

# MORATORIUM TO PRESERVE CULTURES: A CHALLENGE TO THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE?

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## ABSTRACT

This historical study will demonstrate that each age constructs an image of Jesus out of the cultural hopes, aspirations, biblical and doctrinal interfaces that make Christ accessible and relevant. From the earliest times, the missionaries and the church were of the opinion that Africans had no religion and culture. Any religious practice which they came across among the Africans was regarded as heathen practice which had to be eradicated. While references to other Pentecostal denominations will be made, this paper will focus on the first Pentecostal church in Zimbabwe, namely the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). Scholars are not agreed on the origins of Pentecostalism. However, there is a general consensus among scholars that the movement originated around 1906 and was first given national and international impetus at Azusa Street in North America. William J. Seymour's Azusa Street revival formed the most prominent and significant centre of Pentecostalism, which was predominantly black and had its leadership rooted in the African culture of the nineteenth century. Despite this cultural link, when Pentecostalism arrived in Zimbabwe from 1915 onwards, it disregarded African culture. It must be noted that in preaching the gospel message, missionaries have not been entirely without fault. This has resulted in many charging missionaries with destroying indigenous cultures and helping to exploit native populations for the benefit of the West. The main challenge is not that missionaries are changing cultures, but that they are failing to adapt the Christocentric gospel to different cultures. Often the gospel has been transported garbed in the paraphernalia of Western culture. This paper will argue that there is a need for Pentecostal churches to embrace good cultural practices in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Moratorium; culture; Pentecostal; Azusa Street revival; Christocentric; missiological; Zimbabwe; Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM)

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## INTRODUCTION

Every time I try to sit down with my children and teach them traditional values they are quick to dismiss me saying their church teaching does not say so. They even disobey me telling me openly that they have the blessing from the church. (Angela Matambo, quoted in *News Day* 04-01-15).

In the same article, Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs president, Fortune Charumbira, said Pentecostal churches were disobeying cultural practices. Avoidance of cultural practices and ancestral worship were taught as signs of genuine Christianity. Missionaries bequeathed anti-African culture theology that left a legacy of expensive scars on the souls of the people. This theology is perpetuated by many Pentecostals to this day. It encouraged a parasite mentality and submissive accommodation with Western ethos and values. It must be noted that Christianity emerged from a conflux of traditions with the encounter between the streams of the Jewish tradition and the diverse stream of Hellenistic culture, which had been very important for the development of attitudes. In addition, before coming to Africa, Christianity was immensely influenced by Western culture. Pentecostals in Zimbabwe placed great emphasis on the salvation of the soul, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, and living a holy life at the expense of cultural accommodation. This call for Pentecostals to stop their anti-cultural activities is dividing missionaries and Christians in Zimbabwe, as will be shown in this article. According to Wakatama (1976, 9), “no subject is as controversial and emotion-packed in the missionary movement as the suggestion that missionaries stop their activities.” This moratorium has caused controversy in Pentecostal churches and is best demonstrated by home-grown breakaway movements such as Mugodhi Church, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, United Family International Church, Apostolic Flame Mission, and Heartfelt International Ministries, which have gone a long way to accommodate Zimbabwean cultural values. Most of the breakaway churches have become major Pentecostal churches on the Zimbabwean religious landscape.

This topic is missiological. It is a critical reflection on matters pertaining to the cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith. Every perspective on the complex missiological task has a measure of legitimacy—in the sense that it must be heard—we seek to guard our historical identity as scholars of religion. As missiologists, we are fully committed to the pursuit of all validities related to the Christian mission. This includes the preservation of culture. Admittedly, God cannot be obeyed perfectly, however, the essence of his nature and the mission of his church can be known through his self-revelation enshrined in the Bible. The biblical revelation brings enlargement of heart and mind through exposure to the relevant demands arising from the many diverse cultural situations in which the mission of the church finds itself in Zimbabwe today. The purpose of this article is to explain selected aspects of that interaction, and to show how they would be useful for understanding other situations in the relationship between religion and culture.

## CULTURE DEFINED

Culture is a coherent and self-contained system of values, symbols, activities and products of a given social group which distinguish it from other similar groups (Zigomo 1998, 4). It involves such things as people's language, dress, conduct or behaviour, customs and traditions. Culture can be described as that which holds a community together, giving a common framework of meaning. It is preserved in language, thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes, symbols and presuppositions, and is celebrated in art, music and other activities. Therefore, culture can be defined as all learned behaviour which is socially acquired, that is the material and non-material traits which are passed on from one generation to another. It must be admitted that Zimbabwe is a multicultural society made up of many ethnic groups such as Ndebele, Zezuru, Venda, Ndau, Kalanga, Karanga, Tonga, Shangani, Sotho, Korekore, Manyika, among others; and culture in these ethnic groups is not necessarily similar. This article will focus mainly on the general understanding of culture in Zimbabwe as a whole.

