

# SUPER ROMA AS A NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN ZIMBABWE<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Ever since the publication of Shoko's (2006) pioneering study on Super Roma, the movement has become a subject of serious sustained research at the University of Zimbabwe. This present article explores and examines the impact of Super Roma theology on traditional Christian theology and practice. It specifically investigates the extent to which Super Roma theology contradicts, corrects or clarifies traditional Christian theology and practice. The main argument developed in this article is that, whilst it may be true that Super Roma theology may have something new to offer theologians, it presents a number of areas of potential clash with traditional mainstream Christianity – particularly in its interpretation of concepts such as creation, original sin, reincarnation and exorcism, among others. The article also argues that as a movement that is backed by some Roman Catholic priests and nuns, the factors favouring the expansion of Super Roma are more significant than the factors that threaten its existence.

**Keywords:** mainstream Christianity, Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, Super Roma theology

## INTRODUCTION

The Super Roma ecumenical movement has been in operation since 1970.<sup>2</sup> For the past four decades, the movement that employs the ‘stay and reform from within’ strategy has managed to carve out its own identity and exercise its influence, particularly in its theology. This article has three main tasks. The article shall first explore the theology of Super Roma. Secondly, it shall examine the extent to which the same theology has affected the traditional Christian theology. Lastly, the article shall examine the prospects of the Super Roma movement and the problems facing it in Zimbabwe. The ideas formulated in this article are in large part the distillate of the author’s current thesis on the impact of Super Roma on the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. Before we zero in on Super Roma theology, it is critical to first briefly look at the background of circumstances that often surround the birth of religious movements in Africa in order to introduce ourselves to the content of Super Roma theology.

## THE BIRTH OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

Daneel (1987) traces the general circumstances that surround the birth of independent religious movements on the African continent. In his observations, he underlines the fact that the birth of most independent movements is characterised by manifestations of hierophanies.<sup>3</sup> For Eliade (1957), in most extraordinary experiences with the hierophany, there is a feeling of terror before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery (*mysterium tremendum*), the majesty (*maiestas*), that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power. Generally, there is a religious fear before the fascinating mystery (*mysterium fascinans*) in which perfect fullness of being flows. The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from ‘natural’ realities.

Daneel (1987) records that as early as 1700, Donna Beatrice of Congo, formally known as Kimpa Vita, claimed that the spirit of Saint Anthony had taken possession of her and she was later commissioned to form a religious movement. Similarly, during the 1918 flu epidemic, Simon Kimbangu heard a voice calling him one night to a special kind of service. The same voice subsequently called for the formation of the Simon Kimbangu Church in Zaire.

Daneel (1987) further underlines that similar dramatic experiences with the supernatural were also common with those who championed some new religious movements in Zimbabwe. Dreams and visions played a critical role in the commissioning of prophets such as Johane Marange, Nehemiah Mutendi and Sengwayo of the African Congregational Church among many other self-styled prophets. Both Johane and Mutendi dreamt of wheat sheaves which had greater merit than other sheaves. Johane also dreamt about himself as a Moses figure who led his

people through fire and enemy countries by means of his sacred rod. Sengwayo, the leader of the African Congregational Church (*Chibarirwe*) also attested to the voice of God having led him to establish his own church.

Circumstances that surround the birth of Super Roma are in no way different from the above. On 12 June 1970, Father Augustine Urayai (Catholic-priest-cum exorcist) claims to have communicated with the archangel Cherubim<sup>4</sup> during one of his many healing sessions at Mutero Mission in the District of Gutu.<sup>5</sup> It was on that particular occasion where he was commissioned to pioneer the formation of an inter-denominational movement that would celebrate the Lord's Supper together, a movement bound by a common theology. His encounter with the hierophany then became a watershed in his entire priestly ministry, as he continuously encountered many more angels thereafter who came to communicate with members of his group through mediums.<sup>6</sup> The movement often referred to these angels as *matenga*. Most importantly, Father Urayai's regular interaction with *matenga* did not just alter his metaphysical thought and awaken him from the slumber of dogmatic patriotism—*matenga* also became the source of the movement's moral code. As underlined by Cox (1992: 110), 'in every religion, the "ought" is an imperative because its authority is traced back to the hierophany. To disobey the moral imperative is to disrupt life, to counter the ordering effect of the original sacred event.' To this effect, as noted by Masvosva (2007), from the moment of its foundation, apart from being tipped by *matenga* to be role models and live according to the Golden Rule (Matthew 7: 12), the group was warned to desist from traditional practices such as beer-drinking, polygamy, veneration of ancestors, consulting traditional practitioners such as *n'angas* and the use of contraceptives, among others.

Not only were *matenga* the source of Super Roma theology, Masvosva (2007) highlights that they also became the source and warehouse of Super Roma's 'new' theology. Thus, the theology of Super Roma does not bear the marks of Father Urayai's genius but ostensibly the result of *matengas'* direct recitation.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst on one hand a certain section of the Zimbabwe Christian community views Super Roma as an instrument of unity, essentially based on the missionary mandate and principles of ecumenism, on the other, the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (2006), views the same phenomenon as an instrument of division, targeting and practically misleading Christians in Zimbabwe. Kugwa (2005: 3) also viewed Super Roma as 'not only controversial and suspicious but also strange and satanic'. In view of such wide perspectives, there is therefore a glaring need to carry out a penetrative examination of Super Roma theology.

