

WRITING FAITH IN THE LIFE OF S.M. DZIVHANI

Caroline Jeannerat

Paper to be presented to the History and African Studies Seminar, University of Kwa-Zulu
Natal, 30 November 2005

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In 2002, when I presented a paper reflecting on my first couple of months doing research on my dissertation project, a leading historian in our field of African history, religion and anthropology made the comment that I should just go to the archives, that the material that I was looking for was there. This was after I had presented a whole paper sketching out the difficulties of getting at the voices of the members of the church of the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) in the Zoutpansberg, in particular voices speaking about their understandings of faith Jeannerat 2002.¹ The comment by this historian implied that I had not looked carefully enough for documents by African Christians and that if I just looked at the right place, I would indeed find them in multitudes.

I have found some documents written by Christians of the BMS church, but to this day I have not found these (promised) multitudes, in particular not addressing issues of faith. Perhaps I have looked in the wrong places. I suspect, however, that they do not exist in the manner that they exist, as the historian indicated, for other mission societies working in Africa. The fact that I am not finding many documents by African Christians who were members of the church of the Berlin Mission Society indicates something important about the church and about this particular mission society – a point I want to examine more generally in my dissertation.²

¹ Referencing style??? comments/suggestions appreciated.

² This is part of the wider question of why there is not such a strong, mission-generated, educated elite in the Zoutpansberg today as there is further south, as for example among the members of the Swiss Mission, today the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. Clearly, the political history of the area plays a crucial role, as well how people were forced to engage with and adapt to western models of status and success (R. Thornton, personal comm. 2005). This would allow me to identify the particularities of the Lutheran

This chapter, and the dissertation more generally, is about traces, about gaps, about silences. It aims to trace how Christians who belonged to the BMS church understood their faith. Yet it has to rely on a scarcity of documents and documents – both historical and anthropological – that do not speak to this question in any direct manner. I am imagining my task a bit as that of an archaeologist who has to lift one layer from the next with careful precision, in an attempt to identify and analyse the importance of each layer.

The chapter is, therefore, about reading carefully, about reading against the grain, and about the recognition of the boundaries of interpretation and thus the ethics of interpretation. It raises the question that if the scarce documents that I have available do not speak in any direct way about the faith of the authors, how then do I define acceptable and believable interpretation and how do I determine the signs of an over-interpretation? How do I interrogate the information which is often difficult to cross-check? Can I, and how do I, use oral histories from present-day members of the church about past members as corroboration of information in the historical documents?

This chapter, in its full format, analyses the published writings of members of the BMS church in the Zoutpansberg. These include articles written by 21 members³ of the church which were published in the newspaper *Mogoera oa Babaso*⁴ in the 1920s and 1930s;

faith and mission, and allow an analysis of links between various mission societies, as well as the lack thereof (cf. Jeannerat, Morier-Genoud, and Péclard 2004).

³ Nathaniel Labembe Tshishonge (1929, 1930), Isaac Mulaudzi (1929), Samuel Makhavhuli (1930), Fanuel Matloxa (1931), Stefanus Makhado Masiagwala (1931), J.S. Mundalamo and W.R. Masikwa (1931), N. Lalumbe (1932), E. F. Neluvhalani Mudau (06/1932, 11/1932, 1933, 04/1934), Manase Mmbwathinamulomo (03/1933, 04/1933, 06/1933, 11/1933, 1935), Yosia Mutsila (1933), Simeon R. Mutshekwane (10/1933, 12/1933, 1934, 07/1935), Walter R.B. Masikwa (1934), Amos Masindi (1934), Maggie Tshatsinde (1934), Ernest Mudau [=E.F.N. Mudau?] (1934), Elon Marivate (1934, 1935) (though Marivate is a Tsonga name, the article is published in TshiVenda), Yohanes Mariba (1934), Paulo Nngwana (01/1935, 07/1935, 01/1936), Netshifhefhe Mudau (1935).

⁴ The newspaper *Mogoera oa Babaso* was a newspaper published by the Berlin Mission Society in Middleburg, most probably from its mission station in Botshabelo. It was published from 1908 to 1938, though I have to date only been able to get access to the volumes from 1/7/1925 to April 1938 (these volumes are available at the National Library of South Africa, Pretoria Campus, with the volumes 12/1927, 1/1931 and 02/1934 missing). The

a letter and an article published by two authors in early published school readers in TshiVenda;⁵ accounts of the history of the church and of the Zoutpansberg more generally by church members;⁶ language studies by TshiVenda authors;⁷ and songs.⁸

The aim of analysing these sources is to examine how Christians and members of a mission church consciously aimed to present and represent themselves to outside audiences: What were the concerns that they raised and why? How did they present themselves, as Christians, as Lutherans, as Vendas? How did they present their Christianity? What assumptions underlay their arguments and what audiences did these assumptions presume? Was there a link between the raising of certain issues and the particular forms of writing?

