

The Rise of African Christian Consciousness: Exploring the Trajectories in the Africanisation of The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe (1934 – 1982)

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Abstract

“Until Lions write their own history, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”- so goes an African proverb. The truism of such a wisdom saying among Africans is validated when one takes a look at the planting of Christianity in Africa. Most accounts told and retold the achievements made by the early Christian missionaries and hardly is there mention of the evangelised. Taking a third world perspective, this paper examines the struggle by African converts to add an African flavour to the new religion they had received. Focusing on the Catholic Church, in particular, the paper discusses the process and challenges faced in trying to come up with a Christianised Kuchenura Munhu Rite. The zeal and determination shown to see such a rite see the light of day shows that Africans were not just mere receptors but major players in the process of Christianization of Africa.¹

Key Words: Catholic Church, Kurova guva, evangelisation, inculturation, missionaries, Christianised Kuchenra Munhu rite, African Christian consciousness.

Introduction

A closer look at the old guard of Christian history shows that it is presented in such a way that much attention has been placed on the achievements of the evangeliser while developments on the side of the evangelised have hardly received any notice, if at all ever mentioned. Departing from the old guard of doing history, I adopt in this paper a third-world perspective which shifts the focus of doing history. A third world perspective is a look at history from the perspective of third world countries who were mainly the recipients of the Christian message. It endeavours to show that peoples of the third world were not just passive recipients of the gospel message but active ones. Focusing on Africa, I will first pay particular attention to the rise of a re-awakening kind of spirit which was sweeping across Africa and then look at the achievements scored by African converts as a result of this re-awakening. This re-awakening spirit is what I characterise here as the rise of African Christian Consciousness. It was more of a fight for self-identity and

recognition as African Christians. In discussing about African Christian Consciousness, there is need to understand this phenomenon within the context of the whole movement of African self-assertion.

The movement of African self-assertion

The movement of African self-assertion had its very origin in the disappointment of the African elite who had adopted the White man's God and his ways of living but were baffled at the rejection they received in the society of this White man. With the hope of being accommodated by the society of Paris, the Francophones² had gone to France only to find doors being slammed right before their faces. The same was true with the Anglophones; some had sought admission in British clubs such as the Chichester Club only to find sentries, who often were fellow Black Africans, turning them away following the orders of the White Chef. Quite disappointing also was that even with equal educational qualifications, the treatment was never to be the same; the African Black man would always be taken as second class. Racism was at its ugliest form at this period. Interpreting the events of his time, it was easy for the Black man to conclude that there was no future at all in trying to be 'a Black European'. As a result, to assert their own dignity, the French-speaking intelligentsia coined the term "la negritude" and the English-speaking came up with "African personality" (Baur, 2001, 425).

Generally, the whole movement of African self-assertion can be looked at under three facets: cultural, religious and political. From a political context, colonial administrators in Rhodesia had tried to suppress political parties but in the 1950s the movement of African nationalism was just impossible to resist. Repeated calls by the Catholic Bishops for the government to grant African aspirations for independence were falling on deaf ears of the State. When Ian Smith had assumed power as Prime Minister, he categorically declared, "Independence yes, but not in this century, surely not in my life-time" (Ian Smith cited in Baur, 2001, 427). Finer details of this political facet can be obtained in publications such as: Janice McLaughlin (1996); Terrence Ranger (1985); David Lan (1985); N. Bhebhe, N. Kriger; Martin and Johnson, and many others.

When it comes to the religious-ecclesial aspect, one finds that the movement of self-assertion chiefly fought with the lack of trust evident in the slow pace of promotion of the African clergy and the preferential treatment of White Church members. Abhorrent also to the movement was the wholesale rejection of African customs and any kind of missionary paternalism. A more pronounced form of this protest was the open secession of some Church members, leading thus to the formation of the earliest Independent Churches. The impact of this religious-ecclesial aspect of self-assertion was not so well pronounced in the Catholic Church.

As early as the 1930s African candidates for the priesthood and sisterhood were sought and their training inaugurated. One can recall also that by at least 1973 Patrick Chakaipa had been consecrated as Auxiliary Bishop and installed as Archbishop in 1976 in succession to Archbishop Francis Markall (Dachs and Rea, 1979). Fewer members also were lost to Independent Churches in comparison with other denominations. Shedding more light on this is a comparison which was made by M.L. Daneel (1971) between the attitudes and policies of the Roman Catholic Missions and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in an effort to explain why the former lost fewer members to the Independents than the latter. Daneel came to conclude that the willingness of the Catholics to Christianise elements of Shona rituals and to be flexible on such matters as polygamy, bride wealth and veneration of ancestors was the most important reason for this discrepancy (Daneel cited in Strayer, 2008).