## SUPER ROMA THEOLOGY

This section sets out to examine Super Roma theology. Urayai (1994) underlines that Super Roma theology, largely derived from *matenga*, is unique and considered sacrosanct because it derives or takes its origin from *matenga*. For more than four decades, the theology has remained the movement's best-kept secret. Some of the movement's key theological concepts that require attention include: Belief in the spiritual creation of all things, in a direct link between the fallen angels and humanity, in man as a retrievable ruin, in a spiritual Paradise and the earth as God's testing ground for the fallen angels, in Christ as the eraser of the original sin, in individual judgement, in reincarnation, in the power of high *od*<sup>8</sup> in effective healing and in the theology of recycling of evil spirits.

### Belief in the spiritual creation of all things

Belief in the spiritual creation of all things in heaven by the Almighty Creator is a basic and fundamental doctrine within the Super Roma movement (Chigumbu, Interview 10 October 2012). It is one of Super Roma's articles of faith. In fact, for Super Roma, it is the genesis of all God's creative work. The spiritual creation of all things includes, among other things, the creation of God's seven archangels and a host of other angels, all created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) outside of time, with a special gift of free will (Ecclesiasties 15:14). Lucifer (now Satan) was God's first created archangel who witnessed the calling into being and induction of the remaining six. Whilst the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) teaches that there are only three archangels, namely, Gabriel, Raphael and Michael, for Super Roma, names like Christ, Cherubim, Michael, Gabriel, Seraphim and Raphael complete the list of the seven created archangels. Urayai (1994) teaches that from the beginning of creation, each of the seven was allotted a particular task. By ranking first in the order of creation, Lucifer was the leader and was deputised by Christ. To Cherubim was allotted the task of judging, Michael was the commander of the celestial army and Gabriel was God's messenger. Raphael and Seraphim were allotted tasks of healing and planning respectively. Greber (1970) also confirms the same number of archangels and responsibilities.

Super Roma teaches that with the exception of Christ and Lucifer, the responsibilities of the other five archangels have not changed to date. Following Lucifer's sin of apostasy and subsequent expulsion out of heaven with a third<sup>9</sup> of God's created angels (Rv 12:4), the position of King was then conferred upon Christ who had been Lucifer's junior and deputy for a period shrouded in the mists of time (Urayai 1994). These changes were effected long before the events described in any of the accounts of the earth's creation. Thus, whilst traditional Christian theology had mystified the relationship between Father, Son (Christ) and Spirit(s) (angels), Super Roma demystified the relationship and claims that the three are not at all

equal. Son and Spirit(s) were created beings. There was a time when they were not in existence and they are not co-eternal with the Father (God). For that reason, Super Roma does not subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as it is understood in various churches. As noted by Muzuva (Interview 20 October 2013), members of the movement always begin their prayers in the name of the Father (God), the Son (Christ) and the Holy Spirits. By Holy spirits, reference is made to other created angels.

## Belief in the original sin

The Super Roma movement strongly believes in the original sin. However, it differs sharply from traditional Christian theology in the interpretation of the first sin of humanity. Whilst the original sin is commonly linked to Adam and Eve, Super Roma strongly argues that the original sin is not a heritage from the sin of humanity's progenitors (Adam and Eve)<sup>10</sup> or the 'Adamic guilt' as it is popularly known but rather a sin committed by rebellious angels in a world of spirits. It is a sin that was committed and not simply contracted. For Super Roma, the fall of the angels represents not just the original sin and root of all evil (*radix mali*) but the genesis of the problem of evil that both philosophers and theologians have grappled with since time immemorial (Porter 2001). The act of disobedience made the fallen angels a *massa damnata*, meaning 'mass of perdition or condemned crowd'. As a result of the Fall which was an act of disobedience, the angels lost the beatific vision, their sanctifying grace and state of innocence, and thus turned into evil spirits. This act of disobedience is viewed as the first and universal transgression in which all humanity participated, otherwise it would be unjust for God to hold humanity responsible for an act committed before their birth. Urayai (1994) simply refers to the fall of angels as 'the First Fall'.<sup>11</sup>

For Super Roma, there is a direct link between the fallen angels and humanity. The movement stipulates that, humans essentially incarnations of the same fallen angels now participating in God's plan to effect their gradual ascent and restoration through cycles of birth and rebirth. To this effect, the Super Roma movement teaches that God is literally the 'Father of spirits' (Heb 12:9). Man as a spirit pre-existed in heaven, was begotten and born of heavenly spiritual parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth or testing ground in a temporal body after the Fall. Thus, death and corruptibility did not originate with God. He could not be the author of evil. Death is the natural result of turning away from God, the result of the sin of apostasy. The Genesis account, therefore, is viewed by Super Roma as comparatively brief, simple and a much later development.

