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Focus:

D. Tutu (S. Africa) and T. Tshibangu
(DRC); D. Ayegboyin (Nigeria);
Women's stories (Kenya and
Zimbabwe)



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Now published quarterly, with all issues available online, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will include biographies already available on the website itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the DACB itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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Introduction: Activism, Theology, and Witness with an African Color

This issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* pays tribute to two outstanding global church leaders who sought to model “African color” in their life-long witness as activists and theologians. Desmond Tutu (South Africa), in his anti-apartheid struggle, peacekeeping initiatives, and his role as Anglican archbishop, modeled a deeply enculturated African Christian identity that sent shockwaves around the world and continues to inspire all those who care about racial justice and human rights. Tharcisse Tshibangu (DRC), in his early student years, dared to challenge the travesty of an African theology of adaptation that was not African from the roots up. The Vatican eventually recognized his prophetic voice as advocate of theology with an “African color” by making him bishop and inviting him to dialogue at the level of the global Catholic Church under Vatican II.

Next, in our featured interview, long time DACB associate Deji Ayegboyin speaks of his pioneering work promoting African Christian history (education and research) in the university. His visionary leadership has “converted” many of his students to the necessity of documenting the lives of the elders of African Christianity before their memory fades. His influence in the field, as a member of the DACB Senior Advisory Council, continues today.

The second half of the issue focuses on the stories of three women: Mama Eunice Njoki Wangai of Kenya, and Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa and Sikhawulaphi Khumalo of Zimbabwe. In all three articles—one book review and two biographies—the female authors were concerned to tell the story of a woman whose ministry had been forgotten or overshadowed by that of the men around them. By bringing their stories into the light, they honor the African color of the work and witness of women of God who are well “worth writing about”—to borrow the words of Barbara Mahamba.

Michèle Sigg
Editor

Tribute

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1931-2021) and South African Black Theology

By Francis Anekwe Oborji¹

At the beginning of his crusade and struggle against the apartheid system and white minority racist government and ideology in South Africa, the late Archbishop Tutu observed: “I want to declare categorically that I believe apartheid to be evil and immoral, and therefore, unchristian. No theologian I know would be prepared to say that the apartheid system is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”² Speaking further on the religious matter of South African Black liberation theology, he said: “The perplexity we have to deal with is this: why does suffering single out black people so conspicuously, suffering not at the hands of pagans or other unbelievers, but at the hands of fellow Christians who claim allegiance to the same Lord and Master?”³

The concerns in South African Black theology largely rest on this religious interpretation of the apartheid system by late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In that sense, Tutu merits the title of “Father of South African Black Theology.” His seminal religious interpretation of the evils of the apartheid system and white minority racist government and ideology in South Africa was pivotal in the development of South African Black liberation theology.

In the present article, we want to honor this great son of Africa and icon of the South African anti-apartheid crusade who died on December 26, 2021, by highlighting, however briefly, this aspect of his contribution to the growth of African theology—that is, the area of South African Black liberation theology. Many, no doubt, may remember him primarily as a courageous and outstanding anti-apartheid crusader, a Black African Anglican archbishop during the struggle against the apartheid system and white minority racist government and ideology in South Africa. Tutu is remembered also for his ardent political activism,

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² D. Tutu, Press Statement of October 11, 1979, in reply to minister Le Grange's attack on SACC (South African Council of Churches); the statement is reproduced in Tutu, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness* (London, 1982), 35.

³ Tutu, Press Statement.

religious and moral authority of the first hour, in his struggle and advocacy for racial equality and social justice in South Africa; his public activism and consistent protests and civil disobedience for the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. Many also may remember him especially as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 as well as a renowned, world acclaimed public speaker and lecturer, and finally, as chair of post-apartheid South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

However, few may be familiar with Tutu's enormous influence on the birth and development of contemporary African Christian theology, especially the influence of his religious and theological writing on the development of South African liberation theology, during and after the fall of apartheid in South Africa. This is why it is necessary that we highlight that aspect of his life and contribution as an African theologian of the first hour. Tutu remains an inspiration to many, especially many young Africans in theological scholarship, operating in areas in which the Gospel meets the ever-changing socio-cultural, religious, political and economic reality of Africa.

Moreover, Tutu remains a model for many African Church leaders today, as the continent is in dire need of committed religious leaders with deep spirituality, moral probity, authority, and public trust to guide their respective countries and people to true social, moral, and spiritual renewal so that a new Africa will emerge.

Above all, Tutu's example has a message for the emerging freedom fighters of our day, especially the young people in Africa. That is, those who have started to engage in freedom fighting and the struggle for self-determination or second independence of their different ethnic-nationalities from the domineering ethnic-group/groups in their respective African nation states born of European colonialism. These young Africans must remember that for any freedom fighting movement or agitation for self-determination to be meaningful, it must be well-grounded in authentic spirituality and theology.

Background to Archbishop Tutu's African Theology

Desmond Mpilo Tutu (October 7, 1931 – December 26, 2021) was a South African Anglican archbishop and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid icon and crusader for racial equality, civil rights, and social justice. He was a powerful voice for non-violence in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. His good sense of humor, inspiring message, and conscientious work for civil liberties and peoples' rights earned him international accolades and admiration.

Tutu's theological methodology and perspective borrowed substantially from the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. John Mbiti's classic phrase "I am because we, and since we are, therefore I am," captures a key feature in Tutu's *ubuntu* philosophy. *Ubuntu* is a South African (Bantu) phrase, meaning, "humanity" or "I am because we are." The African philosophy of *ubuntu* is an explanation of the African cosmology that places God and God's basically good intention in the creation of human beings and the universe, above every other consideration. In the African worldview and spirituality of *ubuntu*, humanity (individuals and community) is the focal center.

In general, African spirituality is based on this centrality of human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life, this side of the grave. It consists of their attitudes, beliefs, and practices as they strive to reach out toward super-sensible realities of God, the spirits, and the invisible forces in the universe. The central concern is how to make sense of this life and ensure that it is meaningful, harmonious, good, and worth living. The outcome of the project of life depends on how successful and beneficial the relationships are between the living and the invisible world.

For traditional Africans, humanity is first and foremost the *community*. In the first place, it is the extended family based on blood kinship or on affinity through marriage, and then the clan, the tribe, or the nation (ethnic-nationality). Kinship and affinity create a special kind of bonding within which mutual rights and duties are exercised unconditionally. Individuals acquire their basic identity through these relationships and enjoy a feeling of security in life as long as the exchange of these rights and duties is guaranteed.

This is the background for appreciating Tutu's love as it relates to the African philosophy of *ubuntu* (humanity-community). It is often said that where Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), the African would rather say, "I am related, therefore we are" (*cognatus ergo sum*). In other words, in African spirituality, the value of interdependence through healthy inter-human relationships comes above that of individualism, segregation, and personal independence. By the same token, the practice of cooperation is relied upon more than competition.

Moreover, in the African worldview that informs Tutu's philosophy of *ubuntu*, the relationship between the human community and the rest of the universe is not conceived of as a struggle in which human beings view the world or a fellow human being as an object or an adversary whose nature and function should be investigated and reduced to formulas so as to be mastered and exploited. Rather the universe is seen as a common heritage, its diverse components as potential partners in the shared project of existence. There is,

therefore, a feeling of mutual dependence among the different parts: human beings, the animal world, vegetation, the elements, the heavenly bodies, the departed as well as the diffuse forces, visible and invisible that circulate all around.

All these help us to put into perspective Tutu's African philosophy of *ubuntu* that guided his theological approach and understanding in bringing the apartheid system and white minority racist government in South Africa to a standstill. In one of his famous speeches at the height of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, he said: "If you think you can stop us from becoming free, you are going to be stampeded. ... For unless we are free, no one in this country is going to be free." The same *ubuntu* philosophy guided him as chair of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

In a bold anthropomorphic vein, I can picture God surveying the awful wrecks that litter human history – how the earth is soaked with the blood of so many innocent people who have died brutally. God has seen two World Wars in this century alone plus the Holocaust, the genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, [the pogroms against Biafrans in Nigeria], the awfulness in the Sudan, Sierra Leone, the two Congos, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East, and the excesses that have characterized Latin America. It is a baneful catalog that records our capacity to wreak considerable harm on one another and our gross inhumanity to our fellow humans. I imagine God surveying it all, seeing how His children treat their sisters and brothers. God would weep as Jesus wept over the hard-hearted and unresponsive Jerusalem, where he had come to his own people and they would not receive him.⁴

The Specific Path of South African Black Theology

Although, South African Black theology may bear many features similar to South American liberation theology and the North American Black theology movement, South African Black theology has nothing to do with the founders of those movements or their ideologies and even less with Black Power as a political ideology.

For instance, exponents of South African Black theology do not see their theology as primarily a racial affair. In other words, they are not saying (as some exponents of Black liberation theologies in the Americas seem close to saying) that God is on the side of Black people simply because they are Black. Rather,

⁴ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 124.

“Black” to South African theologians such as Tutu is less a racial designation than a socio-political symbol: it is primarily a synonym for oppression and exploitation.⁵

Put in its historical perspective, South African Black theology is said to have emerged as a coherent theological force as a result of conferences held in 1971, the papers of which were published in book form the following year. However, the book was immediately banned, but eventually reprinted in London in 1973 and edited by Basil Moore. Other shorter contributions to South African Black theology appeared in *Pro Veritate*, the journal of the Christian Institute. This was in turn banned in 1977, in the repressions following the demonstrations that took place around Biko's death. Prominent among the contemporary exponents of South African Black theology are Desmond Tutu, Manas Buthelezi, and Allen Boesak.

The primary objective of South African Black theology is to refute the arguments of the racist theology which presented the White claim to racial superiority as the will of God. South African Black theologians affirm that Blacks, like all races, are created in God's image and therefore have the same dignity as all the children of God, Whites included. Theologians also, identify the God of Jesus Christ as the God of Exodus and therefore a liberator, on the side of the oppressed. However, in Tutu's words, “the Whites in South Africa also need to be liberated, because they dehumanized themselves by oppressing the Blacks.”⁶

Following the same line of thought, Mokgethi Motlhabi, another South African theologian, argues that South African Black theology is an effort to “relate God and the gamut of religious values to the Black man in his situation in South Africa.” Its concern is with Blacks in the totality of the dilemma of oppression in which racial prejudice against them is of paramount concern. But at the same time, racial prejudice is the root cause of other forms of dehumanization and oppression that Blacks have continued to suffer at the hands of Whites. As such, it is emphatically a theology of Black liberation – the liberation of the whole experience - economic, social, political as well as religious.

At the same time, South African Black theology has as its focus the entire Christian community, Blacks as well as Whites. Its essential aim is to provide guidelines for a Christian praxis by which all the Christians in South

⁵ See B. Moore, “What is Black Theology?” in *Black Theology, the South African Voice*, Papers from various conferences held in South Africa, 1971 (London, 1973), 16.

⁶ D. Tutu, “Black Theology/African Theology - Soul Mates or Antagonists?” in G. S. Wilmore & J. H. Cone (eds.), *Black Theology*, 489.

Africa can partake in the liberating activity of God in Christ.⁷ This involves analyzing the social and political situation in which Blacks find themselves, in order to expose the contradictions within that society and deal with the racial conflicts inherent in it. In this way, the role of theology is to bring about social change, and it is only insofar as members of the church become involved in this process of change that its praxis is relevant.

In fact, for Bonganjalo Goba, such a process for change is intrinsic to the Christian Gospel. Religion is not a private matter, observes Goba, “but is a public praxis of the Christian faith, which seeks to transform the existing situation.” Therefore, the church has the obligation to involve itself fully in transforming the political and social structures that oppress and dehumanize the Black population of South Africa. In this way, theology becomes a “Christian communal praxis,” a theology of Christian community wrestling with concrete problems as well as providing alternatives in the process of liberation. It is in this context that Christ may be described as “Black”; Christ liberates because he shares our common humanity and shows that “God, in his forsakenness, suffers with us as the one who is crucified.”⁸

Goba's analysis brings together several themes that are characteristic of South African Black theology. Its central concern is humankind itself, suffering under an oppressive and dehumanizing system and an ideological rationalization that has reduced one race to the status of an animal. The theology grapples with the problems of liberation and the use and abuse of power and human intelligence. But the most positive aspect of it all is that South African Black theology has the Scripture as its base, since it seeks to relate the Gospel to the Black socio-political situation or rather racial oppression. Apart from Tutu, these themes have received their most extended treatment in the writings of two leading South African Black theologians, namely Manas Buthelezi and Allan Boesak.⁹

However, given the collapse of apartheid and communism, South African Black theology is becoming more and more affiliated with liberation theology in other parts of Africa. Authors of the theology, as we have seen in the thoughts of Tutu, have started to also draw inspiration from African tradition and contemporary reality and wisdom. Moreover, they now focus more on the

⁷ Cf. B. Goba, “Doing Theology in South Africa: A Black Christian Perspective” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 31(1980), 22-35.

⁸ Goba, “Doing Theology,” 22-35.

⁹ See for example, B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology, the South African Voice* (1973); A. Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence* (1977); J. Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (1995).

themes of justice, civil rights, reconciliation, integration, and acceptance of one another.

These are the strands of thoughts and understanding one finds in South African Black theology, developed during the apartheid era and after the fall of apartheid. It is a kind of a “protest” theology against racist ideology and the apartheid regime and system in South Africa. This is what distinguishes the South African Black theology from the other currents of African liberation theology developed in other part of Africa (including African women’s liberation theology.)

Conclusion

Tutu’s exemplary life reminds us how important religious and theological fronts are in any freedom fighting and agitation for liberation and self-determination worth its name. The archbishop’s life, work, and social activism in bringing about the fall of the apartheid system and white minority racist government in South Africa is a challenge to many church leaders today in different African countries where people are still living under the bondage of tyrannical and dictatorial regimes, discrimination, marginalization, oppression, conflicts, and wars.

More significantly, Tutu’s extraordinary commitment to the reconciliation process in post-apartheid South Africa, the skillful way he chaired South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission—a role that President Mandela had assigned to him—remains a challenge to match. At the conclusion of that assignment, Nelson Mandela said of him: “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa has put the spotlight on all of us ... In its hearings Desmond Tutu has conveyed our common pain and sorrow, our hope and confidence in the future.”

In his award-winning book, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999), Tutu argues that true reconciliation cannot be achieved by denying the past. But neither is it easy to reconcile when a nation “looks the beast in the eye.” Going further, he writes:

You are devastated by the fact that it could be possible at all for human beings to shoot and kill a fellow human being, burn his body on a pyre, and while this cremation is going on actually enjoy a barbecue on the side. What had happened to their humanity that they could do this ... How was it possible for them to return from such an outing to their homes, embrace

their wives, and enjoy, say, their child's birthday party?¹⁰

Be that as it may, rather than repeat platitudes about forgiveness and pains of the past, Tutu represents for us today a man of bold spirituality who recognizes the horrors people can inflict upon one another and yet retains a sense of idealism about reconciliation and *ubuntu*. With a clarity of sight born out of decades of experience, he has demonstrated to us how to move forward with honesty, truthfulness, justice, equity, compassion, and love to build a newer and more humane society and world.

Appendix: A Brief Biography of Desmond Tutu's Life

(Excerpted and compiled by M. Sigg]

Desmond Tutu (1931-2021) was born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal, about 179 km west of Johannesburg into a Methodist family that later became Anglican. His parents were Xhosa and Tswana, and his father was a teacher. He attended school at Johannesburg Bantu High School. He trained first as a teacher at Pretoria Bantu Normal College and, in 1954, he graduated from the University of South Africa. He worked for three years as a high school teacher and then decided to study theology. He had wanted to pursue a medical career but could not afford the training.

In 1955, he married Nomalizo Leah Shenxane. After his ordination as a priest in 1961, he pursued further theological study in England from 1962 to 1966, leading up to a Master of Theology. He taught theology in the Eastern Cape, South Africa from 1967 to 1972. At this time, he started to make his anti-apartheid views known. He then returned to England for three years to become the assistant director of a theological institute in London. In 1975 he became the first Black Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg.

