Luther’s theology of the cross helps sub-Saharan Africans redefine their understanding of suffering. The two kinds of righteousness help them in understanding the vertical and horizontal relationships when it comes to forgiveness and righteousness. What this research essentially wants to point out is that forgiveness and reconciliation between the sub-Saharan communities and child soldiers, the warlords and government officials and civil war victims and perpetrators is very important but the forgiveness we should seek is God’s. As much as Africans live by ubuntu values, their understanding of ubuntu is worldly, in a sense that it only looks to the here and now, it doesn’t concern itself with the salvation of humans. Africans should be concerned about their salvation and where they will go next after this life, which helps inform our role in the world now where Christ has given us a ministry of reconciliation.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i2.5838

**Abstract:** The focus of this article is to highlight some of the inherent gender injustices experienced by the female pastors within the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ). Drawing insights from the field research conducted in pursuance of a doctoral programme, the study foregrounds some of the barriers that women have had to endure when it comes to the issue of being ordained as a pastor. The article also interrogates the reasons used as a basis to exclude female pastors from the key decision-making bodies and to deny them the opportunity to preach at the national conference, which is the biggest gathering within the AFMZ. This is a qualitative study utilizing interviews, focus group discussions and the observation method. The main findings emerging from this study reveal that whilst some positive changes have been made towards the inclusion of women in the pastoral ministry, however, there are still many gaps needing urgent attention before the AFMZ becomes a gender-inclusive and gender-equitable faith community.


**Abstract:** The issue of suffering in Africa has resulted in Africans attributing suffering to God’s work, ancestors’ anger and evil spirits or witchcraft’s work. This is a skewed understanding of suffering. And not only that, the suffering that has been perpetrated by the civil war has birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers resulting in Africa casting out its children. In both of these presented issues sub-Saharan Africans need to look deep into its ubuntu as a value system to find solutions for reconciliation in the region. With existing examples of reconciliation through South Africa’s restorative justice approach with their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Rwanda’s retributive justice approach with the Gacaca courts to borrow from for solutions, this research contends that true reconciliation between people is hard to achieve unless there has been a reconciliation with God. In providing another way for sub-Saharan Africa’s suffering, we will engage Martin Luther’s theology of the cross and two kinds of righteousness with Desmond Tutu’s ubuntu theology.

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Introduction: Activism, Theology, and Witness with an African Color

This issue of the Journal of African Christian Biography pays tribute to two outstanding global church leaders who sought to model “African color” in their life-long witness as activists and theologians. Desmond Tutu (South Africa), in his anti-apartheid struggle, peacekeeping initiatives, and his role as Anglican archbishop, modeled a deeply enculturated African Christian identity that sent shockwaves around the world and continues to inspire all those who care about racial justice and human rights. Tharcisse Tshibangu (DRC), in his early student years, dared to challenge the travesty of an African theology of adaptation that was not African from the roots up. The Vatican eventually recognized his prophetic voice as advocate of theology with an “African color” by making him bishop and inviting him to dialogue at the level of the global Catholic Church under Vatican II.

Next, in our featured interview, long time DACB associate Deji Ayegboyin speaks of his pioneering work promoting African Christian history (education and research) in the university. His visionary leadership has “converted” many of his students to the necessity of documenting the lives of the elders of African Christianity before their memory fades. His influence in the field, as a member of the DACB Senior Advisory Council, continues today.

The second half of the issue focuses on the stories of three women: Mama Eunice Njoki Wangai of Kenya, and Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa and Sikhawulaphi Khumalo of Zimbabwe. In all three articles—one book review and two biographies—the female authors were concerned to tell the story of a woman whose ministry had been forgotten or overshadowed by that of the men around them. By bringing their stories into the light, they honor the African color of the work and witness of women of God who are well “worth writing about”—to borrow the words of Barbara Mahamba.

Michèle Sigg
Editor


Description: Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville explores the changing relationship between women and the Catholic Church from the establishment of the first mission stations in the late 1880s to the present. Phyllis M. Martin emphasizes the social identity of mothers and the practice of motherhood, a prime concern of Congolese women, as they individually and collectively made sense of their place within the Church. Martin traces women’s early resistance to missionary overtures and church schools, and follows their relationship with missionary Sisters, their later embrace of church-sponsored education, their participation in popular Catholicism, and the formation of women’s fraternities. As they drew together as mothers and sisters, Martin asserts, women began to affirm their place in a male-dominated institution. Covering more than a century of often turbulent times, this rich and readable book examines an era of far-reaching social change in Central Africa. (Amazon.com)


Description: This is a brilliant piece of work! In what he calls Sketches, Prof. Omulokoli has put together an excellent collection of stories of great men and women, some of whom many of us may not be familiar with; but who were greatly used of God to lay the foundations of Christianity in our land. The slightly older folk will recognize familiar names — some still alive as at the time of this writing — and whose testimonies they can attest to. Combining fact, humour, and deep scholarly insight; this collection brings to the fore the truth and reality of what it meant to be a radical follower of Jesus Christ at a time when many knew nothing other than the pursuit of traditional customs and worship of ancestral gods. (From the Introduction / amazon.com)

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Tribute
Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1931-2021) and South African Black Theology

By Francis Anekwe Oborji

At the beginning of his crusade and struggle against the apartheid system and white minority racist government and ideology in South Africa, the late Archbishop Tutu observed: "I want to declare categorically that I believe apartheid to be evil and immoral, and therefore, unchristian. No theologian I know would be prepared to say that the apartheid system is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Speaking further on the religious matter of South African Black liberation theology, he said: "The perplexity we have to deal with is this: why does suffering single out black people so conspicuously, suffering not at the hands of pagans or other unbelievers, but at the hands of fellow Christians who claim allegiance to the same Lord and Master?"

The concerns in South African Black theology largely rest on this religious interpretation of the apartheid system by late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In that sense, Tutu merits the title of "Father of South African Black Theology." His seminal religious interpretation of the evils of the apartheid system and white minority racist government and ideology in South Africa was pivotal in the development of South African Black liberation theology.

In the present article, we want to honor this great son of Africa and icon of the South African anti-apartheid crusade who died on December 26, 2021, by highlighting, however briefly, this aspect of his contribution to the growth of African theology—that is, the area of South African Black liberation theology.

In the present article, we want to honor this great son of Africa and icon of the South African anti-apartheid crusade who died on December 26, 2021, by highlighting, however briefly, this aspect of his contribution to the growth of African theology—that is, the area of South African Black liberation theology.

The Routledge Handbook of African Theology is an authoritative and comprehensive survey of the theological landscape of Africa. As such, it will be a hugely useful volume to any scholar interested in African religious dynamics, as

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1 Francis Anekwe Oborji is Professor Ordinarius (Full Professor and Chair) of Contextual Theology, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome and a regular contributor to the Journal of African Christian Biography.

2 D. Tutu, Press Statement of October 11, 1979, in reply to minister Le Grange's attack on SACC (South African Council of Churches); the statement is reproduced in Tutu, The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness (London, 1982), 35.

3 Tutu, Press Statement.
religious and moral authority of the first hour, in his struggle and advocacy for racial equality and social justice in South Africa; his public activism and consistent protests and civil disobedience for the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. Many also may remember him especially as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 as well as a renowned, world acclaimed public speaker and lecturer, and finally, as chair of post-apartheid South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

However, few may be familiar with Tutu’s enormous influence on the birth and development of contemporary African Christian theology, especially the influence of his religious and theological writing on the development of South African liberation theology, during and after the fall of apartheid in South Africa. This is why it is necessary that we highlight that aspect of his life and contribution as an African theologian of the first hour. Tutu remains an inspiration to many, especially many young Africans in theological scholarship, operating in areas in which the Gospel meets the ever-changing socio-cultural, religious, political and economic reality of Africa.

Moreover, Tutu remains a model for many African Church leaders today, as the continent is in dire need of committed religious leaders with deep spirituality, moral probity, authority, and public trust to guide their respective countries and people to true social, moral, and spiritual renewal so that a new Africa will emerge.

Above all, Tutu’s example has a message for the emerging freedom fighters of our day, especially the young people in Africa. That is, those who have started to engage in freedom fighting and the struggle for self-determination or second independence of their different ethnic-nationalities from the domineering ethnic-group/groups in their respective African nation states born of European colonialism. These young Africans must remember that for any freedom fighting movement or agitation for self-determination to be meaningful, it must be well-grounded in authentic spirituality and theology.

**Background to Archbishop Tutu’s African Theology**

Desmond Mpilo Tutu (October 7, 1931 – December 26, 2021) was a South African Anglican archbishop and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid icon and crusader for racial equality, civil rights, and social justice. He was a powerful voice for non-violence in South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. His good sense of humor, inspiring message, and conscientious work for civil liberties and peoples’ rights earned him international accolades and admiration.

**West**, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 68.
Tutu's theological methodology and perspective borrowed substantially from the African philosophy of ubuntu. John Mbiti's classic phrase "I am because we are," captures a key feature in Tutu's understanding of human beings currently living in the concrete circumstances of life, this side of the grave. In general, African spirituality is based on this centrality of human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life, this side of the grave. It consists of their attitudes, beliefs, and practices as they strive to reach out toward super-sensible realities of God, and the spirits as they strive to reach out toward the universe. The central concern is how to make sense of this life and ensure that it is meaningful, harmonious, good, and worth living. The outcome of the project is the African worldview and spirituality of ubuntu (humanity-community). It consists of their attitudes, beliefs, and practices as they strive to reach out toward super-sensible realities of God, and the spirits as they strive to reach out toward the universe. The central concern is how to make sense of this life and ensure that it is meaningful, harmonious, good, and worth living. The outcome of the project is the African worldview and spirituality of ubuntu (humanity-community). It is often said that where -cogito ergo sum- Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," the African would rather say, "I am related, therefore we are" -cognatus ergo sum-. In other words, in African spirituality, the value of interdependence through healthy inter-human relationships comes above that of individualism, segregation, and personal independence. By the same token, the practice of cooperation is relied upon more than competition. Moreover, in the African worldview that informs Tutu's philosophy of ubuntu, the relationship between the human community and the rest of the universe is not conceived of as a struggle in which human beings vie for the world or a fellow human being as an object of an adversary whose nature and function should be investigated and reduced to formulas so as to be mastered and exploited. Rather, the universe is seen as a common heritage, its diverse components as potential partners in the shared project of existence. There is...
therefore, a feeling of mutual dependence among the different parts: human beings, the animal world, vegetation, the elements, the heavenly bodies, the departed as well as the diffuse forces, visible and invisible that circulate all around.

All these help us to put into perspective Tutu’s African philosophy of ubuntu that guided his theological approach and understanding in bringing the apartheid system and white minority racist government in South Africa to a standstill. In one of his famous speeches at the height of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, he said: “If you think you can stop us from becoming free, you are going to be stumpeded. . . . For unless we are free, no one in this country is going to be free.” The same ubuntu philosophy guided him as chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

In a bold anthropomorphic vein, I can picture God surveying the awful wrecks that litter human history – how the earth is soaked with the blood of so many innocent people who have died brutally. God has seen two World Wars in this century alone plus the Holocaust, the genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, [the pogroms against Biafrans in Nigeria], the awfulness in the Sudan, Sierra Leone, the two Congos, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East, and the excesses that have characterized Latin America. It is a baneful catalog that records our capacity to wreak considerable harm on one another and our gross inhumanity to our fellow humans. I imagine God surveying it all, seeing how His children treat their sisters and brothers. God would weep as Jesus wept over the hard-hearted and unresponsive Jerusalem, where he had come to his own people and they would not receive him.4

**The Specific Path of South African Black Theology**

Although, South African Black theology may bear many features similar to South American liberation theology and the North American Black theology movement, South African Black theology has nothing to do with the founders of those movements or their ideologies and even less with Black Power as a political ideology.

