundred years and has to that extent also become the way of life of many Africans, and, therefore, their culture.¹

4. While Christianity must be expressed in a truly African context, it must not fall victim to culture. The Christian gospel should not be twisted in order to accommodate cultural practices. Difficulty sometimes arises when words and phrases in the English versions of the Bible are translated into the vernacular languages or paraphrased so as to produce an equivalent meaning.

In an attempt to produce this equivalent meaning, great care should be exercised when it comes to aspects of culture which present a negative association in the minds of Christians, even though there may be nothing wrong in them. For example, in Shona the name for God is "Mwari", a name also applied to the traditional deity. The Christians have never rejected the use of this name. When in 1978 the Bible

¹Sam U. Eriwo, "Traditional Culture and Christianity: Rivals or Partners?" African Ecclesiastical Review 21 (August 1979): 216.

Society in Zimbabwe introduced a new Shona version of the Bible, an attempt to accommodate traditional forms was made. Instead of using "Yesu" (a transliteration of "Jesus") the term "Mudzimu" (ancestor) was used; instead of "muporofita" (prophet), the term "svikiro ra Tenzi" (the medium of the one above) was used. This aroused great opposition among Christians because these terms had negative associations with the past traditional beliefs and practices. As a result that version was rejected and underwent revision.

How to Deal with Ancestral Beliefs and Practices

Suggestions are made here regarding appropriate ways for Christians to relate to ancestral beliefs and practices. Several suggestions are given which may help in dealing with these beliefs and practices.

Recognizing the human need. Ancestral beliefs and practices should be seen as an attempt to meet the human need for security and immortality. In the first-century, Greek cults were a means of dealing with guilt and of ensuring security from demons and spiritual forces; but the people found no lasting deliverance.¹ The Christian gospel should be preached in such a way as to answer this search for security and immortality.

It is here that the Epistle to the Hebrews provides

¹Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 22.

helpful answers to the perplexities of life. In the Epistle to the Hebrews Christ is in control of His creation. He is the pre-existent Christ since He created all things. As Creator and Sustainer He qualifies to provide protection to those who feel vulnerable to the forces of misfortune. Christ is presented as one who identifies with and cares for people since He became like them. He is also presented as one who is their security and source of power since He sits at the right hand of God's throne for humankind. People's lives are safe in Him. Thus the gospel should not simply condemn but should recognize the human need and provide an alternative to that need.

Avoiding two extremes. Christians grounded in Western rationalization tend to be sceptical about the reality of the experience of those who practice other religions. It is easy to take the attitude that communication with ancestral spirits, belief in witchcraft, or the use of magic are illusions and not a genuine reality in the experience of the people. As a result they dismiss out of hand these things and fail to minister to the needs of the people. The truth is that many who are members of the Christian churches still engage privately in these practices because they meet a need in their lives.

Michael Green warns Christians against two extremes: (1) excessive pre-occupation with Satan; (2) excessive scepticism about his existennce. He observes that doubt

about the existence of Satan is to be found largely in Christian lands. Those who know about his defeat in Calvary are the ones who have become sceptical of Satan. In non-Christian lands, he observes, it is not so; there is a vital awareness of the reality and personality of evil forces.¹ In Heb 2:14-14 the devil is not an illusion but a reality. He should be taken seriously. However, too much pre-occupation with the devil and the forces of evil may dilute belief in the power of Christ and of the gospel. Ellen G. White cautions against this danger:

. . . If the professed followers of Christ would, with purity of heart, exercise as much faith in the promises of God as they repose in satanic agencies, they would realize, in soul and body, the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.²

She adds

. . . the feet will stumble and fall that venture upon this forbidden ground. There is a God in Israel, with whom is deliverance for all who are oppressed. . . .³

At the same time Christians need to recognize that the forces of evil work in different ways among different societies in this world.

Christians in independent churches take the devil and his work seriously. Not only do they preach against the ancestors and witchcraft, they also believe in the power of

¹Michael Green, I Believe in Satan's Downfall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 17.

²Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1951), 457.

³Ibid., 458.

the Holy Spirit. They believe that through the Holy Spirit, God has provided a power against the devil. Hence any techniques of protection against misfortune and illness are ruled out.

The new covenant principle. The Epistle to the Hebrews is about the new covenant relationship between God and the believer. Based on Jer 31, this covenant suggests that the law will be in the heart (mind) rather than be a meaningless theory (8:10; 10:16). The law in the heart suggests the loving obedience which genuine Christianity should exemplify. Christians are to obey God as a matter of principle and not because of fear.

Christianity is a religion of the heart which means that it needs to be internalized. For example, it is quite common for church members to put emphasis on outward acts and ignore inward growth and devotion. As a result, some believers publicly appear to follow the Christian way of life while privately denying it. Such Christians are simply man-pleasers rather than God-pleasers.

Ellen G. White observed that as the church increased numerically there was the danger of paying more attention to outward labor and less special attention to fervent piety, Christian simplicity, and earnest devotion. The heart was less attended to. She noted:

. . . The church seem content to take only the first steps in conversion. They are more ready for active labor than for humble devotion, more ready to engage in outward religious service than in the inner work of the

heart. Meditation and prayer are neglected for bustle and show. Religion must begin with emptying and purifying the heart, and must be nurtured by daily prayer.¹

Christian maturity takes place only when the gospel has taken charge of the heart. Believers should not act from fear of what the church will do if they behave one way or another. Instead, they need to look to Jesus Christ and live a life of faith (Heb 10:37).

The new covenant principle can also be applied to the church in Africa to encourage it to reflect seriously on theological issues. The church in Africa has been known as a church without theological reflections of its own. The reason for this is that for a long time Africans relied on the missionaries and the church in the west to solve their cultural and theological problems. For example, in issues of polygamy, what constitutes a Christian wedding and the conducting of funerals, the Western church has had more say than the Africans themselves.

The collective input of the Western church is essential and should be taken into consideration if the church in Africa is to avoid parochialism. However, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), the church in Africa should exercise its own effort to see if those things are really so. Christian maturity is one of the characteristics of the new covenant experience. Thus Christians in Africa should

¹White, Testimonies for the Church, 4:535.

be allowed to make decisions based on their covenant experience with Christ and, in the light of Scripture, take responsibility for those decisions. Instead of using milk they should use "solid food" (Heb 5:12).

The new covenant principle can be a helpful way of living out the claims of the gospel. Since the law of God is in the heart, Christians will exercise loving obedience to God. They will not privately consult their ancestors and diviners in order to escape the notice of the rest of the church members. The Christian's sole desire will be to please God even when facing difficult times.

This principle can also be helpful in encouraging Africans to reflect about what constitutes Christian practices and what should be left out from traditional beliefs and practices. Strong belief in Jesus Christ is an essential pre-requisite for those who attempt to express the Gospel in the concrete African situation. The new covenant principle thus presupposes a growing faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

Exorcism and cases of possession. In typical traditional societies where possession illnesses are manifest, exorcism of such illnesses is always a possibility. The church is often faced with cases of mental and physical illness that modern medical science fails to cure. While the Adventist church does not affirm exorcism as a method in cases of possession, experience has shown

that the believers do in fact use it. They lay their hands upon those believed to be possessed, and through prayer they call upon the name of Christ to free such people.

