

CHAPTER SIX: INCULTURATED AFRICAN SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS IN JMCN CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE

This chapter critically unpacks the central research question which is the inculturated African spiritual elements in the JMCN Church spirituality. The notion of inculturated African spiritual elements in the JMCN Church spirituality is the centre of the study because spirituality of any religious movement is displayed in its sacred places, rituals, celebrations, sacraments, religious objects and symbols; which will be focused on in the chapter. The JMCN Church's elements of inculturated African traditional aspects such as sacred places, ritual, celebrations, sacraments religious objects and symbols are discussed to ascertain whether the JMCN Church's spirituality is aligned with other AICs Spirituality. The study does not dispute the fact that there is no homogenous and singular Christian spirituality since there is nonsingular Christianity but Christianities (Ukah 2007:11).

Although there are many Christian spiritualities, like Anglican, Pentecostal and Catholic and now AICs spiritualities. The study postulates that there are certain elements or tenets which should continue to be at the centre of any Christian spirituality regardless of space and time. These are; doctrine of Christ (Christology), Trinity, Soteriology, doctrine of the word and Pneumatology (Moodley 2008:76) and (Amanze 1998a:55). The study observed that what constitutes an authentic Christian spirituality is such AICs maintained the majority, not all of the major Christian tenets such as Christology, pneumatology, missiology, ecclesiology, Trinity and soteriology (Amanze 1998:63). This is not the case in the case of JCMN Church.

There is a general consensus among African theologians such as Kofi Appiah Kubi (1979) that AICs took a major step in contextualising Christian gospel by selectively inculturating compatible African spiritual elements into their Church liturgies. Appiah Kubi who studied AICs in Ghana. Observed that most AICs in Ghana such as Church of Christ in Africa (CCA), Church of Messiah in Ghana (CMG) and, the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) all in Ghana have made a conscious attempt to revive or perpetuate selected certain aspects of local cultures to inform their Church spiritualities Kofi Appiah-Kubi (1979:118). For Appiah-Kubi these AICs, Christ continues to be at the centre of human salvation. Amanze adds that Jesus Christ is seen by the AICs

as the mediator between the AICs members and God. The Bible is also read and interpreted from an African perspective (Amanze 1998a). Chitando (2004) argues that this initiative was taken to make Africans Christians feel at home in Church. This suggests that AICs presented a Christianity influenced by African traditional institutions and belief systems (Amanze 1998b).

This Christianity is referred to as African Christianity in the study. African Christianity, therefore, in the study is a brand of Christianity that is African in nature but continue to be in tandem with the rest of the Christendom. What makes an African Church to remained in tandem with the rest of Christian Churches in the World are the central Christian spiritual elements discussed in the study such as, the divinity of Jesus Christ; Holy Trinity; Doctrine of the Bible; Salvation through belief in Jesus Christ and belief in the Second coming of Jesus to judge the World. However, it was noted that as other AICs maintained the central traditional Christian spiritual elements of faith the disputed AICs disregard them and consciously inculturated incompatible African spiritual elements of faith.

Therefore, we are argued that in the process of inculturation only accommodated 'selected' compatible African spiritual elements, like translation of the Bible into local languages (Dickson 1995:45), accommodation of local music instruments in Church services (Mbiti 1976:27), accommodation of the African worldview of ancestors to explain that Jesus Christ is the "Proto Ancestor" (Bujo 2003:113), accommodating the Trinitarian God, Christ Jesus being the incarnate God, is the best way so as keep what makes a Church Christian.

Incompatible African spiritual elements are defined in the study as the *sine qua non* of the *sacrosancta* of African Traditional Religion. These are central spiritual elements that cannot be borrowed by any other religion in the process of religious dialogue. In other terms, these are the core spiritual elements that distinguish ATR from Christianity or from Islam in Zimbabwe. As alluded to earlier on, every religion has its own unique central spiritual elements. For instance, in Islam there are central rituals; places of worship; celebrations; a certain seating arrangement Muslims follow, different from other religions of the world. The theology of a Muslim is guided by the *Holy*

Quran while Christian theology is guided by the *Holy Bible* (Mbiti 2008). This explains that what constitutes genuine Islam as expressed through the five pillars of Islam as contained in the Holy Quran.

Likewise ATRs and Christianity possess their own unique spiritual elements that make them unique in this setting of religious pluralism. These are referred to in the study as non compatible spiritual tenets. We argue that such spiritual tenets are incompatible for religious dialogue because they are the landmarks of any religion in any case. For example, a Muslim cannot take Jesus Christ to be his/her Savior and continue to be identified as a Muslim. This idea is borrowed from Hierbert Paul's theory of Bounded set theory (Hiebert Paul 1994). According to this theory, there are certain boundaries or elements that separate religions. Thus, elements such as African forms of worship and rituals, African traditional shrines (sacred places), African objects for religious ceremonies, certain African taboos and the respect for ancestors (Mbiti, 1980:77) are argued in the study to be incompatible African spiritual elements that cannot be borrowed by any other religion, either by Christianity or Islam.

Critical questions for the study are: what to inculturate and not to inculturate? Should African Church inculturate incompatible African spiritual elements such like respect of ancestors, praying under selected traditional sacred trees, using traditional sacred objects for worship and initiating Church members in traditional sacred pools and dams and retain the designation of a Christian Church? The study posits that certain religious spiritual elements should be avoided in this process of inculturation. The argument being made in these pages is that the difference between African Christian spirituality and ATR is their central spiritual elements of faith.

One can question that; unlike in Christianity and Islam where central spiritual elements of faith are concealed in their sacred written Scriptures, where do we find those of ATRs, since ATRs do not possess any sacred scripture? To respond to this Mbiti argues that, though African Tradition Religion has no written scripture, African spirituality appears in different forms and settings (Mbiti 1980:56). For him African spirituality is a response to situations in life such as calamities, birth, death or wars. This is how certain mountains, rivers pool, caves and trees are central to African spirituality. Hence the situation where there are certain mountains, hills,

rivers, dams, caves and trees that are sacred shrines for ATR. These specific places were separated and become distinctly different from profane space due to certain happenings or manifestations of the divine (Eliade 1957). This is the reason why early scholars' adage of referring to Africans as 'Animists' because they saw them praying to their god under certain trees, caves and rocks. The study has demonstrated that African spirituality is in the history, hearts and experience of people. African spirituality is applied to a situation as the need arises. Hence Africans live their spirituality as circumstances prescribes. Therefore, we argue in the study that JMCN Church 'inculturated' certain selected traditional sacred shrines, certain traditional rituals, certain traditional religious symbols and certain traditional African objects to inform their Church spirituality in Zimbabwe.

Sacred places are central to most religions. For Eliade a sacred place is the *rendezvous* between human beings and the divine (Eliade 1959:25). Thus, a sacred space functions as the focal point in most religions. For instance, Muslims congregate in Mosques and annually pay homage at the Ka'abah in Mecca. Most Christian congregate in temples, church buildings and some African Indigenous Churches congregate under certain trees. Eliade (1959:26) argues that every sacred space implies a hierophany, an eruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different". Arguably, a sacred place is different from an ordinary profane spaces because it is the manifestation of the divine (Eliade 1957). Likewise, JMCN has its own sacred places.

Examples of such places are; Chivavarira hill in Chirumhanzu, Mawanga Mountain in Domboshava and DomboraMwari in Epworth. These are some of the African traditional sacred shrines which the JMCN Church appropriated as their religious places for prayers. The study examines how and why Johane Masowe churches willingly turn such old African traditional shrines to be their holy shrines?

Chivavarira hill is situated in Chirumhanzu district at the borders of Masvingo and Midlands provinces. This particular hill appears to be ordinary to the natural eye, yet it is a sacred shrine for the community of Chirumhanzu. Old Shona novels such as Gonawapotera (1978) and Nhume yaMambo (1988), depict the sacredness of the hill. According to these two Shona novels Chivavarira became a sacred hill from early 1890s during the tribal wars

between the Ndebele and the Karanga people of what Mutasa (1988) termed *Chiri-muhanzu*. The Karanga people of Chirumhanzu used to hide in the numerous caves in the hill when the Ndebele regiments came to attack and raid for women, young men and cattle.

The term *Chivavarira*'s etymologically is derived from a Shona word *kuvavarira* which means (striving to reach the place of refugee) (Musoni 2016:10). It was however, noted through interviews that even to this day, the local people of Chirumhanzu testify to and confirm the sacredness of this hill. The critical question is: what makes the hill sacred that has attracted the JMCN Church esteemed it the same way it is revered by the indigenes of Chirumhanzu today? Below is the portrait of the Chivavarira hill.

Figure 6.1: Chivavarira sacred hill



This photo was taken by the researcher showing the sacred hill Chivavarira. The researchers were shown about 23 caves used as graves for Chiefs and Headmen of Chirumhanzu district. At the centre of the hill situated the religious Shrines for Chirumhanzu residents. This cave is used for religious prayers and rituals today.

