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Focus:

Samuel Mutendi (Zimbabwe)

Paul Nkwi (Cameroon)



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The *Journal of African Christian Biography* was launched in 2016 to complement and make stories from the on-line *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (www.DACB.org) more readily accessible and immediately useful in African congregations and classrooms.

Now published quarterly, with all issues available on line, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will always include biographies already available in the database itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the *DACB* itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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Note: Photo on the cover is of Bishop Samuel Mutendi from the site “Old and New in Shona Religion,” <http://sites.bu.edu/shonareligion/>

Samuel Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church:
Interpretations of a Prophet
By Dana L. Robert

From the 1910s through 1940s, a wave of indigenous church leaders spread across southern and central Africa. As the white governments of South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) steadily tightened legal restrictions on African labor, and restricted land ownership, independent prophets such as Enoch Mgijima, Edward Lion, Engenas Lekganyane, and Johane Maranke launched evangelistic movements that recruited thousands of rural, displaced, and migrant Africans into what scholars later called “African Independent” or “African Initiated” Churches (AICs). Early AIC leaders had prior relationships with a range of missions including Presbyterian, Methodist, Dutch Reformed, and the pentecostal Apostolic Faith Mission. But they chafed under restrictive white control in both church and state. Inspired by dreams and visions, and certain of their own dignity and callings, they founded churches characterized by deep engagement with rural African cultures. By the mid twentieth century, the AICs were the largest and most vigorous evangelistic movements in southern and central Africa. Today in South Africa, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane remains the largest denomination. [1]

One of the most important of the early AIC leaders was migrant laborer and former policeman Samuel Mutendi of Rhodesia. After having joined the nascent Zionist group of Lekganyane in South Africa, around 1925 Mutendi returned to Rhodesia and started his own ministry. He led the Rhodesian Zion Christian Church until his death in 1976. Under his leadership, the church grew into one of the largest denominations in the country. [2] Mutendi was known as a healer, especially for barren women. He believed in education and self-improvement, and he founded schools wherever he went—in defiance of white regulations, and for which he was arrested multiple times. In common with other large Zionist movements, he founded a holy headquarters or “Zion,” like a residential mission station to which people came to be healed, or live nearby. As a member of the royal Rozvi clan of the Karanga (Shona), Mutendi took on the prerogatives of a traditional chief, including rainmaking through use of his holy staff, and having seventeen wives and approximately 80 children. Samuel Mutendi exercised prophetic ministry in defiance of the white Ian Smith regime during the protracted Zimbabwean liberation war of 1965-1980. He preached that Africans should not bow and scrape at the presence of whites. He sued the white government for conniving with the head tribal chief in the country to seize

Rozvi land, on which there were ancestral graves. Several of his sons were arrested for protesting the land seizure, tried in court, and sentenced to prison. [3] With the loss of his land, and despite his advanced age, Mutendi led his followers to found a new holy Zion City at Defe Dopota in the north of the country.

The ministry of Samuel Mutendi exemplifies the challenges of historical documentation of major figures, most of whose lives were spent in oral contexts among non-literate peoples. His ministry began among a shifting terrain of labor migration, increasing racially-based legal disabilities, modernization through education, and crisis over control of land. Indigenous Christian leaders met the challenges of their context by crafting multiple new religio-social configurations and hybridities. Despite secular sociological biases that fail to acknowledge churches as “social movements,” the Zionist movement of Samuel Mutendi, David Masuka, Andreas Shoko, and others, represented quiet but firm widespread resistance to narratives of white control. Religious prophets preached sermons in the vernacular, exorcised evil spirits, cured witches, and led rural healing movements that were ridiculed or ignored by mainstream missions. Most references by missionaries or government officials dismissed them as heathens to be converted, or latent troublemakers to be regulated. Thus in their early decades, these ministries were largely undocumented by modern scholars. The first major effort to document them was by Swedish Lutheran missionary bishop Bengt Sundkler, whose 1948 classic *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* put the phenomenon of AICs on the scholarly agenda. [4]

The three documents in this issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* represent different lenses on a leader much of whose ministry, therefore, remains lost in the fog of time. However, his stature as founder of a major tradition in Zimbabwe means that his legacy is ripe for appropriation, interpretation, and reinterpretation by a range of interested parties, including scholars and contemporary church leaders who draw upon his authority for their own purposes. As founding father, or “saint” of the ZCC, his burial place at Defe attracts tens of thousands of followers in annual pilgrimages. The largest branch of his succession, led by his son Nehemiah Mutendi, has constructed a huge and impressive Zion complex at Mbungo Estates outside Masvingo in Central Zimbabwe. The importance of the ZCC in Zimbabwe today is indicated by its role in the inauguration of church member Emmerson Mnangagwa as third president of Zimbabwe on November 25, 2017. Bishop Nehemiah gave the inaugural prayer, and the ZCC band and dancers performed in their church uniforms.

With the destruction of the Zimbabwean economy in the early 2000s, the resulting emigration of thousands of Zimbabwean ZCC members has

expanded a primarily rural movement abroad and into more urban areas. Thus the meaning of Samuel Mutendi's legacy is being renegotiated in a transcultural context, and litigated by interested parties in South Africa and elsewhere. For example, the mammoth ZCC of Engenas Lekganyane has sought to exert control over Zimbabwean Zionists living in South Africa, based on the spurious grounds that the original incorporation of the ZCC name in South Africa entitles it to control the Zimbabwean church. There is a lot riding on shaping the narrative of Samuel Mutendi, even as many aspects of his life simply lack full documentation in a modern scholarly sense.

From a postcolonial perspective, therefore, one can argue that all of history about Samuel Mutendi is a matter of interpretation—though critical historians will find some evidence more convincing than others. The earliest documents about Mutendi's church were for internal purposes, coming from oral tradition. Thus variation in the Mutendi narrative was a normal part of the process of church development. Only in 1965 did a major scholarly project focus on the Shona Zionists, when a young doctoral student M. L. "Inus" Daneel moved for three years into the rural homelands of central Zimbabwe. Having grown up on a Dutch Reformed mission station near Fort Victoria (now Masvingo), Daneel was fluent in Karanga, the Shona dialect of Samuel Mutendi. As a participant-observer, Daneel lived for length of time in Zion City with the Mutendi family. His close relationship with Samuel Mutendi was such that Mutendi adopted him as a son and gave him unique access on both a personal and scholarly level. Daneel's three-volume *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* remains the classic, founding study of Shona independency, with which subsequent interpreters must reckon. [5] Of the early generation of AIC scholars, including Bengt Sundkler, Harold Turner, and G. C. Oosthuizen, Daneel was the only one to have lived for years among the people he studied. He subsequently spent decades facilitating theological education by extension among them, and founding a grassroots environmental movement that in its heyday was the largest tree planting movement in southern Africa. [6] In 1991, the Ndaza Zionists consecrated him a bishop in honor of his work among them, and by virtue of his adoption he remains the "elder brother" of Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, current head of the main branch of the ZCC.

The first essay in this journal issue is thus a brief encyclopedia entry by Inus Daneel, first published in 1998 in the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson. [7] While the entry gives a few basic facts about Mutendi's life, several interpretive features should be noted. In this essay, Daneel focuses on the leadership of Samuel Mutendi in launching large evangelistic campaigns. The insistence that Mutendi himself was a "missionary,"

and the original publication of the article in a dictionary on missions, echoes the important interpretive argument put forward in Daneel's writings that AICs were not primarily reactive movements to white racism, but proactive missionary movements in their own right. The vast majority of converts to AICS were not previously members of western denominations, but were evangelized by great indigenous mission leaders. In other words, a leader like Samuel Mutendi should be interpreted on his own terms, as a great leader, and not through the lens of white-centered narratives about reaction to racism. A second interpretive point made in the brief biography is Daneel's interpretation of Mutendi as a "black icon" who "mirrored the life of Christ in an African setting." [8] This point stems from Mutendi's repeated assertions to Daneel that he was not himself a Messiah or Christ figure, but rather pointed his followers to Christ. This important theological point not only confirms the theological orthodoxy of the Zionist movement, but it contradicts Bengt Sundkler's 1948 claim that Zionist leaders were "black Messiahs." [9] The brief biographical entry thus establishes Samuel Mutendi as a mainstream church leader, missionary, and theologian.

The second article in this issue, by Dr. Vengesai Chimininge, represents second generation scholarship. Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the Open University of Zimbabwe, and also a supporter of the church, Chimininge builds upon the primary internal Mutendi church narrative from the 1950s (*Rungano*) and Daneel's writings. The article goes further, however, by deepening and extending the analysis of Samuel Mutendi's family origins, and bringing to fore the series of dreams and visions through which he established his leadership. [10] The strength of the article lies in its engagement with the spiritual grounding of Mutendi's movement. It relies also upon interviews with current church leaders and Mutendi family members. Chimininge takes at face value the supernatural origins of Mutendi's ministry as recounted in the *Rungano*, and narratives of his calling as affirmed by the doctrines and beliefs of the current church. Thus his approach to Samuel Mutendi says more about the current self-identity of the church than do Daneel's observations from the 1960s.

Chimininge's focus on the semi-autobiographical *Rungano* and on the self-representation of the current leadership is not consistent in all respects with Daneel's analysis. The use of different sources leads to different interpretive emphases. Daneel's accounts were based on listening and recording many dozens of Mutendi's sermons, and of spending months in personal discussions with him in the 1960s and 70s. As a product of the church, the *Rungano* represents the church's theological narrative and divine charter. It did not necessarily represent Bishop Mutendi's own self-presentation, though obviously Mutendi allowed it. The *Rungano* narrative contains tropes of divine encounter clearly modeled on

the life of Jesus. In it, Mutendi is visited by the Angel Gabriel who calls him into ministry. Like Jesus, he raises a young girl from the dead. [11] He is queried by black religious leaders from the Dutch Reformed Church, who challenge his authority to preach without a license, in clear parallel to Jesus' questioning by Jewish religious authorities. In the *Rungano*, the parallel between the life of Jesus and that of Mutendi lend sacred authority to his ministry. Chiminingo also mentions dates that are highly significant to the history of the movement. He notes that Mutendi preached "fire baptism" in 1921, an act that would put his pentecostal roots prior to meeting Engenas Legkanyane. [12] With angels guiding him to partner with Legkanyane, Samuel Mutendi's spiritual pedigree flows from independent divine guidance, rather than any kind of derivative authority from Engenas Legkanyane, the founder of the South African ZCC.