## Belief in man as a retrievable ruin

Super Roma argues that if even finite human beings do not punish their children eternally, it then logically follows that it is against the nature of an all-loving God to condemn his children to perpetual suffering. For this reason, Mupure (Interview 27 July 2014) believes in man as a retrievable ruin – by man, reference is made to fallen angels, including Lucifer. It is a common belief and teaching within the Super Roma movement that at the end of time, God shall restore all things as they were at the beginning of creation before the fall of angels. The process of making the return of all the ‘lost sheep’ (Lk 15:4-7) or fallen angels, including Lucifer himself (Rv 12:7-12) a reality at the end of time is referred to as the Great Project within Super Roma circles (Masvosva 2007). However, only God knows what shall become of hell and the material universe when the time of *apocatastasis* (restoration) comes.

## Belief in a spiritual paradise

Belief in a spiritual paradise is one of the central teachings within the Super Roma movement. Porter (2001) stipulates that since it is against the nature of an all-loving, all-powerful and all-righteous God to punish his children eternally, Super Roma believes that God conceived a plan that would give the fallen angels a chance to return to heaven. The plan was to create a spiritual paradise. Contrary to the belief in an earthly paradise, the one referred to by Super Roma was some kind of neutral zone or sphere where Adam and Eve, together with countless other apostate angels, underwent a period of testing before they could be re-admitted to heaven (Urayai 1994). Adam and Eve only championed God’s plan in paradise.

Urayai (1994) further highlights that Adam and Eve did not remain faithful to God in the spiritual paradise and neither were their subordinates (fallen angels). Disguised as a snake, Lucifer followed and deceived them for the second time. This led to ‘the Second Fall’ and the end of God’s first plan to retrieve the fallen angels. Had the apostate angels paid heed to God’s prohibition<sup>12</sup> in the spiritual paradise, Super Roma believes that, it would probably have been their shortest way back to heaven. Logically, it would then follow that the material world would not have been created. They would not have had to become human. Had they remained faithful to God, they would have passed God’s test of obedience without bodily death.

## Belief in earth as God’s testing ground

A number of Super Roma lessons give great prominence to the importance of the material world as God’s final testing ground for the fallen angels, following a rather abortive first plan in paradise. Unlike in heaven and paradise where fallen angels had existed in spiritual form, in the material sphere, the testing ground, they were to incarnate and take on flesh. Temporarily, they were doomed to perish. The physical

body, which Urayai (1994) often referred to as a clothing for worksmen,<sup>13</sup> (*hovhorosi*) would perish at death whilst the spirit that pre-existed in heaven would go back to heaven to face judgement. Unlike in heaven where everything that God created was real and permanent, like in Plato's (428–348 B.C.E.) world of forms, the world of the immaterial, everything that He created on earth (including the physical body) is subject to change, transformation and annihilation.

Like in the spiritual paradise, Adam and Eve were tasked by God to again champion his plan on the material planet. Super Roma teaches that from the point of the emergence of Adam and Eve on the temporal testing ground, primordial mankind descended from this first pair of human beings, temporarily using a human body as a vehicle for material existence. Spirits are clothed in a perishable body in order to fulfill certain tasks on earth, thereby ensuring their purification. However, upon their incarnation, spirits lose all recollection of their past lives, making it very difficult to know their origin, destiny or even their tasks. Chief among the tasks they are meant to fulfill is the love of God and neighbour. However, few of the intended tasks are being fulfilled, as Lucifer is determined to sabotage God's most inflexible plan.

From heaven, angels always descend on earth to inspire people to do the will of God the glory of heaven and to perform many other functions such as encouraging man to do pious and righteous deeds. These angels, as underlined by Mandivenga (1983) are always kind and honourable towards man. Whilst some come as guardian angels, others come to communicate with human beings through mediums, as in the case of Super Roma. In matters of faith and morals, Super Roma believes that only God's angels are without error. No human being, therefore is without error or infallible. Hence, the Roman Pontiff is also fallible. Within Super Roma circles, authoritative papal decisions on doctrinal matters are not viewed as infallible. The Pope's influence on people's lives is viewed as limited and narrow. To this effect, Super Roma does not believe in papal infallibility, since he is also mortal and liable to error like any human being.

Whilst angels are sent to protect, shepherd and speak through human mediums, also operating from hell comes the Devil and his warriors to exert tremendous influence on people to live lives of iniquity, idolatry and polytheism, among many other sins. Their visit on earth is meant to win many people's souls back to hell, the place of suffering. Back in time immemorial (Super Roma concurs with Greber [1970]) Lucifer claimed that all spirits that incarnate on earth belonged to him until the surrender of this right had to be forced upon him by a Redeemer.

## Belief in the redemptive act of Christ<sup>14</sup>

Super Roma believes that Christ's main mission on earth was to take away the sin of the world (Is 53:5). For them, the sin of the world here referred to is the original sin, the sin of apostasy.