Mbiti, a writer and researcher of African Traditional Religion, posits that African spirituality unlike Islamic spirituality and Christian spirituality is not found in a book or Scripture but is found in sacred places such as hills,

mountains, rocks, rivers and trees (Mbiti 1991:20). These places are jealously guarded and certain taboos are followed when one approaches such places.

Three years of visiting Chivavarira and randomly interviewing the indigenes of Chirumhanzu gave the researchers confidence that the hill continues to be a holy shrine from past generations to this generation. Thus, the sacredness of Chivavarira is not legendary or fictitious but it is a place that attracts people from all walks of life coming for various religious rituals. The hill continues to be a sacred shrine for the indigenes of Chirumhanzu even in the aftermath of 1890s tribal wars because of two important phenomena. First, Chivavarira is a sacred shrine for the indigenes of Chirumhanzu because of the numerous caves which the locals used to hide during tribal wars. These caves were turned into burial shrines for Chiefs and respected family elders. Second, on top of the Hills is a big cave which is being used for religious ceremonies by the local people (Zvarevashe, 1978:10).

From the interviews carried out, it emerged that since the beginning of the year 2000 until 2015, the traditional leaders of Chirumhanzu were uncomfortable because their traditional shrines were taken by the JMCN Church and the African Apostolic Church (AAC). Concerted efforts to bar these Masowe Churches from using the cave failed. These two African Indigenous Churches took turns to visit the sacred hill religiously every year around the same time. Each year the African Apostolic Church (AAC) led by Paul Mwazha visits Chivavarira in August while the JMCN visits the place in October. Further to that, these two Churches; the JMCN and the AAC erected religious centers near the hill.

Paul Mwazha is originally from Chirumhanzu before his family migrated to Guruve (Mwazha & Mwazha 1997:1). This is the reason why today the AAC has bounced back to the original root of its founder, to the sacred Chivavarira hill. Similarly, the national leader of JMCN, Baba Tawanda Ndaidza is from Chirumhanzu, Mapiravana (Baba Gilbert: 2014). Obviously, Baba Ndaidza and Mwazha knew about the sacrality of Chivavarira from their childhood. This historical background of these two African Indigenous Church leaders plays a very pivotal role in supporting the argument that the use of Chivavarira hill by these two Churches is not an accident of history but a well calculated religious move.

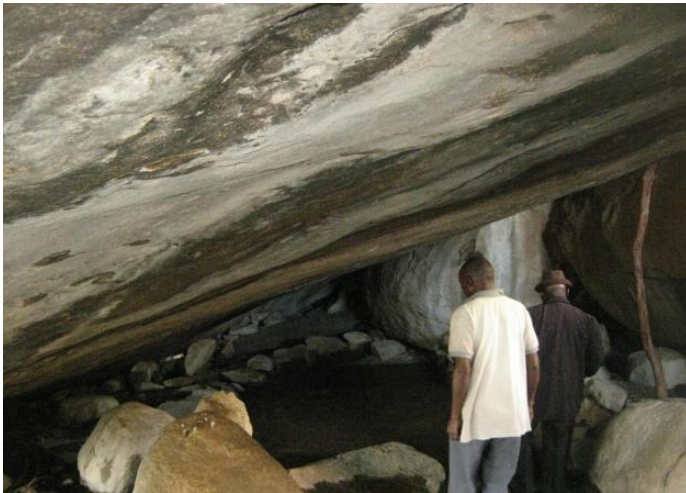
During their visit to the place in August and October respectively, an advance team of *vabati vemweya*, those gifted with the spirit, will go ahead for seven days to prepare for the religious visit. According to key informant the advance team would spend those seven nights praying in the cave while during the day they will be at their designated centers down the hill. It was not clear whether this was done to persuade the spirits of the hill not to hinder them from conducting their religious rituals. Though fire is not allowed near the hill, even cutting of trees, on several occasions the Chief would find fire-wood and ashes in the cave that is a sign that these churches were in the cave for their religious rituals. Asking why these African Churches forcefully appropriated such renowned traditional African sacred shrine, one member of JMCN church claims that as it was is with Israel, certain mountains and rivers are sacred, so too with Africa. Baba Gift in an interview further noted that Chivavarira hill is a sacred place because God is believed by the locals to have his inhabitants in the cave and in the pool Gonawapotera (Baba Gift: 2014).

This takes the discussion back to the central research questions of the study which are: should Christians go to renowned ATR shrines in search for God and do Christians find God in African Traditional Shrines. These questions are raised to suggest a theological prolegomenon to undergird future religious dialogues. For undisputed AICs such places are not desirable for Christian church services. Though many AICs pray on mountain tops, they do not specifically go to renowned African traditional Mountains for prayers. Rather they go to any mountain in their proximity. Some AICs members go to mountains on which their founders encountered a revelation. An example cited in the study is ZAOGA FIF with the Mt. Chipindura in Bindura (Maxwell 2007:72) now turned to be *gomo reZAOGA*, the ZAOGA mountain. Mt. Chipindura became sacred because Ezekiel Guti, the founder of ZAOGA Church claimed to have encountered God on this mountain as was praying in a cave (Guti 2014:23). It is also imperative to note that not only AICs select mountains for worship. In Zimbabwe, the Anglican Church annually visits Bernard Mizeki hill in Marondera district, Mashonaland East province for prayers where one of their influential priests, Bernard Mizeki, was laid to rest.

The study observes that prayer retreat in mountains and caves is therefore, not uniquely AICs but also some missionary churches have the same practice, particularly those in Zimbabwe. It can be argued that the concept of visiting

mountains and hills for prayers is a borrowed phenomenon from both Old and New Testaments. For example, in the Old Testament Moses prayed on Mt Sinai and in the New Testament Jesus invited his disciples to go up the mountain for prayer (Matthew 14:23, Luke 6:12). However, what is not common among other Christian Churches in Africa particularly in Zimbabwe is the deliberate attempt to revive or perpetuate selected traditional sacred Mountains and hills for Church prayers and Church services. JMCN Church's appropriation of Chivavarira cave represents a new approach towards the practice of inculturation. Chivavarira cave is used by the indigenes for religious ceremonies as evidenced by the presents of African Traditional paraphernalia such like wooden clay pots, traditional tobacco used for traditional rituals, sacred traditional linen, *maretsa*, used for traditional celebrations, wooden rod and traditional spears are all kept in this cave. It is in such a cave that the JMCN Church and AAC also go for prayer retreats. Below is the portrait of the Chivavarira cave.

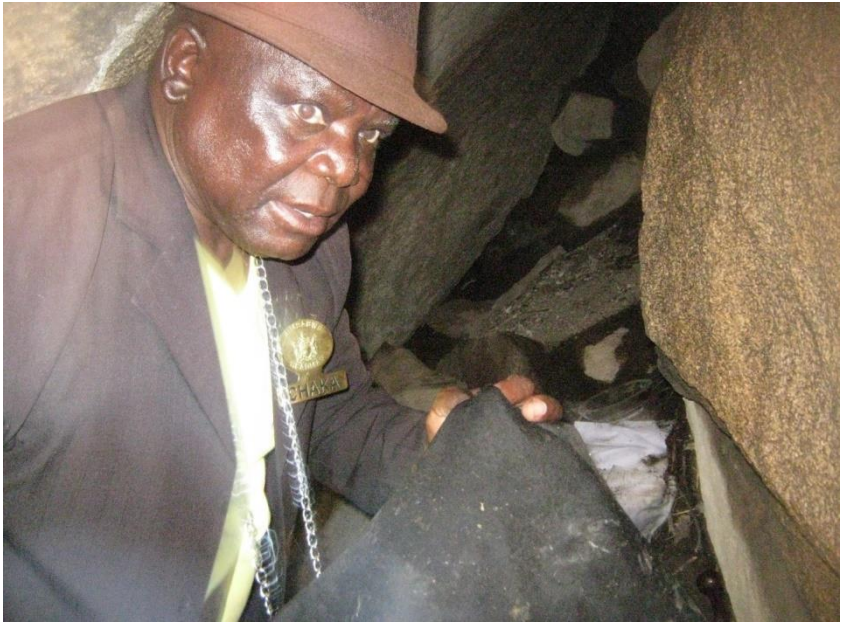
Figure 6.2: Chivavarira cave



The photo, taken by the researcher 19 December 2014, depicts the entrance to the Chivavarira cave. Picture there shows Chief Chaka in dark suit followed by his body guard Mr. Mhazi. A closer look in the cave reveals stones arranged to beyond no one is allowed to cross. On the right is a wooden pole the JMCN Church used to tie their religious flag during their all night prayers.