For instance, exponents of South African Black theology do not see their theology as primarily a racial affair. In other words, they are not saying (as some exponents of Black liberation theologies in the Americas seem close to saying) that God is on the side of Black people simply because they are Black. Rather, are not quick at lessons, but they can tell everything worth knowing about their kaffir corn, the different edible roots and wild fruits, the way of sheep and cattle. . . . The girls are expert at cooking porridge and the side dishes or sauces, even the tiny ones will tell you they can stamp meal and prepare porridge.134

The African women were not blank slates on which the missionaries could write uninhibitedly; the slate already had meaningful content. Rather, what was needed was a process of articulation between the modes of life of the Africans prior to the arrival of the missionaries and the new modes that the missionaries were introducing. The Roman Catholic missionaries were slow to play their part in this process.

Sikhawulaphi’s generation of women had to bear the negative sentiments of the missionaries, who were impatient for African women to conform quickly to Western Christian principles. In Sikhawulaphi’s time, education was not an avenue for upward mobility, especially for women. African education in that era was meant to serve the interests of the Europeans, and, as Kimberly Richards and Ephraim Govere write, schools served as “agencies for training the next generation of labourers.”135 Yet, as mentioned earlier, women such as Mai Musodzi, and even the urban vakadzi vemapoto, were able to use their limited educational skills to their own benefit as well as that of their communities. Women of Sikhawulaphi’s generation conceded the public sphere to men, choosing to seek fulfillment in the private domain. Unlike the shumba women who relied on African spirituality to give them a positive sense of identity and power, Christian women such as Sikhawulaphi found fulfillment by investing in their children, making sure that they received a good education without gender discrimination. In this way they enabled their daughters to use education as a vehicle for upward mobility.136 Sikhawulaphi conformed to the missionary and settler ideal of a mission-schooled African woman. She was not educated to seek wage labor, but was expected to continue to live in the reserves, marry a Christian man, and raise a family. The wage-earning men were expected to set up

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4 Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 124.

134. ZMR5, no. 63 (January 1914): 67.


136. Shumba refers to a local family-oriented cult practised by Kalanga women. The *shumba* (lion) spirit was a special class of ancestral spirits that were believed to protect the homestead.
attended church services and abided by the rules set by the missionaries. Health facilities were also available at the mission.

Sikhawulaphi raised her children to become devout Catholics, as was she. Her children, both boys and girls, received missionary education with its strong emphasis on industrial skills, reflected in her children’s later occupations. Following, in order of seniority, are her children and their professions: Paul became a teacher; Andrew, a carpenter; Francis, a builder; Steven, a hospital orderly; Joseph, a policeman; Josephine, a dressmaker who also worked in a hospital. Kholi went to South Africa and never came back; while Antony did not seem to have a recognized career. Maria became a founding member of the first African congregation of nuns in Matabeleland, the Ancillae Mariae Reginae (AMR).

By being able to embrace Western-style education and to speak, read, and write English, Sikhawulaphi showed herself to be a remarkable woman. She was able to embrace a world religion, becoming a devout Catholic, while also retaining her identity as an honest, diligent, humble, resourceful, and respectable Ndebele woman. She ensured that all her children received an education without gender discrimination, thereby achieving through her children what she could not, and empowering her daughters and sons to navigate the colonial system through varied careers. She left a legacy of faith to the Roman Catholic Church in her family and community.

At the same time Sikhawulaphi is representative of her generation of mission-educated women. Her case clearly brings out how Roman Catholics, together with other missionaries, worked to construct the institutional and ideological framework for promoting the “domestic ideal,” introducing it to African women through missionary education. Missionaries saw education as the “handmaiden to Christianity” and would rather that “Africans remained uneducated than that they should get education without Christianity.” As a child in school at Empandeni, Sikhawulaphi represents African women who struggled to grasp the relevance of Christianity and education for their lives. Extracts from a letter written by a Notre Dame nun in 1914 illustrate this struggle. The girls at Empandeni, she relates, “Black” to South African theologians such as Tutu is less a racial designation than a socio-political symbol: it is primarily a synonym for oppression and exploitation.5

Put in its historical perspective, South African Black theology is said to have emerged as a coherent theological force as a result of conferences held in 1971, the papers of which were published in book form the following year. However, the book was immediately banned, but eventually reprinted in London in 1973 and edited by Basil Moore. Other shorter contributions to South African Black theology appeared in _Pro Veritate_, the journal of the Christian Institute. This was in turn banned in 1977, in the repressions following the demonstrations that took place around Biko’s death. Prominent among the contemporary exponents of South African Black theology are Desmond Tutu, Manas Buthelezi, and Allen Boesak.

The primary objective of South African Black theology is to refute the arguments of the racist theology which presented the White claim to racial superiority as the will of God. South African Black theologians affirm that Blacks, like all races, are created in God’s image and therefore have the same dignity as all the children of God, Whites included. Theologians also, identify the God of Jesus Christ as the God of Exodus and therefore a liberator, on the side of the oppressed. However, in Tutu’s words, “the Whites in South Africa also need to be liberated, because they dehumanized themselves by oppressing the Blacks.”

Following the same line of thought, Mokgethi Motlhabi, another South African theologian, argues that South African Black theology is an effort to “relate God and the gamut of religious values to the Black man in his situation in South Africa.” Its concern is with Blacks in the totality of the dilemma of oppression in which racial prejudice against them is of paramount concern. But at the same time, racial prejudice is the root cause of other forms of dehumanization and oppression that Blacks have continued to suffer at the hands of Whites. As such, it is emphatically a theology of Black liberation – the liberation of the whole experience - economic, social, political as well as religious.

At the same time, South African Black theology has as its focus the entire Christian community, Blacks as well as Whites. Its essential aim is to provide guidelines for a Christian praxis by which all the Christians in South

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Christian instruction, therefore, focused greatly on Christian marriage. A letter written by one nun highlights the centrality of preparation for marriage in the Empandeni girls’ lives:

Our children here are showing the fruit of the instruction they have received, and I am glad to say their spirit is remarkably good. Several big girls who have left the school are now engaged to Christian boys and will be baptized before they are married. We have a girl staying with us who is going to marry an old Chishawasha boy, Dick by name. The girl’s name is Manengi.126

Bride wealth (lobola) was paid in the form of cattle and goats, followed by a Christian wedding in church.127 The number of such marriages was used to judge the success of missionary work.

Around 1916 or 1917 Sikhawulaphi married Mangeni Ndleleni from Filabusi, who was working at the mission. The nun, no doubt, played an influential role in preparing Sikhawulaphi for marriage. At some point after the wedding (the dates are not clear), Mangeni and Sikhawulaphi went to Nkanzi, where they set up their rural home. While living at Nkanzi, they had nine children. Mangeni worked on farms and railway tracks around Filabusi. In 1930, Mangeni Ndleleni died, leaving the widowed Sikhawulaphi with nine children, the missionaries at Empandeni immediately sent for her to be brought back to the mission, where they pledged to help her raise and educate her children.128 By returning to Empandeni, Sikhawulaphi reestablished a strong bond with the priests and nuns, reminiscent of her childhood. Like other widows in those days, widowed women and unmarried mothers could live on the Empandeni estate and farm as long as they raised the children who had been left with the mission.129

Africa can partake in the liberating activity of God in Christ. This involves analyzing the social and political situation in which Blacks find themselves, in order to expose the contradictions within that society and deal with the racial conflicts inherent in it. In this way, the role of theology is to bring about social change, and it is only through its practice that its praxis is relevant.

In fact, for Bonganjalo Goba, such a process of change is intrinsic to the Christian faith, which seeks to transform the existing social situation. Therefore, the church has the obligation to involve itself fully in the public praxis of the Christian community.130 In this way, theology becomes a “Christian communal praxis,” a theology of Christian community wrestling with concrete problems as well as providing alternatives as “Black” Christ librarians because offsets our common humanity and shows that “God, in his foreknowledge, suffer with us as the one who is extricated.”

Goba’s analysis brings together several themes that are characteristic of South African black theology. Its central concern is humankind itself, suffering under an oppressive and dehumanizing system and an ideological rationalization that has reduced one race to the status of an animal. The theology grapples with the problems of liberation and the use and abuse of power and human intelligence. But the most positive aspect is that it is a theology of Christ as it relates to South African black theology. The South African black theology has the Scripture as its base, since it seeks to relate the Gospel to the black socio-political situation or rather racial oppression. Apart from Tutu, these themes have received their most extended treatment in the writings of two leading Black African black theologians, namely Mamas Buthelezi and Allan Boesak. However, given the collapse of apartheid and communism, South African black theology is becoming more and more affiliated with liberation theology in other parts of Africa. Authors of the theology, as we have seen in the writings of Tutu and Allan Boesak, have drawn inspiration from African tradition and contemporary reality and wisdom. Moreover, they now focus more on the
themes of justice, civil rights, reconciliation, integration, and acceptance of one another.

These are the strands of thoughts and understanding one finds in South African Black theology, developed during the apartheid era and after the fall of apartheid. It is a kind of a “protest” theology against racist ideology and the apartheid regime and system in South Africa. This is what distinguishes the South African Black theology from the other currents of African liberation theology developed in other part of Africa (including African women’s liberation theology.)

Conclusion

Tutu’s exemplary life reminds us how important religious and theological fronts are in any freedom fighting and agitation for liberation and self-determination worth its name. The archbishop’s life, work, and social activism in bringing about the fall of the apartheid system and white minority racist government in South Africa is a challenge to many church leaders today in different African countries where people are still living under the bondage of tyrannical and dictatorial regimes, discrimination, marginalization, oppression, conflicts, and wars.

More significantly, Tutu’s extraordinary commitment to the reconciliation process in post-apartheid South Africa, the skillful way he chaired South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission—a role that President Mandela had assigned to him—remains a challenge to match. At the conclusion of that assignment, Nelson Mandela said of him: “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa has put the spotlight on all of us … In its hearings Desmond Tutu has conveyed our common pain and sorrow, our hope and confidence in the future.”

In his award-winning book, No Future Without Forgiveness (1999), Tutu argues that true reconciliation cannot be achieved by denying the past. But neither is it easy to reconcile when a nation “looks the beast in the eye.” Going further, he writes:

You are devastated by the fact that it could be possible at all for human beings to shoot and kill a fellow human being, burn his body on a pyre, and while this cremation is going on actually enjoy a barbecue on the side. What had happened to their humanity that they could do this … How was it possible for them to return from such an outing to their homes, embrace

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In contrast to a Christian family, Sr. Josephine painted a vivid scenario: Basikana, one of the Christian schoolgirls, took the nuns to her home. In this homestead, there are only two families and they are all Christians. The children at once get us three stamping machines which turned up-side-down make capital seats and then having carefully washed out a tin can, filled it with beer and laid it at our feet. At the next homestead, whose members again were all Christians, all the family members were at home, sitting and working in a shaded area. “The men were dressing goat skins, the women and girls making baskets, or mats, or threading beads, all so happy and content in this bright free land. This is the first time we have seen women and men work together,” To the nuns, the Christian family was the representation of a solid, nuclear, happy family where women and men worked together, and where the virtues of Western-style cleanliness and hospitality were evident, a perfect example of the transforming effects of the girls’ education on domestic life.

