

## CHAPTER FOUR: CENTRAL SPIRITUAL TENETS OF AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

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It was noted in chapter one of the study that there is no homogenous definition of African spirituality due to diversities of African cultures and many conceptions thereto. However, what we refer to as African Spirituality in this study's specific intellectual purview, is the traditional Karanga ways of approaching the ultimate-being that pre-dates Christianity. African spirituality signifies the homegrown knowledge system *chivanhu chedu* Our humaneness that includes the worship of God *Musikavanhu*, in designated sacred shrines, veneration of ancestors and using of certain objects and substances for worship (Turaki 2000). We argue in this research that what distinguishes African Spirituality from other spiritualities are these central elements of faith, elements such as; ancestor veneration, reverence of certain sacred places, the use of certain selected objects and following certain rituals and ceremonies.

Orobator raised that, long before missionaries came to Africa, Africans had already developed various ways of expressing and celebrating their experience of God (Orobator 2008:142). To be precise, African spirituality denotes African traditional ways of communicating with the divine that was handed down orally from one generation to another by our forebears. For Nyamiti (1994:68), African spirituality is a phenomenon shaped by Africans' problems, needs and aspirations. This spirituality is expressed in various ways and systems such as symbols, worshipping in certain sacred places, such as pools, rivers, trees, hills and mountains. Wakefield (1983:16) defines spirituality as beliefs and practices which move religious people's lives and help them reach-out towards their ultimate concern. This is a way of life connected to the spiritual world. The study posits that the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu have designated places that are sacred to them which are characterized by the presence of traditional priest and priestesses offering prayers and rituals guided by certain taboos. These places still exist with chiefs as the priests of such places. Example of such places is the *Gonawapotera* pool and *Chivavarira* hill of Chirumhanzu Midlands province in Zimbabwe. These places are characterized by mythical stories, certain practices and taboos that depict the manifestations of the spiritual world

(Mbiti 1970:15). Thus, for Mbiti (1970:16), the spiritual world of Africans is populated with spiritual beings, spirits, and the living-dead all of whom play a major role in Africans' well-being. It is the aim of the study to investigate to what extent JMCN Church inculcated such African worldview to shape its Church spirituality in Zimbabwe.

Rituals are religiously meaningful performances that members of that grouping perform in appropriate circumstances, usually following a standard format (Lugira 2009:74). Thus, rituals are tangible manifestation of a group's belief systems. These rituals are carried out in the events of an individual's birth, naming, initiation, marriage and one's death (Lugira 2009:73). Some rituals are carried out on communal gathering such as harvest and bringing rain ceremonies (Mbiti 1991). Some events are for the family and others are for the nation. These events are religious, not secular. Members express their beliefs in practical terms that include praying, sacrifices and offerings, rituals and observing customs. Festivals are enjoyed when people sing, dance, and eat on an event like rain ceremonies, harvest, birth of a child. These rituals are done in designated places such as mountain, caves and rivers. For Maxwell (1999:198), places like mountains and caves are sacred places because such places are associated with ancestral spirits because they are burial shrines for chiefs. However, it has been noted that not all mountains and caves are revered by Africans, but certain mountains, caves, trees, rivers and pools are central shrines for African Indigenous religions. Mbiti observes that certain forests are sacred places such that no one is allowed to kill a bird that hides in such places (Mbiti 1986:55). It was found out during fieldwork that, according to the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu, mostly mountains and caves where chiefs were buried are usually the ones used for these rituals. In a way, carrying out these rituals at these burial places connects the living living with the living dead (Benyera 2015:13).

These places are not commonly used except for religious purposes. Some are man-made features and others are natural and set apart for religious purposes in their original form. Some shrines are for family and others for the nation e.g. family - grave yard, national graves such as the National Heroes' Acre in Harare. Africans bring sacrifices to sacred places where they pray and offer these sacrifices for accompanied with specific requests and prayers. There are traditional priests who preside over the offertory processes, clean the site,

receive visitors and protect it from misuse. It is such sacred shrines the study investigated to ascertain to what extent Johane Masowe weChishanu yeNyenyedzi embraced them for Church services. The study discusses Church rituals and ceremonies conducted in such places and why such sacred places are selected by African Churches.