The coming of Christ that took place about two thousand years ago constituted a critical turning point in the history of mankind (fallen angels). It brought with it a number of advantages for humanity, the one-time deserters of heaven. First, Christ's redemptive death signified the removal of the original sin and a great stride in the accomplishment of God's Great Plan of Salvation. The original sin that the prophet Isaiah alluded to, always kept humanity separate from God. By dying on the cross, Jesus nullified the original sin that separated humanity from God and for that reason, the efficacy of baptism in removing the original sin, as taught by the Roman Catholic Church and many other Christian denominations, falls away. Baptism is, therefore, reduced to a mere method of choosing one's faith that has nothing to do with the washing away of sin, whether original or personal. It also stands to reason that, if Jesus abolished and nullified the original sin, all people born after Christ's redemptive act are born without the original sin. Following the same logic, the argument that the Adamic guilt, together with all of its consequences and penalties is transferred by means of natural heredity to the entire human race, falls away as well. Falling away with the same argument is also the belief that children who die before baptism go to hell, as formally taught by many other denominations, the Roman Catholic in particular. For Super Roma, no child is born with the slightest mark of the original sin, save only for those who incarnated before Jesus' redemptive act.

Christ's redemptive act did not just lead to the removal of the original sin and the final release from bondage of those in Lucifer's prison (limbo) but also condemned Lucifer to the lowest of the seven dark spheres.<sup>15</sup> Within Super Roma circles, the condemnation of Lucifer to the seventh dark sphere of hell was the Final Judgment and there is no other.<sup>16</sup> Apart from condemning Lucifer to the very last level of hell, Jesus also took with him the spirits of the righteous who had waited for his coming for ages in limbo.<sup>17</sup> Above all, the act ushered in a new era of responsibility and accountability whereby Christ bridged the gulf that had long existed between heaven and earth. Because of the victory of Christ on the cross and in the tomb, humanity has been set free and life dawned for all, both in hell and on earth.<sup>18</sup>

For the successful execution of the redemptive act, God raised Christ high and gave him the name which is above all other names, so that all beings, in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus (Phlp 2:9–11). As observed by Greber (1970), Christ successfully acted as God's viceroy, emissary and the promulgator of his teachings. However, Super Roma continues to teach that in spite of the fact that Jesus bridged the gap that had separated heaven and hell for ages, human nature is still inclined to choose evil and to sin, and it is for such personal sins that humanity shall face judgement.

## Belief in individual judgement

Whilst Super Roma believes in pre-existence and the resurrection of the soul, the interdenominational movement does not subscribe to the concept of general



judgement or the sounding of the trumpet on the last day as is believed in some quarters. Instead, Super Roma believes in particular or individual judgement, the judgement that is passed on each person immediately after death.

The movement believes that when a spirit leaves the body, it is expected to pass through four main zones, namely, resting, treatment, judgement and feasting. Shoko (2006) refers to zones as *agedhe*. Of the four *agedhe*, the third is the most decisive. This zone is manned by the judging angels who operate under the leadership of archangel Cherubim, the same archangel that founded the Light of Life movement (Super Roma). Spirits that pass the video test in the judgement zone proceed to the fourth zone where they receive a hero or heroine's welcome, with ululation, dancing and feasting. A banquet is thrown for victors before they proceed to heaven where suitable accommodation is allocated to them. Spirits that fail the video test are condemned to hell for correctional service whilst they await another chance to reincarnate in another body, in another country or continent (Urayai 1994).

### Belief in reincarnation<sup>19</sup>

Reincarnation is one of Super Roma's distinctive features and cardinal articles of faith. In the Super Roma movement, every life is believed to be an examination. Whoever fails to pass the examination must, therefore, try again and again until they pass. Reincarnation is but one of God's many fixed spiritual laws. Thus, there is a common belief within the movement that spirits that fail to make it in the decisive zone will first go to hell, then reincarnate later. Reincarnation therefore nullifies the logic behind spirits re-uniting with their mortal bodies on the day of judgement, like the dramatic resurrection of Ezekiel's dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14).

The concept of reincarnation is also common in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

### Belief in the healing power of *od*

Since its inception in 1970, Super Roma has made an effort to come to grips with the problem of sickness and disease, employing both physical and spiritual means to cure and heal. At the same time the ecumenical movement has developed its own views and insights with regard to the concept of healing in general.

Wood (1996) defines healing simply as the restoration of one to full health who has been ill in body or mind, or both. The key word in this definition is restoration. People who are restored to good health were either physically or psychologically unbalanced, diseased or damaged. With respect to physical damage or disease, Wood (1996) further states that healing often involves the repair or reconstruction of living tissue or organs and the resumption of normal functioning of one's body. In psychological disorders the term healing is normally used to describe an improved

mental state. Thus, when a psychologically unbalanced person is healed, people often say restoration has been effected.

With regard to healing, Super Roma stipulates that for any healing to take place, the fundamental element that is required is *od* (Muzuva, Interview 20 October 2013). God as the fountain of all *od* energy is, therefore, the summit and source of all healing. Thus, He addressed Himself as ‘Yahweh your Healer’ (Ex 15:26; 23:25). As source and summit of all healing, God mostly heals by using parts of his creation as healing instruments. If God is the primary source of all healing, it therefore logically follows that all his instruments are secondary sources (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops 1989: 2). In this case, parts of God’s creation include both medical and faith healing practitioners. When practitioners carry out their healing duties, they do so in the person of Jesus Christ (*in persona Christi*), the premier healer of all times who heals both physical and spiritual disorders.