The picture of the heathen family stands in sharp contrast. Without providing any evidence, the nuns viewed the heathen family as presenting a scene of hostility to the nuns, noncooperation between men and women, absence of happiness, and people suffering as a result of ignorance and dirt. At the entrance of one such homestead, all the men were seated carving round bowls out of the trunk of the umganu tree. They looked surly and would hardly say sakubona. Some women began to peep round the corners so we went over to them and found a poor girl standing sadly apart. She was dreadfully burnt, hand and foot, a mass of burnt flesh, drawn, dirty and half healed.

We are presented with a disjuncture between a traditional African homestead (depicted as dirty, unfriendly, and regressive) and a Christian homestead (progressive and family friendly). That the effort to discredit the non-Christian villages was deliberate appears evident.
their wives, and enjoy, say, their child’s birthday party?10

Be that as it may, rather than repeat platitudes about forgiveness and
pains of the past, Tutu represents for us today a man of bold spirituality who
recognizes the horrors people can inflict upon one another and yet retains a sense
of idealism about reconciliation and ubuntu. With a clarity of sight born out of
decades of experience, he has demonstrated to us how to move forward with
honesty, truthfulness, justice, equity, compassion, and love to build a newer and
more humane society and world.

Appendix: A Brief Biography of Desmond Tutu’s Life
(Excerpted and compiled by M. Sigg)

Desmond Tutu (1931-2021) was born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal, about
179 km west of Johannesburg into a Methodist family that later became
Anglican. His parents were Xhosa and Tswana, and his father was a teacher. He
attended school at Johannesburg Bantu High School. He trained first as a teacher 
at Pretoria Bantu Normal College and, in 1954, he graduated from the University
of South Africa. He worked for three years as a high school teacher and then
decided to study theology. He had wanted to pursue a medical career but could
not afford the training.

In 1955, he married Nomalizo Leah Shenxane After his ordination as a
priest in 1961, he pursued further theological study in England from 1962 to
1966, leading up to a Master of Theology. He taught theology in the Eastern
Cape, South Africa from 1967 to 1972. At this time, he started to make his anti-
apartheid views known. He then returned to England for three years to become
the assistant director of a theological institute in London. In 1975 he became the
first Black Dean of St. Mary’s Cathedral in Johannesburg.

In 1985, at a time when townships were rising up in rebellions against
the apartheid regime, Tutu was installed as the first Black Anglican bishop. He
publicly endorsed civil disobedience and an economic boycott of South Africa to
put an end to apartheid. A year later he was elected the first Black Archbishop of
Cape Town. With other church leaders, he mediated clashes between
government forces and Black protesters. In 1988, he also became Chancellor of
the University of Western Cape in Bellville, South Africa.

she had a lot to ask the priest about. Her confidence as a Christian is
illustrated by the fact that after the first communion, the other children
were afraid to eat in front of crowds for fear of being bewitched, but
Sikhawulaphi was not afraid, but would be happy to go to heaven on her First Communion day.120

In a way, Sikhawulaphi’s baptism was a triumph of the missionaries’
desires for girls and women to be pious. In the eyes of the missionaries, it was a
triumph over Ndebele women’s “addiction to heathen practices” and an answer
to Sikhawulaphi’s prayer that Mary would help her with her catechism lessons
“as if she were one of her own children.”121 Since priests were determined to keep
Makhwelambila’s non-Christian influences at bay, the baptism was also perhaps
a triumph of Christian patriarchy over African patriarchy. Sikhawulaphi’s
commitment to Christianity later drew her father to convert, even though he had
initially been unwilling.

Adult Life

A yawning gap in the record exists pertaining to Sikhawulaphi’s life between her
baptism and her adult life as a wife and mother. Mainly this deficit arises because
Bullen’s Journal ceases abruptly in 1904, spelling an end to any specific references
to Sikhawulaphi. References to her in the
Zambezi Mission Record
also dwindle,
leaving researchers to rely on patchy evidence from the Empandeni Annals as well
as oral testimony.

Sikhawulaphi had dreamed of joining the nuns, but that desire was
suppressed and she was channeled into Christian motherhood. The nuns reported
her childhood inclination to marry and have children. As a child, Sikhawulaphi
longed for “a beautiful child who can open her eyes and talk, who she can carry
on her back.”122 Moreover, celibacy, one of the vows taken by women religious,
was not easily understood or accepted by the African communities. It was
considered a disgrace for an Ndebele woman to die childless. These ideas were
strengthened by Christian perceptions of motherhood, which were reinforced
when Sikhawulaphi was given a doll, a symbol of Western motherhood.

The nuns’ concern that Sikhawulaphi should have a Christian marriage
and family can be understood from the scenes they portrayed of a heathen family

10 Desmond Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, Image (New York: Doubleday
Publishers, 1999), 130.
120. Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 114.
121. Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 110.
122. ZMR2, no. 20 (April 1903): 223.
In 1990, President FW de Klerk unbanned the African National Congress (ANC) and announced the imminent release of Nelson Mandela from prison. Apartheid laws and racist restrictions were repealed the following year. 1994 saw the first democratic elections during which Mandela won by a landslide. At this time, Tutu coined the term “Rainbow nation” to describe the multiracial composition of post-apartheid South Africa.

Also in 1994, Mandela invited Tutu to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights violations under apartheid. In 1996, Tutu retired from his position as a primate and became archbishop emeritus, though continuing to work as a public figure. He pulled out of public life in 2010 but continued to advocate for conflict resolution with other world leaders in the group The Elders that he co-founded in 2007. In 2013 he criticized the ANC for its inaction in addressing questions of inequality, corruption, and violence. Through the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation (https://www.tutu.org.za/), he and his wife worked to promote peace-building and conflict resolution to achieve reconciliation and cultivate accountable servant leadership.

Tutu was not afraid to critique the church that he had served for decades. When there was an uproar over the ordination of gay bishops in the Anglican Church, he criticized an “obsession” with homosexuality that overshadowed the clergy’s battle on poverty. This did not stop him from declaring his support for gay rights in 2013.

On October 7, 2021 he attended a thanksgiving service in honor of his 90th birthday at St. George’s Cathedral in Cape Town, his former parish. He died on December 26, 2021 in Cape Town. According to Al Jazeera online:

“His ‘clear views and fearless stance,’” which made him a “unifying symbol for all African freedom fighters,” won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, according to the Norwegian Nobel Institute.

Though short in stature, Tutu was a giant of South African politics, notable for his drive, infectious laughter and witty critiques of apartheid’s absurdities. In one example, he told followers: “Be nice to whites, they need you to rediscover their humanity.”

“He was South Africa’s Martin Luther King – a Christian clergyman who worked, non-violently, for racial justice and equality,” Steven Gish, author of a biography on Tutu, told Al Jazeera. “He never hated his oppressors and always believed in dialogue and appealing to people’s moral conscience.”

Sikhawulaphi was so determined to be baptized that on one of the visits from her father, she begged him to allow her to be baptized. When Makhwelambila finally consented to his daughter’s requests, Fr. Hartmann was so happy, he gave Makhwelambila a blanket. He was probably also worried about losing his daughter to the missionaries and therefore tried to delay the baptism for as long as he could. Fr. Hartmann responded by accosting Makhwelambila with his notebook and made him sign a statement that he would give Sikhawulaphi the liberty to practice her religion and to marry as a Christian. Fr. Hartmann used the same tactic on other Ndebele fathers who wished to arrange marriages for their daughters who either were Christians already or were being prepared for baptism. In this notebook, he kept a record of agreements regarding who these girls could or could not marry. As Sr. Josephine put it, “Woe betide the Christian who is thinking of marrying a heathen girl.”

On June 22, 1902, Sikhawulaphi was baptized “solemnly” in a public baptism so that she could be a shining example to be seen by all. Shetikwa was her godmother. She received the name Agnes, a saint killed by non-Christians. Her joy and happiness were described as genuine and pure. Fr. Hartmann gave her a hen as a present. The hen was meant to remind her that from the day of her baptism, she had a mother (Mary, the mother of Jesus) who would take care of her better than her own mother, who had abandoned her, could ever do. An example of a genuine conversion, Sikhawulaphi was a source of pride for the nuns and priests.

An evidence that Sikhawulaphi’s baptism was special was that when she asked for more time for her first confession before her first communion, her request was granted. She wished for more time for

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114. ZMR2, no. 19 (January 1903): 223.
115. Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 110.
118. Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 111.
119. Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 111.
she believed that UMlimophezulu would help her in her lessons because she was one of his own children.109

Apart from being keen to be baptized, Sikhawulaphi took her schoolwork seriously. On August 29, 1901, she appeared on the list of prizewinners, attaining the third position in her class, with Ndawana achieving the first and Ndunu the second. Extremely inquisitive, she was noted for being an intelligent child, an attentive listener who asked a lot of questions, and the nuns were prepared to explain things that she found difficult to understand.

Several anecdotes illustrate how Sikhawulaphi grappled with understanding Christianity from what the nuns taught her, on the one hand, and from their behavior, on the other hand. Sr. Andrina complained about a noisy insect and Sikhawulaphi said, “God made that insect and you don’t like it.” When the nun complained about too much rain and how it would ruin the crops, leading to scarcity of food, Sikhawulaphi asked, “Who sends the rain?”110

She also learned the virtue of punctuality through hearing a sermon about a lady who arrived late for mass every Sunday in spite of repeated warnings. When the lady’s time to die came, the priest was late and she died without the last sacraments. After hearing this story, Sikhawulaphi, who previously had arrived late for prayers, never delayed for prayers and would be kneeling in the church long before the bell rang. The reason for this change in behavior was that she did not want the priest to be late when she died.111

Sikhawulaphi also grappled with the meaning of the consecrated altar bread. She observed Sr. Josephine baking the bread and asked, “Are you making UMlimophezulu?” to which the sister said she was making bread and the priest would change it into UMlimophezulu.112

Sikhawulaphi could not understand why her baptism was taking so long and seemed to blame the nuns and priests, saying,

If the Fathers and you (nuns) and white people won’t let me into Heaven because I am not baptised, I will not stop calling at the door to our Lady. She is up at the top near God. She will let me in and then I can stop just inside the door. I will sit there, and the white people cannot chase me away then.113

Sources:


Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu is best remembered by the able and courageous way he argued for a theology with an “African-color” as a student, in a series of theological debates between him and the Dean of his Faculty of Theology, Belgian professor Alfred Vanneste, at the prestigious Lovanium University in Kinshasa in 1960. These debates took place as part of the famous Kinshasa Theology Faculty symposia (1960-1968) that centered on the “Possibility of an ‘African Theology.’”

Adieu, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku (1933 – 2021)

We just received the sad news of the call into the great beyond of His Excellency, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku of the Democratic Republic of Congo. His call into the glory of the Risen Christ in heaven came just three days after the death of another global church leader, the South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu.

The loss of these two great sons of African Christianity and pioneer theologians is a tremendous blow at a time like this. Their deaths mark the end of an era in the development and growth of African Christianity and theological thought in the continent. The baton is now with the younger African theologians and church leaders who must not allow the labors of these pioneers in African theology and growth of Christianity in the continent, to be in vain.

