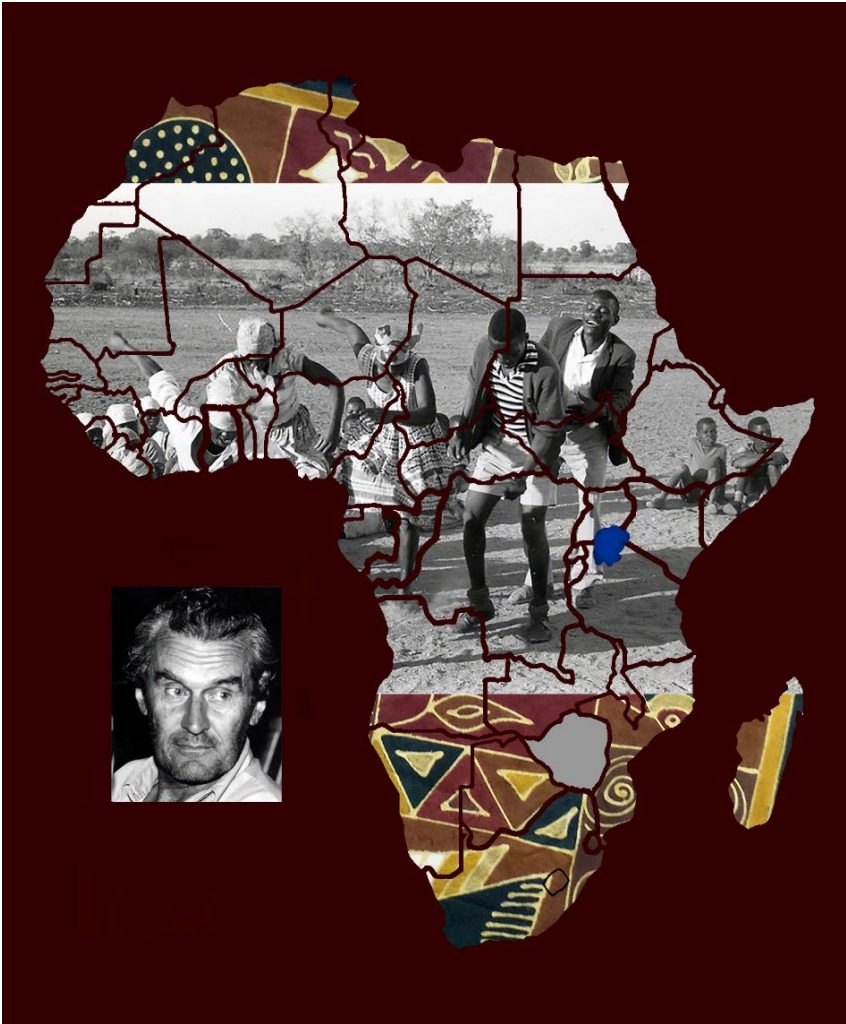


JOURNAL OF
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CHRISTIAN
BIOGRAPHY

Vol. 9, No. 4 (Oct. 2024)

Focus: The Pioneering Legacy of
Marthinus L. “Inus” Daneel



A publication of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

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Table of Contents

Introduction by Michele Sigg, Editor	7
Remembering Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi (1948 – 2024).....	8
Celebrating the Witness of M. L. “Inus” Daneel by Dana L. Robert Daneel	13
Tributes:	
The Legacy of Marthinus L. Daneel by Allan H. Anderson	17
Martinus (Inus) L. Daneel – Bishop Moses Daneel – Muchakata – Co- Creating African Earthkeeper by Charles J. Fensham	22
A Rebel or A Prophet: Professor M. L. Daneel’s African Eco-Missiology by Kapya Kaoma.....	28
Remembering Inus Daneel by William (Bill) Gregory.....	40
In Honor of Inus Daneel by J. N. J. (Klippiess) Kritzinger	42
African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation by M. L. Daneel	44
M. L. Daneel Full Bibliography	63

Photo by M. L. Daneel from Old and New in Shona Religion project
(<https://sites.bu.edu/shonareligion/photos/>)

Headshot of Marthinus L. “Inus” Daneel

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Honoring the Legacy of a Prophetic Theologian

By Michele Sigg, Editor

This issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* commemorates the pioneering legacy of Marthinus L. “Inus” Daneel (1936-2024). The impact of his work in missiology and eco-theology through his writing, his advocacy, and his long term friendship with the Shona people will only be fully measured with the long perspective of history. Dana L. Robert Daneel, his beloved wife of 28 years and fellow missiologist, describes him as “one of the greatest, most creative missiologists of the late 20th century . . . a prophetic theologian” whose forward-looking initiatives were “the wave of the future.”¹

While Daneel was often considered a rebel, a loner, and even a heretic among his professional peers, he found great joy in his relationship with Robert.² His deep gratitude for their relationship and his love for her were gently obvious to those of us students who attended the annual academic year kickoff celebration—the famous “Robert-Daneel pizza party”—at their home in Somerville. His wry jokes and longwinded stories always made Robert chuckle and the rest of us laugh, especially when, with a twinkle in his eye, he admiringly called her “his lady” and told us how he used to “carry her bookbag.” “That story is pure myth,” she told me later.

The tributes in this issue bear witness to the powerful mark that Daneel left on those close to him. Five former students or colleagues, either in South Africa or in Boston, describe his formidable influence on their lives, their research, and, by extension, their fields of study. The full bibliography at the end illustrates the width and breadth of his theological thought and its application for the church, not just in Africa but in the global church. Are we not now in a time of global climate crisis? Is this not the time for the church everywhere to repent of our mistreatment of the natural world and to make amends to the earth for the suffering we have inflicted on it? And to seal that act of contrition with an ecumenical eucharist would indeed remind us that creation does not in fact belong to us (to do with as we please) but that we belong to creation and to God the creator, who gave his son so that we, and all creation, may be redeemed.

To further illustrate Daneel’s forward thinking theology, we have republished here one of his most groundbreaking articles, “African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation.” This rich text gives a thick description of what Robert calls the “iconic” quality of AIC leadership and Daneel’s highly original theology that emerges from his experience of living among the Shona and his ecumenical work in the Earthkeeping movement.

Finally, this issue begins not with Daneel but with another important work of sacred remembrance: a tribute to the life of Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi (1948-2024), wife of Professor Jesse Mugambi (DACB Executive Committee) and mother of Professor Kyama Mugambi (DACB Editorial Board). Elizabeth died in June, just weeks before Daneel. Because Dana and Jesse—friends and colleagues—share the grief of losing a beloved spouse at this time, we decided to honor both of their life partners together in this volume.

Through these pages, may the memory of Elizabeth and Inus live on in our hearts and in the history of the global church in perpetuity.

¹ Email from Dana Robert dated 10/24/24. See the April-July 2024 issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* for an obituary by Robert, describing some of Daneel’s pioneering initiatives and research.

² Dana Robert email.

Remembering Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi (1948 – 2024)³

By Kyama Mugambi

Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi's life exemplifies the experiences of first generation of urban dwellers in Nairobi, the post-colonial African city. Her story illustrates how new urban residents negotiated their communal identities amid unprecedented social change. Like urban Christians of her generation, her faith and community served as stabilizing forces against relentless social, political, economic, and cultural transformations.

Born on December 26, 1948, in Murang'a, Central Kenya, Elizabeth Nyathira was the sixth of twelve children of Shadrack Karuca and Loise Wairimu Njuguna. She grew up in an era when she had access to traditional Kikuyu wisdom from her grandparents who lived close by. This together with her Anglican faith played a vital role in her upbringing, alongside her siblings John Gathiong'o, Jane Wanjiru, Joseph Wainaina, Wilson Muiruri, Jennifer Gaciku, Stella Kahaki, Samuel Ngugi, Mary Magiri, Samson Ngaruiya, and Josephine Wairimu. They remember her as someone who "always showed a depth of care that resonated deeply with everyone around her."⁴

Elizabeth began her education at Githunguri Primary School and continued at Githunguri Girls Secondary School. In an era when Kenyan families allowed only four to six years of primary education, her father allowed her to proceed to the second year of high school. Her schooling took place during the infamous Emergency period (1952-1957), characterized by a violent colonial response to the African struggle for independence. Kenya eventually gained independence in 1963 while Elizabeth was still in school.

Determined to further her education, she enrolled at Machakos Teachers College in 1966 where she nurtured her calling as a teacher and met her future husband, Jesse Mugambi. Elizabeth's passion for music led her to join ballroom dancing classes, where her relationship with Jesse blossomed. Jesse recalls that he was particularly drawn to her values, which formed the foundation of their relationship.⁵

Elizabeth completed her teacher training in 1969 and began her teaching career in Nairobi's Eastlands, a region designated during the colonial period for working-class Africans. She taught at Heshima Road Primary School, in the Bahati area, which was populated by middle and lower-income government workers. Concurrently, Jesse pursued further studies at Kenyatta University College. They continued their friendship despite Jesse's brief period of study in the UK in 1970.

With their parents' blessings, Elizabeth and Jesse married on July 1, 1972, at St. Peter's Anglican Church in Githunguri, near her birthplace.⁶ She became the first daughter-in-law to Timothy Kanyua and Jemima Koori Mugambi from Mutunduri, Embu. Her new family included Jesse's siblings Eunice Marigu, Gladys Gicuko, Titus Njeru, Karen Wambugi, David Njangeruko, Catherine Njoki, Mercy Wanjira, Mary Wandiri, and Lucy Wambugi. All except Eunice were younger than Elizabeth. Consequently, Elizabeth shared in Jesse's responsibility to

³ Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi is the wife of Prof. Jesse Mugambi, DACB Executive Council member, and the mother of Prof. Kyama Mugambi, DACB Editorial Board member, assistant professor at Yale Divinity School, and author of this tribute.

⁴ Wilson Muiruri, "Tribute - Murang'a Siblings," June 19, 2024.

⁵ Jesse Ndwiga Kanyua Mugambi, "My Tribute," June 19, 2024.

⁶ Jesse Ndwiga Kanyua Mugambi, "My Tribute," June 19, 2024.

support and educate his younger siblings who fondly recall how she “housed and fed us when we were not old enough or strong enough to fend for ourselves. Always ready for a hug with a big smile, Elizabeth came into our lives when we were all young and assumed the role of not only a big sister but a mother.”⁷ The couple lived in Maringo in Nairobi’s Eastlands where they attended St. Steven’s Anglican Church on Jogoo Road.

In 1974, the family moved from Eastlands to Nairobi West, and Elizabeth continued her teaching career at Kongoni Primary School, a public institution in the South C area. This area, making up South B, South C, and Nairobi West, was initially zoned for Indians but now had a growing African population. It was in Nairobi West that Elizabeth and Jesse raised their children: Mbogo Kyama, Njane Muriithi, Muriuki Munene, Karimi Wandiri, Karanja Thiong’o, and Mukami Wairimu, born between 1973 and 1984. Elizabeth adapted the values she had learned in her childhood to the emerging urban setting, teaching her children “the value of hard work, resilience, and planning.”⁸

Like first-generation Nairobi residents, Elizabeth and Jesse’s home had an open door for the extended family, and friends. In Karimi Mugambi’s words the home was “a sanctuary filled with love and warmth.”⁹ Gathoni Njuguna, one of Elizabeth’s nieces, remembered it as “a place where we always felt welcome and safe.”¹⁰ The communal values instilled in her rural upbringing remained close to her heart. She shared her motherly love freely with Gathoni Njuguna, Conrad Samanya, Wanjiru Mugambi and others. Wanjiru Mugambi, another niece, reminisced, “My brother and I landed into your hands at a tender age... I was only 11 years old... We fitted in very well with your children... No one could tell... You treated us the same as your own.”¹¹

Elizabeth had an insatiable love for learning, driven by a curious mind that continually sought new knowledge. This enduring thirst for education inspired her to pursue academic achievements beyond her initial secondary schooling and teacher training. She successfully sat for her O Levels as a private candidate and further took her A Levels in 1976.

Her intellectual curiosity also led her to explore the world of fashion and dressmaking. In 1990, she attended the Evelyn School of Design and later pursued studies in textile and fashion at Kenya Technical Teachers College in Gigiri, Nairobi. This educational journey culminated in her role as a technical teacher at Kenya Polytechnic, where she taught drafting and other technical subjects until her early retirement in 1998.

To enhance her management skills, Elizabeth enrolled at the Kenya Institute of Management. This education proved invaluable in managing her various farming projects, effectively combining her love for nature with practical management techniques. Additionally, she intermittently undertook counseling courses at Nairobi Chapel and other institutions.

After retiring, Elizabeth fully immersed herself in farming, cultivating crops and breeding rabbits, chickens, ducks, goats, pigs, and keeping apiaries. Her love for growing flowers is etched in the minds of her family members.¹² Not content with relying solely on existing knowledge, she enrolled in courses on organic farming methods and beekeeping to further her expertise.

These diverse educational pursuits are remarkable accomplishments, particularly considering her multifaceted roles as a wife, mother of six, active member of two extended families, a farmer, and, for a time, a full-time teacher. Elizabeth modelled a lifelong quest for

⁷ Mercy Wanduara, “Tribute by Siblings from Embu,” June 19, 2024.

⁸ Mukami Mugambi, “Mathe’s Tribute,” June 19, 2024.

⁹ Wandiri Karimi Mugambi, “My Tribute to Mum,” June 19, 2024.

¹⁰ Jenny Gathoni, “Tribute - Tata Nyathira,” June 19, 2024.

¹¹ Purity Wanjiru Mugambi, “Tribute - Embu Nieces and Nephews,” June 19, 2024.

¹² Wandiri Kyama, “Tribute,” June 19, 2024.

knowledge which inspired her children to pursue various courses of study as mature students. This period of learning and teaching enabled Elizabeth to combine her passion for education with a commitment to inspiring and guiding students along the way. Her students remember her fondly as a devoted teacher who instilled discipline and hard work in them. Doris Nanga Mwamodo, who was Elizabeth's pupil in grade 5 in the 1990s, recalls how Elizabeth "was firm but also had a genuine love for us."¹³ Chris Lyimo, another former pupil from 1981, affirmed her enduring influence in his life by noting that even when they served together as fellow congregants at Mavuno Church 30 years later, "She was always my teacher."¹⁴

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, Elizabeth's children grew into adulthood and her family continued to expand. Like the children of most first-generation Nairobi residents, they studied and lived in the city, only visiting the rural areas briefly. Those who joined the extended family deeply appreciated the warm and nurturing environment they met. In her retirement, Elizabeth hosted her children and grandchildren for a monthly lunch at her home. Despite the busy urban lives of her children and grandchildren, she was available for each of them. At her residence, she warmly welcomed her daughters-in-law Wambui Kyama, Rachel Mugambi, and Kezia Thiong'o. Her grandchildren, Naiserian, Muthoni, Wandiri, Mwenda, Mukiri, Yasmin, Mugane, Iman, Rithi, Heri, Emy, and Nina affectionately called her *Gaka*, an honorific Embu title for grandmother.

Emy and Nina Ngure remarked on "how kind she always was and how she welcomed us into the family and affirmed to us that we belong."¹⁵ Their mother, Kezia Thiong'o, added that Elizabeth was "an amazing woman whose legacy was her family."¹⁶ Michael and Beryl Guy, their in-laws from Alsager in the United Kingdom, said, "She had many talents, but to us the most important one is that she was a family person, valuing each member of it, and that is how we shall remember her."¹⁷ Her grandson, Rithi, noted, "Gaka was a light, and she shone her light on everyone she was around."¹⁸ Mukiri Mugambi appreciated how Gaka "saw what my interests were and encouraged me with them." Her son, Njane Mugambi, credited his family's love for live sports to instances when they watched Kenyan national events live at the Nyayo Stadium, a national sports complex near Nairobi West.¹⁹

Although an introvert, Elizabeth deeply valued her relationships with others and went out of her way to make people feel at home and comfortable whenever they visited. Mwenda Mugambi affirmed this saying, "She valued her relationships with other people very much and would go out of her way to make people feel at home and comfortable whenever they visited."²⁰ Naiserian Kyama fondly remembered "all the times you called during the holidays to check how I was doing, and you organized countless sleepovers."²¹

Elizabeth held a broad and inclusive view of community. She welcomed all who came into her home, whether they came for family visits or as part of the learning cohorts that frequently visited. Paul Mwangi, Okello Ogera, Telesia Musili, and other graduate students mentored by Jesse fondly recalled Elizabeth's talks and her generous welcome into their home. Edith Kayeli remembered how, in moments of conversation, Elizabeth would offer invaluable nuggets of

¹³ Doris Nanga Mwamodo, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

¹⁴ Chris Lyimo, "Tribute," October 14, 2024.

¹⁵ Emy Ngure and Nina Ngure, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

¹⁶ Kezia Thiong'o, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

¹⁷ Michael Guy and Beryl Guy, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

¹⁸ Rithi Rimbui, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

¹⁹ Njane Mugambi, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

²⁰ Mwenda Mugambi, "Mwenda's Tribute to Gaka," June 19, 2024.

²¹ Naiserian Kyama, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

wisdom about life.²²

When asked how she navigated the multiple challenges and relationships in her life, Elizabeth's unwavering answer was always "Faith in God." This profound commitment was clear from her early married life when she and Jesse attended St. Stephen's Anglican church on Jogoo Road. They later became members of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Nairobi West when it opened in 1983. Elizabeth served in various capacities within the church, including as a leader at Bible Study Fellowship in the 1990s and as a member of the Prayer Team at Nairobi Chapel in the early 2000s.

In 2006, she joined Mavuno Church, a plant of Nairobi chapel. As she had done before she actively took part in church life by joining the prayer ministry and small groups. Elizabeth came across to her church leaders as a "solid believer in Christ's work."²³ Fellow church member Carol Rarieya from Nairobi Chapel recalled being a "beneficiary of her unrelenting prayers. For a period of time, we were prayer partners - trusting God for a shared issue that grieved our hearts."²⁴ Jude Gichuri also reminisced about their time together at Mavuno Church, commenting, "I so remember serving with her at the church prayer tent."²⁵

Later, Elizabeth became a member of the Mothers Union after moving to All Saints Cathedral Anglican church, which became their home church in 2015. Though the cathedral is a large church her pastors, Sammy Wainaina, the then provost, Evans Omollo, the provost at the time of her death, James Kanyi, the assistant provost and other clergy knew her well. The leaders got acquainted with the family members with whom they interacted often.²⁶ Wainaina remembers her as a Christian who was "elegant - physically and spiritually. She exuded confidence in herself and her faith in God."²⁷ Marjorie Gaciithire from All Saints Cathedral described Elizabeth as a dependable friend, sister, leader, mother, and host – qualities she showed during their meetings in the years before her passing.²⁸

Elizabeth's daughter-in-law, Rachel, highlighted her "pragmatism and faith in God."²⁹ At every family meeting, Elizabeth would ask for prayer requests and meticulously write them down in a book.³⁰ Together with Jesse, she would pray for these needs daily and follow up until there was a resolution. Wambui Kyama noted, "Gaka persisted in hope and in prayer, especially over countless challenging situations."³¹ In moments of anxiety or uncertainty, Karanja remembered her often saying, "In God's time."³²

Gathoni, noted her eclectic taste in Christian music, reflecting the diverse preferences of her first-generation urban African contemporaries.³³ During Elizabeth's time at the hospice, she and Gathoni would alternate between genres, enjoying Kigoco, Kiswahili, Contemporary (Hillsong), and Country music. Gathoni Njuguna and James Kanyi recall how these musical

²² Edith Kayeli, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

²³ James Kanyi, "WhatsApp Message: Tribute," October 23, 2024.

²⁴ Carol Rarieya, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

²⁵ Jade Gichuri, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

²⁶ *Celebrating the Life of Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi*, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/live/VD0Lhu9NV0M>.

²⁷ Sammy Wainaina, "WhatsApp Message: Tribute," October 23, 2024.

²⁸ Marjorie Gaciithire, "All Saints Cathedral Cell Group Tribute," June 19, 2024.

²⁹ Rachel Mugambi, "Tribute for Gaka from Rachel," June 19, 2024.