The weight of the chapter, however, will be on the person who forms the core of the present paper, the author Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani, born in about 1888 and deceased in 1975. The reason why Dzivhani is of such interest to this project is twofold: firstly among the Zoutpansberg authors, he was the one to publish the most with 22 articles in the *Mogoera* over the time period 1926-1932, one independent publication,⁹ and several songs that were published or came into the public sphere through competitions.¹⁰ Secondly, and even more critically, his personal papers were collected after his death and deposited as an archival

newspaper was published in Sepedi. The spelling of the title was changed to Moxwera wa Babaso with the October 1930 edition accompanied by a general change to the new Sepedi orthography at that time. Throughout this period, articles by Dzivhani and the other TshiVenda speaking authors were published variously in Sepedi and in TshiVenda, though in the latter language with frequent spelling mistakes. The intended audience of the newspaper was in particular the Sepedi-speaking membership of the BMS church, though there were a number of Venda names amongst the regular subscribers to the newspaper during the 1920s and 1930s.

⁵ Dzivhani 1944, Mutsila 1913-1962.

⁶ Mukwevho ; Nemudzivhadi ; Nemudzivhadi 19?a; Nemudzivhadi 19?b; Dzivhani 1940; Nemudzivhadi 1977; Nemudzivhadi 1985; Tempelhoff and Nemudzivhadi 1997.

⁷ Ngwana 1954; Ngwana 1970; Ngwana 1983.

⁸ “Mafhungo a ndifhelaho,” in [Berlin Lutheran Church] 1960: 335; “Unisa Hundred Years Old,” 5.6.1973, Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 7:2]; S.M. Dzivhani, n.d., “Vhavenda National Anthem: Venda lalamaa! Venda, live long!” Dzivhani Papers A1075: [insert box no 6:31BQ1, 6:31BQ3/6:31BO]; S.M. Dzivhani, 1975, “Tsimbi i ri vhidzelela / The bell is calling us”, song submitted for the 1975 Eisteddfod Competition, Dzivhani Papers A1075: [insert box no 6:31BF].

⁹ Dzivhani 1940, reprinted in Dzivhani and Mudau 1958.

¹⁰ See footnote 8.

collection, thus allowing a deeper insight into his person and, hopefully, a more accurate reading of his publications.¹¹

The critical point in published texts is that they present a view that an author wanted to portray of him/herself to the outside world; it is how he/she wanted to be seen. It is a created image, and a consciously created one. The advantage of this for a study of faith is that published texts would then portray how Christians wanted to be seen, the image they wanted to give to an outside, Christian as well as non-Christian world. Published texts would thus give access to very consciously constructed Christian self-images.

Texts not written for publication, on the other hand, allow scope for writing that is more explorative, that reveals tensions and contradictions in a person's life. Drawing on the personal papers of Dzivhani for this paper (and in the chapter) thus suggest a pull away from a public presentation of the self into a more private reflection on self. I would argue, however, that to a large extent this is not the case with the Dzivhani papers. Though the collection contains personal, unpublished documents, much of the material present, in particular an array of compositions, was written for a wider church public and was intended for public consumption. There are a series of autobiographical texts written by Dzivhani on his life that allow a more private view of his self-conceptions. With these again, however, I argue that there are indications that each was written with a particular audience in mind and Dzivhani might even have intended to circulate it amongst a wider public.¹² I suggest therefore that though the nature of personal papers threatens to shift (and perhaps obfuscate) the analysis in this paper, they allow a more insightful and critical understanding of Dzivhani.

¹¹ Dzivhani Papers, Historical and Literary Papers Department, Library, University of the Witwatersrand, A1075. The collection was deposited at the archive by Gerhard Schutte who at the time was an anthropologist in the anthropology department at the University of the Witwatersrand and was doing research on religion in Venda. There is no documentation accompanying the collection, which leaves open a series of questions: the year in which the collection was deposited, how Schutte got access to the papers, how the collection was assembled, whether Dzivhani was part of planning the collection. This leaves open in particular questions about the completeness of the collection.

¹² There do seem to be a couple of sermons amongst the papers in the collection. I have not yet been able to translate and analyse them. They do not, however, question the argument that the collection is, in general, made up of documents intended for a wider public.

Due to the fact that in general the indications we have on faith by African Christians is so marginal, I suggest that to have some bulk information on a specific person allows a more certain analysis.