Tharcisse Tshibangu was born in Kipushi (Katanga, DRC) on April 24, 1933. After taking Greek and Latin in secondary school, he studied philosophy and theology at the Major Seminary of Moba (former Baudouinville). Thereafter, he pursued his studies in the Theology Faculty at the prestigious Lovanium University in Kinshasa from 1957-1961, graduating with a degree in theology. From 1961 to 1965 he pursued further studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, obtaining a PhD in Theology (1962) and a Habilitation in Higher Instruction, with English being introduced gradually. Through her daily interactions with the nuns, she learned to speak English at a quicker pace than the other children, picking up the language from listening to the nuns conversing among themselves. Her ability to speak English at an early age gave her confidence when relating to the nuns as well as to the outside world. It probably helped her understand the Christian teachings better than the other children, thus causing the missionaries to view her baptism as a special occasion.

Baptism

Since women on the Empandeni estate were regarded, by nuns and priests alike, as being resistant to Christianity, their conversion was seen as special. Baptisms of women were valued and, in the missionaries’ records of their converts, the number of women baptized was highlighted. For example, on Saturday, May 27, 1899, they recorded that there were “11 baptisms, 3 of them women, mothers of our children.” Sikhawulaphi’s baptism was extraordinarily special because in her the Notre Dame nuns found a true candidate for Christianity who “astonished Fathers by her intelligent answers.”103 In her, the nuns professed to have found “a precious pearl which repays ten- and twentyfold the disappointments one otherwise experiences at a mission field like that of Empandeni whose ground is so hard, stony and sterile.”104 Sikhawulaphi was different from the other girls, who, according to the nuns, “did negative things instinctively and were difficult to convert” and “were lazy and indolent.”105 Sikhawulaphi was fond of work, thorough in whatever she did.106 She was determined to become a Christian, even at the cost of incurring anger from her father.107

Her baptism became the center of a wrangle between her father, Makhwelambila, who was reluctant for her to be a Christian, and the Jesuit missionaries. Her father tried to delay granting his consent until, in his words, “she learnt more book and is taller.” In contrast, the Jesuit missionaries were adamant that she had chosen to become a Christian and should be allowed the freedom to practice her faith.108 Sikhawulaphi was aware of her predicament, but

103. ZMR 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.
104. ZMR 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.
105. ZMR 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.
106. ZMR 2, no. 20 (April 1903): 223.
107. ZMR 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.

11 Francis Anekwe Oborji is Professor Ordinarius (Full Professor and Chair) of Contextual Theology, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome and a regular contributor to the Journal of African Christian Biography.
Education (1965). In 1965, he returned to Lovanium (Kinshasa), where he secured an appointment as a full-time professor until 1966.

He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Lubumbashi in 1959 and was appointed to Vatican Council II by Pope John XXIII (1966) as a member of the Congolese Universitarians. He then went on to teach at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Lovanium University in Kinshasa, where he took part in creating the Lo- 
vanium Theological Circle. Within that setting, the first debates regarding the possibility of an "African theology" took place. These debates eventually launched the scientific research that contributed a great deal to giving birth to what we know today as African theology. The influence of the Lovanium Theological Circle began to spread like wildfire to the rest of the continent, beginning in 1960.

In other words, Tshibangu was, from day one, a central figure in giving an African direction to the celebrated synod debates on "African Christianity and African Theology." At the Faculty of Catholic Theology, Kinshasa, in the debates of 1960 and 1968 with Dean Vanneste, Tshibangu did not mince words as he questioned the type of missionary theology being used in the church's missionary approach to Africa at the time: "Adaptation is not simply a matter of personnel, of having African Bishops and lay leaders, nor is it meant only to adapt the liturgy, and reform parish and pastoral structures. Rather, it means giving a prominent place to key factors in Africa's worldview, culture, and religion, in particular, to African philosophy and intuition. (...) These are 'latent theological seeds,' which "adaptationism" could purify and use as 'religious analogous' to illumine the Ndebele people in general. Nuns and priests wrote of the Ndebele as "a proud and sensitive race and hence the heads of families . . . do not like to dwell in populous centres where they would almost be nonentities." 97 They worried that as the girls grew toward womanhood, they might "give cause for anxiety, but it would be unreasonable to expect much from them." 99 Of Sikhawulaphi, the nuns' view was the opposite. For instance, years after Sikhawulaphi had left school for marriage, Sr. Laura still remembered her as a "fine character and, as a good Catholic who still lives at the mission after a varied career." 100

As a child Sikhawulaphi probably worked for her board in the Notre Dame nuns' convent. She described the work she did in letters to her relatives in the Ndebele which were translated and published in the Zambezi Mission Record. In speaking of her morning routine, Sikhawulaphi writes that she would make coffee for the nuns and priests, after which she would go to the church for prayers. She would come back to the kitchen to wash the dishes, milk the cows, and put the kettle on for the nuns when it was time for tea. Sikhawulaphi also refers to another girl whose name she does not give, but whose brother was called Mbaimbai. 101 This girl did not live with the nuns, but did some work for them and African theology" at the Faculty of the Catholic Theology, Kinshasa. In the debates of 1960 and 1968 with Dean Vanneste, Tshibangu did not mince words as he questioned the type of missionary theology being used in the church's missionary approach to Africa at the time: "Adaptation is not simply a matter of personnel, of having African Bishops and lay leaders, nor is it meant only to adapt the liturgy, and reform parish and pastoral structures. Rather, it means giving a prominent place to key factors in Africa's worldview, culture, and religion, in particular, to African philosophy and intuition. (...) These are 'latent theological seeds,' which "adaptationism" could purify and use as 'religious analogous' to illumine the Ndebele people in general. Nuns and priests wrote of the Ndebele as "a proud and sensitive race and hence the heads of families . . . do not like to dwell in populous centres where they would almost be nonentities." 97 They worried that as the girls grew toward womanhood, they might "give cause for anxiety, but it would be unreasonable to expect much from them." 99 Of Sikhawulaphi, the nuns' view was the opposite. For instance, years after Sikhawulaphi had left school for marriage, Sr. Laura still remembered her as a "fine character and, as a good Catholic who still lives at the mission after a varied career." 100

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back on December 17, “the same child, bright and happy.” Although the nuns and priests did not stop Makhwelambila from visiting his daughter whenever he wished, they were not comfortable with his visits because he was not a Christian.  

A struggle for control of her welfare ensued, with Christianity and European patriarchy represented by the Jesuit priests, mainly Fr. Prestage and Fr. Hartmann, and “paganism” and African patriarchy represented by her father. The priests and nuns sought to limit the freedom of members of her extended family to visit her. Unlike her father, Sikhawulaphi’s relations were only allowed occasional visits. Although the missionaries were wary of “pagan influences” that could result from family visits and despite the pressure she was under, no evidence exists to suggest that Sikhawulaphi ever turned against either her father or any of her relatives, or that she lost her African identity and values. This claim is borne out by her adult life, as will be illustrated below.

For Sikhawulaphi, therefore, the convent was a home when she had no other. It provided a conducive atmosphere within which she was able to embrace the Christian faith. The defeat that dismantled the Ndebele state meant the breakup of her family, which, under normal circumstances, would have provided a safety net for her. The convent filled the void that resulted by providing safety and security, it became both a religious and social sanctuary for her.

Numerous terms of endearment are used to describe Sikhawulaphi in the entries in Sr. Josephine’s diary and the Zambezi Mission Record. She is referred to as a model child, the nuns’ pride and joy, a thoroughly good child, thorough in whatever she did, “fond of work, unlike the other natives,” “her ladyship,” and “the famous Sikhawulaphi.” Sikhawulaphi was also gifted with piety and common sense. These descriptions summarized virtues that the missionaries deemed to be lacking in the Empandeni community, especially in the girls and women; they were characteristics that the missionaries wished to inculcate through Christianity and education. The missionary education system, with its heavy emphasis on manual work, became an important tool for disseminating this missionary ideology.

Sikhawulaphi was also described as “proud and sensitive,” terms that fit her into the missionary perception of an Ndebele person, for they used the same theological problems confronting missionary activity in Africa.  

In his response entitled, *D’abord une Vraie Théologie* (First, a True Theology), Dean Vanneste said that adaptation means rising to a higher level, not descending to a lower one. In this way, African theology and Christianity would be part of the worldwide theological endeavor.

As Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, Tshibangu’s biographer, rightly said, By an “African-colored” theology, Tharcisse Tshibangu and his group meant to go beyond Africanizing the hierarchy, the lay leaders, the parish and pastoral structures and also the liturgical and para-liturgical rites. In their eyes, it was a question of going back to the “very spirit of Christianity.” This concern also differs from the problem of giving a soul to and informing the African’s life, mentality, way of seeing things and all his cultures by means of the Christian spirit. One ought to go beyond the authors of the *Des Prêtres Noirs s’interrogent* (1956) (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), whose concern was to proclaim the need of Christianizing the African mentality and culture.

Today’s theology of inculturation has tried to correct some of the inadequacies in the theology of adaptation of old. However, at the time Tshibangu was making this argument in an African context in particular, it was a novel and courageous attempt by a young African theologian of his age. Who would had thought that a people once considered to be culturally a “tabula rasa” (without culture and civilization) were now spoken of as having not only admirable culture and civilization but also an African ontology, to the point of discussing the metaphysical realities of the law of God? Such was the courage of the young Kinshasa theologian Tshibangu at the time.

Tshibangu’s primary concern was to formulate a theology with an “African-color” that was supposed to develop into a work aiming at the meeting between authentic African tradition and the original and specific elements of Judeo-Christian revelation. In this endeavor, in the tradition of authors of the


child, quite European in comparison with her companions, who do not altogether appreciate the sprightly ways and occasional teasing of the small princess."88 It is not clear what exactly made her “European”—her appearance or the “sprightly teasing” of her peers, but the implication was that the nuns regarded her as being of a higher social status than her peers. She was the only one who stayed when, in less than a month, the other girls began to leave one by one.89 She proved to be a great help to Sr. Mary in the kitchen. Having been dependent on the nuns from an early age, Sikhawulaphi probably felt a degree of loyalty to them, which may explain her desire to conform to Christian teachings and to please the nuns. The nuns and priests saw in the vulnerable little girl a protégé whom they could fashion.

Sikhawulaphi’s separation from her mother very probably troubled the little girl, for the nuns tried to arrange for her to visit her mother in Francistown, an attempt that turned out to be unsuccessful. She was accompanied on her missionary-sponsored train journey by Mawaba, one of the mission’s trusted general hands. Sikhawulaphi had prepared presents, which included a blanket and a cock and a hen from her own fowl run, for her mother and her siblings.90 She showed confidence on the train as she journeyed from Plumtree to Francistown, conversing in English with European passengers. On reaching their destination, they found that Sikhawulaphi’s mother had gone on a visit to a village a couple days’ walk away. They stayed overnight with relatives and searched for two days, but without success. Disappointed, she and Mawaba returned to the mission to be welcomed back by the nuns, who had been worried that if she succeeded in finding her mother, she might decide not to return to Empandeni but to live with her mother permanently.91 She never spoke of having attempted a second visit.