³⁰ Wambui Kyama, "Wambui Kyama's Tribute to Gaka," October 8, 2024.

³¹ Wambui Kyama, "Wambui Kyama's Tribute to Gaka," October 8, 2024.

³² Karanja Thiong'o Mugambi, "Tribute," June 19, 2024.

³³ Gathoni, "Tribute - Tata Nyathira."

sessions offered spiritual comfort during her final days.³⁴

In 2022, Elizabeth was diagnosed with cancer. After initial treatment, the cancer went into remission at the end of that year but recurred at the end of 2023. During this season her commitment to Christian values remained evident. Muthoni Kyama recalls how, “Even during the last months of her well lived life, she was still encouraging us to love each other and be united.”³⁵ She passed away peacefully at 5:20 a.m. on June 13, 2024, after three months in hospice care. During that period many came around the family as an expression of their love for her. Patrick Mbugua, Kagema Gichuhi and others spoke of their connection with her and the family as they assisted with funeral arrangements. As she did in life, Elizabeth also inspired creative reflection in her passing. Those close to her prepared creative pieces in her memory. Yasmin Mugambi mourned her grandmother with a poem and drawing.³⁶ Elizabeth was laid to rest in Kerarapon, 40 kilometers east of Nairobi, on June 19, following a memorial service at All Saints’ Cathedral in Nairobi.

Elizabeth was an inquisitive thinker, a creative artist, enthusiastic encourager, understanding confidant, indefatigable teacher, caring mother, and loving wife. Her dedication and support enabled Jesse, their children, and grandchildren to achieve remarkable accomplishments across various fields, including academia, music, and sports. Throughout her life, Elizabeth remained deeply committed to the values instilled in her by her family and education. Her passion for teaching allowed her to shape young minds, a role she cherished dearly. “Gaka’s unwavering faith in God, peaceful character and graceful nature” inspired those in her orbit.³⁷ In his tribute, Jesse expressed profound gratitude to God for the life they shared, celebrating their friendship and marriage.³⁸ It was from the stability of their home that Jesse and their children were launched into lives of significant impact in their respective spheres. From his first book *Carry it Home*, a collection of poems which he dedicated to Elizabeth, Jesse acknowledged her support in his professional life.³⁹ Her encouragement made it possible for him to devote himself to a prolific writing, teaching and publishing career.

Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi gracefully navigated the immense challenge of living in a dynamic urban environment. She found strength and resources in her faith and community to manage the seismic transition from her monoethnic rural upbringing to the urban cosmopolis that Nairobi became. Despite the changes and challenges, she stayed close to her communal identity, keeping an inquisitive mind and a willingness to adapt. Elizabeth consistently nurtured an profound awareness of the sacred amid a rapidly secularizing environment. Her legacy offers profound insights into the impact of an African woman of faith on the lives of those around her, both near and far.

³⁴ *Celebrating the Life of Elizabeth Nyathira Mugambi*.

³⁵ Nashepai Muthoni Kyama, “Muthoni’s Tribute,” June 19, 2024.

³⁶ Yasmin Mugambi, “Tribute,” June 19, 2024.

³⁷ Kyama, “Muthoni’s Tribute.”

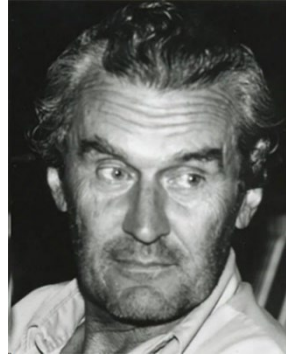
³⁸ Mugambi, “My Tribute.”

³⁹ J. N. K Mugambi, *Carry It Home* (Nairobi: EA Literature Bureau, 1974).

Celebrating the Witness of M. L. “Inus” Daneel

By Dana L. Robert Daneel⁴⁰

The death of M. L. “Inus” Daneel on July 29, 2024, marked the end of the era of mid-20th century pioneer missionary researchers on African Initiated Churches.⁴¹ Among AIC scholars, Daneel’s research in Zimbabwe was marked by a solidarity that helped him to produce the most in-depth study of “African Independency” in one ethnic group—the massive three-volume *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*.⁴² To remain in Africa during the fifteen-year liberation war that gave birth to the nation of Zimbabwe, Daneel turned down the professorship of missiology and religions at the Vrij Universiteit Amsterdam. Instead, he itinerated thousands of miles, even in war zones, to run an ecumenical Theological Education by Extension (TEE) program in alliance with AIC leaders across Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.⁴³



In all his writings, Daneel insisted on seeing AIC leadership as iconic, rather than according to the “bridge back to heathenism” evaluation of the early G. C. Oosthuizen and the early Bengt Sundkler.⁴⁴ His lifetime spent among the Shona people coupled with his native fluency in Karanga (a dialect of Shona) led Daneel to argue that AICs were missionary churches in their own right and were not mere reactionary movements.⁴⁵ Daneel’s kinship with AIC

⁴⁰ Dana L. Robert Daneel is the William Fairfield Warren Distinguished Professor at Boston University, Director of the Center for Global Christianity and Mission, Former Vice-Chair of ZIRRCO, and an Associate Editor of the *Journal of African Christian Biography*.

⁴¹ Daneel’s older peers included missionary scholars Bengt Sundkler (South Africa), David Barrett (Kenya), Edwin and Irene Weaver (Nigeria), and Harold W. Turner (Nigeria)—with each of whom he corresponded and visited in the 1960s and 1970s.

⁴² M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Background and Rise of the Major Movements*, vol. 1, Change and Continuity in Africa (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Leadership and Fission Dynamics*, vol. 3 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1988). Many of Daneel’s writings have been scanned and are freely available online at <https://sites.bu.edu/shonareligion/books/>.

⁴³ M. L. Daneel, *Fambidzano: Ecumenical Movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1989): xiii–xviii.

⁴⁴ Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 2d ed., Lutterworth Library, v. 32. Missionary Research Series, No. 14 (New York: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1961); G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968).

⁴⁵ On Daneel’s groundbreaking work of partnering with AICs for theological education, rather than trying to convert them from “heresy,” see David A. Shank, “Mission Relations with the Independent Churches in Africa,” *Missiology* 13, no. 1 (1985): 23–44. See Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987). Bishop Sundkler attended Daneel’s dissertation defense at the Vrij in 1971 and placed his mantle on him. Daneel, in multiple conversations, helped convince

leaders was best expressed by his adoption as a son by Samuel Mutendi, the founder of the Zion Christian Church in Zimbabwe, and his consecration as an Ndaza Zionist bishop for remaining with the people during the liberation war. Chiefs with whom he worked considered Daneel a *svikiro* (spirit medium) who mediated with their ancestors for the service of the people.⁴⁶ Although Daneel was a devout Christian theologian and church elder in the Reformed tradition, his ecumenical stance caused him to be long labeled a heretic by some missionaries in the church of his birth.⁴⁷

Another important aspect of Daneel's witness, in addition to his solidarity with AICS, was his ecumenical stance toward the priests, spirit mediums, and praise women of the traditional Mwari shrine in the Matopos. After two years living as the only white person in a communal area in the Matopo Hills, Daneel was admitted into the oracular cave of the traditional deity. Mwari, speaking in an ancient Rozvi dialect and in the voice of a woman, instructed Daneel to warn the Rhodesian authorities that if the white people did not return land to the black inhabitants, there would be war.⁴⁸ Accompanied by Mwari's messenger from Gutu, his friend Vondo Mukozho, Daneel delivered Mwari's message to the District Commissioner. Of course the message was rejected, despite Daneel pointing out that during the rebellion of 1896, the priests of Mwari and the spirit mediums led the war against the white settlers.⁴⁹ As Inus and Vondo left the DC's office to meet with the waiting council of chiefs, it began to rain. The two men raised their fists and shouted the rain-making praise names of Mwari, as women ululated in the distance.

When Ian Smith declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in November of 1965, Daneel heard it over the radio as he was helping to deliver a Shona woman's baby in the back of his truck. Because of his ministry among the Shona, he claimed conscientious objector status and refused to bear arms. When summoned before a military council by Colonel Hartley, Daneel was accused of being a "traitor to the white cause" and threatened with imprisonment. Later, to process his war experiences, Daneel interviewed former guerilla fighters and wrote a historical novel under his adopted clan name Mafuranhunzi Gumbo, *Guerilla Snuff*, that in 1997 was given the literary prize by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, and then selected in 2004 as one of the best 75 works of fiction written by a Zimbabwean in the 20th Century.⁵⁰ 25 in English, 25 in Shona, and 25 in Ndebele were selected from 5600 nominations to comprise "classic" Zimbabwean literature. Daneel's book was the only winner written by a white Zimbabwean.

After the civil war ended, in 1981 Daneel accepted a position as full professor of missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). As the anti-apartheid faculty of Afrikaners, UNISA theologians were educating the largest number of African students of any major tertiary institution during the late apartheid era. Missiologist David Bosch, of course, made the

Sundkler that AIC leaders in southern Africa were not supplanting the place of Christ.

⁴⁶ "Interviews with Chiefs Chikwanda, Chivi and Murinye, 'Muchakata and the War of the Trees,'" in *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*, eds. Greg Cuthbertson, Hennie Pretorius, and Dana Robert (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2003), 43-54.

⁴⁷ As late as the 2000s, at a meeting of Mashonaland missionaries of the NGK (Dutch Reformed Church) that Inus and I attended in Pretoria, South Africa, an older missionary apologized to me for having considered my husband a heretic for thirty years.

⁴⁸ M. L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia*, Communications, 1. (The Hague ; Mouton, 1970), 77-80.

⁴⁹ Daneel, 30-33.

⁵⁰ Mafuranhunzi Gumbo, *Guerrilla Snuff* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Baobab Books, 1995).

missiological faculty of UNISA known worldwide.⁵¹ Together Bosch and Daneel were the full professors in the department. Bosch taught the “A stream” (European theologies) while Daneel taught the “B stream” (African and black theologies). Daneel produced the first prescribed academic study guide on African theologies, which was well-received at UNISA and shaped the emerging consciousness of hundreds of post-graduate students.⁵² In 1995, Daneel retired from UNISA and moved part-time to the Boston University School of Theology, where he taught African religions and theology for 15 years, while living six months a year in Africa. In 2001, Inus and I founded the Center for Global Christianity and Mission, partly as a way to support outreach and research in Zimbabwe.

A major area of scholarly contribution and activism by Inus Daneel was his commitment to environmental justice and ecological mission. After the civil war ended, he stood with chiefs and spirit mediums overlooking the scenery at Morgenster Mission, where he had grown up as a missionary kid. The group lamented that even though the lands had been returned, they had been destroyed by war and its aftermath. Cultivation of riverbeds and destruction of contour ridges, uncontrolled tree chopping, digging up land mines, and other practices were legacies of war, injustice, and social breakdown. In response to the shared lament over the degraded landscape, in 1984 Inus sold his car and his house to seed a tree planting movement among traditionalists. Called AZTREC (Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), the group called upon the ancestors to help them protect the land. AIC leaders were also interested, and so a Christian wing called AAEC (Association of African Earthkeeping Churches) was founded. The two groups collaborated in an organization called ZIRRCO (Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation), that mobilized thousands of people.⁵³ Daneel raised money from Dutch and German church development agencies and requested sponsorships from local businessmen in Masvingo. Daneel and ZIRRCO founded dozens of nurseries and woodlots across Masvingo Province, raised seedlings, held arbor day events at schools and other public spaces, and planted hundreds of thousands of trees a year. Undergirded by religious rituals emphasizing earth care, ZIRRCO flourished for over fifteen years, with Daneel commuting to Zimbabwe while teaching at UNISA and then at Boston University.

As he became a prophet for ecotheology, of particular importance was Daneel’s 1991 speech at the Brighton Conference—the first international global conference on Pentecostal theology.⁵⁴ The organizer, Pentecostal ecumenist Harold D. Hunter, recalls that Inus’s powerful paper on “African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation” changed

⁵¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Twentieth anniversary ed., American Society of Missiology Series ; No. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011).

⁵² M. L. Daneel, *Missiology (B.Th.): Christian Theology of Africa: Mission as Liberation, Third World Theologies* (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 1989); M. L. Daneel, “African Indigenous Models of Mission,” in *Missiology: Introduction to Missiology*, ed. Willem Saayman (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 1992), 144–91.

⁵³ M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 1988), <https://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/19419>; M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective*, vol. 2 (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ See the program of this groundbreaking conference, https://www.academia.edu/4020171/Brighton_91_First_Global_Pentecostal_Conference. Harold D. Hunter and Peter D. Hocken, eds., *All Together in One Place: Papers from the Theological Section of the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 281. Reprinted with a new introduction by Wipf and Stock in 2019. On Hunter’s evaluation of the paper and its importance, see his introduction to the video of Daneel’s lecture at Brighton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2MFVg2xBUY>

the course of Pentecostal theology and launched his own commitment as an early Pentecostal ecologist. Hunter indicated that Daneel's paper was the most influential of the papers at this seminal conference.⁵⁵

In his last decade of living in Zimbabwe, following the destruction of the rule of law around the year 2000, Daneel's mission became primarily that of Christian presence. He supervised a small TEE program, laid hands on people for healing, preached in churches, and participated in the opening of a new Mwari shrine by a traditional woman ecologist. As a minority white person living in a situation of severe racial tension, he tried to maintain a positive presence, speaking Shona, and witnessing to his Christian faith. Much of the work he had pioneered was closed or destroyed.⁵⁶ Even so, his missionary vocation remained. The earthkeeping movement he had founded and wrote about became an African model widely admired throughout the world. By 2014, advanced age and ill health required that he spend most of his time in the United States where I could care for him. He continued his witness to Christ in Boston, blessing and praying for African students up until his death shortly before his 88th birthday. Although my husband was keenly aware of his sinfulness under God, he trusted the Lord for his salvation. In his last days, he continually gave thanks for our long and loving relationship, for his ministry, and for the people of Zimbabwe.

Inus Daneel left behind a prodigious amount of primary research, including over 10,000 hand-written pages of AIC sermons from the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of photographs, interviews with priests and spirit mediums from the traditional religion, and more. To protect them from destruction, the research materials were moved to Polokwane, South Africa, in the early 2010s. The full dimension of Inus Daneel's contribution will take many years to sort out and to evaluate.⁵⁷ Preserving, scanning, translating, and annotating the M. L. Daneel Archive is a new project jointly of the Center for Global Christianity and Mission at the Boston University School of Theology, and the African Studies Library at Boston University.

⁵⁵ See the paper (reprinted with permission in this issue): M. L. Daneel, "African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation," *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 326 (1993): 143–66.

⁵⁶ See M. L. Daneel, "Zimbabwe's Earthkeepers: When Green Warriors Enter the Valley of Shadows," in *Nature, Science, and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment*, ed. Catherine M. Tucker (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2012): 191-212. The anthropologists who produced this book dedicated it to "Marthinus 'Inus' L. Daneel, Environmental activist, inspiration, and friend," (Tucker, *Nature*, viii). On Daneel's ecological spirituality, see Benjamin Webb's interview with Inus Daneel, "Africa's Independent Churches and the Earthkeeping Movement," in *Fugitive Faith: Conversations on Spiritual, Environmental, and Community Renewal*, ed. Benjamin Webb (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998): 193-205.

⁵⁷ This paper shares only a few highlights of Daneel's vocation. His life as a missionary kid, his education in the Netherlands, his solidarity with the Shona AICs in wartime, his adventures as grade-A hunter and fisherman, his friends and family, his existential loneliness as self-described "nomad" caught between worlds, and his work as ground-breaking missiologist and ecumenist, will need to be the subject of a full biography.

Tributes

The Legacy of Marthinus L. Daneel

By Allan H. Anderson⁵⁸

Marthinus (better known as “Inus”) Daneel was born in Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, on 24th August 1936, the son of Dutch Reformed missionaries at Morgenster Mission near Masvingo (Fort Victoria). He died in Boston, Massachusetts on July 29, 2024, and leaves his wife, Dana Robert Daneel, four adult children and two adult stepchildren.

Inus Daneel spent over fifty years working among Shona independent churches as a scholar, theological training programme director, ecumenist, and environmentalist. Growing up in the Karanga heartland, he became fluent in the Shona dialect of that region at an early age. He had primary and secondary schooling in Zimbabwe, his undergraduate studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and his doctoral studies at Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam in the Netherlands, graduating D.Theol. (cum laude) in 1971. The empirical part of his research involved three years living among African independent churches (AICs) in rural central Zimbabwe, where his fluency in Karanga stood him in good stead. There he studied Shona independent churches and developed strong friendships with their leaders, particularly the founder of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zimbabwe, Bishop Samuel Mutendi, who soon adopted Daneel as one of his sons.

While completing his doctorate, Daneel was a senior lecturer and researcher at VU Amsterdam, and after that went to work with AICs in Zimbabwe for a decade. In 1972 he founded and directed the African Independent Church Conference (*Fambidzano*), and the Theological Education by Extension, Zimbabwe, work that continued for seventeen years, even after he took up an academic position at the University of South Africa (Unisa). In 1984 Daneel started another enormous project when he founded the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCO) and was its director for sixteen years until 2000. In this latter project he worked with both Christian and traditional religious leaders. He was Professor of Missiology at Unisa from 1981-1995, after which he became part-time Professor of Missiology at the Boston University School of Theology, as he had married Dana Robert, one of its professors. In Boston he co-founded the Center for Global Christianity and Mission. His legacy lives on there, where his many fine photographs and recordings have been digitally archived (Old & New in Shona Religion), his books digitized, and where the online *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* and the *Journal of African Christian Biography* are produced.

Daneel’s publications were profoundly ground-breaking. His first book, *The God of the Matopo Hills*, was published in the Netherlands in 1970 and chronicled his remarkably rare encounter (for a white person) with the Mwari (Supreme God) cult in western Zimbabwe. As a result of his doctoral research, Daneel produced the prodigious three-volume *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, each volume a treasure trove of valuable, comprehensive,

⁵⁸ Tribute originally posted on the Center for Global Christianity and Mission website: <https://www.bu.edu/cgcm/daneel-obituary/>. Used with permission. The author, Dr. Allan H. Anderson, is Emeritus Professor of Mission and Pentecostal Studies in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, UK.

and first-hand knowledge of these churches. His rich, thick descriptions of AIC rituals and services follow in the very best traditions of missionary anthropology. I do not know of any study of African Christianity rivalling this enormous achievement. No western observer has spent the amount of time that Daneel spent among the independent churches of Zimbabwe, nor with such intensity. It is even more remarkable that his research was conducted in a rural area (so called “tribal trust land”) during the early stages of the second “Chimurenga” liberation war.

The first volume, subtitled *Background and Rise of the Major Movements*, was published in the year of his doctoral graduation (1971) and is dedicated to those AIC leaders (the first mentioned is Mutendi) “whose reassuring trust, goodwill and unflinching aid largely contributed to this study”. Daneel’s method was to be an involved participant observer to whom access to these churches was possible because of his relationships. The volume gives the socio-religious and historical background to these churches, both “Spirit-type” and “Ethiopian type”. The second volume, *Church Growth — Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques*, followed in 1974, three years later, where his key themes of “adaptation and transformation” between the “old” and “new” religions is given prominence. The third volume, *Leadership and Fission Dynamics*, was published in 1988 in Zimbabwe, where subsequent events since the 1960s are traced, including the schisms that followed the deaths of church founders like Samuel Mutendi. These three volumes were followed in 1989 with an equally impressive work, *Fambidzano: Ecumenical Movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches*, detailing his work with theological education by extension amongst these churches, a movement he helped found. Altogether, these four books on Shona independent churches total well over two thousand pages, a veritable mine of information and loaded with Daneel’s own interpretations.

It must not be forgotten that permeating and informing these pages was a profound understanding of Shona religion, both “traditional” and contemporary. Daneel was an expert in how to relate the “old” Shona religion with the “new” African Christianity. He was also a keen environmentalist. After the liberation war had ended and in response to the concerns of African leaders about the devastation of the land through deforestation, he founded one of the largest tree-planting projects in the sub-Sahara. This environmental work featured in two further monographs (1998, 1999) titled *African Earthkeepers*, where ecological concerns become part of the mission of the church and indeed, of religion as a whole. As a measure of his stature among the Zionist churches in Zimbabwe, he was consecrated as an Ndaza (Holy Cord) Zionist bishop in 1991. One of the fundamental convictions of Daneel was that AICs were not primarily a reaction to missionary colonialism and racism, but predominantly missionary organisations in their own right, most of whose converts had never been in other churches.