## THREE MODELS ON CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

There are three important schools of thought which describe the encounter between Christianity and culture. The researcher is also going to look at the theological strand of the AFM in view of the position in which they place culture. The theological positions under discussion are exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. These three categories were proposed by Paul Knitter in 2004. Each of them will be briefly examined here.

### The Replacement Model/Exclusivism (Evangelical/Pentecostal)

Most Protestant Evangelicals prefer the exclusivist paradigm because of their *salvific pessimism* to the unevangelised. Thus a fundamentalist, inerrantist, infallibility belief in the Bible is employed. The key biblical text in the Replacement Model/Exclusivism (Evangelical/Pentecostal) is that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life." (John 14:6). Exclusivists vaunt that a Christian has nothing to learn from other cultures and religions. Exclusivism is the theological position that holds to the finality of the Christian faith in Christ. The finality of Christ means that there is no salvation in non-Christian religions and cultures. In other words, Christianity is a full package and there should be no cultural additions from the receiving community. Christianity is the only true religion and it totally replaces all others including the culture therein. Those who die without Christ will perish eternally. Exclusivists regard all other cultures as false and invalid since the Christian revelation is accepted as true. Exclusivists hold that salvation is through Christ alone. It is through a personal experience of commitment to Christ that one receives assurance of salvation and not cultural invasion. Put differently, for most missionaries, Western culture is normative and others must be just passive recipients of the gospel.

Inclusivists claim that Cyprian's famous slogan that "outside the church, there is no salvation" (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) has influenced the spirit of exclusivism (Knitter 2004, 37). The exclusivist begins with the Bible as the source of all knowledge about spirituality and salvation. The Bible is the criterion of all religious truth. The Bible relates the history of redemption, gives a foundation to personal faith, is a guidebook of the Christian community, and tells us of the future of the world that links up all history, life, and service with meaning and purpose. The role of culture is undermined. The sections below will demonstrate that the AFM belongs to this school of thought.

Exclusivists should realise that there is always the reality of that conversation or mutual interaction of the Jesus story, the biblical story, the church's story and the cultural story that continually witness to the enduring power of this particular narrative. It is an attempt to tread a fine line between cultural accommodation and cultural insensitivity.

### The Mutuality Model/Pluralism Model (Liberal Protestants)

Paul Knitter named the second model "The Mutuality Model." In this model the occidental and the oriental experiences intertwine into a collaborative attempt to explain the mystical reality (Knitter 1985, 145–167; 2004, 109–148). Liberal Protestants confess that Jesus Christ alone is Saviour and Lord and that salvation is possible through faith in him; but they acknowledge that there is validity in other religions and cultures. They recognise the presence of some knowledge of God in other cultures. Their maxim is: "Revelation, Yes; Salvation, No." The key question is how far they go in incorporating cultural practices? Christians in this model are allowed to shop from African culture. They source knowledge from things God created.

Proponents of this view do not necessarily look for biblical support. They reckon that Jesus respected Jewish culture and the same could be said of the greatest missionary ever, St Paul. Pluralism is basically the belief that the world religions are true and equally valid in their communication of the truth about God, the world, and salvation.

The key aim is to foster tolerance among the religions and cultures. To an evangelical Christian, however, such pluralism only means the abolition of *kerygmatic* mission and therefore, is sinful. It is capitulation to heathenism and the created world. Evangelism is diluted and it compromises the unconquerable image of Christ. Culture is very important. For them religion is a reasonable faith.

During the colonial period African Traditional Religion was widely practised, although in secret. The reason for the secret practice was that the missionaries, by the nineteenth century, "whether they were Congregational, Methodist, Anglican and Lutheran or, Catholic, were aggressively opposed to traditional African practices that they considered barbaric and based on superstition" (Mills 1995, 153–172).

## The Fulfilment Model/ Inclusivism (Roman Catholic)

The argument of the Fulfilment theologians is that all religions are of value and that God is within them and working within them (Knitter 2004, 63). Proponents of the Fulfilment Model believe that the dissolution of culture is not a precondition to salvation. All religions find their fulfilment in Christ. They are preparations for Christ. Salvation is possible through other faiths and cultures. The key verse in the Inclusive Model is that the will of God is for the salvation of all men (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus' desire is that all people will come to the knowledge of the truth; knowledge of Christ precedes the reception of saving grace in faith.