The third document in this issue of the *Journal* is the composite of two recent reflections written by Inus Daneel. The chief purpose of these reflections is to share more information about the legacy of Samuel Mutendi by someone who knew him well during the 1960s and 1970s, both as a peer and an "adopted son." A second purpose is to defend Mutendi from accusations against his integrity made in 2016 by a western scholar. [13] As the only outsider to spend time with Mutendi in lengthy discussions, and live with him and his wives, Daneel's memoirs are particularly valuable to the church today. They contain insights and information to which nobody else was privy, including Mutendi's many children who experienced him as a father figure rather than personal confidant. As one of the oldest living "sons" of Mutendi, Daneel's words also carry authority that is respected by the current Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, his "younger" brother. [14] This document, composed of memories of over fifty years ago by a friend and scholar, holds unique significance for future historical studies of the Zion Christian Church.

Daneel's recollections contain the strengths and weaknesses of an insider-outsider document, based on memories of years past. The obvious challenge of this kind of document is that memories can be faulty, as over time the mind shapes and rationalizes events from the past. Memoirs also can mix up chronologies and so should be cross-checked with documentation from the past era, such as newspaper accounts and other interviews. The main focus of the memoir is Daneel's own relationship with the Mutendi family, something that was hidden in the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s, but is now being recalled before it is too late. Seen through the lens of a loving personal relationship with Samuel Mutendi, Daneel's memoir says as much about himself as it does about Mutendi.

An example of original material in this memoir is information on the home life of Mutendi and his wives in Zion City. A second example of unique material references the trial of the Mutendi family for resisting the seizure of Rozvi land. Daneel vividly remembers the strains of living as a white man who sided with the black population during the fifteen-year civil war. Thus the narrative is concerned with personal experiences of crossing racial divides, and solidarity in the face of a full-blown racial war. The hospitality of Samuel Mutendi and his wives extended to sharing family meals and down time with his white son. Public loyalty to each other went both ways. Daneel recalls how throughout the trial, he sat in the docket with the Mutendi sons, as an act of solidarity with his adopted family. [15] Then when the Mutendis were sentenced, Daneel used his own funds to bail out the entire family so that none of them had to serve prison time. They walked out of court together, a witness to interracial solidarity.

Each of the documents in this issue of the *JACB* focus on the biography of Samuel Mutendi. Their use of different sources and purposes provides varied readings of the life of a major Shona church leader. Together they portray him as a great prophet with regard to mission work, healing ministry, church planting, and public leadership during the age of apartheid in Rhodesia. Cumulatively, they demonstrate why the task of African Christian biography is both challenging and necessary for the documentation of African Christianity. None of the articles will be the last word on the historical analysis of Samuel Mutendi. But without them, future historians will not be able to understand the fullness of his life and legacy.

Endnotes:

1. The *World Christian Database* estimates five million members as of 2015, Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2018).
<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org.ezproxy.bu.edu/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=183&PageSize=250&cntxt=1>.
2. The *World Christian Database* estimates that as of 2015, the Zimbabwean ZCC had 900,000 members, Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Database* (accessed March 2018).
<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org.ezproxy.bu.edu/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=183&PageSize=250&cntxt=1>.
3. Inus Daneel, interview by author, March 7, 2018, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
4. Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1948).
5. Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, vol. 1: Background and Rise of the Major Movements* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, vol. 2: Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques* (The Hague, 1974), Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona*

Independent Churches, vol. 3: Church Leadership and Fission Dynamics (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1988). For an online multimedia archive see Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Shona Religion*, <http://sites.bu.edu/shonareligion/>

6. See Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers, vol. 1: Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care* (Pretoria, Unisa: 1998), Daneel, *African Earthkeepers, vol. 2: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Pretoria, Unisa, 1999).

7. Marthinus L. Daneel, "Samuel Mutendi," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

8. Daneel, "Samuel Mutendi," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 483.

9. Between Sundkler's book *Bantu Prophets*, and his second book *Zulu Zion*, he had conversations with people to correct aspects of the first book. One of these issues was whether "black messianism" was an issue among Zionists. Daneel and Sundkler discussed this issue in person, and Daneel insisted to Bishop Sundkler that AIC leaders do not put themselves in the place of Jesus Christ when they act as traditional messengers, pleading and praying for their followers before Christ. In African traditional societies, the go-between is not the chief himself, and his power is derived from that of the chief. Daneel, interview by author, March 7, 2018.

10. See also Vengesai Chimininge. "A Phenomenological Quest of Understanding the Sacrality of the Defe Dopota Shrine in the Zion Christian Church of Samuel Mutendi" (master's thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2005) and Vengesai Chimininge, "An Analysis of Myths and Rituals Associated with the Origins and Development of Zion Christian Church of Samuel Mutendi in Zimbabwe" (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2012).

11. In his time with Mutendi in the 1960s, Daneel knew the *Rungano* and was aware of its claims that Mutendi had raised a girl from the dead. He did not press the issue with him. But in all the sermons he recorded, and the discussions he had with Mutendi, he never heard him claim the power of raising from the dead for himself. Instead, Samuel Mutendi repeatedly told his followers that he himself was not Jesus Christ. Like a traditional messenger, he would vouch for his followers before God. But only Jesus had the power to get them into heaven. Daneel, interview by author, March 7, 2018.

12. Barry Morton argues that archival evidence of church records proves that Mutendi was a leader in the Zion Apostolic Church prior to joining Legkanyane at a date later than that put forth in the *Rugano*. While Morton's analysis of church records is helpful and suggestive, his larger conclusion that Samuel Mutendi was a "liar" both ignores the bishop's legacy of integrity and resistance, and overanalyzes the meaning of the *Rugano* as a technical "autobiography" rather than a communally-generated, church resource based on oral traditions. Barry Morton, "Samuel Mutendi's Biography Cannot Be True" (unpublished manuscript, 2016),

https://www.academia.edu/26700853/Samuel_Mutendis_Biography_Cannot_Be_True?auto=download, accessed March 9, 2018.

13. Morton, "Samuel Mutendi's Autobiography Cannot Be True." Morton's use of archival documents contradicts the *Rungano* at several key points.

14. Bishop Nehemiah named the church library and archives at Mbungo Estates after Daneel.

15. Daneel, interview by author, March 7, 2018.

Mutendi, Samuel (A)
1890-1976
Zion Christian Church
Zimbabwe

Samuel Mutendi was the founder of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). A muRozvi-Shona born in the Bikita district of Masvingo Province, he was raised and educated in the Dutch Reformed Church. Even as a young man, Mutendi had dreams and visions reflecting his church leadership ambitions. As a labor migrant in Pretoria, he first obtained membership in the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission, then in 1925 broke away with Enginase Lekganyane and a few other key figures to form the ZCC. Ordained as a ZCC minister, Mutendi founded the Rhodesian branch of the new church, with its headquarters near Nyika Halt in Bikita. Although he retained ideological and historical links with what was to become the largest Christian Church in South Africa, Lekganyane's ZCC, currently based in Pietersburg, he developed the Zimbabwean ZCC into a fully autonomous church, with an estimated 500,000 members in 1996. Zimbabwean-affiliated ZCC congregations also exist in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique.

As bishop of the ZCC, and unlike his Apostolic counterpart, John Maranke, Mutendi focused on building an impressive Zion City, or Moriah, with schools, church, a faith-healing "hospital," and other symbols of the presence of Christ, the Lamb of Mt. Zion (Rev. 14:1). In Zion City, Mutendi's leadership resembled both that of a Rozvi monarch and that of a messianic "man of God," as he is called by his followers. As a black icon, he mirrored the life of Christ in an African setting. His resistance to oppressive colonial rule, which resulted in several detentions, added to his popularity and stature among African chiefs and commoners alike.

In ZCC theology preoccupation with human well-being through exorcistic healing and agro-economic development contributed toward a strong emphasis on this-worldly salvation. Zionist achievement and progress therefore became essential components of the Good News propagated by the ZCC. Nevertheless, Mutendi's church never forfeited its essentially missionary character. The annual paschal celebrations at Zion City serve as a springboard for massive missionary campaigns throughout Zimbabwe and beyond its borders—campaigns of witness, outreach, celebration, and healing that activate entire church communities.

After Mutendi's death, a schism occurred, each faction operating under the leadership of one of his sons, Nehemiah and Ruben. The relationship between the two factions is marked by meaningful interaction rather than alienation.

Marthinus L. Daneel

Bibliography:

Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, vol. 1, *Background and Rise of the Major Movements* (1971).

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Mutendi, Samuel (B) **1890-1976** **Zion Christian Church** **Zimbabwe**

According to section nine of the booklet entitled "Rungano rweZion Christian Church in Rhodesia," Samuel Mutendi was born to Makuwa, son of Mudengezerwa who was the son of Chirume Mushavi who lived at Great Zimbabwe. Chirume Mushavi was born to Dlembeu, the first son of Chief Chirisamhuru of Matopos. This means that Samuel Mutendi was of the "*Moyo wavaRozvi*" or heart totem. His father Makuwa was one of King Chikore's vice regents and a traditionalist who later was converted to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). This history shows that Mutendi was a member of the Rozvi royal family and grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Samuel Mutendi was born in Zaka at Mount Havunga under the chieftainship of Chipinda, the year Chief Chikore of Zaka District, in Masvingo Province, was raided by the Ndebele people. After the battle, Makuwa set up his homestead that shared borders with three chiefs: Chipinda, Muroyi, and Marozva. It was at this homestead that Samuel Mutendi was born. The current Zion Christian Church (ZCC) bishop, Nehemiah Mutendi, explicitly said that his father was born in July 1890 and that:

My father was born a premature baby. His grandmother who was the midwife wanted to bury him but they discovered that he was blinking. He was then taken to the goat's pen to stay there since the place was warm to the extent that it could sustain the life of a premature baby. A month later he was taken from the goats' pen back home where he was subsequently named *Tongotendaziso*.

The name Tongotendaziso is a combination of two Karanga words—*tenda* meaning “thanks” and *ziso* meaning “eye.” Therefore *tongotendaziso* literally means “Thanks-to-the-eye” or “Believe-the-eye.” The name was derived from the fact that he was saved by his blinking eyes. Later on, people shortened his name to Tendeziso. Sydney Mutendi, the son of Samuel Mutendi, who is currently headman under Chief Sahi in Gokwe South District, further explained: “It was our grandmother who gave him the name Mutendi though she had no idea that one day he would grow up to be a ‘believer.’ So when he was baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church he was named Samuel Mutendi Makuwa.” Thus, the current name Samuel Mutendi is the Christian name for Tendeziso Makuwa.

When he grew up, Mutendi was taken by his relatives of the Gumunyu family to Bikita District. He took the national identity card in 1908. At that time, Chief Tochipi was reigning under the Mkanganwi dynasty. According to ZCC tradition, Samuel Mutendi had a belligerent character and always wanted to fight with others while herding cattle. Even at beer parties, he would wreak havoc. In Bikita, he survived as a master farmer and attended the Dutch Reformed Church regularly. During his lifetime, Mutendi married seventeen wives and had more than seventy children.