Sikhawulaphi was therefore literally brought up by the nuns, and the priests showed tremendous concern for her welfare. The nuns often took her along when they visited the villages or went on picnics.92 Her father visited her occasionally; sometimes he would fetch her from the convent and she would be away for long periods. On October 19, 1904, she left with her father and came

Bantu philosophy of “life-giving force” that came before him, especially, the trio Placide Tempels, Vincent Mulago, and Alexis Kagame, Tshibangu (like Mulago), emphasized the principle of unity of life as an epistemological principle marking African cultures in their internal coherence.

It would seem that the adaptation theology of the past that negated the existence of authentic African culture and ontology previously blocked the acknowledgment of this dynamic union of past, present, and future in African philosophy and worldview. The African philosophy of the principle of unity of life affected the life of a single human, of a community, and of nature and the world. It was commonly known as a holistic vision of life. But with the coming of colonialism and Western philosophy and theology, another epistemology burst onto the scene.

The anthropological consequences of Western epistemology have, unfortunately, developed the individual by promoting his or her freedom. They have not however, equally promoted the community-humanity (life-giving force) dimension of individual freedom in line with African thought-patterns, meaning, and ultimate reality. In Western epistemology, the purpose of life is to master the laws of nature in view of dominating it and it has substituted the African sense of cooperation with competition and struggle for survival. That is, struggle for a harmonious insertion into a community or into nature.

Tshibangu argues that the result of such a “fatal” encounter between African philosophy and worldview and Western thought patterns and philosophy has been an ever-increasing distancing from the principle of unity of life, of the living world, of the visible and invisible universe. It has deeply transformed everything, including cultural, political, economic, and religious structures. As a result, according to Tshibangu, African theological thought is torn between inculturation through which one recovers the holistic process of life and knowledge—as demonstrated in various African traditions—and liberation from the contradictions and denials of the human being that flow from inserting oneself into a Western epistemology of being.

The Obligations of African Theologians

Tshibangu points out that political and cultural approaches must be interwoven if Christian theology is to deal adequately with the problems confronting it. This task, Tshibangu argues, imposes certain conditions on African theologians, who must now channel their theological effort and commitment in a sound and organized way.

88. *ZMR* 1, no. 12 (April 1901): 419.
90. *ZMR* 2, no. 27 (January 1905): 494.
92. Empandeni Annals, January 22, 1901, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Archives, Liverpool, UK; hereinafter SNDdeN Archives.
Having been rescued from “bad motherhood,” as well as from the breakup and scattering of the royal family, Sikhawulaphi was presented to the theologians, as follows: First, African theologians must be fully aware of the fact that their Catholic work calls for real spiritual commitment. There can be no entry about the questions raised by the appearance of new values in a given society, by the characteristic perception and conception of things (that is, its typical epistemological viewpoint), and by the facts and events related to its sociocultural evolution and development. The third obligation imposed on African theologians, according to Tshibangu, is that of their own social commitment. They cannot live as isolated beings because they must bear responsibility for their own personal destiny and that of others. They must be involved in their community, and their community participation must be as active as possible. This participation puts them in a position to gain a deeper grasp of the cultural issues posed by their community and the living conditions of their contemporaries. It helps them to pay due attention to the questions raised by the appearance of new values in a given society.

Fourthly, and closely associated with this overall commitment, is the obligation of ecclesial involvement. African theologians must live in fidelity to ecclesial truth. They must of course possess discernment so that they can know exactly what is defined as certain truth by the Church. But they must equally cultivate courage and take risks, exploring, pondering, and expressing the theological conclusions that derive from their authentic research.

resulting from the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893–94 and the destruction of the Ndebele state which scattered some members of the royal family.

Under normal circumstances, a child born out of wedlock among the Ndebele would have been brought up by its mother’s extended family since lobola (bride wealth) would not have been paid. In precolonial Ndebele society lobola was paid primarily to transfer reproductive rights from the wife’s family to the husband and would not be paid until the couple was blessed with a child. The effects on Sikhawulaphi of the political upheavals in Matabeleland and of her unstable family background are somehow suggested in the very name Sikhawulaphi, which means literally “Where do we end?” This name is usually given to a child born during a period of misfortune that the parents wish would come to an end. During Sikhawulaphi’s childhood, Makhwelambila no longer enjoyed the privilege of being a king’s brother, since the Ndebele royal family became “like the rest of the natives” after the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893–94 and the 1896 anticolonial uprisings. By the time Makhwelambila brought his daughter to the mission, he wished for her to be treated just like the other girls there.

European nuns in Zimbabwe have a history of “rescuing” orphans from villages surrounding their stations. Some of the children who were cared for by the nuns expressed wishes to serve the Lord by becoming priests and nuns. For instance, in 1919 at Saint Triashill Mission, in Manicaland Province, one of the pioneer Precious Blood nuns, Sr. Olympia, rescued a baby boy called Alois whose mother had died while giving birth to him. The child was a weakling and Sr. Olympia at one time gave up hope that he would live. He did survive and at the age of eleven asked Brother Goeb, SJ, if it was only the white people who could become priests. When he was told that anyone could become a priest, he decided to pursue a vocation. In 1936, Alois was sent to Chishawasha, a seminary set up by Bishop Chichester of Salisbury (now Harare), and after graduating he was ordained as a priest. The gendered nature of the nuns’ response to African children who grew up under their care is illustrated by the fact that while Alois’s wish to become a priest was encouraged, Sikhawulaphi’s dream to become a nun was not embraced. As a little girl, Sikhawulaphi expressed the desire to become like the Notre Dame nuns when she was older but, because of prejudice and limited vision, the nuns did not encourage this ambition. Instead, they chose to nurture her dream to become a mother.

16 T. Tshibangu “The Task and Method of Theology in Africa,” 40.

Conclusion

Apart from his stewardship as bishop and theologian, it suffices to mention, at least in passing, that Tshibangu, as bishop and theologian, together with other members of the Congolese Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and the entire body of Christ in Congo, weathered the storm during the trying period of the dictatorial regime of Mobutu in his country, formerly called Zaire.

Tshibangu’s qualities as a solid Christian, a well-balanced African bishop-theologian, and a social reformer are his greatest legacy to the church in Africa and the world. The combination of these three qualities in the exercise of his ministry will remain forever the greatest epitaph in honor of an exceptional African church leader and theologian.

Adieu, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu.
May the Angels of God welcome you at the gate of heaven! Amen.

81 Bullen, Empandeni Interlude, 72.
82 Jesuit Archives, Harare, Triashill Again, Box 196.
Tell us about your family background, childhood, education. Where did you grow up, and what were the circumstances of your upbringing?

I am from Ile Alapo (Alapo House) in Ogbomoso, in Nigeria. I was the fifth of nine children. I grew up in Ghana where I had my primary and middle school education in Kumasi, Ghana. I was from a rather poor family but, in spite of hardship at that time, my parents and my most senior brother gave me the needed support to attend a secondary school after my middle school education. I thus became the first person in the family to attend secondary school. After my secondary education at Ahmadiyya Secondary School, I continued with my post-secondary teacher education at Wesley College, Kumasi for two years. I was thus qualified as a teacher and taught in two primary schools for two years.

What individuals (parents, siblings, spouse, relatives, friends, teachers, mentors, role models) particularly influenced you growing up? What was it about them that made an impact on you?

I come from a Christian home and my parents were quite strict, ensuring that we went to church regularly. After service on Sundays, my father would ask us one by one what we had learned from the service. You dared not say that you did not remember the topic of the sermon and the passages read. My three elder brothers influenced me a lot in my education, teaching career, and growth as a Christian. Most influential and impactful was the ascetic life of my senior most brother, Moses Oladejo, who later became Chief Alapo of Ogbomoso. He fasted frequently and recited solitary prayers during the night. When I was growing up, I absorbed many of these practices.

After my secondary education, he strongly encouraged me to study hard, to take my Advanced Level courses seriously, and to go to University. His prayers were answered when I had the privilege of going to the University of Ghana, Legon to do a Diploma course in Religion. A year after the completion of the course, I was invited to continue with the BA (double honors in Sociology

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17 Deji Ayegboyin is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan and a scholar and public speaker in great demand. He is a member of the DACB Senior Advisory Council.
and the Study of Religions.)

What events, circumstances or books were somehow pivotal in your life?

I do not remember well why I was a very committed member of the Scripture Union when I was in secondary school. However, I became more committed to the things of God when I was admitted to Wesley College. Through the influence of the chaplain I became a member and later the secretary of the preaching band and a chorister in the Wesley Chapel ensemble. During my second year, I became a Methodist lay preacher even though I was a Baptist at home. While I was at Wesley, I expressed the desire to go to the prestigious Trinity Seminary at Legon in Accra to train as a priest but I was not qualified to be admitted then. Two years later, I gained admission into the University of Ghana, Legon.

What were some of the greatest challenges/obstacles that you encountered in becoming who you are?

In 1969, while my parents and siblings were living in Ghana, the Aliens Compliance Order was enacted, stipulating that Nigerians and other aliens without valid residence permits had to leave the country in the space of a couple of months. I had just written my school certificate examination and was waiting for the results when this happened. I was in a serious quandary when my parents and six of my siblings left for Nigeria, leaving three of us to wait by faith. The government did not disturb the students who were studying in one school or another, so I decided to stay. Fortunately, I was soon admitted to Wesley College where I did not have to pay for tuition, boarding, and lodging. University education was free and because I was also a certified “A” teacher, I was granted study leave throughout the course of my study at the University of Ghana, Legon.

After my national service in Ghana in 1980, I moved to Nigeria, where I had the opportunity to lecture in the College of Education at Ilesa. The college gave me the opportunity to apply for postgraduate studies at the University of Ibadan. A couple of years after earning my PhD, I was invited to join the Department of Religious Studies as a lecturer. Incidentally, the very day I was offered this rare opportunity, the president of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, also invited me to take up an appointment as a lecturer at the seminary with the prospect of being ordained as a Baptist pastor while lecturing. These two opportunities, coming within a space of two hours, created a serious dilemma for me for a few days. I was convinced that it was better to go to seminary but my friends in the fellowship who I had asked to pray along with me and another colleague who was a Pentecostal minister insisted that I should understand Christianity, her journey through baptism, her life as a Christian mother, and then her years as a widow living at the mission estate. Though Sikhawulaphi’s main area of influence was her family, she deserves a place in Zimbabwean women’s history. This history has tended to concentrate on assertive, strong-willed, illustrous, and politically powerful independent women. Examples of such women include Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana—whose role in the Shona risings of 1896 became legendary and inspired Zimbabwean nationalism during the colonial era—and the Ndebele Queen, Lozikeyi Dlodlo, who was described as “a very dangerous and intriguing woman.”

Although Sikhawulaphi was a devout Catholic, she was not a founder of an urban women’s movement as was Elizabeth Musodzi. Musodzi, also a product of Catholic missionary education—by the Dominican nuns at Chishawasha—not only founded a Catholic women’s movement, but also dined with King George VI and the Queen Mother when they visited Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1947. Sikhawulaphi was not among the urban prostitutes and women in temporary relationships (known in Shona as vakadzi vemapoto), who have found their place in Zimbabwean women’s history for working hard to turn around societal stigmas against urban women and to live better lives. Sikhawulaphi did not have a dominating presence in the public sphere. She did not advocate for the promotion of girls’ education in the direct manner that Elizabeth Musodzi did. Sikhawulaphi’s advocacy was subtle but representative of female Catholic mission education graduates of her generation, who exercised agency mainly by realizing that, although the colonial system deemed their generation of African women as not yet ready for the world of work, they needed to provide education as a foundation for their children to use in navigating the colonial landscape.