Soon after my arrival in Birmingham in 1995, I was asked to speak at a faculty meeting at Selly Oak on my personal pilgrimage in mission. I reflected there on the profound impact that Daneel had had on my own life and thinking. We had some things in common. My parents and grandparents were missionaries in Zimbabwe, where I also grew up. I had been introduced to a paper Daneel had given in Harare by a friend who had attended this lecture in the late 1970s. When Daneel took up his appointment at Unisa in 1981 I was a struggling part-time, third year BTh student in his department and a Pentecostal Bible school teacher in Soshanguve (near Pretoria), trying to plough through what seemed an insurmountable amount of study whilst juggling my work duties. It did not take long for me to be fascinated with his grass-roots approach to research and theology in Africa, that resonated with my own situation at the time. He supervised my masters research degree and my doctorate. I remained under his mentorship and tutelage until I completed my doctoral dissertation in 1992. I had been his student for the best part of a decade, and there were indeed many lessons to learn. The following are just a few of the many ideas that I found inspiring.

Daneel taught us to treasure the vast riches in the African religious and cultural heritage and the need to be sensitive to that in mission in Africa. He emphasised the enormous missiological relevance of the AIC movement together with its potential resources for academic research. His sympathetic approach to loaded terms like “syncretism” and “heathenism” further influenced the approach of his students. More than anyone else, this unique combination of Afrikaner Reformed and Zimbabwean African missiologist provoked those who knew his work to strive for academic excellence and meaningful missiological reflection and interaction. He constantly stretched our horizons with his profound observations, and his practical experiences stimulated a desire to probe further. He was no armchair academic, for his prodigious writings were solidly built on his empirical research. During these years at Unisa he was involved in ground-breaking theological education for Zimbabwean AIC leaders (Fambidzano) and the massive tree-planting project reflecting his lifelong ecological interests. His academic output was already legendary, and I eagerly absorbed, and sometimes unconsciously reproduced, as many of his ideas as possible. So much of what he had written about Zionists and Apostolics in Zimbabwe paralleled my own Pentecostal perspective, and I began to realise that there was far more in common between these AICs and western-founded Pentecostalism than most would admit. His own passionate defence of “Spirit-type” churches, of which the ZCC is one, and his trenchant criticisms of misinterpretations that had been so common since Bengt Sundkler’s ground-breaking *Bantu Prophets*, coming as they so often did from misunderstandings of African cosmology (Daneel 1974:347), were to profoundly influence my own writing and the direction of my research. Here follow some of the principles I learned from Daneel’s *Old and New*.

Daneel has given invaluable and comprehensive detail on the adaptations made by southern Shona churches to traditional customs, a significant source of attraction (1974:103, 117, 139). He observed that God’s messages are often transmitted through the ancestors in these churches (1974:142), that “the manifest content of dreams leaves little doubt as to the Church which a person is supposed to join” (1974:151), and that this was particularly true of “Spirit-type” churches. He found that prophetic healing was the single most frequently mentioned factor for people joining “Spirit-type” churches (1974:186), particularly in the case of the ZCC, the largest church denomination in southern Africa. Because of the significant number of second-generation Christians now in these churches, the ongoing healing offered to members and new recruits made healing one of the most important factors in their continued expansion. It was this insight that later led me and others to consider healing as a main attraction for the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa.

For Daneel, Zionist prophets are people of immense importance. They are the messengers who hear from God and proclaim his will to people and the seers who have divine power to receive the revelations of God pertaining to the complaint of the enquirer, especially sicknesses. Like diviners, they are usually expected to “see” the complaints before they are uttered by the sufferers. They are healers *par excellence*, the ones to whom the faithful must go when they or their loved ones are afflicted in any other way. Their healing practices are expected to be effective and to bring actual healing to the patients. They are the ones who must pray for and dispense holy water and other symbolic healing objects as the need arises. They are also people who are expected to give direction and counsel for all kinds of problems, and in a few instances they are believed to declare the will of the ancestors. The prophet is expected to be available to fulfil this comprehensive prophetic function at any time. Prophesying is an essential aspect of the ministry in these churches. As Daneel (1988:25) put it, “It is the accepted way in which the Holy Spirit reveals His will for a specific situation”. In this sense it formed part of pastoral care; for the many different problematic situations encountered by African people are brought to the prophets for their assistance. They make known the will of God for a particular situation and through the

Holy Spirit help bring relief. In these churches “it is taken for granted that this form of communication between God and [humanity] belongs to the essence of Christianity” (1988:27). Prophets often exert a moral restraint on people. Sometimes the prophets initiate a process of reconciliation, such as Daneel (1974:307) had observed in Zimbabwe, in which both the afflicted and the ones accused of afflicting were counselled within the church fold. The prophetic advice may have been the beginning of a truly African solution. Finding the cause of the suffering is very important in this context, and this type of prophetic diagnosis may not always be wrong. The diagnosis may produce a psychological catharsis which may benefit the afflicted in relation to the real fear of witchcraft. The spirit world of African traditional thought constructs in its own cosmology the built-in fears and threats that demand a Christian response. The African Christian prophet attempts to give this response, particularly in the healing sessions, when the nature and the cause of the disease are given at the same time. Diagnostic prophetic activity is probably the most common type of prophecy in these churches.

Daneel consistently pointed out both the similarities, but especially the contrasts between Zionist prophets and traditional diviners. This he often did in reply to western critics who had claimed that the prophet and the diviner were one and the same. On the contrary, wrote Daneel, the similarities that exist between the two explain why “the diagnostic prophecies have such an appeal for the afflicted Shona” (1974:224). The parallels are seen in the preliminaries, whereby a “state of trance” is sometimes induced in the warming-up atmosphere of singing, clapping, dancing and stamping. Because the prophecy is seen in terms of an African's own orientation it is very meaningful. Daneel (1974:224-5) pointed out that the difference between traditional divination and prophetic diagnoses lies in the “medium through which the extraordinary knowledge is obtained”. The diviner relies on divinatory slabs, bones or spirits, or some other means, whereas the prophet invokes and speaks on behalf of the Holy Spirit. The important point is that both concentrate on “the personal causation of illness”, which is the question foremost in a person's mind. The prophet seeks to witness to the power of the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, thus providing a remedy more effective than traditional rites. Daneel (1974:228) argued that the prophetic diagnoses and prescriptions point to confrontation and change rather than to a preserving of the old order. Shona prophets “ultimately emphasize their dependence on the Holy Spirit as the real revelatory agent” (1974:232), and they often confront the ancestors. Because of this fundamental difference, in Daneel's research any similarities of method between prophets and diviners remain outward forms with radically differing meanings.

Daneel discovered that healing from illness undoubtedly played a major role in the life of Zionist members in southern Africa. The use of healing symbols is one of the central and most important features of the church's life, and the Zionist healing methods bear “direct parallels” to the practices of traditional diviners (Daneel 1974:232). The most common symbol used is that of water, which is “blessed” or prayed for by a minister or prophet for use by the congregants, either as a healing potion itself or in large quantities to induce vomiting. It is only the prayer which makes the water efficacious. As in traditional healing methods, a patient must expel the “death” that is in the stomach to be healed. The vomiting is believed to get rid of both physical sickness and spiritual defilement. The water is seen to represent cleansing and purification from evil, sin, sickness and ritual pollution — concepts carried over from traditional thought. Members receive holy water, which is then taken home and sprinkled as a ritual of purification or protection or is drunk or washed in for healing purposes.

Daneel (1974:233) observed that the similarities between the symbolic healing objects and those of traditionalists are similarities of form but not of content, and they are “primarily the visual symbolic concretization of the Divine Power, which in itself has no medicative effect.” Nevertheless, Daneel (1974:233) warned of the possible danger of misinterpretation, noting that

in some cases this was due to “the inclination of the Shona to identify the symbolic object with that which it represents in the ritual context” (1974:338). This is particularly the case (as is true of all varieties of Christian expression) when with the passing of time, members observe certain rituals because they have become traditions of the church, and not because they really understand their symbolic significance. In these instances, the forms remain unchanged while the meaning has become obscured. But this problem is by no means peculiar to the AICs. All types of church members throughout the world tend to attach magical interpretations to symbols so that their meaning is obscured.

Inus Daneel was one of the greatest missiologists of our time. His natural curiosity, close-up, insider perspectives, and above all his practical involvement in African religion have made his unparalleled and unique research the quintessence of all AIC studies. This standard may never be achieved again. His holistic love for rural Africa and its environment and his pursuit of excellence for himself and his students undergirded by an evangelical faith will always be for this disciple at least, both daunting and inspiring. For this I will be forever grateful.

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Martinus (Inus) L. Daneel – Bishop Moses Daneel – Muchakata – Co- Creating African Earthkeeper

By Charles J. Fensham⁵⁹

Martinus (Inus) Daneel has been named Bishop Moses Daneel by the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC) and *Muchakata* by the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC).⁶⁰ His life is a study in solidarity. Born and raised in a white missionary family in Zimbabwe, his heart was always with its people and their troubles. I got to know Inus in the 1980's when I was finishing my studies in theology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and eventually ended up being a junior lecturer with an office adjoining his on the University campus. Those were difficult days in Zimbabwe as well as in Apartheid South Africa. Our theology faculty at UNISA was academically connected to the liberation movements in both countries. Many of our students were political prisoners.

We often mused about “informants” in our faculty when the South African security police took interest in our activities. Inus was deeply involved in Zimbabwe during its second *Chimurenga* (Struggle for liberation) war which finally ended with elections in 1980. This was not a comfortable position to be in as he was often placed in the midst of the many internal tensions within Zimbabwe. In the introduction to his book *Guerilla Snuff* he wrote, “. . .the story of liberation was writing me. At times it cast me out to suffer despair on the margin of both black and white worlds.”⁶¹ Living within this unbearable tension Inus was a bridge builder among different factions particularly through his work at bringing people together for the integrity of creation.

In the early 1980's he became a member of Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC, first known as the Association of Zimbabwe Spirit Mediums AZM). As director of the Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Conservation Trust (ZIRRCON) he brought together the AZTREC community and the newly founded Association of African Earthkeeping Churches. Yet again he found himself in a difficult tension between the traditional African religious leaders and those of the Christian churches he was working with. Yet, he understood that the task of earth repair was too important not to take on the challenge and work on bridging the differences. He did all this while teaching in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology at UNISA and publishing intriguing papers on African traditional religion in Zimbabwe and the emergence of new indigenous Christian movements. At that time David Bosch was head of the department and Inus taught various courses while bringing awareness and advocacy to the faculty for the struggles of the Zimbabwean people as well as a passion for theological education of the Africa Initiated Church leaders.

Inus loved nature, the African bush, the Zambesi River teeming with fish, crocodiles, and hippos, but above all he loved the people of Zimbabwe and was deeply concerned with both their physical and spiritual needs. With the inability of traditional Western Christian churches to properly engage traditional African culture and to respect African leadership many Africa Initiated (Indigenous) Churches (AIC's) started to emerge in the early 20th century particularly

⁵⁹ Tribute originally posted on the Center for Global Christianity and Mission website: <https://www.bu.edu/cgcm/daneel-obituary/>. Used with permission. The author, Dr. Charles J. Fensham, is Professor of Systematic Theology, Knox College, University of Toronto.

⁶⁰ The *Muchakata* (wild cork) tree bears nutritious fruit that has often saved lives during famines in Zimbabwe.

⁶¹ Daneel, M.L. 1995 *Guerilla Snuff*. Harare: Baobab Books, xi.

in sub-Saharan Africa. As a theologian and missiologist, Inus was concerned with providing theological education and biblical literacy to the leadership of these emerging new Christian movements. It was the time of the flourishing of Theological Education by Extension and Inus played an important part in this process in Zimbabwe. As an ecologist, deeply aware of the looming climate crisis, Inus was also aware how the “cry of the earth” is also reflected in “the cry of the poor,” an insight way ahead of Leonardo Boff’s book that made that connection. In his award-winning book *Guerrilla Snuff* (1995) he describes how the struggle after the war had to continue for the integrity of the land.⁶² This was a struggle and a war to be waged by the combatants and their spiritual leaders to save the land from erosion, over-population, and deforestation. His concern was expressed through efforts to integrate the return of the traditional lands, alienated from the people through colonization, with sustainable ecological practices inspired by both traditional African religion and indigenous forms of African Christianity.

Inus was a deeply creative and adventurous man. With his Shona friends he walked traditional paths and joined the ritual hunt, but his imagination inspired new trails of healing. *Guerrilla Snuff*, in his own words was “neither a conventional history nor fiction.”⁶³ For Inus, this creative narrative had to cut a new path through the Zimbabwean bush as a contemporary myth-encased history for the ordinary people of Zimbabwe as they gather under the *muchakata* tree (*Parinari curatellifolia*). In a very real way this was a deeply intellectual and spiritual book that intentionally did not bow to the limitations of Western academia. Inus was an outstanding academic as attested in his many publications, his work at UNISA over 16 years, his status at Free University in Amsterdam and the University of Leiden, his research fellowships at The University of Zimbabwe and Harvard, and his long association with the African Studies Centre as well as the Centre for Global Christianity and Mission at Boston University. Nevertheless, his heart was always in activism for the good of God’s people and God’s earth.

Inus was a committed ecumenist in the widest sense of that term. He was particularly interested in fostering ecumenism among the African Independent churches but also expanded that focus to an interfaith ecumenism in aid of supporting ecologically sustainable practices and healing of the land in Zimbabwe. As a visionary builder of institutions, he founded two organizations. One, founded in 1972, was *Fambidzano yemaKereke avaTema* which was established as a cooperative of black independent churches. Their primary concern was cooperation in Theological Education by Extension. The other organization ZIRRCO, founded in 1988, was a religiously based earthkeeping institution. It expanded ecumenism to the practitioners of traditional African religion including: “chiefs, tribal elders, headmen, and senior spirit mediums” as well as Christian churches. These two religious groups were structured into different units within ZIRRCO.⁶⁴ This ultimately created a massive movement for earth repair in Zimbabwe that consisted of over two million adherents.⁶⁵ Behind these actions was a process of deep reflection on the nature of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The theological inspiration for this grew out of Inus’ friendship with Jerald D. Gort’s work on theology of religions. In Zimbabwe Inus endeavoured to practice the insights developed in Gort’s concept of “liberative ecumenism” which provided the vision for the massive movement for the good of

⁶² *Guerrilla Snuff* was selected as one of the 75 most influential Zimbabwean books of the 20th century, <https://www.bu.edu/cgcm/research-associates/m-l-daneel/>

⁶³ Daneel, *Guerrilla*, x-xi.

⁶⁴ Daneel, M.L. 2005. “Liberative Ecumenism at the African Grassroots.” In Daneel, M.L., Van Engen, C. & Vroom, H.M. *Fullness of Life for All*. Leiden: Brill, 295-327.

⁶⁵ Daneel, “Liberative Ecumenism,” 295.

God's creation that emerged.

In reviews of Inus' books there is a common theme of critique that goes to his identity as a white man working in a black African context in both his field work and his advocacy. So, for example, Norma Kriger, in her positive review of *Guerilla Snuff* mentions this inevitable tension arising out of identity.⁶⁶ In David Field's positive review of the Two Volume *African Earthkeepers* series, he comments on questions around Inus' potential influence on some of the rituals developed as part of the work of the African Initiated Churches in ecological activism and reforestation of Zimbabwe.⁶⁷ The implication was that somehow, as an outsider, it was inappropriate for a white man to help shape a response to the challenges of the churches and people of Zimbabwe. In places so deeply shaped by British colonialism and its development of racism and colonial exploitation, questions of racial hierarchy and use of power are inevitable. Of course, Inus' extensive work on observing and describing the churches in Zimbabwe and his profound understanding of the traditional African *Mwari* cult situated in the Matobo Hills (earlier known as the Matopo Hills), carry, of necessity, limitation as an etic (outsider) view. The colonial past always looms over such work. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that Inus was something much more than an "outsider." His adoption as a "son" of the Gumbo people and honorific adoption as a bishop, and his indigenous facility with the Shona language suggests a more complex relationship. There is an "etic" dimension to his work, particularly in his theological formation, but it is moderated by a good measure of "emic" (insider) understanding and a passion to bring these worlds into mutual dialogue for the good of God's reign. There is no doubt that Inus always remained aware of and sensitive to such tensions. That is why an enduring theme in Inus' writing is his own awareness of the limitations of his powers of observation and description.

In his fascinating 1983 paper on "Communication and Liberation in African Independent Churches" published in the Journal *Missionalia*, he writes, "My own observations in this field understandably remain those of an 'alien participant' and are therefore of a preliminary nature, aimed at the discernment and description of relevant trends rather than at conclusive definition."⁶⁸ Likewise, he completes this exhaustive paper (37 pages long) in the same spirit of humility, writing, "I realise that I have succeeded only in drawing a scant and incomplete profile..."⁶⁹ Well versed in anthropological field work, Inus redefines the "participant observer" in his case to that of an "alien observer." It is perhaps this kind of humility in the midst of the Shona people that led them to adopt him as one of their own.

As I reflect on this intercultural bringing together of identities, I treasure a memory from some time perhaps in 1987, when Inus returned to UNISA after spending Easter with the Zionist church. He told me with joy and a good serving of humour of the unexpected invitation to preach. The crowd was so large and there was no amplification method, so the crowd was divided in two with a path between the two sides. As a preacher he had to walk down this path and preach every few meters to address that section of the crowd who could hear him. With a chuckle he told me that you had to take off your shoes when preaching at these events as this moment was considered to be on holy ground before God. So, with bare feet he set out, only

⁶⁶ Kriger, N. 1997. "Mafuranhunzi Gumbo *Guerilla Snuff*" Review in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23:4, 673-4.

⁶⁷ Field, D. 2002. "African Earthkeepers Volumes 1 & 2." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 113 Jul 2002, p 117-120.

⁶⁸ Daneel, M.L. 1983. "Communication and Liberation in African Independent Churches." *Missionalia* 11:2, 59.

⁶⁹ Daneel, "Communication," 92.

to discover that the ground was full of thorns. With a twinkle in the eye he said it was hard not to let the crowd hear him swearing under his breath every time he stepped on a thorn... Inus literally embodied the white-black, Western-African, tensions while painfully wrestling with the alienation that comes with living within such cultural and political tensions.

The two volumes of the *African Earthkeepers* series, published at UNISA, documents some of the important earthkeeping efforts in a Zimbabwe that was quickly being deforested as people were trying to eke out a living while piecing together sustainable African traditions profoundly impacted by the colonial era. Volume 1 tells the story of the African religion traditionalists and Volume 2 the story of the Africa Initiated Churches. In the introduction to Volume 2 Dana Robert writes,

Readers of this book will be drawn to the detailed descriptions of 'earth healing' (*maporesanyika*) ceremonies held by the earthkeeping churches. The ceremonies combine the classic AIC emphasis on healing with tree-planting eucharists in which communicants confess their sins against the earth. The reception of the sacrament accompanies distribution of seedlings that are planted to heal the denuded and damaged earth, often understood as the body of Christ. Since many AICs use the eucharist as the launching point for missionary campaigns, the incorporation of environmentalism into the heart of Christian sacramental life demonstrates a holistic mission model that potentially could be applied in other parts of southern Africa.⁷⁰

There can be no doubt about the profound impact Inus Daneel's life work has had on the country of Zimbabwe. Despite droughts, hunger, political upheavals, and ongoing deforestation, Zimbabwe—its people, and its churches—were being transformed for the better. Despite the contemporary disdain for creating institutions and building sustainable communal structures, it is exactly such structural work that helps to respond to the large challenges of the world. Inus understood this and worked tirelessly at building institutions. Institutions do not only bring meaning to a culture and society, but they also make real change possible on a macro scale.