In 1913, Samuel Mutendi joined the British South Africa Police (BSAP) and served as a police officer for nine years. It was during his tenure as a police officer that he received his first calling in June 1913 in Hartley (Chegutu) when he was on patrol. He saw a vision of the angel Gabriel who said to him, “Behold I tell you that you will set up a church in your tribal land.” This vision terrified him but encouraged him to devote himself to prayer. In 1919, Samuel Mutendi dreamed he was talking to God and was reminded of the 1913 vision. Again, he was terrified and he continued to devote himself to prayer and fasting.

At times, as a policeman, he would go with the prisoners to hear the word of God in the Dutch Reformed Church. Meanwhile, the dream angel revealed himself several times. At last, he dreamed that he was at a high place accompanied by many children of different races carrying bundles of grass on their heads. These children put their bundles of grass around Mutendi. He narrated his dream to one of his fellow police officers called Rarimoni Murevi. Like Joseph in the Old Testament, Rarimoni interpreted Mutendi's dream

saying. “Your dream signifies that you will become a leader of a large church congregation comprised of different nationalities.”

Rarimoni’s interpretation confirmed Mutendi’s vision-dream of 1913. According to Rev. Mutema, Samuel Mutendi’s vision-dream could be likened to that of Joseph in Genesis 37:5. According to this passage, Joseph shared his dreams with his brothers but they were not happy with what they revealed. Like Joseph, Mutendi’s relatives were not happy with the things he was promised in his dreams.

In 1921, Samuel Mutendi resigned from the British South Africa Police in Chegutu and went back home. In Bikita, he was employed at the DRC Gumunyu School as a teaching assistant. At this school, he started preaching about fire baptism. He also urged people to sing choruses, dance, and pray on their own rather than follow written prayers in the DRC hymnals. He supported his teachings with Biblical passages such as Psalm 150. At that time, mass prayer, the beating of drums and other musical instruments, and dancing were not allowed in the Dutch Reformed Church. For this reason, Mutendi faced a lot of opposition from DRC ministers.

As a result, Mutendi decided to travel to South Africa in search of a job. Before traveling, he preached from Genesis 28:11 about the journey of Jacob to Laban’s family. That day, Mutendi and his friends prayed fervently for God to guide them to South Africa. On his journey to South Africa, Mutendi was accompanied by Charles Mabvure, Aaron Chinembiri, Paul Taka, and Muyaramwi. They went on foot and covered around 700 kilometres from Bikita to Polokwane in South Africa.

In South Africa, Mutendi and his colleagues found jobs at Bombara Farm in the Transvaal region. One day after work, Mutendi and his colleagues debated which church was ideal for them to join. The debate continued but they couldn’t reach an agreement. That night, Mutendi dreamed about two angels whom he had seen in a dream while he was a police officer at Hartley in 1913. One of the angels urged him to wake up and pray. While he was praying, the angel spoke to him, saying “The ideal church for you is the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission.” He woke up and reported his dream to his colleagues and they were very happy. The next day they decided to join the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission where he also met Engenas Legkanyane. It was at this point in time that Mutendi was joined by Andreas Shoko.

Mutendi and his colleagues spent most of their time fasting, praying and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Mutendi told his friends that when he planned to visit South Africa, he never thought that one day he would become a founder and the bishop of a big African church. He thought he would just go

there to work and buy clothes and cattle. Yet God was preparing him to be a minister of the Word to his own people. In South Africa, some of his fellow countrymen were laughing at him and he would laugh at them in turn. They were telling him, “You have forgotten your main aim of coming here. We are here to make money and we are going to pray in our churches at home.”

In 1922, still in South Africa, Mutendi was baptized in the church shown to him by the angel, the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission. That was the church brought from America to Basutoland by Edward, and then to Transvaal by Engenas Legkanyane. Mutendi chose Andreas Shoko to be his assistant because Andreas was very wise, gifted in music, and diligent in studying the Bible.

While Mutendi was in South Africa, a certain man called Thomas dreamed he was sent by God to tell him to preach the word of God from Luke 3:1 upon his arrival in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Following Thomas’s dream, Mutendi decided to return to Zimbabwe with the Bible only, while others brought blankets, clothes and money to buy cattle at home. Again people laughed at him while he laughed back at them. He came to Zimbabwe to do what he was called for. At first, he was afraid as he did not know where to start because no black man had been preaching the gospel in Zimbabwe at that time.

In Zimbabwe, Samuel Mutendi began to preach the gospel to his former colleagues at Gumunyu School and some people repented and were saved. His preaching was quite different from that of the Dutch Reformed missionaries since he was able to contextualize the biblical message to an African worldview. As a result, he managed to establish various congregations in Masvingo province and he baptized people by immersion.

From Gumunyu, Mutendi and his friends moved on to Nyika village in Bikita District. While he was there, a certain man reported to them that a girl called Miriam Rukuni had died. Miriam was a member of their church. The man who came to invite Mutendi and his team wanted him to come and bury her. A coffin had already been bought. Upon their arrival, Mutendi’s companion called Petros Mamvura stood up and prophesied, “Do not bury her but pray for her because she will rise up. This will demonstrate the power of God whom Mutendi and his followers are worshipping.” Immediately after these prophetic words, Samuel Mutendi announced to the girl’s parents that her daughter was not dead and therefore should not be buried.

The large crowds of mourners were angered by Mutendi’s words because they thought that he was arrogant. They wondered, “How can she be raised? She is already dead.” These people took their spears, knobkerries, bows, and arrows and said to Mutendi, “If you fail to raise the girl we are going to kill you since you are wasting our time.” Despite these threats, Mutendi went into

the house where the corpse was laid and prayed. Meanwhile, crowds of disgruntled people waited for him outside. All the members of the church joined Mutendi in prayer. All they wanted was for God to show them signs and wonders. Fortunately, God worked a great miracle and the girl rose from the dead. Mutendi handed over the girl to her parents. Consequently, many people joined Mutendi's church and praised the Lord Almighty.

However, the majority of people in and outside the DRC wondered about the source of Mutendi's power. As a result, the Dutch Reformed Church ministers and laypeople convened a meeting at Mushana Mission in order to investigate Samuel Mutendi's manner of preaching, where he had gotten the authority to preach, and how he was able to heal the sick. They agreed to send a spy to find out the source of Mutendi's authority and power. They sent Rev. Hurandini to try to instill fear in him. Rev. Hurandini attempted to go with a car but the car broke down along the way. He made a second attempt with a bicycle but the bicycle also broke down. Therefore, Rev. Hurandini could not meet Samuel Mutendi as planned.

Instead, Rev. Muzvare and Johannes Muchengeti decided to go and talk to Samuel Mutendi in a kind manner. They found Mutendi doing work at his home. They asked him whether the reports they had received about him of having a church, speaking in tongues, and baptizing people in the river were true. Samuel Mutendi looked at them with a quizzical eye. They continued to ask him where he had received authority and power to do those things and whether he had a license and a certificate to preach the Gospel. Mutendi responded, "How come a Reverend has deserted his ministry and become a police officer?" The Reverend said to Samuel Mutendi, "Are you possessed with an evil spirit? Why do you question me like that?" Mutendi again answered them, "How can I be afraid today? All along people were talking about me saying I am possessed by evil spirits. Do you forget that even people like Jesus, the early disciples and church fathers were accused of being possessed by evil spirits? I do not have to trouble my heart." Rev. Muzvare said to Samuel Mutendi, "Why do you want to equate yourself with the believers of old?" They nodded their heads and returned to their mission.

From that day on, Mutendi and his followers were persecuted everyday by the Dutch Reformed Church, Roman Catholic Church members, and African traditional leaders. They made false accusations because they were jealous that his church was growing so fast. One day, the DRC minister in Bikita District reported Mutendi to the police, saying that he was organizing bands of terrorists against the government. As a result, Mutendi and his colleagues were arrested.

Mutendi and his colleagues were summoned to the Magistrate's Court in Fort Victoria (now Masvingo). Mutendi took some of his elders who were prophets and went to Masvingo. When they entered the courtroom for the trial, those who had accompanied him suddenly realized that the case was very serious and they were afraid. When they were asked to confirm if they normally associated with Mutendi, they all denied knowing him.

A white man called Charles who was not a Christian confessed that he knew Mutendi. He testified, "Do not blame this man because it is his occupation because I know him." This explanation saved him. There was much fear among both whites and blacks who witnessed what happened that day. Mutendi and his colleagues were released and returned home. On their way, they discussed the way forward. They agreed that they needed to register their church in Salisbury (now Harare) since this was the only place where certificates for preaching were given. However, at Salisbury they were told not to establish a church.

In February 1940, they finally received permission to register their church. Consequently, the word of God began to spread without the worshippers having to hide or fear. When people realized that Mutendi was now operating with a license, they flocked to the church in order to have their evil spirits chased away. Even the majority of chiefs who were against Mutendi's movement were converted in the ZCC and became very close to Mutendi. They now recognized Mutendi as the great king of their land. Mutendi finally built his church headquarters, Zion City Morijah, in Bikita District, in Masvingo province.

In April 1951, Chief Gangazha gave Mutendi a plot of land on which he built a church that opened its doors to worshippers at Easter of 1951. The district commissioner Mr. Drum was invited. Many people gathered to witness the opening of the church by Chief Gopo of the Rozvi tribe who led the congregation around the church singing the gospel song 118 from the DRC hymn book. There was a lot of jubilation as people sang and played musical instruments to praise the Lord. Part of the congregation milled around the church but there was not enough room for everyone inside the church due to the large numbers in attendance. Chief Gopo delivered an emotional sermon congratulating Mutendi for the courage he had demonstrated up to that day. He thanked Mutendi's followers for the unity of purpose and the resilience they had shown in the past years.

Despite these achievements, the antagonistic relationship between Samuel Mutendi and the Dutch Reformed Church, the Catholic Church, and the colonial administrators continued as his followers increased in Masvingo and Manicaland provinces. Mutendi therefore decided to extend his territory to Midlands province. In the 1960s, he established another great center of worship

in Gokwe in the area of Chief Sahai. He managed to establish a mission station at Defe Dopota. But by then, Mutendi was old and his days were numbered.

According to Daneel (1989), during Mutendi's countrywide round of paschal celebrations in April 1976, the frail old bishop must have had foreknowledge of his coming death. He told his followers that he would not be seeing them again and that he was being called to heaven to receive the crown that was due to him.

Mutendi, the most remarkable independent church leader in Zimbabwe, who led the ZCC for some fifty years died on July 20, 1976 at a newly established Jerusalem at Defe in Gokwe South District. Since 1977, every July 20, thousands of Zionist pilgrims from across the world converge at Defe Dopota shrine to celebrate the life of Samuel Mutendi.