Childhood


who attended school in the early days of the mission.69 Unfortunately, Sikhawulaphi features for a period of only about ten years. These records, however, do provide not only references to the nuns’ expectations of her, but also her own reactions to Christianity, for the nuns recorded some of Sikhawulaphi’s own statements verbatim, expressing her responses to Western-style education and Christianity. Her descendants also made a meaningful contribution to the writing of this biography. By keeping her memory alive, they made available aspects of Sikhawulaphi’s life, particularly her adult life, that are not in the written record. Sikhawulaphi’s biography opens a window into how Christianity and Western schooling were received and appropriated by the schoolgirls at Empandeni and into how, when they were older, they used the experience and skills they had gained to navigate the colonial system, as well as to guide their children to be able to adapt to their changing environment. Her biography provides a broader understanding of the interplay between individual lives and the social and political forces that were at play during the times of rapid change brought about by colonialism.

Sikhawulaphi did not have any leadership roles in the Roman Catholic Church, but her story, which I shall tell within the broader framework of the nuns’ and priests’ educational goals, will serve to illustrate what became of the female graduates of Roman Catholic mission schools in southwestern Zimbabwe. She is unique in that from childhood she earned a reputation for taking Christian teachings more seriously than did other children. As an adult, she became an ideal model of Christian motherhood—this being the only avenue open for the first group of girls schooled at Empandeni to express their conversion to a world religion and Western schooling. My purpose in writing her biography is not so much to suggest that her experiences were representative of those of all girls schooled at Empandeni, but rather to glean information from her experiences about aspects of social life in the early history of the mission station and the surrounding areas.

For writing Sikhawulaphi’s biography, I have adopted the approach of social biography, a shift away from the tendency by biographers to focus on great men and women and their deeds.70 I explore Sikhawulaphi’s struggle to go to the university. Another minister friend prophesied that after some time in the university I would have another invitation to go to the seminary. It was a difficult decision but I yielded to the counsel of my Christian friends and eventually accepted to go to the university almost reluctantly.

What do you feel were your most significant accomplishments?

I feel fulfilled as lecturer having risen to the peak of my profession. I have supervised over 40 PhD theses and more than 100 MA and MPhil dissertations. I have served as external examiner to several universities in and outside the country and as assessor of professors to many universities in Africa and outside the continent and some of the students I have mentored have become professors in Nigeria and outside the country. Some are now chief lecturers and senior administrators at Colleges of Education.

After the special offer to do my undergraduate studies at Legon, I had another opportunity to do postgraduate studies (MA and PhD) at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. A few years later, I was employed as a lecturer in the same university. This opportunity offered me golden opportunities and attracted unlimited favor. I had the opportunity to spend my research leave at the Graduate Institute of Religion and Theology, University of Birmingham (UK) where I was nominated the 2004/2005 William Paton Fellow and Visiting Scholar. A couple of years later, I was able to use my sabbatical leave to serve as a visiting professor and the first research fellow in African Studies in 2006/2007 at Liverpool Hope University (UK). Two years later, the University of Ibadan approved my leave of absence to serve as the president of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Oghomoso, founded in 1898, the first degree awarding institution in Nigeria and one of the oldest and most prestigious theological institutions in Africa. It was while I was at this institution that my elevation to the professorate was announced at the University of Ibadan. Soon afterwards, Liverpool Hope University also conferred on me the title of Senior Fellow, Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity. In 2018, I was elected Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL).

On the international ecumenical platform, I have served as chief editor of publications for the West Africa Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI) for three terms. I have served as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Theological Desk of the All-Africa Council of Churches in Nairobi (2010-2015) and I was the African member on the Joint Commission for the International Ecumenical Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council. We held our deliberations in the United States, Singapore, Germany, Jamaica, and the United Kingdom. I have also served as:

“A Character Worth Writing About”: Sikhawulaphi Khumalo’s Education and Christian Experiences at Empandeni Mission, Southwestern Zimbabwe, 1900–1940s

By Barbara Mahamba

The experiences of the first girls to attend mission schools such as Empandeni Girls Mission School, located in southwestern Zimbabwe, have been ignored by mainstream history. Little is known about how they perceived the new religion to which they were introduced or about how they interacted with the nuns and priests. The main reason for their marginalization today is that they were ignored by those who composed historians’ main sources, the mission records. It is difficult as well to recapture their voices, for one can no longer interview them. The access to life and thought in a girls’ mission school offered by the case of Sikhawulaphi Khumalo (mid-1890s–1966), therefore, is exceptional. The daughter of Makhwelambila, a half-brother of the Ndebele king Lobengula, Sikhawulaphi’s situation was unique. Because of her relationship with the late king Lobengula, she was brought up as a little girl by the Notre Dame nuns, living with them in the nuns’ convent at Empandeni Mission. The nuns and priests at Empandeni loved her, and she featured frequently in the pages of the nuns’ diaries and in the Empandeni Annals, as well as in the priests’ reports. A Jesuit priest, Father John O’Neill, commented that she was “a character worth writing about.” Sikhawulaphi is indeed worthy of being written about for many reasons.

Do you have any regrets? If so, can you elaborate?

I guess I would have had many regrets if I had gone to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, instead of proceeding to university in 1993. I learned many things at the University of Ibadan and at the Universities at Birmingham and Liverpool where I did my sabbatical and utilized my fellowships. The experiences gathered from these great institutions came in handy when I served as the president of NBTS Ogbomoso.

What are your concerns for Africa (or for your church, your country) as you contemplate the future? What are some of the issues that African Christian leaders need to address?

Christianity—whatever it used to be—can no longer be considered the religion of white Europeans and North Americans. Indeed, not only has Christianity ceased to be an exclusively western religion in our generation, it is also no longer news that Christianity seems barely to be holding its own in Europe and other parts of the West. Conversely, Christianity is not only firmly rooted in several African societies, it has also become Africa’s fastest growing religion.

A number of authors, notable among which are Professors Andrew Walls, Kwesi A. Dickson, J. S. Pobee, Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu and Philip Jenkins, have critically observed and categorically declared that there will be at least three significant historical developments related to African Christianity in the twenty-first century. First, there will be a phenomenal numerical surge of the faith in Africa. Second, Africans will be the main actors and catalysts shaping Christian cultures. Third, Christianity will evolve permanently into a primarily nonwestern religion. In other words, this prophetic affirmation may be expressed

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67 In mission schools, education was a tool of evangelization.

68 Zambezi Mission Record 2, no. 30 (October 1905): 624; (hereinafter ZMR).
forcefully this way: The contemporary generation of African churches will determine the whole shape of church history and theology for centuries to come. This has been referred to as the paradigm shift of Christianity from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. All these prophetic observations are being fulfilled now, apparently even faster than it was originally thought.

Indeed, the renewal of Christianity in Africa is not limited to the increase in numbers of adherents or in the socio-cultural influence of the faith. It is also evident in the vitality of the numerous movements that are engaged in establishing churches worldwide. Bengt Sundkler puts it succinctly thus: "The prevalent Church trends in several countries such as the Charismatic renewals are modified in Africa according to local structure and indigenous peculiarity."

All these developments suggest that the church in Africa must not vanish again. Christianity, which is in our care, must not die for a second time in Africa.

It is imprudent for the church in Africa to continue operating without an adequate awareness of where it has come from or of the vital forces that brought it to its present situation. It is also imperative for the African church to note that it cannot "thrive without sound doctrine or Constructive Theology." The combination underlines the urgent need of Christian scholarship in Africa to help the church to be more theologically informed and to develop traditions that build consciously and constructively upon the learning of the past.

The need for more relevant theological thinking to underpin the future advance of the church in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Already, keen observers have warned that the spiritual sickness that is prevalent in some churches today is due to the lack of training in sound doctrine. It is important to stress that diluted theology will always result in diluted religion, just as shallowness of thought will always result in shallowness of character. Misinformed and uninformed religious leaders and members are the main unruly and badly-behaved fanatics of our time.

What are your dreams and hopes for the Christian movements and churches in Africa? If you were to return to this continent 100 years from now, what would you hope to find? What would you fear you might find?

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My fears about African Christianity include how Christian movements are given to being devotional and evangelized in the field. I would continue to proliferate and yet remain orthodox. Heresy was a blemish in the wheel of progress of the Early Church in Africa. It posed a greater threat to insiders than persecution. While persecution was an external aggression which one could easily recognize and possibly run away from, heresy, on the other hand, add more convincing subtlety. I have come to believe, further, that Doris Dube is a true believer in a faith that results in living in the world, but not of it—and that positioning includes remaining at a distinct remove from partisan approaches to worldly power.

Tell us about your involvement with the DACB. Please share your thoughts on the work of the DACB, present, or future.

I first heard about the DACB and the DBKL and my thoughts on the project were first formed at the African Church Literature Committee that produced the centennial book, *Celebrating the Vision* and *Growing and Branching Out*. The DACB membership of Zimbabwe largely comes from the Matabeleland region—made to understand by the Gukurahundi's harsh body. The African church must take the issue of authentic theology seriously. The very vagueness of the stories renders their purely pietistic aims more convincingly apolitical. I have come to believe, further, that Doris Dube is a true believer in a faith that results in living in the world, but not of it—and that positioning includes remaining at a distinct remove from partisan approaches to worldly power.

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most prolific writer of authentic and well researched stories for the DACB. Professor Nihinlola, who succeeded me as the president of NBTS, not only retained Dr. Ogunewu but also promoted him to the position of Senior Lecturer and Director of the Smith’s Archives and Museum at NBTS, Ogbomoso.

In my inaugural lecture, I created space to promote the work of the DACB with this announcement:

**Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB)**

“The mission of the DACB is to collect, preserve, and make freely accessible biographical accounts and church histories—from oral and written sources—integral to a scholarly understanding of African Christianity.”

The project has uploaded hundreds of original or untold stories of African Christians who have transformed the history of the church and transformed Christian history. You may send stories of Christian leaders and lay persons whose meritorious services have not been acknowledged or documented from your village to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB—www.dacb.org).

I am a Member of the Advisory Council of the DACB and an Editorial Member, Journal of African Christian Biography: A Publication of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, Boston University.

Do you have words of advice for readers of the JACB?

I entreat the readers especially lecturers in the Universities and Theological Institutions to write and to encourage their students not only to read but also to write original stories for the JACB. I am sure that some are not aware that JACB stories are accepted as offshore publication for promotion purposes. Try and write something today.

On the Development and Impact of African Christian Theology: I have underscored the view that even though a good number of African Christian thinkers, men and women, have given us much material through articles and books on the church in Africa, something is still missing. The present theological developments, as revealing as they are, still leave chasms, because these advances have so far made little impact on both “church ethos and theological education.”

One of the missing links is being filled by the DACB and the JACB

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62. Nkala and Dube, eds., Growing and Branching Out, back cover.
64. Dube, Silent Labourers, 49–50.