Moving to the cultural aspect of African self-assertion, it is an undeniable reality that Western missionaries presented the Christian message under the garb of Western culture thereby requiring African Christians to adhere to Western cultural norms. The prevailing conviction was that African culture had to be replaced by a European Christian civilisation. The call to go back to the Gospel as a meeting place with African culture had since been pronounced in the early 1870s but it had failed to draw the attention of this second wave of missionary activity. Making an analysis of the Catholic missionary approach at that time, John Baur says that Catholic dogmatism had a close set of truths in which the Bible served only as a book of reference and no room was left for an African cultural approach (Baur, 2001, 426). Nothing went beyond the use of African proverbs by the missionary to bring home a moral lesson.

It was, however, only a matter of time and opportunity to have the African's deepest longings realized. Since their reception of Christianity, Africans had always sought to live their faith within the context of their own cultures, condemnation of what they held as treasure to themselves was the only thing hampering them. By the 1950s this self-assertion was becoming too powerful to resist. Nicholas M. Creary captures well what was going on within the African camp in Zimbabwe by analogously relating it to James C. Scott's idea of a 'hidden transcript,' a discourse that occurs "beyond direct observation by power holders" (Creary, 2008, 1). Creary also notes that the expression of African Christian Consciousness in Zimbabwe from the late 1950s and through the anti-colonial war of liberation (1966-1979) involved making public what had been latent. The late 1950s saw African Catholics in Zimbabwe beginning for the first time to express their views and aspirations to each other and to Whites in the public forum.

Looking back a bit into the period prior to the 1950s, one would realise that while the need to express their views and aspirations was indeed always felt by many among the African Catholics, it was often overshadowed by fear emanating from

the subjugation following the suppression of the First Chimurenga Uprising (1896) as well as by a hidden desire to exploit what they had come to conceive as the benefits of encountering the White man. Generally, it can be noted that the presence of the White missionary at this period was considered as unwelcome. This is well reflected in the words of the editor to the Zambezi Mission Record (1910).

When he first settles among these natives, the missionary is regarded with suspicion and dislike. He has come-so they think-to rob them of their deeply-cherished customs; to upset their social economy; to turn the hearts of the children against their fathers, and of fathers against their children; and worst of all, to fetter them with the creed of the hated Whites (Editor of the Zambezi Mission Record cited in Zvobgo, 1996, 91).

In a similar vein, Lawrence Vambe recalls a family crisis from his childhood in the 1920s. His aunt Josephine Mandinema had fallen pregnant prior to being married in Church. Being staunch Christians, Josephine's father and sisters had condemned her irresponsible disregard for the rules of Christian conduct which was also now putting the interest of the whole family at stake. The only person in the family who had stood by her was her mother called Mandizha. Instead of having been offended by what Josephine had done she had actually been delighted. Privately, Mandizha had made her view of the matter known to the family:

This matter was African [...] and strictly domestic [...]. (The couple) had done no wrong whatever (because) among our people the birth of a child was the only binding factor in a marriage, almost the only reason for getting married at all [...]. More than that, Mandizha regarded (the pregnancy) as an act of defiance against the alien religious system that she detested and felt it her duty to denounce day by day (Vambe cited in Creary, 2008, 4).

Though the family ultimately managed to keep the pregnancy secret and arrange a Church wedding at their earliest convenience, what it helps us show is that given a chance, some would have publicly challenged the White missionary's teachings. Mandizha's voice was not a lone voice but was actually one among many. It is unfortunate that the opposing voice of the Africans in many matters was often kept from the missionary. Cases of 'good boy' especially if one was working within the mission farm, are hard not to conceive of. Such people would at times act as some form of insulin blocking the venom of fellow Africans from reaching the missionary. The quest for total conversion in some, however, made them regard any opposition to what the missionary would have said a taboo. In Josephine's case, her husband agreed to marry in Church out of his respect for his father-in-law's faith and out of love for Josephine but not necessarily out of concern for the

Church's teaching. Applying Scott's idea of the 'hidden transcript' one would find that while the public transcript reveals Josephine's husband asking the priest to announce the marriage banns and there afterwards he and Josephine having a 'White wedding', the hidden transcript shows that not only were these VaShona aware of Church marriage regulations and the penalties for violating them but were actually aware of the specific points of contention between their African and European understandings of marriage. The 'hidden transcript' in this case also brings to light the vigorous debate and considerable opposition to Church teachings which was going on but could not be publicly expressed at the mission.