Vengesai Chimininge

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Living Memories:
The Legacy of My Father and Friend Samuel Mutendi [1]
By Marthinus Louis Daneel

Early in 1965, I started extensive field research on the African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe. I first had to drive into Zion City, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) headquarters of Bishop Samuel Mutendi, situated at Mutarara in the Bikita district. I arrived unannounced and completely unknown to the bishop. Yet he was not the least bit disturbed by my unexpected arrival.

He was neatly clad and dignified, staff in hand, sitting to the side of his walled, domestic sanctuary where his large family of seventeen wives and seventy-something offspring lived. My first impression of him was that of a soft-spoken patriarch, good at listening sympathetically to his subjects, yet quick-witted and capable of adding humor to his handling of serious church matters and spiritual teachings. There was no question about his discipline and authority, judging by the honor and respect shown him by subordinate ZCC office-bearers in his presence. Despite his quiet demeanor, he struck me as a Rozvi *Mambo* (king) of great influence and wisdom.

Upon hearing my request to live for some months at Mutarara and study the ZCC, the bishop did not hesitate to grant it. We looked at each other with mutual candor and approval. This instinctive trust and respect marked our relationship from the first moment. The relationship proved to be decisive for the insights I gained on the ZCC, and for a cherished bond of friendship that lasted until his days on this earth were full.

Soon after settling at Zion City in 1965, I was invited by Bishop Mutendi to join his family as an “adopted” son. This was an unexpected but welcome opportunity for me that I duly accepted. Because I had grown up in a somewhat Calvinist Dutch Reformed context and was raised by dedicated missionary parents at Morgenster mission station—the main center of the church Mutendi originally belonged to—it was a bit of a jolt to be “inducted” into an African family belonging to a veritable church “patriarch.”

My adoption into the Mutendi family also had a decidedly public side attached to it. I shall not forget the Saturday morning when I parked my vehicle in front of Standard Bank in Masvingo town (then still called Fort Victoria). Unexpectedly the ZCC bus, packed full with members of my African family, came to a halt some fifty yards up the street. As the doors flew open, all the neatly uniformed Zionist mothers, together with their children, moved jubilantly down the street to greet me, the latest and slightly bewildered addition to the household.

They were singing and dancing, swaying and ululating. In a festive manner, they were “telling” the white-run town that they had adopted a *murungu* into their fold. Their message was quite clear: even in the face of the threatening war of attrition, Zion was prepared, publicly, to break down the barriers of racial prejudice and isolation. As the significance of this town event dawned on me, my arms and legs found the rhythm of dancing feet on the pavement.

I was struck by the bishop’s close involvement at home and in public with all his wives and children. He genuinely cared for them, patiently listened to their requests, and shared their concerns about the children. When there were conflicts between his co-wives he addressed the issues at stake, without hesitation. Because he believed disciplined behavior was an important hallmark of a Christian family, he insisted on regular Bible-study and prayer meetings for all his wives together.

Learning about ZCC Women

I learned many things from three of the bishop’s prominent wives. Mai Tsungi taught me how a polygamous household in an extended Zionist family was arranged. Mai Joleka, the church’s lead dancer, gave advice on those tricky Zionist dance steps I never fully mastered, and Mai Solomon, the dedicated leader of the *Ruwadzano* (the ZCC Women’s Association) interpreted for me the testimony sermons of women on the healing experiences and the role of the “man of God” in their lives.

Mother Solomon invited me to attend some of their *Ruwadzano* meetings in the surrounding villages. The women’s sermons impressed me because of their evangelical content. Always aware of their own mandate and responsibility as messengers of the biblical good news, they made strong appeals for conversion, baptism, and spiritual growth. During witness sermons, they often mentioned the faith-healing service of the “man of God” at Moriah. Yet, their narratives were down-to-earth accounts of Bishop Mutendi and the teams of prophetic healers living at the ZCC “*hospitara*” (hospital) who laid prayerful hands on their heads and gave them holy water to drink for healing purposes or to bring the birth of children.

They were not just propagating a kind of guaranteed success story. In some public testimonies, barren women openly spoke about their anguish at God not granting them children despite the intercession of their church leader. Invariably, they added that God enabled them to overcome their disappointment about barrenness by accepting additional ministries in Zion such as attending to the sick and suffering in needy families, or acting as teachers and evangelistic

preachers in the church's outreach programs. Other women who had suffered from their husbands' aggression, including physical assaults, witnessed about Bishop Mutendi's steady influence that brought stability, peace, and mutual respect back into their spousal relations.

Sacrament and Outreach of the Church

The rapid and sustained growth of the ZCC in Rhodesia (and subsequently in Zimbabwe), was not merely the result of Pentecostal-type faith-healing activities or miracles. For Bishop Mutendi, the growth of the church was dependent on the mystical link between Christ's body and the body of living believers in the sacrament of Holy Communion. In practice, this meant that the annual three to four major *Paseka* (Paschal) events that drew hundreds of thousands of ZCC members to Zion City were preparations for the extensive "missionary campaigns" countrywide and beyond that followed the Eucharistic event.

By developing the "sacrament of union" between Christ and His followers as a regular springboard for massive outreach campaigns, the bishop mobilized virtually his entire church as a missionary movement. The bishop, of course, did not appreciate the use, and in some respects misuse, of the term "mission" by foreigners. He therefore introduced his own favorite terms, e.g. *kufamba*: literally "to walk on patrol" (a reminder of his service earlier in life, as a policeman); *kufamba rwendo*: "to go campaigning"; *kundomutsa vatezvo*: "to go and uplift or inspire the church members."

To prepare the Eucharist, the bishop often preached on Christ's classic mission command in Matthew 28:19 ff. He emphasized the centrality of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church and the church's expansion in the world as the manifestation of God's emergent kingdom. Mutendi never tried to portray himself as an African Messiah or the Savior figure of his people. On the contrary, he warned his followers against such beliefs. As we were in the midst of the *Chimurenga* liberation struggle he did, however, assure his followers that the struggle itself was a sign of God's emergent justice in Africa. He urged his followers who were out campaigning, converting, and baptizing people, not to fear and sit down as cowards when they saw white people approaching, but to retain their composure with dignity and courage, whatever the nature of the interracial encounters.

The campaigning teams were carefully composed of senior church officers that included a minister, senior evangelists, preachers, *Ruwadzano* women, and several youth members who were being trained to do ZCC campaigning. A full campaign usually lasted two to four weeks and members

traveled by bus, bicycle or on foot, depending on the distance. This model of outreach showed that my African father had created an inculturated church that required all its members to take responsibility for its mission and growth.

A Man of all Seasons

Bishop Mutendi was particularly proud of his descent from the royal Rozvi clan. He traced his lineage all the way back to the famous Rozvi King (*Mambo*) Dlembewu Dombo, who is said to have founded a stable Shona dynasty; his successive rulers, such as Chirisamuru, the protector, Rupandamananga, and Mutinhima; and then a number of Rozvi chiefs; Ngwerengwezhe, Gumunyu and Zihumbga Jiri, in whose chiefdom in Bikita the bishop's Zion City was situated.

At a time when all Africans suffered from some form of colonial oppression, Bishop Mutendi addressed their need for liberation by building a holy city that was relatively free from white colonial intervention, under the authority of the Christian God. Mutendi's wide ranging influence was reminiscent of the far-flung rule of the dynastic Rozvi kings in the pre-colonial past. Unlike the fierce Ndebele invaders, the Rozvi *Mambos* were remembered and respected as Shona rulers.

As the "man of God" at Zion City gained prominence as a veritable Rozvi "king" in the midst of a colonially oppressed people, his followers formed great expectations for a new liberation. At the onset of the *Chimurenga* struggle in 1965, Shona chiefs, including many Rozvi chiefs and their elders in desperate need of socio-political change converged on Mutendi's church. Bishop Mutendi also maintained close contact with chiefs who were longstanding members of his church. They came to Zion City to consult and pray with their leader about the looming war. He also sent out prophets and prophetesses to outlying chiefdoms to advise affiliated chiefs or ward-headmen on political matters.

A Passion for Education

During the *Chimurenga* years, Mutendi became known as a courageous leader who persistently resisted the colonial administration. He also negotiated with colonial officials and confronted them on issues concerning the growth of the ZCC. Despite his tranquil demeanor, he was utterly fearless and relentless when he introduced church projects that were beneficial for his people. He fought for the ZCC to have autonomous administration of their schools so they could control the religious instruction and choose their own schoolteachers, just like the foreign mission churches in Rhodesia.

Mutendi's passion for the educational progress of his people caused him to follow the example of the Dutch Reformed Church, the educational powerhouse in the region that ran 600 rural schools among the Shona. His first attempts, however, did not meet government standards when it came to school buildings, teacher qualifications, or prescribed curricula. As a result, government disapproval led to repeated clashes and imprisonment for Mutendi due to his stubborn refusal to withdraw from educational engagement. Later however, he secured permission for the ZCC schools by allowing the Dutch Reformed Church to be in charge of their oversight.

A New Understanding of AIC Leadership

My breakfast meetings with Bishop Mutendi helped me to understand important issues related to the origins and growth of the ZCC. In particular, I needed to understand the question of AIC leaders as Black Messiahs. Bengt Sundkler, in his ground-breaking study on the AICs entitled *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, had singled out church leaders such as Isaiah Shembe and Engenas Lekganyane (founder of the ZCC in South Africa), as providers of salvation to their followers at the gates of heaven.[2] This interpretation led to radical criticism, in AIC literature, of so-called African Messianic leadership because it appeared to distort the uniqueness of Christ's biblical role as Savior.

Bishop Mutendi explained to me that, as a ZCC leader, he served in a heavenly "gate-keeping" function in the afterlife. But this meant that he would only act as a kind of *munyai*—that is, a messenger or go-between—who introduced his deceased ZCC members to God at the heavenly portals. He emphasized that this role in no way threatened the uniqueness of Christ as Savior. The judgment of individuals and their eternal salvation or damnation, he said, was entirely in the hands of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. The "man of God" consistently warned his followers not to equate him with the biblical Christ figure.

I communicated these insights to Sundkler. As a result, he admitted that his original interpretation of the so-called Bantu Messiahs was too radical to be generalized to the rich diversity of AICs. He indicated in his follow-up book, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists*, that the Bantu Messiahs were not replacing the Biblical Christ or attempting to lead their followers back to pagan practices. Instead, they were *iconic leaders* who genuinely tried to mirror the life and salvation of the Biblical Christ to their followers.

Sundkler's changed views and my own publications on the Shona contributed to a noticeable swing towards a much more positive evaluation of the

AICs in subsequent literature and in ecumenical interaction between the churches of Southern Africa.