Besides bringing together the Africa Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe, Inus also fostered the necessary theological reflection in the midst of these communities to bring awareness of their stewardship of the earth and their environment. As he found in his research, the AIC's were already at the forefront in Zimbabwe in building a sustainable agricultural community in the face of climate crises and the vulnerabilities of subsistence farmers in Zimbabwe.⁷¹ These churches had no problem building grassroots systems of agricultural education that integrated new Western scientific practices with traditional beliefs while encouraging the community as a whole to pitch in when food supplies became vulnerable.⁷² Christian faith and these practices were seamlessly stitched together.

One of the key initiatives of ZIRRCO was to encourage the planting of trees and their care to counter the fast-moving deforestation in Zimbabwe. This intuitive indigenous knowledge that trees and the survival of people are inextricably linked, were given expression through the work of the AAEC unit within ZIRRCO. The result was an impressive people movement that planted trees and saw it as their spiritual duty to care for these trees and to continue the movement. Many scientists and environmentalists initially questioned this strategy

⁷⁰ Daneel, M.L., 1999. *African Earthkeepers. Volume II*. Pretoria: UNISA, xvi. (This is the initial edition with full text.)

⁷¹ Daneel, "Communication," 72-3.

⁷² Daneel, "Communication," 73-4.

claiming that these life-giving acts will hardly have an impact on the overwhelming environmental crisis. It is enlightening to find that many years later a large scientific research study has proved these efforts of ZIRRCOON right. In July 2019, the Crowther Lab in Switzerland published a peer reviewed study in the journal *Science* that demonstrated the importance of reforestation as an ecological strategy.⁷³

In the light of this, the development of Christian liturgical practices that brought together theological insight with an environmental social movement made all the sense in the world. In the abridged Orbis edition of *African Earthkeepers Volume*, Inus recounts the tree planting liturgy led by Bishop Rueben Marinda. Bishop Marinda (also Chief Chiwara) was the first leader of an AIC who received formal theological training from the ecumenical United Theological College in Zimbabwe. He developed this prayer liturgy while planting trees,

Mwari Father, I have come today to plant your trees. I have come with the *mutumbu* tree to pay for my transgression [of earth destruction]. I place them here in your soil. You tree, I place you in this soil. Grow! Become tall, wax strong! Even if the hail from the heavens hits you, I want you to remain alive ... through the coming ages. My friend whom I love, I shall come to visit often to see you. Stay right here where I plant you. Amen.⁷⁴

This moving liturgy sacramentally integrates the importance of the *Mutumbu* tree with an indigenous eco-theology. The human destruction of the earth is linked to sin while the theology is enacted ritually to make it real for the community. In his research Inus demonstrated a deep appreciation for the integration of life and faith within the AIC's. Their practices go beyond prayer, and reflection, to action and prophetic promise. Although we might assume that Inus played some role in encouraging such liturgical practices, it must also be noted that the proud independent tradition of the AIC's and a sophisticated theologian like Bishop Marinda must be primarily credited for the theological reflection and content of these liturgies.

In my own context in Canada, this work by indigenous Zimbabwean Christians has also been inspiring. Through a decolonial process of listening to the Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada, traditional Christian churches have much to learn from the profound environmental awareness and accountability of Canada's much mistreated indigenous population. Here too we are being taught about the inextricable link between community and care for God's earth. Among Canada's indigenous peoples this traditional eco-spirituality is represented in the teaching of "all my relations" which includes animals, and trees, and plants as relations to be respected and cared for.

The impact of the initiatives in Zimbabwe even reached through Canada to Cuba. At a theological consultation and reflection at the Seminario Evangélico de Teología de Matanzas, in 2012, a group of Canadian and Cuban theological students and faculty studied and considered this example of the Zimbabwean church. In response the Seminary determined to enact its own tree-planting liturgy. For the Seminary, this was not something that fell from the sky, but rather an addition to an ecological commitment already practiced through their large organic garden that feeds the seminary as well as many of the needy in the city of Matanzas. In Canada a Christian public theology advocacy group published a reflection on tree-planting as a theological act in response to the Zimbabwean example.⁷⁵ In so many ways the power of earthkeeping lives on.

⁷³ See ETH Zürich news release <https://ethz.ch/en/news-and-events/eth-news/news/2019/07/how-trees-could-save-the-climate.html>

⁷⁴ Daneel, M.L. 2001. *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*. New York: Orbis Books, 185. (This is the abridged edition with both volumes in one published monograph by Orbis Books).

⁷⁵ Fensham, C. J. 2013 "Imagine a Sacramental Tree Planting Conspiracy" in *Living Eco Justice*. Ottawa:

Therefore, I believe that Martinus (Inus) L. Daneel was not just an “alien observer” but also Bishop Moses Daneel, *Muchakata*, a co-creator for the sake of the integrity of God’s creation.

Citizens for Public Justice, 69-75.

A Rebel or A Prophet: Professor M. L. Daneel’s African Eco-Missiology

By Kapya Kaoma⁷⁶

In his last days on earth, Prof. M. L. Daneel constantly reflected on his lifelong work among African Earthkeepers in Zimbabwe. I once asked him how he reconciled his white background, Reformed Christian identity, and African beliefs with his missionary career during the Second Chimurenga (war of liberation). He replied, “I am a rebel.” He then shared how he was often perceived as a traitor by his fellow whites and missionaries, and how his life was threatened.

Throughout his academic endeavors, Prof. Daneel self-identified as a participant-observer among those he studied. Thus, to properly understand his eco-theology, we must pay close attention to his association with African traditionalists and African Initiated Churches (AICs). Like all his theological works, his eco-missiology was highly informed by the above associations. He not only rebelled against Western colonial systems but also against academic paradigms that held African theological reflections captive. In doing so, Daneel developed a holistic and interfaith African eco-missiology that sought the liberation of all created beings—both humanity and the environment.⁷⁷

It is important to note that climate change was not the primary driver of Daneel’s eco-missiology; rather, it was deforestation and its effects on rural communities. As a missiologist, Daneel sought appreciative inquiry with the affected communities to resolve this crisis. John Mansford Prior writes, “Through these discussions, the community commits to an inclusive approach to problem-solving and a commitment to common action. In this process, the movement shifts from what is to what ought to be. By focusing on people’s aspirations for a better future, communities and movements develop creative innovations to face the future.”⁷⁸

As a result, rural communities declared the Third Chimurenga (the war of liberation or the war of trees) by fostering inclusive problem-solving and collective action. This war led to the planting of over three million trees in the Masvingo area of Zimbabwe. Like in the first and second Chimurenga, African religion was central to the mobilization process.

Daneel’s outstanding knowledge of African traditional rituals and AIC theologies provided valuable tools for theologizing, which were essential for his sound eco-missiology rooted in African spirituality and practices. Aside from illustrating the relevance of African beliefs in contemporary life, his eco-theological praxis was existentially oriented; it aimed at the liberation of “not only humans, but the trees, the animals and the waters.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ A tribute to my mentor, professor, and friend M. L. Daneel. I was blessed to have him in my life. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory. Highly humbled to write this piece—I don’t deserve to. (ed: A Visiting Researcher at the Center for Global Christianity and Mission at Boston University, Dr. Kapya Kaoma has authored numerous works on African ecological ethics and ecological mission.)

⁷⁷ M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

⁷⁸ John Mansford Prior, “Practical Theology and Mission Studies,” In Kim, Kirsteen, Knud Jørgensen, and Alison Fitchett Climenhaga, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*. First edition, 165-183. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2022), 177.

⁷⁹ M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care*, v.1 1st ed. (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1998), 104.

The strength of Daneel's eco-missiology lies in his firsthand experience of participating in and observing traditional rituals and AIC services. His eco-theology was not abstract but applied. Although he tried to relate African eco-theology to established Western theology and doctrines, the center of his theology was African spirituality. In short, his eco-missiology was informed by African spirituality as opposed to Western thought.⁸⁰ As Magesa argues in *What is not Sacred?: African Spirituality*, "African spirituality is not something in the past; it is current and real."⁸¹ African spirituality, founded on its own sacred values, provides life with meaning. In this worldview, everything is sacred, and sacredness encompasses all reality.

Daneel perceived African spirituality as a critical part of all value systems, including human interactions with the environment. In this lifeworld, spirituality is at the core of all existence, shaping human interactions and giving life to cultural beliefs and ethical principles. Without spirituality, life ceases to have meaning. Spirituality, therefore, is the engine of all life and existence.

Daneel's Impact on My Ecological Thought

Daneel is one of the most influential African theologians. His works have had a lasting impact on my academic life. In fact, he recommended that I enroll at Boston University for my doctoral studies. My reading of mission history with his wife, Dana Robert, once led me to consider studying David Livingstone's "sacred regard for life" for my doctoral thesis. "Why do you want to study a dead white man?" Daneel asked with great disapproval. Through countless meetings and discussions, I returned to my African roots. I realized that African religions and spirituality could aid Christian responses to the mounting ecological catastrophe. My thesis sought to link ancestors and Jesus to earthcare using the philosophy of *ubuntu*—the belief that we are all intricately interconnected in the web of life.⁸²

Andrew Walls argues that African Christianity can guide global Christianity in countless ways. Aside from becoming the center of global Christianity, Africa now occupies the place once held by Euro-American Christianity. Walls insists that the word "martyr," once understood as "witness" rather than as one who dies for Christ, suggests that African stories of suffering are examples of the cost of discipleship, which can inform global Christianity. He writes,

The long history of Christ's church in Africa provides abundant testimony to the cost of discipleship, the processes that produce Christian quality. In its witness to Christ, the African church had to withstand false gods, sometimes dressed in patriotic garb. It has seen recurrent renewal movements when in danger of succumbing to easy going Christianity. It has known what Paul calls the principalities and powers and confronted them in the guise of both malign spiritual entities and malign political structures. In the light of the events of our own day, it is right to ask: Whom has God been preparing through the fires of affliction for leadership in his church at large?⁸³

Through the tree-planting movement, one can argue, God raised Daneel and African Earthkeepers to address one of the most pertinent issues of our time—the ecological crisis.

⁸⁰ Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, 100.

⁸¹ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 15.

⁸² Kapyra Kaoma, *Ubuntu, Jesus, and Earth: Integrating African Religion and Christianity in Ecological Ethics* (Boston University, 2010).

⁸³ Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity*. Edited by Mark R. Gornik. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 90.

African Traditional Religions and the Environment

Daneel understood the sacredness of the natural world in African worldviews. Gods, ancestors, and spirits (*mizimu*) inhabit the natural world, thus making creation sacred. This does not imply that creation is divine, but rather that the divine often reveals the divine-self through creation.

Daneel incorporated this understanding into his theologizing. African rituals, he argued, are apt to heal human relationships with the land, ancestors, and the Creator. Instead of confining African religions to human salvation, as most African theologians have done, Daneel expanded this cosmic aspect of African theological pedagogy—motivating Christians and non-Christians to heal the earth through tree planting.

The traditional *mukwerere/mufukudzanyika* ritual (dressing the land), for example, carries ecological overtones; it exists to ensure environmental well-being. As guardians of the land, the Supreme Being, spirits, and ancestors monitor human interactions with the earth. For this reason, Daneel identified the close interconnection between the natural world, humanity, ancestors, spirits, and the Supreme Being. Identifying ancestors, spirits, and the Supreme God as guardians of the land implies that the living are simply caretakers, akin to biblical teaching.⁸⁴ In African spirituality, therefore, preservation of the earth is a paramount duty of the living—it is an expression of honoring the Creator and the ancestors. In other words, humanity is duty-bound to care for the earth out of reverence for the Creator and ancestors, whose presence is felt on earth.

This understanding demands an earth-centered spirituality—something Daneel identified. African spirituality, he believed, can bridge the religious relationship between African Christians and traditionalists. Since addressing deforestation and the wider ecological crisis requires a broader spiritual dialogue beyond Christianity, eco-missiology must be interfaith in its application—echoing Pope Francis’ call in his encyclical “*Laudato si’*”: an ecological invitation to every global citizen.⁸⁵

Daneel is not the first scholar to integrate African religions into African Christianity. What sets him apart, however, is how he approached traditionalists. He didn’t employ traditional beliefs to validate Christian theology; instead, he employed traditional religion to invite traditionalists to participate in religious earth healing activities and responsibilities. In social movement terms, earth healing and deforestation aided frame alignment—Christians and traditionalists were able to identify with African spirituality as it relates to human responsibilities toward the earth. In earth healing, the gap once created by colonialism and the Christianization process was finally bridged—mobilizing both groups to see deforestation as a common enemy. In other words, Daneel viewed the ecological crisis as a spiritual problem in need of an interfaith spiritual response—one that promoted collaboration over conversion, again illuminating a new conception of Christian mission.

Daneel’s work can be described as material-enacted eco-missiology. It developed from what Meredith B. McGuire terms “lived religion.” McGuire writes, “Lived religion consists of the practices people use to remember, share, enact, act, adapt, and create the stories out of

⁸⁴ M. L. Daneel, “Healing the Earth: Traditional and Christian Initiatives in Southern Africa” (Part II), *Journal for the Study of Religion* 6, no. 2 (1993): 3–28, 22.

⁸⁵ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home Encyclical Letter*.

https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si_en.pdf. Accessed July 29, 2024.

which they live. And lived religion comes into being through the practices people use to turn these stories into everyday action.”⁸⁶

Based on people’s enacted and acted rituals of tree planting, for example, Daneel proposed new ecological insights that are usually ignored in urban Christian contexts. For earthkeepers, the earth was not an empty space awaiting human exploitation, but the Lord’s acre and home to our ancestors, who are encountered in lived religion. In his words, “...the resurgence of ancestral and related cults as African worldviews and philosophies reassert themselves as part of Africa’s post-colonial search for its roots, it stands to reason that... ecological conservationist activities could be profitably based on religious motivation and customary earthkeeping insights.”⁸⁷

The formation of “The Association of African Earthkeeping Churches,” “The Zimbabwe Association of Spirit Mediums,” and “The Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists” point to one grand goal—religious people of all traditions can join hands in earth healing activities. (It is important to note that African religions deserve respect from Christians—they must not be looked at as underdeveloped religions. They have their spirituality and philosophy that can inform ecological responsibility and actions. In short, they must be studied as part of the world religions.) Although most mainstream Christians and theologians view traditional mediums negatively, Daneel’s actions were not only courageous but also prophetic.

It is important to add that tree-planting rituals have glued these groups together. For this reason, tree-planting ceremonies, eco-sermons, and other traditional practices are central to understanding Daneel’s eco-missiology. These activities illustrate the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, ancestors, and the Creator in African worldviews. African rituals are ecological statements directed at Earth’s well-being. Through rituals, communities commune with the sacred to ensure community health, fertility, and land productivity. In this worldview, the health of humanity and the land is intricately interconnected.⁸⁸

Daneel pointed out that African Earthkeepers’ self-identification with plants as brothers and sisters may share much in common with St. Francis of Assisi; yet, that relationship was born from their ritual experiences during tree-planting ceremonies. Earthkeepers learned to see trees as relatives based on the ritual experiences of the moment—adding another layer of responsibility for caring for those plants. Nancy R. Howell seems to share this perspective when she dispels the idea of human superiority over other creatures. Pointing to similarities between human and chimpanzee behaviors, she insists that humans are not separate from nature but part of the natural world.⁸⁹ Daneel shared this theological perspective; all living beings are interconnected and share a kinship with every creature, regardless of size or species.

African Traditional Religions and Daneel’s Eco-Missiology

Nwaka Chris Egbulem discusses the cosmic outlook of the African worldview, arguing that in the African lifeworld, the entire creation is sacramental. He writes, “The moon and stars, rivers and seas, hills and mountains, fish and animals, human beings; all carry the message of God’s

⁸⁶ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2008), 118.

⁸⁷ M. L. Daneel, “Healing the Earth: Traditional and Christian Initiatives in Southern Africa (Part II),” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 6, no. 2 (1993): 3–28, 22.

⁸⁸ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 129.

⁸⁹ Nancy R. Howell, “The Importance of Being Chimpanzee,” *Theology and Science*, Vol 1. 2.(2023): 179-191, 189

presence. Created nature and the human environment (visible and invisible) bear the mark of goodness and godliness.”⁹⁰

Daneel embraced this African perspective to some extent, integrating it into what Henning Wrogeman terms “intercultural” missiology. Whereas context, local people, the economy, and politics are major factors in spreading the gospel, Wrogeman argues that the success of interreligious relations and dialogue demands respect for religious traditions.⁹¹

Religious traditions, however, don’t exist in a vacuum. Hence, Christian mission occurs within the material environment, making nature an essential factor. This is something Daneel advocated; Christology ought to be cosmic, as the wounded earth is the body of Christ. However, he extended this belief to include ancestors, who, like Christ, are the default guardians of the land—thereby creating an African theology that relates humanity to the entire creation. This theology appeals to both Christians and traditionalists. By planting ecotheology in African cosmology, Daneel didn’t just appeal to Christians but also to non-Christians. We are all kin and kith in creation and in responsibilities. For Christians, this carries an extra responsibility. Christ’s reign demands the liberation of the earth, not by *dominium terrae*, but by acts of healing, tending, and, above all, the restoration of the wounded earth. Tree planting is thus an act of healing. This theological vision is enacted in green rituals and liturgies.

African theologians have long asserted the unity of the God of Africa and the God of the Bible. Daneel used Trinitarian arguments to demonstrate this unity—God is the Creator and protector of crops, Christ is the Earthkeeper, and the Holy Spirit is the healer of creation.⁹² Christopher J. H. Wright’s view on creation care shares this understanding: the relationship between God and all creation is covenantal. To Wright, the primary value of creation lies in glorifying God—something that grants creation both sacredness and sanctity.⁹³ Mindyo Sasongko compliments this argument: “the creation is good because it has received value, unity, integrity and dignity from the Creator.”⁹⁴ Whereas Sasongko advocates the birth of “ecological oriented missiology in which humanity fulfills its biblical mandated dominion,”⁹⁵ Daneel promoted a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood with creation.

Influence of African Christianity on Daneel’s Eco-Missiology

To understand Daneel’s eco-missiology, one needs to pay attention to the development of African Christianity. African theologians have long opposed the hegemony of Euro-American doctrines, advocating instead for a form of Christianity that aligns with African culture. According to Magesa, inculturation involves the contextualization of the Christian faith within the African culture. In this case, genuine theologizing can only occur when religion is lived. Here, Christianity must be localized in order to become an integral part of African culture.⁹⁶ In tandem

⁹⁰ Nwaka Chris Egbulem, “Mission and Inculturation in Africa,” in Wainwright, Geoffrey, and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 678-69 (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2006), 681.

⁹¹ Henning Wrogeman, “Mission Studies as Intercultural Theology,” in Kim, Kirsteen, Knud Jørgensen, and Alison Fitchett Climenhaga, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*. First edition. 145-163, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 147.

⁹² Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, v.1, 106.

⁹³ Wright, *Mission of God*, 402.

⁹⁴ Wright, *Mission of God*, 93.

⁹⁵ Nindyo Sasongko, “The Dearest Freshness Deep Down Things: Environmental Justice and Mission in Ecumenical Perspective,” *International Review of Mission*, 105.1 (402), (July 2016): 86-103, 9

⁹⁶ Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2004),

with Guder's statement that there is "no cultureless gospel,"⁹⁷ it is critical for Christian faith to be rooted in African culture. This is what Daneel did—he applied the concept of inculturation not only in church rituals but also to address deforestation.

Daneel's success can be attributed to the flexibility of AIC theologies. Magesa contends that missionary-founded churches adhere to Western doctrines, while AICs are more adaptable to change since they have "a wide leeway of tolerance in belief and action."⁹⁸ The theological education received by some African earthkeepers through Daneel's efforts, for example, is detectable in their sermons and speeches. Similarly, the Trinitarian theological outlook of African earthkeepers, which views the Triune God as the source of creation and healing, could have been influenced by Daneel; however, their flexible theological approach enabled the adaptation of ecological interpretations of rituals, biblical narratives, and traditional myths in earth healing activities.