20 Mission statement from DACB homepage: [https://dacb.org/](https://dacb.org/).
21 Deji Ayegboyin, Inaugural Lecture, 40, 44-46.
22 Deji Ayegboyin, Inaugural Lecture, 40, 44-46.
As is well known, the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* project has recognized the value of collecting many life histories of committed African Christians. Derek Peterson, on the faculty of the University of Michigan and historian of Kenya and Uganda, has written extensively on the self-recording efforts of Africans in that region. The role of missions and mission schools in promoting literacy has been well and widely understood, but Peterson’s studies have carried the implications of that impact into multiple fascinating corners, including the record keeping of Mau Mau fighters schooled at the Presbyterian mission at Tumutumu, Kenya. Of particular relevance is his article “Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya,” in which he highlights the extensive practice of creating hagiographic autobiographies as a vibrant genre in Kenyan Christian circles. “Autobiography was the most widely practiced literary genre in colonial Kenya. Christian converts were invertebrate autobiographers.” What I have learned is that Doris Dube and Barbara Nkala have been a power team of hagiographic recording in Zimbabwe. They articulate the motivation behind their latest book, *Growing and Branching Out*, stating:

> Ours is an oral culture. Stories and information which has passed on from generation to generation through word of mouth has been lost. It has been a cause for concern when some important information is needed and individuals start asking each other questions, or try to piece the known information together. . . . One of the reasons for writing this book is to document some of the information which makes up the history of our Church for this generation and for posterity.

They go on to state that their aims are faith-based, with a desire that their publishing efforts would be an authentic response to the Great Commission.
The book The Power of the Word, A History of the Seventh-day Adventism in Central Kenya, published by Grandmaster Empire in 2021, is authored by Pastor Dr. Frederick Kimani Wangai. According to the back cover of the book, Wangai was ordained a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in 1960. He served as an evangelist, a church pastor, and an administrator in various positions until his retirement in 2002. After retirement, he took up a new challenge that culminated in a PhD in Christian Counseling. He now operates a counseling practice. He is often called upon to perform ecclesial activities such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals and he also regularly participates in evangelism and preaching of the Word.

Drawing inspiration from the transforming power of the Word, he integrates his experience as a pastor with his counseling skills to offer his clients not only counseling services, but also an introduction to the Mighty Counselor as the real and lasting solution to life's challenges. Together with his wife Eunice, Wangai divides his time between his homes in Nairobi and Murang'a. He is particularly passionate in his support of the initiatives of his local church, Kagwathi, the pioneer congregation of the SDA church in Central Kenya. He also enjoys spending time with the few living pioneer gospel workers and his family, particularly his grandchildren. In the book, Wangai provides a personal reflection on 60 years of working life, stretching from the colonial period to the contemporary times, covering Kenya, other parts of Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. He captures well the key role of the missionaries in the establishment and growth of the SDA church in Kenya—particularly Central Kenya. He also provides an overview of worldwide Adventism and highlights some elements of discontent in the SDA Church in Central Kenya, as well as the implications of Mau Mau for Christianity.

According to the SDA administrative structure, Central Kenya covers a large section of Kenya. Wangai lists the areas and describes the various clergy and the few lay persons—the majority of them men—who broke ground for the mission and served in various capacities in these regions. The accounts include his personal experiences and also those of parents, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. It is noteworthy that there is only one female clergy. Nevertheless, it is commendable that, for each individual, Wangai gives the name of the spouse and, as much as possible, describes the role each spouse played in the work of evangelism and mission.

Wangai acknowledges the significant part his wife Eunice played on the mission field and he lovingly dedicates the book to her. In the dedication, he states that it was Eunice who urged him to write the book. He describes how, being a professional teacher, Eunice used school holidays to train Adventist ladies on how to spread the good news to their neighbors. Her work with the Dorcas Society ladies in particular received accolades from the church leadership. As a result, she received support to reach out in East Africa and Southern Africa. Eunice is credited with initiating the Shepherdess Program for pastors’ wives. With Eunice they established Kitui Primary and Secondary schools as well as Emale Primary School. Wangai also credits Eunice for the construction of a modern school and a dispensary in Gatumbi, both of which also served for evangelization.

Understandably, the book does not provide many other details about Eunice. But those close to her have provided further information on her life that it is appropriate to share at this point.

As of 2022, Eunice is 86 years old. She was the first-born child in a polygamous home. Her mother Ruth was converted to Adventism in the 1940s. This caused friction with her husband because she could no longer brew beer for him. Ruth, however, had the support of a key family member, Ngoroi, who was already practicing Adventism. This same relative encouraged Ruth to send Eunice to school. Eunice’s father Gitau was enraged because this would deny him bridewealth. Ngoroi told Gitau that the time had come when the clan had to make decisions for the common good of the wider community. Under these circumstances Eunice began attending Karura, an Adventist school where she was converted, and eventually met and married her teacher, Wangai.

Before her conversion, Eunice was the star village dancer. She and her peers found it unbelievable that she had quit dancing and reveling to become a Christian. It was a testament to the transforming power of the Word. She testifies access to formal medical care has all but dried up due to the environmental and political crises that have rocked the country since the year 2000.57

Conclusion

Nellie’s description of her trials during the war and her yearnings for taking up peacebuilding work show her sensitivity to the powerful events through which she has lived. Her response to those events shows her courage and servant-leadership, drawing on the tools offered by her faith. By her own account, her unwavering focus has been on using prayer as her means of discerning God’s call and then finding the courage and means to obey it. Throughout her life, Nellie has participated richly in an intergenerational cycle of female mentoring. She was mentored by elders such as her mother-in-law, Lomapholisa Khumalo Mlotshwa, and BICC female evangelists Sitshokupi Sibanda and Maria Tshuma. In turn she has been a steady elder sister and mother in the faith to those younger than herself such as Doris Dube, Barbara Nkala, her niece Hlengiwe, and the hosts of BICC women whom she reaches through her peacebuilding workshops, articles in the church paper, the meetings of the mothers’ union, and the General Convention. Nellie has also repeatedly proven her outstanding intellectual quality by being a high performer in her schooling; by continuously striving for higher education and deeper qualifications; through her many years as a trusted educator at church and secular primary schools, at theological colleges, and then as principal of EBI; by her superior command of spoken and written English; and through her deep and detailed memory of the histories of her many relatives and of many church leaders.

I interviewed former BICC Bishop Stephen N. Ndlovu in 1999. At that time he was an instructor at the Theological College of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo and was one of the revered elders of the church. He had had extensive experience with the global Mennonite community, had studied in the United States with Mennonite groups, and had been an active agent attempting to broker an end to the Gukurahundi violence in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. In my discussion with him about church leadership in the BICC, he spoke at length about the exceptional faith and courage of women members of the church. Women have significantly outnumbered men in church membership for most of the church’s

to be distributed to ZANU-PF loyalists, the collapse of the currency by 2005, and the election violence of the 2008 elections have, however, marred the promise of the early 1980s.55

**Big Dreams of Later Life**

One of the main projects occupying Nellie Mlotshwa’s imagination and efforts in the 2000s has been to respond to the unresolved wounds of the Gukurahundi—as well as multiple other challenges since then—in as many ways as her faith, energy, good health, and impressive network of local and international connections allow. She has been committed to peacebuilding activities. In 2002 she was selected by representatives of Mennonite Central Committee Southern Africa to go to a peacebuilding program at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. She had temporarily resigned from EBI after many years and was wishing to take up a new kind of service, training others to be conflict mediators, starting at the household and grassroots level. She said, “I have big dreams. The Lord gives me big dreams.” “As you walk through the town, standing by the bus, you see a great need for counseling.”56 She was coaxed out of retirement from EBI to serve as its principal for several years in the 2000s. In 2005 she served on the BICC’s peace and justice committee.

Nellie also has given full support to a new NGO called Hope for Mtshabezi, established by her niece Hlengiwe Mlotshwa Sibanda, Peter’s brother’s daughter. Hlengiwe was Nellie’s pupil in primary school during the 1960s, and Nellie has played a steadfast role as surrogate familial and spiritual mother to Hlengiwe since the death of her own mother. Hope for Mtshabezi aims to restore medical care to the rural areas around Mtshabezi Mission, where

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Christian marriage or devotional pieces based on Scripture passages. Peter was selected to go for further theological studies at Daystar University in Kenya in 1981. The ordained BICC men who had studied abroad for divinity studies up to that point numbered just two—and both had become bishops. Very sadly, while his studies at Daystar, Peter fell ill with cancer and died in 1984. After his passing, Nellie continued to teach at EBI (the Bible institute at Mtshabezi Mission), to look after the educational needs of her children, and to serve as a national leader in the church. She was one of the featured inspirational speakers at the 1987 meeting of the BICC mother in the community. Nellie emphasized that they should be living examples, endeavoring, at all times, to set a perfect standard. In the next several years she served on the church growth committee again, then the prayer committee, and the literature committee.

From 1983 to 1987, Zimbabwe experienced the Gukurahundi. Under the leadership of Robert Mugabe, the newly ZANU-PF dominated government, political parties were forced into ZAPU-Patriotic Front (ZAPU-PF) under the leadership of Bishop Stephen Ndlovu. The BICC regional base in great measure overlapped with that of ZAPU. Estimates of the number of dead range from 8,000 to 20,000, many of them in unmarked mass graves. The worst of the violence that occurred occurred in the heart of the BICC's people and territory. For a pietistic church that embraced peace teaching, the situation was excruciating. If politics was killing your people, how did you talk about politics and deal with those deaths? The violence ended after the Unity Accord of 1987 led to the fusing of the ZANU and ZAPU political parties into ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) under the headship of Robert Mugabe, who as of 2016 remains the Zimbabwean head of state.

The AIDS crisis, the launching of various government initiatives such as Operation Marimba, the forced claiming of commercial farm properties, the forced evictions of white farmers, and the forced claiming of commercially viable land for the resettlement of Zimbabwean farmers, is written for African woman theologians, faith-based community service, and the phenomenon of African-generated Christian biographies in the BICC of Zimbabwe.

This chapter is based on multiple interviews and written communications with Nellie Mlotshwa, the earliest occurring in 1997 and the most recent in 2016. My interactions with Nellie grew out of my larger research on the history of the BICC of Zimbabwe. I was at first simply interested in her story as one of the key subjects of the study; however, Nellie took a strong interest in my project and did much to support it, helping me to contact interviewees. Over the past thirty or more years, Nellie Mlotshwa, sisters Doris Dube and Barbara Nkala,
Nancy Shenk and Bekhemba Dube have been actively involved in capturing stories about the people in the BICC of Zimbabwe. Much of this material has been published in the BICC's Bulawayo-based church paper, Amahle/Good Words, and in a variety of books published under the aegis of Barbara Nkala (see epilogue). As one of this important cadre of insider recorders of the church’s history, Nellie became a key informant on many matters far beyond the subject matter of her own life. She and the Zimbabwean members of the BICC were already composing their stories before I arrived. The people I called to were not merely telling me what I wanted to know. Such a cynical view assumes they were not already thinking about themselves and their family members, I was in fact far from the first to have interviewed Nellie.27

The use of oral history interviews in the composition of this biography offers understandings that are inaccessible from research that works solely with published and archival material. The printed record shows us a history of the BICC that is limited by the church’s formal policy of separation from the world and by the official printed record’s consistent inattention to the leadership exercised by women. The inclusion of the oral material has been led by spiritually powerful versions such as Nellie Mlotshwa.30

My work has been influenced by Marcia Wright’s Strategies of Slaves and Women in Central Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. Wright uses life histories gleaned by missionary Elise Kootz-Kretschmer from African converts to the Moravian Church at the turn of the twentieth century. I found the attention she gives to the guerillas who were around Mayezane when they returned after a month of waiting, Jonah said, “Let’s go back to work,” so we did. So they never came. The group which had called me home, they must have just left the area.