A Time of Political Unrest

Towards the end of my stay at Zion City in 1965, the storm clouds of war and political unrest were gathering, putting the future of the entire settlement in jeopardy. The District Commissioner of Bikita was planning to change the boundary line between the Rozvi and Duma chiefdoms, a move that would place the entire ZCC settlement under the jurisdiction of the Duma instead of the Rozvi chief. The consensus was that the colonial government had deliberately planned to rein in Mutendi's initiatives or else to push him out of Masvingo Province.

To protest this action, Mutendi's sons and fellow Zionist villagers staged a peaceful public demonstration. Subsequently, the demonstrators were summoned to appear in the Bikita district court for a public hearing. All the leaders of the demonstration, including some of Mutendi's sons, received brief prison sentences. Fortunately, I managed to bail out the entire group immediately after the trial.

Mutendi, however, in a final act of defiance, publicly tried to save his "city" by challenging the ruling of the colonial authorities on the boundary issue in court. Unfortunately, he suffered a crushing defeat and lost the treasured City of Zion, including the recently completed modern school. The bishop and his people headed some 500 miles north, to the northernmost region of Gokwe district, to settle there and build a new life. Mutendi, now in his mid-seventies, did not waste time grieving over his loss but led the exodus to the north like Moses of old. They soon constructed a second Zion City, surrounded by newly allotted Zionist farms where fertile soils, near the Chirisa Game Reserve, allowed the settlers to grow bumper crops of cotton in the new Rozvi chiefdom and sub-chiefdoms adjacent to Chiefs Chireya's and Sahi's territories.

On the issue of education, the situation in Gokwe was quite different from Bikita. District Commissioner Roy Wyatt proved to be supportive of new educational and farming schemes that could benefit the local African population. He therefore encouraged Bishop Mutendi, whom he trusted, to build new schools and to introduce anti-soil-erosion farming methods in spite of the escalating *Chimurenga* war effort.

In 1972, I returned from Holland to lay the groundwork for an ecumenical movement of AICs in Zimbabwe. The Zionist "homecoming" in Gokwe had special meaning for me because I had realized the profound impact

the three years of living among the AICs and my “adoption” into Mutendi’s family had had on my life. After graduation, I had refused the offer of an endowed chair as professor at the Free University of Amsterdam because I knew that I had to be in Africa in full-time service to the AIC’s.

In the 1970s, I was building *Fambidzano* (Union of African Churches), overseeing its theological education program for AICs, and negotiating associate membership for the new movement in the Rhodesia Christian Conference, the precursor of the Zimbabwean National Council of the World Council of Churches. In that position, I was able to help the District Commissioner in Gokwe to resolve local game problems but also to visit my Zionist family relatively often.

At that time in Zimbabwe, there was an escalation of the *Chimurenga* struggle, especially in the country’s border areas. Gokwe was eventually declared a war-zone. The Rhodesia Light Infantry (R.L.I.), Rhodesia African Rifles (R.A.R.), and the South African Police (S.A.P.), all patrolled the region and engaged the “boys of the bush” (*vakomana hwesango*), as the freedom fighters were called. In Zion City, secrecy about feeding the bush-fighters was of the essence. Nevertheless, my father-friend during private discussions filled me in on the responsibilities his ZCC prophets and healers shared in tending to the wounded freedom fighters, as church members moved them around to safe places, such as caves and dense thickets, in order to prevent their detection by the Rhodesian forces.

In all these activities, the “man of God” emerged as a freedom fighter in his own right in three particular areas. He presented his people with religious freedom, that is, the opportunity to join an African controlled church, free from white missionary tutelage, from European culture, theology, and Bible interpretation. He provided educational freedom in the form of opportunities at Zionist schools where Zionist teachings could replace the Reformed, Catholic or other catechisms taught in mission schools. And finally, the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute was a step towards African political freedom and wider support of the *Chimurenga* struggle. This became evident when the ZCC offered prophetic healing services for wounded guerilla fighters once the Defe ZCC headquarters in northern Gokwe had been established.

Bishop Mutendi’s courageous leadership in the face of adversity and danger challenged me to stand firm when it really mattered in war-torn Rhodesia. During the mid-seventies, while the *Chimurenga* struggle was exacting its toll, I was summoned by the regional military tribunal of Masvingo Province to appear at Colonel Hartley’s farm near Masvingo town, to justify my refusal of conscription in the Rhodesian military forces. When I explained my research and

why I refused to take up arms against my fellow black Zimbabweans, the officers accused me of being a “traitor to the white cause in Africa.” They threatened to punish me with a lengthy prison term in the infamous Chikurubi jail in Harare. The threat reminded me of my adoptive African father’s repeated spells in prison, and I found the peace of mind to say in my final statement: “If jail is the only option, so be it. My task is to promote reconciliation between all the races of Zimbabwe, instead of fighting for white supremacy in Southern Africa.” Afterwards, though no action was taken, the threat of military retaliation continued to hang like a dark cloud over me until the new state of Zimbabwe emerged.

The Legacy of Samuel Mutendi

As a youngster, Isaiah 58 was given to me by my mother as part of a birthday present. The prophet Isaiah preached that the fasting required by God is “the removal of the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, which allows the oppressed to go free.” (Is. 58:6). God proclaimed:

If you put an end to oppression (...) If you give food to the hungry and satisfy those in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon. And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry. (Is. 58:9-11)

As I read these texts in the starkly racist and oppressive context of Southern Africa, the challenge of Isaiah 58 became a kind of *leitmotiv* in my life. As a result, I put a full-time academic career on hold as I became, for a time, a freelance “missioner” among the AICs. In this ministry, I had to oppose the colonial, racist walls of partition more deliberately than I had earlier in my life.

My African father and friend fearlessly addressed the impact of colonial oppression in his sermons and adjusted the structure of his church to accommodate the needs of the sick, the hungry, and the poor. He thus responded more forcefully and consistently to Isaiah’s prophetic challenge than I observed elsewhere in Zimbabwean AIC circles. As a Rozvi “warrior,” he was passionately engaged in the provision and control of Zionist schools, and the struggle cost him repeated imprisonments. But this was how he taught his people to walk tall with courage and pride, whatever the consequences.

On Sundays, the entire church community at Zion City “high-stepped” purposefully and publicly in marches and dances. Bishop Mutendi, as leader of his uniformed family band, appeared in a neatly pressed navy-blue suit with

braided gold around the arms, resembling the adornments of a marine-admiral. With deft movements of his holy staff, he conducted the march-beat of his band. The modern instruments glittered in the sun (base-drums, snare-drums, tubas, trumpets, bugles, trombones), and the loud drumbeats sounded like a call to arms in a military parade. The real intent of those Sunday marches was to express life and peace by replicating God's Jerusalem in Africa, where the new heaven and new earth meet.

For Zionists, the language of dancing feet was a form of protest against the colonial authorities, a way to disassociate from their unfair laws. To pound the earth with heavy boots and shoes was symbolic, a sure sign that followers and leaders were united and fully embraced the cause of liberation from oppression by casting off the shackles of injustice in a lively dance performed with abandon.

The New Jerusalem and the “Brightness of Noon”

Bishop Mutendi was deeply aware of the plight of his followers when crops failed. Over many years, he developed a massive food security strategy orchestrated at the ZCC headquarters to feed thousands of needy families during periods of agricultural crisis caused by droughts, floods, and crop raiding. The lives saved and the relief derived from reliable food-aid schemes were ways to turn “the darkness into the brightness of noon.” Here the witness of the “man of God” was at stake along with the commitment of thousands of ZCC farmers who followed his example by tithing part of their crop yields to the church, for food distribution among the needy.

Comfort for Vulnerable Women

Another example of the “brightness of noon” was the way Mutendi's Zion City helped barren women suspected of witchcraft and of destroying or “eating the fruit of their own wombs.” When there was a family history of barrenness, suspicions of witchcraft were particularly heavy and social judgement could be swift and merciless. Suspected barren women were often abused by their spouses and in-laws, and ostracized from the community. In the most extreme cases, the burning of the departing “witch's” huts and a pronouncement of the death penalty (whether executed or not), showed the severity of public disapproval of the evil of witchcraft.

Bishop Mutendi spent countless counselling sessions with young women seeking the gift of *chibereko* (literally “fruit” of the womb) and realized how vulnerable they were to witchcraft accusations in their home villages if they

did not bear children. In response, he developed long-term housing facilities at Zion City to serve as a safe haven for individuals needing extensive prophetic counselling and faith-healing treatment. Thus, a large complex of “*hospitara*” (hospital) huts were built where barren women of all ages and other patients could find sympathetic treatment along with protection against rumor-mongering and threatening witch-finders.

By providing a long-term sanctuary for women who remained barren in spite of repeated intercession and the symbolic touch of his holy staff, the bishop was publicly admitting that he could not guarantee any healing miracles because he was only a servant of the Lord. The testimonies of many women at church headquarters—those with and those without children—attested to the truth that the ultimate decision regarding procreation belonged to Jesus Christ, in whose service their caring leader operated. Publicly, the bishop never pretended that his faith-healing efforts would always succeed. Therefore, he was committed to providing long-term care for barren women, despite criticism. This showed his mature spirituality and divinely inspired wisdom.

The housing also enabled barren women to settle for extended periods or permanently in a Zionist community where their husbands could live with them periodically while they battled their disappointment. They experienced deliverance largely from living peacefully, shielded from accusations of witchcraft by understanding prophetic healers and fellow patients. If barren women confessed that they were receiving call-dreams from matrilineal ancestral spirits who had practiced witchcraft while they were alive, the prophets prescribed cleansing exorcistic ceremonies until they were satisfied that the tempting “demons” were fully expelled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, prolonged stays at Zion City not only enabled barren women to come to terms with the hurt and the social implications of their barrenness, it also gave them opportunities to develop their talents for meaningful service in church and society. The oppressive darkness of false accusations that caused the despised “witch” to experience anger, fear, and despair gave way to the brightness of noon, to a new story in which she could experience joy, faith celebration, mutual trust, care-giving, love, and respect.

The opportunities in Zion for recovering patients included farming activities, such as ploughing the lands, planting new crops, weeding, protecting crops against raiding baboons and flocks of birds, harvesting, and storing the grain in granaries. The labor itself was part of the patients’ physical recovery, and food gathering was a stabilizing therapy towards regaining individual independence. Consequently, the bishop allowed the residents at his *hospitara* to till large sections of arable land for the duration of their stay.