Great care should be exercised so that exorcism does not become a marketplace commodity, as observed in Pentecostal congregations. As Michael Green suggests, exorcism is appropriate only to those who have been utterly taken over by Satan to the extent that their freewill has been rendered inoperative.¹ Thus psychological ailments should be met at the level of the Spirit and faith. An important lesson may be learned from those independent churches which discourage the use of magical techniques of protection and healing because they have a superior power in Christ. Their strong faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit should be emulated.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in prayer for the sick, as is suggested in Ja 5:13-20. From the way this prayer ritual is performed, one gets the impression that it prepares the patient for death rather than for life. Usually, the ritual comes at an extreme point in one's illness when hope for recovery is gone. As a last resort, the anointing and prayer take place. The patient may see this as a signal that death is pending.

The Vapostori regard prayer for the sick as an opportunity for healing to take place. The whole psychology

¹Green, I Believe in Satan's Downfall, 132.

of prayer centers around God's power to heal. The patient too regards this occasion as one of recovery. This is therapeutic to the mind of the patient and often results in healing.

Christianity is about life beyond. Traditional religious beliefs put much stress on the present and the past. There is little room, if any, for anticipating a life beyond the present. True, the spirit world of the ancestors exists, but it is never anticipated or longed for as compared to the Christian faith which anticipates the coming of Christ and spending eternity with him. It is here that the Christian gospel can offer a balanced view of life which accepts the realities of this life but also believes that the final day is coming when a new order of things will be inaugurated. This is where Christian faith sustains those who encounter perplexities in life because it provides anchorage in heavenly realities.

Giving a sense of identity. The church needs to recognize that Christianity has contributed to the dismantling of kinship relations by its stress on personal salvation and individual accountability. Yet its members are still torn between society and the church. When the church lacks communal fellowship, its members easily find their way back to their traditional practices.

As churches grow bigger (a contemporary phenomenon in Africa), they tend to see people statistically. This

danger can occur when churches enter into global competition concerning baptismal figures and fail to maintain a caring, nurturing, and redeeming ministry. The members wish to feel that they are accepted and cared for by the rest of the "body of Christ." When this happens it is easier for them to resist the temptation to participate in ancestral rituals. These members know that when society and relatives reject them, they will be accepted in the church family to which they already belong.

I observed among the Vapostori of my village in Zimbabwe that it was easy for them to rehabilitate converts who were alcoholics and chain-smokers. Where it took the Seventh-day Adventists several months or years to get the same converts to stop the habit, Vapostori achieved it in a matter of days. Their secret was that of prayer and spiritual friendship. The old members kept close to the converts and assisted them to survive during the period of transition. Smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages were considered the works of Satan. Through prayer and laying on of hands, the power of the Holy Spirit was invited to get rid of those habits. The Vapostori employed the same technique when it came to ancestral beliefs and practices.

Christians should experience a sense of mystical union with Christ so that they may not fall back to communal

rituals.¹ The idea of the corporate nature of the worshipping community should demonstrate a sense of mutual responsibility among Christians (Heb 10:24-25). When a believer isolates himself from the fellowship of other believers, he runs the danger of also losing his faith. Observation shows that a fall from fellowship nearly always precedes a fall from faith. Union with Christ and with other believers is strength. One is a saint in relation to Jesus Christ and the corporate body of Christ, and not in isolation thereof.

Churches should take credit for liberating Africa.

The Christian church has been accused of collaborating with colonial institutions in order to oppress Africans. Credit for the liberation of Africa from those colonial institutions has often gone to the ancestors and their mediums. The church has never been a perfect institution on earth. It has had its share of mistakes. But what has escaped the minds of many is that Christianization of any people ultimately results in the quest for self-determination. One cannot perpetually subjugate Christians because they have a sense of human dignity and destiny. The preaching of the gospel brings about this sense of destiny and self-determination.

African nationalism was an indirect result of the

¹Monica Wilson, Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 181.

work of Christian missions. Mission churches built schools and educated people to determine their own future. A great number of nationalists were people from mission schools. The church should therefore take the credit for making this possible. However, its task in this area has not ended.

The people of Zimbabwe commemorate the death of their heroes during the month of August. The Heroes Holiday is a time of remembering those who died during the liberation war. On the traditional level, the commemoration is flavored with praises to the ancestral spirits who were behind the liberation war. The church can provide a Christian twist to this nationally significant occasion by focusing on national ideals for progress for which the heroes died.

The church can do this by presenting programs geared for public consumption rather than for its own members. During that national holiday, the church can address issues on education, village economy, health, poverty, and the family. The Heroes Holiday is a time when people are receptive and willing to participate in public gatherings. The church in doing this can demonstrate that it has a role to play in society. For this reason, it would earn the respect of the nation.

Handling Traditional Practices
Without Compromising the Gospel

The "bringing-home" ritual and traditional healing

are often causes of great concern in the churches. Generally speaking, the Adventist church discourages participating in these practices, but not without consequences. On the one hand, the members are torn between the church and the society to which they belong; on the other, they become anxious about their personal welfare. Consequently, in such a state of anxiety they want to do something about sickness or disease. Because they do not want to break kinship ties or become helpless victims of sickness and death, they have recourse to ancestral practices.

This study, therefore, suggests a philosophy which Christians can live by and which may make it possible for them to deal with traditional practices without compromising the gospel. This philosophy is based on a major principle: that when something of value is taken away, and which meets their needs and gives them satisfaction, it be replaced with something of equal or higher value. One cannot simply leave a vacuum; the people will simply go back to their former ways.

The church should definitely discourage involvement in practices which are contradictory to the Gospel; but it should also seek alternative ways to help people cope with the realities of life. The people, as Hastings observes, need a frame of reference which renders illness,

bereavement, or misfortune something tolerable.¹

It is not possible to discuss the ancestral practices which involve healing and death here since these have already been dealt with above.² However, several observations are made which should serve to guide Christians faced with these issues.

1. Trust placed in ancestors as a means of securing well-being in this life is in direct conflict with the Christian understanding of the mediatorship of Christ. Christ is the only Mediator between God and man, and no place is given to ancestors.

2. Communication with the dead contradicts the doctrine of the state of the dead and ignores the commandment against consulting the dead (Deut 18:1).

3. The meat that is shared in fellowship with the deceased during the bringing-home ceremony also contradicts Scriptural admonition against eating food offered to idols.

4. Traditional healers who attribute their healing power as derived from alien spirits and whose healing methods involve ritualistic acts on their part and on the part of their patients should be avoided by Christians.

5. Those healers who simply treat physical symptoms without any claim of spiritual powers or use of divining

¹Hastings, 64.

²See pages 32-52.

devices¹ should be considered appropriate. However, great care should be taken because it is not always possible to determine the true nature of these healers.

Having said this, it is important to recognize that these observations do not solve the problem of ancestral beliefs and practices in themselves. True, the believers have been taught the correct doctrine regarding the state of the dead. They have been taught that there is one Mediator, Christ. They have been taught that the Bible forbids any form of communication with the dead. They know that food offered to idols is "anathema." Yet the believers continue to practice the very things they have been warned against.

It is my contention, therefore, that these Christians know and believe what the Bible says about the state of the dead. But at the same time they are faced with the apparent reality of being visited by the dead. When they perceive their lives to be in danger or when misfortunes occur, they revert to the same practices they have been forbidden to follow. The solution in this case is not more teaching regarding the state of the dead and the fact that the Bible warns against communication with the dead.