Inclusivism is based on two suppositions: the first is that salvation is through Christ alone, the second is that God wills the whole world to be saved. Consequently, God saves people through Christ alone; however, he makes this possible through ways that extend to all humanity.

Inclusivism is the belief that God is present in non-Christian religions and cultures to save the adherents through Christ. According to Knitter (2004: 73), Vatican II attested to this: "Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God." The salvific grace is mediated through general revelation, not just through special revelation. It is God in Christ who reaches out to the individual in his own personal religious history to save him.

## THE COMING OF PENTECOSTALISM TO ZIMBABWE

The Pentecostal/charismatic movement began in the twentieth century with four "speaking in tongues" revivals across the globe: the famous Bethel Bible College revival in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901; the Welsh revival that occurred in 1904–1905; the Azusa Street revival in 1906; and the India revival in 1906. Thereafter, isolated Christian groups were experiencing charismatic phenomena such as speaking in tongues. Of note is the Azusa Street revival in 1906. William J. Seymour, an African-American preacher, travelled to Los Angeles, where his fervent preaching sparked the Azusa Street revival in 1906. The beginning of the widespread Pentecostal movement in the United States is generally considered to have begun with Seymour's Azusa Street revival in the United States of America.

The Azusa Street revival was the first Pentecostal revival to receive significant attention, and many people from around the world became drawn to it. Pentecostal denominations today trace their historical roots to the Azusa Street revival. Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe trace their history to the outreach of the American missionaries. The history of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and its connectedness to the Azusa Street revival is important in this paper. The Azusa Street revival experience is cited in most of the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, for example, the AFM, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA), and Family of God churches. The Pentecostal missionaries

were driven by a missional zeal, leading them to embark on the spread of the gospel to all corners of the world.

John Graham Lake (1870–1935) took the revival to South Africa in 1908. Lake ministered in many cities and towns across South Africa, establishing assemblies and appointing elders and evangelists. South Africa was home to many migrant workers from sub-Saharan countries. One such migrant worker, who took the gospel to Zimbabwe, is Zacharias Manamela. The AFM was born on 25 May 1908 in Doornfontein, Johannesburg by two missionaries, John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmelech.

In Zimbabwe, the church was founded in 1915 in Gwanda through the preaching of Manamela, a convert of the AFM of South Africa. Manamela is one of the unsung heroes of African church history. He was a fiery preacher who made a number of converts in the Gwanda area. Manamela's work was recognised by the mother AFM of South Africa and an experienced missionary, G.J. Booysen, was appointed to supervise the work and seek registration of the church with the colonial government. Another South African missionary called Kobe succeeded Manamela and he also worked under Booysen. Kobe's area of specialisation was divine healing; he was a gifted faith healer who healed many diseases and ailments. The intensity of the manifestation of demons is a key caveat of Pentecostalism. The thrust of his gospel was generally triumphalistic. The invincibility of Jesus was emphasised. This made the AFM very popular with the locals. Because of the practice of faith healing and speaking in tongues, the AFM was negatively viewed by the colonial masters. This explains why the church was mostly restricted to urban centres.

Paul Kruger was a revered missionary in the history of the AFM in Zimbabwe, to the extent that the AFM is sometimes referred to as *Chechi ya Kruger* (the Church of Kruger) to this day. Kruger played a distinctive role in the establishment of the AFM in Zimbabwe. Among his early converts were later luminary leaders of the AFM, such as Mutemererwa, Mashavave, Mugodhi, Chiumbu, Masembe, the five Gwanzura brothers (Petros, Enoch, Ezekiel, John, and Samson), as well as Kupara. These converts became evangelists and leaders of the thriving church during the Rhodesian colonial era. It is evident that the AFM worked hard and won converts by giving them a holistic gospel—social, material and spiritual.

To advance its missionary activities, the AFM bought a farm in Gobatema, south of Gwanda, to set up a “Mission Station” for their work in Zimbabwe. The church also expanded inwards through the work of Luttig in 1918. Luttig established an AFM base in Gatooma, now known as Kadoma in central Zimbabwe. He preached in the town of Kadoma, in townships, in mining compounds and in surrounding villages. Luttig was a pragmatic evangelist. He appreciated the principle of using an African to convert other Africans. He made use of a popular Methodist preacher by the name of John Wesley Dingiswayo, who had been dismissed from the Methodist Church on allegations of sexual immorality. Dingiswayo swayed a number of Methodists to join the AFM and this incensed Methodist leaders who protested to the AFM in Johannesburg; Luttig was relieved of his duties and recalled to South Africa.