Long-term female residents with fertility issues were encouraged to attend religious activities regularly. Those gifted in Bible knowledge and interpretation contributed towards Bible study and discussions during the weekly *Ruwadzano* (Women's Association) meetings, where some of Bishop Mutendi's wives played leading roles. The diligent women with energetic dispositions were appointed as assistants to the senior *Ruwadzano* women who conducted house visitations in the surrounding villages to assist elderly or sick people with their domestic chores (house cleaning, clothes washing, food preparation). Such basic domestic services often included Bible reading, spiritual exhortations, and dancing to the beat of popular Zionist songs. These caregiving visits in the village context with experienced *Ruwadzano* leaders, were deeply inspiring "crash courses" in Zionist pastoral care for caregivers-in-training.

The girls or women passing through Zion City in search of cures or psychological support also had other opportunities for community participation. Novices already experiencing visions, call-dreams or speaking-in-tongues, for instance, could learn from ZCC prophets and healers who spent days and nights up in the holy mountains where they received instruction, spent hours in secluded prayer, and fasted. This interaction with experienced prophets and healers often helped the learners to make such progress that they soon qualified to become responsible "workers of the Holy Spirit" in the church and could communicate reliable revelations of the Spirit to offer guidance to people facing issues in their lives.

Bishop Mutendi's care for beleaguered women who were traumatized and feared for their lives and his provision for their safety inside of the holy city were indeed cause for the light of noon to overpower and replace the darkness of injustice.

Mutendi's Last Days

Shortly before his death at Defe in 1976, I visited my father-friend for the last time. Together we sat in the winter-sun basking in its warmth on the porch of one of the numerous newly built houses of Zion. We did not need to engage in absorbing conversation as we were simply enjoying each other's presence. Samuel, the prophet-bishop, must have been in his late eighties then. He was frail and spent from all the "battles" he had endured as a Rozvi warrior, yet still quietly upright and dignified as a Rozvi "monarch." He still had a twinkle in his eyes, especially during church services, while he watched his youngest children attempting to dance to the rhythmic beat of the tip of his holy staff.

Bishop Mutendi was buried at his second Zion City in Gokwe. Thousands of ZCC members from all over Zimbabwe congregate there annually, around the date of his death to commemorate their founder leader, to derive new inspiration from sermon narratives on outstanding features of his rich life, and to plan together the future strategies of evangelistic outreach and church expansion.

Note:

1. This testimony combined and abridged the content of two texts:

Daneel, M. L. “Bishop Samuel Mutendi: Memories of my Father and Friend.” *Dopota Star*, September 2013.

Daneel, M. L. “A Letter to Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, with Personal Recollections of Bishop Samuel Mutendi, and Defense of his Integrity as a Man of God.” Unpublished. April 18, 2017.

2. Alternate spelling of Engenas is Enginasi.

African Retrospect and Prospect : A Christian view from
Cameroon - Interview with Paul Nchoji Nkwi
November 28, 2017

Interviewee: Paul Nchoji Nkwi is Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the Catholic University of Cameroon (Bamenda), Member of the Constitutional Council of Cameroon, and *DACB* Advisor

Interviewed by Jonathan Bonk, *DACB* Project Director and *JACB* Editor

Please tell us a little bit about yourself: Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What were the circumstances of your home/family as you were growing up?

I was born on October 13, 1940 in a village called Wombong, a village whose key members brought the Christian faith to this part of Cameroon (Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian). For almost eighteen years I lived in this small village perched on the slope of Mount Boyo. My father married my mother in 1924 after serving as palace notable as a young man. When the first missionaries arrived in Kom country in 1913, the ruler sent him to consult the gods about the new religion. He came back with the message that the Christian faith was unstoppable. He left the palace, became a Christian. He brought us up in the Christian faith and he married my mother who herself was converted.

Can you tell our readers about your education? What kinds of schools did you attend as a boy? As a young adult? As a young man?

I did not go to school until I was ten years old. The school was about three kilometers away and despite that fact that other kids travelled that distance, my father considered it still too far for me. At age ten, I went to the primary school where I spent eight years and eventually went on to secondary school at age eighteen. At St. Joseph's College, Sasse, I was able to complete my secondary education by graduating with a GCE/West African School certificate in 1963. By the time I started university studies I was 23.

At that age, I was mature enough to study the most difficult subject: philosophy with metaphysics—a hard nut to crack. After four years of philosophical studies at Bigard Memorial Seminary, I flew to Rome to begin theological studies at the Pontifical Urban University. I graduated in 1971 with great honors and specialized in Christology. At this stage, my thirst for a greater knowledge of my culture or the philosophy of culture sent me on an exploration for greater knowledge. I spent the next five years studying anthropology and all its vicissitudes. From 1971 on, and with qualifications in philosophy and

theology, I studied for the masters and PhD in anthropology at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Obtaining a PhD eventually landed me on my first job at the University of Yaoundé in 1976. From the time I had entered primary school in 1950 until I started teaching anthropology at the university it had taken me 26 years of schooling

Why did you decide to become an anthropologist?

While at the university we had a Ghanaian professor, Fr. Akoi, who taught us essentials elements of culture. When I began to read the monographs about my people by Phylis Kaberry (1910–1977) [1] and Elisabeth Chilver (1914–1971) [2], two British anthropologists, I thought I could do better, being born and bred in the Kom culture. Brought up using the cultural-historical method (*kulturhistorische Methode*) I was fascinated with the understanding of culture from a historical perspective. What we called *culture* has been crafted and engineered by generations of human groups. I was interested in this historical process of understanding culture generally, and my people particularly, and anthropology seemed to be the discipline that could shape me and creatively transform my human intellect to understanding the inner vicissitudes of human and cultural behavior.

How would you describe your work and community involvement?

My work in the university was an entry point into my involvement in local community affairs. Teaching applied anthropology to students, and from time to time engaging as a consultant to NGOs made me aware of the need to give back to the communities that shaped me with the knowledge that made me what I am today. Appointed first in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research successively as program officer, deputy director, acting director and finally as senior adviser opened up avenues of engagement in community activities that I could otherwise never have known. My first community engagement began in 1982 when, as a group of elite from the Kom community, we organized the mobilization of funds to provide a variety of projects in education, water and electricity, sports and social infrastructure. We made it possible that every year the external elite would spend three days around Christmas working with the local people to mobilize funds for projects. For ten years (1982-1992), I served as president of Njinikom Area Development Association (NADA), an outfit I created to pull resources into rural development projects.

With the structural adjustment programs (SAP) of the Bretton Woods Institutions [3] eliminating state subsidies for social services, it was impossible for

many rural communities to survive. The state started imposing charges on basic services to vulnerable populations. In 2002, working with a group of the educated elite, we decided to increase the accessibility of financial services to rural populations by establishing a micro-finance enterprise “MC2 NjiniKom.”[4] Within another ten years, we were able to inject over \$560,000 into the local economy and empower more and more women to access to financial services.

Another engagement has been the creation of technical schools within the rural community. As I had been sponsored by a Canadian family while pursuing my philosophical and theological studies, it was now time for me to educate others. Lawrenz Bens died leaving behind about \$3,000 for me. I was able to combine this sum with my own resources and use it to construct four classrooms. These classrooms were used to train many young people in technical areas: electricity, wood technology, computer literacy, secretariat, building construction and so on. Since 1989, over 800 young men and women have received this rudimentary technical education which has greatly enhanced their lives. My vision was that a country’s development depends on such technical skills that can transform people’s lives.

How did you come to be a Roman Catholic?

My parents came to accept Christ as adults. I was born into the Catholic Faith and baptized while I was barely a few days old. Accepting Christ is like accepting food for the soul. There is no need to wait until a child grows up and decides which faith to follow. My parents had chosen the Catholic faith they strongly believed in and they brought up all their children, including me, as Catholics.

Can you tell us something more about your family?

My parents were fervent Catholics whose conversion lead them to live a monogamous married life, very uncommon in their day. They had twelve children, all brought up as Catholics, four girls and eight boys. I am one of the surviving sons of my parents. I married Maria-Goretti Ntein in 1974 and today we have three boys and two girls. We were fortunate to work for the government of Cameroon and consequently we were able to save enough money to train our five kids both at home and abroad. Today, my first son lives in Australia, my second son lives with me and supports the family’s social and charitable activities, the third son lives and works in the USA. My first daughter lives and works in France while my second daughter lives and works in Douala, Cameroon. With nine grandkids, we almost form a clan and, with four nationalities within the family, I consider us a miniature “United Nations.”

Please give us your perspective on various world and African affairs over the years: As you look at the continent of Africa in the decades following the official departure of colonial governments, are you able to offer some general impressions on what you have observed?

African nations seem to have been ill prepared for independence. The pressure of the independent Afro-Asian nations in the late 1940s seems to have predicated that ill-prepared colonies achieved independence. In the late 1950s, only about six African nations enjoyed a certain amount of independence, namely Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea, and Egypt. This would constitute the short-lived “Casablanca bloc.” [5] Its vision was for a “United States of Africa” (USA) with one federal government and a common high command for defense. The establishment of the USA was to take effect at a meeting in 1960 in Monrovia, Liberia. The six nations were not able to achieve their dream at Monrovia because new African nations emerging from colonialism were unwilling to see their countries become small units within this amorphous body called USA. Most of the newly independent countries opted for full autonomy of their political entities. Most French-speaking countries (sixteen of them) resisted the idea of a strong united Africa. The 1960 meeting in Monrovia virtually buried the idea and by the time they met in Lagos, the idea of the “Organization of African Unity” (OAU) applied the *coup de grâce* to the concept of the “United States of Africa.” OAU soon became an “old boys club” of presidents whose actions and decisions were ultimately meaningless because no state could interfere in the internal affairs of OAU members. The organization became moribund until the European Union’s success served to resuscitate the idea. But it is hard to detect any functional significance in the actual political and economic integrity of its member nations. To me, the failure to follow the ideals of the Casablanca block model was the first misstep for Africa.

Are you generally positive or negative about the future of the continent? Please explain.

Under the current leadership, the future of Africa looks bleak. Some leaders came into power using western democratic principles but realized that the DNA of an African leader puts one in place for life. Prior to European invasion and the imposition of their governance, many African people practiced the principle of the “chief for life.” A chief was not chosen for a specified time period, he was chosen for life. This principle was indeed the hallmark of the two African political systems: stateless and state societies. In African state societies, the ruler or chief was chosen on the basis of genealogical norms and consanguineous ties was the defining principle. In stateless African systems, power was not hereditary but

defined by a person's capacity to articulate the aspirations of the groups. Once chosen on that basis, the ruler was ruler for life. The British recognized the existing governance system and used it in their policy of indirect rule defined as "do not create or impose institutions on people if those on the ground can perform its desired functions in the same way or even better." Then, the introduction of western democracy in the selection of African leaders forgot to consider the inert or inner disposition of African leaders to stay on in power forever. African leaders get caught in the trappings of power to the extent that it is their personal survival rather than the defense and achievement of the common good. This attitude has led to an underdeveloped Africa, high levels of corruption, nepotism, the death of meritocracy, and the exploitation of strategic ethnicity for political ends. These constitute the vices that have plagued Africa.