Like most Christians, Super Roma strongly believes in the power of conventional medicine. Thus, during his heydays as an exorcist, Father Urayai often advised patients in cases that he felt did not require exorcism to first visit their nearest clinics or hospitals for medical attention before coming for exorcism. Super Roma believes that all health delivery systems are God’s instruments to effect healing upon His people. In fact, the movement strongly believes that all conventional medicine contains high *od* from God. Just as Porter (2001) classifies angels into a large number of different groups, according to their areas of responsibility, so does Super Roma. Whilst in the Bible an angel is primarily a messenger (the meaning of the Greek *aggelos*) in the Super Roma movement angels have much more varied and extensive roles. In addition to angels who control natural phenomena, there is also a whole range of celestial beings whose primary function is to dispense high *od* and heal the sick, either directly or indirectly through nurses and doctors. Super Roma refers to these as healing angels and they operate under the leadership of the archangel Raphael (Tob 12:15), one of God’s seven archangels. Healing angels always direct medical practitioners in their research and clinical operations (Muzuva 2013). Thus, in the light of this, Super Roma encourages its youths to train as doctors and nurses for purposes of participating in God’s economy of salvation through working as God’s healing instruments.

In addition to a strong belief in conventional medicine, Ticharwa (Interview 12 March 2014) underlines that Super Roma mixes conventional medicine with the use of plants for medicinal purposes. As part of God’s creation, all plants are believed to be therapeutic and as such are to be used as alternative medicines. Orthodox and alternative medicines are said to be complementary. Each herbal prescription is, therefore, a cocktail of many substances, usually tailored to the individual patient. Any herb or plant part is used for its scent, flavor, or therapeutic properties. Within the Super Roma movement, for more than three decades (1970–2003), it has been the responsibility of *matenga* to prescribe the right herb to patients in need of such.

Most group members are herbal specialists. Just as conventional medicine possesses healing *od*, so does botanical or herbal medicine. Super Roma members are, therefore, encouraged not just to use herbal medicine but also to create small herb gardens at their homes. Apart from it being cheap, such a practice would also save them from the temptation of engaging African traditional medical practitioners for healing services. Thus, Super Roma discourages its members from seeking herbal medication from quarters they are not in league with. Herbs from *n'angas*, medicine men and women, diviners and seers, among others, in spite of them also being therapeutic by nature, are believed to have low *od* from the devil simply because they would have passed through the 'dirty' hands of Satan's agents (Urayai 1994).

Whilst Super Roma believes that most illnesses may be healed through either conventional medicine or the use of herbs, save for some physically or psychologically unbalanced conditions, the movement is aware that some illnesses may require other forms of healing such as exorcism.

## Theology of exorcism

For more than four decades, exorcism has been and continues to be one of Super Roma's critical recruitment techniques. Just as *od* is critical in effecting healing in conventional medicine, so Super Roma teaches that *od* is also of universal and timeless importance in carrying out any form of exorcism. God, as the source of *od*, is the possessor of ultimate power to drive out evil spirits. Super Roma believes that humanity fully possesses the ultimate weapon against the inroads of Satan.

Even though God is said to be the ultimate healer, Super Roma teaches that the moral life of the exorcist plays a critical role. The Roman Catholic governing code, the Code of Canon Law (1983) is also concerned about the piety, knowledge and integrity of the life of the priest exorcist. For Super Roma a good moral life helps exorcists accumulate as much high *od* as possible, which enables them to properly and effectively dispense their spiritual duties. With *od* everything good is possible. The exorcists can heal or protect themselves the same way Job was protected by a spiritual wall or armor around him, his house and all his domain (Job 1:10). With a spiritual wall around the exorcists, they can also heal and protect others with their spiritual magnetic field in a similar manner that Peter's shadow healed those tormented by evil spirits (Acts 5:15). With enough *od*, the exorcist can also perform distant healings, the same way Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:22) and many others. Just as healing angels always direct the operations of medical practitioners, so Super Roma teaches that angels under the leadership of the archangel Michael<sup>20</sup> are responsible for directing and assisting exorcists (Muzuva 2013).

Prayer and fasting are said to be critical in the life of the exorcists especially when they are preparing for a healing session. Jesus also emphasised the need to fast and pray (Mk 9:29). Through regular periods of seclusion, meditation and prayer,

good conduct, balanced behaviour and good character, exorcists accumulate the required *od*. For the same reason Jesus often went out into the mountains and valleys to pray and ask God for such power (Mt 14:23, Lk 6:12).

Unlike the Code of Canon Law (1983: 1173) that teaches that no one may lawfully exorcise the possessed without the special and express permission of the bishop, Super Roma sees no reason to receive permission from any human power since the movement does not resort under any bishop. Unlike the same Code (1983: 1173) that stipulates that permission to exorcise must be granted by the bishop only to a priest who is endowed with piety, knowledge and integrity of life, exorcism in Super Roma is not reserved for priests. Lay people (both men and women) are among the group of exorcists (*vanamatiri*) specially selected and equipped by *matenga* to wrestle with demons. Super Roma currently has five female exorcists (Muzuva 2013).