The problem seems to have to do with the clarification of values and rearrangement of priorities at a given time and space. These people accept the doctrines,

¹See Chavunduka, 22.

but at the back of their minds the question is asked: How do I practice what I believe to be true and still survive within society and also enjoy total well-being? What they need is orientation to a totally different world view. In other words, the teaching of doctrine must be accompanied by orientation toward a different world of existence than the people are used to. They need a mental shift. This means that the gospel must take people where they are and move them to where they ought to be. In doing so, the church should accept the interpretive reality of the people and then help them get the alternatives.

To illustrate, for many years church members in Zimbabwe were taught stewardship from the perspective that they neither knew nor accepted the doctrine of stewardship. The result was that they were bombarded with voluminous amounts of literature which tried to convince them that tithing was biblical and needed to be followed. What escaped the attention of missionary teachers until recently, was that these members were not returning tithe because of lack of knowledge or because they did not accept the doctrine. For the majority, the problem was the fact that their values and priorities were not clarified. They wondered how they could practice stewardship and still meet their commitments. The church has had to educate people on the principles of budgeting because this has always been the issue and not the rejection of the doctrine per se.

One solution to the problem of ancestral beliefs and practices seems to lie in the area of orientation toward a certain philosophy of life on which Christians should focus. Until this is changed there will be no change in behavior at all. The gospel must be presented in such a way as to help clarify people's values and priorities about life. The Epistle to the Hebrews has much to offer in this area.

Formulating a view toward suffering. Suffering should not be seen as an evil that is to be avoided at all costs.¹ The cross of Christ explains suffering. It is the result of sin and is here to stay. But the cross tells one that God has taken care of suffering. In Christ it is potentially destroyed. The solution to death has been found through the cross. The Christian too must participate in the death and resurrection of Christ.² This view toward suffering suggests that suffering should not destroy one's relationship with God because he already participates in eternal life in Christ.

A Christian is one whose vision in life transcends the experience of this life because, even though here, he is a citizen of another world. As C. Raymond Holmes suggests, no-one will stand with Jesus on Mount Zion who has not been

¹David J. Bosch, "The Gospel in African Robes: Toward the Africanization of the Gospel," Unpublished lecture notes presented at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, Ventnor, New Jersey (March 1987): 25.

²Ephraim K. Mosothoane, "Communo Sanctorum in Africa," Missionalia 1 (August 1973): 88.

with him in Getsemane and Calvary. Holmes also identifies four kinds of suffering which come to humanity: (1) that which is general to all mankind which is a result of the fallenness of the human nature, (2) that which is a result of man's own stupidity, lawlessness, and disobedience, (3) that which comes in the form of Christian tribulation, and (4) trials which are brought by God to His people so they might share in His holiness (Heb 12:10).¹

Insightfully, Ellen G. White speaks about Christians partaking of Christ's sufferings in their earthly life if they would be partakers with Him of His glory in heaven.

Heaven will be cheap enough, if we obtain it through suffering. We must deny self all along the way, die to self daily, let Jesus alone appear, and keep his glory continually in view. I saw that those who of late have embraced the truth would have to know what it is to suffer for Christ's sake, that they would have trials to pass through that would be keen and cutting, in order that they may be purified, and fitted through suffering to receive the seal of the living God, pass through the time of trouble, see the King in his beauty, and dwell in the presence of God and of pure and holy angels.²

Christ is a greater reality. Christians sometimes live under the illusion that Satan is a greater reality than Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Christians to better things in Christ because Christ is a greater reality. Believers should be helped to anchor their faith, hope, and

¹C. Raymond Holmes, unpublished lecture notes for Spirituality for Ministry, Andrews Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, (Winter 1986).

²Ellen G. White, Early Writings (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 67.

relationships on Christ. This is what brings about a new meaning in life. An encounter with the living Christ does indeed provide people with power which they are seeking (4:14-16).

Conclusion

This study shows that many Adventists in Zimbabwe are attracted to the ancestral beliefs and practices because (1) they want to solve the tragedy of distance which results from the concept of a transcendent Deity or the departure by death of loved ones, (2) they attempt to meet their existential need of freedom from illness, death, misfortune, and tragedy, and (3) they are ever conscious of the negative powers--witches, sorcerers, avenging spirits--which threaten their social, physical, and emotional well-being. Hence, the attraction to the ancestral beliefs and practices has to do with the consultation of positive powers--diviners, healers, spirit mediums, ancestor--in order to secure total well-being.

This study demonstrates that unless Jesus Christ is presented as one who meets the social, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity, Christians will always resort to anything that promises to provide answers to their needs. For many Adventists, it does not constitute a theological problem to consult the ancestors when one is in danger. These Adventists often have the impression that if something works, then it must be right. The idea behind

this logic is that if going to the ancestors solves one's immediate problems, God will understand.

Satan has planted in the human heart the idea that people serve God for what they can get out of him (as in the case of Job). If they do not get what they want they go somewhere else. The Epistle to the Hebrews addresses the absurdity of this philosophy by (1) showing that Christians are called upon to persevere (10:19-25), (2) warning them against throwing away their confidence (10:35-39), (3) portraying the lives of those who endured suffering and inspired hope and faithfulness, and (4) calling upon Christians to endure hardships. They are called upon to fix their gaze upon Jesus their champion of salvation and upon Him who as forerunner now sits at the right hand of power in God's throne.

The idea of suffering is very significant in Hebrews (2:18; 5:8; 10:32; 11:26,36; 13:12). The Epistle to the Hebrews shows that being Christian does not necessarily render one immune to suffering (12:5-11). Christianity is not a charm to be used to ward off suffering in this life and should not be presented as a success religion. When this happens, people create in their minds a commercial relationship with God which is solely dependent on what they can get out of it. The sovereign God should not be utilized; rather, He is there to be worshipped (12:18-29).

The Christian church, in spite of the many

missionary approaches at its disposal, continues to face the dilemma regarding the phenomenon of the ancestors. This is so because Christianity and African traditional religions ultimately do not solve every human problem. No matter what one does, people will continue to get ill and die. Tragedies and calamities for which there may be no religious or ritualistic remedy, will always occur. This is the dilemma.

What the church should do is to continue its endeavor to help people cope with that which is inevitable. While attempting to provide practical answers and solutions to people's problems, the church should also help them find meaning in life in a world fraught with suffering and social disharmony.

Chapter 5 introduces a campmeeting program designed to promote Christian faith through commitment to Jesus Christ and helping people cope with their problems in life. It does this by presenting sermons and Bible studies based on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

CHAPTER V

A CAMPMEETING PROGRAM DESIGNED TO PROMOTE COMMITMENT TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AMONG ADVENTISTS IN ZIMBABWE

This part of the study forms a practical application of Christian approaches to handling ancestral beliefs and practices with a view to promoting Christian faith among Adventists in Zimbabwe. Having noted above in this study that the Epistle to the Hebrews provides an answer to the issue of ancestral beliefs and practices, this study now utilizes the message of this epistle to promote loyalty to Jesus Christ. It does so in the form of a campmeeting program consisting of sermons, Bible studies, and discussion groups.

The Rationale for a Campmeeting Program

The rationale for having a campmeeting program as a means of promoting Christian faith among Adventist believers in Zimbabwe stems from three factors.