Can you comment on the Church across Africa? According to commonly cited statistics from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, in 1910, only 9% of Africa's population was Christian, and 80% of Christians lived in just four countries: Ethiopia, South Africa, Egypt, and Madagascar. According to this source, by 1970, Africa's Christian percentage had risen to 38.7%, many of whom were converts from religions that were indigenous to sub-Saharan Africa. By 2020, the percentage of Africans who self-identify as "Christian" is expected to reach 49.3%.

To be honest I believe that by 2020, at least 50% of Africans will identify themselves as Christians. Although Islam is making in-roads in Africa, it is my intelligent guess that Christianity will be the dominant religion on the African continent. What are the facts? First, the invasion of Africa by evangelical movements is a positive move for Christianity. Our towns, especially, are infested with these movement and they are exploiting the poverty of many Africans. Second, the emergence of the radical Islamic movement is casting doubts on the Islamic faith. How can Africans follow a religious movement that advocates the killing of the innocent? African culture does not tolerate the killing of the innocent—especially killing through abortion. Most African cultures value and protect human rights and frown on those who go against such principles. Third, Catholics have witnessed a resurgence in vocations to the priesthood and the preaching corps of the Catholics is increasingly better prepared for the ministry than ever before. Today, it is not enough to do "*cursus seminaristicus*" (just enough to perform the basic functions of a priest) but priests must acquire knowledge at the university—both at the graduate and postgraduate levels. The decline in priestly vocations in Europe is prompting western churches to turn to Africa for backup. For example, the Diocese of Portsmouth in England have a

number of Cameroon priests from the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Cameroonian priests are lending a helping hand to the bishop of Portsmouth. That is the increasing trend today and I strongly believe that Christianity will continue to grow. It is one religion that has shown, through its social programs (education, health, etc), it goes beyond the religious transformation of the individual to the very core concerns of the believer.

What do you make of such numbers, and what is their significance for the continent?

These numbers indicate the trend. Christianity is in African to stay and grow. This growth is probably based on the common ground that Christianity shares with African religions. Long before the arrival of Christianity on the African continent, the problem of the “unknown,” that is, life after death, was a real issue. Fundamentally, African ethical reflections highlighted not only the concept of good and evil, but also apportioned reward to good and evil after death. Among the Kom people in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon, good people had a better life after death. They were believed to die and go to fertile soil or somewhere the good ancestors do not have to toil. Bad or evil people were expected to end up in unfertile red soil where nothing grew. When the missionaries began to preach about heaven and hell, many understood the correlations. Conversion was much easier even though some of the cultural values found contradictions in Christianity. The good thing was that polygyny was optional and more economical. Christianity insisted on monogamy and discouraged polygyny, something that Islam exploited. Islam’s exploitation of human nature and human instinct seems to attract many Africans but the economics of it have little or no hold on the well-educated who have come to know that Islam seems to be a plagiarized version of Christianity. [6]

Some observers are critical of the disconnect between African Christianity and African politics, ethics, and social institutions. The same criticisms can, of course, be leveled against the United States as well—particularly now that the cloak of decency and propriety has been ripped off to expose the grotesquely deformed naked truth beneath the self-righteous platitudes of by-gone years. But I would like you to comment on Africa, as an African who has been active in church, society, and academy throughout most of your life. Can you comment on the role played by Christianity in the common good of societies and conventions across the continent?

At this critical moment in the history of Christianity, Africans are disappointed with the moral depravity of the West. The endorsement of homosexuality, the

wanton approval of abortion, and other anti-Christian behaviors of the West leave African Christians wondering whether the missionaries deceived them. The signals coming from the West do not augur well with the emerging brand of Christians in Africa who took everything from the missionaries as gospel truth. With most African cultures, the fundamental belief in the procreative act and the prolongation or the immortalization of the lineage is sacrosanct. Anything that augurs against these principles is to be abhorred. Christianity has been seen and respected because it stood for these and other fundamental truths on which the African community was based. The family and lineage were the sure guarantee of the survival of the human species and, as such, were surrounded by rites and rituals that enhanced and entrenched the sacredness of procreative functions. In the West today, all of this has been reduced to mere banality by pornography and by the excessive commercial and entertainment exploitation of sex and sexuality. The disconnect is the African's incapacity to understand the new signals being sent by the West about the most fundamental beliefs and this has permitted humanity to get to this point.

You are an active churchman – a Roman Catholic. What do you see as the strengths, weaknesses, and prospects of the Roman Catholic Church in your region and across the continent?

My Catholic faith has been strengthened by my long years of systematic training in the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church. I was born into the Catholic faith through my Catholic parents who ensured I was baptized when I was barely two weeks old. One of the major strengths of my Christianity is the fact that it is based on history and tradition. Jesus the Christ was a historical figure and the church he founded took its inspiration and growth from the apostles and disciples whose successors through the centuries have brought us this salvific message in successive ranks.

One of the weaknesses of the Catholic Church has been its inability to bring back the union Christians once enjoyed before the Reformation. What would Christianity have been like without its hundreds and even thousands of divisions? The Catholic Church believes very strongly that the church is both human and divine. It is sometimes the human aspects that divide and separate us. Its divine nature continues to radiate in our modern era through the leadership of convinced Christians. The Catholic Church acknowledges the need for Christian unity and that is why in January of each year, special days are reserved to pray for, work for, and celebrate Christian unity.

The prospects of the Catholic Church in my country and in Africa as a whole seem very bright. A few decades ago, the Catholic Church organized the

Synod of African Bishops chaired by St. John Paul II which produced a synodic document entitled “*Ecclesia in Africa*” (The church in Africa). The document acknowledges the need to understand the cultures of Africa in order to better tailor the gospel message to languages that are culturally African. The whole concept of “inculturation” highlights the notion that Africans have many cultural values and norms that ought to be accepted and used for the spread of the gospel. All major seminaries in Africa teach African anthropology. Since 1978, I have taught African anthropology and a basic training in theology and Christology in Major Seminaries in Cameroon. Coupling this with my advanced training in cultural anthropology, I have attempted to teach future priests about the strengths and pitfalls of incorporating indigenous culture into Christian teaching. It is a tough assignment, but worth it if we are to bring values and good norms into our catechesis.

What role does or can African Christianity play globally, through its missionary activities, yes, but especially through the African diaspora to every continent on the planet (with the exception of Antarctica!)?

As I said earlier, Africans will have to re-Christianize the West. While the West is drifting away into scientific paganism, Africa must demonstrate to the West that the science part of western culture should present a better platform for preaching the gospel. I was really amazed when the first man to land on the moon was able to assert, in flight, that there is a God. The progress of science should lead to a better discovery of God rather than to a denial of his existence. As African Christianity continues to integrate God into its basic cannon, Africa will show the way for the rest of the world.

In visiting and traveling on five continents, I have found African churches filled with faithful worshipers while churches that abound in Europe and the U.S.A. go empty. One Sunday in Harare, Zimbabwe, I went to church and could not find a seat. On a visit to the University of Leiden in Holland, I attended a mass with barely 30 worshipers. I spent a whole morning in Bangkok looking for a Catholic Church and, when I finally found one, it was made up a few foreigners, mostly Africans and a handful of American service men. On a visit to Bali in Indonesia, I was able to find a church at last but was amazed at the number of Buddhist temples. My visit to Ghumeng in China convinced me that Christianity has a long way to go. I could not find a church but I was taken to village whose god was believed to be a monkey.

These experiences suggest to me that missionaries did a good job of spreading the gospel, and were probably aided by the colonial policy that saw religion as a handmaiden of the process of colonial domination.

Can you give readers your perspective on some of the greatest challenges facing the church in Africa specifically, and the entire continent generally, in the century ahead?

The greatest challenge to the church in Africa is secularism. It seeks to demystify and undermine basic Christian truths such as the existence of God. Secularists use science to demonstrate that Christians—especially *African* Christians—are ignorant.

The rollback of Islam in Africa is also one of the greatest challenges facing African Christians. Islam exploits our basic human nature and appeals to its inner recesses. Islam certainly attracts young Africans who are seeking God as they drift away from traditional religious beliefs. As radical Islam spreads throughout Africa and the world, we followers of Christ need to make an extra effort to roll back this religious virus that threatens us all.

As a Catholic, my greatest concern has been the rapid spread of fundamentalist Christians and the monetary value they attach to preaching the gospel. I speak of what is commonly known as the “success gospel.” For example, there are over 70 evangelical churches in my home city with its population of 800,000 people. Every little corner has an evangelical center providing all kinds of visions and strange interpretations of the biblical teachings. Their impact on the mainstream churches is enormous, leading many within my Christian circles to ask, “Is the end near? Is Christ coming back soon?” Is this the fulfilment of Christ’s prophecy that “before I come many false prophets will come in my name” (Matt. 24:10-11)?

Paul, like me, you are now a senior leader—in your case spiritual, academic, and intellectual—with most of your allotted years behind you. What are your deepest wishes for Africa of the future?

For me, Africa has a great future. Its enormous human and physical resources constitute the basis on which this future lies. Now, just imagine the millions of Africans who were taken into slavery and who helped develop powerful economies. Imagine how much more can be accomplished in the future with Africans taking their destiny seriously and planning for a more constructive future.

My greatest fear is the western conspiracy never to leave Africans alone to take their destiny into their own hands. Great economies that need the mineral resources of Africa will never allow Africans to control those resources. History has shown us that any African who attempted to give Africa a sense of pride and independence was marginalized or eliminated: take Nkrumah, Sankara,

Lumumba, Sekou Toure ... a few of many, many examples. Failure to eliminate Mandela shows the capacity of visionary Africans to provide a common platform for us humans. Martin Luther King falls within this category of Black leaders through whom I believe God wished to show the unique role each of the races he created had to play for the common good of humanity.

You have been a member of the Advisory Council of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* for several years now. Why, in your opinion, is this project important? Why and how should Africans be engaged with the DACB?

To be honest with you, this is a great project. It offers us Africans the unique role of recounting how thousands if not millions of Africans received the gospel and kept it. Documenting the religious experience of Africans serves as our legacy to future generations. It is important for Africans serving on the Advisory Council to claim ownership and engage in providing financial resources to support the project. It is possible for those members who have authority over congregations to begin to mobilize them so that they make contributions. Our benefactors in the West would be further encouraged if they see our commitment through constructive support of this endeavor.