The exchanging of the baton, passing on the flame, handing over the wheel, and changing the guard towards concerns for self-determination, devolution, autonomy and indigeneity; nothing of this was easy in the AFM. The ecclesiastical exchange of the baton to Africans generally took place the same period that historic churches were doing the same. Kupara became the first black superintendent of the church in the 1970s and is a highly regarded clergyman in the history of the AFM in Zimbabwe.

The AFM was the first Pentecostal church to arrive in Zimbabwe. Other Pentecostal churches soon followed, but the vast majority are home-grown Zimbabwe-initiated Pentecostal churches. The AFM is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations or churches in Zimbabwe. It has a huge following of people from various parts of the country.

The Bible had to be brought to the Zimbabweans, which meant that a script had to be devised for each native tongue, the people had to be made literate in it, and the Bible translated into it and duly printed. Alternatively, the people had to be made fluent and literate in English and be given the Bible in one of its translations.

Unwittingly, for the most part, the missionaries were preaching an idealised version of their own cultural norms, failing to realise that according to the incarnation of the church, the body of Christ (in the culture of the locals) is a witness to the deepest meaning of the gospel. For the most part the missionaries were preaching an idealised version of their own culture norms—thinking that if locals adopted this path, they would dissolve into the community of Christians.

## ATTACK ON CULTURAL PRACTICES

From the earliest times, the missionaries and the church were of the opinion that Africans had no religion and culture whatsoever. Any religious practices which they came across among the Africans were regarded as heathen practices which had to be eradicated. (Manyoba 1991, 63)

The missionaries and the church underestimated the grip of African culture on the Africans. Undoubtedly, the predominant attitude of the church through Christian history has been to regard the outsider as in error or darkness, beyond the realms of truth and light. Exclusivism, however, has not been confined to the pronouncements of other faiths. The same note was dominant against other cultures. There is need for dialogue that continually rescues the person of Christ from the emasculation and obfuscation of Christian propaganda and control. Like African Independent Churches, new charismatic movements broke away from the AFM which could not hear and feel the yearnings of Africans as they searched after God (Pobee 1998, 2).

### Cultural rites

The AFM is vehemently opposed to traditional customs such as paying homage to ancestral spirits, *kurova Guva* (bringing back the spirit of the dead ceremony), and

*barika* (polygamy), *masungiro* (sanctification of the first born ritual). There is a popular saying in Harare: *ukaona makuva ese asina kugadzirwa ndeevanhu veAFM* (there is no tombstone unveiling for the dead members of the AFM). The church regards such ceremonies as the heathenisation of Christianity. Not surprisingly, many members of the church see this as anti-communitarian and un-African. In the words of Pobe (1998, 26):

Africans have understood the church according to the paradigm of the traditional extended family, wanting to stress the sense of belonging and community. This quest of Africans, deeply rooted in their self-understanding of reality and being ... they have found no satisfaction in the very individualistic understanding of the Christian faith and church.

Cultural ethos embraces the dead as part of the extended family and therefore deserves respect—even after death.

## Questions on the name Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

The name Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe speaks volumes of how the founders regarded their mission. Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe is abbreviated AFM. “Z” for Zimbabwe is missing in the abbreviation unlike other churches such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) and the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ). The name Zimbabwe implies the geographical location, otherwise theologically and doctrinally the church has remained unchanged from its paternal church. Paternalism has choked growth of self-propagating and self-sustaining African churches. Cultural imperialism has continued to this day. African churches do not drink from their own wells; they drink from Western wells. There has been no attempt to Africanise the church. Before independence in 1980 the church was simply called Apostolic Faith Mission. Pentecostal churches of Zimbabwean origin, such as ZAOGA, emphasised their Zimbabwean self-awareness and identity.

## Music and dance

Bakare avows that:

One of the precious gifts God has given to Africans is the gift of singing and dancing. Africans dance on all sorts of occasions to express their inner feelings, whether of joy or of sorrow. While the dancing is spontaneous and voluntary, the drumbeat provides the rhythm that holds the dancers together. (Bakare 1997, 1)

The drum plays an instrumental role in cultural activities and rituals in Africa. It invokes emotions that touch the souls of those who hear its rhythms; it is incomprehensible that the earliest missionaries to the continent forbade its use in church services. Western musical instruments such as the piano or organ replaced the drum. Music in AFM churches has a Western style of worshipping. Listening to and dancing to secular music



is prohibited for members of the AFM—even outside a church setting. Music plays a central role in AFM services. The church has a hymn book and music department which enabled the formation of ZimPraise, responsible for music production and performance in Zimbabwe. Hymnody is regarded as Western heritage.