Moving to the 1950s, a different scenario with regard to the ability of Africans to express themselves, as already been pointed out, had emerged. Those who had been fortunate enough to pass through the mission schools had managed to come together in 1934 and form an organisation which later came to be known as the Catholic African Association (CAA)³ under the leadership of Ambrose Majongwe. The objective of this Black lay organisation was to mobilise African adults in self-help and self-improvement schemes that would produce 'better homes, better hearts and better harvests.' Under the guidance of the then Fr Markall, later to be Archbishop, the Association had grown to be nation-wide in 1955 and by 1961 it could boast of 5 000 paid-up members, a large membership than any African national organisation of the time (Dachs and Rea, 1979, 194). It was actually during the annual general meetings of this organisation that different questions were raised and discussed at length. Thus indeed for the first time Black Catholics had found an opportunity to express their views and aspirations to each other and to the White hierarchy in the public forum.

Quite a number of reasons can be enumerated which acted as catalysts in the incorporation of the hidden transcript of African values and symbols. Inspiring CAA in the first place was the greater cultural freedom that the Church allowed on the eve of Vatican II and the period after this Council. In 1958 Pope John XXIII had made an announcement on the need for reform in the Church. He also had gone on to announce the convening of the Second Vatican Council and called the Church in the whole world to prepare for it. When the Council finally kicked off from 1963-65, various resolutions were passed resulting in a new image of the Church. Among the laborious fruits of this Council was the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy which addressed the relationship between the Gospel and local cultures, pleading for a multi-cultural and plural Church. Vatican II revived the 1659 Propaganda Fide directive, calling for the adaptation of the liturgy in missionary lands. Much of the work was left in the hands of the local Episcopal Conferences to carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and cultures of individual peoples could appropriately be admitted into divine worship (Abbot, 1966, 151-2).

What the CAA did was simply to take advantage of the new winds of change which were blowing from Rome and they sought to find a spiritual home within the Church by incorporating their values and symbols to make it their own. Moreover, Pope Paul VI in a post-conciliar document: *Ecclesia Sanctae*, produced a year after Vatican II, had requested the Episcopal Conferences to set up study groups whose tasks were to examine the thought of the people on the universe, on man and his attitude to God and undertake theological reflection on what was good and true in their culture (Flannery, 1987, 857). The CAA saw their meetings as the appropriate forum to fulfil Pope Paul VI's recommendations.

Playing a pivotal role also was the growing African nationalist movement that culminated in Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. After the failure of the 1961 constitutional arrangements, some mission schools and Churches had been attacked and burnt in civil disorders. The blame for this civic disorder was laid on Archbishop Francis Markall who had called on Catholics to vote in the 1961 elections (Gundani, 2008, 130). It was unfortunate that only a few people voted making thus no impact. Seeing no progress the people had turned against the Archbishop, interpreting his call to vote as a perpetuation of their past experience with the Church as being one with the colonial state and colonial structures. Disappointed, a few leaders of the Catholic African Association, Ambrose Majongwe being among them, resigned and joined politics full-time (Gundani, 2008, 130). The Catholic African Association was not slow to take advantage of this political situation to drive home the need for reform in the Church.

Not least among the catalysing forces was the ordination of indigenous priests. By the late fifties and early sixties a few Black priests had been ordained and these were invited by the CAA to say mass and give talks at the congresses and annual general meetings. Invited in particular were Frs. Joseph Kumbirai and Raymond Kapito. Unlike the missionary priests, the CAA found the indigenous priests as more approachable and conversant with some of the cultural matters they were debating. Since some of these local priests were found indeed to have a keen interest in the culture of the Shona, the CAA took advantage of that by approaching them as potential mediators with the Bishops. Though unfortunately many of the indigenous priests could not explain Shona customs more intelligibly to the hierarchy, an opportunity for research had availed itself so as to advise the hierarchy on the aspects of the culture the Church could adopt (Gundani, 2008, 131).

Enhancing also the CAA to bring the hidden transcript into the public forum was the launch of Moto Magazine (1958) by Bishop Haene of Gweru in conjunction with members of this lay organisation (Creary, 2008, 3). Prior to its launch, it had always been a felt need among the CAA members for a magazine or paper that would provide Catholics with a reliable source of information and, as noted by P.