In 1985, at a time when townships were rising up in rebellions against the apartheid regime, Tutu was installed as the first Black Anglican bishop. He publicly endorsed civil disobedience and an economic boycott of South Africa to put an end to apartheid. A year later he was elected the first Black archbishop of Cape Town. With other church leaders, he mediated clashes between government forces and Black protesters. In 1988, he also became Chancellor of the University of Western Cape in Bellville, South Africa.

¹⁰ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Image (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1999), 130.

In 1990, President FW de Klerk unbanned the African National Congress (ANC) and announced the imminent release of Nelson Mandela from prison. Apartheid laws and racist restrictions were repealed the following year. 1994 saw the first democratic elections during which Mandela won by a landslide. At this time, Tutu coined the term “Rainbow nation” to describe the multiracial composition of post-apartheid South Africa.

Also in 1994, Mandela invited Tutu to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights violations under apartheid. In 1996, Tutu retired from his position as a primate and became archbishop emeritus, though continuing to work as a public figure. He pulled out of public life in 2010 but continued to advocate for conflict resolution with other world leaders in the group The Elders that he co-founded in 2007. In 2013 he criticized the ANC for its inaction in addressing questions of inequality, corruption, and violence. Through the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation (<https://www.tutu.org.za/>), he and his wife worked to promote peace-building and conflict resolution to achieve reconciliation and cultivate accountable servant leadership.

Tutu was not afraid to critique the church that he had served for decades. When there was an uproar over the ordination of gay bishops in the Anglican Church, he criticized an “obsession” with homosexuality that overshadowed the clergy’s battle on poverty. This did not stop him from declaring his support for gay rights in 2013.

On October 7, 2021 he attended a thanksgiving service in honor of his 90th birthday at St. George’s Cathedral in Cape Town, his former parish. He died on December 26, 2021 in Cape Town.

According to Al Jazeera online:

His “clear views and fearless stance,” which made him a “unifying symbol for all African freedom fighters,” won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, according to the Norwegian Nobel Institute.

Though short in stature, Tutu was a giant of South African politics, notable for his drive, infectious laughter and witty critiques of apartheid’s absurdities. In one example, he told followers: “Be nice to whites, they need you to rediscover their humanity.”

“He was South Africa’s Martin Luther King – a Christian clergyman who worked, non-violently, for racial justice and equality,” Steven Gish, author of a biography on Tutu, told Al Jazeera. “He never hated his oppressors and always believed in dialogue and appealing to people’s moral conscience.”

He received honorary doctorates from a number of leading universities in the USA, Britain, and Germany.

According to Britannica online:

Tutu authored or coauthored numerous publications, including *The Divine Intention* (1982), a collection of his lectures; *Hope and Suffering* (1983), a collection of his sermons; *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999), a memoir from his time as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (2004), a collection of personal reflections; and *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference* (2010), reflections on his beliefs about human nature. In addition to the Nobel Prize, Tutu received numerous honours, including the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom (2009), an award from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation that recognized his lifelong commitment to “speaking truth to power” (2012), and the Templeton Prize (2013).

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Tribute

Msgr. Tharcisse Tshibangu (1933 – 2021): Promoter of Theology with an “African Color”

By Francis Anekwe Oborji¹¹

Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu is best remembered by the able and courageous way he argued for a theology with an “African-color” as a student, in series of theological debates between him and the Dean of his Faculty of Theology, Belgian professor Alfred Vanneste, at the prestigious Lovanium University in Kinshasa in 1960. These debates took place as part of the famous Kinshasa Theology Faculty symposia (1960-1968) that centered on the “Possibility of an ‘African Theology.’”

Adieu, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku (1933 – 2021)

We just received the sad news of the call into the great beyond of His Excellency, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku of the Democratic Republic of Congo. His call into the glory of the Risen Christ in heaven came just three days after the death of another global church leader, the South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu.

The loss of these two great sons of African Christianity and pioneer theologians is a tremendous blow at a time like this. Their deaths mark the end of an era in the development and growth of African Christianity and theological thought in the continent. The baton is now with the younger African theologians and church leaders who must not allow the labors of these pioneers in African theology and growth of Christianity in the continent, to be in vain.

Tharcisse Tshibangu was born in Kipushi (Katanga, DRC) on April 24, 1933. After taking Greek and Latin in secondary school, he studied philosophy and theology at the Major Seminary of Moba (former Baudouinville). Thereafter, he pursued his studies in the Theology Faculty at the prestigious Lovanium University in Kinshasa from 1957-1961, graduating with a degree in theology. From 1961 to 1965 he pursued further studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, obtaining a PhD in Theology (1962) and a Habilitation in Higher

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Education (1965). In 1965, he returned to Lovanium (Kinshasa), where he secured an appointment as a full-time professor until 1966.

He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Lubumbashi in 1959 and was appointed to Vatican Council II by Pope John XXIII (1966) as a student in Louvain, Belgium. Thereafter he was appointed prelate by Pope Paul VI who consecrated him bishop (1970). He was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa from 1991 to 1992. In 1992, Pope John-Paul II appointed him archbishop of the Diocese of Mbuji-Mayi. After August 1, 2009, he was Emeritus Archbishop of the Diocese of Mbuji-Mayi until his demise.

After the merging of the various universities of Zaire into the National University of Zaire (UNAZA) in 1971 under Mobutu's regime, Tshibangu became rector until decentralizing policy restored autonomy to the various universities. From 1981 until his retirement from active service, he served as Chancellor and President of the Board of Directors of the Universities of the Congo.

Tshibangu received a doctorate *honoris causa* from the University of Human Sciences of Strasbourg in France in 1977 to honor him for as the first Congolese University rector and for his role in creating UCB.

More significantly, as a student at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Lovanium University in Kinshasa, he took part in creating and organizing the Lovanium Theological Circle. Within that setting, the first debates regarding the possibility of an "African theology" took place. These debates eventually launched the scientific research that contributed a great deal to giving birth to what we know today as African theology. The influence of the Lovanium Theological Circle began to spread like wildfire to the rest of the continent beginning in 1960.

In other words, Tshibangu was, from day one, a central figure in giving an African direction to the celebrated symposia debates on "African Christianity and African theology" at the Faculty of the Catholic Theology, Kinshasa. In the debates of 1960 and 1968 with Dean Vanneste, Tshibangu did not mince words as he questioned the type of missionary theology of adaptation being used in the church's missionary approach to Africa at the time:

Adaptation is not simply a matter of personnel, of having African Bishops and lay leaders; nor is it meant only to adapt the liturgy, and reform parish and pastoral structures. Rather it means giving prominent place to key factors in Africa's worldview, culture, and religion...in particular, to African philosophy of life (principles of life-unity [*la force vitale*]), symbolism and intuition. (...) These are "latent theological seeds" which "adaptationism" could purify and use as "religious analogous" to illumine

theological problems confronting missionary activity in Africa.¹² In his response entitled, *D'abord une Vraie Théologie* (First, a True Theology), Dean Vanneste said that adaptation means rising to a higher level, not descending to a lower one. In this way, African theology and Christianity would be part of the worldwide theological endeavor.¹³

As Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, Tshibangu's biographer, rightly said, By an "African-colored" theology, Tharcisse Tshibangu and his group meant to go beyond Africanizing the hierarchy, the lay leaders, the parish and pastoral structures and also the liturgical and para-liturgical rites. In their eyes, it was a question of going back to the "very spirit of Christianity." This concern also differs from the problem of giving a soul to and informing the African's life, mentality, way of seeing things and all his cultures by means of the Christian spirit. One ought to go beyond the authors of the *Des Prêtres Noirs s'interrogent* (1956) (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), whose concern was to proclaim the need of Christianizing the African mentality and culture.¹⁴

Today's theology of inculturation has tried to correct some of the inadequacies in the theology of adaptation of old. However, at the time Tshibangu was making this argument in an African context in particular, it was a novel and courageous attempt by a young African theologian of his age. Who would had thought that a people once considered to be culturally a "tabula rasa" (without culture and civilization) were now spoken of as having not only admirable culture and civilization but also an African ontology, to the point of discussing the metaphysical realities of the law of God? Such was the courage of the young Kinshasa theologian Tshibangu at the time.

Tshibangu's primary concern was to formulate a theology with an "African-color" that was supposed to develop into a work aiming at the meeting between authentic African tradition and the original and specific elements of Judeo-Christian revelation. In this endeavor, in the tradition of authors of the

¹² T. Tshibangu, "Vers une théologie de couleur africain" in *Revue du Clergé Africain*, 5 (1960), 333-352. NB. For more about these debates, also see T. Tshibangu, *La théologie africaine. Manifeste et programme pour le développement des activités théologiques en Afrique*, St. Paul, Kinshasa, 1987.

¹³ See A. Vanneste, "D'abord une vraie théologie" in *Revue du Clergé Africain*, 5(1960), 346-352 and "Théologie universelle et Théologie Africaine" in *Revue du Clergé Africain* (RCA), 24(1969), 324-336.

¹⁴ E. Ntakirutimana, "Msgr Tharcisse Tshibangu: Champion of an 'African-coloured' Theology" in B. Bujo & J. Ilunga-Muya (eds.), *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers Vol. 1* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications-Africa, 2003), 49.

Bantu philosophy of “life-giving force” that came before him, especially, the trio Placide Tempels, Vincent Mulago, and Alexis Kagame, Tshibangu (like Mulago), emphasized the principle of unity of life as an epistemological principle marking African cultures in their internal coherence.

It would seem that the adaptation theology of the past that negated the existence of authentic African culture and ontology previously blocked the acknowledgment of this dynamic union of past, present, and future in African philosophy and worldview. The African philosophy of the principle of unity of life affected the life of a single human, of a community, and of nature and the world. It was commonly known as a holistic vision of life. But with the coming of colonialism and Western philosophy and theology, another epistemology burst onto the scene.

The anthropological consequences of Western epistemology have, unfortunately, developed the individual by promoting his or her freedom. They have not however, equally promoted the community-humanity (life-giving force) dimension of individual freedom in line with African thought-patterns, meaning, and ultimate reality. In Western epistemology, the purpose of life is to master the laws of nature in view of dominating it and it has substituted the African sense of cooperation with competition and struggle for survival. That is, struggle for a harmonious insertion into a community or into nature.

Tshibangu argues that the result of such a “fatal” encounter between African philosophy and worldview and Western thought patterns and philosophy has been an ever-increasing distancing from the principle of unity of life, of the living world, of the visible and invisible universe. It has deeply transformed everything, including cultural, political, economic, and religious structures. As a result, according to Tshibangu, African theological thought is torn between inculturation through which one recovers the holistic process of life and knowledge—as demonstrated in various African traditions—and liberation from the contradictions and denials of the human being that flow from inserting oneself into a Western epistemology of being.

The Obligations of African Theologians

Tshibangu points out that political and cultural approaches must be interwoven if Christian theology is to deal adequately with the problems confronting it. This task, Tshibangu argues, imposes certain conditions on African theologians, who must now channel their theological effort and commitment in a sound and organized way.

Tshibangu developed what he termed “Obligations of African theologians,” as follows: First, African theologians must be fully aware of the fact that their Catholic work calls for real spiritual commitment. There can be no theological effort without commitment. One must raise questions about one’s own life and about the spiritual destiny of the people with whom one is associated. This presumes a real ability to ask fundamental questions. The theologian must be a person of deep faith and a solidly metaphysical life: “The theologian cannot do any useful, worthwhile or relevant work unless he or she accepts personal involvement in the theory and practice of life, while making every effort to maintain intellectual and moral sincerity and scientific objectivity.”¹⁵

Secondly, Tshibangu observed that the African theologian must be equally conscious of the intellectual demands imposed by theological work. As in any other scientific discipline, the theologian must possess theological knowledge in the strict and formal sense. It also means that the theologian must strive to possess the deepest and most accurate scientific knowledge of humanity and the factors that condition it. Theologians must be able to propose matters in a valid and convincing way to other human minds.

The third obligation imposed on African theologians, according to Tshibangu, is that of their own social commitment. They cannot live as isolated beings because they must bear responsibility for their own personal destiny and that of others. They must be involved in their community and their social participation must be as active as possible. This participation puts them in a position to gain a deeper grasp of the cultural issues posed by their community and the living conditions of their contemporaries. It helps them to pay due attention to the questions raised by the appearance of new values in a given society, by the characteristic perception and conception of things (that is, its typical epistemological viewpoint), and by the facts and events related to its socio-cultural evolution and development.

Fourthly, and closely associated with this overall commitment, is the obligation of ecclesial involvement. African theologians must live in fidelity to ecclesial truth. They must of course possess discernment so that they can know exactly what is defined as certain truth by the Church. But they must equally cultivate courage and take risks exploring, pondering, and expressing the theological conclusions that derive from their authentic research.

¹⁵ T. Tshibangu, “The Task and Method of Theology in Africa” in J. Parratt (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology* (SPCK, London 1987), 38ff.

The Churches of which African theologians are members also have a role to play:

They must have confidence in their theologians unless there is a good reason to feel otherwise. They must support them on the intellectual level of religious practice, encouraging their research, avoiding hasty condemnations, and being careful not to voice fears and reservations for purely *a priori* reasons.¹⁶

Tshibangu believed that if these conditions are met, African theologians can undertake research that offers a real chance of success. He concluded by saying that there are many tasks African theologians must undertake, some of them urgent.

For Tshibangu, African theologians must also help to clarify and eventually resolve the theological questions that the churches have not yet solved. In some instances, an African approach may reveal that the questions are false or badly framed. In other instances, it will have to offer a contribution towards the ultimate solution. Tshibangu recognized that the projected research program is a vast one.

Conclusion

Apart from his stewardship as bishop and theologian, it suffices to mention, at least in passing, that Tshibangu, as bishop and theologian, together with other members of the Congolese Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the entire body of Christ in Congo, weathered the storm during the trying period of the dictatorial regime of Mobutu in his country, formerly called Zaïre.

Tshibangu's qualities as a solid Christian, a well-balanced African bishop-theologian, and a social reformer are his greatest legacy to the church in Africa and the world. The combination of these three qualities in the exercise of his ministry will remain forever the greatest epitaph in honor of an exceptional African church leader and theologian.

Adieu, Archbishop Tharcisse Tshibangu.

May the Angels of God welcome you at the gate of heaven! Amen.

¹⁶ T. Tshibangu "The Task and Method of Theology in Africa," 40.

Interview with Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, DACB Pioneer and Facilitator in Nigeria¹⁷

Tell us about your family background, childhood, education. Where did you grow up, and what were the circumstances of your upbringing?

I am from *Ile Alapo* (Alapo House) in Ogbomoso, in Nigeria. I was the fifth of nine children. I grew up in Ghana where I had my primary and middle school education in Kumasi, Ghana. I was from a rather poor family but, in spite of hardship at that time, my parents and my most senior brother gave me the needed support to attend a secondary school after my middle school education. I thus became the first person in the family to attend secondary school. After my secondary education at Ahmadiyya Secondary School, I continued with my post-secondary teacher education at Wesley College, Kumasi for two years. I was thus qualified as a teacher and taught in two primary schools for two years.

What individuals (parents, siblings, spouse, relatives, friends, teachers, mentors, role models) particularly influenced you growing up? What was it about them that made an impact on you?

I come from a Christian home and my parents were quite strict, ensuring that we went to church regularly. After service on Sundays, my father would ask us one by one what we had learned from the service. You dared not say that you did not remember the topic of the sermon and the passages read. My three elder brothers influenced me a lot in my education, teaching career, and growth as a Christian. Most influential and impactful was the ascetic life of my senior most brother, Moses Oladejo, who later became Chief Alapo of Ogbomoso. He fasted frequently and recited solitary prayers during the night. When I was growing up, I absorbed many of these practices.