1. Campmeetings in Zimbabwe offer the greatest possible access to the majority of church members compared to other programs of the church. Since my future ministry

will be localized at Solusi College where I will serve as teacher, I will not have direct access to congregations except when invited to conduct a campmeeting.

2. Campmeetings in Zimbabwe offer great opportunities for dialogue and sharing between pastors and church members and between members of different congregations. It is a time when people are keen to learn from one another because of the solitary environment in the countryside.

3. Campmeeting time offers a peak experience in the life of the church during the church calendar year. It seems logical that capitalizing on this occasion by presenting this kind of program would go a long way to fulfill the expectations of the church members.

An Analysis of Campmeetings in Zimbabwe

Campmeetings in Zimbabwe fall into two categories: rural and urban. The largest number of campmeetings are those which are held out in the countryside.

Rural Campmeetings

A pastor in Zimbabwe generally takes charge of fifteen to twenty-five congregations. These are comprized of organized churches and several companies and branch Sabbath schools. A company can number anywhere from twenty to fifty members, but it lacks the necessary skills to merit the status of an organized church.

The leadership in the churches and companies can be male or female depending on the kind of human skills each particular congregation may have. During the year these churches are on their own most of the time except for two to three times when a pastor may pay a short visit. Some congregations virtually go without a pastor's visit for the whole year. The pastor simply is not able to visit all the congregations in one year and still provide high quality spiritual nurture. The pastor, therefore, relies heavily on church members to nurture themselves. Campmeeting time generates a tremendous amount of excitement. Not only will members meet with their pastor but also with members from sister congregations.

The campmeeting site is usually situated at a central location to make it possible for most members of churches to attend. Such a campmeeting comprizes one or more districts, depending on the size of membership and the number of congregations in each district. A district consists of several churches and companies under the leadership of one pastor. Usually each district has its own campmeeting. This means that the local conference (mission field) has as many campmeetings as it has pastors.

The local conference assigns guest speakers to each campmeeting. The local district pastor serves as host to the visiting pastors. These guest pastors are assigned according to the membership size at each campmeeting. The

larger the campmeeting, the more speakers it will have. Experience shows that by the end of the campmeeting, the pastor are totally exhausted because church members want to get as much out of them as possible while they are available.

Campmeeting time for rural churches usually takes place during the dry winter months of the year (July to September) and lasts from Tuesday to Saturday night. Sometimes the local pastor may have his members come two days earlier in order to have extra time to discuss matters of concern among the churches in his district. The conference sets the date of each campmeeting, by consultation, to allow for equitable distribution of guest speakers. The conference usually invites speakers from other conferences and unions within the Division territory. Since having guest speakers is very expensive, the conference relies heavily on its own pastors.

The meeting location is generally in a "bush" setting. The main meetings take place inside an open, grass or branch enclosure with a few trees providing the shade to hundreds of men, women, and children. The people provide their own sitting arrangements. The men sit on logs or chairs while women spread their mats on the ground. The children sit on the floor directly in front of the makeshift pulpit. Around the place of assembly are many enclosures made out of grass, tree branches, or plastic material.

These camps are where the people stay.

Urban Campmeetings

Urban campmeetings are few. They consist of all the churches within a given city or a combination of congregations in adjacent cities. The procedure for allocating guest speakers by the conference is the same as for rural campmeetings. The time for urban campmeetings is set to coincide with two public holidays--Easter (in April) and Heroes holiday (in August). The days of these campmeetings are shorter than those of rural campmeetings because most of the members work in industries. Thus urban campmeetings begin on Friday and end on Monday, the normal holiday period.

The Program

The campmeeting program is generally drawn up by the local pastors in consultation with visiting pastors. Occasionally, the conference may suggest a theme and a tentative program; otherwise the program is very flexible to allow for input from pastors and local church elders. The program suggested in this study is basically in line with the traditional model of campmeetings in Zimbabwe.

The theme focuses on Christianity as a religion of better things. This is designed to help Christians identify with Christ even when they face the uncertainties of life. An attempt is made to show that what Christ and the

Christian faith can offer is far superior to what ancestral beliefs and practices purport to offer their adherents.

Three approaches are planned to present the theme:

1. Sermons will be preached from the Epistle to the Hebrews, Wednesday through Saturday at the 11:00 service.

The other two sermons will be preached on the opening night, Tuesday, and the closing night, Saturday, at 7:00 pm. Most of the sermons will be based on the Epistle to the Hebrews and designed to deal with and answer questions of practical concern among Adventists in view of ancestral beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe. However, the sermon on the opening night will be more general and designed to sensitize believers concerning the great controversy between good and evil. This is done to create an awareness among members as to their role in the controversy between Christ and Satan.

2. Bible studies will be presented from 2:00 to 3:00 pm., Wednesday through Saturday. These will also be based on the Epistle to the Hebrews. The studies will focus on the superiority of the person and work of Christ. On Saturday the study will deal with the better country which is the focus of the Christian's pilgrimage.

3. Following the Bible study hour, there will be a time for group sharing. People will meet in small groups in order to reflect on the message of the sermon and the Bible study. Prior to campmeeting I plan to send a list of suggested readings from the book Steps to Christ. The book

has already been translated into the vernacular in Zimbabwe. Members will be requested (1) to relate the message of this book to the message of Hebrews, (2) to share how they relate to the various aspects of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, (3) to pray together, and (4) to share personal experiences of victory over ancestral beliefs and practices. It is anticipated that those who are illiterate may thus also benefit from this dialogue.

On Saturday the program will be different. Instead of having group discussions, a congregational testimony period will be held. It is expected that people will testify as to what has happened to them during the campmeeting and also share any experiences of victory over ancestral issues in the past. This should encourage other believers in the congregation. Campmeeting time offers a great opportunity for spiritual enrichment and evangelism. Many people take a stand for Christ at campmeeting.

Anticipated Results

It is anticipated that believers will discover, from the study of Hebrews, that Jesus Christ is the answer to every human need and that they do not have to resort to ancestral practices. It is also hoped that they will also desire to identify with Christ all the way in their Christian walk, even in difficult times.

Believers will be encouraged to continue to study the Epistle to the Hebrews when they return to their

respective churches. It is hoped that the campmeeting experience will set the stage for an on-going study program in the churches. Similar studies could be carried out by using other books of the Bible such as the Gospel of John, the "I Am" sayings of Jesus, Revelation, and the Epistle of James.

APPENDIXES A - B

APPENDIX A

Sermon 1

Date: Tuesday - opening night

Title: The Great Controversy Has Not Ended Yet.¹

Aim: To derive from the Bible incidents where God's people resorted to unfamiliar spirits in order to resolve a predicament in their lives; also to show that God's people today still find themselves resorting to the same forbidden practices.

Introduction

Christians are part of the struggle between Christ and Satan. Satan attempts to draw our allegiance away from God and continues to use lying, threatenings, trickery, and fear to lead us away from God.

Many of you, with courage, stepped out of traditional non-Christian practices and forsook the ancestral beliefs and practices. But Satan has not given up. As you encounter sickness, death, tragedies, and various calamities, you have found yourselves drawing back to your old practices.

The challenge is before us. We must decide where we

¹Ideas for this sermon are taken from the sermon "Choose Whom Ye Will Serve" by H. Carl Currie. He preached this sermon in several Adventist churches in Zimbabwe in an attempt to deal with the issue of ancestors.

are going to stand. Dare we say with Joshua, as he came to the close of his life's work: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The Bible has a record of people who fell back to other gods in search of security and power. You and I are not alone in this experience. Do you find yourself swinging between Christ and amadlozi? Let us look at some of the people who turned their back on God to traditional gods.