The paper thus uses the writings by Dzivhani – both published and unpublished – to gain an understanding of how Christianity, religion and personal conceptions of faith featured in the life of one specific individual. I do not claim that this individual is representative of Christians in the Zoutpansberg who were members of the BMS church. But I argue that his writings allow us a deeper insight into how individuals in the Zoutpansberg affiliated with the BMS church could imagine their faith.

The dissertation as a whole attempts to trace how Christians who belonged to the church of the Berlin Mission Society understood their faith: how did they think of Christianity, what did they think of aspects of Christian theology, how did they experience faith and how did they express faith? The aim of the dissertation is to get at the everyday-ness of faith of the Christians of a mission church, and to get at faith among the members of the church. It attempts to get away from the manner in which the missionaries and the mission society would have formulated and framed faith and its expressions.¹³

As explained above, neither the historical documents used for this analysis nor the ethnographical fieldwork provide any direct evidence for how people thought about their faith. It is thus necessary to tease out indications of personal conceptions of faith from texts, to read them for their symbolisms, the metaphors used, the words chosen, the silences kept. The rest of this paper takes the writings by Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani in a first attempt to extract these often ephemeral indications of faith. It attempts to read his writings from several angles: What is the nature of the Christianity that is reflected in these texts? How is Christianity defined, what is identified as belonging to it and what as being strange and

¹³ In history, the focus on the everydayness of people's lives and experiences, which has drawn heavily on anthropological conceptualisations, has been demonstrated in particular in the school of *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday life) in Germany (Medick 1984, Lüdtkke 1993; see also Sider 1986, Sider 1993, Slezkine 1994, Lüdtkke 1995).

foreign to it? How is Christianity framed, how is it imagined? What is a Christian, how is a Christian expected to behave, and what is not Christian? What role is Christianity portrayed as playing in a Christian's life? With what is Christianity associated, and with which things can it not be affiliated?

On a larger scale, this analysis enquires how the views on Christianity by Dziyhani, and by the other authors, fit into the orthodox and dogmatic understandings of Lutheranism that the missionaries would have represented – and where they are contrary or even contradictory to these Lutheran understandings. This opens up the question of dogmatic Lutheranism. The understanding of Lutheran doctrinal positions has not remained the same since Luther's age in the early 16th century. In fact, understandings of what it means to be a Lutheran would even have changed within the BMS through the course of its history from its foundation in 1827 to its form today as the Berliner Missionswerk, the mission department of the Lutheran church in the state of Berlin-Brandenburg in Germany.

What has remained constant since quite early in the Lutheran history in the 16th century has been the understanding that Lutheranism is defined by a set of foundational texts. First among these were Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism (1529) (see, for example, Luther 1995; Luther 2004), which summarize the main points of the Lutheran faith for its believers and pastors, respectively. Second was the Konkordienformel (1577), a compilation of texts which was the result of an attempt to find a median position between various dissenting Lutheran positions that were in dispute in the mid-16th century Kolb and Wengert 2000. It contained the following documents: the Augsburg Confession (1530), which defined the position of the Reformers, and especially of Luther, towards Catholic theology; Philipp Melancthon's defence of the Augsburg Confession ("Apologie des Augsburger Bekenntnisses") (1530); Luther's Schmalkald articles (1537), written to prepare a specific set of discussions with the Roman Church on the Reformist challenges; and Melancthon's discussion of the papacy ("Von der Gewalt und Obrigkeit des Papstes")

(1537).¹⁴ For the analysis of Dzivhani's writings and of his songs in particular, I have used Luther's small and large catechisms. Though I do not have specific proof yet that the missionaries of the BMS used these catechisms extensively in their pastoral activities, it is very likely that they did. The first TshiVenda translation of the Small Catechism that I have found is dated to 1962 Luther 1962 (see also Luther 1976).

Short biography on Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani

Dzivhani's birth date was not known to him.¹⁵ Dzivhani calculated that he was most probably born early in 1888 on the basis of events that had happened around his birth.

In his youth he herded cattle, and learnt the basic reading skills from his brother. He then met a white man, a Mr. Niekerk, who offered him a job working as kitchen boy in his household, which took him to Boksburg. When after two years his employer moved away but paid him only a small fraction of his salary, Dzivhani went to Pretoria where other Venda men found him a job as municipal worker. After a couple of months he returned home to Venda. Having been introduced to Christianity when in town, he approached the missionary

¹⁴ Wallmann 2000:92, Rössler 1999:82.