After my secondary education, he strongly encouraged me to study hard, to take my Advanced Level courses seriously, and to go to University. His prayers were answered when I had the privilege of going to the University of Ghana, Legon to do a Diploma course in Religion. A year after the completion of the course, I was invited to continue with the BA (double honors in Sociology

¹⁷ Deji Ayegboyin is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan and a scholar and public speaker in great demand. He is a member of the DACB Senior Advisory Council.

and the Study of Religions.)

What events, circumstances or books were somehow pivotal in your life?

I do not remember well why I was a very committed member of the Scripture Union when I was in secondary school. However, I became more committed to the things of God when I was admitted to Wesley College. Through the influence of the chaplain I became a member and later the secretary of the preaching band and a chorister in the Wesley Chapel ensemble. During my second year, I became a Methodist lay preacher even though I was a Baptist at home. While I was at Wesley, I expressed the desire to go to the prestigious Trinity Seminary at Legon in Accra to train as a priest but I was not qualified to be admitted then. Two years later, I gained admission into the University of Ghana, Legon.

What were some of the greatest challenges/obstacles that you encountered in becoming who you are?

In 1969, while my parents and siblings were living in Ghana, the Aliens Compliance Order was enacted, stipulating that Nigerians and other aliens without valid residence permits had to leave the country in the space of a couple of months. I had just written my school certificate examination and was waiting for the results when this happened. I was in a serious quandary when my parents and six of my siblings left for Nigeria, leaving three of us to wait by faith. The government did not disturb the students who were studying in one school or another, so I decided to stay. Fortunately, I was soon admitted to Wesley College where I did not have to pay for tuition, boarding, and lodging. University education was free and because I was also a certified “A” teacher, I was granted study leave throughout the course of my study at the University of Ghana, Legon.

After my national service in Ghana in 1980, I moved to Nigeria, where I had the opportunity to lecture in the College of Education at Ilesa. The college gave me the opportunity to apply for postgraduate studies at the University of Ibadan. A couple of years after earning my PhD, I was invited to join the Department of Religious Studies as a lecturer. Incidentally, the very day I was offered this rare opportunity, the president of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, also invited me to take up an appointment as a lecturer at the seminary with the prospect of being ordained as a Baptist pastor while lecturing. These two opportunities, coming within a space of two hours, created a serious dilemma for me for a few days. I was convinced that it was better to go to seminary but my friends in the fellowship who I had asked to pray along with me and another colleague who was a Pentecostal minister insisted that I should

go to the university. Another minister friend prophesied that after some time in the university I would have another invitation to go to the seminary. It was a difficult decision but I yielded to the counsel of my Christian friends and eventually accepted to go to the university almost reluctantly.

What do you feel were your most significant accomplishments?

I feel fulfilled as lecturer having risen to the peak of my profession. I have supervised over 40 PhD theses and more than 100 MA and MPhil dissertations. I have served as external examiner to several universities in and outside the country and as assessor of professors to many universities in Africa and outside the continent and some of the students I have mentored have become professors in Nigeria and outside the country. Some are now chief lecturers and senior administrators at Colleges of Education.

After the special offer to do my undergraduate studies at Legon, I had another opportunity to do postgraduate studies (MA and PhD) at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. A few years later, I was employed as a lecturer in the same university. This opportunity offered me golden opportunities and attracted unlimited favor. I had the opportunity to spend my research leave at the Graduate Institute of Religion and Theology, University of Birmingham (UK) where I was nominated the 2004/2005 William Paton Fellow and Visiting Scholar. A couple of years later, I was able to use my sabbatical leave to serve as a visiting professor and the first research fellow in African Studies in 2006/2007 at Liverpool Hope University (UK). Two years later, the University of Ibadan approved my leave of absence to serve as the president of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, founded in 1898, the first degree awarding institution in Nigeria and one of the oldest and most prestigious theological institutions in Africa. It was while I was at this institution that my elevation to the professorate was announced at the University of Ibadan. Soon afterwards, Liverpool Hope University also conferred on me the title of Senior Fellow, Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity. In 2018, I was elected Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL).

On the international ecumenical platform, I have served as chief editor of publications for the West Africa Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI) for three terms. I have served as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Theological Desk of the All-Africa Council of Churches in Nairobi (2010-2015) and I was the African member on the Joint Commission for the International Ecumenical Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council. We held our deliberations in the United States, Singapore, Germany, Jamaica, and the United Kingdom. I have also served as:

- (a) Member, Baptist World Alliance Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity
- (b) Chairman, Board of Trustees, Theological Education Council in Nigeria (TECON) since 2016
- (c) Chairman, Baptist Accreditation Council for Theological Institutions in Nigeria (BACTSIN) since 2015
- (d) Chairman, Central Promotion and Appointments' Council for Baptist Theological Institutions in Nigeria, since 2015
- (e) Chairman, Board of Trustees, Theological Education Council in Nigeria (TECON) since 2016

Since 2014, I have been a member of the Advisory Council and then the Senior Advisory Council of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB.org) and Contributing Editor of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* (JACB).

Do you have any regrets? If so, can you elaborate?

I guess I would have had many regrets if I had gone to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, instead of proceeding to university in 1993. I learned many things at the University of Ibadan and at the Universities at Birmingham and Liverpool where I did my sabbatical and utilized my fellowships. The experiences gathered from these great institutions came in handy when I served as the president of NBTS Ogbomoso.

What are your concerns for Africa (or for your church, your country) as you contemplate the future? What are some of the issues that African Christian leaders need to address?

Christianity—whatever it used to be—can no longer be considered the religion of white Europeans and North Americans. Indeed, not only has Christianity ceased to be an exclusively western religion in our generation, it is also no longer news that Christianity seems barely to be holding its own in Europe and other parts of the West. Conversely, Christianity is not only firmly rooted in several African societies, it has also become Africa's fastest growing religion.

A number of authors, notable among which are Professors Andrew Walls, Kwesi A. Dickson, J. S. Pobee, Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu and Philip Jenkins, have critically observed and categorically declared that there will be at least three significant historical developments related to African Christianity in the twenty-first century. First, there will be a phenomenal numerical surge of the faith in Africa. Second, Africans will be the main actors and catalysts shaping Christian cultures. Third, Christianity will evolve permanently into a primarily nonwestern religion. In other words, this prophetic affirmation may be expressed

forcefully this way: The contemporary generation of African churches will determine the whole shape of church history and theology for centuries to come. This has been referred to as the paradigm shift of Christianity from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. All these prophetic observations are being fulfilled now, apparently even faster than it was originally thought.

Indeed, the renewal of Christianity in Africa is not limited to the increase in numbers of adherents or in the socio-cultural influence of the faith. It is also evident in the vitality of the numerous movements that are engaged in establishing churches worldwide. Bengt Sundkler puts it succinctly thus: “The prevalent Church trends in several countries such as the Charismatic renewals are modified in Africa according to local structure and indigenous peculiarity.”¹⁸

All these developments suggest that the church in Africa must not vanish again. Christianity, which is in our care, must not die for a second time in Africa.

It is imprudent for the church in Africa to continue operating without an adequate awareness of where it has come from or of the vital forces that brought it to its present situation. It is also imperative for the African church to note that it cannot “thrive without sound doctrine or Constructive Theology.”¹⁹ The combination underlines the urgent need of Christian scholarship in Africa to help the church to be more theologically informed and to develop traditions that build consciously and constructively upon the learning of the past.

The need for more relevant theological thinking to underpin the future advance of the church in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Already, keen observers have warned that the spiritual sickness that is prevalent in some churches today is due to the lack of training in sound doctrine. It is important to stress that diluted theology will always result in diluted religion, just as shallowness of thought will always result in shallowness of character. Misinformed and uninformed religious leaders and members are the main unruly and badly-behaved fanatics of our time.

What are your dreams and hopes for the Christian movements and churches in Africa? If you were to return to this continent 100 years from now, what would you hope to find? What would you fear you might find?

¹⁸ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

¹⁹ See Isaac Deji Ayegboyin, *Taxonomy and Revolution in African Christianity: The Nigerian Experience, An Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 2017) 28-32*

My fears about African Christianity include how Christian movements would continue to proliferate and yet remain orthodox. Heresy was a blemish in the wheel of progress of the Early Church in Africa. It posed a greater threat to the church than persecution. While persecution was an external aggression which one could easily recognize and possibly run away from, heresy, on the other hand stealthily crept into the fellowship and instigated grievous divisions within the body. The African church must take the issue of authentic theology seriously. There are too many ignorant Apostles and unenlightened General Overseers in Africa today.

Tell us about your involvement with the DACB. Please share your thoughts on the work of the DACB, past, present, or future.

I first heard about the DACB and saw the earliest few writings on the DACB from Dr. Kehinde Olabimtan. I developed much interest because making efforts at retrieving and recording the personal histories of the leading personalities of African Churches across the centuries struck me as a very laudable innovation. I heard a few more things about the DACB from Dr. Kemdirim, also a member of WAATI. I became more elated when, after reading about the DACB, I realized that it was a project undertaken in Africa by African scholars and administered by the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, under the able leadership of the founder and visionary icon, Professor Jonathan Bonk, ably assisted by Michele Sigg, the project manager at that time.

I met with Prof. Bonk at a conference in Berlin and he encouraged me more by giving me some materials. Immediately I started to work with my postgraduate students at the University of Ibadan. I encouraged my students to write at least one original or untold story of African Christians who had transformed the history of the church. Most of my students were quite interested in the adventure. Later, however, I made it compulsory for a graduating MA student in Church History to write two stories. I tried it with the undergraduate students, but most of them just copied stories from the internet without proper references, so I discontinued that mission.

One of my PhD students Dr. Michael Leke Ogunewu, was particularly interested and well informed about the project. Fortunately, when he decided to take his sabbatical when I was the president at NBTS Ogbomoso, there was an opening for him. While he was there, he created the time and expended much energy and expertise to ensure that he lectured and supervised the writing of stories by virtually all postgraduate students who came to the seminary. He did exceptionally well—so well that he was retained as a lecturer at the seminary. I recall that he won the DACB's award as the

most prolific writer of authentic and well researched stories for the DACB. Professor Nihinlola, who succeeded me as the president of NBTS, not only retained Dr. Ogunewu but also promoted him to the position of Senior Lecturer and Director of the Smith's Archives and Museum at NBTS, Ogbomoso.

In my inaugural lecture, I created space to promote the work of the DACB with this announcement:

Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB)

“The mission of the *DACB* is to collect, preserve, and make freely accessible biographical accounts and church histories—from oral and written sources—integral to a scholarly understanding of African Christianity.”²⁰ The project has uploaded hundreds of original or untold stories of African Christians who have transformed the history of the church and transformed Christian history. You may send stories of Christian leaders and lay persons whose meritorious services have not been acknowledged or documented from your village to the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB—www.dacb.org). I am a Member of the Advisory Council of the DACB and an Editorial Member, *Journal of African Christian Biography: A Publication of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, Boston University.²¹

Do you have words of advice for readers of the JACB?

I entreat the readers especially lecturers in the Universities and Theological Institutions to write and to encourage their students not only to read but also to write original stories for the JACB. I am sure that some are not aware that JACB stories are accepted as offshore publication for promotion purposes. Try and write something today.

On the Development and Impact of African Christian Theology: I have underscored the view that even though a good number of African Christian thinkers, men and women, have given us much material through articles and books on the church in Africa, something is still missing. The present theological developments, as revealing as they are, still leave chasms, because these advances have so far made little impact on both “church ethos and theological education.”²²

One of the missing links is being filled by the [DACB](http://www.dacb.org/) and the JACB

²⁰ Mission statement from DACB homepage: <https://dacb.org/>.

²¹ Deji Ayegboyin, *Inaugural Lecture*, 40, 44-46.

²² Deji Ayegboyin, *Inaugural Lecture*, 40, 44-46.

[\(https://dacb.org/journal/\)](https://dacb.org/journal/). I wish to advise readers to be more interested in the course of the JACB and to contribute in whatever form possible to promote its development.

Book Review

The Power of the Word, A History of the Seventh-day Adventism in Central Kenya: Highlighting the Role of Mama Eunice Njoki Wangai

By Mary Getui²³

The book *The Power of the Word, A History of the Seventh-day Adventism in Central Kenya*, published by Grandmaster Empire in 2021, is authored by Pastor Dr. Frederick Kimani Wangai. According to the back cover of the book, Wangai was ordained a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in 1960. He served as an evangelist, a church pastor, and an administrator in various positions until his retirement in 2002. After retirement, he took up a new challenge that culminated in a PhD in Christian Counseling. He now operates a counseling practice. He is often called upon to perform ecclesial activities such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals and he also regularly participates in evangelism and preaching of the Word.

Drawing inspiration from the transforming power of the Word, he integrates his experience as a pastor with his counseling skills to offer his clients not only counseling services, but also an introduction to the Mighty Counselor as the real and lasting solution to life's challenges. Together with his wife Eunice, Wangai divides his time between his homes in Nairobi and Murang'a. He is particularly passionate in his support of the initiatives of his local church, Kagwathi, the pioneer congregation of the SDA church in Central Kenya. He also enjoys spending time with the few living pioneer gospel workers and his family, particularly his grandchildren.

In the book, Wangai provides a personal reflection on 60 years of working life, stretching from the colonial period to the contemporary times, covering Kenya, other parts of Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. He captures well the key role of the missionaries in the establishment and growth of the SDA church in Kenya—particularly Central Kenya. He also provides an overview of worldwide Adventism and highlights some elements of discontent in the SDA Church in Central Kenya, as well as the implications of Mau Mau for Christianity

²³ Dr. Mary Getui is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya). She has published widely on religion, culture, gender, education, peace, family and health. She is a member of the DACB [International Editorial Board](#).

in Kenya. The book includes a gallery of the presidents who served in Central Kenya from 1953 to 2020.

According to the SDA administrative structure, Central Kenya covers a large section of Kenya. Wangai lists the areas and describes the various clergy and the few lay persons—the majority of them men—who broke ground for the mission and served in various capacities in these regions. The accounts include his personal experiences and also those of parents, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. It is noteworthy that there is only one female clergy. Nevertheless, it is commendable that, for each individual, Wangai gives the name of the spouse and, as much as possible, describes the role each spouse played in the work of evangelism and mission.

Wangai acknowledges the significant part his wife Eunice played on the mission field and he lovingly dedicates the book to her. In the dedication, he states that it was Eunice who urged him to write the book. He describes how, being a professional teacher, Eunice used school holidays to train Adventist ladies on how to spread the good news to their neighbors. Her work with the Dorcas Society ladies in particular received accolades from the church leadership. As a result, she received support to reach out in East Africa and Southern Africa. Eunice is credited with initiating the Shepherdess Program for pastors' wives. With Eunice they established Kitui Primary and Secondary schools as well as Emale Primary School. Wangai also credits Eunice for the construction of a modern school and a dispensary in Gatumbi, both of which also served for evangelization.

Understandably, the book does not provide many other details about Eunice. But those close to her have provided further information on her life that it is appropriate to share at this point.

As of 2022, Eunice is 86 years old. She was the first-born child in a polygamous home. Her mother Ruth was converted to Adventism in the 1940s. This caused friction with her husband because she could no longer brew beer for him. Ruth, however, had the support of a key family member, Ngoroi, who was already practicing Adventism. This same relative encouraged Ruth to send Eunice to school. Eunice's father Gitau was enraged because this would deny him bridewealth. Ngoroi told Gitau that the time had come when the clan had to make decisions for the common good of the wider community. Under these circumstances Eunice began attending Karura, an Adventist school where she was converted, and eventually met and married her teacher, Wangai.

Before her conversion, Eunice was the star village dancer. She and her peers found it unbelievable that she had quit dancing and reveling to become a Christian. It was a testament to the transforming power of the Word. She testifies

that it was through prayer that she was able to overcome temptation. Eunice wanted to become a pastor but she found out from the missionaries that this would not be possible, given that the SDA church did not ordain women. When she decided to receive Christ as her Savior, she also committed to serve God.

She accompanied her husband to theological school where she deepened her knowledge on hygiene, home making, serving and learning the ropes of being a pastor's wife. She trained as a teacher and has served exceptionally well, mentoring young minds on issues regarding school as well as on eternal questions. She considers her employment an opportunity to evangelize.