Importantly, African religions and AICs share a common practice of healing rituals, often overlooked in mainstream Christianity. As Egbulem posits, healing is central to the African lifeworld: "The search for healing is ultimately a search for wholeness."⁹⁹ In her discussion of healing and lived religion, McGuire asks, "so, if we were to ask, in the contemporary context, "From what do you most want to be saved/redeemed/protected?" many people—religious and non-religious alike—would be likely to name illness, debilitates old age, pain or dying." She adds, "Lived religion is, for many people, immediately connected with the well-being of their bodies and minds, because they do not experience their spiritual lives as separate from their physical and mental/emotional lives."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, in Africa, most people are likely to turn to religion to address both physical and mental and emotional aspects of their lives. This observation is central to African spirituality: healing is married to religion.

Daneel's eco-missiology, for instance, views eco-justice as an act of healing for both humanity and the earth. This understanding reflects the Fall in Genesis 3, when human sin affected the land. For this reason, African healing rituals usually carry ecological overtones. Daneel stressed this healing motif by linking earth healing to human well-being through the ministry of prophets and spirit mediums during tree-planting ceremonies.¹⁰¹ In defining deforestation as wounding the earth and tree planting as healing the earth, Daneel creatively developed a multi-faith eco-missiology that linked human health to environmental well-being.

Ancestors play a key role in healing rituals. In *God's Family, God's Earth*, I argue that the ancestor cult is synonymous with the cult of "Earth since it seeks to uphold ecological balance of the ecosphere."¹⁰² While AIC leaders often overlook the role of ancestors in their theologies, Daneel incorporated the reverence for elders/ancestors in tree planting ceremonies. Since the relationship between ancestors and elders is complex, the role of Jesus as an ancestor appealed to both Christians and traditionalists. He writes, "Christ as the fulfillment of all ancestorhood,

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⁹⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 114.

⁹⁸ Magesa, however, observes that this situation is likely to change due to the exposure to theological education to which future leadership is exposed. *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 170. For example, Daneel spent many years providing theological education to AICs leaders in Zimbabwe.

⁹⁹ Egbulem, "Mission and Inculturation in Africa," 687.

¹⁰⁰ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 137.

¹⁰¹ M. L. Daneel, "Healing the Earth: Traditional and Christian Initiatives in Southern Africa" (Part II), *Journal for the Study of Religion* 6, no. 2 (1993), 3–28.

¹⁰² Kapya J, Kaoma, *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu* (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere. Series, 2013), 53.

as the true *muridzi wenyika*, guardian of the land, the ‘Ancestor’ of all the universe, commissioned and empowered by the Godhead to introduce new life to all creation”¹⁰³

In addition, the ethic of replenishing the earth is Daneel’s gift to African and global Christianity. Despite historical challenges of colonialism, landlessness, and forced migrations, he advocated for responsible ecological resilience and consideration for future generations. By involving primary school children in tree-planting activities, for example, Daneel inculcated intergenerational ethics of environmental responsibilities and actions. Despite the emphasis placed on children as blessings from ancestors, Daneel addressed the impact of population growth on deforestation, advocating for education, access to birth control, and legislation aimed at mitigating environmental destruction: “My suggestions have all been based on the argument that the rate of environmental destruction far exceeds the current prospect of controlled population growth and that education, birth control and related factors should be augmented by legislation if the tide is to be reversed in time.”¹⁰⁴

Daneel addressed these hot issues because of his attentive listening to African communities. Shaped by their cyclical view of time and communal land practices, Daneel’s narrative-oriented theology prioritized addressing immediate human needs without compromising the future. Through trust-building initiatives like tree planting, Daneel practiced a mission of presence that fostered community relationships and earth care.

One of the most important values that Daneel possessed is *ubuntu*—the ethical belief that we exist together in the bundle of life. His relationships with AIC leaders, prophets, and traditional authorities not only demonstrate his commitment to interfaith dialogue but also reflect his authentic humanity. His acceptance into the sacred shrine of the Mwari cult speaks to this value. He recounted to me his acceptance into Matonjeni—to hear the voice of Mwari at the Matopo Hills.¹⁰⁵

I had to wait and wait and wait. I was about to give up. But one day, the eagle that had finished capturing the chicken in Matonjeni was flying around. “You see that Chapungu” the High Priest said, “it has finished our birds.” I took my gun and aimed at it. I then shot at it, and it came down—and dropped where the High Priest was seated. That changed everything—I became *mafuranhunzi Gumbo*—shooter of flies. Above all, it was taken as a sign from Mwari—I was able to enter the shrine and listen to Mwari.

The eagle incident at Matonjeni signified divine approval of Daneel’s presence at the shrine, suggesting the sacramental nature of creation in African spirituality, in which creation serves as a conduit for divine interactions and visibilities.

Daneel’s Ecological Insights

In my countless discussions with Professor Daneel, here are some ecological insights he left me to ponder:

Importance of Myths in Eco-missiology

¹⁰³ Marthinus L. Daneel, “Christian Mission and Earth Care: An African Case Study.” In Kapya J. Kaoma, ed. *Creation Care in Christian Mission* 29, 15–30, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers 2016), 27.

¹⁰⁴ Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, V2., 306.

¹⁰⁵ M. L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

According to John Archer, myths function “collectively” in people’s memories and are often political. Archer writes, “[myths] have much to do with establishing the role and place of the citizen in society, and even organizing the ways citizens conduct daily life. In this sense, the crucial role of myth is often to sustain the relationship between the citizen, the broader culture, and social and political institutions.”¹⁰⁶

Although Archer is writing about the myth of the housing market in America, shared myths are critical to social mobilization. The Chimurenga (the liberation war) has traumatic overtones, yet Daneel reframed this myth in his prognostic presentation of deforestation. He presented efforts to address deforestation as another Chimurenga—motivating people to feel like they were part of the mythical and historical Chimurenga to liberate their land. Since the groups shared common myths and beliefs about creation—seeing creation as divinely infused—his motivational alignment of earthkeeping through the myth of Chimurenga avoided the often complex theories associated with academic approaches to earth care. Instead, his eco-missiology was grounded in the lived religion of ordinary people, stressing sacred myths (in the Bible and Zimbabwean culture) connected to the land.

Rethinking African Liberation Theology

African liberation theology has traditionally focused on church activities, often sidelining the role of Christianity in daily life. Unlike South African black theology, which has played a pivotal role in liberation struggles, African theology’s influence on post-independence Africa has been limited. However, Daneel demonstrated that African liberation theology can be appropriated to address the ongoing environmental crises.

As inhabitants of the earth, we all have a shared responsibility to care for creation. Christian mission, known as “*missio Creatoris*,” should be comprehensive, encompassing the liberation of the whole creation. The cries of the poor, and the cry of the earth, are interconnected. As Pope Francis rightly noted, a true ecological approach must embrace an eco-social perspective; to “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”¹⁰⁷ Eco-missiology should reform anthropocentric theologies, liturgies, and theories if it is to confront the ongoing ecological crisis. We all have a collective duty to protect creation. We are active agents of eco-social justice and participants in God’s liberating love.

Intercultural Eco-missiology

If Christianity is a global religion, eco-missiology should be cross-cultural too. Daneel employed African ideas to create practical ethical practices for earth care. Christian earth care should be adapted to local contexts, considering local traditions and past events. Our God is the God of history; in Africa, ecological issues related to YHWH must be viewed through African historical lenses, while also taking historical injustices into account.

Eco-missiology must be both intercultural and inclusive. This need is especially evident in Africa, where traditional beliefs play a significant role in shaping views on environmental responsibilities and action. Daneel’s research is an example. Western and African philosophies once integrated can create practical earth care ethics that align with diverse cultural backgrounds.

¹⁰⁶John Archer, “The Resilience of Myth: The Politics of the American Dream,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 25, no. 2 (2014): 7–21, 8.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24347714>.

¹⁰⁷Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’*, Par. 49.

Stephen A. Jurovics writes, “Our latitude with respect to the treatment of the natural world requires us to see each member (human, fish, animal, tree, mustard seed) as created by God and see each constraint relevant to our faith as a cord that potentially connects us personally to the divine and to the part of creation affected by the constraint.”¹⁰⁸

Inculturation as Ecological Responsibility

The concept of inculturation has been used to Africanize Christian liturgy. We should not, however, ignore that Christian worship involves addressing ecological problems. Jurovics writes that the Bible “teaches that the land belongs to God and that its use must be commensurate with the holiness of its owner.”¹⁰⁹

Daneel empowered rural Africans to attach holiness to the trees and all creatures. As active participants in the mission of the Creator, their actions qualified as applied African liberation theology. The growing ecological crisis should inform how we do mission and theology, inviting us to witness to God’s love for all creation. In this shared mission, there are no winners or losers; we are in this together.

Engagement with the World for Eco-praxis

Christian mission must engage with the world in a way that recognizes the cosmic nature of the Creator’s mission. The value of creation lies in worshipping the Creator, with its instrumental value to humanity being secondary. Wright cautions against solely viewing the earth in terms of its usefulness to us. The earth’s value, he forcefully argues, is in bringing glory to God.”¹¹⁰ Put differently, eco-missiology must promote and uphold the earth’s intrinsic value, acknowledging creation as an active participant in glorifying God. A paradigm shift is needed if nature is to fulfill this role in God’s mission. We must accept that, when it comes to the earth, we are mere servants of the Creator.

Spirituality in Planting and Harvest

In traditional African culture, planting and harvesting are spiritual practices that connect individuals to their environment. Christian mission should promote ecological rituals, as they are essential for life. Daneel’s tree planting ritual aligned with African cosmic spirituality that led to an interfaith and ecumenical movement of tree planting. The Church should incorporate planting rituals as a way of participating in God’s creation of new life on earth.

Interfaith and Ecumenical Eco-missiology

Daneel’s eco-missiology embraced cooperation among faiths, promoting respectful coexistence rather than conversion. It combined traditional beliefs about nature and the environment with Christian teachings on healing the earth. In caring for the earth, unity of purpose overrides religious differences. This unity is evident in joint efforts for earth care by religious leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as well

¹⁰⁸ Stephen A., Jurovics, and J. Matthew Sleeth. *Hospitable Planet: Faith, Action, and Climate Change* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2016), 72.

¹⁰⁹ Jurovics, *Hospitable Planet*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Wright, *Mission of God*, 399.

as organizations like the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Movement. Christian advocacy for earth care can potentially promote positive interfaith dialogue and strengthen Christian unity.

A Luta Continua

Daneel's unfinished research was on the efforts of Mbuya Juliana, a traditional woman medium in Zimbabwe who is re-creating new traditional sacred groves. Daneel viewed the destruction of sacred groves (*murambatemwa*) as mindless assaults on gods and ancestors. "I felt deep hurt and growing anger as I observed the slow destruction of the green mountain fortress," which he argues is "the epitome of human hubris in the face of the ultimate forces of life."¹¹¹ Other scholars have recognized the importance of sacred groves for community-based conservation in Africa.¹¹² It is vital to note that African traditions are essential alongside scientific approaches to combat deforestation and the ecological crisis at large. The recreation of African sacred groves is another indication of the enduring influence of African religion in contemporary Africa. African governments and scholars should include these sacred groves in conservation efforts instead of disregarding them.

Conclusion

Daneel's eco-missiology focused on the idea that the earth is God's mission field, where Christian mission takes place. He believed that every space is sacred ground, belonging to God. Accordingly, there is no place where we are not on God's property.¹¹³ Christ is the one who liberates, redeems, heals, and protects the entire created order, as stated in Colossians 1:20. Therefore, Christ is considered the supreme ancestor, the ultimate healer, and the guardian of the land.

While colonialism blamed Africans for soil erosion and deforestation, Daneel criticized the landlessness caused by colonialism and its negative effects on both the land and the poor. Nonetheless, he stressed the importance of earthkeeping, regardless of poverty or historical burdens. In Zimbabwe, this involved planting trees and accepting human responsibility for deforestation.

Daneel argued for a sincere and introspective approach to African spirituality and Christian mission, rejecting an anthropocentric interpretation of both African theology and the Bible. As a rebel, he believed that radical paradigms are necessary for earth care, demanding a departure from established traditional missiological approaches. Collaboration with all community cultures, including former rivals, is crucial in addressing environmental challenges.

Many scholars have used Daneel's ideas without always giving him credit, possibly due to his background as a white scholar conducting field research among Africans. Nonetheless, his deep knowledge of African theological and missiological themes sets him apart.

Daneel envisioned the African Earthkeepers' Union, drawing on grassroots communities in rural and urban areas. While this Union never materialized, the current ecological crisis in Africa calls for a renewed focus on this idea. A new movement dedicated to environmental conservation is needed, one that incorporates eco-missiology and mission work. Embracing local

¹¹¹ Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*, 9.

¹¹² Michael J., Sheridan, and Celia Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics & Social Change* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008).

¹¹³ Wright, *Mission of God*, 403.

religio-cultural contexts and fostering a love for nature are essential for addressing biophobia and promoting earth care.

Wright is correct—earth care “is a prophetic opportunity for the church.”¹¹⁴ Pointing to the Hebrew Prophets and Jesus, Wright argues that prophets addressed the contemporary issues of their time, making them unpopular due to their scorching relevance. In short, they were rebels—and so was Daneel to African and global Christianity.

Farewell Son of the Soil,
Farewell Muchakata,
Among the great African ancestors,
African trees will always sing,
Our protector in silence lies,
Awaiting Bishop Moses to arise,
To dance to the drums of Matonjeni
When Mwari speaks from the rocks
A fight for the trees
Is our fight for life!

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¹¹⁴ Wright, *Mission of God*, 417

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Remembering Inus Daneel

By William (Bill) Gregory¹¹⁵

I met Inus Daneel in 1998 when I took his class on African Traditional Religion at Boston University. I had just spent two years living in West Africa and was trying to make sense of the significance of that experience for my own future. We quickly connected over our love of Africa and by the time I finished my second class with him on African Christianity we had forged a close bond, fortified by his wonderfully hospitable presence and by long talks in his office in the African Studies Center.

In class and out, I came to see him as more than a professor seeking to help us students understand and grow professionally. He made himself available as a companion and guide through the landscapes of the spirit we walked, ever ready to help us meet the different challenges we faced in life.

I thought for a time I too might become an Africa scholar and even spent ten days in Masvingo exploring some research possibilities with him. But I eventually sensed my path lay in a different direction. Yet he remained a good friend and mentor after that and always an inspiration for the depth of his Christian witness, for his adventurous, observant, and joyful spirit, and for his lifelong closeness to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, including at great personal sacrifice during the civil war there in the 1970s.

I treasured meals with him in the BU student union and was honored by his presence at important moments during my remaining graduate school years in Boston—at my doctoral exams during which he argued for my passing with distinction, after my dissertation defense when he offered a congratulatory toast before family and friends, and in sending me significant and unanticipated counsel after my wife Susanna and I decided to marry.

Somewhere along the way I realized that he had become a father figure to me—that he fit that role in my life—and when I last saw him in 2023 he said something close to that, saying that he thought of me as a younger brother. However best to describe the connection, after twenty-five years it was something we both recognized, though with him as the elder I know I am far more indebted.

Amid the different encounters we had over the years, he taught me some very important things: courage in time of trial, fighting for a worthy cause, standing on principle, humility before the divine mystery, attentiveness to the Spirit's presence, and perhaps most of all, trust in God's providence. Life to him, I know, was a sacred sojourn, miraculous and intensely interesting. It is obviously marred by terrible tragedy and evil, but because it is ultimately supported by God's love and goodness, we can have faith in creation and in each other, walk across walls and barricades, and look out for the new things that God is doing this day.

Since Inus passed, I have been remembering many of the stories he told me—of growing up at Morgenster Mission, of his theological training in South Africa and in the Netherlands, of living among the Shona and enduring the war, and of promoting ecumenism, theological education, and earthcare. These stories were always captivating, yet they were also sometimes sad because he endured some difficult years and often lived close to those with heavy burdens to bear.

I have also been remembering other scenes—of praying with him before meals, watching

¹¹⁵ Dr. William (Bill) Gregory is associate professor of Religious Studies at Clark University.

him befriend Shona strangers by comparing ancestral lineages, him writing out for me an English translation of a Dutch Reform Church service in Afrikaans, hearing him address a village congregation on reconciliation within a ring of stones under a tree, and most recently, marathon talks with him at his and Dana's home in Somerville.

Reflecting on all this, I cannot measure the gift of having walked these paths with him since that first class day in 1998 or of having witnessed the testament to God's love, abundant creativity, and surpassing faithfulness that was his life. Farewell, Inus! May the Lord meet you on your way and bring you home!

In Honor of Inus Daneel

By J. N. J. (Klippias) Kritzinger¹¹⁶

Marthinus Daneel, known among his friends and colleagues as Inus, lived a long and impactful life in Zimbabwe, South Africa and, eventually, Boston Massachusetts. This tribute flows from my experience of working with Inus in the Department of Missiology, as it existed in the 1980s and 1990s at the University of South Africa (Unisa). I treasure the memory of Inus as friend, scholar, organiser, and fellow pilgrim.

As a friend, Inus was generous and welcoming. When hosting Unisa colleagues on fishing trips in Zimbabwe, he magnanimously shared his boat and fishing equipment as well as his time and expertise to introduce us to the art of tiger fishing, even when we did not always show proper respect for the expensive equipment. Inus loved conversation and carried a large bag of jokes wherever he went. He was an accomplished storyteller who could entertain and intrigue for hours, recounting his experiences of research, theological education, and “earthkeeping” activism in Zimbabwe. His tallest tales, however, were reserved for hunting. He was affectionately known in Shona as *Mafuranhunzi* (“The one who can shoot a fly”) for his hunting prowess and he used that name as *nom de plume* for his work of fiction, *Guerilla Snuff*, in 1995. His legendary shooting skill surprisingly allowed him access to the oracular cave of Mwari in the Matopo Hills and he never tired of telling that story. The tales of successes and escapes on hunting trips with Nico Smith and Willem Saayman, his Unisa colleagues and friends, were legendary and they (predictably) became taller and more dramatic through constant retelling. Both Nico and Willem preceded him in “the final departure to the Beyond,” as Inus once formulated it. And now he has joined them.

As a missiological researcher, Inus represented a rare combination of observer, interpreter and activist. His competence in Shona, which he acquired as a “missionary kid” growing up on the Morgenster Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church near Masvingo, opened unique research opportunities as a unique insider-outsider researcher of African religion and African-initiated churches. His postgraduate formation in Amsterdam at the feet of his three Reformed role models – Hendrik Kraemer, Johan H. Bavinck, and Gerrit Berkouwer – instilled in him a lifelong striving for academic excellence and accurate observation but also a mystical sense of wonder. Inus was a prolific author, not only because he produced numerous publications but also because of the way he wrote. He was not given to terse and summarising writing. He had too much respect for the people about whom he was writing and the complexities of their context, particularly for the role that religion played in shaping their lives. For that reason he gave lengthy, “thick” descriptions of the fascinating encounters taking place in (mainly rural) communities as African believers remixed and improvised their cultures and Christianity.

The “missionary” impetus in his life did not allow Inus to be a mere observer and interpreter of African religious movements. It led him to initiate an ecumenical theological education programme (*Fambidzano*) for African-initiated churches as well as tree-planting and other earth-keeping organisations (ZIRRCO, AZTREC, AAEC), to mobilise both AIC leaders and spirit mediums for ecological activism. His creative liturgical proposal for a tree-planting Eucharist deserves special mention. In the tree-planting context he earned another Shona nickname, *Muchakata*, (“the tree that may not be felled”), which refers to the cork-tree that is sacred to the ancestors and may therefore not be chopped down. His two Shona nicknames reveal

¹¹⁶ Dr. J. N. J. (Klippias) Kritzinger is Professor emeritus of the University of South Africa (Unisa).

the high regard in which he was held by his collaborators.

When I wrote a chapter for a *Festschrift* dedicated to Inus in 2003, I called it “*Pamberi!* Towards a pilgrim theology”. I did that to honour Inus’s activism, since *Pamberi* (“Forward!”) was a rallying cry that he and others used to mobilise communities for “The war of the trees,” a new liberation struggle. I did that also to express my resonance with his journey as a Eucharist-shaped pilgrim to (and in) the margins, moving into the light of the dawning Day of God.