Gundani, such a need had arisen against the background of misinformation which was emanating from the government media (Gundani, 2001, 22). While the monthly Moto Magazine had initially been dedicated to the coverage of CAA congresses and the annual get-togethers, no later had it become one of the most outspoken voices of lay African perspective in Rhodesia, often providing also scathing criticism of the settler government and support for African nationalist parties. Apart from advocating African political rights, Moto covered also local Church-related events, keeping a close watch on the formation of African clergy and religious, paying particular attention to the elevation of Africans to the hierarchy and ranks of the Canonized. It also touched upon many facets of the inculturation of the Church in an African context, including liturgy and the promotion of African literature. Broadly viewed, one can say that Moto provides the window through which one can view the maturation of a distinctly Africanized Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

Having attended school in the established mission schools, many of the African Catholics were aware of the European cultural components of the Christian message hence they were very vocal in their desire to integrate their own religious symbols and practises into Christian liturgy. One contributor, for example, to the Moto Magazine argued that Christianity was not:

as real as African religion [...] (because it) still appears like an imported product. It has not paid enough attention to the African way of doing things- ways of asking for favours, of honouring or praising a hero, of behaving at a religious ceremony. For example, in the Latin rite of Catholic Mass, the congregation stands during the Prayer of the Faithful, but VaShona custom is to sit when asking a favour (Makoni cited in Creary, 2008, 5).

In a similar vein Adam Mkosana, contributing to the December issue of 1970 pointed out that if Christianity is not integrated to the culture of the people, people are bound to lead two lives: that demanded by the Church and that by reason of their belief and ideas developed and fostered through culture for centuries (Mkosana cited in Creary, 2008, 5).

Chitenderano chitsva (New Testament)

An important step in the Africanization of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe was the publication of the New Testament in ChiShona in 1966. Compared with other denominations, one would realise that the Catholic Church took this step at a very much late time. Protestant Christians had since begun translating the Bible into ChiShona and SiNdebele as early as 1897 (Creary, 2008, 8). What early 20th Century Catholic missionaries had managed to do was the translation of Catechisms, Prayer

books and Hymnals into African languages. Somehow a laxity to translate the Scriptures into Shona existed in the Church at the time emanating from the fear that the laity would misinterpret the Bible if the Scriptures were put at their disposal. As earlier cited from John Baur, Catholic dogmatism had a close set of truths in which the Bible served only as a book of reference.

Later when the tide began to change, Catholic-Shona speakers began to rely on the International Protestant Shona Bible. They would have loved to modify the language of this Protestant Shona Bible to suit Catholic expression had it not been that they were denied permission by the publishers of the Protestant Shona Bible. Seeing that the door had been slammed in their face, the Catholic Bishops appointed a five-member Committee in 1962 to undertake a translation that would be readily intelligible in any Shona dialect (Creary, 2008, 8). Contributions were sought from all Catholics across Shonaland and the project spanned something like four years to see its completion. With the publication of *Chitenderano Chitsva* (NT) the long wish of the Shona Catholics to have their own translation had been fulfilled. Writing to Moto, to express his joy at having a new Shona Bible, B.J. Moyo said that it is, “a great blessing for the majority of Christians who do not know enough English” (Moyo cited in Creary, 2008, 8). Others described it as a clear and animated text, one that should have great influence.

Music

Following the liberalisation of Vatican II as regards the use of vernacular in liturgy as a whole and in music in particular, the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe took no time to have the mass and other liturgies translated into ChiShona and SiNdebele. Music in particular, which forms an integral part of the liturgy, was made open to local variations. Prior to this development, the hymnody of the Roman Catholic Church was marked by different nationalities involved in the mission work using their German, English and French hymnals as source books. Most of these hymns were translated into Shona. The first Shona hymnal in the Zezuru dialect, as J. Lenherr points out, appeared in 1905 and it had been edited by Fr E. Biehler. Another hymnal *Munda we mweya* (field of the spirit) in the Manyika dialect was compiled by Fr F. Mayr and published in 1911. This was the only Catholic Shona hymn book to use sol-fa notation.⁴ The following second year, 1913, saw another publication by Fr Yaeckel and in 1918 yet another collection was edited by missionaries at Triashill Station. Finally, the various hymnals were gradually worked into one called Dzimbo Sande (Holy Songs) during the 1930s (Lenherr, 1977, 109).

A certain discontent, however, with the Dzimbo Sande hymnody began to arise from around 1935. A proposal was made that “the hymns be revised with the assistance and guidance of Africans to suit the natural desires of the Bishops’ African

flock" (Lenherr, 1977, 109). Around the 1940s Swiss missionaries gave a new impulse to this need and this saw some hymns being translated and some new ones being composed using a solo-chorus pattern which was derived from African musical form. The period up to the 1950s saw the growth of Shona hymnody in a number of different dialects, so was also the growth in the desire to find a style that was more natural to African congregations.