Perhaps the most controversial aspect in Super Roma's theology of exorcism is the idea of recycling of souls and re-directing repentant evil spirits to heaven or paradise. Super Roma teaches that when an evil spirit (in the victim) is either forced or persuaded by the exorcist to repent and make a perfect act of contrition, the spirit is then taken by God's planning angels. Consequently, another life is later planned for the same spirit. Having failed to repent or make a perfect act of contrition, the evil spirit wanders around and may later pounce on the same victim or another with redoubled energy especially when the victim lapses in prayer. In spite of Super Roma's controversial theology of recycling of souls, Shoko (2006) underlines that the movement's healing ministry is essentially based on Christian orthodox and missiological ideology, namely, 'fulfillment of the Good News' to heal.

## PROSPECTS OF SUPER ROMA

As a new religious movement that employs a very diplomatic and highly sophisticated 'stay and reform from within' strategy, a number of factors that are individually spelt out below are likely to advance Super Roma's success.

### Spiritism

Spiritism is one obvious factor that is likely to attract many believers to Super Roma. Because of the many challenges that affect today's Christians, any religion or movement that has seers or prophets who get in touch with the spirit world directly or indirectly stands a chance of attracting a large following. Since spiritism is one common characteristic of all African traditional religions (ATRs), by claiming to offer practical answers to fundamental human questions through mediums, a shift from ATR to Super Roma may not be too difficult or alien to African Christians.

## Divine founder

A divine founder is one factor closely associated with spiritism. Whilst Father Urayai may only be taken as Super Roma's human founder, the fact that Super Roma claims to have been founded by one of God's archangels may be an additional attraction on the part of the movement, because most Christians want to be associated with such hierophanies. Encounters that involve hierophanies are thus often accepted without question. In addition, theological and moral reforms also associated with the same hierophanies are often taken as sacrosanct.

## Reform strategy

The internal subversion or camouflaged reform method that Super Roma is currently using is cherished by many. Whilst most, (if not all) new religious movements have been employing the strategy of moving out of mainstream denominations in order to reform, the method has been an instrument of division for many years, as reflected by the number of new religious movements and independent churches. Whilst there are a number of reform-minded Christians in mainstream Christianity, not all of them are bold enough to come into the open. The majority are shy about openly taking sides. Hence, by not standing as a separate entity and also referring to its teachings simply as 'extra-spiritual lessons', Super Roma's undercover reform method is described by Mupure (Interview 27 July 2014) as user friendly.

## Exorcism

Just as Jesus became so popular with his healing ministry, new religious movements that use exorcism as a recruitment technique have made an impact on the lives of many Christians. Following the same logic, the fact that Super Roma has read the signs of the times and taken the ministry of exorcism seriously means that the movement shall continue to provide much needed assistance in the ministry of healing and exorcism.

## Strict morals

Comby (1984) underscores that when Christianity was born during the Roman Empire, there was a general decline of morals and people were in search of new self-understanding. With its strict morals, Christianity won the hearts of many. Similarly, with its strict prohibitions against and attitudes towards practices such as traditional dancing, smoking, beer drinking, veneration of ancestors and consulting *n'angas*, Super Roma may impact positively upon some conservatives, particularly those who have been calling for reforms in such areas. With its strict morals, Super Roma has since managed to make an impact on people of all walks of life. Teachers, medical

doctors, nurses, intellectuals, commercial farmers, bankers, vendors, drivers, those who cross borders, politicians and the clergy<sup>21</sup> are among those who have joined the new religious movement. Mupure (Interview 27 July 2014) argues that Super Roma would not have recruited from amongst Zimbabwe's intellectuals if the movement had not successfully presented itself as an alternative to the mainstream denominations by claiming to offer its members concrete and clear answers to fundamental questions of life.

## Ecumenism

The ecumenical nature and composition of Super Roma are also likely to favour its further success. Super Roma ecumenism is unique in the sense that instead of coming from above, it has come from below. It has been expected that key ecclesiastical authorities such as popes and bishops shall be key drivers of ecumenism, particularly regarding the aspect of the common sharing of the Eucharist. However, in the case of Super Roma, the highest goal of ecumenism, namely, the sharing of the Eucharist among all denominations, has been driven and championed from below. Thus, whilst the reformation by Martin Luther (1484–1546) not only shattered the unity and common foundation of faith but also divided religious thought into denominational thought, Super Roma's idea of ecumenism aims at drawing Christians together and retaining the unity of all Christians. It is, therefore, a wake-up call for the drivers of ecumenism who are still dragging their feet when it comes to making a breakthrough in ecumenism, and that breakthrough is the common celebration of the Eucharist. Because of its ecumenical nature, Chagwiza (Interview 15 October 2010) has referred to Super Roma as 'the super rainbow movement'.

## Common theology

Common theology within the Super Roma movement contributes to denominational unity. Christianity has often been accused of being a divisive phenomenon. Worse still, it was also accused of failing to offer some logical and conclusive answers with regard to fundamental questions concerning the afterlife. Key among areas where Christianity was accused of failing to give logical explanation include the Genesis creation account(s), the original sin that is closely connected to it and the holy Trinity (relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit). With a single, apparently logical and demystified theology that appears to answer some fundamental questions of human existence, Super Roma has the potential of winning the hearts of both Christians and non-Christians.