The JMCN Church holistic approach to this sacred cave Chivavarira is a fascinating one. It is fascinating in the sense that they do not go there with a motive of vandalizing the places and turn it into a new sacred place for denoting a Christian Church. Rather the Church has inherited everything found in the cave as using for worshipping their God. In this cave there are sacred objects for the Indigenes of Chirumhanzu such as wooden plates, clay pots, traditional clothes/ machira e Mudzimu, traditional tobacco and a traditional rod as is shown on this portrait.

Figure 6.3: Example of religious objects kept in Chivavarira cave



The photo, taken by the researcher 19 December 2014, depicts the Chief Chaka showing us religious objects kept in the cave. Among the objects are the black and white clothes, wooden rod, clay bowl, wooden bowl and traditional tobacco.

Figure 6.4: Inside Chivavarira cave



The photo, taken by the researcher 19 December 2014, is showing Chief Chaka and Mr. Mhazi standing in Chavavarira cave. On the extreme right are ashes remained in the cave after the Church used the cave for all night prayer.

The JMCN Church did not only grab Chivavarira and Gonawapotera Chirumhanzu sacred shrines. We noted that DomboraMwari in Epworth is another shrine the JMCN turned to be their place of worship. Below is a discussion of another notable traditional sacred shrine that was appropriated by the JMC churches called DomboraMwari Epworth in Harare.

DomboraMwari is one phenomenal place that continues to attract people of different faiths – the AICs and the Shona Traditionalist. DomboraMwari, literally God's rock, is situated in Epworth in Harare outside the residential area of Epworth. This rock is a 318 meter flat topped rock and the largest physical feature in the area (Vambe 2008:69). In his book, *The hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe* (2008) Vambe perceived a potential religious contestation besides the political Murambatsvina of 2005 one which

resulted many people from Epworth residence homeless (Vambe 2008). For him Christian faith mostly the white garmented Churches compete to control the place while the Shona traditionalists claim historically and culturally rightful owners of the rock (Vambe 2008:69). The reason for this contestation is that historically the rock was and continued to be a sacred shrine.

Mythical stories have been told about the Rock and its surroundings. Firstly, it is believed that on top of the Rock there is an incredible sight of a footprint indicating that somebody walked across it before the molten lava set. If one imagined the temperatures of molten lava as it was discharges out of an active volcano, then one would obviously infer the footprint can only be God's hence the name DomboraMwari. Accordingly, DomboraMwari was formerly a traditional sacred place for the indigenes of Epworth (Gundani 2007:146). Secondly, on the bottom of the rock there was a Musasa tree where people could be served with Sadza and meat(Vambe 2008:69) Below is a portrait depicting Mapositori praying at DomboraMwari (See Fig. 3 overleaf).

What is important to note is the repetition of Chivavarira religious contestation resurfacing again in Epworth Harare. This denotes that the Chivavarira conflict was not an accident of history but a welcome calculated JMCN theological move. They do not just turn a profane space to be sacred, the revive the already declared sacred places by other religions a typical example of a syncretic fundamentalist religious denomination. However, today the numerous Apostolic Churches have forcefully grabbed the shrine for their prayers.

JMC Churches in Zimbabwe have not only grabbed Chivavarira and DomboraMwari sacred shrines but many more. These Masowe Churches also grabbed Mawanga Mountain in Goromonzi district, Mashonaland East province for their religious purposes. Mawanga Mountain is a renowned sacred shrine for the indigenes of Goromonzi district from time immemorial. It is against this background people from different parts of Zimbabwe come to this shrine for healing and deliverance from evil spirits (Kawadza 2015). This Mountain which stretches from Chakabvapasi and Mushayapekuvaka villages to Chinhamora on the Northern boundary is now a religious icon for both Masowe Churches and traditional healers. According to the Herald of 17

January 2015, on one end of the mountain was a Johane Masowe Chishanu prophetess and on the other end of the same mountain was *Sekuru* (Spirit Medium), both were drawing equal huge crowds (Kawadza 2015). The prophetess, Madzimai Tabeth whose real name is Marjory Charuma confessed that she was using the power that was coming from the sacred mountain to heal the sick and exorcising demons (Kawadza: 2015).

Figure 6.5: Portrait of the Mawanga Mountain



In this photo sourced from the Herald of 17/01/2015 depicts the Mawanga Mountain where a big sacred cave is being shared between a Traditional healer Sekuru Sibanda and A JMC Prophetess Madzimai Tabeth for exorcism and healing powers.

It is posited that the reviving of old sacred shrines in search for power by the JMCN Churches is a replica of the 1950s Black Ancestor Church of Malawi and the Herero Protestant Church of Namibia. The study demonstrated that

the above cited churches redefined African Traditional Shrines and Traditional African practices to inform their Church spiritualities. For instance, the Herero Protestant Church accommodated the notion of the Holy fire (Kandovazu 2009) which is an African traditional way of ancestor veneration while the Black Ancestor Church revived the *Mbonga* cultic shrine (Schoffeleers 2013).

The study argues that this wave of inculturating traditional sacred places continued resulting in more newly established AICs appropriating more traditional sacred places. What is noteworthy is the continuous thriving of AICs to redefine Traditional African sacred shrines into Churches centres. In 2014 a new AIC was founded in Chitungwiza. According to the 20 May 2016 Kwaedza Newspaper edition, a Church called The Power of the Holy Spirit Ministries International (POTHS) or Deliverance Centre Church (DCC) whose Founder is Apostle Farai Rukweza was founded in Chitungwiza's Unit A (Mapupu 2016).

It was also found out that when people hear about a new Church being founded, what quickly comes into their minds is a building or an open space (*masowe*). Surprisingly, in Unit A in Chitungwiza, DCC Church members turned a traditional sacred cave into their Church centre. The particular hill housing this cave is known from time past as a sacred shrine for the indigenes of Seke Chitungwiza (Mapupu 2016). The cave was used for religious ceremonies such as *mapira emhuvura*, rain making ceremonies, and *mapira ekutenga vadzimu nekuda kwegoho*, harvest ceremonies. This cave contains paintings of bushman images which drawn on the walls of the rocks, wooden pates, clay pots and spears. Apart from this hill being used as a sacred shrine for religious rituals, because of its big cave at the centre, the Kwaedza newspaper crew reported that there are numerous caves in this hill which are now burial shrines for Chiefs and religious leaders. The study has noted that Unit A Chitungwiza hill is similar in function with Chivavarira hill of Chirumhanzu. The only difference is that the indigenes of Chirumhanzu are not comfortable to share their sacred places with other religions hence a contestation of the holy shrine. Apostle Rukweza was granted permission to transform the sacred place into a Church by the indigenes of Chitungwiza.

Below is the portrait of the entrance into the Traditional shrine turned into a Church by DCC.

Figure 6.6: Entrance into the cave that was turned into a Church Centre



This photo taken by the Kwaedza crew on 20 May in 2015 depicts the entrance to the Unit A cave which the DCC church turned into its centre. In the photo the one standing far right is the founder of the Church Apostle Rukweza.

Apostle Farai Rukweza (33) the Founder of this Church in an interview by Kwaedza newspaper, posited that his coming to this cave was a result of God speaking to him through dreams many year ago, well before he became a Christian in 2008. He claimed to have received this vision when he was in Bulawayo 450km away from Chitungwiza (Mapupu 2016).

Apostle Rukweza told Kwaedza that he saw in a dream praying and healing many people in this Hill. On the portrait above a chain has been used to demarcate the sacred pace from profane pace. Also a signage in scripted 'Last Bust stop' is by the entrance into the cave. Asked by the Kwaedza crew what was the significance of the signage 'last Bus stop', Apostle Farai Rukweza responded that through entering into the sacred cave, all problems are solved.

The Kwaedza crew highlighted that there is also another sacred pool in the hill believed by the Church members to be a curative pool. Tellingly water from this pool is drawn to heal all types of sicknesses and diseases. However, the researcher did not get an opportunity to authenticate these claims.

Examination of the appropriation of traditional sacred places by AICs in Zimbabwe today constitutes a new concept which the study termed 'back to the beginnings'. The AICs' understanding of traditional sacred places as meeting places with the divine is a dominant feature in their theology and spirituality. There is a strong belief that Mwari *anogara muzvimbo dzaiyereswa nemadzitateguru edu*, God is found in these sacred places and not anywhere else. This is how JMCN among other revived the old sacred places for Church services and rituals. Below we discussed the inculturated traditional sacred trees by the JMCN Church in Zimbabwe.