Endnotes:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis_Kaberry
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Millicent_Chilver
3. Editor's note. The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They were set up at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944. Their aims were ostensibly to help rebuild the shattered postwar economy and to promote international economic cooperation. Good intentions were and are subverted by economic and social ideologies that have, in the end, provided minimal benefits to populations while at the same time propping up dysfunctional systems of resource extraction and human dislocation that have been the ruin of many countries. For an easy to access, credible critique of this well-intentioned but deeply flawed Western approach to "development" (or what the West once referred to as "civilization"), see William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (Penguin 2006).
4.
http://www.ruralfinanceandinvestment.org/sites/default/files/1220215106527_CoadyCameroun061908.pdf
5. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casablanca_Group
6. A Christian convert from Islam told me that Mohammed spent time in a Christian monastery and that what he learned about Christianity drove him to establish a new religion. This may be a simplification of the many influences that both Christianity and Judaism had on Mohammed.

Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Daneel, M. L. *Zionism and Faith-Healing in Rhodesia: Aspects of African Independent Churches*. Mouton & Co., the Netherlands, 1970.

Available: <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/8946>

Description: Contents include: The Role of Healing in the Zionist Recruitment, Technique, Church Headquarters as “Hospital,” Prophetic Activities and Healing, and Preaching and Faith-healing.

Multiplying in the Spirit: African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe. Edited by Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Joachim Kügler. Otto-Friedrich-University, 2014.

Available: [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) £15.12 ; ISBN-10: 3863092546 / ISBN-13: 978-3863092542

Description: "This volume was motivated by the realization that AICs continue to be a significant player on Zimbabwe’s spiritual market. Members of predominantly Apostolic, but also Zionist, churches are highly visible in both rural and urban areas. Prophets from AICs are constantly in the news, alongside advertising their competence in urban areas. Thus it is high time to bring AICs—being an important part of recent social reality in Zimbabwe—back into academic focus. BiAS 15 at the same time is ERA 1 which means that this volume opens a new sub-series to BiAS which is meant to explore religion in Africa in all its manifold manifestation, be it Christian or not."

Prophets, Profits, and the Bible in Zimbabwe: Festschrift for Aynos Masotcha Moyo. Edited by Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda. University of Bamberg Press, 2013.

Available online: <https://d-nb.info/1058949144/34>

Description: Essays include: 1. The “Man of God,” 2. Zimbabwean Pentecostal Prophets, 3. Prophecy in an African Context, 4. “...But the one who prophesies, builds the Church,” 5. Prophets, Profits, and Protests, 6. Reflections on the Morality of Some Prophetic Acts in Zimbabwe's Pentecostal Movements, 7. The Rise of White Collar Prophecy in Zimbabwe, 8. Young, Male, and Polished, 9. What's in a Name, 10. Pentecostalism, Prophets, and the Distressing Zimbabwean Milieu, 11. Prophets, Profits, and the Bible, 12. "For with God Nothing is Impossible," 13. The Prophetic Figure in Zimbabwean Religions, 14. Traversing the Thin Line Between “Chibhoi” (Indigenous Spirituality) and Miracle Working, 15. Reading Zimbabwean Writers on

Churches and Prophets, 16. Media Representation of Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, 17. Prophets and Politics in Zimbabwe, 18. Studying the United Family International Church in Zimbabwe, 19. People with a Future.

Togarasei, Lovemore. *Cursed be the Past! Tradition and Modernity among (Modern) Pentecostal(s) Charismatics.* Boleswa Occasional Papers in Theology and Religion, Volume 2006, Issue 1, Jan 2006, p. 109 – 118. University of Botswana

Available online: http://hdl.handle.net/10520/AJA18183816_12

Abstract: "Although the church has been known for condemning tradition (particularly African tradition), Pentecostal charismatics have moved further in condemning the past. These churches are known for their call to a "complete break with the past" (Meyer, 1998). This paper will discuss how modern charismatic Pentecostals have embraced modernity by emphasizing a complete break with the past. It will also analyze whether they have succeeded in breaking with the past or whether this call has only remained theoretical. The discussion will be based on the teaching and practice of Pentecostal charismatics in Harare (Zimbabwe) and in Gaborone (Botswana)."

Cuthbertson, Gregor; H L Pretorius; Dana Lee Robert. *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel.* South Africa: UNISA Press, 2003.

From: Biblio.com \$25.97 ; ISBN 10:1868881938 / ISBN 13:9781868881932

Summary: This title showcases recent reflexive research on African Christianity that draws inspiration from the career of Inus Daneel. Essays include: The many names of Inus Daneel. M. L. Daneel: Missionary as folk theologian / Dana L. Robert -- Even hunters can change : a personal appraisal of Inus Daneel and his work / Frans J. Verstraelen -- My friend Mafurahunzi / Willem Saayman -- Mudavanhu: The one who loves the people / Reuben Marinda -- Interviews with Chiefs Chikwanda, Chivi and Murinye : Muchakata and the war of the trees -- Bishop Moses, the earthkeeper / Solomon Zvanaka -- Bishop Moses and the trees / Larry Rasmussen -- Chakarakata and Chimurenga: Stories of the Zimbabwean War of Liberation / Greg Cuthbertson -- II. Daneel's academic legacy: AIC studies and African religions. The three-self formula in light of the emergence of African Independent Churches / Stan Nussbaum -- Healing in the Zion Christian Churches of Southern Africa : Daneel's research in Zimbabwe compared with the South African Movement / Allan Anderson -- You shall have no other gods before me / Nicolas Stebbing -- Issues of "Catholic" ecclesiology in Ethiopian-type AICs / Stephen Hayes -- Strange are the ways of

Zion: A coloured Zionist pioneer / Hennie L. Pretorius -- Interpreting the interpreters of AICs and other grassroots Christian communities in South Africa / Tinyiko Sam Maluleke -- Mantsopa : popular religion and the Anglican Church in South Africa / Janet Hodgson -- Pamberi! Towards a pilgrim theology / J. N. J. Kritzinger -- One god, many people / Marcelle Manley -- On the interplay between political and therapeutic ngoma: a case from Malawi -- Bibliography of the writings of M. L. Daneel.

De Vries, Jacqueline. *Catholic mission, colonial government and indigenous response in Kom (Cameroon).* African Studies Centre, Leiden. External Research Report, 1998.

Available: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) \$49.50 ; Also available online full-text:

<http://hdl.handle.net/1887/485>

Abstract: This thesis illuminates the way in which a complex configuration of factors interacted in the first half of the 20th century to fundamentally transform the Kingdom of Kom in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. It examines the impact of colonial and missionary penetration, as well as the responses of various groups of Kom people to colonial and missionary policies. The focus is on the interwar period, during which Kom was confronted with the change from German to British colonial rule. The first part of the study provides background information on the colonization of Cameroon, British indirect rule, and the indigenous political structures of the Kom Kingdom. The second part presents the case study, describing developments in Kom since c. 1913, with a focus on the arrival of the Roman Catholic mission, obstacles encountered by the mission, and responses by traditional authorities and the colonial administration. Part three summarizes the findings and places the case study in perspective. Field research was carried out in the village of Njinikom in the summer of 1994.

Strohbehn, Ulf. *The Zionist Churches in Malawi: History - Theology - Anthropology.* Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016.

Available: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) \$18.32

Description: “This book presents an African Christian movement full of vitality and creativity.... Why have Spirit Churches, including Pentecostalism, been so successful in Malawi? Why do some religious groups still refuse medical help, up to the point that children die of cholera? How did the independent churches deal with the colonial trauma? In this masterful portrait, Strohbehn takes the reader from industrial mine compounds to rural colonies, where churches have set up their own spiritual and political rule. He carefully dissects

the fine lines between traditional notions and Christianity's influence. We find a spiritual portrait of the Ngoni people, a fascinating cultural analysis of dancing and an encounter with a unique style of preaching.”

Dissertations & Theses

Mushayavanhu, David. *The spiritual weakness of Western Missionary Founded Churches as the cause of the rise of African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe with special reference to the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.* University of Pretoria. MA Dissertation (Theology), 2013. Publication: <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/37314>

Abstract: This dissertation is an attempt to analyze and investigate ways of responding to the poor UPCSA missional approach to Zimbabwean society. The desire to write this dissertation was born out of the experience of working for the past six years as an ordained minister of this denomination in the Presbytery of Zimbabwe. There are six congregations with the right to call a minister, thirty grant receiving and fifteen preaching stations in the whole country which is serviced by thirteen ministers, including probationers. The UPCSA has a total of four thousand five hundred and ninety seven members not counting Sunday school children. The dissertation seeks to survey the history of how the people in the Presbytery of Zimbabwe came to be some of fewer memberships as compared to other denominations in the country. It will focus on colonial and post-colonial events, which led to evangelizing the nation.

Skelton, Colin. *Spiritual circles: ritual and the performance of identities in the Zionist Christian Church.* University of Witwatersrand. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Dramatic Art, 2009.

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7346>

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine how spiritual identities are constructed and enacted through ritualized behavior in Zionist Christian Church services. Another aim was to identify the significance of specific religious objects and activities in order to investigate how these contribute to the performance of identity in the Zionists. The investigation was rooted in various ritual performance theories (Turner, 1982; Schechner, 2002). The study utilized qualitative research methodology. The research data consisted of casual conversations with congregants, six open ended and semi-structured interviews, numerous photographs and approximately three hours of raw video recordings. Additionally, one vignette interview was conducted where congregants responded

to photographs and video footage of their church service. Most of the data was gathered on site at the Melville Koppies nature reserve in Johannesburg. One congregation, the New Gospel Church in Zion of Africa, participated in the study.

The investigation revealed that Zionist identity is performed on both the individual and collective levels of Zionist culture. The results indicated that identity is constructed through a series of religious acts and symbolic behaviors and that identity formation occurs through performance. It was also discovered that Zionist church services are highly ritualized and that spiritual identities emerge through “restored” behaviors prescribed in the ritual context. The belief in the “Holy Spirit” was also discovered to play a significant role in the emergence of spiritual identities.

Wouters, Jacqueline Martha Francisca. **An anthropological study of healing practices in African Initiated Churches with specific reference to a Zionist Christian Church in Marabastad.** University of South Africa. MA dissertation (Anthropology), 2014.

Publication: <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/18867>


Abstract: This study encompasses an anthropological investigation of healing practices in the Zion Christian Church with reference to the Marabastad congregation in Pretoria (Tshwane), South Africa. The Zion Christian Church functions as an extremely successful healing ministry, and can thus be characterized as a spirit-type African Initiated Church, a type known to attract members through healing activities. The concepts of ill-health, health, healing, and curing are crucial to understanding the church’s role, as all activities at the Zion Christian Church revolve around the attainment of absolute health. The embedded nature of healing in the church is explored through an analysis of the spatial and material aspects of the church’s healing practices, including codes of conduct, roles of participants, religious services, and intangible and tangible instruments of healing. The study is further contextualized against the broader history of the emergence and growth of African Initiated Churches from the late 19th century onwards.



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