In the month of December 1964, two Shona-speaking Africans joined 26 delegates from ten other African nations to attend a training course for African Church music composers in Kitwe, Zambia (Creary, 2008, 8). During this composers' training course, the participants were made to study music theory and history, methods of composition, music criticism, choral conducting and practical singing. As part of their initiative, the participants strongly recommended the use of drums in the liturgy and suggested that composers should work in rural areas so as to maintain a closer contact with the traditional African heritage unlike in the Western musically populated towns.

Following the success of the training course in Zambia, Abraham Maraire released a record of nine hymns in February 1965 which were in traditional African style wherein he fitted Christian texts to traditional Shona songs. In July of the same year, R.H. Paradza writing to Moto, noted that many teachers and catechists were now producing their own tunes to the Psalms in the Shona prayer book 'Mupiro Wedu' (Creary, 2008, 8). What this simply indicates is that Africans were quite zealous in incorporating indigenous music into the liturgy. Many had come to realise that it is through music that they could participate more lively in the liturgy of the Church as laity and have an opportunity to exert some influence over the shape of their lives in the Church. After Maraire, was Stephen Ponde who composed 19 new hymns and were published in the January of 1966. Jeminos Masvingise, through Moto, took no time to praise Ponde's compositions and noted:

Ten of the nineteen hymns are accompanied by drums and hosho (rattle). All of those who want to introduce these instruments into their singing [...] would do well to listen carefully to the record to find out how the drumming should be done [...] Missa Shona 1 (collection title) can serve as evidence of the deep roots which Christian faith has taken in our people. It is at the same time a proof that Christianity is as African as it is European, or rather that it is 'all things to all men' (Masvingise cited in Creary, 2008, 9).

Since the door to new compositions had been made open, more and more people zealously undertook the new challenge and it was not long before Mambo records produced another landmark in Shona Church music with the release of five records by four different composers. Most of these hymns were composed from the new

and official Shona translations of the Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Sanctus and Agnus Dei or simply the traditional elements of Catholic Mass. The main purpose behind the Mambo records having these compositions recorded was not just to have them stored on discs but rather that they could be more accessible to all, thus enlivening the liturgy of the congregations throughout the country. To ensure that the African liturgical music was well received and sung properly, various workshops were conducted between 1964 and 1970. In such workshops people received training on how to introduce African music and instruments into Catholic liturgy. This development in music was surely a landmark in the Africanization of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

Kurova guva

The success in music was followed by the adoption of a Christianised rite of the Shona custom of *kurova guva* though after a long contentious debate. This debate stretching as far back as the 1950s had actually been ignited by the CAA. In its congresses and annual general meetings a dominant theme that had always featured from time to time was the issue of *kurova guva*. Now having found the opportunity to bring the 'hidden transcript' to the public forum, members of the CAA had persistently expressed their discontent at the Church's stance against the African ways of honouring their deceased parents and relatives. What they wanted was the Church to lift the ban on *kurova guva* and that they be provided the guidance on how to practice the ritual in a Christian way. The concerns of CAA in these early days were also shared by some White missionaries who felt also that there was need to recognise some values of the Black man's religion. Writing back as early as 1954 R. Federer, a Bethlehem missionary as well as a gifted philosopher and linguist said,

It would be an ill people that did not remember its dead. And it would be foolish of us if, because the Chikaranga custom of *kugadzira* involves some elements contrary to the faith as for instance, ancestor worship, we should try to eliminate it root and all. It is very doubtful whether we would succeed, and if we did we might have done more harm than good (Federer cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, 1999, 7).

During the recess of the Second Vatican Council in 1963, the Rhodesian Catholic Bishops agreed to delegate the Inter-diocesan Liturgical Commission to investigate the degree to which African customs which had a religious nature, could be incorporated in Catholic worship. In no time, some local priests from Salisbury and Gwelo dioceses were seen embarking on field research and discussions on the *kurova guva* practice. From their research findings most began to advocate that the practise be Christianised. Courageous advocates of adaptation of the traditional

rite at this time were Fr C. Dober and Rev Joseph Kumbirai who advised the Bishops that the whole liturgy needed a total overhaul so that African worshippers could feel at home with the manner in which it was celebrated (Gundani, 2008, 132).

