

ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION: THE TRADITIONAL-HEALER PROPHET AND HIS INTEGRATION OF HEALING METHODS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the practices of traditional healing and how they are integrated or rejected by the African Independent Churches (AICS) in Botswana. The paper argues that in spite of some doubtful elements of rejection in the AICS, there is a large degree of integration of healing in the AICS in Botswana. The story of this paper is based on a long discussion with a prophet healer who does not have a clear view of his position with respect to integration of healing in the AICS and traditional healing.

1. General Introduction.

The relationship between Christian healing and traditional healing within the AICS, and the extent to which they can or should be integrated is an issue that has long dominated the study of the AICS in Southern Africa. The first comprehensive study of the AICS in South Africa, by Sundkler¹, makes several references to AICS as custodians of traditional culture. Sundkler discusses a number of issues relating to the life of the AICS under the heading “*New wine in old wine skin.*”² His argument is that the AICS can be seen as the rebirth and revitalization of African culture in the guise of Christianity. It is from this attitude that Sundkler argued that the AICS were “*bridges back to paganism.*” In his discussion, Sundkler has observed the following as central elements of the Christianity of the AICS:

*Ancestral spirit and Holy Spirit
Magic and divination
Dreams as means of revelation.*

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth the arguments of Sundkler. In a nutshell, Sundkler argues that the ancestral spirit plays the role of the Holy Spirit, and that the magic and divination of the traditional healer has been replaced by prophecy, with dreams and revelations from the ancestral spirits forming the basis of prophecy. The conclusion reached by Sundkler is that the AICS of the Zionist type are syncretistic in their Christianity. However, the persistence or the constant appeal to traditional religious beliefs and practices by the AICS, led Daneel ³, to introduce a new concept called *transformation*. By transformation, Daneel means that the inclusion of traditional religious beliefs by the AICS in their Christianity has changed the whole meaning of belief in the ancestors.

In many AICS in Zimbabwe and in the Head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion- Botswana, the notion of the ancestral spirit has been so transformed that the spirit of the ancestor becomes that of the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ. This is based on the understanding that when Jesus left his disciples and ascended into heaven, he said that he would not leave his disciples alone but would send the Holy Spirit to guide them and lead them (LK.24:49). On this understanding, possession by the ancestral spirit is recognized but it is transformed by faith and prayer giving way to the Holy Spirit from Christ who gives the gift of prophecy. If the ancestral spirit does not lead to prophecy, it is thought to disappear and leaves the person sober, without any spiritual possession.

In many cases, AICS argue that they can in fact make a distinction between possession by an ancestral spirit and by the Holy Spirit. The argument is that a person who is possessed by ancestral spirits (*badimo or badzimu*) always keeps his or her eyes closed when in the church, yet sees everybody in the congregation. On the other hand, a person possessed by a demon, *ledemon*, will show movements and excitement which could be interpreted as mental derangement. In traditional Christian theology, demons are understood as fallen angels who disobeyed God after the creation, and who roam the earth to confuse and destroy people. Origen ⁴, associates the demons with the devil. He sees them as disciples of the devil who jointly form the principle of evil. The AICS