Mbiti 1975:19-30) argues that African spirituality is expressed in rituals, objects, symbols, myths and customs. The study advances that there are certain objects that are uniquely African Traditional Religious objects. We have observed that the majority religions have certain objects of faith that are used for worship. Muslims for example, have the Black stone in the ka'ba, a sacred stone believed that one's sins are forgiven as one kisses the stone during Ramadan(Zaehner 1982:179). Christians have objects of faith such as the Pulpit, Crucifix, Temples and Church buildings.

Likewise, ATR has its objects of faith such as wooden plates, religious rods and clay pots. The study notes that metal objects are prohibited in ATR sacred places. Why? I presume it is because they were brought by whites and thus not considered to be very traditional. Thus, one is not allowed to take with him/her a metal object like a watch to a sacred place. Therefore, the study discusses JMCN religious objects in a bid to discover which African traditional objects the Church has inculturated to shape its Church spirituality in Zimbabwe.

In African Indigenous Religions there are certain symbols or rather signs which are decoded to mean manifestations of the divine in African's daily lives. A symbol is defined in the study as an emblem, a sign or gestures decoded to convey a religious meaning which otherwise it does not depict at face value. These symbols vary from one community to the other and also from time to time. It is essential to highlight that the examples given in the study on African religious symbols are drawn from among the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu in Midlands's province of Zimbabwe. For example, in Chirumhanzu, certain movements of human body parts are decoded as non-verbal language of the spirit world sending messages to the human world. For instance, blinking of the lower eye lid depicts joy whilst blinking of an upper eye lid depicts impending sorrow. The appearance of certain animals or reptiles to individuals is a message either of peace or of trouble. For example,

appearing of an African puff adder, *chiva*, or biris arietans *shukukuviri* is a sign of bad omen or the death of a relative. This is how Kaoma posited that some snakes were treated with respect, dignity as the manifestation of the deity among the Shona people of Zimbabwe (Kaoma 2015:61).

Also a sound from an owl *zizi*, (strigiformes) is a sign of the presence of witches. Besides sounds from animals and reptiles' dreams are others means of the living and the dead in African spirituality. For Daneel the dead communicate with the living through dreams (Daneel 1971:99). Among the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu some dreams are taken to mean impending bad happenings while others are taken to mean impending good happenings. For example, a dream while one is walking in a green healthy field for the Karanga of Chirumhanzu is a sign of death in the family while dreaming catching fish means much wealth coming your way. Again, the study shall exhibit how the JMCN Church inculturated these symbols and dreams as sources of their Church theology and spirituality.

According to Eliade, myth relates to a sacred history that is a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time (Eliade 1959:95), whereas a legend is a story or a narrative that describes deeds of divine beings or heroes or supernatural beings (Degh 2001:42). There is a general tendency of interpreting myths as legendary false stories. This is where mythical stories are taken as fictitious stories or fantasy hence no truth in them. However, from a religious perspective, myths are interpreted as symbols conveying truth about human existence or superhuman reality (Eliade 1959:96). They explain the interrelationship between human beings and their environment. They also explain the interrelationship between people and their gods and man and his physical environment. From a religious perspective, a myth therefore, expresses a way of being in the world. It constitutes the history of the acts of supernatural beings that history is regarded as true and sacred. Myths provide models of all important human actions. For Mbiti (1991:29) African knowledge about God is expressed in proverbs, myths and short statements. What is important to note is that for Africans there is no myth about the end of world since time has no end (Mbiti 1990:23). However, every other action tends to have its model rooted in some form of mythology. Myths in the Shona Karanga worldview are stories which depict a meaning of

life. For instance, we grew up hearing stories like do not sit on cross roads you develop boils. Such stories can be taken casually today but then they were stories pregnant with meanings. It was a way to say if you sit on cross road you can be hit by a car. It is a form of poetry that proclaims the truth (Schilancestorbrack 2003:85). Myths awaken and maintain consciousness of another world or a world beyond the current. Myth enables religious people to live in a time beyond the current time (Mbiti 1991:29). Religious people possess a quest for understanding their origins, for example, understanding the various accounts of creation takes religious people to the very origins of the world (Mbiti 1991:30).