Eunice and Wangai raised three children: Paul, Marion and Lois. Paul is a medical doctor based in Nairobi, active in church ministry. He has dedicated time, money, and effort to reaching out to busy executives of the elite and the echelons of the urban upper class. Marion is an academic and is equally engaged in evangelism. She is a member of Mothers Voice, an all-female singing group. Marion has teamed up with friends in church planting initiatives in Central Kenya. Lois is an educator. In the book, her father describes her as a business partner with her husband, Ngenye Kariuki. Lois and Ngenye have been instrumental in establishing churches in Nairobi and Murang'a. They have also donated land and money to open a church education center. That the Wangai children are independently involved in church ministry is a testimony to the effort of their parents, and indeed their own personal convictions about the Word.

Eunice's desire and dream of being a pastor did not come to nought. She has supported her husband by being a committed wife and mother, thus providing a conducive environment for Wangai to perform his ministerial duties. It is befitting to end with the famous saying: "Behind every successful man, there is a strong woman."

“Why Can’t We Ordain Nellie?”: Leadership, Faith, and Hagiography in the Life of Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, Zimbabwe²⁴

By Wendy Urban-Mead²⁵

The life of Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa—long-serving educator, peacebuilder, and leader in the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) of Zimbabwe—offers wide thematic scope to her biographer. Some of these themes include gender and leadership, enculturation of Christianity in the context of a specific people, the role of prayer, the tension between spirituality and politics (especially for Anabaptists in colonial and postcolonial Africa), global citizenship in the worldwide Mennonite community, African women theologians, faith-based community service, and the phenomenon of African-generated Christian biography, autobiography, and hagiography. All of these themes are implied but none are fully developed in the following overview of Nellie Mlotshwa’s life (born 1934). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the production of African Christian biographies in the BICC of Zimbabwe.

This chapter is based on multiple interviews and written communications with Nellie Mlotshwa, the earliest occurring in 1997 and the most recent in 2016.²⁶ My interactions with Nellie grew out of my larger research on the history of the BICC of Zimbabwe. I was at first simply interested in her story as one of the key subjects of the study; however, Nellie took a strong interest in my project and did much to support it, helping me to conduct interviews with others and facilitating communication with various individuals. Over the past thirty or more years, Nellie Mlotshwa, sisters Doris Dube and Barbara Nkala,

²⁴ This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from Dana Lee Robert, ed. *African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives, and Challenges* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2018).

²⁵ Wendy Urban-Mead teaches world history at Bard College as well as African history with the Bard Prison Initiative. She has published *The Gender of Piety: Family, Faith and Colonial Rule in Matabeleland* (Ohio Univ. Press, 2015). Coeditor of the journal *Social Sciences and Missions*, she has assembled special issues for three journals: *Le Fait Missionnaire* (2006), *Journal of Religion in Africa* (with Stephen Volz; 2008), and *Women’s History Review* (with Deborah Gaitskell; 2008).

²⁶ I interviewed many others in addition to Nellie Mlotshwa herself. The question expressed in the chapter title comes from an interview by the author with Stephen N. Ndlovu, Bulawayo, February 24, 1999.

Nancy Shenk, and Bekithemba Dube have been actively involved in capturing stories about the people in the BICC of Zimbabwe. Much of this material has been published in the BICC's Bulawayo-based church paper, *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*, and in a variety of books published under the aegis of Barbara Nkala (see epilogue). As one of this important cadre of insider recorders of the church's history, Nellie became a key informant on many matters far beyond the subject matter of her own life. She and the Zimbabwean members of the BICC were already composing their stories before I arrived. The people I talked to were not merely telling me what I wanted to know. Such a cynical view assumes they were not already thinking about their life stories and were not already putting together narratives about themselves and their family members. I was in fact far from the first to have interviewed Nellie.²⁷

The use of oral history interviews in the composition of this biography offers understandings that are inaccessible from research that works solely with published and archival material. The printed record shows us a history of the BICC that is limited by the church's formal policy of separation from the world and by the official printed record's consistent inattention to the leadership exercised by women. The inclusion of the oral material makes it clear—despite official versions to the contrary—that this church has been led by spiritually powerful women such as Nellie Mlotshwa.²⁸

My work has been influenced by Marcia Wright's *Strategies of Slaves and Women*, an investigation of the life stories of women slaves in Central Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. Wright bases her work on life histories gleaned by missionary Elise Kootz-Kretschmer from African converts to the Moravian Church at the turn of the twentieth century. I found the attention she gives to

²⁷. Documentary material supporting my wider research on the BICC of Zimbabwe reaches back more than a century. It includes items from the archives of the Brethren in Christ Church in Grantham, Pennsylvania, the records of the BICC in Zimbabwe which are held at the church offices in Bulawayo, and the church's publications.

²⁸. In her study of churchwomen in Harare, Marja Hinfelaar also weaves oral testimonies together with study of the archival record. Her work makes visible the difference between archival/male/official versions of Methodist and Catholic history in Zimbabwe and the picture generated by oral evidence/female/unofficial versions. For example, officially the uniformed Catholic women's group, *Chita chaMaria*, was founded by a priest; however, the oral evidence that Hinfelaar gathered by interviewing aged women members of the group indicates that women were behind the group's founding. See Hinfelaar, *Respectable and Responsible Women: Methodist and Roman Catholic Women's Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1919–1985* (Utrecht: Bookcentrum, 2003).

the arc of the women's *whole life* in the book's several life histories to be significant. Wright's meticulously contextualized analysis of those lives as situated in the changing Central African social, political, and economic context provided a model for my approach to African Christian biography-making.²⁹

Understandings of the work of oral history have transitioned in recent years, as have understandings about women's history and gender history. In fact, in recent years scholars have recognized that the subjectivity of orally-gathered life narratives makes them valuable, particularly for work on piety—a human modality that is one of the most subjective that one can imagine.³⁰ While this biography of Nellie Mlotshwa offers the story of only a single life, it is embedded in the broader themes of Zimbabwe's colonial and postcolonial history as well as in the network of her family relationships and her strong bonds with fellow churchwomen. The salvation history of a single individual becomes more meaningful when set in the context of both her or his family and broader societal and institutional dynamics. A recent special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, devoted to religious biography, emphasized the ability of biographical studies to show how “personal lives have spanned politico-spatial boundaries of all kinds” and can transcend “divisions between social, cultural and religious spheres as well as historical periods.”³¹

²⁹. Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber, 1993).

³⁰. Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), 19. Other African histories based on oral interviews include Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Jean Davison, *Voices from Mutira: Change in the Lives of Rural Gikuyu Women, 1910–1995* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Irene Staunton, *Mothers of the Revolution: The War Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women* (Harare: Baobab, 1990); Belinda Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991); Teresa A. Barnes, “We Women Worked So Hard”: *Gender, Urbanization, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990); Sarah M. Mirza and Margaret Strobel, trans. and eds., *Three Swahili Women: Life Histories from Mombasa, Kenya* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989); Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997).

³¹. Achim von Oppen and Silke Strickrodt, “Introduction—Religious Biography: Transcending Boundaries,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 429.

Early Life

Nellie Maduma was born in 1934 at the BICC's Mtshabezi Mission Hospital. Her home village of Mayezane was in Matabeleland South, south of Bulawayo, and located some twenty miles to the southwest of the mission station. Mayezane was a progressive, modernizing place where Christian Ndebele-speaking Africans had settled in the early years of the twentieth century. The men used plows and wore fashionable hats and neckties, in spite of the church's teachings against worldly fashions.³² The women made more tea than beer. The people of Mayezane planted fruit trees and many of their young men went to work in South Africa. Many of these families had previously lived in the Matopo Hills, about twenty-five miles to the north, but had been forced to leave when the British South Africa Company defeated the Ndebele kingdom in 1896 and began the process of removing Africans from land that the Company desired to sell to white settlers and to lease to mission societies. As with most residents of Mayezane, Nellie's parents were members of the BICC, an American-based mission church with Anabaptist and Wesleyan influences that by the 1930s operated out of three rural mission stations and a host of smaller village churches—churches that also doubled as lower-primary schools. Her father, Sima Maduma, for a time was both a village pastor and BICC primary school teacher in Mayezane.

Nellie's parents had married in 1923; she was the fourth of five children. By the time Nellie was born in 1934, her father was disenchanted with the mission church for a variety of reasons.³³ When she was very small, he married a second wife, violating the mission's teaching on monogamy. Nellie's mother, Sofi Mgemezulu, was devastated, having expected to live in a monogamous marriage, and returned to her parental home. Nellie grew up in her father's house with her stepmother, siblings, extended relatives, and other members of the household. Despite what appeared to be "backsliding," Sima Maduma required that the members of his household observe rigorous home-based Christian devotions, complete with daily prayers and hymn singing. Mandatory memory verses from

³². Wendy Urban-Mead, "Negotiating 'Plainness' and Gender: Dancing and Apparel at Christian Weddings in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1913–1944," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38, no. 2, (2008): 209–46.

³³. See Wendy Urban-Mead, *The Gender of Piety: Family, Faith, and Colonial Rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2015), 38–68, for more on the Mayezane men's dissent in the 1920s against the BICC authorities.

the Bible were issued each evening so that they could be recited the next morning at 5:30.³⁴ Nellie recalled,

He encouraged us in our faith. Really, as far as I am concerned, I learned more from my home than from the primary school I attended. I mean as far as spiritual things are concerned. And so, he taught us all the things of God, while he wasn't any more associated with the church. And that worried me for a long time.³⁵

In short, Nellie was raised in a home in which her father did not go to church and yet claimed a strong Christian identity.

Since the best education in the area remained that offered by the BICC, Nellie's father fully supported her education in the BICC primary school at Mayezane and at the mission boarding school at Mtshabezi. These were followed by combined teacher training at Matopo Mission and a Junior Certificate course through UNISA.³⁶ She later did O levels by correspondence—after she was herself already a teacher, wife, and mother—and earned a bachelor's degree at the Theological College of Zimbabwe in the 1990s.³⁷

Married Life

Nellie taught math, history, and English at the Mtshabezi girls' boarding school for three years, until she married Peter Mlotshwa in 1959. Their common origins in Mayezane yielded many similarities. Peter also was brought up in the BICC. His father also had started out as a convert, BICC pastor, and teacher, but had decided to leave active church membership by the time Peter was born. The young couple moved to Salisbury (present-day Harare) and started their life together. Peter worked as a jeweler and Nellie taught in a government primary school. They eventually had six children.

³⁴. Doris Dube, *Silent Labourers* (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: Matopo Book Centre, 1992), 49–50.

³⁵. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, Wanezi Mission, August 23, 1997.

³⁶. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, Wanezi Mission, August 23, 1997; Dube, *Silent Labourers*, 49–55.

³⁷. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, by phone, July 29, 2016.

Not many years into their life together in Salisbury, however, as Doris Dube put it, “God started dealing with them.”³⁸ The message they perceived was that it was time for them to devote full-time service to the church. Obeying the call, Peter and Nellie Mlotshwa and their children moved back to Mayezane. During the 1960s Nellie taught at the village BICC primary school, and Peter enrolled at the BICC’s Bible institute with an eye to full-time church leadership work as an ordained minister or *Mfundisi*.³⁹ From 1969 to 1975 both Peter and Nellie taught at the BICC’s Ekuphileni Bible Institute (EBI), based at Mtshabezi Mission. In 1976 Peter was ordained *Mfundisi* and made Overseer of the Matopo District, putting him in a pastoral and supervisory role over the pastors of a network of more than forty small village churches.

Wives of church overseers were expected to give up their paid work, so as to devote themselves full time to support of their husbands’ ministries. Indeed, wives stood with their husbands at the ordination ceremony and were ordained with them. In this expectation the church followed an Ndebele pattern. In traditional Ndebele culture, a wife assumed the address of the husband. For example, when Ndebele men became kings or chiefs, their wives shared that status. This pattern carried over in the roles taken on by the women who married BICC ordained ministers or bishops. No separately designated income for the wife, however, came with this arrangement. Nellie explained what it meant to be the wife of a district overseer.

A woman married to a man who was going to be ordained, was ordained with him. Yet when there were ministers’/overseers’ meetings she would have no vote. But she bore a heavy responsibility for his work. As overseer’s wife we had to bake the communion bread, have the basins and towels ready for foot-washing ceremony.⁴⁰

The wives also accompanied their husbands on their journeys to the village churches on the weekends, and they hosted the many visitors and petitioners who came to the churchmen’s residences. Nellie and another newly ordained minister’s wife, Sifiki Otilia Ndlovu, however, refused to leave their paid work.⁴¹

³⁸. Dube, *Silent Labourers*, 51.

³⁹. *Mfundisi* is Ndebele (and Zulu) for ordained minister or reverend; more precisely, the singular is *umfundisi* and plural, *abafundisi*.

⁴⁰. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, Bulawayo, June 27, 1999.

⁴¹. This material on the role of the minister’s or overseer’s (or bishop’s) wife is

These innovations took place in the 1970s. The prior generation of wives of *abaFundisi* had done as expected and given up their paid work. Nellie recalled that “there was quite a lot of grumbling that we still kept our teaching jobs, but no one confronted us directly.”⁴²

Life and Death Struggles of the 1970s

The 1970s were the time of the liberation war, when the armed wings of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) waged guerrilla warfare against the Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith’s Rhodesian Front (RF) party. The violence was most felt in the rural areas, and rural mission stations were often the focus of guerrilla actions in various forms. Ekuphileni Bible Institute, where Nellie and Peter Mlotshwa were teaching, was located at Mtshabezi Mission, forty-one miles southeast of Bulawayo. After guerrillas from the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) paid a menacing visit to the mission station in 1978, the district overseer, Stephen N. Ndlovu, decided to close Mtshabezi Mission and move EBI and other programs to the relative safety of the city of Bulawayo. Thus, the Mlotshwas and their younger children moved to Bulawayo at the height of the war, while their two older sons were attending Tegwani Secondary School at a Wesleyan Methodist mission in the western part of Matabeleland.

In a mass recruitment effort, ZIPRA guerrillas effected a spectacular capture of much of the Tegwani student body and transported them over the border to Botswana. Nellie recalled that day:

We heard on the one o’clock news that the guerrillas had captured all the school children at Tegwani. I thought I would go crazy. I didn’t sleep that night. I sat on the floor against the wall and prayed. Finally in the morning I was so exhausted, I slept a little. Then I felt a hand touching me so kindly. A voice said, “Don’t worry—your children will be returned to you by the garage.” I woke up and thought, what can this mean? We heard later that the Botswana government had refused these children since they had been captured and was going to send them back. All parents should come to Plumtree. We were to pick them up, meet the government trucks at the garage in Plumtree. When we got there, the children looked pathetic; my

drawn from Urban-Mead, *Gender of Piety*, 220–22.

⁴². Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, Bulawayo, June 27, 1999.

son's trousers were torn. Some had lost a shoe. One child cried, the other laughed, when they saw me.⁴³

Rural guerrilla war fostered intense focus on the issues of loyalty to the liberation cause and its opposite, "selling out." Smith's soldiers demanded that Africans in rural areas reveal troop movements of the guerrilla forces, and they beat or killed people deemed uncooperative or deliberately misleading. The guerrilla forces, for their part, would kill villagers who refused to cook for them and beat or executed those deemed "sellouts," that is, those accused of supporting the Smith regime.⁴⁴ Alleged sellouts could be killed for providing information about the movements of guerrillas to the Smith army.⁴⁵ Sellouts also were killed or beaten if it was believed that they were witches or if a woman cooked food that resulted in illness or death of a guerrilla.⁴⁶ Members of the wider Mlotshwa family, which included several of Peter's brothers and their families, all based in and around Mayezane, were vulnerable to sellout accusations due to their relative prosperity: their tin roofs, jobs in Bulawayo, high levels of education, and strong affiliations with a mission church that opted for a neutral stance which, to many advocates for the end of the Smith regime, looked a lot like tacit support for the status quo.⁴⁷ What follows is a series of reflections from Nellie on the danger she and her family experienced during the war.