The years between 1965-1968 were full of 'uncontrollable experimentation' in regard to Shona customs led by African priests and some of the laity. The Chilimanzi Deanery in the diocese of Gwelo actually came up with its own form of a Christianised *kurova guva* which they called Musande (saint). In order to shroud the whole ceremony, they would talk of Kuita Musande (to include someone in the communion of saints) (Elsener and Kollbruner, 1999, 11). Though the ceremony looked quite a step ahead since it had adapted most of the elements from the traditional *kurova guva* ritual, a number of priests felt that it did not express enough some fundamental Christian truths, for example, the redemption through Christ, the cleansing and atonement of purgatory and the function of Holy Mass. In the Archdiocese of Salisbury, Fr Mavhudzi drew up also an alternative rite of *kurova guva*. The rite of Fr Mavhudzi was focused more on substituting rather than adapting the traditional rite. In a paper which Fr Mavhudzi presented at a meeting of African priests on 16 April 1968, he argued that what was offered at the *kurova guva* ceremony were sacrifices to the spirits and were therefore against the first commandment. This claim led him to conclude that *kurova guva* could therefore not be adapted by the Church hence a substitute would be the only way forward (Elsener and Kollbrunner, 1999, 15).

In as much as other dioceses were engaged in the debate, Umtali diocese was no exception. Bishop Lamont set up a commission to investigate whether or not *kurova guva* was to be Christianised. The general conclusion was that great caution had to be made in adapting *kurova guva* and that certain elements were totally unacceptable in Christian faith. The commission was quick to point out the consultation of a *n'anga* (traditional healer), the motive of fear which inspired the rite, belief in the *vadzimu* (ancestors) to wreak vengeance, the libation of beer on the grave, the mixing of blood and the *nhaka* (inheritance) ceremony as those elements which were completely unacceptable. What the commission, however, could not condone was the Church's explicit condemnation of *kurova guva*. It instead recommended that: 1) the whole tradition of Shona culture needs to be studied and consultation with the *vakuru* (elders) and with other Churches should be undertaken; 2) *kurova guva* is only one aspect of a much larger problem which faces our people; 3) the desire to Christianise *kurova guva* appears to come from the Bishops and priests; 4) this interest in traditional beliefs has been awakened by the politicians for their own purposes (Elsener and Kollbrunner, 1999, 16).

Meeting on 9 July 1968, the Bishops' Conference found the recommendations made by the Umtali Diocesan Commission worth adopting (Gundani, 2008, 134).

As a result, the Bishops decided to set up an Inter-Diocesan Commission to investigate the matter in all its aspects. To ensure a fruitful investigation, the Commission was to enlist the help of professional anthropologists, other Churches and priests engaged in pastoral work. Among the crucial issues that were to be tackled by the Commission were:

[...] whether the honour paid to the midzimu (i.e. ancestors) and the manner of expressing it by offering rapoko (millet) was a sacrifice in the strict sense, and whether the power attributed to the midzimu derogates the power of the Almighty (RCBC Minutes, 2BB (1968) cited in Gundani, 2008, 134).

Through the course of 1969 the Inter-Diocesan Commission was engaged in consultation and it was not after long that a minority report was presented to the Bishops' Conference by Fr Mavhudzi perpetuating his earlier view that the offerings made at *kurova guva* were of a sacrificial nature, thus an offence against the first commandment of worship of God alone. The report called upon Church members and their relatives to engage in a simple ceremony of *Nyaradzo* (comforting the bereaved). The report of the majority which was submitted a bit later, however, argued that *kurova guva* and similar ancestral rites were to be understood in the context of the fourth commandment: 'Honour thy father and mother' rather than in the context of first commandment. Finding nothing idolatrous or against faith with the ceremony, this majority report recommended that:

[...] the ban on *kurova guva* should be lifted at once. The people are everywhere continuing to participate in the ceremony and are in bad faith because the Church has forbidden it as gravely sinful. Their bad faith must be removed since there is no adequate theological reason for proscribing the ceremony. We suggest that the people be told that [...] we can permit it with a clear conscience [...]. The Church has never forbidden acts of supplication made by individuals to departed Christians (Dachs and Rea, 1979, 226).

The stance of the majority report was also built upon pastoral developments which had occurred within the Universal Church at that time. Contributors to the majority report had noted that cremation, a practice formerly condemned by the Church for doctrinal reasons, had now been allowed. They had also taken into consideration the acceptance by Rome of the second mortuary ceremony of 'washing the grave' in Chinese rites⁵ as a classic case of inculturation worth emulating. Of worth to note also in the majority report was the argument it presented that it was "an accepted Missiological principle that Christianity must become a leaven in society and be present in all the important events and happenings in the way of life of the people" (RCBC Minutes cited in Gundani, 2008, 135). Basing on this principle the report noted that it was imperative to produce an adult Catechism that would form the basis of an inculturated liturgy on *kurova guva*. It also stressed the principle

that Christianity should preserve what was good and purge erroneous elements of the traditional culture. Note was taken also that the veneration of Saints in Europe had evolved in such a similar way hence the same was to be expected in the case of *kurova guva*.