For Eliade (1957:96) myths are true stories because they deal with sacred realities of life. We argue therefore, in the study that some myths were used to preserve nature while others were used preserve the sacrality of the sacred places. Over and above some myths were used to teach moral lessons. Therefore, we critically discuss how the JMCN substituted all western Christian ways of teaching Church members advocating for Karanga traditional myths and legends as shall be demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6 JMCN of the study.

The question of how God is approached in African traditional religion is central to the study which postulates that there are certain beliefs and customs that are central in African Indigenous Religion. In ATRs, Africans believe that God, *Musikavanhu* is approached through ancestors in using African prayers performed by the elderly or chosen priests or priestesses to invoke a blessing and benevolence for the individual, the family or for the community at large. Moodley (2008:39) defined ancestors as the spirits of the socially significant deceased members of family, lineage, clan and tribal groupings. Mbiti agrees and refers to the ancestor the living dead. In most cases the living dead act as mediators between their families and God (Mbiti, 1997).

Priests and Priestesses are selected to be guardians of people's welfare and subsequently entrusted with the custody of the sacred places. Accordingly, the indigenes of Chirumhanzu believe that during decisive moments if they go to Chivavarira cave to ask God's favor through their ancestors, God will hear

them. Today, Chivavarira is a burial shrine for chiefs and respectable elders of Chirumhanzu district. This hill is characterized by numerous caves where these men and women are being laid to rest. Also, religious ceremonies are carried out on this hill and at the pool downhill called Gonawapotera. Consequently, the spirituality of the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu is centered on these two sacred shrines. The study posits that sacred places are not approached unceremoniously but there are certain prescribed ways to approach such places. Therefore, this research seeks to discuss to what extent the JMCN Church was influenced by Traditional African beliefs and customs more than it was shaped by Christian ethos.

African values and morals are rooted in indigenous ideas that safeguard and uphold the life of people in relation to others and the world around them (Mbiti 1991:22). They deal with issues of truth, justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, character, praise, blame, integrity (Paris 1995:35). They help people to live harmoniously with one another, settle differences amicably, maintain peace, share their collective assets and relate to the environment in a sustainable manner (Mbiti 1991:20). Values and morals may differ in some societies but most of them are commonly shared. Again, we will assess how JMCN's theology shaped by Karanga cultures *tsika dzevanhu vatema* (morals and values of Karanga Africans). The study posits that African moral values, *tsika*, are part of the scripture for the JMCN Religious movement. Some of the terms they use for example, *vasadare* (the one who presides over) as the study will showcase referring to an elderly person who presides over ceremonies such as marriages and is derived from Karanga term *padare* (where elderly people give counselling to young men in marriage). Even when we look at how women greet male counterparts, one can depict a replay of Karanga values and morals by the Johane Masowe weChishanu yeNyenyedzi Church in Zimbabwe today. Women kneel down or sometimes they burnt down to show that they are not equal to their male counter parts. Findings in the study shows that people from outside JMCN seeing this as human abuse, however, women and girls who are members of this Church are actually existed in doing that. One lady a University student informed us that *Mwari aka chiva tsika dzevanhu vatema*, God admired our African cultures hence our kneeling to greet male counterparts is done ungrudgingly (Madzimai Melissa: 2014).

Death, among Karanga people of Chirumhanzu, has remained mystical such that the burial rituals and ceremonies for many years ago have resisted cross-cultural impacts. The taboos and the order of events characterized traditional Karanga Chirumhanzu funerals are still persevering to this very day. For instance, it is a standard norm in Chirumhanzu that from 12-lpm the corpse is not allowed to be taken out of the house for burial. Therefore, it is against this background that the study interrogates JMCN inculturation of traditional Karanga death and burial rituals to shape its Church spirituality.