The Lord helped me. At Mayezane [we were told:] "You haven't joined ZAPU and you're in trouble." Then I left home to go to work [in Bulawayo at the Bible Institute]. The following morning [Peter's] Brother Samuel came to town by early bus. [He said,] "Guerillas have commanded me to

⁴³. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, Bulawayo, June 27, 1999.

⁴⁴. Margaret Viki and Josephine Ndiweni, interviews with Irene Staunton, as quoted in Staunton, ed., *Mothers of the Revolution*, 150–51, 211; Nellie Mlotshwa, interview with the author, by phone, July 15, 2002.

⁴⁵. See Janice McLaughlin, "Avial Mission: A Turning Point in Church Relations with the State and the Liberation Forces," in *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, ed. Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996), 96, for the case of the Catholic priest, Rev. Ignatius Mhonda, in which he argued that he faced a death sentence no matter what he did.

⁴⁶. Richard P. Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family*, (Edinburg: Edinburg Univ. Press, 1991), 151.

⁴⁷. See Urban-Mead, *Gender of Piety*, 171–202, for a more in-depth discussion of the BICC during the liberation war.

tell you to come home to Mayezane with all your children.” . . . Nellie said, “Let’s go.” Peter said, “Let’s just go [the two of us] and die. Let them come for the kids.” Samuel said, “But I’ll be in trouble [if you don’t come with the kids, as they commanded.]” Peter said, “Tell them we are coming. We’ll give the details.” We went home on next day. Someone had been summoned to get [Peter’s brother] Jonah in Gwanda. They said, “You are enjoying all those benefits of the government. As for this woman from EBI we are going to burn her with her Bibles.” I put all my Bibles out together in the living room. There were seven Bibles, one for each of the children and our study Bibles. I said, “Lord, let’s get it over with. Let them come.” I would be kept in suspense. I just prayed to the Lord, “I hand it over to you.” I put all the Bibles out so they’d be there when they came.

The guerillas who were around Mayezane when they returned there according to the summons said, “*Masalu* [slang for grandmother], are you not working, why are you here?” So I said, “Oh, I am going.” They said, “You should be working, we need money for soap, clothing.” I stayed at Mayezane all of January 1979, didn’t return for work at EBI in town. After a month of waiting, Jonah said, “Let’s go back to work,” so we did. So they never came. The group which had called me home, they must have just left the area.⁴⁸

Life in Zimbabwe under Mugabe

When the war was over and the new Zimbabwe was born in 1980, the BICC entered a new, if short-lived, phase of optimism at the opportunity to build a more fully indigenized leadership as part of the postcolonial nation-building moment. All the missionaries had gone or been sent home during the war. Any North Americans coming to serve the church after independence would be considered to be expatriate partners in service of the Zimbabwe church, not colonial-style authoritative missionaries directing policy.⁴⁹

Nellie and Peter Mlotshwa were fully engaged in the energetic new phase. Nellie was active as the only female on the BICC’s national-level church-growth committee. She also contributed articles to the church paper, *Amazwi Amable/Good Words*, on subjects as diverse as what it takes to have a successful

⁴⁸. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interview with the author, by phone, July 15, 2002.

⁴⁹. See Urban-Mead, *Gender of Piety*, 203–32.

Christian marriage or devotional pieces based on Scripture passages.⁵⁰ Peter was selected to go for further theological studies at Daystar University in Kenya in 1981. The ordained BICC men who had studied abroad for divinity studies up to that point numbered just two—and both had become bishops. It seemed Peter Mlotshwa was being groomed to succeed Bishop Stephen Ndlovu. Very sadly, while in his studies at Daystar, Peter fell ill with cancer and died in 1984. After his passing, Nellie continued to teach at EBI (the Bible institute at Mtshabezi Mission), to look after the educational needs of her children, and to serve as a national leader in the church. She was one of the featured inspirational speakers at the General Conference of 1986, speaking on the topic “Unity in Prayer.”⁵¹ In a 1987 meeting of the BICC mother’s union, Nellie gave instruction on the role and conduct of Christian women in the community. She emphasized that they should be living examples, endeavoring “at all times to set a perfect standard.”⁵² In the next several years she served on the church-growth committee again, then the prayer committee, and the literature committee.

From 1983 to 1987, Zimbabwe experienced the *Gukurahundi*.⁵³ Under the leadership of Robert Mugabe, the new Zimbabwe’s ruling party, ZANU, launched a campaign intended to permanently weaken or eliminate their ZAPU rivals. The BICC’s regional base in great measure overlapped with that of ZAPU. Estimates of the number of dead range from 8,000 to 20,000, many of them in unmarked mass graves. The worst of the violence that ensued occurred in the heart of the BICC’s people and territory. For a pietistic church that embraced peace teaching, the situation was excruciating. If politics was killing your people, how did you talk about politics and deal with those deaths?⁵⁴ The violence ended after the Unity Accord of 1987 led to the fusing of the ZANU and ZAPU political parties into ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) under the headship of Robert Mugabe, who as of 2016 remains the Zimbabwean head of state.

The AIDS crisis, the launching of various government initiatives such as Operation *Murambatsvina*, the forced claiming of commercial farm properties

⁵⁰. See the Brethren in Christ Church periodical published in Bulawayo, *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*, no.139, May 1984; no. 157, December 1985; no. 161, April 1986. A joint Ndebele/English publication, *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words* is written for church members in Zimbabwe.

⁵¹. *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*, no. 164, July 1986, 8–9.

⁵². *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*, no. 174, June 1987, 6.

⁵³. *Gukurahundi* is a Shona word that literally means “early rain that washes away chaff.” It has also come to refer to this four-year period in Zimbabwe’s history.

⁵⁴. Urban-Mead, *Gender of Piety*, 203–32.

to be distributed to ZANU-PF loyalists, the collapse of the currency by 2005, and the election violence of the 2008 elections have, however, marred the promise of the early 1980s.⁵⁵

Big Dreams of Later Life

One of the main projects occupying Nellie Mlotshwa's imagination and efforts in the 2000s has been to respond to the unresolved wounds of the *Gukurahundi*—as well as multiple other challenges since then—in as many ways as her faith, energy, good health, and impressive network of local and international connections allow. She has been committed to peacebuilding activities. In 2002 she was selected by representatives of Mennonite Central Committee Southern Africa to go to a peacebuilding program at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. She had temporarily resigned from EBI after many years and was wishing to take up a new kind of service, training others to be conflict mediators, starting at the household and grassroots level. She said, "I have big dreams. The Lord gives me big dreams." "As you walk through the town, standing by the bus, you see a great need for counseling."⁵⁶ She was coaxed out of retirement from EBI to serve as its principal for several years in the 2000s. In 2005 she served on the BICC's peace and justice committee.

Nellie also has given full support to a new NGO called Hope for Mtshabezi, established by her niece Hlengiwe Mlotshwa Sibanda, Peter's brother's daughter. Hlengiwe was Nellie's pupil in primary school during the 1960s, and Nellie has played a steadfast role as surrogate familial and spiritual mother to Hlengiwe since the death of her own mother. Hope for Mtshabezi aims to restore medical care to the rural areas around Mtshabezi Mission, where

⁵⁵. See UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina*, July 2005, accessed September 9, 2016, http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf. Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order, or, Operation "Throw Out the Trash") took place in 2005. The ZANU-PF government forcibly evicted approximately 700,000 people from informal residences in urban areas. See Timothy Scarnecchia and Wendy Urban-Mead, eds., "The 2008 Zimbabwe Elections," special issue, *Association of Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin* 79 (Spring 2008), <http://concernedafricascholars.org/bulletin/>, for more on the election violence of 2008.

⁵⁶. Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa, interviews with the author, by phone, July 15, 2002, and November 27, 2005.

access to formal medical care has all but dried up due to the environmental and political crises that have rocked the country since the year 2000.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Nellie's description of her trials during the war and her yearnings for taking up peacebuilding work show her sensitivity to the powerful events through which she has lived. Her response to those events shows her courage and servant-leadership, drawing on the tools offered by her faith. By her own account, her unwavering focus has been on using prayer as her means of discerning God's call and then finding the courage and means to obey it. Throughout her life, Nellie has participated richly in an intergenerational cycle of female mentoring. She was mentored by elders such as her mother-in-law, Lomapholisa Khumalo Mlotshwa, and BICC female evangelists Sitshokupi Sibanda and Maria Tshuma. In turn she has been a steady elder sister and mother in the faith to those younger than herself such as Doris Dube, Barbara Nkala, her niece Hlengiwe, and the hosts of BICC women whom she reaches through her peacebuilding workshops, articles in the church paper, the meetings of the mothers' union, and the General Convention. Nellie has also repeatedly proven her outstanding intellectual quality by being a high performer in her schooling; by continuously striving for higher education and deeper qualifications; through her many years as a trusted educator at church and secular primary schools, at theological colleges, and then as principal of EBI; by her superior command of spoken and written English; and through her deep and detailed memory of the histories of her many relatives and of many church leaders.

I interviewed former BICC Bishop Stephen N. Ndlovu in 1999. At that time he was an instructor at the Theological College of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo and was one of the revered elders of the church. He had had extensive experience with the global Mennonite community, had studied in the United States with Mennonite groups, and had been an active agent attempting to broker an end to the *Gukurahundi* violence in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. In my discussion with him about church leadership in the BICC, he spoke at length about the exceptional faith and courage of women members of the church. Women have significantly outnumbered men in church membership for most of the church's

⁵⁷. See <http://www.hopeformtshabezi.org/index.html>; Wendy Urban-Mead, "Hlengiwe Lindani Mlotshwa [Sibanda]: Called to 'Trust and Obey,'" in *Growing and Branching Out: Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa*, ed. Barbara C. Nkala and Doris Dube (Harare: Radiant, 2014), 343–57.

history, and he stated that, contrary to many in the Zimbabwean church, he was a staunch supporter of ordaining women to the position of Mfundisi. He concluded by asking, “Why can’t we ordain Nellie?” Ndlovu pointed to her soundness of doctrine, her leadership skill, and her long-tested and resilient faith. Her stature remains undiminished in the years since that 1999 interview; as of 2016 she continues to be called upon in multiple capacities by the national church, and her relatives are now in diaspora all over the anglophone world and throughout global Mennonite networks. There is no doubt that she not only was worthy of ordination as Mfundisi, but would also have been a world-class bishop.

Epilogue: African-Generated Biographies, Hagiographies, and the BICC

In this section I will shift away from Nellie Mlotshwa’s story and turn to some reflections on the roles that the overlapping genres of biography, oral history, and hagiography play in the making of histories of the church in Africa and of Zimbabwe’s BICC in particular. It is impossible to approach writing a biographical piece on any significant figure in the BICC Zimbabwe without also reckoning with the work of Doris Dube and her sister Barbara Nkala. The footnotes of this chapter give evidence of the prominent place occupied especially by Doris Dube. Doris is a long-serving lay leader, educator, and author of the BICC in Zimbabwe. For at least thirty years she has been collecting life histories of members of the church, with a special emphasis on the holy women of the BICC.

Doris and her sister Barbara—also a trained teacher and writer—were members of the church’s literature committee for many years, contributing stories to the Bulawayo-based church paper, *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*. They were part of the team of about eight members of the church who led the way in documenting many aspects of the church’s history in time for the 1998 centennial celebration, which resulted in *Celebrating the Vision: A Century of Sowing and Reaping*, edited by Barbara. More recently, the two collaborated in writing and publishing a book-length biography of their mother: *Golide: Gogo Khokho—Lived, Loved, and Left a Legacy*. Barbara is the main energy behind a new publishing company called Radiant: Publishing for Transformation, based in Harare. In 2014, the sisters produced a new collection of life histories of exemplary members of the BICC, this time with a wider regional focus on Southern Africa and emphasizing developments since 2000, entitled *Growing and Branching Out: Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa*, also

published by Radiant.⁵⁸

As is well known, the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* project has recognized the value of collecting many life histories of committed African Christians. Derek Peterson, on the faculty of the University of Michigan and historian of Kenya and Uganda, has written extensively on the self-recording efforts of Africans in that region. The role of missions and mission schools in promoting literacy has been well and widely understood, but Peterson's studies have carried the implications of that impact into multiple fascinating corners, including the record keeping of Mau Mau fighters schooled at the Presbyterian mission at Tumutumumu, Kenya.⁵⁹ Of particular relevance is his article "Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya," in which he highlights the extensive practice of creating hagiographic autobiographies as a vibrant genre in Kenyan Christian circles. "Autobiography was the most widely practiced literary genre in colonial Kenya. Christian converts were inveterate autobiographers."⁶⁰ What I have learned is that Doris Dube and Barbara Nkala have been a power team of hagiographic recording in Zimbabwe. They articulate the motivation behind their latest book, *Growing and Branching Out*, stating,

Ours is an oral culture. Stories and information which has passed on from generation to generation through word of mouth has been lost. It has been a cause for concern when some important information is needed and individuals start asking each other questions, or try to piece the known information together. . . . One of the reasons for writing this book is to document some of the information which makes up the history of our Church for this generation and for posterity.⁶¹

They go on to state that their aims are faith-based, with a desire that their publishing efforts would be an authentic response to the Great Commission

⁵⁸. Barbara Nkala, ed., *Celebrating the Vision: A Century of Sowing and Reaping* (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: Brethren in Christ Church, 1998); Doris Dube and Barbara Nkala, *Golide: Gogo Khokho—Lived, Loved, and Left a Legacy* (Harare: Radiant, 2011); Nkala and Dube, *Growing and Branching Out*.

⁵⁹. Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004).

⁶⁰. Derek R. Peterson, "Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya," *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 3 (2006), 176.

⁶¹. Nkala and Dube, eds., *Growing and Branching Out*, back cover.

(Matt 28:18–20). They indicate that they have “a passion for capturing accounts that inspire folks to strive to become change agents for a God-fearing family, community, and nation.”⁶²

I was first introduced to the rich possibilities of biographical work in the BICC of Zimbabwe by reading Dube’s 1992 *Silent Labourers*, a book about exemplary women, published by the BICC’s own Matopo Book Centre.⁶³ As a historian seated in a secular university, I found the stories fascinating, tantalizing, and maddening. Why were there so few dates and such scanty references to specific places? Why were so many of the agents in the stories left unnamed? How could I track down these stories and contextualize them? Here is an example of one passage in the chapter about Nellie Mlotshwa that left me with many questions:

Nellie belonged to a family of five children. She can’t recall how old she was when her world caved in, but she remembers the pain. She was too young to see it coming. One day she belonged to a family unit. The next she was tossed about in that terrible situation when parents separate. Her parents had decided that they couldn’t live together anymore.

For a little while after that Nellie found herself living with her maternal grandmother. At about age five her father redeemed the children by paying what was traditionally required of him.⁶⁴

Never are the parents named. We do not learn the name of the maternal grandmother or find out in what village she lived. We do not precisely know why her parents decided to part or “what was traditionally required” of her father.

It appears that several forces were at work. I came to understand that these stories were not biographies so much as they were hagiographies. Therefore specifics of time and space were minimized. The idea was to create something more like a fable for how to cope with life’s challenges and temptations and emerge with one’s soul intact, with “victory in the Lord.” Also, as indicated above, Dube identifies strongly with Ndebele people as coming from an oral culture. The oral mode of storytelling does not necessarily contain as much specificity of detail as written accounts; remembering and passing down stories is easier if they are learned in that way. It seems Dube tried to capture the oral style of storytelling

⁶². Nkala and Dube, eds., *Growing and Branching Out*, back cover.

⁶³. Doris Dube, *Silent Labourers* (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: Matopo Book Centre, 1992).