When the war was over and the new Zimbabwe was born in 1980, the BICC entered a new, if short-lived, phase of optimism in the opportunity to build a more fully indigenous leadership as part of the postcolonial nation-building moment. All the missionaries had gone or been sent home during the war. Any colonial-style authoritative missionaries directing policy, Nellie and Peter Mlotshwa were fully engaged in the energetic new phase. Nellie was active as the only female on the BICC’s national-level church-testimonies together with study of the archival record. Her work makes visible the difference between archival/male/official versions of Methodist and Catholic history in Zimbabwe and the picture generated by oral evidence/female/unofficial versions. For example, officially the uniformed Catholic women’s group, Chita cha Maria, was founded by a priest; however, the oral evidence that Hinfelaar gathered by interviewing aged women members of the group indicates that women were behind the group’s founding. See Hinfelaar, Respectable and Responsible Women: Methodist and Roman Catholic Women’s Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1919–1985 (Utrecht: Bookcentrum, 2003).31

27. Documentary material supporting my wider research on the BICC of Zimbabwe reaches back more than a century. It includes items from the archives of the Voters’ Mission, the records of the BICC in Zimbabwe which are held at the church offices in Bulawayo, and the church’s publications.

28. In her study of churchwomen in Harare, Marja Hinfelaar also weaves oral testimonies together with archival/male/official versions of Methodist and Catholic history in Zimbabwe and the picture generated by oral evidence/female/unofficial versions. For example, officially the uniformed Catholic women’s group, Chita cha Maria, was founded by a priest; however, the oral evidence that Hinfelaar gathered by interviewing aged women members of the group indicates that women were behind the group’s founding. See Hinfelaar, Respectable and Responsible Women: Methodist and Roman Catholic Women’s Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1919–1985 (Utrecht: Bookcentrum, 2003).


31. See Urban-Mead, Gender of Piety, 203–32.
The arc of the women’s lives, as told in the book’s several life histories to be whole life narratives, provided a model for my approach to African Christian biography-making. Understanding the work of oral history has transitioned in recent years, as have understandings about women’s history and gender history. In fact, the better or killed those who were women. Members of the wider Mloshwa families, which included several of Peter’s brothers and their families, were killed. The beat or killed people deemed uncooperative or deliberately misleading. The guerrilla forces, for their part, would kill villagers who refused to cook for them or beat or executed those deemed followers who violated their rules. The movement for the Smith army, which required several of Peter’s brothers and their families, all based in the broader themes of Zimbabwe’s colonial and postcolonial history as well as historical periods.30 While this biography is one of the most subjective that one can imagine, it is also a human life narrative that is very valuable, particularly for work on women’s work and interpersonal dynamics. A recent special issue of the Journal of Southern African Studies, devoted to religious biography, emphasized the ability of biographical portraits to show how personal lives have spanned political and religious spheres as well as historical periods.31

The Lord helped me. At Mayezane [we were told:] “You haven’t joined ZAPU and you’re in trouble.” Then I left home to go to work [in Bulawayo at the Bible Institute]. The following morning [Peter’s] brother Samuel came to town by early bus. [He said:] “Paris has commandeered the Smith army.44 Alleged sellouts could be killed for providing information about the movements of guerrillas to the Smith army. Alleged sellouts were killed. Guerillas also killed those who were women. Members of the wider Mloshwa family, which included several of Peter’s brothers and their families, were killed. The beat or killed people deemed uncooperative or deliberately misleading. The guerrilla forces, for their part, would kill villagers who refused to cook for them or beat or executed those deemed adherents who violated their rules. The movement for the Smith army, which required several of Peter’s brothers and their families, all based in the broader themes of Zimbabwe’s colonial and postcolonial history as well as historical periods.30 While this biography is one of the most subjective that one can imagine, it is also a human life narrative that is very valuable, particularly for work on women’s work and interpersonal dynamics. A recent special issue of the Journal of Southern African Studies, devoted to religious biography, emphasized the ability of biographical portraits to show how personal lives have spanned political and religious spheres as well as historical periods.31

These innovations took place in the 1970s. The prior generation of wives of abaFundi had done as expected and given up their paid work. Nellie recalled that “there was quite a lot of grumbling that we still kept our teaching jobs, but no one confronted us directly.”

Life and Death Struggles of the 1970s

The 1970s were the time of the liberation war, when the armed wings of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) waged guerrilla warfare against the Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith’s Rhodesian Front (RF) party. The violence was most felt in the rural areas, and rural mission stations were often the focus of guerrilla actions in various forms. Ekuphileni Bible Institute, where Nellie and Peter Mlotshwa were teaching, was located at Mtshabezi Mission, forty-one miles southeast of Bulawayo. After guerrillas from the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) paid a menacing visit to the mission station in 1978, the district overseer, Stephen N. Ndlovu, decided to close Mtshabezi Mission and move EBI and other programs to the relative safety of the city of Bulawayo. Thus, the Mlotshwas and their younger children moved to Bulawayo at the height of the war, while their two older sons were attending Tegwani Secondary School at a Wesleyan Methodist mission in the western part of Matabeleland.

In a mass recruitment effort, ZIPRA guerrillas effected a spectacular capture of much of the Tegwani student body and transported them over the border to Botswana. Nellie recalled that day:

We heard on the one o’clock news that the guerrillas had captured all the school children at Tegwani. I thought I would go crazy. I didn’t sleep that night. I sat on the floor against the wall and prayed. Finally in the morning I was so exhausted, I slept a little. Then I felt a hand touching me so kindly. A voice said, “Don’t worry—your children will be returned to you by the garage.” I woke up and thought, what can this mean? We heard later that the Botswana government had refused these children since they had been captured and was going to send them back. All parents should come to Plumtree. We were to pick them up, meet the government trucks at the garage in Plumtree. When we got there, the children looked pathetic; my

drawn from Urban-Mead, Gender of Piety, 220–22.

Nellie Maduma was born in 1934 at the BICC’s Mtshabezi Mission Hospital. Her home village of Mayezane was in Matabeleland South, south of Bulawayo, and located some twenty miles to the southwest of the mission station. Mayezane was a progressive, modernizing place where Christian Ndebele-speaking Africans had settled in the early years of the twentieth century. The men used plows and wore fashionable hats and neckties, in spite of the church's teachings against worldly fashions. The women made more tea than beer. The people of Mayezane planted fruit trees and many of their young men went to work in South Africa. Many of these families had previously lived in the Matopo Hills, about twenty-five miles to the north, but had been forced to leave when the British South Africa Company defeated the Ndebele kingdom in 1896 and began the process of removing Africans from land that the Company desired to sell to white settlers and to lease to mission societies. As with most residents of Mayezane, Nellie’s parents were members of the BICC, an American-based mission church with Anabaptist and Wesleyan influences that by the 1930s operated out of three rural mission stations and a host of smaller village churches—churches that also doubled as lower-primary schools. Her father, Sima Maduma, for a time was both a village pastor and BICC primary school teacher in Mayezane.

Nellie’s parents had married in 1923; she was the fourth of five children. By the time Nellie was born in 1934, her father was disenchanted with the mission church for a variety of reasons. When she was very small, he married a second wife, violating the mission’s teaching on monogamy. Nellie’s mother, Sofi Mgemezulu, was devastated, having expected to live in a monogamous marriage, and returned to her parental home. Nellie grew up in her father’s house with her stepmother, siblings, extended relatives, and other members of the household. Despite what appeared to be “backsliding,” Sima Maduma required that the members of his household observe rigorous home-based Christian devotions, complete with daily prayers and hymn singing. Mandatory memory verses from


Not many years into their life together in Salisbury, however, as Doris Dube put it, “God started dealing with them.” The message they perceived was that it was time for them to devote full-time service to the church. Obeying the call, Peter and Nellie Mlotshwa and their children moved back to Mayezane. During the 1960s Nellie taught at the village BICC primary school, and Peter, who was already working as an ordained minister at the BICC’s Ekuphileni Bible Institute (EBI), became a part-time pastor of a church. From 1969 to 1975 both Peter and Nellie taught at the BICC’s Ekuphileni Bible Institute (EBI), based at the Matabeleland Bible Institute. In 1976 Peter was ordained as a minister and made Overseer of the Matopo District, putting him in a pastoral and supervisory role over the pastors of a network of more than forty small village churches.

Wives of church overseers were expected to give up their paid work, so as to devote themselves full-time to support of their husbands’ ministries. Indeed, wives stood with their husbands at the ordination ceremony and were ordained with them. In this expectation the church followed an Ndebele pattern. In traditional Ndebele culture, a woman assumed the address of her husband. For example, when Ndebele men became kings or chiefs, their wives shared that status. This pattern carried over in the roles taken on by the women who married BICC ordained ministers or bishops. No separately designated income for the wife, however, came with this arrangement. Nellie explained what it meant to be the wife of a district overseer.

A woman married to a man who was going to be ordained, was ordained with him. Yet when there were ministers’ overseers’ meetings, she would have no vote. But she bore a heavy responsibility for his work. As overseer’s wife we had to bake the communion bread, have the basins and towels ready for foot-washing ceremony.

The wives also accompanied their husbands on their journeys to the village churches on the weekends, and they hosted the many visitors and petitioners who came to the churchmen’s residences. Nellie and another newly ordained minister’s wife, Sifiki Ottilia Ndlovu, however, refused to leave their paid work.

Not only did Nellie Mlotshwa teach at the village BICC primary school, but she also earned a bachelor’s degree at the Theological College of Zimbabwe in the 1990s.

Married Life

Nellie taught math, history, and English at the Mayezane girls’ boarding school for three years, until she married Peter Mlotshwa in 1959. Their common origins in Mayezane yielded many similarities. Peter also had started out as a convert, BICC pastor, and teacher, having moved to Salisbury (present-day Harare) as a young couple. Peter worked as a jeweler, and Nellie taught at a government primary school. They eventually had six children.

He encouraged us in our faith. Really, as far as I am concerned, I learned more from my home than from the primary school I attended. I mean as far as spiritual things are concerned. And so, he taught us all the things of God, while he wasn’t any more associated with the church. And that worried me for a long time. In short, Nellie was raised in a home in which her father did not go to church, but he was a convert. His father had started out as a convert, BICC pastor, and teacher, but had decided to leave active church membership by the time Peter was born. The young couple moved to Salisbury (present-day Harare) and started their life together. Peter worked as a jeweler, and Nellie taught at a government primary school. They eventually had six children.

The wives also accompanied their husbands on their journeys to the village churches on the weekends, and they hosted the many visitors and petitioners who came to the churchmen’s residences. Nellie and another newly ordained minister’s wife, Sifiki Ottilia Ndlovu, however, refused to leave their paid work.

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Since the best education in the area remained that offered by the BICC, Nellie’s father fully supported her education in the BICC primary school at Mayezane and at the mission boarding school at Matabeleland Bible Institute. These were followed through UNISA. She later did O levels by correspondence—after she was a teacher, wife, and mother—and earned a bachelor’s degree at the Theological College of Zimbabwe in the 1990s.

33. Doris Dube, Silent Labourers, 51.
34. This material on the role of the minister’s or overseer’s (or bishop’s) wife is more precisely the singular is umfundisi and plural, abafundisi.
38. Dube, Silent Labourers, 49–50.
41. This material on the role of the minister’s or overseer’s (or bishop’s) wife is more precisely the singular is umfundisi and plural, abafundisi.