I. ISRAEL AND HER SENSE OF INSECURITY (Exod 32).

A. Israel felt separated from God and Moses.

They asked Aaron to make a god for them (vs. 1).

B. When he made the golden calf the people declared:

"This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (vs. 4).

C. Aaron called for a feast (vss. 5-6).

1. People brought offerings.

2. They ate, drank, and played before their god.

D. All this came to the attention of the Lord and he sent Moses down.

1. "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!" Moses made the call (vs. 26).

2. The sons of Levi responded and stood on Moses' side.

E. There are choices to be made in our lives, especially as we have come to a time in history when

Africa seeks to return to her roots by reaffirming her traditions. We have to make choices day by day.

II. AHAZIAH AND HIS FEAR OF DEATH (2 Kgs 1: 2-4).

- A. Ahaziah fell sick and was afraid he would die.
- B. He sent messengers to inquire from Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron.
"Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness" (vs. 2).
- C. God saw this and sent Elijah the prophet to intercept the messengers: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?"
- D. The result was that Ahaziah died (vs. 17).

III. SAUL AND THE SPIRIT MEDIUM AT ENDOR (1 Sam 28).

- A. Saul himself had destroyed all the mediums and spiritists in Israel.
- B. Saul was threatened by the Philistines who had camped in Shunem. He inquired from the Lord but the Lord did not answer him because for a long time he had been walking in the path of disobedience.
- C. Saul finally disguised himself and went to Endor to consult a medium, by night.
We may go in disguise but the Lord sees what we do. The church may not see or even know what you do

in private; but the Lord sees and knows.

IV. SERGIUS PAULUS AND THE SORCERER (Acts 18:5-12).

- A. The magician was opposing the work of Paul in Salamis. Many people had accepted the gospel but Elymas the magician sought to turn Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, away from the faith.
- B. Paul, in the power of God, cast blindness upon Elymas.
- C. Yes, there are many here who have suffered from shavi possession and have been told to resist the gospel. The Lord can set you free.

V. WHY SEEK ANSWERS FROM THE DEAD?

- A. God condemns our going to isangoma, n'anga, or midzimu.
- B. We should consult God instead.

VI. THERE IS A WARNING AGAINST THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT WORLD IN THE LAST DAYS (1 Tim 4:1).

- A. This is a warning for Africa.
- B. We see it here today.
- C. To seek spirit mediums is to depart from God.
 - 1. We cannot serve two masters.

VII. ARE WE SEEKING HELP FROM SOURCES OTHER THAN GOD?

- A. If we want to know about a business venture or some

future event, do we go to the diviner?

- B. If lightning strikes your house, do you go to the n'anga?
- C. If some one gets sick, do you turn to the diviner-healer to see what is troubling him?
- D. God warns against trusting our sick to mediums.
- E. How can we ask God to bless our homes when at the same time we have the n'anga protecting them for us? The two have nothing in common.
- F. Can a mother put intebe (protective charm) on the child and then ask the Lord to protect it?
- G. When we bury our dead loved ones, do we not trust them into God's hands or do we dishonor God by committing them to the ancestral spirit?
- H. Do we need to put medicine on the soft spot on the baby's head to protect it from some evil?
- I. Are some dishonoring God by giving your husbands ubulawu (love medicine) to keep their love when you ought to be using the true Christian love to keep their affections?

This wilderness experience with God this week will bring us closer to Him than ever before. We will seek to understand what commitment to the Christian faith is all about. The controversy between Christ and Satan is not over yet. You and I are part of the controversy. We make choices by the way we live and practice our Christian faith.

Christianity is a religion of better, greater, and more excellent things. We need to set our minds on better things than our past traditions.

Sermon 2

Date: Wednesday (11:00 - 12:00 noon).

Title: The God Who Speaks To Us.¹

Main Text: Hebrews 1:1-4.

Aim: To show that the sovereign God is not only transcendent but also is immanent; He is not beyond the reach of His people that they should resort to the ancestors.

Introduction

There are times in our Christian experience when we are tempted to think that God is far removed from us, and that we are left alone to wrestle with life's problems. We begin to doubt if God really cares or if He really comes to our rescue in times of trouble. As a result we find recourse in our ancestral beliefs and practices. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that God never withdraws Himself from His creation.

I. GOD HAS SPOKEN TO US BY HIS SON.

- A. God has always communicated with His people, in ways they can understand (1:1).

¹Ideas for this sermon are adopted from Leon Morris, Bible Study Commentary: Hebrews (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

B. Christ is the finality of God's revelation (vs. 2).

1. God opens to us in revelation and creation.
2. The author of Hebrews paints a word picture of Christ as prophet to help us become aware of God's fellowship, communication, and presence.
3. God is not at all silent; He speaks to us.

II. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT GOD.

A. God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ who is an heir - a status of dignity and greatness.

1. In God's universal estate, Jesus occupies the dignity and greatness of an heir. None else compares with Him. He is son of an owner. So we are at home in the world of our God.
2. The destiny of God's estate is in Jesus Christ (compare with Phil 2:11).

You can look out at the world, in the midst of its evil, sickness, sin, tragedy, and death, and know that ultimately Jesus will overrule.

B. God has made Himself known by one who is like Him.

1. God has communicated in Jesus what He is really like; for he is a Christ-like God.
 - a. Christ is the radiance of God's glory (God's presence).
 - b. He is the exact representation of God; he shows us exactly what God is like.

III. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT OUR WORLD.

- A. God created our world through Christ.
 - 1. Christ is the source of our existing world. We are not to think about a number of creators.
 - 2. This is our Father's world
- B. To think of Christ as Creator is to affirm His greatness and excellence.

IV. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF ALL THINGS.

- A. Christ upholds all things (vs. 3).
 - 1. God did not take His hands off creation.
 - a. He keeps it going.
 - b. Christ is carrying this world along toward an important goal.
- B. Creation is not aimless.
 - 1. It is part of God's plan and Christ is continually bearing creation along toward the fulfillment of that plan.

V. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT SIN (vs. 3).

- A. God in Christ "provided" purification for sins.
 - 1. This is a statement of fact - that God did something about sin.
 - a. The tense shows a complete action.
 - 2. Word picture of Christ is as a priest.
- B. The term "purification" presupposes defilement.

1. Sin defiles.
 - a. It makes us unfit to be in God's presence.
 - b. Sin separates us from God.

C. Christ took away that defilement.

1. Now we can stand before God, cleansed.
2. The word "sin" appears 25 times in Hebrews.
 - a. Sin is a great barrier between God and man.
 - b. This barrier has been demolished.
3. A way to God is open.

VI. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT CHRIST IS DOING NOW.

A. Christ is seated at God's right hand (vs. 3).

1. This says something about the finished work of Christ.
2. God's right hand is a position of power and honor.

B. We are given the word picture of Christ as King.

1. Notice that verse 13 suggests that the angels are standing while Christ is seated.
2. Christ is in a position far superior to that of any angel.