According to (Moyo 2013) though sometimes the causes of death appear to be very natural, for the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu, death is always caused by evil spirits or human magic and witchcraft, *kuroiwa*. Even if someone was hit by a car, the Karanga people will still go to a traditional seer to investigate *chadya munhu*, what killed the person. This points out that there is no natural death in the Karanga worldview, death is caused by external forces such as sorcery, witchcraft and evil magic (Mbiti 1997:80). This is why whenever a person dies, the Karanga seek for a cause of the of death *kuenda kugata* (spiritual autopsy), (Benyera 2014) and in most instances, culprits are identified and blame apportioned to them. There are various forms of punishment that are then meted on the culprit, including but not limited paying fines in the form of livestock, cash or being completely excommunicated from society (Moyo2013).

In ancient Chirumhanzu rural community, those who would be found guilty of bewitching others used to be thrown into Gonawapotera pool situated along the Shashe River. This practice which was a norm in the early 1880s was banned by the colonial government through the enactment of the *Witchcraft Suppression Act* (Chapter 73) in 1899c (Chavunduka, 1980:130). The study seeks to envisage how the JCMN conceptualized the causes of death. It will also discuss Johane Masowe weChishanu yeNyenyedzi's ways of dealing with the causes and prevention of illness. For Karanga people of Chirumhanzu some illnesses are caused by broken taboos or oaths such as failure to pay *mombe yeumai* (a brides price cow for the mother-in-law) while the majority of illnesses are caused by witchcraft. If one breaks oaths such as failing to pay *mombe yeumai* the couple can be barren or bear children that die prematurely. The study will shade more light on how the theology of the

JMCN shaped by traditional worldviews of the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu in Zimbabwe.

There are certain prescribed burial sensitivities, rites and ceremonies practiced by the Karanga people (Mbiti 1991:119). Proper care is given so as not to offend both the living and the departed. These rites are not performed for strangers, thieves, murderers, witches, and trouble makers (Mbiti 1991:120). These rites are normally performed by selected elders. There are other people who are not allowed to touch or come near the corpse. These include children, pregnant women or suspected witches (Mbiti 1991:118). Burial is done at the backyard of one of the houses in a family burial place or original place of birth. The grave maybe rectangular, cave like, or a cave made for that purpose (Mbiti 1991).

In ancient times, people would dispose of the body in the bush for animals or birds to eat or kept in a house to decompose till only the skeleton is left for burial (Chidester 2012). In many parts of Africa people are buried with certain of their earthly belongings such as spears, bows, arrows, stools, snuff, cups, and plates some being placed on the grave afterwards (Mbiti 1991:122). Thus, the Karanga people also believed that the departed needs these things on the way to the next world. Among the Karanga of Chirumhanzu a good correct burial cannot be done without *rukukwe rwemufi* (metress for the deceased). Even though members of the family would buy an expensive coffin traditional reed mattress, *rukukwe* must be laid down first then the coffin will come in after. We observed some similarities, mutual borrowing of burial rites for both African Religion and JMCN Church of Chirumhanzu. Members are buried following certain rituals and styles that the study seeks to unpack. Actually, there is systematic teaching on *kuvigwa kwemupositori* (burial rites for a Masowe/Apostolic member) as the study shall demonstrate.

A funeral occupies a central place in Karanga cosmology. The significance of a funeral depends on the status of the deceased. The funeral of a child and unmarried person is usually simple and not a complicated event. The funerals of chiefs or kings are national or at times international affairs where daily activities are suspended until the person is laid to rest (Mbiti 1991:121). The funerals of important people are fore grounded by much preparations. A great



deal of resources is spent on such funerals which also take days. During this luminal period this funeral of a Head of State, religious groups attract much attention. When a chief dies the eldest son becomes the interim chief till the selection of another takes place. At the burial of an elderly person due care is given to send off the departed peacefully and promote the unity to continue between the living dead and the living living (Benyera 2015). The burial is properly done such that the spirit are not angered, in which case they might seek revenge on the living.