There are certain trees which were used for religious purposes in Zimbabwe from time immemorial. For instance, trees like *Muhacha* (hissing tree), *mukondekonde* (candelabra tree), and *mutarara*, (powder-bark gardenia). The above-mentioned trees are sacred trees in African traditional religions. *Muhacha* is one of the trees that grows big and is always green even during drought sessions. It has dark green leaves and egg-shaped fruits. According to information gathered the tree's dried leaves were used by traditional healers to treat *chikoshoro*, terrible cough. A traditional healer will mix *muhacha*'s dried leaves with hot water as tea leaves to give to their patients. It is common even to ordinary community members that *muhacha* tree is a sacred tree. According to traditional mythology the tree was also used as a luck charm to bring back lost lovers (Aschwanden 1989:69). If a girl whom you love has turned her back on you, you just need to go to a *muhacha* tree and take a small stick, put in your pocket as you go to persuade her to consider you as her lover again (Aschwanden 1989:70).

Therefore, it can be stated that both traditional healers and the Johane Masowe Churches have high beliefs that *muhacha* tree is no ordinary tree. This is reinforced by the customary rule that no one is allowed to cut down *muhacha* tree. According to the history of Johane Masowe Chishanu, the Church started under the hissing tree in Mhondoro Nevanji in the 1930s

before it spread to other parts of the country (Madzibaba Tawona: 2015). This was supported by what was gathered from interviews that Shonhiwa Masedza (Johane Masowe) during one early Saturday morning led a group of people who followed him from a traditional night ceremony into a bush and sat under a hissing tree (Baba Andrea: 2014). There, he performed prayers after he had sung *Hossana! Hossana!* This song is the most common song among all Johane Masowe Chishanu Churches. The song is commonly known as *Hossana mukuru* (long hosanna). Thus, from that incident Johane Masowe Chishanu members believe that if they pray under a *muhacha* tree they will be heard by God. The study observed that most of the Johane Masowe Chishanu Churches believe that bad spirits are easily cast out under the hissing tree or by burning *muhacha* leaves in their homes. Asking why Johane Masowe Chishanu Churches always want to associated with such trees, Baba Emmanuel Mudarikwa, a prophet responded, “these are the only trees that you find green throughout the year hence they provide a good shade (Emanuel Mudarikwa: 2014). Obviously, the trees provide good shade but what about *mukondekonde* and *mutarara* trees? These trees do not provide shade but still occupy a very significant position in the JMC Church spiritualities.

Mukondekonde is the other of the draught tolerant trees that remain green even during very dry sessions. The *Mukondekonde* tree produces milk like juice which bird trappers use to trap birds for relish. The juice which the tree produces from its trunk is ideal for bird hunting as it sticks thereby trapping birds. Also mythological, it is believed among the Shona people that traditional healers use the *mukondekonde* juice to trap witches. In an interview Tsitsi testified that *mukondekonde* is very central in the Church spirituality because the tree does not wither and is drought tolerant symbolizing their spirituality which is always giving life to the people (Tsitsi: 2013).

Water baptism is the initiatory religious rite for most Christian Churches. The ritual is a sign of commitment for new members. It is also a public declaration that one has joined the new faith. Symbolically baptism depicts the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is against this background that we discuss the Christian practice of baptism from a JMCN perspective, highlighting its significance and purpose. The study has highlighted that since 2000 JMCN baptism was conducted at one central place along the

Shashe River in Chirumhanzu. The river is the borderline for Masvingo and Midlands provinces.

This river is central to this thesis because it is in this river that the sacred pool Gonawapotera is situated. The pool is to the right side when crossing Shashe River towards Beitbridge from Harare. According to Zvarevashe (1978:13), witches and thieves used to be drowned in this pool as death sentence in the 1890s. Resultantly, many lives perished in the sacred Gonawapotera pool (Zvarevashe, 1978:14). Traditionally, any person who would be appointed to be the future king for the people of Chirumhanzu was supposed to swim across the pool (Zvarevashe1978:14). The belief was that if the prospective king has the divine a mandate, the water spirit, *njuzu* would protect them from being devoured by crocodiles (Zvarevashe 1978:26). Therefore, what makes the pool sacred is the belief held by the locals that water spirits inhabit in the pool (Chief Chaka: 2014).

According to the local chief, Chief Chaka, people see clothes lying on the rocks early morning, but upon getting closer the pool, the clothes would mysteriously disappear into the pool (Chief Chaka: 2014). Hence the pool remains sacred up to this very day (April 2016) because of the water spirit which is believed to inhabit in the pool (Chief Chaka: 2014). The custodians of African Traditional Religion jealously guard the pool for their religious rituals. This is why Shoko (2008:61) observed that in the traditional religious context, mythological pools inhabited by *njuzu*, the water spirit, are viewed as sacred and associated with curative powers (Shoko, 2008:61). Water and stones from such sacred places where *njuzu* inhabits are taken as *muteuro* (small rock pebbles used for healing and exorcisms) (Shoko, 2008:61). It is in such a pool that Masowe yeNyenyedzi baptised its members from 2000 till this day (April 2016). We attended the Masowe yeNyenyedzi annual prayer meeting *muteuro wegore* in Masvingo, where Madzimai Margret, a prophetess of about 45 years of age stood up to give a word of prophecy. She told the members that water baptism will continue to be held at Shashe in Gonawapotera as long as members continue to follow what the spirit says (Margret: 2014).

The study demonstrated that Gonawapotera was chosen to be the baptismal pool because it is believed to inhabit water spirit. We observed that JMCN is

the only Church among all the JMC Churches in Zimbabwe that exercise water baptism. Other Johane Masowe members do what they call *kugeza munyama*, washing away bad luck in the same pool (Melissa: 2016). For Melissa all members must go through the process of being cleansed from bad luck. The member must dress up in white including the inner clothes. Each one should walk in the water that covers almost the whole body except the head narrated Melissa. However, for JMCN *rubhabhatidzo rweNyenyedzi*, the star baptism is only conducted in African Traditional sacred dams, rivers and pools. This is not by coincidence that members are baptised in such sacred places. We have noted through research that before they moved to Gonawapotera sacred pool, members were baptised first at Nyatsime in Chitungwiza then Hokoyo Dam in Gokwe, all these are sacred places for ATR and they will be discussed in greater details in the next section.

Nyatsime sacred pool is situated in Chitungwiza, 45 kilometers southeast of capital city of Harare. Etymologically the term *Nyatsime* means the owner of the pool. This suggests that the pool is not just an ordinary pool to the locals but one which belongs to someone and this someone is none other than the water spirit. Since Nyatsime is a traditional sacred pool no one is permitted to do laundry for soup is not allowed in such sacred waters (Chief Mutema: 2014). In 2010 a young boy allegedly disappeared in Nyatsime pool as he was playing with his friends. The residents of Chitungwiza with the help of town council searched for the victim but in vain. It was after the consultation of traditional leaders that the boy resurfaced on the waters of Nyatsime but was already dead (Chief Mutema: 2014). It is in this pool that the JMCN Church baptised its first members who had moved away from the original JMC Church. The first baptism took place in 1997 soon after the death of Baba Sandros who had established the JMC branch at Nyatsime (Engelke 2007:55).

Hokoyo dam is situated in the Gokwe about 12km outside the town again in the Midlands Province (Bulawayo 24News 2012). The common name for this dam is Gwehava dam but because of some mysterious happenings one of our key informant up-to-dated us that the dam is nicknamed Hokoyo. The term Hokoyo literally means beware. This term, beware, is a warning denoting that some mysterious happenings occur in the dam. According to key informant

interviews, the dam was given that name because much people had mysteriously disappeared into the dam. Unlike Nyatsime and Gonawapotera, the residents of Gokwe are allowed to go for fishing in this dam, but certain taboos are to be followed. One such taboo is that one is not allowed to go alone for fishing and that one is also not allowed to remain alone fishing while others have gone home (Chief Nemangwe: 2013). These mysterious happenings were also recorded by the Bulawayo News 24 that Gokwe township continues to face serious water challenges despite the completion of the construction of Gwehava Dam amid revelations that authorities are failing to draw water from the dam owing to water spirits (Bulawayo 24News 2012). The News reported that the angry water spirits which at times takes the form of a large snake, blocks the pumping of water by either causing electrical faults that damage the pumping system or would simply coil itself inside the pipes.

It is in such dreadful dams that JMCN Church baptises its Church members. Madzimai Mergury informed us that after the Nyatsime baptism of 1997 the JMCN Church conducted its second baptismal ritual in Hokoyo/Gwehava dam in 1998 (Mergury: 2014). Upon verifying why all the JMCN Church baptismal rituals are conducted in such dreadful dams and pools or rivers that are said to be the inhabitants of water spirits, the response was that baptising people in such places result in members acquiring curative powers to heal and acquire protective powers to fight evil spirits (Mergury: 2014). While it is important to inculturate the local cultures into the Christian message the study is concerned with the influence of ATR in the JMCN Church particularly on especially when it comes to their understanding of baptism being only conducted in African traditional sacred places.