Unlike African Independent Churches and Pentecostals of Zimbabwean origins, which retained and blended traditional music with Christian themes, the AFM has largely remained stark with Western-minted music. The spontaneous traditional forms of music such as ululation, clapping of hands, whistling, incantations and petitions are discouraged in favour of Western Christian forms of worship. Fusion of traditional music is frowned at and regarded as secular and sin. The idiom of the music is very much Western.

Traditional music forms such as *mbira*, *rumba* and *sungura* are popular in many Zimbabwean churches. The same cannot be said of the AFM. They question the source of inspiration for such music and see this as a return to paganism; and thus sinful. Traditional musical instruments such as *hosho* (rattle), *ngoma* (drum) and *mbira* (lamelaphone) are prohibited in the AFM.

While the so-called historic churches embraced cultural music as protest against colonialism, the AFM was an exception. Embracing traditional music was a reaction to conquest and European domination of all sectors of society. During the colonial period the AFM remained a colonial church; it retained many aspects of its origins.

## MORATORIUM TO PRESERVE CULTURE

The author found that the AFM has witnessed more flight or breakaway movements than any other church in Zimbabwe, largely due to the need to preserve culture. The former Vice President of the AFM, Murefu, admitted that “breakaway movements were a threat to the growth and status of the AFM as the oldest and largest Pentecostal church in Zimbabwe (Murefu Titus, Living Waters Theological Seminary, Harare, 10 June 2016). These movements are mainly a rejection of the Western captivity of the church. There is disconnection between the church and some of the membership of the church. The common denominator of churches that broke away from the AFM, such as Mugodhi Church, Zimbabwe” Assemblies of God, United Family International Church, Apostolic Flame Mission, and Heartfelt International Ministries, is commitment to the adaptation of the gospel to African needs, life-view and life-style. They protested against the Western captivity of the gospel and questioned the African-ness of the church in Zimbabwe. Their accommodation of African culture made these churches very attractive.

The relationship between the AFM and the breakaway movements has been shrouded in polemics. The period soon after the divorce was usually acrimonious and bitter. The Mugodhi Church was the first African initiated church to break away from the AFM, because the church failed to hear and feel the yearnings of Africans as they searched after God.

The emphasis is on the necessity of the church to learn from their past mistakes and listen to the concerns of its members. Clever Mugambiwa, a former member of the AFM, had this to say:

The AFM is a soul saving church. I am a proud son of the AFM. However, the church should do more to include good cultural things such as burial and marriage rites. They must halt the attack of good cultural practices. What is wrong with *sungura* gospel music? We enjoy it a lot in HIM (Heartfelt International Ministries). I don't see much difference in both churches other than expressing ourselves freely worshipping our God. (Interview, 12-06-2016, Harare)

This does not mean the AFM has not done anything to accommodate African culture. To translate means to transform from one state to another. In this setting it is changing from one language to another language. When something is translatable it is capable of fitting into any given condition. It therefore means that when the Bible was translated, it fitted into the language and culture of the target language and culture. In Christian circles, translatability is the processes whereby Christianity and its Scripture are empowered to be accommodated into any language, culture or context. It is through this development that Christianity was accepted in Africa and the Bible became a book for African Christians. Translation into vernacular languages goes hand in hand with interpretation, because the process of translation and interpretation is part of the process of making the biblical message relevant in any given culture, language and context.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the discussion above that missionaries pursued their evangelism marked by steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ and much fruitfulness in the service of church and mission. However, the history of the AFM is one of maligning indigenous cultural norms as sin. This work is a historical indictment of the missionaries, and church's attitude towards African culture. The AFM exhibits rabid intolerance towards certain aspects of indigenous cultural values. One of the greatest obstacles in the encounter between Christianity and culture in Africa, is that locals who had become Christians could not just forget their long-held traditional values because they had become Christians. A moratorium is a rejection of cultural imperialism; the heavy hand of paternalism is still very much with the AFM. Inclusion of culture is a relevant demand arising from the many diversities within our essential unity in Jesus Christ; and from the many diverse culture situations in which their mission is being pressed in our day.

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