⁶⁴. Dube, *Silent Labourers*, 49–50.

in writing these life stories. Another element molding the style of Dube's storytelling is that the stories are written and published for an audience of insiders. Inside Zimbabwe in particular, where many of the specifics of context are given known by all, the stories serve a devotional and evangelical purpose. In addition, the fact that the BICC membership of Zimbabwe largely comes from the Matabeleland region—made to understand by the *Gukurahundi's* harsh tutelage that they were in a region of suspect loyalty to the ruling party—is a strong motivator for keeping the stories the church publishes strictly apolitical. The very vagueness of the stories renders their purely pietistic aims more convincingly apolitical. I have come to believe, further, that Doris Dube is a true believer in a faith that results in living in the world, but not of it—and that positioning includes remaining at a distinct remove from partisan approaches to worldly power.

All three of the Dube and Nkala sisters' hagiographic compilations, *Silent Labourers*, *Celebrating the Vision*, and *Growing and Branching Out*, feature chapters on Nellie Mlotshwa. The sisters are good friends with Nellie and have worked together with her on many projects, not least as fellow members of the literature committee that produced the centennial book, *Celebrating the Vision*, and as fellow reporters for *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*. In addition, the role played by Doris and her husband, Jethro Dube, as country representatives for the Mennonite Central Committee facilitated Nellie's attendance at the peacebuilders training in Virginia. In sum, this biographical essay about the life and work of Nellie Mlotshwa to date is much indebted to both Barbara Nkala and Doris Dube.

Author's note regarding source: In addition to sources already cited, readers wishing to pursue further the topics addressed in this chapter will find the following resources of value.

Archives: Brethren in Christ Church, Archives, Grantham, PA; Brethren in Christ Church, Church Records, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Periodicals: *Evangelical Visitor*, Brethren in Christ Church paper published from the late 1800s to the late 1900s, addressed to the North American BICC membership; *Amazwi Amahle/Good Words*, Brethren in Christ Church paper published in Bulawayo, addressed to church members in Zimbabwe.

Books: Terence O. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture, and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Carol Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans' Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918–1940* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press,

1978).

Chapters and articles by Wendy Urban-Mead: “Gender and the Limits of ‘Ndebeleness,’ 1910–1960s: Abezansi Church Women’s Domestic and Associational Alliances,” in *Gendering Ethnicity in African Women’s Lives*, ed. Jan Bender Shetler (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Univ. Press, 2015), 153–77; “Girls of the Gate: Questions of Purity and Piety at Mtshabezi Girls’ Primary Boarding School,” *Le Fait Missionnaire*, 11 (2001): 75–99, also published in *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 25, no.1 (2002): 3–32; “Protestant Women Activists in Matabeleland: Historical Perspectives on ‘Apolitical,’ Faith-Based Action in Response to the Health Care Crisis of 2000–2010” (paper presented at the Britain-Zimbabwe Society Research Days, St. Antony’s College, Oxford, June 19–20, 2010); “Sitshokupi Sibanda: ‘Bible Woman’ or Evangelist? Ways of Naming and Remembering Female Leadership in a Mission Church of Colonial Zimbabwe,” in “Transnational Bible Women,” ed. Deborah Gaitskell and Wendy Urban-Mead, special issue, *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 4 (2008): 653–70.

“A Character Worth Writing About”: Sikhawulaphi Khumalo’s Education and Christian Experiences at Empandeni Mission, Southwestern Zimbabwe, 1900–1940s⁶⁵

By Barbara Mahamba⁶⁶

The experiences of the first girls to attend mission schools such as Empandeni Girls Mission School, located in southwestern Zimbabwe, have been ignored by mainstream history. Little is known about how they perceived the new religion to which they were introduced or about how they interacted with the nuns and priests.⁶⁷ The main reason for their marginalization today is that they were ignored by those who composed historians’ main sources, the mission records. It is difficult as well to recapture their voices, for one can no longer interview them. The access to life and thought in a girls’ mission school offered by the case of Sikhawulaphi Khumalo (mid-1890s–1966), therefore, is exceptional. The daughter of Makhwelambila, a half-brother of the Ndebele king Lobengula, Sikhawulaphi’s situation was unique. Because of her relationship with the late king Lobengula, she was brought up as a little girl by the Notre Dame nuns, living with them in the nuns’ convent at Empandeni Mission. The nuns and priests at Empandeni loved her, and she featured frequently in the pages of the nuns’ diaries and in the Empandeni Annals, as well as in the priests’ reports. A Jesuit priest, Father John O’Neill, commented that she was “a character worth writing about.”⁶⁸ Sikhawulaphi is indeed worthy of being written about for many reasons.

Why Sikhawulaphi Is Worth Writing About

The fact that the Notre Dame nuns found her worth recording in their records allows us the rare opportunity to glimpse more than passing remarks about girls

⁶⁵ This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from Dana Lee Robert, ed. *African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives, and Challenges* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2018).

⁶⁶ Barbara Mahamba is senior lecturer in history at the University of Zimbabwe (2018). She has published “Race and Gender in Roman Catholic Girls’ Education: The Embakwe Experiment, 1922–1965,” *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* (2014).

⁶⁷ In mission schools, education was a tool of evangelization.

⁶⁸ *Zambezi Mission Record* 2, no. 30 (October 1905): 624; (hereinafter *ZMR*).

who attended school in the early days of the mission.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Sikhawulaphi features for a period of only about ten years. These records, however, do provide not only references to the nuns' expectations of her, but also her own reactions to Christianity, for the nuns recorded some of Sikhawulaphi's own statements verbatim, expressing her responses to Western-style education and Christianity. Her descendants also made a meaningful contribution to the writing of this biography. By keeping her memory alive, they made available aspects of Sikhawulaphi's life, particularly her adult life, that are not in the written record. Sikhawulaphi's biography opens a window into how Christianity and Western schooling were received and appropriated by the schoolgirls at Empandeni and into how, when they were older, they used the experience and skills they had gained to navigate the colonial system, as well as to guide their children to be able to adapt to their changing environment. Her biography provides a broader understanding of the interplay between individual lives and the social and political forces that were at play during the times of rapid change brought about by colonialism.

Sikhawulaphi did not have any leadership roles in the Roman Catholic Church, but her story, which I shall tell within the broader framework of the nuns' and priests' educational goals, will serve to illustrate what became of the female graduates of Roman Catholic mission schools in southwestern Zimbabwe. She is unique in that from childhood she earned a reputation for taking Christian teachings more seriously than did other children. As an adult, she became an ideal model of Christian motherhood—this being the only avenue open for the first group of girls schooled at Empandeni to express their conversion to a world religion and Western schooling. My purpose in writing her biography is not so much to suggest that her experiences were representative of those of all girls schooled at Empandeni, but rather to glean information from her experiences about aspects of social life in the early history of the mission station and the surrounding areas.

For writing Sikhawulaphi's biography, I have adopted the approach of social biography, a shift away from the tendency by biographers to focus on great men and women and their deeds.⁷⁰ I explore Sikhawulaphi's struggle to

⁶⁹. See ZMR and Josephine Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude, 1899–1903: Journal of a Woman Missionary. Josephine Bullen, SND de Namur, at the Turn of the Century in Rhodesia*, trans. and ed. Brigid Rose Tiernan (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster, 2008).

⁷⁰. Nick Salvatore, "Biography and Social History: An Intimate Relationship," *Labour History* 87 (November 2004): 187.

understand Christianity, her journey through baptism, her life as a Christian mother, and then her years as a widow living at the mission estate. Though Sikhawulaphi's main area of influence was her family, she deserves a place in Zimbabwean women's history. This history has tended to concentrate on assertive, strong-willed, illustrious, and politically powerful independent women. Examples of such women include Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana—whose role in the Shona risings of 1896 became legendary and inspired Zimbabwean nationalism during the colonial era—and the Ndebele Queen, Lozikeyi Dlodlo, who was described as “a very dangerous and intriguing woman.”⁷¹

Although Sikhawulaphi was a devout Catholic, she was not a founder of an urban women's movement as was Elizabeth Musodzi. Musodzi, also a product of Catholic missionary education—by the Dominican nuns at Chishawasha—not only founded a Catholic women's movement, but also dined with King George VI and the Queen Mother when they visited Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1947.⁷² Sikhawulaphi was not among the urban prostitutes and women in temporary relationships (known in Shona as *vakadzi vemapoto*), who have found their place in Zimbabwean women's history for working hard to turn around societal stigmas against urban women and to live better lives.⁷³ Sikhawulaphi did not have a dominating presence in the public sphere. She did not advocate for the promotion of girls' education in the direct manner that Elizabeth Musodzi did. Sikhawulaphi's advocacy was subtle but representative of female Catholic mission education graduates of her generation, who exercised agency mainly by realizing that, although the colonial system deemed their generation of African women as not yet ready for the world of work, they needed to provide education as a foundation for their children to use in navigating the colonial landscape.

Childhood

⁷¹. D. N. Beach, “An Innocent Woman Unjustly Accused? Charwe, Medium of the Nehanda Mhondoro Spirit, and the 1896–97 Central Shona Rising in Zimbabwe,” *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 27–54; Marieke Faber Clarke, with Pathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo, Queen of the Ndebele: “A Very Dangerous and Intriguing Woman”* (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: Amagugu, 2010).

⁷². Tsuneo Yoshikuni, *Elizabeth Musodzi and the Birth of African Feminism in Early Colonial Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver, 2008).

⁷³. Terri Barnes, *“We Women Worked So Hard”: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999). See also Terri Barnes and Everjoyce Win, *To Live a Better Life: An Oral History of Women in the City of Harare, 1930–70* (Harare: Baobab, 1992).

As a little girl growing up under the care of the Notre Dame nuns, Sikhawulaphi was not representative of ordinary Ndebele girls and women. The fact that she was a niece of the deposed king Lobhengula meant that she was viewed as belonging to a social class above that of the other girls attending school at the mission. The nuns' first impression of Sikhawulaphi's father, Makhwelambila, was that he was "evidently superior to the class around Empandeni."⁷⁴ Father Prestage, who became acquainted with Makhwelambila even before Lobhengula granted the Jesuits permission to open a mission at Empandeni in 1884, also had a very high opinion of him. Sister Josephine recorded in her diary that "many a time in bygone days he has treated Fr. Prestage well and given him presents of lion and leopard skins."⁷⁵ Subsequent comments about the same man show that this high opinion later changed.

Makhwelambila was not a convert and did not live on the Empandeni estate. In October 1900 he approached Fr. Prestage with a request for his daughter, Sikhawulaphi, to live with the Notre Dame nuns. Makhwelambila wished for his daughter to "learn the book" and that she be treated just the same as the other students.⁷⁶ Very little reference is made to Sikhawulaphi's mother in the written sources, except for a brief mention by Sr. Josephine, who wrote that Sikhawulaphi's mother "took another husband" who lived in Francistown.⁷⁷ Oral informants say that Sikhawulaphi's mother (who was known as maTshabangu) and her father had never married, but that Sikhawulaphi was born to them out of wedlock (year unknown) when both were in Figtree.⁷⁸ When maTshabangu decided to go to Francistown, Botswana, with her new husband, she took Sikhawulaphi with her, prompting Makhwelambila to go and get his daughter and to make arrangements to place the child under the tutelage of the Notre Dame nuns stationed at Empandeni mission.⁷⁹ Makhwelambila could not raise his daughter on his own and must have thought that the nuns would give her a good start in life.⁸⁰ Perhaps his decision had something to do with the upheaval

⁷⁴. ZMR 1, no. 12 (April 1901): 419.

⁷⁵. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁷⁶. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁷⁷. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁷⁸. Emma Mlilo, interview with the author, Pumula, Bulawayo, October 24, 2008. In adulthood Ndebele women, whether married or not, continue to be addressed by their father's name which is prefixed with "ma," meaning "daughter of." In this case, "daughter of Tshabangu."

⁷⁹. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁸⁰. Emma Mlilo, interview with the author, Pumula, Bulawayo, June 24, 2010.

resulting from the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893–94 and the destruction of the Ndebele state which scattered some members of the royal family.

Under normal circumstances, a child born out of wedlock among the Ndebele would have been brought up by its mother's extended family since *lobola* (bride wealth) would not have been paid. In precolonial Ndebele society *lobola* was paid primarily to transfer reproductive rights from the wife's family to the husband and would not be paid until the couple was blessed with a child. The effects on Sikhawulaphi of the political upheavals in Matabeleland and of her unstable family background are somehow suggested in the very name Sikhawulaphi, which means literally "Where do we end?" This name is usually given to a child born during a period of misfortune that the parents wish would come to an end. During Sikhawulaphi's childhood, Makhwelambila no longer enjoyed the privilege of being a king's brother, since the Ndebele royal family became "like the rest of the natives" after the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893–94 and the 1896 anticolonial uprisings. By the time Makhwelambila brought his daughter to the mission, he wished for her to be treated just like the other girls there.⁸¹

European nuns in Zimbabwe have a history of "rescuing" orphans from villages surrounding their stations. Some of the children who were cared for by the nuns expressed wishes to serve the Lord by becoming priests and nuns. For instance, in 1919 at Saint Triashill Mission, in Manicaland Province, one of the pioneer Precious Blood nuns, Sr. Olympia, rescued a baby boy called Alois whose mother had died while giving birth to him. The child was a weakling and Sr. Olympia at one time gave up hope that he would live. He did survive and at the age of eleven asked Brother Goeb, SJ, if it was only the white people who could become priests. When he was told that anyone could become a priest, he decided to pursue a vocation. In 1936, Alois was sent to Chishawasha, a seminary set up by Bishop Chichester of Salisbury (now Harare), and after graduating he was ordained as a priest.⁸² The gendered nature of the nuns' response to African children who grew up under their care is illustrated by the fact that while Alois's wish to become a priest was encouraged, Sikhawulaphi's dream to become a nun was not embraced. As a little girl, Sikhawulaphi expressed the desire to become like the Notre Dame nuns when she was older but, because of prejudice and limited vision, the nuns did not encourage this ambition. Instead, they chose to nurture her dream to become a mother.

⁸¹. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁸². Jesuit Archives, Harare, Triashill Again, Box 196.

Having been rescued from “bad motherhood” as well as from the breakup and scattering of the royal family, Sikhawulaphi was presented to the Notre Dame nuns on October 24, 1900, three days after her father approached Fr. Prestage asking for permission to leave his daughter with the Notre Dame nuns. The nuns took an instant liking to the little girl. Sr. Josephine’s first diary entry about Sikhawulaphi was “our princess arrived, her head covered with a towel and over that a small bundle of clothes, tied in a handkerchief.”⁸³ The Notre Dame nuns also described her as “a pretty little thing dressed in a pinafore.”⁸⁴ Sikhawulaphi’s arrival coincided with the time when the Empandeni missionaries were trying out the idea of having boarders, and the nuns and priests were doing all they could to attract African children to live at the mission. The idea was met with resistance from African parents. The nuns succeeded in convincing the first three girls, Mbikwa, Veli, and Mali, who were all baptized, to stay only after much persuasion and a promise to pay them for being boarders. Initially the girls slept on the floor in the washroom at the convent while arrangements were made to build a hut in which they could live.⁸⁵ Another girl, Ntombi, became the fourth boarder. With Sikhawulaphi’s arrival, the number of girl boarders rose to five. Unlike the other girls, Sikhawulaphi did not constantly demand to be paid. The Notre Dame nuns could not understand why the girls were refusing the offered food, clothing, and education, but demanded payment in the form of “money or new calico to do what they like with.”⁸⁶

At some unspecified point, Sikhawulaphi shared a hut with a white girl, Jessie De Vilda, whose parents lived near Plumtree. Jessie’s parents, who were Catholic, brought her to Empandeni when the family was facing financial challenges so that she could be educated and receive religious instruction, for there were no schools for white children at that time. When the family’s circumstances improved, Jessie rejoined her parents. While Jessie was at Empandeni, she and Sikhawulaphi were treated differently, with Jessie receiving the sisters’ food while Sikhawulaphi ate African food.⁸⁷

What endeared Sikhawulaphi to the nuns was that, apart from being the daughter of Fr. Prestige’s friend Makhwelambila, she was the only boarder who was not persuaded or bribed to stay, but instead needed a place to stay. Sikhawulaphi was an instant darling. The little girl “proved to be an intelligent

⁸³. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 72.