The study posits that the JMCN Church's death and burial rituals are deeply rooted in African spirituality. Thus, the study found out that these rituals were guided by African worldviews of life after death; the spiritual powers and mediatory role of the deceased. However, it was noted that certain African traditional death rituals were discontinued. These include, but not limited to the killing of an animal during funeral gatherings known in Shona as *mombe yenhedzo* (Benyera 2015). Throughout the funeral gatherings

mourners eat dried fish and vegetables. Apart from the discontinuation of ritual of animal killing the study observed rituals of mutual fecundation that is a revival of African traditional death and burial rites by the JMCN Church. JMCN members believed that a person must have died a natural death for his/her spirit to be accepted by God. During *muteuro wegore* members are taught that they should pray that when death comes, it must not come to them through unnatural means such as murder, car accident or long illnesses. According to their teaching, anyone who dies in any of the above manners *haana kufa rufu rwemupositori* did not die appropriately. The ostracisation is worse for Church members who commit suicide. Data gathered from key informant interviews revealed that one who committed suicide was not accorded a Masowe yeNyenyedzi burial ritual. For the JMCN certain rituals are done during post and after burial. While other Johane Masowe weChishanu church members cannot be buried in a coffin for JMCN Church it is not important whether one is buried with or without a coffin. However, what is mandatory is the process called *rukukwe rweMupositori*. Literally *rukukwe* is African traditional mattress made-up of reeds. However, for JMCN *rukukwe* comprises of *mahapa* (water lilies), *nhokwe* and *shanga* (water reeds and rushes). These three items are spread in the grave before the deceased is lowered into the grave. This ritual is only performed only to members who have died *rufu rwemupositori*, a natural death. Thus, if one committed suicide the above rituals will not be followed. The sacred song *Hosanna!! Hosanna* again is not sung during burial. There is no memorial service for someone who commits suicide. Nyaradzo, memorial service is very important because this is when the prophets inform the beloved members of whether the deceased has gone to heaven or is still wondering. If he/she is still wondering, certain rituals and prayers are done to plead *Mutumwa Gaburona* (Angel Gabriel) the gate keeper to open the gate (Baba Israel: 2016). The gate keeper can only open the gate when the immediate spiritual leaders, i.e. Baba Johane, Baba Emanuweri or Nyenyedzi signaled *Mutumwa Gaburona* to do so. The idea behind this is that, only the immediate dead members who hold higher position in church can negotiate with *Mutumwa Gaburona* to open the gate of heaven. After these ritual prayers, members are informed that the deceased finally had

succeeded in joining the saints such as Johane, Emanuweri and Nyenyedzi. *Nyaradzo* ceremony usually takes place 21 days after the burial.

The concept of correct death is a borrowed phenomenon from African traditional religion. According to Bourdillon, the person must have had a good death for him/her to be accorded a proper burial ritual and ceremonies. By good death Bourdillon is referring to a death which is not caused by accident or one committed suicide (Bourdillon 1987:209). Apart from correct death, in ATR there are after burial rituals. Two key after burial ritual are *Masuka foshoro* or *Nyaradzo* and *kurova guva*. These rituals are done to qualify the deceased as the family ancestor, thus bringing back the deceased's spirit to look after the remaining family (Benyera 2014). In JMCN *nyaradzo* ritual, can be undertaken from the time that relatives are informed by the prophets that the person has gained *zororo remweya* meaning he/she has gone to heaven. From then one becomes the mediator for his family pleading with the *madzidza* to allow other family members to become members of Johane Masowe. This is how even the three spiritual leaders of this Church Shonhiwa Masedza, Mudyiwa Dzangara and Sandro Nhamoyebonde though all dead are still revered by Church members.

Marriage is understood by Africans as the meeting-point for three layers of human life, the living dead, the living living and the living unborn (Mbiti 1991:104). The living dead are the roots on which the living stand and the living are the link between the living and the living dead and the living unborn are the for future generations hence marriage makes it possible for them to germinate and sprout (Mbiti 1991). This is how the living dead are involved by the Karanga in their traditional African Marriages ceremonies. For instance, during the paying of bride price, *lobola*, the money is placed in a wooden plate or a clay pot, *mbiya*, to show respect for the ancestors, the living dead. Normally paying of *lobola* is contacted in a kitchen in rural areas. The kitchen that is usually a thatched round hut, is considered a sacred shrine for most Karanga people.

Traditional prayers are recited in the kitchen by the eldest family member while kneeling barefoot at what is called *chikuva*. *Chikuva* is a place in the kitchen where water gourds are kept. Apart from the kitchen possessing a place which constitutes a sacred shrine, the kitchen also denotes authority for a married woman. It represents the core of the maternal spirit among the Karanga people. In ATR maternal spirits are feared because they are believed to cause more harm than paternal ancestors. This is evidenced by the African concept of *kutanda botso*. *Kutanda botso* occurs when a person wrongs their mother; the maternal spirits will cause that victim to suffer until a diviner is consulted and appeasement rituals done. The diviner will advise the victim to put on sack-clothes and move around confessing that they wronged their mother. This exercise is called *kutanda botso*. As a result, every African woman is honored and given due respect. It is against this background that the JMCN Church value *mombe yeumai*, brides' price cattle due to the mother, more than anything on *lobola* form. *Mombe yeumai* is a token of appreciation due to the mother of the bride before the two are pronounced husband and wife. This *mombe yeumai* besides being a token of appreciation is also a means of appeasing the maternal ancestors so that they bless their daughter so that her marriage does not fail.

According to information gathered during research, if this cow dies before it gives birth, the son in law will buy another cow to replace the dead one. After it has reproduced once or twice, the cow is then slaughtered in another set of rituals called *nyama yemakunguwo*, literally meaning meat for crows. Three families are invited (the son in law's family; the family of the in laws and the family where the mother-in-law was born) for a ritual called *nyama ye makunguwo*. This ritual is called *nyama ye makunguwo* because when the cow has been slaughtered meat is shared among the three families, and a certain portion of meat is left for crows to eat. This portion eaten by crows represents a meat offering to the maternal ancestors.

For this Church *mombe yeumai* must be paid first before paying other forms of *lobola* such as the father's bride price known as *rusambo*. JMCN teaches that by failing to pay this cow, one will be inviting barrenness or stillbirths in the

family. Thus, members of the Church are taught to pay *mombe yeumai* to avoid angering the maternal ancestors. The study posits that the way this Church values *mombe yeumai* exhibits the high influence of African spirituality informing the JMCN Church spirituality. For JMCN money cannot be accepted in exchange for *mombe yeumai*. For other AICs *mombe yeumai* is just a token of appreciation for the mother-in-law so much that the mother-in-law can be given the money equivalency of a cow. This is not the case with the JMCN Church where a cow must be bought and presented. It is on these bases that the study concludes that *mombe yeumai* is no longer taken as a mere token of appreciation but a means of appeasing the maternal ancestors among the JMCN Church as it is in Karanga traditional religion.

JMCN developed new semantics that are not found in any English, Shona, Ndebele or any local language dictionaries. *Kirawa* is one of the most popular words in the JMCN Church. It denotes a demarcated place *pa Sowe* were members of the Masowe yeNyenyedzi gather for religious rituals (*kushandirwa*). There are certain objects and certain plants that are found at a *Kirawa*. The place is marked by stones surrounding the place. No one is allowed to walk into the *Kirawa* except through an open entrance which is the only entrance to the place. Certain rituals are followed at the entrance such as that one should kneel down, touch the forehead, chest, left and right shoulder (the crucifix sign) prayerfully. This is followed by certain confessions before one enters in the *kirawa*. This process is called *kupinda pachikero* (going through the scale). All prayers are offered facing to the east (*kumabvazuva*). From the interviews held, it was found out that praying while facing east has religious connotations. For them mercy and grace comes as the sun rises from the east (*kumabvazuva kunobva tsitsi nengoni*). Religiously, facing to the east is ritually done expecting mercy and grace to fall on them as they pray. Prophets and Prophetesses always faced the western direction as they administered religious rituals (*kushandira*). Similarly facing the west has religious connotation. For Masowe yeNyenyedzi, evils spirits come from the west (*kumadokero*). As the sun goes down evil spirits are believed to take over and afflict people throughout the night hence prophets faced that direction so that they could fight against these evil spirits (*mweya ye kumadokero*).

Figure 6.7: Example of a kirawa



This picture depicts a typical kirawa. Traditional objects of worship such as clay pots, mbiya, are clearly visible in the background.

A *kirawa* is characterized by objects such as clay pots and small stones in the clay pots, *mitcuro*. These clay pots, *mbiya*, played a very significant role in defining Masowe yeNyenyedzi spirituality. *Mbiya* is an African traditional household utensil used as either a storage container for beer and other products such as animal blood used for traditional religious ceremonies. Even on marriage ceremonies money for *lobola* is placed in the clay pot or a wooden plate. Clay pots are found at *kuchikuva* that is the equivalence of where plates and pots are displayed in a typical rural Karanga kitchen. This place is an *axis mundi*, where African prayers are offered at this revered area in a hut. During these traditional rituals, family elders put traditional tobacco into a clay pot and kneels *pachikuva* to offer prayers to their divine. Children are not allowed to sit on this sacred area in the kitchen. In some the Karanga African

communities, of Chirumhanzu, if a family member dies, the corpse will be placed *pachikuva* over night before burial.