Faced with the conflicting claims and recommendations from the two reports which had been presented, the Bishops' Conference decided that there was need for more intimate knowledge of local attitudes and practices of the ceremony before any move could be taken. The Conference noted also that ethnic differences among the Shona was something which could not just be swept under carpet. As a way forward, the Bishops placed the matter into the hands of Black indigenous clergy who first had to be organised into a national association in pursuit of the Vatican II spirit of trying to foster unity of mind and action among the clergy themselves and their hierarchy.

The National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) was founded in January 1973 and at their meeting in December of the same year, the indigenous diocesan clergy supported the recommendations of the majority report to have the ban lifted on *kurova guva* (Gundani, 2008, 136). Subsequently the Bishops during their meeting in June 1974 accepted the recommendations by both the Inter-Diocesan Commission and the NADC to have the ban on *kurova guva* lifted. The Bishops went on to task the Pastoral Centre to work in collaboration with African priests in the production of a pastoral guide that would preserve and stress all cultural values that were clearly not against faith in order that they too could be accepted in the Church. The Inter-Diocesan Commission was dissolved paving way for the creation of a Theological Commission whose mandate was to make a theological argument and not to examine evidence nor to pass judgement on the work produced by the former commission. It was tasked also to look into the minority report of Fr Mavhudzi (Gundani, 2008, 137).

The Theological Commission's progress was for a while halted by Fr Bernard Ndhlovu who was arguing that the time was not yet ripe for a final decision. Thinking along the same line with Fr Mavhudzi, Fr Bernard had come to conclude that the whole ceremony was in violation of the first commandment for the sacrifice in *kurova guva* was directed to the spirit of the deceased and not to God. For him also, reinstating the spirit of the deceased into the family was against the Church's teaching regarding the disembodied spirit after death (Gundani, 2008, 137). The majority in the Commission, however, dismissed Fr Ndhlovu's understanding of sacrifice, arguing that the beast (n'ombe yenhevedzo) and the goat (mbudzi yeshungu) offered during the ceremony should not be viewed as sacrifice in the theological sense but as food for the invited guests and all participants and that they symbolized the honour and respect paid to the deceased. The Commission

went on to endorse also the defunct Inter-Diocesan Commission's position that *kurova guva* and the overall Shona belief in communing with and depending on ancestors provided fertile soil for the Church's teaching and belief in the Communion of Saints. As regards Fr Ndhlovu's reservations on the fate of the dead, the Commission adopted a position based on the Catholic doctrine of purgatory,⁶ arguing that purification (*kuchenura*) was necessary because death was believed among the Shona to inflict a 'black spell' on the spirit of the deceased. The likelihood of both the Christianised and traditional rites existing side by side for quite some time was quite apparent in the eyes of the Commission members but they envisaged that the erroneous elements would eventually fade out while the Christian rite would prevail.

Having completed its work, the Commission reported its findings to the Bishops' Conference which in turn handed over the responsibility of consulting Black clergy to Bishop Chakaipa who also in turn requested the National Association of Diocesan Clergy to present their recommendations (Makusha cited in Gundani, 2008, 139). It was not until 1977 that NADC set up diocese-based commissions whose task was to make an assessment of each of the stages of *kurova guva* rite and work out a tentative rite of *kurova guva* that reflected the Christian spirit. During a workshop which was held at Driefontein Mission from 14-16 December 1977 representatives from Salisbury, Gwelo and Umtali adopted a well-researched and comprehensive guideline from Gwelo diocese with few amendments (NADC cited in Gundani, 2008, 139). While much disagreement surfaced during the workshop as to whether the diviner had to be totally excluded or not, the final resolve among the members was that the diviner's role was unacceptable at any stage of the *kurova guva* ritual. After the NADC executive meeting held on 6 March 1978 in Gwelo, the finalised text of the rite was presented to the Bishops' Conference with a request for its approval *ad experimentum* for three years (Gundani, 2008, 140). After a careful examination by the two African Bishops, Chiginya and Chakaipa, it was recommended that the Commission for Christian Formation and Workshop redraft the proposed rite for liturgical purposes and a memorandum was sent to the NADC that there be a Catechism on the new rite of *kurova guva*. The Bishops proposed also that this new rite be termed *Kuchenura Munhu* (cleansing of a person), a term which corresponds with the purification which purgatory is believed to effect.