Among the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu, when death has occurred in a family animals will not be milked. Husbands do not sleep with their wives for a month. The dust in the house where the corps was is swept and is kept in a clay pot for 21 days. After 21 days that Clay pot is broken up on cross roads. All these are done symbolically, for instance, Husbands are not allowed to have sex with their wives because for the Karanga people sex is meant for reproduction hence a Child that can be conceived during this Dark Age is considered a misfortune. Breaking of the clay pot at the crossroads is a sign that mourning days are over members are now free to resume normal daily living. Thus, the study will discuss JMCN Church funeral rites. The purpose is to discover to what extent has the Church inculturated traditional Karanga spiritual elements of faith to inform their Church spirituality in Zimbabwe.

Again after 21 days of burial the Karanga people organize what they call *manyaradzo* (comforting) or *Masuka foshoro*, washing of shovels which were used during closing of the grave. Beer is brewed and immediate village members are invited to come together to drink and eat. We noted that 21 days after burial is symbolical. For them they believe that after 21 days of buried body should have that time busted, *kuputika*. This busting of the corps is a sign of the spirit embarking on a new journey. The assumption is all this while the spirit was hanging around the grave hoping perhaps the body will come back. But the busting of the corps is a sure sign that the body will never come back to life again, hence a new journey started. The Johane Masowe we Chishanu yeNyenyedzi organize a similar function and gathering 21 days after the burial. It's significant and meaning shall be discussed in the preceding chapters.

For the Karanga people, the dead go to the land of the spirits, *Nyikadzimu* (Mbiti 1980:160). For some this place is underground while for others *Nyikadzimu* is far above the sky (Chikukwa 2007). However, some Karanga people do not visualize any geographical location of the dead since they believe that the dead continue to live in spirit form among the relatives. For Opoku (1978:137), the dead are not cut off from the living for they continue to reveal themselves in dreams or sometimes appear to their beloved ones in visions, sometimes to give instructions, warnings or information. He adds that Africans believe that the dead are also able to return to the earth to be reborn into their families (Opoku 1978:137).

This is how Africans give their children names of the deceased. Closer to Christianity and Islam, the Karanga also believe that the departed return to their creator where they become intercessors and mediators between the living and the creator. The study deals with how the JMCN members upheld such concept of continuous living of the dead as described in this treatise. We posited that this concept of 'the dead mediating between God and the living is an ATR concept. In ATR community members believe that the next world is invisible but very close to that of the living (Mbiti 1991:116). It is situated on the same earth in the rivers, mountains, lakes, forests, homesteads, fields, domestic animals, wild animals, and all things formed in our physical life. This is how hill like Chivavarira is revered by the indigenes of Chirumhanzu community.

According to the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu, the departed remain in the cosmological neighborhood of their human homestead (Mbiti 1991:122). They still belong to the family of the living. The living believe that the departed remain close to them. They uphold the view that the departed live in woods, forests, river banks, hills (Mbiti 1991:123). For Mbiti (1991:123), these places are avoided and people cannot build homes or cultivate fields there because they do not wish to disturb the departed in these resting places. There is a close knit view of the afterlife concept among major religions of the world; a view that human spirit continues to live even after this present life but in different forms and places. Thus, the study grapples with the concept of afterlife in the Johane Masowe weChishanu yeNyenyedzi Church spirituality.

This will be discussed when the study addresses the subject of the burial rituals for apostolic members, *kuvigwakwe mupositori*.

In this chapter, we have summarised the beliefs and practices of the indigenes of the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu in Zimbabwe. As has been shown, the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu believe that God is found in Chivavarira hill and in the pool Gonawapotera. Most prayers and traditional rituals are done in these two sacred places. We also noted that certain objects are significant for traditional ceremonies, objects such as *mbiya* and wooden rods for traditional celebrations while other objects are prohibited such objects made out of metal. Accordingly, the missiological challenge is to find ways to inculturate Traditional African beliefs and practices of the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu without demeaning the central Christian spiritual elements. It is on this note that following chapter discusses the origin, theology and geographical headquarters of the JMCN Church in Zimbabwe.