Likewise, the JMCN members kneel before the clay pots as they offer prayers. Small stones for religious rituals are kept in these clay pots. In Karanga traditional religious rituals elderly people kneel before *chikuva* place where clay pots are displayed in the rural kitchen. Even the dead body is laid near *chikuva* the whole night before burial. We argued that kneel before a clay pot for prayers by JMCN Church is a borrowed phenomenon from Karanga spirituality. During their prayers all members kneel facing east and those with spiritual problems will be given small stones to use from *mbiya*. Again, water for prayers, *muteuro*, is also kept in these clay pots. From the interviews, these small stones and water are taken from sacred rivers, *nzizi dzinoera*, pools such as Chinhoyi caves, also known as Chirorodziva, Gonawapotera, Nyatsime, and Hokoyo for religious rituals (Baba Nicholas: 2014).

Upon investigating on the significance of *mbiya* Baba Nicholas noted that *mbiya* is significant because it was used from historical times by Karanga ancestors for many functions such as food storage. Thus, originally *mbiya* is an African household utensil which has been inculturated by the Masowe Churches (Baba Nicholas: 2014). He reiterated that the Spirit admired our culture, our household utensils and our old way of worshipping the divine (*Mweya wakafaririra tsika dzevanhu vatema*) (Baba Nicholas: 2014). Baba Andrew supported that view stating that from the day Johane Masowe founded the Church, he started his ministry with *mbiya* and a rod under a *muhacha* tree in Mhondoro (Baba Andrew: 2015). Another important religious object used by JMCN Church is a rod, *tsvimbo*.

Another important object Masowe uses at the kirawa is the rod known in Shona as *tsvimbo*. There are numerous types of religious paraphernalia which those presiding over Masowe uses for the different rituals. The study argues, for example, that these rods are different depending on what the spirit instructed. For instance, there are rods from a traditional tree called wild gardenia, *mutarara*. Normally in African traditional religion, the tree branches of *mutarara* are used to cover the grave immediately after burial. It is believed

by the Karanga that the branches of *mutarara* tree chases wades off witches who would come to take away the dead body during the night. Therefore, the study opines that by Johane Masowe churches using rod from *mutarara* denotes the traditional concept of driving away evil spirits among the members. Thus, the use of *mutarara* rod is a borrowed phenomenon from African spirituality.

Another type of a rod the Johane Masowe uses is the one from a bamboo tree, *mushenjere*. Again, this rod is for specific individuals according to the directives of the spirit. During certain church services, there will be as few as five members having the rod among congregants numbering thousands. The bamboo tree rod is a special type of rod that represents JMCN Church spirituality. Rules and regulations are to be adhered to for one to continue having such a rod. The study observes that the rod itself is a plant plucked from the river banks from a bamboo tree. From time past, Africans from my tribes were discouraged from using this bamboo tree for firewood or any other household chores as the tree is regarded to be sacred. The belief behind this practice is such trees are associated with the water spirits. It is on such trees according to data collected from key informant interviews that mysterious clothes will be hung and upon one advancing towards the river the clothes mysteriously disappeared (Chief Chaka: 2014). The study posits that Johane Masowe use this bamboo rod as a point of contact with mysterious water spirits for curative powers. From the above, he study concludes that, it is one of the main reason why the Masowe yeNyenyedzi Church baptise their members in sacred dams and pools.

The study also observes that the majority of the Masowe yeNyenyedzi male members carry the rod from a tree called *mutema masanhu* (no English name, botanical name could be ascertained). This tree is normally found near mountains and hills. It grows to be a big tree that birds hide from the weather elements. Ironically, the tree does not bear any fruit yet provides a very good sanctuary from the aforementioned weather elements. One key finding about the tree is that dangerous snakes are not found in that shady tree which is unusual to other shady trees. Only snakes like *shanga nyoka* can be found in such trees. These snakes are not poisonous or harmful such as house snakes, *shanga nyoka* are found in and around the tree. In the Karanga worldview,

harmless, non-poisonous snakes are not allowed to be killed. These 'protected' snakes include *shanga nyoka*. The Karanga people of Chirumhanzu believe that this snake represents one's immediate ancestor. For the Karanga people, ancestors are believed to take different forms as they communicate with the living.

The study can conclude that the use of rods from such trees such as *mutema masanhu*, mutarara and the bamboo tree denotes an inculturation of African spiritual elements in the JMCN church spirituality Zimbabwe. African spirituality as argued by Mbiti is found in such trees. Apart from using such rods, all the JMC Churches uses *mbiya* for their religious rituals as argued before. Thus, *mbiya* is very central in defining Masowe spirituality. One informant noted that:

We use *mbiya* to disguise evil spirits so that the evil spirits think we are together though we are against them. He said whenever evils spirits see *mbiya* they will leave us thinking we belong to them while the opposite is true (Baba Gift: 2014).

It can be argued that the JMCN Church spirituality replaced the central Christian objects of faith with *mbiya*, rods caved from sacred trees, stones and waters from sacred dams and pools. Additionally, the Church preserved many of traditional African rituals such as funeral rites and marriage. It was found out that it the Church found it reasonable to inculturate Africans funeral rituals, sacred objects of worship like *mbiya* and cave religious rods from sacred trees for their rituals to make Christianity an African religion. Africanisation of Christianity is a defensible idea chiefly because Africans received a westernized or Europeanized Christianity (Paris 1995:38). For Paris this is the only way Christianity can become an African religion; hence Africans can give devotion to something that resonates with their cultures. However, this process of Africanisation of Christianity does not imply the absence of the reverse, that is, the 'Christianisation' of African religions (Paris 1995:38). It is against this view that it was concluded that indeed there was the inculturation of African Spiritual elements in the JMCN Church spirituality. The JMCN Christianised African religions in their process of trying to Africanise Christianity. The adjudication of the authenticity of JMCN spirituality will not be attempted in this research. The rationale is that Christian spirituality judgments must be elaborated on and not solely be

viewed as deductive and prescriptive. Considering the symbols in the JMCN it can be argued that JMCN is an authentic Christian Church, presenting authentic Christian spirituality. Below is the discussion of the JMCN Church symbols.,

This section explores the key JMCN Church symbols namely the cross and the star. These two are central symbols in the church's spirituality. What is interesting to note is that the Cross and the Star as religious symbols were never used to represent one religion but one was commonly used to represent that religion, while the other symbol was used to represent that religion. Suprisingly JMCN put them together to represent their Church spirituality.

The symbol of the cross was widely accepted by almost all Christian denominations. The study observes that all the Johane Masowe weChishanu Churches have images of the cross on their sacred clothes and Church flags. We argue in the study that JMCN is identified among AICs because of these cross images which are central to the Church spirituality. The cross is seen on their uniforms particularly those who operates in the prophetic offices known as *vabati vomweya*. Besides these cross images, the JMCN Church draw a cross sign at the beginning and at the ending of each prayer session ritualizing the beginning and ending of each ceremony. Some Johane Masowe weChishanu Churches went further to make wooden carvings and designs form of small crosses representing the crucifixion, like the Roman Catholics have rosaries. These small crosses are put at their door posts and even under their pillows during bedtime.

However, though the cross images are prevalent in this Church, we learnt that JMCN does not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church also does not believe that Jesus died a vicarious death. For them Jesus was killed by white people from overseas. So, the cross in the JMCN saves just as a remembrance for the suffering and work of their three spiritual leaders Johane, Emanuweri and Nyenyedzi. The cross sign and images were borrowed from the Roman Catholic but representing different meanings and significance altogether. However, it could be argued that since the JMCN have Cross images, imitated the cross sign like the Roman Catholics do congregate on the Fridays, the day supposedly to be the day Christ was

crucified qualifies to be designated as authentic Christian Church. They even commence church services from Thursday around 3pm till Sunday 3pm which serves as a memorial service for Jesus who was killed (Baba Duson: 2014).

According to the data gathered it was found that the JMCN Church members do not bath from 3pm on Thursday to Sunday. They don't apply deodorants, perfumes or any other fragrant oils. They do not also eat meat for all these days known as *kubatidza amai Maria kuchema Mwanakomana* that is, helping the mother of Jesus to mourn her son who was killed overseas. This will suggest that JMCN Church of Chirumhanzu borrowed the use of the cross from the Roman Catholic though the Catholics are not known of not bathing from Thursday, but some Roman Catholics members do not eat meat on Fridays.