## Priests and nuns

The availability of priests and nuns within the Super Roma movement makes the movement self-reliant and self-ministering. Before the suspension of priests from the Diocese of Masvingo, the Super Roma movement used to rely on visiting priests but the practice stopped in 2005 when the same priests became full-time pastors for the Super Roma movement. Apart from celebrating the Lord's Supper every month, they also engage in family visits, pray for the sick and perform exorcism, thereby stabilising the movement. The fact that the same priests are Catholic trained makes them equally competent pastoral workers and contemporary theologians. The same is true of former Roman Catholic sisters who are also geared for pastoral work, equally competent and ready to train new sisters for the Light of Life Christian Group. The probability of the same priests and sisters to recruit from their former denomination is, therefore, very high.

## FACTORS LIKELY TO IMPEDE SUPER ROMA DEVELOPMENT

In spite of the above promising strides or factors likely to favour the advancement of Super Roma, there are also factors that are likely to make it sink into oblivion or slow down its progress.

### Unorthodox theology

Unorthodox theology is one key aspect that is likely to slow down Super Roma's progress in Zimbabwe. A cursory examination of the movement's key articles of faith, from its interpretation of a planned spiritual creation of all things, to papal fallibility, makes it plain that Super Roma theology reflects a theology breaking away from traditional Christian theology. In fact it is representative of the unofficial and unorthodox theology that has remained a peripheral theology for centuries. For that reason, the movement has been accused of trying to resuscitate a dead or dying theology.

Whilst the Latter Day Saints<sup>22</sup> also believe in the spiritual creation of all things, they have understood such biblical passages as Jeremiah 1:4-5 to refer to individual pre-existence,<sup>23</sup> with implications for subsequent earthly existence. In support of this, it may be pointed out that various Christians and Christian groups in the early Christian centuries taught the same doctrine (cf. Origen, *De principiis* 1:7; 2:8; 4:1), and that it is also to be found in Jewish belief of the same period, including Philo (*De mutatione nominum* 39; *De opificio mundi* 51; *De cherubim* 32); in some apocryphal writings (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20; 15:3); and among the Essenes (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.11, as well as in the Jewish Talmud and Midrash.<sup>24</sup> Related authoritative information also appears in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine

and Covenants, and the Latter Day Saints' temple ceremony. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994, <article?>), however, rejects the doctrine of pre-existence. The Catholic Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God. It is not produced by parents and it will be re-united with the body at the final resurrection. However, like Super Roma, the Roman Catholic Church strongly believes that the soul is immortal.

As early as the first century, Origen (ca. 185-215) championed the theory of the Fall of angels and their subsequent imprisonment in bodies of clay. He also taught that at the end of time there will be a restoration of all things. The danger of resuscitating Origen's ideas is that his theology was condemned by the Church and branded as heretic in the East. In the West, his theology was overshadowed by that of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Thus, by walking in his footsteps, Super Roma may be labeled Origenistic. By asserting that Jesus is not God, the movement sounds more Arian and therefore Protestant according to Catholic terminology. Arian had also taught that Jesus is not God but God's Son. There was a time when he was not in existence. In the light of such a theology that seriously contradicts traditional Christian theology, Super Roma may struggle to win converts from amongst conservative Christians, let alone priests and bishops.

## Attitude toward African traditional practices

Zvarevashe (2004) observes that early missionaries who first came to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) had a negative attitude towards the African traditional religion and practice. Just as these white missionaries condemned African traditional practices out right, so Super Roma is also not comfortable with certain African traditional practices. These include: ancestor veneration, consulting traditional practitioners, bringing home ceremony (*kurova guva*), polygamy, beer drinking and smoking among others. Sibanda (1999) underlines that Super Roma, particularly Father Urayai, views ancestral spirits as deceptive and coming from hell.

Whenever and wherever missionaries attempted to uproot some African traditional practices, Kapito (1982) noted that there has always been resistance. Many Catholics viewed the prohibitions by missionaries as a negation of 'the very essence of the Shona understanding of the spiritual world' (Kumbirai 1977). For Kapito, (1982) sometimes the resistance took subtle, secretive forms. In order not to lose their religion and practices completely, compromise rituals were, therefore, common among traditional Shona or Ndebele Catholics, an indication that traditional Zimbabweans are one with their religion.

The spirit of resisting anything that may want to topple African traditional religion and spirituality is always in the sub-conscious of many conservative Africans. To this effect, as much as Super Roma may want to do away with African traditional practices, there will always be resistance even from amongst its own members. There are always complains about and reports of members of the same



Super Roma movement who not only double-deal and consult *n'angas* in times of serious sickness, but also go to the extent of drinking and smoking in pubs (Marumisa Interview 12 August 2014).

## Negative publicity

It is often the case that when individuals or corporate bodies suffer damage to their reputation or public image, like when negative news comes out, public opinion of them can also turn negative. As a result, they may find it difficult to restore their public image.