VII. WE ARE TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ANGELS TO CHRIST AND US (vs. 4).

A. Christ as son of God has brought salvation to man.

1. Christ is therefore superior to angels.
 - a. Angels are "ministering spirits" (vs. 14).

B. Angels are "spirits"; they are different from us.

1. Their task is service, to God and man.

2. God has done everything possible for man to ensure security and victory.

a. Power is at our disposal because Christ is seated at the right hand of God's throne for us.

b. Salvation and security are ours because God has provided the angels to minister to us.

Sermon 3

Date: Thursday (11:00-12:00)

Title: Christ Our Pioneer.¹

Main Text: Hebrews 2:5-13.

Aim: To show that Christ as our pioneer has opened a way to God's glory for us and made us fit to tread that holy way.

Introduction

The word "pioneer" in Greek secular literature was used to describe the head of a clan, a hero, a founder of a school of thought, or the originator of a certain course of action.

Jesus as "pioneer" has opened the way to glory for God's "many sons". Three aspects of this theme are developed here.

I. OUR PIONEER AND HIS HUMANITY (2:6-9).

A. Jesus opened this exclusive way - the only route to glory.

1. He knows every step of the way from personal experience.

B. To do this He had to be "like his brethren."

¹Adopted from Raymond Brown, Christ above All: A Message from Hebrews (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 53-73.

Christ as son of man has for a time become lower than the angels.

1. So, Christ assumed our frustrated humanity.
 - a. Man is not what he was intended to be. God had intended man to be a creature of His favor (2:6); a creature of special privileges (2:7); a creature of unique dignity (2:7); and be a creature of unrivalled dominion (2:8) with all things under His feet.
 - b. This is not man as we see him today. He dispises God's favor; he abuses his privileges; he ignores his dignity; and through sin, his dominion is limited.
 - c. But man, through Christ, can be what God intended him to be.
2. Christ assumed our suffering nature.
 - a. Becoming man, Jesus entered directly into the arena of suffering.
 - b. When we find ourselves encompassed by harsh realities of human experience, Christ knows exactly how we feel.
3. Christ assumed our threatened humanity.
 - a. Christ took upon Himself a humanity exposed to the anguish of death.
 - b. Man lives daily under this threat.
 - c. Jesus tasted death (2:9) in order to be

truly like His brethren (2:17) and conquered it (2:14-15).

d. As our "forerunner" (6:20) Jesus has gone on before us and we need not fear about the future.

Jesus came into the world and showed us what the ideal man is like in God's original purpose and what he can be through Christ's death. Also, in spite of sin, man has a divinely given responsibility over creation.

II. THE PIONEER AND HIS MISSION (2:10).

A. Jesus came to share and transform our humanity.

1. Man, because of sin, is not crowned but degraded.

2. Creation is not subject to him; instead, man is dominated by its power and control.

3. God has better prospects for man (2:10).

B. It was in God's wisdom that through Christ's death fallen humanity can be brought ultimately into the presence of God.

1. All ways do not lead to God. Universalism has no place here. Christ's sacrifice is the only fitting means for the salvation of all mankind.

2. It is important to understand and respect the religious convictions of others, but there is only one way by which man can be redeemed.

3. Christ has made any other way obsolete and inadequate.

C. Man is destined for God's glory (vs. 10).

1. Christ has led the way to God's glory so we can follow him as pioneer.

2. We are called to pilgrimage need to press on.

3. We are "sons" (certainty) and we will be brought to glory (destiny). We need to have these two.

D. Jesus was made perfect through suffering (2:10).

1. He has always been perfect in a moral sense.

"Perfect" here has to do with the completion of a process, suggesting that Jesus became qualified as pioneer of man's salvation by going through the experience of human suffering.

2. His life and work could not be complete without the process of suffering. He became perfect in obedience, in His calling, in His identification with us.

Accordingly, to the Christian, suffering is the means of attaining Christlikeness.

III. THE PIONEER AND HIS ACHIEVEMENT (2:11-13).

A. Believers are being changed here and now. They are undergoing a process of being made fit for heaven (sanctification).

B. Our pioneer has prepared our way to glory and made

us fit to tread that holy way. He made us one with Him (2:11). We are of the same family.

- C. We are His sons (2:10), His brothers (2:11-12; 11:16), and His children (2:13). We belong to the household of God, forever (3:6).
- D. Believers must recognize that God has first claim over their lives because Christ owns them and also their possessions.

Sermon 4

Date: Friday (11:00-12:00)

Title: Christ Our Liberator.¹

Key Text: Hebrews 2:14-18

Aim: To show that Christ liberates from sin - man's greatest enemy.

Introduction

While man survives under the threat of sickness, death, misfortune, and the forces of evil, yet his greatest enemy is sin. There is no power against sin in human society or in the spirit world of ancestors. However, there is hope for the believer because God has provided a solution to this great predicament.

I. CHRIST IS LIBERATOR FROM SIN (2:14-18).

A. Christ's liberating mission was a necessity.

He liberates us from our most serious form of bondage.

1. Man is faced with a triple enemy: sin, death, and the devil.
2. Jesus came to deal with these three powers, in our human frame.

¹See Brown, 53-73.

- a. Sin is a hostile, destructive, and inward power that prevents us from being what God wants us to be. Christ came to offer a sacrifice for our sins (2:17).
 - b. Death results from sin and threatens man all the time (2:15).
 - c. The devil is a defeated foe; hence death is also stripped of its power. The devil is a reality in Hebrews. Jesus did not minimize the devil's power or rationalize his sinister influence. Instead he described the devil as "murderer," "liar," and "thief" (Matt 4:1-11; 13:19; 16:23).
- B. Satan's power is limited power.
1. Jesus has overcome the devil's power through His incarnation, sinlessness, and atonement.
 - a. Illustration: A chained dog has limited power and is rendered impotent unless one draws too close.
- C. Whatever the hardships, Jesus is able to help those who are tempted (2:18).
1. He removes our fears - fear of death.
 2. He shows His mercy by taking care of our past sins (2:17).
 3. He provides His faithfulness (2:17) and comes to us when we are tempted (4:16).

4. He is dependable and adequate in every experience of life.
5. He shares our sufferings (2:18) and does not detach Himself from our plight.
6. Jesus is able to help us in our moment of fierce temptation.

Sermon 5

Date: Saturday (11:00-12:00)

Title: Faith in Hard Times.¹

Key Text: Hebrews 11:23-29

Aim: To show that faith is an imperative in the believer's life. Christians can cope with hard times if they have faith.

Introduction

Moses and the believing community of Israel have something to teach us about the role of faith in hard times. In these verses (11:23-29) we note five aspects of faith that are emphasized.

- I. FAITH CONQUERS OUR FEARS (vs. 23).
 - A. Moses's parents ignored the king's decree and were not afraid of the consequences.
 - B. By faith God's people have overcome their worst fears.
 - C. When you take a stand against ancestral beliefs and practices, by faith you will conquer.

¹Brown, 214-219.

II. FAITH DETERMINES OUR OPTIONS (11:24-26).**A. In life we have to make choices.**

1. By faith Moses made choices and took his stand with God's people.

a. By faith he forsook social honors in the Egyptian palace.

b. He had access to privilege and distinction.

c. But he chose the hazards of the desert with God's people.

d. You can choose social deprivation of this kind only if you have faith.

2. Physical satisfaction was available to Moses in the palace.

a. He saw that the pursuit of pleasure is temporary (fleeting).

b. He decided to identify with God's people.

c. Following Jesus may often mean deciding against your own personal welfare.