After the initial failure by Fr R.J. Kapito and others to work out the desired Catechesis due to lack of time, Fr R. Zinkann with a group of deacons and catechists produced such a Catechesis in Shona (Elsener and Kollbruner, 1991, 33). The Catechesis presented *kuchenura munhu* as the pivot of ancestor veneration in Shona life and it concentrated on the lasting values which should be retained in a changing society. After criticism and revision by the Commission for Christian Formation and Workshop, the draft was finally sent to the Bishops' Conference for adoption.

The Bishops' Conference in turn sent it to Rome for approval. Having received Rome's approval, the Christianised Kuchenura Munhu Rite was finally published in October 1982 for use by all members of the Church as official liturgy.

Conclusion

To conclude, while missionaries need to be credited for their zeal and sacrifice shown in trying to plant Christianity in Africa, their success was only possible through the cooperation of the evangelised peoples. It is unfortunate, however, that only the evangeliser has received all the glory and nothing much has been said about the evangelised. Seeing this deficit in Christian historiography, this paper has looked at the part played by African converts and laid it bare that they were not mere catalysts but were actively involved in trying to determine the destiny of Christianity on African soil. The coming up with a Christianised *Kuchenura Munhu* rite was one such demonstration that they were not satisfied with an imported Christianity but a Christianity brewed in an African pot.

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Footnotes

¹ This article is based on my published PhD thesis, Mwandayi C. *Death and After-life in the eyes of the Shona: Dialogue with Shona customs with the quest for authentic inculturation*, Bamberg: Bamberg University Press, 2011

² The adjective 'francophone' means French-speaking, typically as primary language whether referring to individuals, groups or places. More often the term is used as a noun to describe a natively French-speaking person. In a narrower sense, the term refers to people whose cultural background is primarily associated with the French language regardless of ethnic and geographical differences. The Francophone Culture beyond Europe is the legacy of the French colonial empire and that of Belgium. A related term 'Anglophone' on the other hand, refers to belonging to an English-speaking population in a country where two or more languages are spoken. In its narrower sense, the term refers to people whose cultural background is primarily associated with English language regardless of the ethnic and geographical differences. The Anglophone culture is largely the legacy of British colonial empire. See *Francophone and Anglophone*, in <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed 01/02/13).

³ The initial idea of forming an association for the laity had actually been started by Fr Bernard Huss of Marianhill in Natal (1934). Later after its formation CAA was later changed to Catholic Association (CA) to express its non-racial character. In 1971 it was registered as a welfare organisation under the Welfare Organisation Act (1966). Despite its new non-racial face, a few of the Whites who had been registered with it soon left leaving it predominantly a Black association. The formation, however, of the Roman Catholic Council for the Laity in 1968 and the Diocesan Councils for the Laity in the early 70s saw CA being eventually superseded at national, diocesan and parish levels. Cf. P. Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority and Leadership: Developments in the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe after Vatican II (1965-1985)*, (2001).

⁴ Tonic sol-fa is a system of musical notation invented by John Curwen (1816-1880) on a basis of the principles of solmization (from names of the syllables sol and mi) and solfege (sol-fa) and once used by choral singers, for it simplifies the sight-reading of music. Tonic sol-fa is based on the old syllabic system of Do, Re, Mi and so on and takes the following form: d, r, m, f, s, l, t, the names of the notes being Doh, Ray, Me, Fa, Soh, Lah, Te. In English-speaking countries these seven syllables are normally pronounced: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti. Traditionally, solfege is taught in a series of exercises of gradually increasing difficulty. Cf. Tonic sol-fa in *The Free Dictionary*, <http://encyclopedia.farlex.com> (accessed 21/02/12).

⁵ Around the 17th and 18th Century there developed a sharp argument among Roman Catholic missionaries working in China as to whether the ceremonies honouring Confucius and family ancestors were so tainted with superstition as to be incompatible with Christian belief. The Jesuits believed that they probably were not and so argued that they could be tolerated within certain limits. The Dominicans and Franciscans, however, took the opposite view and carried the issue to Rome. In 1645 the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith acting on the basis of the argument presented by the Dominicans, condemned the rites. After, however, considering the arguments of the Jesuits, the same congregation lifted the ban in 1656. See *Chinese Rites Controversy: Roman Catholicism*, www.Britannica.com (accessed on 17/02/12).

⁶ Though now a debatable doctrine, it has been a long teaching of the Church that those in a state of grace, but still retaining after-effects of repented sins as well as those retaining unrepented venial sins, need to undergo purification before they can receive beatific vision. To speed up the state of purification they need the prayers and especially the Masses of the faithful living members. The Church formulated this doctrine of faith on purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence (AD 1431-1445) and Trent (AD 1545-1563).