Whilst Super Roma may have good intentions of creating role models within different denominations through their 'stay and reform from within' strategy, the fact that the new religious movement is currently suffering from brand damage may impact negatively on its prospects. In fact, a damaged reputation may scare potential converts or even increase government scrutiny. It would, therefore, require liberals and conscientious objectors who swim against the current to embrace and side with a movement whose image is perpetually under attack.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear that Super Roma is the embodiment of an unofficial and unorthodox theology that has remained peripheral for centuries. For that reason the theology of Super Roma presents a number of areas of potential clashes with traditional mainstream theology as it undermines major articles of the Catholic faith. However, even though Super Roma represents a theology that is breaking away from the past, it still has some residues of traditional Christian theology. The same theology has something to offer to theologians. The new religious movement may hatch some ideas that may be used in the continued study of Christian history and thought. More so, as a movement that employs a sophisticated 'stay and reform from within' strategy, Super Roma has more prospects than problems that are likely to impede its advancement.

## NOTES

1. Super Roma is a nickname. The official name of the movement is The Light of Life Christian Group. The author has opted for the name Super Roma simply because pioneering studies on the same phenomenon (Shoko and Sibanda) have used the same name. Whilst the name Super Roma shall feature more often, at some point, the two names shall be used interchangeably.
2. Within Roman Catholic circles, the Super Roma movement is viewed as a heretical splinter sect, founded by a non-competent ecclesiastical authority and based on

unorthodox theology. It is viewed as anti-Roman Catholic, unconstitutional, targeted at misleading the Zimbabwean Christian community (Zimbabwe Bishops' Conference Pastoral Letter, 7 December 2005).

3. The word hierophany comes from Greek, *hieros*, meaning sacred or holy and (*epi*) *phaneia* meaning appearance. Thus Eliade (1957) defines hierophany simply as the manifestation of the sacred, of God's presence.
4. The angel spoke through Sylvester, Fr. Urayai's catechist.
5. A detailed account of Fr. Urayai's encounter with the hierophany is covered in my other article: 'Re-thinking new religious movements: Super Roma.'
6. Fr. Urayai started a small school of mediums in Zhombe in the late seventies that had a total of 15 trainees, males and females.
7. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Masvingo suspended five of their active priests in 2005 in connection with the Super Roma movement and doctrinal damage.
8. Super Roma teaches that *od* is some supernatural power or energy. Positive or high *od* emanates from God while negative or low *od* emanates from the Devil.
9. Super Roma teaches that two-thirds of God's created angels remained loyal to Christ. One-third of heaven's total population went with Lucifer to Hell for correctional services. There are seven spheres of hell created by Christ before the archangel Michael fought against the dragon (Rv 12:7–10). They are called spheres of darkness.
10. Super Roma teaches that Adam and Eve also participated in the First Fall and therefore were once fallen angels.
11. The Bible also teaches that when angels sinned, God sent them to the under-world and consigned them to the dark under-ground caves to be held there till the day of judgement (2 Pt 2:4).
12. Super Roma teaches that *matenga* did not disclose the nature of God's prohibition in Paradise.
13. In South African English an overall.
14. Contrary to popular opinion that Christ was born on 25 December, Super Roma celebrates Christmas on 4 October. In fact, they celebrate two Christmases every year, the private one on 4 October and the public one on 25 December. They also teach that Jesus was the first born in a family of seven, five boys and two girls, based on Mk 6:1–6.
15. It is a common belief in the Super Roma movement that just as there are seven heavens, there are also seven spheres of hell. Lucifer was first left in the fourth sphere by the archangel Michael after the First Fall.
16. Super Roma also teaches that there is no *Parousia* or second coming of Christ.
17. In Luke, limbo was called Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22). St Peter called it prison (1 Pt 3:19). Those who had waited for Jesus in limbo went into heaven at Jesus' entrance upon his ascension.
18. Super Roma teaches that even evil spirits that are still in hell, loyal to Lucifer's rule, shall one day incarnate as human beings and begin their ascent back to heaven, their original home of bliss.

19. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When the single course of earthly life is completed, we shall not return to another. It is appointed for men to die once. Hence there is no reincarnation (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1013. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P2I.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P2I.HTM) (accessed 23 December 2014).
20. The book of Revelations states that the archangel Michael was responsible for driving the rebel angels out of heaven (Rv 12:7–12).
21. Apart from Roman Catholic priests who have joined Super Roma, there are also Anglican priests, not to mention Anglican sisters.
22. Mormonism is a mixture of Gnostic and ancient pagan teachings about gods, Mohammedan polygamy, Jewish theocracy, rationalist Protestant biblical interpretation and a polity inclined to Catholic practice, with an addition of American nationalism and Anglo-Saxon tenacity. It was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830.
23. Jeremiah 1:4 says, 'The word of YHWH was addressed to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you".'
24. The *Talmud* is composed of the oral law which was in existence by the end of the second century C.E. It is a source from which Jewish law is derived. Midrash is derived from the Hebrew term, *daras*, meaning to search out, investigate or discover a thought not seen on the surface. It has reference then to a didactic or homiletic exposition.

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