3. Moses chose physical abuse in this world and God's approval in the next.

a. Faith made the difference.

b. Abuse suffered for Christ is of greater value eternally than secular considerations.

c. The author of Hebrews is thinking about those Christians who may have been in serious danger of abandoning their membership in

Christ's community in favor of physical security and social approval.

III. FAITH SHARPENS OUR VISION (11:27).

A. Moses refused to look at the angry face of Pharoah when he left Egypt.

1. He focused his vision toward heaven.

2. He looked into the face of God who could not be seen.

a. This shows a determined choice.

b. We should fix our gaze on the ultimate and eternal things.

3. Pharoah was angry and did not want to let Israel go.

a. Moses refused to meditate on Pharoah's anger.

b. Instead, he meditated on God's mercy.

c. As a result he received strength to endure.

IV. FAITH RECOGNIZES OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD (11:28).

A. Israel had numerical strength and patriotic leadership; but the exodus event could be achieved only by God's powerful intervention.

B. All nine attempts to convince Pharoah had failed, until the angel of death smote the first-born in each home that had no blood on the doorposts.

- C. Thus the blood of the Passover lamb makes the difference in our lives.

V. FAITH OVERCOMES OUR DIFFICULTIES (11:29).

- A. Moses' faith led the Hebrews out of Egypt, but against many odds.
 - 1. The people had to exercise faith in leaving Egypt and performing the Passover ritual.
 - 2. They exercised faith in crossing the Red Sea.
 - a. This was indeed an act of obedient faith.
 - b. They had to go forward against many odds.
- B. By faith they triumphed over their difficulties and discovered that each fearful obstacle was a further opportunity to prove God'd power.
- C. We need faith if we are to triumph over the forces of evil in this life.

Sermon 6

Date: Saturday - Closing Night (7:00-8:00)

Title: Seven Dangers to the Christian Life.

Main Text: Hebrews 2:1-4

Aim: To help Christians to watch against some of the dangers that the Epistle to the Hebrews talks about.

Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews has warnings that we need to pay attention to. The Christian life is not as smooth as some may think. There are dangers and perils along the way.

As we prepare to leave this place and go our separate ways, we need to know what dangers might come our way. We need to know what we must do to live a victorious life. The Epistle to the Hebrews will prepare us to meet life's experiences. Let us take a look at some of these dangers.

I. WE SHOULD WATCH AGAINST THE DANGER OF DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE THINGS WE HAVE HEARD (Heb 2:1-4).

A. Picture a boat on the lake.

1. Drifting at the mercy of the wind
2. Drifting away from the launching point

B. We should watch against the imperceptible drift from the word of God.

1. Peril of losing interest in spiritual things.

2. Peril of losing appetite in what is familiar.
3. Indifference to the gospel.

II. STAGNATION IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS LEADS TO DEGENERATION
(5:11-14).

- A. As every health baby must grow, so must Christians know more about Jesus Christ.
- B. Stagnating is a prelude to spiritual death.
- C. Christianity is a missionary religion; it must be shared.
 1. When you become a Christian you are a learner as well as a teacher.
 2. Knowing Jesus is our first duty and sharing our faith is our next.
 3. The biblical principle: You lose what you do not use.

III. STAGNATION MAY LEAD ONE TO THE DANGER OF APOSTASY
(6:1-6).

- A. These Christians had enjoyed many blessings:
 1. Had been enlightened.
 2. Had "tasted of the heavenly gift."
 3. Were partakers of the Holy Spirit.
 4. Had tasted the Word of God.
- B. Active hostility to Christ is not redeemable.
 1. Apostasy does not occur overnight.
 2. It usually follows a history of spiritual

stubbornness, neglect, and self-imposed
ignorance.

IV. IN ISOLATING OURSELVES FROM FELLOWSHIP WE ARE IN DANGER
OF LOSING OUR FAITH (10:24-25).

- A. Fellowship in the church family is an essential part
of one's spiritual and social life.
- B. Fall from fellowship precedes fall from faith.
- C. Union is strength.
 - 1. To consider Christ (3:1).
 - 2. To consider one another.
 - 3. To consider ourselves (Gal 6:1).
- D. We are saints in relation to one another and not in
isolation thereof.

V. IF WE CAST AWAY OUR CONFIDENCE IN LOYALTY TO CHRIST WE
ARE IN DANGER OF GROWING WEARY (10:35-39).

- A. We should not be tired of struggling.
 - 1. Endurance is a necessity.
 - 2. Faith and patience go hand in hand.
- B. In only a little while the Master will come.
 - 1. He who endures to the end will be saved
(Matt 10:22).

VI. WE MUST WATCH AGAINST THE PURSUIT OF COMFORT (12:3-8).

- A. Suffering and Christian living are inseparable.
 - 1. Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

2. Christianity is not a success religion.
3. When one becomes a Christian Satan is out to get him.

VII. WE SHOULD NOT LOOK BACK (12:1-2).

- A. Faith takes one to the throne of God, right where Jesus is.
- B. A race is won only by those who look ahead to their target.
 1. It is never won by looking back.
- C. We are not in competition with one another.
 2. All who run the race and look to Jesus will win and receive a crown of life.

APPENDIX B

Bible Study 1

Date: Wednesday (2:00 - 3:00pm).

Title: A Better Name and Better Leader.¹

Aim: To show that since Christ has a better name and since He is a better leader, He is more qualified to provide every help we need. We do not need to resort to the ancestors or their mediums.

I. CHRIST HAS A BETTER NAME (1:5-2:18).

A. Christ is superior to angels (1:5-14).

1. The name "Son" is applicable only to Christ.
2. Angels worship Christ.
3. The son and angels have different natures:
 - a. angels are winds and fiery flame.
 - b. son is God and exalted above all.
4. The son and angels have contrasting service:
 - a. son reigns at the right hand of God.
 - b. angels minister and serve for the sake of the people of God.

B. All this serves to emphasize that Christ is not negotiable.

¹These studies are adopted from W. G. Johnsson, Hebrews (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), 5-97.

1. What Christ can do for man is far greater than that which ancestral beliefs can offer.

C. When Christ became man He necessarily became lower than angels (2:5-18).

1. This was a temporary phase.

2. Humanity was a necessity to one by whom God spoke.

3. Christ's humanity was real (vss. 10-13).

a. He calls us "brothers".

b. The "perfecting" (maturing) motif shows that He had to undergo a preparation for His work.

c. Here we see a theology of suffering.

4. Christ's accomplishments (vss. 14-18).

a. He broke the power of death among Christians. They are no longer tyrannized by death.

b. Christ became qualified to become high priest ('merciful" and "faithful").

c. Christ was enabled to provide timely help vs. 18).

II. CHRIST IS A BETTER LEADER (3:1-4:13).

A. Christ is a faithful leader (3:1-6).

1. Believers are to consider Him (apostle and high priest).

a. They are to trust what Jesus has done.

b. They are to contemplate the victory which He has achieved.

c. Salvation is a free gift.

2. No matter how rough the Christian way may become, Christians are assured that their leader is faithful.

a. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (13:8).

3. As apostle, He is one sent from God.

4. Christ is contrasted with Moses (a representative of the old system).

a. "House" is the people of God.

b. Moses is leader in God's house.

c. Christ is leader over the house. He is the representative of the new exodus.