Figure 6.8: A portrait of the JMC church service in UK



In the picture above, Church members are seen singing Hossana Hossana with a white cloth spread before them. Three crosses stand in the picture represent mitumbi mitatu, Johane at the centre, Emanuweri and Nyenyedzi on either side. Again, there is mbiya a symbol of their spirituality. Sometimes the clay bowl contains water or small stones.

The cross symbol dominates the JMCN Church spirituality. However, the combination of the cross and clay pot, *mbiya* typifies syncretic movement

hence the notion of undoubted New Religious syncretic movement. New Religious Syncretic Movements are Churches that advocates for double standards. These churches are neither here nor there, they use the cross but denying the Christian significance of the cross. They make wooden crosses from African Traditional sacred tress such as *mutarara*.

Apart from the cross, Johane Masowe weChishanu yeNyenyedzi Church displays the star, nyenyedzi, on their church regalia and even on church flags at all of their holy shrines. These flags play a very significant role for JMCN Church spirituality as they act as their spiritual antennas for connecting to the religious signal. The flags are hoisted high above all objects around the place to receive the spiritual signals. More importantly flags serve as a trademark for the church since Masowe churches are many and follow different doctrines. Therefore, the star symbol on the flag are primary identifiers identifying to the people that this is the Johane Masowe Chishanu yeNyenyedzi, *inotungamirirwa neNyenyedzi*, John of the wilderness that is led by the star Church. It is very possible to find more than 10 small groups of white garmented Churches in one open space. These small white garmented groups represent different JMC Churches. The star on their regalia and Church flags distinguishes the JMCN from other JMC Churches.

The star also represents the Angel that guides the Church, *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi* who leads JMCN Church wherever the Church is. It has been noted through the study that almost all the Apostolic sect subscribe to certain a *Mutumwa* Angel. Some believe in *Mutumwa Maikoro*, Angel Michael and some in *Mutumwa Eria* and Angel Elijah. However, in the JMCN, three Angelic beings are mentioned all the time. These are *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi*, *Mutumwa Gaburona* and *Mutumwa Edah* (an explanation will be given later). We noted that *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi* is the Arch Angel for this Church. Therefore, each year there is a conference, *musangano weNyenyedzi* mandatory for all JMCN members. Members from Botswana, Burundi, South Africa and other African countries gather together during the month of August to attend this conference in Mkoba 19, Gweru in the Midlands province. Key informants noted that the conference was very special because it was a time for building spiritual census in Church and members are counted by *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi*.

One can also not that this is the first time Star is used in a Christian Religion. We used to know that a star and a crescent are found in the Islamic Religion. Surprisingly the star and crescent are also found in the JMCN Church. This becomes confusing whether the Church borrowed this from Islamic faith or African traditional beliefs since the Church does not read the Bible. In the Karanga traditional religious beliefs a star and crescent are central religious symbols. A cresset is a half moon and in the Karanga religious beliefs when the moon is half it means something good is coming and usually when you see a star moving very fast if you are not married your life partner will come from the direction the star goes. From interviews the star represents an Angel of the Church. We have also noted that the JMCN Church have many other central Angels that constitute their spirituality.

One of these is Mutumwa *Maikoro*, Angel Michael who is considered to be God's Angel of war. This Angel operates through selected and very few prophets within the Church hierarchy. During their religious rituals like *muteuro wegore* or *Jorodhani pana Shashe* (Jordan at Shashe), one prophet leads the congregation, and this must be a prophet guided by Mutumwa *Maikoro* who is also the Angel of revenge and death. All members of this Church were reported to be afraid of this person who they believe to be overshadowed by Mutumwa *Maikoro*. This person is always identifiable by wearing a red garment while everyone else wear white garment during such ceremonies.

Apart from Mutumwa *Maikoro* there is Mutumwa *Edah* who is honored in a song sung during *musangano we gore*, "*Tichifamba naEdah*", guided by Edah. Edah is the rod which was handed down to the Church leaders from Baba Sandros Nhamoyebonde. This suggests that although Sandros died and was buried in July 1994, he left a rod that leads the JMCN Church members. The rod is used during water baptism ceremonies, for deliverance during *muteuro we gore* and the rod is also used to count people during *kuverenga neNyenyedzi*. This rod is like a magnate that when the prophet pointed at a member in the queue, the Prophet can detect whether the person is afflicted with demons or not. This rod is therefore, central in the church's spirituality as it is efficacious in administration of key church functions such as healing of the afflicted.

During *Muteuro wegore* which was held in Masvingo Mucheke in 2014, many congregants fell down after being pointed by this rod while standing in a

queue. However, another informant said *Edah* is an Angel sent by God to Africans, like Jesus Christ was an Angel sent to whites (Madzimai Edzayi: 2013). Though it was not clear who *Edah* was, it can be concluded that *Edah* is the sacred rod that was handed down to the JMCN by Baba Sandros Nhamoyebonde to be used for religious rituals. It resonates with other narratives where a rod was handed down to the future generation from the founders of AICs. In Zimbabwe we know of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) with *svimbo yaSamueri Mutendi*. Stories are told that Bishop Dr Nehemiah Mutendi the son to late Samuel Mutendi is using the rod that his father used for religious purposes. Thus, below is a portrait of the late Sandros holding the rod supposedly referred to as Mutumwa *Edah*.

Figure 6.9 Portrait Baba Sandros Nhamoyebonde



This picture was taken from the memorial program of events which is held in July every year to remember this great Father of faith in the JMCN Church. Every July the Church host a memorial service at Sandros grave in Seke Chitungwiza cemetery. The picture above depicts Sandros Cryson Nhamoyebonde carrying the sacred rod (supposedly Mutumwa *Edah*) for

the JMCN Church today. Even though this great leader has departed His rod remained with the Church. The rod is used during muteuro wegore to cast out demons and during Jorodhani pana Shashe. The rod is always in front of their Church possessions especially on Joridhani pana Shashe.

The study observes that this rod continued to be a sacred rod from the time of Sandros throughout to this generation in the JMCN Church. The same rod is used during national gatherings such as annual prayer, the star census conference, water Baptism at Shashe and lastly at the *Rupawo rweNyenyedzi* conference.

The following paragraphs deal with the religious commemorations in the JMCN Church. Religious commemorations are discussed because they constitute the centrality of any spirituality. Spirituality is seen and displayed in the inherent spiritual ceremonies. We have noted that Church spirituality is also celebrated in songs, rituals and symbols that show the energising spirit animating the community to move together in response to God (Constable 2003:10).

Memory and remembering is a key concept in almost all religions. Mbiti posits that a repeated word or action is powerful since it is spoken in a dramatic fashion and repeatedly (Mbiti 1991:131). We argue that the act of memorizing certain passages of scriptures, doctrines and teachings is at the centre of any religion. Jesus taught his disciples to repeatedly do the Lord supper in remembrance of Him (1Corinthians 11:24). Thus, the study discusses the celebrations in the JMCN Church. The reason of discussing these celebrations is to unpack what is at the centre of their celebrations. The analysis is guided by Jesus' command that Christians should always commemorate the HIS, death, burial and resurrection. The study posits that Christian spirituality can be called Christ spirituality because there is no Christ (ian) spirituality without Jesus Christ. Following are the key JMCN celebration the study selected to discuss:

- *Muteuro we gore*, annual prayer
- *Musangano we gore*, annual conference
- *Pasika*, Easter Conference.
- *Muteuro wegore*, annual prayer

The JMCN Church hold five annual celebrations and these are:

- Annual prayer conference in every May,
- Easter conference following the Gregorian calendar,
- Annual Conference held in August,
- Water Baptism Conference in every October and
- Seal of the star conference held every December.

Thus, *Muteuro wegore* is a common conference in most JMC Churches. What differed were the ways in which these celebrations were done. For the JMCN Church the Annual prayer is very important. The other name for this *muteuro wegore* is *Musangano weku pitsikwa kwemadzidza*/ no proper English translation but could mean-final release from Evil spirit). The meaning of *kupitsikwa kwemadzidza*, is held during the annual prayer and is a conference to convince the ancestors, *madzidza* to allow its family members to constantly, faithfully subscribe to JMCN spirituality (Baba Amos: 2014). Baba Amos argued that as long as one is not permitted to follow this new faith by his/her ancestral spirits, the person will certainly not last long in the new faith (Baba Amos: 2014). It was noted that the highest selling point for this Church is by first instilling fear into the people then convert them to be their Church members from henceforth they will be beholden. Many people in this Church are afraid of *mweya ye kumadokero*, *mweya ye madzidza*, spirits of the dead and goblins. A key informant stated confidentially during *muteruro wegore* that:

kana madzidza asina kukutendera kuti uroore unongoona musikana anga abvuma zvakana naka ave kuti haachadi (unless ancestral spirits permitted you to marry, promising love relationships just fade- up).