⁸⁴. *ZMR* 1, no. 12 (April 1901): 421.

⁸⁵. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 70.

⁸⁶. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 70.

⁸⁷. Memoirs of Sister Laura from 1903, SNDdeN Archives.

child, quite European in comparison with her companions, who do not altogether appreciate the sprightly ways and occasional teasing of the small princess.”⁸⁸ It is not clear what exactly made her “European”— her appearance or the “sprightly teasing” of her peers, but the implication was that the nuns regarded her as being of a higher social status than her peers. She was the only one who stayed when, in less than a month, the other girls began to leave one by one.⁸⁹ She proved to be a great help to Sr. Mary in the kitchen. Having been dependent on the nuns from an early age, Sikhawulaphi probably felt a degree of loyalty to them, which may explain her desire to conform to Christian teachings and to please the nuns. The nuns and priests saw in the vulnerable little girl a protégé whom they could fashion.

Sikhawulaphi’s separation from her mother very probably troubled the little girl, for the nuns tried to arrange for her to visit her mother in Francistown, an attempt that turned out to be unsuccessful. She was accompanied on her missionary-sponsored train journey by Mawaba, one of the mission’s trusted general hands. Sikhawulaphi had prepared presents, which included a blanket and a cock and a hen from her own fowl run, for her mother and her siblings.⁹⁰ She showed confidence on the train as she journeyed from Plumtree to Francistown, conversing in English with European passengers. On reaching their destination, they found that Sikhawulaphi’s mother had gone on a visit to a village a couple days’ walk away. They stayed overnight with relatives and searched for two days, but without success. Disappointed, she and Mawaba returned to the mission to be welcomed back by the nuns, who had been worried that if she succeeded in finding her mother, she might decide not to return to Empandeni but to live with her mother permanently.⁹¹ She never spoke of having attempted a second visit.

Sikhawulaphi was therefore literally brought up by the nuns, and the priests showed tremendous concern for her welfare. The nuns often took her along when they visited the villages or went on picnics.⁹² Her father visited her occasionally; sometimes he would fetch her from the convent and she would be away for long periods. On October 19, 1904, she left with her father and came

⁸⁸. *ZMR* 1, no. 12 (April 1901): 419.

⁸⁹. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 74.

⁹⁰. *ZMR* 2, no. 27 (January 1905): 494.

⁹¹. *ZMR* 2, no. 24 (April 1904): 494.

⁹². Empandeni Annals, January 22, 1901, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Archives, Liverpool, UK; hereinafter SNDdeN Archives.

back on December 17, “the same child, bright and happy.”⁹³ Although the nuns and priests did not stop Makhwelambila from visiting his daughter whenever he wished, they were not comfortable with his visits because he was not a Christian.⁹⁴ A struggle for control of her welfare ensued, with Christianity and European patriarchy represented by the Jesuit priests, mainly Fr. Prestage and Fr. Hartmann, and “paganism” and African patriarchy represented by her father. The priests and nuns sought to limit the freedom of members of her extended family to visit her. Unlike her father, Sikhawulaphi’s relations were only allowed occasional visits. Although the missionaries were wary of “pagan influences” that could result from family visits and despite the pressure she was under, no evidence exists to suggest that Sikhawulaphi ever turned against either her father or any of her relatives, or that she lost her African identity and values. This claim is borne out by her adult life, as will be illustrated below.

For Sikhawulaphi, therefore, the convent was a home when she had no other. It provided a conducive atmosphere within which she was able to embrace the Christian faith. The defeat that dismantled the Ndebele state meant the breakup of her family, which, under normal circumstances, would have provided a safety net for her. The convent filled the void that resulted; by providing safety and security, it became both a religious and social sanctuary for her.

Numerous terms of endearment are used to describe Sikhawulaphi in the entries in Sr. Josephine’s diary and the Zambezi Mission Record. She is referred to as a model child, the nuns’ pride and joy, a thoroughly good child, thorough in whatever she did, “fond of work, unlike the other natives,” “her ladyship,” and “the famous Sikhawulaphi.”⁹⁵ Sikhawulaphi was also gifted with piety and common sense.⁹⁶ These descriptions summarized virtues that the missionaries deemed to be lacking in the Empandeni community, especially in the girls and women; they were characteristics that the missionaries wished to inculcate through Christianity and education. The missionary education system, with its heavy emphasis on manual work, became an important tool for disseminating this missionary ideology.

Sikhawulaphi was also described as “proud and sensitive,” terms that fit her into the missionary perception of an Ndebele person, for they used the same

⁹³. Empandeni Annals, October 19, 1904, and December 17, 1906, SNDdeN Archives.

⁹⁴. *ZMR* 2, no. 24 (April 1904): 494.

⁹⁵. *ZMR* 2, no. 24 (April 1904): 494; 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188; 2, no. 27 (January 1905): 494; and 2, no. 30 (October 1905): 624.

⁹⁶. *ZMR* 2, no. 27 (January 1905): 494.

terms to describe the Ndebele people in general. Nuns and priests wrote of the Ndebele as “a proud and sensitive race and hence the heads of families . . . do not like to dwell in populous centres where they would almost be nonentities.”⁹⁷ Sikhawulaphi provided a good choice for a role model because she was well-known and respected in the community, being the defeated king’s niece. The fact that as a child Sikhawulaphi needed the missionaries for her survival gave the nuns and priests opportunity to groom her as an ideal role model. Although this arrangement may not have been the best for Sikhawulaphi, the fact that her mother had deserted her, that her extended family was scattered, and that her father was unable to look after her, left her with little choice.

The nuns and priests’ perception of Sikhawulaphi is, therefore, the opposite of their perception of other girls and women whom they viewed as “lazy and fickle.”⁹⁸ Generally, the missionaries expressed very low hopes for the girls. They worried that as the girls grew toward womanhood, they might “give cause for anxiety, but it would be unreasonable to expect much from them.”⁹⁹ Of Sikhawulaphi, the nuns’ view was the opposite. For instance, years after Sikhawulaphi had left school for marriage, Sr. Laura still remembered her as a “fine character and, as a good Catholic who still lives at the mission after a varied career.”¹⁰⁰

As a child Sikhawulaphi probably worked for her board in the Notre Dame nuns’ convent. She describes the work she did in letters that she wrote in Ndebele which were translated and published in the *Zambezi Mission Record*. In speaking of her morning routine, Sikhawulaphi writes that she would make coffee for the nuns and priests, after which she would go to the church for prayers. She would come back to the kitchen to wash the dishes, milk the cows, and put the kettle on for the nuns when it was time for tea. Sikhawulaphi also refers to another girl whose name she does not give, but whose brother was called Mbaimbai.¹⁰¹ This girl did not live with the nuns, but did some work for them at the convent.¹⁰² Sikhawulaphi’s daily work contrasts with that of the other girls whom the missionaries portrayed as being lazy.

Despite the work she did, Sikhawulaphi benefited from the privilege of living with the nuns. In school, the nuns used Ndebele as the medium of

⁹⁷. *ZMR* 2, no. 24 (April 1904): 377.

⁹⁸. *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 223.

⁹⁹. *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 223.

¹⁰⁰. Memoirs of Sister Laura from 1903, SNDdeN Archives.

¹⁰¹. “Mbaimbai” is an Ndebele corruption of “bye and bye.”

¹⁰². *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 223.

instruction, with English being introduced gradually. Through her daily interactions with the nuns, she learned to speak English at a quicker pace than the other children, picking up the language from listening to the nuns conversing among themselves. Her ability to speak English at an early age gave her confidence when relating to the nuns as well as to the outside world. It probably helped her understand the Christian teachings better than the other children, thus causing the missionaries to view her baptism as a special occasion.

Baptism

Since women on the Empandeni estate were regarded, by nuns and priests alike, as being resistant to Christianity, their conversion was seen as special. Baptisms of women were valued and, in the missionaries' records of their converts, the number of women baptized was highlighted. For example, on Saturday, May 27, 1899, they recorded that there "were 11 baptisms, 3 of them women, mothers of our children." Sikhawulaphi's baptism was extraordinarily special because in her the Notre Dame nuns found a true candidate for Christianity who "astonished Fathers by her intelligent answers."¹⁰³ In her, the nuns professed to have found "a precious pearl which repays ten- and twentyfold the disappointments one otherwise experiences at a mission field like that of Empandeni whose ground is so hard, stony and sterile."¹⁰⁴ Sikhawulaphi was different from the other girls, who, according to the nuns, "did negative things instinctively and were difficult to convert" and "were lazy and indolent."¹⁰⁵ Sikhawulaphi was fond of work, thorough in whatever she did.¹⁰⁶ She was determined to become a Christian, even at the cost of incurring anger from her father.¹⁰⁷

Her baptism became the center of a wrangle between her father, Makhwelambila, who was reluctant for her to be a Christian, and the Jesuit missionaries. Her father tried to delay granting his consent until, in his words, "she learnt more book and is taller." In contrast, the Jesuit missionaries were adamant that she had chosen to become a Christian and should be allowed the freedom to practice her faith.¹⁰⁸ Sikhawulaphi was aware of her predicament, but

¹⁰³. *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.

¹⁰⁴. *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.

¹⁰⁵. *ZMR* 2, no. 15 (January 1902): 190.

¹⁰⁶. *ZMR* 2, no. 20 (April 1903): 223.

¹⁰⁷. *ZMR* 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 188.

¹⁰⁸. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 88.

she believed that *Umlimophezulu* would help her in her lessons because she was one of his own children.¹⁰⁹

Apart from being keen to be baptized, Sikhawulaphi took her schoolwork seriously. On August 29, 1901, she appeared on the list of prizewinners, attaining the third position in her class, with Ndawana achieving the first and Ndunu the second. Extremely inquisitive, she was noted for being an intelligent child, an attentive listener who asked a lot of questions, and the nuns were prepared to explain things that she found difficult to understand. Several anecdotes illustrate how Sikhawulaphi grappled with understanding Christianity from what the nuns taught her, on the one hand, and from their behavior, on the other hand. Sr. Andrina complained about a noisy insect and Sikhawulaphi said, “God made that insect and you don’t like it.” When the nun complained about too much rain and how it would ruin the crops, leading to scarcity of food, Sikhawulaphi asked, “Who sends the rain?”¹¹⁰ She also learned the virtue of punctuality through hearing a sermon about a lady who arrived late for mass every Sunday in spite of repeated warnings. When the lady’s time to die came, the priest was late and she died without the last sacraments. After hearing this story, Sikhawulaphi, who previously had arrived late for prayers, never delayed for prayers and would be kneeling in the church long before the bell rang. The reason for this change in behavior was that she did not want the priest to be late when she died.¹¹¹ Sikhawulaphi also grappled with the meaning of the consecrated altar bread. She observed Sr. Josephine baking the bread and asked, “Are you making *Umlimophezulu*?” to which the sister said she was making bread and the priest would change it into *Umlimophezulu*.¹¹²

Sikhawulaphi could not understand why her baptism was taking so long and seemed to blame the nuns and priests, saying,

If the Fathers and you (nuns) and white people won’t let me into Heaven because I am not baptised, I will not stop calling at the door to our Lady. She is up at the top near God. She will let me in and then I can stop just inside the door. I will sit there, and the white people cannot chase me away then.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹. “*Mlimo*” is Kalanga for “God,” and “*ophezulu*” means “in heaven”; hence, “*Umlimophezulu*” means “God in Heaven.” See Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 110.

¹¹⁰. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 102.

¹¹¹. *Empandeni Annals*, January 1, 1902, SNDdeN Archives.

¹¹². Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 90.

¹¹³. *Empandeni Annals*, January 1, 1902, SNDdeN Archives.

Sikhawulaphi was so determined to be baptized that on one of the visits from her father, she begged him to allow her to be baptized. When Makhwelambila finally consented to his daughter's requests, Fr. Hartmann was so happy, he gave Makhwelambila a blanket.¹¹⁴

Since Ndebele women were expected to marry and have children, Makhwelambila was anxious to know if his daughter could take a husband after baptism, or if she would remain single like the nuns.¹¹⁵ He was probably also worried about losing his daughter to the missionaries and therefore tried to delay the baptism for as long as he could. Fr. Hartmann responded by accosting Makhwelambila with his notebook and made him sign a statement that he would give Sikhawulaphi the liberty to practice her religion and to marry as a Christian.¹¹⁶ Fr. Hartmann used the same tactic on other Ndebele fathers who wished to arrange marriages for their daughters who either were Christians already or were being prepared for baptism. In this notebook, he kept a record of agreements regarding who these girls could or could not marry. As Sr. Josephine put it, "Woe betide the Christian who is thinking of marrying a heathen girl."¹¹⁷

On June 22, 1902, Sikhawulaphi was baptized "solemnly" in a public baptism so that she could be a shining example to be seen by all. Shetikwa was her godmother. She received the name Agnes, a saint killed by non-Christians. Her joy and happiness were described as genuine and pure.¹¹⁸ Fr. Hartmann gave her a hen as a present. The hen was meant to remind her that from the day of her baptism, she had a mother (Mary, the mother of Jesus) who would take care of her better than her own mother, who had abandoned her, could ever do. An example of a genuine conversion, Sikhawulaphi was a source of pride for the nuns and priests.¹¹⁹

An evidence that Sikhawulaphi's baptism was special was that when she asked for more time for her first confession before her first communion, her request was granted. She wished for more time for

¹¹⁴. ZMR 2, no. 19 (January 1903): 223.

¹¹⁵. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 110.

¹¹⁶. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 110.

¹¹⁷. Josephine Bullen, "The Journal: Empandeni Interlude, 1899–1903" (n.d.),

97.

¹¹⁸. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 111.

¹¹⁹. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 111.

she had a lot to ask the priest about. Her confidence as a Christian is illustrated by the fact that after the first communion, the other children were afraid to eat in front of crowds for fear of being bewitched, but Sikhawulaphi was not afraid, but would be happy to go to heaven on her First Communion day.¹²⁰

In a way, Sikhawulaphi's baptism was a triumph of the missionaries' desires for girls and women to be pious. In the eyes of the missionaries, it was a triumph over Ndebele women's "addiction to heathen practices" and an answer to Sikhawulaphi's prayer that Mary would help her with her catechism lessons "as if she were one of her own children."¹²¹ Since priests were determined to keep Makhwelambila's non-Christian influences at bay, the baptism was also perhaps a triumph of Christian patriarchy over African patriarchy. Sikhawulaphi's commitment to Christianity later drew her father to convert, even though he had initially been unwilling.

Adult Life

A yawning gap in the record exists pertaining to Sikhawulaphi's life between her baptism and her adult life as a wife and mother. Mainly this deficit arises because Bullen's *Journal* ceases abruptly in 1904, spelling an end to any specific references to Sikhawulaphi. References to her in the *Zambezi Mission Record* also dwindle, leaving researchers to rely on patchy evidence from the *Empandeni Annals* as well as oral testimony.

Sikhawulaphi had dreamed of joining the nuns, but that desire was suppressed and she was channeled into Christian motherhood. The nuns reported her childhood inclination to marry and have children. As a child, Sikhawulaphi longed for "a beautiful child who can open her eyes and talk, who she can carry on her back."¹²² Moreover, celibacy, one of the vows taken by women religious, was not easily understood or accepted by the African communities. It was considered a disgrace for an Ndebele woman to die childless. These ideas were strengthened by Christian perceptions of motherhood, which were reinforced when Sikhawulaphi was given a doll, a symbol of Western motherhood.

The nuns' concern that Sikhawulaphi should have a Christian marriage and family can be understood from the scenes they portrayed of a heathen family

¹²⁰. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 114.

¹²¹. Bullen, *Empandeni Interlude*, 110.