B. Christians are to learn from the experience of Israel's unfaithfulness (3:6-19).

1. Membership among God's people is not automatic.

a. It must be complimented by a life of steadfastness.

b. Mere membership in the church is not sufficient to win the final goal. Faith is required.

2. "Today": There is no more convenient a time than now. Urgency and immediate response.

3. Instead, Israel hardened its heart.

- a. Israel refused to obey (an act of rebellion).
 - b. Believers are to watch against slowly drifting away and apostatizing (vs. 12).
4. Here we have a warning against carelessness in religion rather than total rejection of God.
- a. Believers who from time to time resort to ancestral practices find their warning here.
 - b. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (2:3).
5. Israel failed to enter God's rest (the inheritance of Caanan).
- a. They had started well but did not persevere.
 - b. They became too self-confident and lacked faith.
- C. God's people are called to faithfulness (4:1-13).
1. A warning is turned into an invitation.
 2. A promise of divine rest is set before them.
 - a. The rest is present and future.
 - b. God's people are to enter an experience of rest, not to become anxious.
 - c. The fulness of rest is future; they are to persevere toward it.

Bible Study 2

Date: Thursday (2:00-3:00pm)

Title: A Better Priesthood

Aim: To help believers to know that Jesus, as their high priest, cares and offers overcoming help.

I. A BETTER PRIEST (Heb 4:14-5:10).

A. The merciful high priest (4:14-16).

1. Christianity is a confession of the great high priest.

a. Christians are to hold fast this confession.

2. Christ is a sympathetic high priest who identifies with us.

a. Reality of His tests.

b. Tested in every respect.

c. Tested as we are.

d. Tested and yet remained blameless.

3. Christ offers overcoming and forgiving help.

B. Christ's priesthood is compared and contrasted with that of Aaron (5:1-10).

1. Aaron and his priesthood

a. appointed by God

b. came from among men (representative)

c. acted on behalf of men (mediatorial)

d. to offer sacrifices (cultic)

- e. to offer sacrifices for sins (expiatory)
 - f. deals gently with our frailties
 - g. to offer sacrifices for his own sins.
2. Jesus as Son sets him apart from Aaron.
 - a. As son he leads us into the very presence of God.
 - b. In His humanity He was perfected through suffering.
 3. The better has come; they are to forget the past.

II. A BETTER PRIESTHOOD (7:1-28).

- A. Melchizedek is set forth as a type of Christ.
 1. His genealogy is not given.
 - a. Genealogy is of particular interest to Africans.
 2. Melchizedek is not the center of attraction here. His priesthood is likened to that of Christ.
- B. Melchizedek is greater than Levi (7:1-10).
 1. He existed before the Levitical order
 - a. Hence Melchizedek is superior to Levi who was in Abraham's loins. Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek and was blessed by him.
- C. A new priesthood has come (7:11-19).
 1. The old priesthood is now superseded by the new.
 2. The uniqueness of the person of Christ.

- a. His priesthood is not dependent on genealogy.
 - b. His is like that of Melchizedek which has no ending.
- D. The new priesthood is superior (7:20-28).
- 1. Instituted by divine oath; there is divine involvement which the old priesthood cannot claim (came by birth).
 - a. Thus it guarantees a better covenant.
 - 2. Does not change as result of death.
 - a. The Levitical priesthood changed - many priests.
 - 3. Centered on a sinless high priest (vss. 26-27).
 - 4. New priesthood has a perfected son as high priest (vs. 28).

Bible Study 3

Date: Friday (2:00-3:00)

Title: A Better Sacrifice

Aim: To highlight the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ in dealing with the human predicament of sin. Every religion must ultimately face up to this issue. The problem is there, but where is the answer? Man is out of tune with his environment because of sin.

I. JESUS PROVIDES A BETTER MINISTRY (8:1-6).

A. We have a better high priest (8:1).

1. He is able to help those who are tempted (2:18).
2. He is passed into the heavens (4:14).
3. He is able for all time to save (7:25).
4. We have confidence to enter the sanctuary (10:19).

B. Christian life must lay hold on a transcendent reality. It means a shift in world-view.

1. We have here, and elsewhere, a two-tiered world-view.
 - a. We belong to this world, but much more to the transcendent world.
2. The ministry of Christ prepares us for that transcendent order.

II. JESUS IS MINISTER OF A BETTER COVENANT (8:6-13).

- A. A new ministry necessitates a new covenant (8:6).
- B. The new covenant brings better promises (8:6).
 - 1. Particularly the removal of sin, the human predicament.
- C. Two covenants with two phases in the working out of God's promises.
 - 1. First, associated with the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices.
 - a. But could not decisively remove the problem of sin.
 - b. The old had limitations (9:1-10). Could not bring perfection.
 - c. The old had a place in history but was to be set aside at the appointed time (8:8-9).
 - 2. Second, associated with Christ as high priest and with his own self-sacrifice as offering.
 - a. Cleansing made to the very conscience.

III. THE BETTER BLOOD (9:11-22).

- A. Christ's blood is superior over that of animals in the old system (vss. 11-14).
 - 1. It cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- B. The relation of blood to covenant (vss. 15-22).
 - 1. The death of Christ validated the covenant.

- C. The human problem is defilement (sin).
 - 1. We are dirty right in the inside. This is our predicament. How can we be clean? We are separated from God.
 - 2. We need purification to be reconciled to God.
 - a. The blood of Christ purifies (9:22).
 - b. Libation to the spirits does not cleanse the heart.
 - 3. It is the blood of Christ that brings promises of cleansing to a reality.

IV. JESUS OFFERED A BETTER SACRIFICE (9:23-10:18).

- A. The old system had restricted access to the presence of God.
- B. Old system had no finality in dealing with sin.
- C. Christ, through His blood, had opened access to God.
 - 1. The high priest in old system entered presence of God "not without blood."
 - 2. Christ has entered the presence of God with His own blood.
 - 3. There are no favorites anymore; all can approach God.
 - 4. Christ is high priest; we have access into the executive presence of God (by faith).
 - a. It is our powerhouse.

Bible Study 4

Date: Saturday (2:00-3:00).

Title: Better Country.

Aim: To show that a call to follow Christ is a call to pilgrimage. Christians are in a journey to heaven. By faith they are to grasp the invisible world.

I. WE HAVE A BETTER COUNTRY (10:19-12:2).

A. Full confidence required (10:19-25).

1. We have confidence to enter God's presence by Christ' blood.

2. Need to draw near in assurance of faith.

a. Certainty of being accepted.

b. Assurance of acceptance is power that transforms.

c. Need to encourage one another.

B. Warning against willful sinning (10:26-31).

1. There are consequences for doing so.

2. Wilful sinning undermines Christ's sacrifice.

C. Call to faithfulness (10:32-39).

1. Remember past victories.

2. Do not throw away confidence.

a. The need to endure.

D. Examples of faith (11:1-40).

1. We can emulate the lives of those who had faith,

confidence, and endurance.

E. We need to look to Jesus (12:1-2).

1. He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

a. He is at the presence of God for us.

2. Christianity is a way of perseverance.

II. WE HAVE A BETTER CITY (12:3-12:24).

A. Be steadfast (12:3-17).

1. Suffering is inescapable.

a. It may come in form of divine discipline.

b. It shows we are God's children.

c. It brings good in us.

2. Tragedy and suffering are the greatest hindrances to faith.

B. Christian living should be a foretaste of what is to come.

1. We have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God - the heavenly Jerusalem.

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