How did Inus integrate all these dimensions of his life? He was a liminal, hybrid figure who managed to hold together a (non-doctrinaire) Reformed theology with an African worldview and a commitment to grass-roots transformation. He was a pilgrim activist, imbued with a grace-filled spirituality that enabled him to avoid the hubris of a “we can change the world” activism and to respect the unique initiatives of AIC leaders and spirit mediums. This enabled him to work *with* rural peasant communities for the liberation of the earth from deforestation *and* to write academic publications *about* that work. He was able to move across boundaries and to be at home in different worlds, embodying an intercultural and interreligious transformation praxis. He had deep roots and solid wings: He was an African in heart and mind, who was also at home in the USA due to his commitment to the love of his life, Dana Robert – his soulmate, intellectual partner, and unwavering support until the end. He was a Reformed Afrikaner in heart and mind, who was also at home among Zimbabwean AICs due to his commitment to Shona communities and to gospel-based rural transformation in their midst. He was an African Christian in heart and mind, firmly connected and deeply loyal to the triune God and to the Gumbo clan that had adopted him – and also at home among the spirit mediums who shared his passion for “clothing the land.”

A majestic *Muchakata* tree, with wide-reaching branches and casting a long shadow, has fallen.

African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation¹¹⁷

By M. L. Daneel

Ever since the beginning of this century African Independent Churches have taken root, proliferated and shown phenomenal growth throughout our continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹⁸ Because many of these churches originated through a variety of schismatic processes within western oriented mission churches (either large scale schisms or individual defections), they were often characterized negatively as “separatist,” “parasitic,” “nativistic” or “sectarian” movements.¹¹⁹ In Christian terms they were considered either non-Christian movements whose members should be approached as objects of mission or evangelism to be baptized or rebaptized into mission church folds, or marginally Christian because of their alleged syncretism and therefore not properly belonging to the mainstream of Christianity—the so-called “mainline churches.”

In contrast to these one-sidedly condemnatory views I wish to point out at the outset that despite obvious limitations (notably the lack of a written theology) and with the exception of those movements that deliberately move away from a Christian position,¹²⁰ I consider the AICs on the whole to be *integral to the mainstream of Christianity*. Most of them accept and apply scripture as literally and fundamentally normative. Belief in a triune God, the reign and closeness of a creator father, the saviourhood and mediation of Christ and the pervasive presence of an indwelling Holy Spirit, together with the regular or intermittent practice of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, are common and key features of these churches.¹²¹ Their enacted theology, moreover, represents a sensitive and innovative response to Africa’s existential needs and must be seen as a central—if not the most important and authentic part—of African theology. Consistent with this view is the assertion that the AICs constitute an integral and legitimate part of the universal church and that their response to the gospel, their belief systems and missionary strategy are well worth considering in a context such as this conference where the world-wide evangelistic outreach of Christ’s church is focal.

One need only consider the current growth and size of some of the AICs to realize their challenging significance. In South Africa alone an estimated 5,000 AICs represent between 30 and 40 percent of the total black population. The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Bishop Lekhanyane, with its millions of adherents all over South Africa, probably is growing faster than

¹¹⁷ This article was originally published in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXII, No. 326 (April 1993). The author’s original bio read: M. L. Daneel is founder and former director of Fambidzano, ecumenical movement of African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe; founder and current director of ZIRRCO (Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) in Zimbabwe; and senior professor in Missiology at the University of South Africa, Pretoria.

¹¹⁸ D.B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968; M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987; N.I. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the African Independent Churches and in Biblical Tradition*. London: SPCK, 1985.

¹¹⁹ H.W. Turner, “A Typology of African Religious Movements,” in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, passim; Daneel *ibid.*, p. 28f.

¹²⁰ Turner, *op. cit.*, Daneel, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

¹²¹ Daneel, *ibid.*, pp. 223f, 250f.

any other church in the country, the established western-oriented churches included. Among the Northern Sotho-speaking people, for instance, where the ZCC has its headquarters, the growth rates of the various churches in the period 1970-1980 were as follows: Independent Churches 173.8 percent; Roman Catholic Church 83 percent; and Dutch Reformed Church 59.9 percent. Most other churches grew at a rate below the 43.7 percent of the Northern Sotho population growth rate.¹²² Among the three groups of churches showing any significant growth, the Independent Churches far outstripped the others.

In Zimbabwe, the Independents in many of the rural areas represent 50 percent or more of the Christian population (see for example the statistical analysis of church growth in the Chingombe chiefdom, Gutu district, in Daneel.)¹²³ The larger Spirit-type churches, such as the African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke, the Zion Christian Church of Bishop Mutendi and the Ndaza (holy cord) Zionist movement, together have several million adherents. The Kimbanguist Church in Zaire, with its more than eight million members, is the largest Independent Church of the continent. In West Africa the Aladura churches, too, represent a vast and still growing movement.¹²⁴

For classification purposes a distinction can be made between the Pentecostally-oriented, Spirit-type prophetic churches and the so-called "Ethiopian" or non-prophetic groups.¹²⁵ Some observers also distinguish a third messianic category, where a prophetic leader usurps the position of Christ and poses as a black messiah.¹²⁶ This, however, can be a highly misleading classification. Despite some messianic trends it rarely happens that prominent prophetic leaders deliberately attempt to supersede the mediatorship of Christ by posing as Christ figures.¹²⁷ It is more appropriate to speak of iconic leadership¹²⁸ in those cases where prophets closely identify with the Christ figure in an attempt to illuminate dramatically and contextually the salvific gospel message.

Significantly, the vast majority of AICs in southern Africa at least, are of the prophetic type. They reveal definite Pentecostal traits, in that the Holy Spirit features prominently in their worship and daily activities. "Jordan" or adult baptism is directly related to the conversion experience. Spirit-induced faith healing and exorcism become focal in Christian living. The Spirit, moreover, is believed to manifest itself through the visions, dreams, prophecies and/or glossolalia of the believers. It follows that numerical growth, geographical expansion and the development of church headquarters at the holy cities—the "Zions," "Moriahs" or "Jeruselems" of Africa - are attributed directly to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Although in many respects this characterization is equally applicable to western pentecostalism, there are essential differences. These should become apparent in my discussion of a few important pneumatological tenets underlying the above-mentioned practices of the Spirit-type AICs. But this is not in the first place a comparative study of western and African pentecostalism. On the contrary, I shall merely sketch briefly the AIC experience of the working

¹²² J. J. Kritzing, *Die onvoltooide sendingtaak in Lebowa*. Pretoria: Iswen, Univ. of Pretoria, 1982.

¹²³ M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. II: Ghurch Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment techniques. The Hague: Mouton, 1974, ch. 1.

¹²⁴ H.W. Turner, *African Independent Churches*, Vol. I: The Church of the Lord (Aladura). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967; Vol. II: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

¹²⁵ Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I: Background and Rise of the Major Movements, chs. 4 and 5; Daneel, *Quest*, p. 38f.

¹²⁶ B.G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 323.

¹²⁷ Daneel, *Quest*, p. 189f.

¹²⁸ B.G.M. Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 309.

of the Holy Spirit. The admittedly limited pneumatological profile which emerges, both in its historical contextuality and in its relevance for an interpretation of salvation, may present a challenge and/or inspiration for the ongoing missionary task of the universal church.

In probing for the essentials of AIC pneumatology I am engaged as a fellow Independent coming from a Protestant (Dutch Reformed) background. In the course of many years of identification with and participation in the life of the Shona Independent Churches in Zimbabwe I have become part of that movement. Consequently my observations and insights are based mainly on the AICs of Zimbabwe. Special attention will be given to the two largest Spirit-type churches in that part of the world: Bishop Samuel Mutendi's ZCC and Apostle Johane Maranke's vaPostori. As both these founder leaders have already passed away and have been succeeded by their sons, I wish to present this paper in truly African fashion, that is in commemoration of two of the outstanding missionary spirits of our continent. By now they belong to the Christian cloud of witnesses, so their message to the world church is essentially the one they proclaimed so fervently to their followers: salvation in Christ and renewal through the Holy Spirit to the four comers of the earth!

The Holy Spirit as Saviour of humankind

Before they founded their own churches, Bishop Mutendi and Apostle Maranke were members of the Dutch Reformed and Methodist Churches respectively. Both of them were attracted by the Pentecostal features of the Independent Churches they came across,¹²⁹ both in South Africa (Mutendi) and Zimbabwe (Maranke). As a result, the work of the Holy Spirit featured prominently in their campaigning activities right from the start. Their ministries were preceded by call-dreams, visions and spells of Spirit-possessed speaking in tongues, which both of them considered to be the visible manifestations of a missionary mandate received directly from God.

In the ZCC *Rungano* (the handbook of Mutendi's church) the leader's first important sermon in 1923 in the Bikita district is described as follows:

He stood up and preached with great power from Luke 3, as he was told to do by the prophets... Many believers were possessed by the Holy Spirit. The people present got frightened and some of them ran away, saying: "That man arouses *zvitebwe* [vengeful spirits which destroy cattle]...Some people laughed when they saw the others getting possessed by the Spirit....From that day Mutendi never stopped preaching the Word of God, and he was greatly strengthened by that same Spirit."¹³⁰

Johane Maranke's visionary spells are recorded in his *Umboo utsva hwavaPostori* (New Revelation of the Apostles). He is said to have received directly from God two books, which he could only understand through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and not through the education he had received at the European mission station. The contents of these books held the message of eternal life (*sadza risingaperi*: lit. porridge, i.e., food, of eternal life), and it is this message of salvation for human beings that became focal in Johane's sermons. In his visions Johane saw himself as a Moses figure, leading his followers from many countries through hostile terrain and fires to a safe, heavenly destination. The host of followers was likened to the sand on the shores of Lake Nyasa in Malawi.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I, pp. 287f, 315f.

¹³⁰ Zion Christian Church History, *Rungano*, p. 19; Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I, p. 294.

¹³¹ AIC Literature, *New Revelation of the Apostles (Umboo utsva hwavaPostori)*.

The ministries of both these prophetic leaders were characterized by awareness of the lostness and sinfulness of humanity and the urgent need for conversion and baptism as a means of avoiding God's judgement through entry into his kingdom. God himself was the one responsible for drawing people into his kingdom (John 6:44). The Holy Spirit was the main agent directing the judgement prophecies against sinners and unaware ministers in mission churches, the healing miracles in and around baptismal pools or rivers, and the building of new communities of the kingdom. The prominence of and dependence on the Spirit are clearly portrayed in the song that the vaPostori of Johane have sung ever since the inception of their church near Mutare in eastern Zimbabwe in 1932:

Everywhere we see people who do not know Christ,
They are lost, that is why they sin,
Our mighty God send the Holy Spirit to those who do not have it.
God bless Africa and hear our prayers; God bless it!
Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit!
Bless us your servants.

In both movements the Holy Spirit provides the full charter for the new church. All the laws and customs of the church, the innovations and deviations from western Christianity, are justified by attributing them directly to the inspiration and command of the Holy Spirit. In a sense therefore the Spirit legitimates the exodus from the religious house of slavery, the reign of the white mission churches. Salvation takes the form of black liberation from foreign institutions where the full benefit of the gifts of the Spirit was allegedly withheld from black converts. The reaction to missions during this first phase of new AIC formation finds its most poignant expression in the allegation that white Christianity dropped the banner of the Holy Spirit and that this banner has now been picked up by Africans, the black, rejected (by whites) house of Ham. Consequently the black race of Africa—the neglected, the poor and the oppressed—are now the exalted and the elect, called by the Holy Spirit to spread the true message of salvation throughout the continent.

How was this to be achieved? Both leaders responded to the challenge by designing their churches as missionary institutions in which the sacrament of holy communion was to become the launching pad from which wave upon wave of Zionist and Apostolic missionaries was sent forth to preach the good news of salvation to their fellow Africans.

Bishop Mutendi developed his church headquarters as a “holy city” where he conducted at least three Paschal celebrations annually, each culminating in holy communion. In preparation for the sacrament Mutendi used to preach about the great commission (Matt. 28:19), encouraging his followers to prepare themselves, like Christ's disciples, to “go forth and make disciples of all the nations.” In his treatment of Matthew 28:19, Mutendi seldom dwelt on the actual meaning of the words, “all the nations,” and he rarely defined the actual object of missionary endeavour. Instead he gave the text a specific Zionist connotation by relating it to such texts as Isaiah 62:1: “For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest.” In addition he would protest against the half-hearted response of some of his followers to the church's mission by citing Romans 11:25, which deals with the hardening of the Israelites' hearts.¹³²

Following the climactic celebration of holy communion, the ZCC teams of missionaries would set out on properly planned two to three-week campaigns all over Zimbabwe and sometimes beyond its borders. Meanwhile, the congregation at Zion City engaged in daily

¹³² M. L. Daneel, “The Missionary Outreach of African Independent Churches,” in *Missionalia*, Vol. 8, 3, 1980, p. 107.

intercession for the campaign. Upon the return of the emissaries their reports on conversions, healings, establishment of new congregations, church growth, etc., were preached to the people at Zion City. Thus the entire church participated actively in a variety of ways in fulfilling its missionary mandate.

Johane Maranke, again, interpreted his calling as an apostle not in terms of building a holy city, but in setting a personal example—together with a band of fellow apostles—as an itinerant missionary. For just over thirty years, from the founding of his church in 1932 until his death in 1963, he travelled—on foot, by ox cart, then by bicycle, and ultimately in a Landrover—preaching the gospel, converting people and establishing new congregations. In his church the annual “Pentecost” ceremony - in commemoration of the Holy Spirit’s institution of the movement - became the pivot of spiritual renewal and missionary outreach. Here, too, the ritual of holy communion was the overriding statement on Christ’s Saviourhood, triggering waves of Apostolic evangelizing activity. Apart from campaigns throughout Zimbabwe, Johane regularly travelled south as far as the Transvaal, westward to Botswana, east to Mozambique, and north to Zambia, Malawi and way up into Zaire; overall he and his fellow preachers converted and baptized hundreds of thousands of people.¹³³

One of the remarkable features of Johane’s ministry as a travelling missionary was that it was undertaken on the basis of an agrarian subsistence economy. Budding Apostolic congregations all over Zimbabwe and in the surrounding countries, consisting mainly of relatively poor peasant families in rural areas, supported - both economically and spiritually - what they considered to be the salvific movement of God’s Spirit in their midst.

In both Mutendi’s *ZCC History* and Johane’s *New Revelation* salvation, conversion and baptism into the kingdom in preparation for eternal life (in the sense of the Holy Spirit drawing individual people to repentance), are set against a background of God’s imminent judgement. This remains focal in both Zionist and Apostolic evangelistic outreach up to this day. During the 1960s I accompanied some of the ZCC missionaries on their campaigns. Their appeal for individual conversion was direct and blunt. “To those who do not believe God’s word,” the Rev. Ezekiah proclaimed, “there will be gnashing of teeth on the day of judgement.... My friends, we have not come to put up a show or to show you how to dance, but to warn you of the coming danger... Even love between people on this earth comes to an end. My friends, let us believe what the Bible says in order to be saved ... *Pindukai! Pindukai! Pindukai!* [be converted].”

In Ezekiah’s sermons the destructive power of God’s judgement was always expressed in terms of the biblical deluge, the destroying sword of Ezekiel 33 or the pit of fire (*gomba romwoto*). Such destruction could only be avoided by seeking shelter in God’s kingdom, symbolized in this existence by the Zionist Church and, in the African context, likened to a maize granary (*dura*). The real purpose of ZCC evangelization, then, is to gather people into the *dura raMwari* (the granary of God), where they would be safe from eternal damnation. It is to this end that the missionary activities of Mutendi, the “man of God,” and the mighty stir of the Holy Spirit is directed.

Ezekiah’s elucidation of the granary concept highlighted the eschatological tension between the partly realized kingdom and the one yet to come. On the one hand there were the this-worldly benefits of church affiliation, and of Zion City as a shelter against racial discrimination, illness, witchcraft, etcetera. On the other hand suffering (for example, the persecution of Zionists) remains, “for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come” (Heb 13:14). Ezekiah’s frequent use of this latter text to emphasize the apocalyptic, futuristic character of God’s kingdom meant that his campaigning sermons—like

¹³³ Daneel, *Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol. I, pp. 327-331.

those of his fellow missionaries—centred more on the eschatological “not yet” than on the “already” of God’s kingdom.¹³⁴

Here we have a significant indicator that AIC pneumatology, as perceived in the prophetic churches, is not confined to this-worldly salvation, despite strong trends in this direction (see below). Ever since the inception of the two churches under discussion, the good news of their missionary proclamation implicitly upheld the eschatological tension between an incarnate Christ present in the prophetic leader and the work of the Holy Spirit here and now, and the yet to be fulfilled eternal salvation of human beings.

The Spirit as healer and protector

Although the healing ministry of Christ featured strongly in the proclamation and practice of both Zionist and Apostolic churches from the outset, it was only in the 1940s and 1950s that there was a shift of the pneumatological focus. During this period faith-healing colonies were established at Mutendi’s Zion City in Bikita and at the homesteads of several Apostolic healers in the vicinity of Johane’s headquarters in the Maranke chiefdom. In both instances, the dwindling of mission church influence, the powerful drive towards genuine contextualization of church practice and the amplification and diversification of the main leader’s prophetic task through the activities of a host of subordinate prophetic healers operating daily in the healing colonies, contributed to change. Church life started revolving to a large extent around faith healing. Healing interpreted in its widest sense (i.e., not only of physical maladies, but also of the “illness” of oppression, racial discrimination, lack of job opportunities, conflicts between spouses, family members, factions, etc.) became the most potent recruitment instrument in these churches.

Healing and protection against evil forces now manifested more than anything else the pervasive presence of the powerful Spirit of God. Speaking in tongues became the prelude to all prophetic diagnostic sessions, during which the Holy Spirit would reveal to the prophet the cause of the patient’s illness. All symbols used during healing rituals—such as holy water, paper, staffs and holy cords—symbolized the power of the Holy Spirit over all destructive forces. “Jordan” baptisms increasingly became purificatory, healing and exorcist sessions, during which the power of the Spirit to expel all evil, was persuasively evident. Witness preaching about successful healing became focal, and in Mutendi’s case Zion City started to represent an African Jerusalem in which the triumphal reign of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, permeated every activity. In a sense the Holy Spirit had turned the Black Zion of Africa into a haven for the afflicted, the lost, the poor, the widows, orphans and social misfits.

Increasingly the liturgy of these prophetic churches reflected their preoccupation with healing. The very songs sung during daily prayer, Bible reading and healing sessions challenged all comers to consider God’s act of transforming human brokenness into wholeness. At Zion City one frequently hears the following words, sung jubilantly:

Come and see what Jesus does,
Come and see what Moyo [Mutendi] here performs.
Come from the East and look
You from the West, come and observe what Zion does.
You who are sick, to Zion for treatment come!
Come and see!
You epileptics, come and be healed,
Come and see what Jesus does.

¹³⁴ Daneel, *Missionalia*, pp. 112-113.

The other day we were with him
Last night we were in his sight
Last year we were with him
Even today he's with us
Come and see what Zion does!

A close scrutiny of the *diagnosis* and *therapy* of prophetic healers reveals both parallels with and deviations from traditional divination and healing practices. It is at this level, so crucially important to both healer and patient, that there is continual dialogue between contextualized Christian and traditional African world views. *Here an intuitive and unwritten, yet very real African theology takes shape.* Here, too, AIC pneumatology finds its existentially most meaningful expression.

Diagnosis: All prophetic consultations start with prayer and speaking in tongues, to recognize and establish in the mind of the patient(s) the presence of the Holy Spirit as the source of revelation. Yet to the casual observer the prophet's obvious concern - much like that of the *nganga* (traditional doctor) - with the personal causation of illness (be it ancestral spirits, vengeful spirits or witchcraft) appears to be sufficient evidence of a return to the old order and a warning against syncretism. Significantly, however, *the prophet claims an entirely different source for his extra-perception, namely the Holy Spirit of the Bible*, as opposed to the *nganga* who relies on divinatory slabs (*hakata*), ancestral or *shavi* (alien) spirits for divination. This does not mean that all prophetic claims in the name of the Holy Spirit are valid or genuine. But the prophetic insistence on the direct involvement of the Holy Spirit reflects an important departure from traditional divination. For prophetic diagnosis, unlike traditional divination, is not aimed at satisfying the demands of the afflicting spirits. Instead, through revelations inspired by the Christian God, the prophet seeks to take the thought world and experience of the patient seriously and to introduce, at an existentially important level, the healing and salvific power of the Christian God.