It can be noted that the congregants believed that one cannot materially prosper or get promotion unless their ancestral spirits desire it to happen. Accordingly, during *muteruro wegore* commemorations *vabati veMweya* will persuade family members' ancestors to allow the said member to get married those who want to get married, get job promotions, and job-seekers to get jobs. During these negotiations between the living and the living dead some congregants were informed by the prophets to go and make peace with their parents and in laws before any spiritual intercessions could be undertaken on their behalf. Some congregants were asked to go and appease their angry

ancestors so that they could be delivered and get married, get jobs and be promoted. An analysis of the annual prayer revealed that the mediatorship of Jesus Christ was demeaned as Prophets negotiated with family ancestors. We argue that this process of persuading the family ancestors for the promotion and well-being of its members seems to be deviating from traditional Christian doctrine on salvation through Jesus Christ.

Easter commemorations became a worldwide event within the Christian liturgical calendar. The purpose of this commemoration is to remember the passion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Messages on the passion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ are energetically proclaimed throughout the holy week which usually begins on a Holy Thursday ending on a resurrection Sunday (Easter Sunday). Some Churches dramatise the events that led to the death of Jesus Christ and how He was crucified on the cross. Apparently, the purpose of this ritual of the re-enactment is to capture the minds of the congregants on how their saviour suffered and eventually died on the cross to bring salvation to humanity. Invariably, on the resurrection Sunday, the services will end with a ritual of Holy Communion.

However, while other Christian denominations commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter, we have noted that the JMCN Church, celebrate 'Easter' with a difference. For them 'Easter' is the time to remember the 'Fathers of Faith', i.e. the messianic leaders whom God raised to give leadership and guidance to the church. Every Easter, the JMCN Church commemorates deliverance from evils spirits which was made possible through the charismatic leadership of Shonhiwa Masedza (Johane) (founder of the original 'Church', Mudyiwa Dzangara (Emanuweri), second from Johane and Sandros Nhamoyebonde (Nyenyedzi), third from Johane. This commemoration is commonly referred to in their semantics *tsoro yaJohane* literally a *three tier* game which is played in turns. Hence for them Johane came to introduce the religion, then followed by Emanuweri and lastly by Sandros hence the notion of *tsoro yaJohane*.

The study observed that though this Church commemorates Easter, the passion death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was removed from the

centre of the event and replaced by Johane, Emanuweri and Sandros. The main purpose and significance of Easter commemorations has been overshadowed hence inviting more questions on the authenticity of this church's Christian spirituality. We argue throughout the study that JMCN Church spirituality seems to have deviated from the central Christian spiritual tenets in a myriad way. We thus posit here that the Johane Masowe Chishanu yeNyenyedzi Church gravitated more towards becoming a syncretic, New Religious Movement. This reason is based on the fact that the commemoration of salvation that came through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, *Christus victor* which was replaced by remembering of the work done by Johane, Emanuweri and Sandros during Easter commemoration. For the church *tsoro yaJohane* is 'the' gospel. We have also noted that every Friday *tsoro yaJohane* or *nhoroondo ya Johane*, the history of the Church is the main sermon that they preach. After *nhoroondo ya Johane*, the JMCN Church have what they term *tsanangudzo dzeMweya*, prophecy. These two *tsoro ya Johane* and *tsanangudzo* together with *Gumi remitemo*, *Miko ne murairo* form the theology of the JMCN Church.

It is against this strong emphasis in the JMCN Church doctrine that Baba Gift in an interview spoke boldly that JMCN Church members are not Christians but simply followers of Johane Masowe/tiri vadzidzi va Johane (Baba Gift: 2014). He adds "Christianity is a religion for white, we follow the teaching of Baba Johane hence we are his disciples (Baba Gift: 2014). This was supported by Baba Tawona in his defence of the religion of the Vapositori in an online article "Johane Masowe Way of Worshipping and Life: The Truth vs Myths and Lies", (Madzibaba Tawona 2015b). In that article Madzibaba Tawona said, "I mentioned before that we, of Johane Masowe yeChishanu, are not Christians" (Madzibaba Tawona 2015b).

The last conference discussed in the study is the Annual Conference, *Musangano we gore*. This conference is held in the month of August annually. The main purpose of this conference is to take census of the said true members of JMCN Church. Members from every country attend this conference. The conference venue changes from one place to the other and from one country to the other. In 2014 this conference was held in Mkoba 19, Gweru, in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. This conference is sometimes referred to as *musangano wekuverengwa ne Nyenyedzi*, the star census conference.

Members of this Church believe that *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi* should always take a routine count of true members of JMCN who have followed the doctrine genuinely throughout each year. Thus *gumi remitemo* and *miko nemirairo*, Ten Commandments and rules and regulations are the key elements of their spirituality. Anyone who would have disobeyed one of the laws cannot be counted by *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi*.

Much time is devoted to confession of sins from Friday and Saturday while congregants wait for the counting process to commence on Sunday morning. Members will be in two long queues one for men and the other one from ladies. Unlike other conferences, the international leader Baba Antony normally presided over the counting process. The JMCN sacred rod, *Mutumwa Edah* is used to count members in the queues. Something to note is the presence of Baba Antony (International leader) at this conference. We could not have access to interview him because he was surrounded by his subordinates and was virtually inaccessible. His presence shows the magnitude of this conference in the JMCN Church. The Baba Antony is now staying in Botswana where he is a tentmaker.

After the census exercise, we were told that there will be 'the seal of the star' conference to be held sometime in December after *Jorodhani pana Shashe*. The seal of the star form what we gathered through interviews is the time members of the JMCN are given a mark to show that they are true members of JMCN Church. Upon enquiring the type of a mark, and where the mark is inserted on members, the response was that, the seal was spiritual and not physical.

Again, the study posits that the role of Jesus Christ for salvation of humanity has no place in the JMCN Church. *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi* is at the centre of these celebrations. We observe that throughout these celebrations, the JMCN do not officiate the Lord supper, Holy Communion and Jesus Christ message is not preached. Emphasis is on following the *Gumi remitemo miko ne mirairi* and Rule and Regulations.

In the chapter we offered some inculturated African spiritual elements. A special focus was paid to the JMCN's sacred places, rituals, objects, symbols and celebrations. These elements were discussed to respond to the main

research question: *To what extent should AICs inculturate African spiritual elements to shape their Church spirituality in a bid to have African Christian spirituality without obfuscating the central Christian spiritual tenets?* Hence, in summary this research which is based on participant observation and interviews brings to the fore the following observations, uncertainties and contests.

First, the JMCN Church has appropriated the central African traditional shrines of the Chirumhanzu indigenes i.e. Chivavarira hill. This is a concern because the locals are not amused with this kind of sharing of sacred places. Efforts to put security fence around Chivavarira by the indigenes of Chirumhanzu was work in progress (April 2015). Also, a critical concern in African Christian spirituality is: Should Christian Churches go to African traditional sacred mountains and hills in pursuit of spiritual powers? Second, the JMCN church gravitated more to African tradition religion by initiating their newly Church members into sacred pools such as Nyatsime, Gonawapotera and Hokoyo in the name of baptism. Arguably, these cited examples of pools, dams and rivers are believed by locals to be sacred because they supposedly inhabitants of Water Spirits. Baptising Church members in such places in quest for curative powers from water spirits is a course of concern.

Third, while the JMCN celebrate Easter, they do not believe that Jesus Christ died for human sins. According to the JMCN, Jesus was just killed by white people of overseas. Their ritual gathering during Easter is just to help the mother of Jesus to morn his son who was killed by whites and Jews. We observe that JMCN Church also do not believe the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather after whites killed Jesus, God took the spirit which was operating in Jesus and put it in Shonhiwa Masedza first then into Mudyiwa Dzangara secondly and lastly into Sandros Nhamoyebonde for the salvation of black Africans. For them God could not have sent a White person (Jesus) to give salvation to blacks.

Fourth, the Karanga people of Chirumhanzu use clay pots for religious ritual. They observe Muhacha tree as sacred place. So, the study posits that JMCN's use of such objects for worship is evidence of the resilience of African spirituality in the JMCN Church. Fifth, the JMCN Church believe that their

Church is led and guided by three Angels, *Mutumwa Nyenyedzi*, *Mutumwa Gaburona* and *Mutumwa Edah*. However, the fourth angel is the angel for war, thus *Mutumwa Maikoro*. This theology of African Angels leading the Church is contestable terrain in Christian spirituality for it seems to have substituted mediatorship and Lordship of Jesus Christ over His Church. The challenges raised in the study are: How to rebrand Christianity in African cultures without clouding and dropping the essential Christian spiritual elements? Is there any room in Christian Theology for Christians to persuade their family ancestors to allow members to become true Christians, and how should it be done? With this question raised, the following chapter gives the concluding remarks of this research study based on the findings: Is JMCN Church spirituality Christian or Not.