¹²². *ZMR* 2, no. 20 (April 1903): 223.

in contrast to a Christian family. Sr. Josephine painted a vivid scenario: Basikana, one of the Christian schoolgirls, took the nuns to her home. In this homestead,

there are only two families and they are all Christians. The children at once get us three stamping machines which turned up-side-down make capital seats and then having carefully washed out a tin can, filled it with beer and laid it at our feet.¹²³

At the next homestead, whose members again were all Christians, all the family members were at home, sitting and working in a shaded area. "The men were dressing goat skins, the women and girls making baskets, or mats, or threading beads, all so happy and content in this bright free land. This is the first time we have seen women and men work together."¹²⁴ To the nuns, the Christian family was the representation of a solid, nuclear, happy family where women and men worked together, and where the virtues of Western-style cleanliness and hospitality were evident, a perfect example of the transforming effects of the girls' education on domestic life.

The picture of the heathen family stands in sharp contrast. Without providing any evidence, the nuns viewed the heathen family as presenting a scene of hostility to the nuns, noncooperation between men and women, absence of happiness, and people suffering as a result of ignorance and dirt. At the entrance of one such homestead,

all the men were seated carving round bowls out of the trunk of the umganu tree. They looked surly and would hardly say *sakubona*. Some women began to peep round the corners so we went over to them and found a poor girl standing sadly apart. She was dreadfully burnt, hand and foot, a mass of burnt flesh, drawn, dirty and half healed.¹²⁵

We are presented with a disjuncture between a traditional African homestead (depicted as dirty, unfriendly, and regressive) and a Christian homestead (progressive and family friendly). That the effort to discredit the non-Christian villages was deliberate appears evident.

¹²³. Bullen, "The Journal," 64.

¹²⁴. Bullen, "The Journal," 64.

¹²⁵. Bullen, "The Journal," 64.

Christian instruction, therefore, focused greatly on Christian marriage. A letter written by one nun highlights the centrality of preparation for marriage in the Empandeni girls' lives:

Our children here are showing the fruit of the instruction they have received, and I am glad to say their spirit is remarkably good. Several big girls who have left the school are now engaged to Christian boys and will be baptized before they are married. We have a girl staying with us who is going to marry an old Chishawasha boy, Dick by name. The girl's name is Manengi.¹²⁶

Bride wealth (*lobola*) was paid in the form of cattle and goats, followed by a Christian wedding in church.¹²⁷ The number of such marriages was used to judge the success of missionary work.

Around 1916 or 1917 Sikhawulaphi married Mlangeni Ndleleni from Filabusi, who was working at the mission.¹²⁸ The nuns, no doubt, played an influential role in preparing Sikhawulaphi for marriage. At some point after the wedding (the dates are not clear), Mlangeni and Sikhawulaphi went to Nkankezi, Filabusi, where they set up their rural home.¹²⁹ While living at Nkankezi they had nine children. Mlangeni worked on farms and railway tracks around Filabusi. In 1930, Mlangeni Ndleleni died, leaving the widowed Sikhawulaphi struggling to raise the nine children on her own. Upon hearing about Sikhawulaphi's predicament as a widow with nine children, the missionaries at Empandeni immediately sent for her to be brought back to the mission, where they pledged to help her raise and educate her children.¹³⁰

By returning to Empandeni, Sikhawulaphi reestablished a strong bond with the priests and nuns, reminiscent of her childhood. Like other widows in her time, Sikhawulaphi felt secure at the mission, where she was given access to land, enabling her to feed her children. In those days, widowed women and unmarried mothers could live on the Empandeni estate and farm as long as they

¹²⁶. ZMR 2, no. 24 (April 1904): 495.

¹²⁷. Emma Mlilo, interview with the author, Pumula, Bulawayo, June 24, 2010.

¹²⁸. Emma Mlilo, interview with the author, Pumula, Bulawayo, June 24, 2010.

¹²⁹. Arnoldise Ndleleni, interview with the author, Empandeni Mission, October 24, 2010.

¹³⁰. Oliver Ndleleni, interview with the author, St. Mary's Cathedral, Bulawayo, November 6, 2008.

attended church services and abided by the rules set by the missionaries. Health facilities were also available at the mission.

Sikhawulaphi raised her children to become devout Catholics, as was she. Her children, both boys and girls, received missionary education with its strong emphasis on industrial skills, reflected in her children's later occupations. Following, in order of seniority, are her children and their professions: Paul became a teacher; Andrew, a carpenter; Francis, a builder; Steven, a hospital orderly; Joseph, a policeman; Josephine, a dressmaker who also worked in a hospital. Kholi went to South Africa and never came back; while Antony did not seem to have a recognized career.¹³¹ Maria became a founding member of the first African congregation of nuns in Matabeleland, the Ancillae Mariae Reginae (AMR).

By being able to embrace Western-style education and to speak, read, and write English, Sikhawulaphi showed herself to be a remarkable woman. She was able to embrace a world religion, becoming a devout Catholic, while also retaining her identity as an honest, diligent, humble, resourceful, and respectable Ndebele woman. She ensured that all her children received an education without gender discrimination, thereby achieving through her children what she could not, and empowering her daughters and sons to navigate the colonial system through varied careers. She left a legacy of faith to the Roman Catholic Church in her family and community.

At the same time Sikhawulaphi is representative of her generation of mission-educated women. Her case clearly brings out how Roman Catholics, together with other missionaries, worked to construct the institutional and ideological framework for promoting the "domestic ideal," introducing it to African women through missionary education.¹³² Missionaries saw education as the "handmaiden to Christianity" and would rather that "Africans remained uneducated than that they should get education without Christianity."¹³³ As a child in school at Empandeni, Sikhawulaphi represents African women who struggled to grasp the relevance of Christianity and education for their lives. Extracts from a letter written by a Notre Dame nun in 1914 illustrate this struggle. The girls at Empandeni, she relates,

¹³¹. Arnoldise Ndleleni, interview with the author, Empandeni Mission, October 24, 2008.

¹³². Michael O. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002), 69.

¹³³. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 36.

are not quick at lessons, but they can tell everything worth knowing about their kaffir corn, the different edible roots and wild fruits, the way of sheep and cattle. . . . The girls are expert at cooking porridge and the side dishes or sauces, even the tiny ones will tell you they can stamp meal and prepare porridge.¹³⁴

The African women were not blank slates on which the missionaries could write uninhibitedly; the slate already had meaningful content. Rather, what was needed was a process of articulation between the modes of life of the Africans prior to the arrival of the missionaries and the new modes that the missionaries were introducing. The Roman Catholic missionaries were slow to play their part in this process.

Sikhawulaphi's generation of women had to bear the negative sentiments of the missionaries, who were impatient for African women to conform quickly to Western Christian principles. In Sikhawulaphi's time, education was not an avenue for upward mobility, especially for women. African education in that era was meant to serve the interests of the Europeans, and, as Kimberly Richards and Ephraim Govere write, schools served as "agencies for training the next generation of labourers."¹³⁵ Yet, as mentioned earlier, women such as Mai Musodzi, and even the urban *vakadzi vemapoto*, were able to use their limited educational skills to their own benefit as well as that of their communities. Women of Sikhawulaphi's generation conceded the public sphere to men, choosing to seek fulfillment in the private domain. Unlike the *shumba* women who relied on African spirituality to give them a positive sense of identity and power, Christian women such as Sikhawulaphi found fulfillment by investing in their children, making sure that they received a good education without gender discrimination. In this way they enabled their daughters to use education as a vehicle for upward mobility.¹³⁶ Sikhawulaphi conformed to the missionary and settler ideal of a mission-schooled African woman. She was not educated to seek wage labor, but was expected to continue to live in the reserves, marry a Christian man, and raise a family. The wage-earning men were expected to set up

¹³⁴. *ZMR* 5, no. 63 (January 1914): 67.

¹³⁵. Kimberly Richards and Ephraim Govere, "Educational Legislation in Colonial Zimbabwe (1899–1979)," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 35, no. 2 (2003): 237.

¹³⁶. *Shumba* refers to a local family-oriented cult practised by Kalanga women. The *shumba* (lion) spirit was a special class of ancestral spirits that were believed to protect the homestead.

permanent Christian homes in the reserves, far from the polluting influence of the “white” cities, which were regarded as centers of African moral decadence.

It would seem that Sikhawulaphi was a true product of Roman Catholic missionary education which taught girls that it was their duty to stay at home, cook, clean, raise healthy children, and respect and obey their husbands.¹³⁷ Sikhawulaphi’s life after marriage seems a betrayal of the intelligent girl of her school years. She could speak English well and was literate—skills which she could have used to obtain a domestic job in the growing town of Bulawayo. After her husband’s death Sikhawulaphi went back to Empandeni, where she lived no differently than did the illiterate women. Even the missionaries would not employ her, though they did assist her in raising her children. She contributed toward her children’s upbringing through her traditional skill of making *amasi*, an Ndebele delicacy of milk curds, that she sold.

To look for dramatic change in terms of academic achievement or influence in the public domain on the part of the groundbreaking generation of Sikhawulaphi and her peers, however, may not be fair. Her generation was at the receiving end of the combined effects of African customs and colonial mission education, which united in subordinating women.¹³⁸ The fact that she succeeded, in defiance of her family, especially her father, to become a Christian at a tender age, is itself a remarkable achievement.

Sikhawulaphi’s story illustrates the significant binaries that were characteristic of many female graduates of missionary schools of her generation. The girls and women embraced Western education, but they did not experience that education’s full life-changing effect. They were educated by an institution that was not yet ready to empower them to fully utilize the minimal domestic and literary skills that they were learning, and they were then released into a society that was not yet ready to embrace their newly-found schooled status.

Conclusion

Sikhawulaphi’s life story begins and ends at Empandeni. Her generation of mission-schooled girls did not overtly challenge the concepts of gender relations current in their time. They were held up as models of family life for Christian converts, supreme in the domestic sphere, and devoted to the care of their husbands and children. In fact, as they negotiated the boundaries between African

¹³⁷. Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), 122.

¹³⁸. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 68.

tradition and colonial-cum-missionary modernity, Sikhawulaphi's generation of mission-schooled girls defended the patterns of behavior that the nuns had taught them. Ultimately, these women sought personal satisfaction and fulfillment in the calling of homemaker within the confines of the home.¹³⁹

Sikhawulaphi Khumalo's story gives insight into the effect of missionary education and into the roles and responsibilities that missionaries thought fitting for African women during her time. Although she did not use her Western education as an instrument for upward mobility, she made sure that her children received Western schooling, which they were able to use to navigate the colonial economic landscape. Just as she was a model Christian child in her childhood, she became a devout Catholic and a model of Christian motherhood in her later life. She fostered strong bonds with the missionaries that cascaded down to her descendants, who still reside on what used to be the mission estate and who are strong practicing Catholics. One of her daughters, Maria, became a founding member of the first African congregation of nuns in southwestern Zimbabwe, the AMR, fulfilling her mother's childhood dream. Indeed, Sikhawulaphi is "a character worth writing about," given her location in the heart of the early Catholic missionary narratives of southwestern Zimbabwe.

¹³⁹. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 68.

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Tshishiku, Tharcisse Tshibangu. **Le concile Vatican II et l'Église africaine - mise en oeuvre du concile dans l'Église d'Afrique, 1960-2010.** Karthala Edition, 2012 (French Edition). \$37.39 <https://www.amazon.com> ISBN-10: 2811107843, ISBN-13: 978-2811107840

Description: The second Vatican Council (1962-1965) opened in October 1962. It is considered one of the major events of the twentieth century. Bishop Tharcisse Tshibangu played a direct role in this council and was the youngest theologian to take part, appointed by Pope John XXIII. In this book, he provides a personal account and perspective from the African Church.

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Bongmba, Elias Kifon (editor). **The Routledge Handbook of African Theology.** Routledge; 1st edition. 2020. \$104.50 (Hardcover), \$42.36 (Kindle). www.amazon.com ISBN-10: 1138092304, ISBN-13: 978-1138092303

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Martin, Phyllis M. **Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville: Mothers and Sisters in Troubled Times.** Indiana University Press, 2009. \$25.26. www.amazon.com ISBN-10: 0253220556, ISBN-13: 978-0253220554

Description: Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville explores the changing relationship between women and the Catholic Church from the establishment of the first mission stations in the late 1880s to the present. Phyllis M. Martin emphasizes the social identity of mothers and the practice of motherhood, a prime concern of Congolese women, as they individually and collectively made sense of their place within the Church. Martin traces women's early resistance to missionary overtures and church schools, and follows their relationship with missionary Sisters, their later embrace of church-sponsored education, their participation in popular Catholicism, and the formation of women's fraternities. As they drew together as mothers and sisters, Martin asserts, women began to affirm their place in a male-dominated institution. Covering more than a century of often turbulent times, this rich and readable book examines an era of far-reaching social change in Central Africa. ([Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

Omulokoli, Watson O.A. **Christianity in Africa: Select Pillars From Kenya (Vol. Book 1).** Nairobi: Tafsiri Press, [2017]. \$4.99 Kindle Edition, www.amazon.com ISBN-10: 9966004254; ISBN-13: 9789966004253

Description: This is a brilliant piece of work! In what he calls Sketches, Prof. Omulokoli has put together an excellent collection of stories of great men and women, some of whom many of us may not be familiar with; but who were greatly used of God to lay the foundations of Christianity in our land. The slightly older folk will recognize familiar names — some still alive as at the time of this writing — and whose testimonies they can attest to. Combining fact, humour, and deep scholarly insight; this collection brings to the fore the truth and reality of what it meant to be a radical follower of Jesus Christ at a time when many knew nothing other than the pursuit of traditional customs and worship of ancestral gods. (From the Introduction / [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

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Mupangwa, Terence and Sophia Chirongoma. **The challenges of being a female pastor: A case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe.** *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* v.76, no. 2 (2020)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i2.5838>

Abstract: The focus of this article is to highlight some of the inherent gender injustices experienced by the female pastors within the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ). Drawing insights from the field research conducted in pursuance of a doctoral programme, the study foregrounds some of the barriers that women have had to endure when it comes to the issue of being ordained as a pastor. The article also interrogates the reasons used as a basis to exclude female pastors from the key decision-making bodies and to deny them the opportunity to preach at the national conference, which is the biggest gathering within the AFMZ. This is a qualitative study utilizing interviews, focus group discussions and the observation method. The main findings emerging from this study reveal that whilst some positive changes have been made towards the inclusion of women in the pastoral ministry, however, there are still many gaps needing urgent attention before the AFMZ becomes a gender-inclusive and gender-equitable faith community.

Shabalala, Nokukhanya Pearl. **Truth and Reconciliation in Light of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross in Relationship to the Current Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu.** M.A. Thesis, Practical Theology, Concordia Seminary, 2019. URL: https://scholar.csl.edu/ma_th/89

Abstract: The issue of suffering in Africa has resulted in Africans attributing suffering to God's work, ancestors' anger and evil spirits or witchcraft's work. This is a skewed understanding of suffering. And not only that, the suffering that has been perpetrated by the civil war has birthed the phenomenon of child soldiers resulting in Africa casting out its children. In both of these presented issues sub-Saharan Africans need to look deep into its ubuntu as a value system to find solutions for reconciliation in the region. With existing examples of reconciliation through South Africa's restorative justice approach with their Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Rwanda's retributive justice approach with the Gacaca courts to borrow from for solutions, this research contends that true reconciliation between people is hard to achieve unless there has been a reconciliation with God. In providing another way for sub-Saharan Africa's suffering, we will engage Martin Luther's theology of the cross and two kinds of righteousness with Desmond Tutu's ubuntu theology.

Luther's theology of the cross helps sub-Saharan Africans redefine their understanding of suffering. The two kinds of righteousness help them in understanding the vertical and horizontal relationships when it comes to forgiveness and righteousness. What this research essentially wants to point out is that forgiveness and reconciliation between the sub-Saharan communities and child soldiers, the warlords and government officials and civil war victims and perpetrators is very important but the forgiveness we should seek is God's. As much as Africans live by ubuntu values, their understanding of ubuntu is worldly, in a sense that it only looks to the here and now, it doesn't concern itself with the salvation of humans. Africans should be concerned about their salvation and where they will go next after this life, which helps inform our role in the world now where Christ has given us a ministry of reconciliation.