A sure sign of the Christian prophet's more critical approach, compared to that of the *nganga*, is his general qualification of the afflicting spirit, once it has been identified in terms of traditional conflict patterns, *as a demon or evil spirit which must be opposed.* This is a far cry from the early observations of Sundkler,¹³⁵ who suggested that in Zulu Zionism in South Africa the inspiring Angel or Spirit visiting the prophet-healer was in reality the ancestral spirit itself; also the statements of Oosthuizen,¹³⁶ who saw prophetic concern with the spirit world as a reversion to ancestor domination at the expense of genuine Christianity. To the Shona Zionist and Apostolic prophet, however, the work of the Holy Spirit excludes any form of ancestor worship or veneration. Compromise solutions are only prescribed in family conflicts when patients are pressurized by non-Christian relatives to produce sacrificial beasts to appease afflicting spirits with legitimate claims in terms of customary law. In such instances the threatening spirit is exorcised by the prophet-healer in the church context, while traditionalist relatives conduct an appeasing ancestral ritual on their own. Thus the liberating power of the Holy Spirit is ritually acknowledged and family conflicts are resolved in order to create the best possible circumstance for successful therapy.

Therapy: After the diagnosis of illness, the similarity between *nganga* and prophetic activity

¹³⁵ Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 250.

¹³⁶ G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*. London: Hurst, 1968, p. 120.

ceases. Both trace the origin of disease to a disturbed society. Both recognize the disruptive effect of evil powers unleashed in interhuman relations. But they ward off these powers differently. *While the nganga seeks a solution that accedes to the conditions of the spirits, prophetic therapy is based on belief in the liberating power of the Christian God, particularly the Holy Spirit, which surpasses all other powers and is consequently capable of offering protection against them.*

In an attempt to restore disrupted social relations the *nganga* advocates ancestor veneration in the case of neglected ancestors, and the expulsion of evil witchcraft or vengeful *ngozi* spirits through magical rites. To the Zionist and Apostolic prophet the ancestral claim to sacrificial veneration is inadmissible on biblical grounds. Once identified (as an ancestral, alien or witchcraft spirit), the afflicting agent is qualified by the healer-prophet as a demon or *mweya yakaipa* (evil spirit). In true Christian tradition the prophet prescribes only one solution: exorcism of the demon in the name of the triune God! This is done by means of whichever one of a variety of dramatic exorcist rituals is applicable. Sometimes the spirit is virtually “drowned” in Jordan water; or it may be tied down with holy cords or chased away by condemnatory curses. All such activity is designed to vividly demonstrate the Holy Spirit’s triumphal power over evil. Even where a compromise solution is found to satisfy non-Christian relatives, the overriding aim of prophetic therapy remains the incorporation of the patient, or preferably the entire family, into the “new community” of Zion or the apostles, which in terms of the healer’s convictions offers the best prospects of physical and spiritual security and well-being.

The extent to which therapeutic treatment of this nature enhances the image of *the church as a healing and more specifically as a protective institution* is clearly reflected in the observation of Elias Bope, a young epileptic who was treated for many years in Mutendi’s Zion City. He said:

My cousin and a vengeful [*ngozi*] spirit are conspiring to cause my downfall. I was carried here in a totally debilitated state. That same day I was baptized as a protection against the *ngozi*. The baptismal water [of “Jordan”] was blessed with prayer beforehand to make it more potent for the *ngozi*’s expulsion. At present I drink the hallowed water regularly and undergo the laying on of hands daily. Sometimes during fits of possession [presumably epileptic seizures] Bishop Mutendi treats me with his holy staff, which contains great power. This power [of the Holy Spirit] is from on high. *Here at Moriah I am protected against the ngozi spirit, and for the time being I remain here, because I am shielded from the destructive attempts of my cousin.*¹³⁷

The question is whether this shift of focus in AIC pneumatology does not lead to a one-sided and limited understanding of salvation. It stands to reason that in the prophetic healing colonies salvation can easily be identified with healing, as it includes the restoration of harmony in interpersonal relations, as well as physical and material well-being, in a society marked by conflict, suffering and deprivation. In theological terms this tendency can be described as an overemphasis on this-worldly progress, on a *realized eschatology*. God’s kingdom must take on concrete form *here and now!* The Spirit saves and uplifts humankind in this existence through his prophets, the totality of whose activities is a sure sign of God’s blessing on his African Zion or apostles.

Several theologians have criticized this trend in the AICs. Mention is often made of a *secularistic* or *materialistic* distortion of eschatology. Oosthuizen,¹³⁸ for example, maintained that in all “nativistic” religious movements (which would include the Shona prophetic churches) the

¹³⁷ M.L. Daneel, “Charismatic Healing in African Independent Churches,” in *Theologia Evangelica*, XVI, 3, 1983.

¹³⁸ Oosthuizen, op. cit., p. 96.

objective is material wellbeing—an Africanized utopia in which Christ plays no role and where the black messiah effects health, fertility, and material progress for his disciples. The profoundly felt need for liberation from physical and social suffering makes the message of a future salvation a stumbling block. Full salvation *must* be available *now*. Consequently, according to Martin,¹³⁹ the prophetic quest is for healing rather than redemption. In this version of salvation the eschatological tension between the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom lapses. Because the future kingdom is in fact to be taken by force—as Martin and Oosthuizen¹⁴⁰ put it, there is a “seizing” and a “snatching” of the future—the prospect of eternal life and the hope of Christ’s second coming is lost.

In my view, however, empirical reality does not warrant such a harsh judgement. The manifestly heavy emphasis on Spirit-inspired realization of God’s kingdom in this existence, in the case of the Shona Zionists and apostles, does not lead to a so-called “snatching of the future.” The shift of pneumatological focus resulting from the Zionist and Apostolic preoccupation with healing and protection is not absolute. One should rather speak of an extended, more comprehensive and holistic interpretation of salvation, which at no point excludes the kind of conversion or missionary proclamation described above. The themes of a futuristic kingdom and ultimate eternal salvation for individual beings keep recurring in the Zionist and Apostolic sermons preached in their holy cities and healing colonies. Pneumatologically, the work of the Holy Spirit comprises both eternal salvation for a redeemed humanity and a concretely experienced wholeness and well-being for those who place themselves in faith under his healing care. Hence the good news of eternal salvation is not superseded but acquires concrete and understandable contours through healing in this troubled and broken existence.

The Spirit of justice and liberation

In the prophetic movements the activity of the Holy Spirit has never been conceived of as restricted to spiritual matters or healing. At an early stage Bishop Mutendi entered the political arena by opposing the colonial administration on educational, land and religious issues, for which he was detained several times. To his followers he became a Spirit-led Moses figure, champion of the oppressed. Like Shembe of the Zulu Nazarites in South Africa, Mutendi drew many chiefs and headmen into his church. Through regular advice to these tribal dignitaries and the appointment of Zionist prophets in their tribal courts, the Zionist bishop managed to secure considerable influence in tribal political affairs. During the 1950s and 1960s, many of the Zionist chiefs openly stated that the power of the Holy Spirit, represented by supportive prophets, enabled them to maintain some form of just rule and balance amid the complex and conflicting demands of white colonial rule and the rising tide of black nationalism. They also considered the role of prophetic court counsellors to be crucial for fair trials both in the administration of customary law and in harmonizing these laws with Christian principles in a changing situation.

As a descendant of the royal Rozvi tribe Mutendi, in the context of his impressive “Zion City,” also appealed to the sentiments of tribal leaders who had not forgotten the past glories of the once powerful Rozvi dynasty. Mutendi represented the supratribal unity that had once been the backbone of a great nation. In addition to Zionist religious connotations, his popular title (“man of God”) had distinct political overtones to many of his followers. Zion City became a safe spiritual anchorage for tribal dignitaries, a place where they could discuss the pressing issues of

¹³⁹ M.-L. Martin, *The Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in Southern Africa*, Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1964, p. 158.

¹⁴⁰ Martin, *ibid.*, p. 160; Oosthuizen, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

boundary disputes, unruly tribesmen and even intimidation by extremist politicians. Here a message of liberation could be evolved. It was not a message that promised easy solutions or revolutionary change in the political constellation, as if sudden freedom from bondage would be ushered in by divine power. Basically it meant the presence of Mwari in his Spirit, which could liberate chiefs and headmen from fear and anxiety, enabling them to deal more effectively with the issues confronting them.

Just as Christ failed to introduce a messianic order that would satisfy Jewish nationalistic aspirations, Mutendi did not promise another Rozvi confederation or a Zionist empire that would overthrow white rule. But throughout his life he set an example to the chiefs of how one could realistically cooperate with the rulers of the day without loss of dignity and how one could fearlessly resist unjust legislation or action even if it did not always bring about the desired results. *In a sense his Zion City became to the chiefs a halfway house between white local government and African nationalistic factions, a refuge where they could participate in the subtle resistance of their people to the imposition of foreign influence without entirely jeopardizing their position in relation to the white administration on which they depended financially.* Like Isaiah Shembe did for his “Israelites” in South Africa, Bishop Mutendi presented his Zionist followers not with an indifferent, remote deity, but one who, through the power of the Spirit, manifested his involvement in the totality of life (politics in particular) as “a God who walks on feet and who heals with his hands, and who can be known by men, as God who loves and has compassion.”¹⁴¹

Possibly the most dramatic episode of Spirit involvement in Mutendi’s resistance to colonial rule was the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute in Bikita, which came to a head in 1965. Mutendi’s Zion City itself was situated in the disputed area and he organized the Rozvi chiefs opposition to the District Commissioner’s decision, which favoured a rival Duma chief’s claim. Ultimately, when all else had failed, Mutendi sponsored and initiated legal action in the high court against such formidable colonial opponents as the Bikita District Commissioner, the Provincial Commissioner of the then Victoria Province and the Minister of Internal Affairs. The outcome was predictable. Mutendi had become too prominent an adversary to the administration, and the state machinery was set in motion to destroy the Rozvi bishop’s power base.

I lived in Zion City at the time. The spiritual mobilization of the entire community during the months of uncertainty and stress while the “man of God” did battle was a moving experience. Sermons became more intense. Regular prayer meetings were held on behalf of those involved in the struggle, and in a host of prophecies the Holy Spirit was considered to give guidance on future action that would lead to justice and liberation. But liberation in this instance did not mean the preservation of Zion City. Liberation meant suffering and loss. Liberation to the “man of God” implied not compromising, overcoming fear, and at the cost of the most prized achievement of a lifetime—a “holy city” symbolizing African achievement—standing up and protesting against impossible odds.

As the Zionist chiefs and headmen rallied round their leader during a Paschal celebration before the court case, one of them, Chief Ndanga, preached as follows:

Let those with the strong hearts stand up and stand by his [Mutendi’s] side. Let this man build our hearts so that we will be humble people. Africa has started to listen to the voice of Mutendi . . . Allow this chief sent by God to examine your hearts. Praise him because he works through the spirit of Jesus!

Bishop Mutendi himself on the same occasion called on his followers to be courageous:

Fear not and do not be offended when people accuse you falsely. He who does

¹⁴¹ Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 278.

not stay amongst the proud is blessed. The police and the prophets [i.e., the administration and the church] should first consider the word of God before setting about their tasks, if they want to perform well. In Zechariah 8 God says: "I am back in Zion, the City of Jerusalem, therefore it will not be destroyed any longer." We take these words to support us. This Jerusalem of ours will not be destroyed! Zion is small but strong. It will never die because it belongs to nobody but God.

These were prophetic words, inspired by the Spirit of liberation. Only as the message was translated into the ensuing events at Zion City did its real significance become evident. For it was Mutendi himself who, in the aftermath of bitter defeat, was liberated by the Spirit he propagated from bitterness, indecision and even from his ties with the settlement in Bikita. His vigour in leading a large contingent of Rozvi kinsmen and Zionist followers to settle in a remote area in northern Gokwe, far away from his original sphere of influence, gave real meaning to his publicly declared conviction that Zion would not die, because it belonged to God. Like Moses of old, the aging bishop arranged the exodus of his people. In the course of only a few years another Zion City was erected in the far north of Zimbabwe and the Zion Christian Church, instead of fizzling out, showed an increased growth rate.

During the same period in the late sixties, the apostles of Maranke voiced the mood of black nationalism in even more aggressive anti-white statements than the Zionists. Here the interjections during sermons were not "Peace in Zion" or "Joy be with you all" but, challengingly and stridently, "Peace to us Africans!" and even in some cases "Peace to Africans only!" Feelings of naked resentment surfaced in the repeated accusations that the white race had killed Jesus and that the whites, in their oppression of the blacks, had deliberately repressed the message and benefits of the Holy Spirit.

At the Pentecostal festivities of the vaPostori near Mutare in April 1966, the following messages were preached:

--The true witnesses of Mwari were buried by the Europeans, until God gave them the task of witnessing to us, the apostles of Africa. They killed Jesus and the early apostles because they wanted to eliminate the Church of the Holy Spirit. So God decided to send the Church of the Holy Spirit to our race in Africa. Peace to Africa!

--The houses of Shem and Japheth were blessed long ago. *Now we, the descendants of the house of Ham, are blessed!* We are blessed because the prophecy of Isaiah, "I will send them a leader of their own race," has come true. God sent us black people a leader to do the same things that were done by Moses in Egypt. My brothers, let us obey the message which a black man of Africa has brought us. A donkey does not low like an ox. Therefore we shall not follow the instructions of the Europeans, but of our own black messenger.

Racial bias and concern for a unique supernatural mandate for the Apostolic church, free from white interference, are evident in these sermons. One should remember that they were delivered on the eve of *chimurenga*, the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, when anxiety and uncertainty were rife and intimidation and detentions were becoming more frequent. Basically, the Apostolic preachers aimed at *reassuring* their people. They were using the church as a place to vent their frustrations at white rule and were virtually claiming the work of the Holy Spirit exclusively for their cause of liberation.

It should be noted that the Zionist and Apostolic movements during the 1960s officially maintained a certain aloofness from politically organized violence and subversion. Bishop Mutendi even dissociated the ZCC from the then banned political parties, ZANU and ZAPU. Nevertheless, these churches gave full expression to African nationalist sentiments. *They became the propagators of equality between the races, the dignity of black Africans, and their ability to rule*

themselves. In doing so they sharpened the concept of a just God who sided with the oppressed and who, through his Spirit, could be counted upon to inspire the poor and the dispossessed in their struggle for the lost lands. At this stage, therefore, the prophetic contribution to political liberation, particularly in the rural context, lay in providing what was considered to be a sound, *scripturally based legitimation and justification of the struggle*.

Against this background it is not surprising that Zionist and Apostolic prophets increasingly played a key role at the war front as *chimurenga* escalated in the form of a bush war throughout Zimbabwe in the 1970s. Much like the traditional spirit mediums, who were providing the guerrillas with mystical ancestral guidance, prophets were also moving around with the fighters at the front, prophesying to them in the name of the Holy Spirit about enemy movements and related security matters. Thus the diagnostic and revelatory services of the prophets became a significant factor in the determination of guerrilla strategy as the fighters improvised their tactics from one situation to the next. On the one hand the senior ancestral spirits, as “guardians of the land” (*varidzi venyika*), directed the fighters in their battle for the lost lands through their spirit mediums (*masvikiro*). On the other hand the Holy Spirit, also acting as a kind of “guardian of the land” against the white intruders, was directing the forces of liberation through his emissaries, the Zionist and Apostolic prophets. Much depended on the predilections of Christian and non-Christian guerrilla commanders whether they favoured traditionalist or prophetic guidance. Many of them made use of both, cross-checking the one against the other.

Apart from the “fighter prophets” operating at the front, there were others who stayed at their church headquarters or healing colonies, from where they provided the guerrillas with information, pastoral support, faith-healing services and the like. Stressed or wounded fighters at times lived at healing colonies, or in secret caves nearby, in order to receive regular prophetic treatment.

Possibly the most important *chimurenga* function of some prophets was their assistance in “community-cleansing” operations during *pungwe* meetings. There they had to help the guerrillas to determine who were the sell-outs, the traitors to the cause. Much of this work took place in the traditional idiom of tracing wizards. Invariably collaborators of the Rhodesian army, or villagers involved in attempts to poison or expose guerrilla fighters, were branded *varoyi*. Ritual affirmation of accusations, either through ancestral or Holy Spirit revelations, was required before cleansing, through execution or other forms of punishment, could take place. Thus the Holy Spirit of the prophets was publicly seen to act radically and judgementally against the opponents of *chimurenga*.

The role of prophets in the *pungwe* courts could raise critical questions about arbitrary judgements, executions and the possible misrepresentation of the work of the Holy Spirit. In fairness, however, one should consider that it was in this very context that the Spirit invariably revealed himself to suspect members of the community as a life-giving and protective force. In a number of case studies I have established beyond doubt that prophets were often also instrumental in preventing executions whenever it was apparent that villagers were merely using the *pungwe* to project their prejudices and animosities in order to get rid of people they resented. In cases where wizardry accusations during *pungwe* sessions merely reflected tensions and internal village conflicts, prophets elicited public confessions from suspects, the background to which demonstrated to the guerrillas and village elders that they were not dealing with war offences. In numerous cases suspect villagers were actually ordered to go and live in prophetic healing colonies, where the scrutinizing, revelatory and disciplinary power of the Holy Spirit could, over a period of time, bring the culprits into line with the requirements of society at the time. Hence, by appealing to the ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit, prophets managed to introduce an element of moderation and sanity, often at grave personal risk, into *pungwe* situations where

flaring emotions and the need for revenge in a war-torn society could easily claim innocent lives.

Judging by these prophetic activities one surmises that the pneumatology evolved by the Spirit-type churches during *chimurenga* was one of a warring Spirit, deeply immersed in a just cause, inspiring the fighting cadres to overthrow the oppressive rule of an alien enemy, as well as do combat with the enemy within their ranks, which could devastate innocent lives if left unchecked. During the war the theology of liberation—unwritten, yet spontaneously enacted by the Independents—led to a closer identification of the concepts of salvation and political liberation. Yet the quest for political and socio-economic liberation at no point obscured the prophetic vision of God's saviourhood in terms of eternal life. Whereas the perception and experience of the Spirit's direct involvement in the achievement of peace and improved living conditions in this existence were certainly broadened and deepened, this did not obscure the good news of future salvation. On the contrary, the indications are that during the liberation struggle numerous AICs intensified their quest for conversion and eternal life. Quite a number of guerrilla fighters and people who sought refuge in the prophetic healing colonies were actually evangelized by the prophets whose assistance they sought. To such converts prophetic Spirit manifestations certainly meant both liberation from unjust rule and individual salvation, the culmination of which still lay in the future.

Despite religious revival and church growth during the war years, there were also signs of retrogression. Paradoxically, intensified concern with a liberating Spirit was in many instances countered by a submerged or diminished Christology in both AICs and mainline churches. The reason for this was that a renaissance of traditional religion caused many of the bush fighters to oppose Christianity. Some of their units destroyed or closed down church buildings. They saw Jesus as the white man's god, the epitome of oppressive rule. Consequently they operated under the slogan, *Pasi na Jesu!* (down with Jesus!). Many of the church leaders and congregations who continued to profess their faith in Jesus Christ publicly had their Bibles and vestments burnt by the guerrillas. Some were martyred, while others were forced to go underground. Many church leaders today frankly admit that during the war years they continued to preach about Mwari the Father, the one God who was known in Africa long before Christianity came, and that they prophesied or acted in the Spirit; but that they seldom spoke about Christ for fear of being branded traitors to the cause. The war years therefore present us with a chequered picture that defies easy generalization; but a picture which, for all its complexity, does not erase the predominant image of God's liberating Spirit operating in his black prophets throughout the war.

The earthkeeping Spirit

In the post-Independence period in Zimbabwe, starting in 1980, the AICs increasingly turned their attention to development projects. Fambidzano, the ecumenical council of Independent Churches (present membership about ninety churches) raised funds for quite a number of churches to erect community development and vocational training centres, to develop small-scale industries such as carpentry and clothing manufacture, and engage in agricultural and water projects. Here, too, the Independents saw the Holy Spirit featuring prominently, in this instance inspiring socio-economic progress. Having delivered his people from political bondage, the Holy Spirit was now increasingly seen as the liberator from poverty and economic despair, as one intimately involved, through the Fambidzano and other churches, in nation building. Development projects and even educational training centres at AIC headquarters—such as the multi-million dollar college that Bishop Nehemia Mutendi (son and successor of the late Samuel Mutendi) erected at Zion City—increasingly became the hallmarks of God's blessing on his people. This was not an entirely new development. It was rather a broadening of a

pneumatological trend already manifest earlier, namely that the Holy Spirit's function as healer and life giver holistically encompassed everything relating to human well-being. The Spirit was also the healer and protector of crops. Through a host of symbolic, supplicatory rites the Spirit could be persuaded by the faithful to safeguard or multiply their agricultural produce.

As was argued before, the perception of salvation undergirding this pneumatology does not exclude faith in a redemptive future for believers, or a heavenly eternity beyond this existence. Nevertheless, a strong focus on this-worldly salvation, which includes Spirit-led improvement of the quality of this life—whether in terms of spiritual, cultural or socio-economic progress—is unmistakable. A pragmatic anthropocentric trend is also discernible. After all, it is human beings who are saved, individuals who make progress through schools, community development centres and agricultural projects, and oppressed people who are liberated from unjust rule. The totality of creation is indeed holistically considered, as the prophetic appeal to God for good rains, bumper crops and prolific cattle breeding indicates. But pragmatism leads to exploitation! And African holism does not of necessity imply a world-view that altruistically incorporates all of creation in the humanly perceived salvific work of God. So in the AICs—as elsewhere in the world church—human self-centredness and the tendency to emphasize a personalized soteriology at the expense of the cosmic dimension of salvation easily lead to a triumphalist attitude; one which plays down human stewardship over all of nature, prioritizes human liberation and, by implication, promotes unjust and destructive over-exploitation of a suffering creation. In a sense therefore the AICs, notwithstanding their peasant environment and holistically contextualized liturgies, share with the rest of Christianity a limited and incomplete perception of the grace of God; a grace that encompasses the entire creation as a gift from God. All of us together have somehow proved unworthy of this gift and we must all confess that “the ruin of nature and the denial of God go hand in hand, because both over-exalt human beings.”¹⁴²

It is against this background that we of the AICs in Zimbabwe are endeavouring to reinterpret and develop a praxis-related pneumatology on the basis of existing belief systems. For example, while seeing the Holy Spirit as saviour, healer and liberator, we are moving away from a predominantly personalized and therefore exploitive soteriology towards a more universal, cosmic and—by implication—altruistic approach that proclaims and promotes *justice, peace and salvation for all of creation*. Such a comprehensive pneumatology, one hopes, will characterize AIC theological trends in the 1990s and beyond.¹⁴³ The main difference from the historical pneumatological trends described above is that some of the incentive for change derives from external, more specifically western-related sources, such as my own participation in the AICs concerned. In other words, western theologies of the environment or of ecological liberation (for example, those of Moltmann, Carmody and Granberg-Michaelson) are being reinterpreted, adapted and blended with AIC prophetic praxis in a mutually enriching learning process, instead of all development being determined solely by spontaneous prophetic praxis as in the past. In this respect, ecumenical interaction is complementing prophetic contextuality and exclusivism, underscoring in the process AIC recognition of their integral relatedness to the universal church. This realization, however, does not detract from the fact that current developments in pneumatology still basically reflect the local church's response to deeply felt needs or crises, as happened during the liberation struggle. In this instance, peasants in the

¹⁴² J. Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Towards a New Christian Theology of Nature*, Ramsey, NY: Paulist Press, 1983, p. 79.

¹⁴³ M.L. Daneel, “Towards a Sacramental Theology of the Environment in African Independent Churches,” in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 1, 1991, passim.

communal areas are increasingly faced with overpopulation, overgrazing of lands, soil erosion, diminishing crop returns on overextended soils, deforestation and the related problems of desertification, scarcity of firewood and spoilt water resources.

How do the prophetic movements respond to this crisis? In my opinion the prophets are starting to conceive of and respond to the Holy Spirit as the *earthkeeping Spirit*. Increasingly the guidance of the Spirit appears to point to the healing and restoration of nature as a vitally important part of his salvific work. As this conviction grows—an experience that I share with and propagate amongst the AIC prophets—the churches are being mobilized into ecologically liberating action.

I shall attempt to sketch briefly the current profile of such action and some of the more pertinent theological convictions behind it.

First of all, the prophets have been critically watching and assessing the conservationist work of AZTREC (Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), a body consisting of traditionalist spirit mediums, chiefs and ZANLA ex-combatants. Founded in 1988 as a sister organization of an institute (ZIRRCO - Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) of which I am the director, AZTREC aims at extending *chimurenga* from the socio-political arena to ecological conservation—tree planting, wildlife conservation and the protection of water resources. As happened during the struggle for political independence, the implementation of projects to liberate nature from destruction is inspired by the guardian ancestors of the land and the traditional oracular deity, Mwari. At present the prime objective is afforestation of communal lands where the threat of desertification is greatest.

At AZTREC's initiative several nurseries have been developed in Masvingo Province. Since 1988 more indigenous seedlings have been grown than ever before in Zimbabwe. Mobilization of rural communities has resulted in the planting of 5,000 trees in 1988, 150,000 trees in 1989 and more than 500,000 during the 1990/91 rainy season. Rural committees were formed by peasant villagers to take responsibility for all the woodlots: planting ceremonies, fencing, watering of trees, protective measures and so on. Thus the largest earthkeeping movement in Zimbabwe was developed at grassroots level over a relatively short period of time—its success deriving from ecological commitment rooted in traditional religion and philosophy.

Not to be outdone by AZTREC, yet taking their cue from AZTREC activities, the AICs have recently formed the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC). Some thirty-five churches have already joined. A constitution has been drafted and an executive, with a salaried general secretary, is already in charge. The new movement has similar ecological objectives to AZTREC, the main difference being that earthkeeping activities are based on Christian principles evolved in the AIC context.

A situation has therefore developed in which ZIRRCO, besides being the nerve centre, provides funding, policy-making and organizational services for two sister organizations—the one traditional, the other Christian, but both aimed at the liberation or restoration of nature in terms of their respective religious traditions. Attempts are made to establish meaningful interaction between AZTREC and AAEC at all levels, resulting in sustained interfaith dialogue on common religio-ecological goals.

In the second place, the immediate practical consequence of forming the AAEC has been the development of several church nurseries for exotic, fruit and indigenous trees at or near prophetic church headquarters. Plans for large-scale tree-planting operations by participant churches during the next rainy season are already underway. The unfolding “battle of the trees” in the churches is being interpreted in prophetic circles as the movement of the earthkeeping Spirit, who aims at healing the land by clothing the earth once again with life-restoring vegetation

(*kufukidza nyika*, to clothe the earth). This battle takes the form of prophets diagnosing the illness of mother earth in terms of human greed and ecological offences, and prescribing a therapy of Christian renewal and commitment, manifested in earthkeeping action. As this ecological side of the healer and protector Spirit emerges, the wider cosmic dimensions of salvation also gain prominence. This inevitably adds a new perspective to the AIC understanding of the good news of Christ's Saviourhood, so ardently proclaimed during evangelistic and missionary campaigns. For it is in Spirit-led tree-planting activities that the churches are announcing the reign of Christ, to whom belongs "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18); a reign that liberates and heals not only human beings but all of creation.

Third, attempts are made to develop, for and with the AICs, a written theology of the environment. Their characteristic theology enacted in dance, song and prophetic revelations is being complemented by a somewhat more organized, reflective and written record. In this field the Rev. Ruben Marinda and Solomon Zvanaka, both Zionist leaders holding advanced theological qualifications and key positions in ZIRRCO and the AAEC, are assisting me with the drafting of conscientization courses for training programmes in religion and ecology.

Fourth, western and AIC theological insights blend in the context of course development and teaching. At this level new trinitarian perspectives are being worked out and incorporated into training materials. Thus Jürgen Moltmann's emphasis on God's immanence in creation provides an important guideline for a new theology of ecology. He says:

God is not merely the Creator of the world. He is also the Spirit of the universe. Through the powers and potentialities of the Spirit, the Creator indwells the creatures He has made, animates them, holds them in life, and leads them into the future of His kingdom.¹⁴⁴

Moltmann's views correlate closely with the convictions of the late Bishop Samuel Mutendi, who preached about the biblical Mwari as a creator truly present and totally involved in all of creation—in a peasant society as the God of the farmers and their crops. Through ZCC rituals to bless the seed to be sown and the implements to be used in the fields, etcetera, Mutendi managed to bring the remote oracular deity (Mwari of the Matopo hills), traditionally approachable only to a few select cultic officials, into daily peasant life. His was already a theology of ecology, albeit focused on seasonal cattle and crop farming. By combining Moltmann's ideas with some of Mutendi's rituals we relate the pervading presence of Mwari, the immanent creator, to a long-term ecological strategy. At this point the message is: Indeed, recognize Mwari as the one who blesses and germinates the seeds for the coming season! But let him also be the God of the seedlings nurtured in church nurseries and the God of tree crops in plantations that will not only provide the building materials and firewood for coming generations, but will also clothe the earth for its own sake.

In the fifth and last place, an attempt is made to reflect on AIC pneumatology and to draw the consequences for church praxis. Special attention is given to *the Spirit's ecological healing activity in relation to the sacraments*. Here, too, the centrality of the Spirit in prophetic earthkeeping corresponds with current theological notions in the western world. In his trinitarian interpretation of creation Moltmann, for instance, deliberately chooses to concentrate on the third person. He argues that all divine activity is pneumatic in its manifestation. It is always the Spirit who brings the activity of the Son to its goal. The cosmic Spirit he refers to has no relation to Stoic pantheism. It remains God's Spirit acting in this world in the differential modes of *creating, preserving, renewing and consummating* life. Thus he comes to his basic assertion:

Creation in the Spirit is the theological concept which corresponds best to the

¹⁴⁴ J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. London: SCM Press, 1985, p. 14.

ecological doctrine of creation we are looking for and need today. With this concept we are cutting loose the theological doctrine of creation from the age of subjectivity and the mechanistic domination of the world, and are leading it in the direction in which we have to look for the future of an ecological world-community.¹⁴⁵

Through the Spirit we are bound together with the natural environment. This association is a system comprising human beings and nature. We might describe it as a spiritual ecosystem. Through the Spirit, human societies as part systems are bound up with the ecosystem “earth” (*Gaia*). So human beings are participants and sub-systems of the cosmic life-system, and the divine Spirit that lives in it.¹⁴⁶

Moltmann’s views are entirely relevant to current ecological concerns of the prophetic AICs. His idiom may be alien and the context of his appeal may be mainly the academic west and the threat of modern industrialization to our planet. Yet the AIC prophets of Africa will agree with his emphasis on the need to establish an ecological world community and in their own way express the conviction that only through the indwelling of the Spirit can such a goal be realized. In some respects the AIC prophets probably understand and experience the life-giving power of the outpoured and ever present Spirit better than Moltmann and other western-oriented theologians like myself do. Their intuition was shaped by their forefathers, who sensed as well as any Old Testament sage that the spirit (*mweya*) imparted by God the creator (*musiki*) was the source of all life. This intuition ultimately blossomed in an all-absorbing and most persuasive testimony to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit (*Mweya Mutsvene*) in the Spirit-type churches, especially in their healing colonies. And now the extension in prophetic praxis of the healing power of the Spirit from the specifically human condition to the entire “cosmic life-system” (to use Moltmann’s words) is becoming manifest in the AIC sacraments.

Conversion and sin are being ritually reinterpreted in the sacramental context of baptism and the eucharist. It is in preparation for baptism that the prophetic leader emphasizes the need for radical public rejection of sin under the guidance of the Spirit. Ecologically conscientized prophets now reveal that the Spirit expects novices not only to confess their moral sins in disturbed interpersonal relations, but also their ecological sins: chopping down of trees without planting any in return, overgrazing and neglecting to make contour ridges, thereby causing soil erosion, etcetera - in other words admitting to human greed and exploitation of the good earth, taking it for granted without nurturing it or reverencing it in return. At “Jordan” (any river, called Jordan for the duration of the baptismal ceremony) it makes sense to the newly converted to confess ecological guilt, where the barren treeless plains, the ever deepening erosion gulleys, the denuded river banks and the clouds of dust testifying to wind erosion, are clearly in evidence. Here the prophet has a unique opportunity to instruct converts that crossing the river Jordan into a new life implies more than individual incorporation into the body of Christ and the prospect of salvation in heaven. It also requires the new convert’s commitment to help restore creation and to engage in ecological stewardship, in recognition of God’s grace and in selfless service to the generations yet to come.

To many Independents baptism is also a healing ceremony, in which the life-giving water of “Jordan,” filled by the Spirit, is drunk by baptisands for individual cleansing and curative purposes. In this respect the ceremony offers a unique opportunity for interpreting the Spirit as healer both of the people and of the land. In that case the drinking of Jordan water symbolizes not just the baptisands’ healing or salvation, but their identification with desecrated mother earth

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

and their participation in cosmic healing. The focus then shifts from private, personal benefit by the Holy Spirit's healing powers to a statement of solidarity with all creation and an affirmation of new commitment, through individual conversion, to the healing and restoration of nature.

In most of the Spirit-type churches the eucharist is preceded by an even more dramatic public confession of sin than happens at baptism. Johane Maranke's vaPostori spend an entire night performing a massive preparatory cleansing ritual. Thousands of participants run around huge fires shouting their offences out loud. Then they pass the symbolic gates of heaven, each consisting of twelve prophets standing in pairs. All sins must be confessed at the gates, as the Holy Spirit, through the prophets, detects all hidden sins, from adultery to wizardry. The unrepentant are disqualified from participating in the sacrament. Some of the prophets involved in the AAEC tree-planting programme have started to combat ecological sins. Offences that lead to a shortage of firewood, soil erosion and poor crops are increasingly branded as a form of *uroyi* (wizardry) - the most serious of all sins, as it threatens human existence and life itself. I anticipate that unrepentant ecological wizards will in years to come find themselves debarred at the Zionist and Apostolic gates from participation in the eucharist. Through the earthkeeping Spirit the AAEC prophets already know who such *varoyi* are: the ones in the resettlement schemes who prejudice the common good by chopping down as many trees as they can for a quick profit from selling firewood, those who refuse to accept the principle that firewood can only be used by those who plant the trees that supply it; the resisters of government conservationist measures and of the chiefs' prohibition of chopping down trees in the holy groves of the ancestors, and the destroyers of river banks.

In addition to such reinterpretation of conversion and sin in the sacramental context, our theologizing in the earthkeeping churches includes a strong plea that in an ecologically ravaged environment each church should conduct at least one *tree-planting eucharist* annually. This would be one of the most relevant and convincing ways of publicly witnessing to Christ's reign over all creation and ritually acknowledging human involvement in its realization. It would be another way of agreeing with Granberg-Michaelson¹⁴⁷ that God's gift of grace received through the bread and wine cannot be treasured and held within our own selves. Instead, we are liberated to pour out our lives for the sake of Christ's reign over all creation, incorporating into our concern for internal, individual spirituality the ministry of global sanctification.

A tree-planting eucharist is one of the most powerful ways of saying that Christ's good news not only liberates and saves human beings, but also heals and protects nature where it agonizingly awaits redemption. Thus the missionary task acquires a wider dimension and sacramental empowerment. For mission, seen in this perspective, entails both evangelistic outreach and environmental restoration.

In the AAEC churches, where the eucharist is already linked with tree planting, the realization is dawning that sacramental participation in the body of Christ inspires both spiritual growth and ecological responsibility. Under the guidance of the earthkeeping Spirit the cosmological inferences of Colossians 1:15-20—"in Christ all things hold together"—are being drawn in a profound manner.

Such sacramental activity excludes the pretence that we, the earthkeepers, are the saviours of creation, for that we can never be. But, as believers we are erecting not only symbolic but concrete signposts of life-giving hope in a creation suffering while it awaits redemption. For, as Duchrow and Liedke¹⁴⁸ 31 correctly state:

¹⁴⁷ W. Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality - The Call to Redeem Life on Earth*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984, p. 136.

¹⁴⁸ U. Duchrow & G. Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace*. Geneva: wee

Spirit-endowed beings do not save creation, but creation looks to us. The way that we cope with its suffering shows how much hope there is for creation. When we increase the suffering of creation its hope sinks. When we sharpen the conflict between human beings and nature, and also the conflict between humans, then creation lapses into resignation. When, instead, in solidarity with nature and our fellow human beings, we reduce suffering, then the hope of creation awakes into new life.

We have now traced some of the major characteristics of AIC pneumatology as it emerged in response to distinct historical phases and ecclesiastical developments in Zimbabwe. In the process we have gained an impression of how a section of the world church has interpreted and experienced the movement and guidance of God's Spirit in its midst. We have also noted different emphases in the related concepts of salvation.

Of great significance is the fact that the richness of the Spirit's involvement and presence in the movements concerned was never obscured by prophetic preoccupation with historically and contextually determined issues at a given historical time. As I have pointed out, the prophets' involvement in the political liberation struggle and the concomitant image of the Holy Spirit as liberator of the oppressed—in spite of a temporarily weakened Christology—in no way quenched their missionary spirit or zeal for individual conversions and the propagation of eternal salvation in the present yet still coming kingdom of God. Likewise, the current response of the AICs to the Spirit as earthkeeper and the resultant widening perspective on salvation as extending to all creation, instead of overriding evangelistic outreach in the traditional sense, is incorporated into and enriches the individual conversion experience. It enhances the hope in the future fulfilment of salvation.

In a sense the earthkeeping venture is part of an ongoing and comprehensive conversion process of the entire church. Thus engaged, the church is actually carrying out an expanded missionary mandate: proclaiming through its Spirit-led life and work that the good news of salvation, of God's grace, extends to all of creation. Salvation here and now, manifest in the Black Jerusalem and Holy Cities in this existence—in terms of healing, liberation and earthkeeping—in no way "snatches the future" but meaningfully concretizes the dominion of Christ over heaven and earth and maintains the eschatological tension between the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom.

In this respect, the prophetic movements are enacting their own unique liberation theologies, without falling into the pitfall of reducing the message of salvation exclusively to a this-worldly programme of liberation from socio-political oppression or poverty. They also avoid the pitfall of reducing the good news to one-sided future salvation of souls through their holistic interpretation of the Holy Spirit's comprehensive involvement in all of life. Thereby they escape the western classifications of "liberationist," "evangelical," "charismatic" or "ecumenical." Instead, they encompass all these distinctions and many more, as they uninhibitedly read the scriptures and intuitively feel for the Holy Spirit's guidance in Africa. Herein lies their challenge to the world church as it ponders both vision and strategy for a renewed evangelistic thrust.

Together with them we pray:

Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit,
Bless us, your servants.

M. L. Daneel Full Bibliography¹⁴⁹

Organizations Founded

1991 – The Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC), a grassroots environmental and tree-planting movement composed of 180 African-Independent denominations.

1988 – The Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), a grassroots traditionalist earthkeeping and tree-planting movement composed of traditional chiefs, spirit mediums, headmen, etc.

1984--2000 – Founder and Director of the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCO), composed of departments of research, ecology, development programs, women's desk, youth desk, wildlife, theological education by extension, finance and administration.

1972-1981 – Founder and Director of the African Independent Church Conference (Fambidzano), an ecumenical movement of independent churches for theological training and community development, founded in the midst of Zimbabwe's liberation war and now the oldest ecumenical movement of AICs in Zimbabwe. At its peak 600 students enrolled at 40 extension centers annually.

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Zorora murugare. Rest in peace.



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