¹⁵ Dzivhani's name is spelt in several different ways in his personal papers, and he is listed with different names in various locations. The earliest example of Dzivhani's written name is in the newspaper Mogoera oa babaso where his name is spelt fourteen times as Dzivane, three times as Dziwane and once as Dzivhani, while he is referred to four times by his initials only (S.M.D. or S.M.Dz.). In a travel document issued on 13 Mai 1963 his name is given as Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani, from Miluwani, Mphaphuli Location in Sibasa. In some documentation the additional first name Muekesi is also given, though this seems to have been a nickname (Mpho Rathando, pers. comm., August 2005). Dzivhani never included the name Muekesi in his signature. In all documents which Dzivhani personally signed he spelled his name as "Dzivhani", though all of these signatures are from the 1960s or 1970s. The differences in spelling are probably linked to the changes in TshiVenda orthography as the missionaries of the Berlin Mission church attempted to develop a more precise manner of spelling the Venda language through the first half of the 20th century. [Get details. It is significant that most of the principal language studies on the TshiVenda language do not include any comment about the historical roots of TshiVenda orthography in missionary studies of the language, in particular by Paul Erdmann Schwellnus and his brother Theodor Schwellnus, nor in the work by the linguist Carl Meinhof (see, for example, Van Warmelo 1989, Ziervogel, Wentzel, and Makuya 1981, Wentzel and Muloiwa 1975; Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982; cf. Veit 2005 for a discussion of missionary roots in anthropology. One exception is Department of Bantu Education 1972).

Theodor Schwellnus at Beuster mission station. He was baptised and then accompanied the missionaries to build the new mission station at Georgholtz, about ... kilometres further to the east. He had expressed the wish to be trained as a teacher and was accepted at the mission-run Botshabelo seminary where he studied from 1907-1913. Accompanying his academic studies he also learnt to play the organ, brass instruments, and the violin. After his graduation he was employed at the school at Beuster mission station. From here he founded the Mphaphuli Memorial school, on the basis of a request by, and with the active support of, Chief ... Mphaphuli. In 1928 Dzivhani had a fight with the mission church due to questions over who should control Mphaphuli Memorial school, and where Dzivhani's allegiances should lie. He opened a whole series of primary schools in the Sibasa area. Later in his life Dzivhani became an agent and commercial miller for the Otenda Mills at Sibasa under the Mealie Control Board.

In 1916 Dzivhani married Selina Manyakanyaka from Wolf River Lower in the eastern Cape. They had five children, of which only two survived their youth, namely their daughter, Ulrica, and their son, Bennett. The date of death of Dzivhani's wife is not recorded in the available documentation, though a reference in a letter by Ulrica Dzivhani makes clear that she had died by 1969. Dzivhani himself died in 1975, but again the precise date of death is not recorded in the available documentation.

Warning: As a whole, what follows are small vignettes from the material I am trying to analyse. I am finding the analysis and writing very difficult, as you will see, as the traces of faith are so faint and diffuse: the individual pieces of information seem too small to carry analytical weight; they are difficult to link together into overarching themes; and the stories speak in such an opaque manner to the question of faith. The question is: how do I analyse the texts – i.e. a hermeneutical question; how do I bring them together in an analytical discussion – i.e. a writing and structural question; and, most crucially (but hopefully a question I do not need to take on), can I say anything about faith at all, or am trying to do the impossible? – i.e. a feasibility question.

I suspect that in the end these small stories will be no more than a phrase or at most a sentence in the discussion to illustrate the larger theme. But how to get there??

Dzivhani's *Mogoera oa babaso* articles¹⁶

Among the 19 articles by Dzivhani in the *Mogoera oa babaso*, 15 are articles describing events that took place in the Zoutpansberg, from the praying for rain to the welcoming of a chief's wife, from meetings of church workers to the organisation of "Venda games" by the Department of Labour, from the induction of new pastors to the marriage ceremony of church members.

As the *Mogoera oa babaso* was owned by the mission, it is very likely that the authors who published in this newspaper to a large extent shared understandings of Christianity and expressions of faith with the Berlin missionaries, and were happy to express these shared understandings. It is likely that if they had expressed views that differed from the official approach of the Mission, or that questioned and challenged the Mission, they would not have been published. These articles thus grant insight into how the authors positioned themselves within and towards the mission, and what theological positions they took up consciously and officially. A reading against the grain also permits a view of where these authors subtly and perhaps unconsciously challenged the positions of the missionaries.¹⁷

¹⁶ Dzivane 1927, Dzivhani 1927a, Dzivhani 1927b, Dzwane 1928, Dzivane 1928b, Dzivhani 1929, Dzwane 1930, Dzivane 1930a, Dzivhani 1930a, Dzivane 1930b, Dzivane 1930c, Dzivane 1930d, Dzivane 1931a, Dzivane 1931b, Dzivane 1931c, Dzivane 1931d, Dzivane 1931e, Dzivane 1932.

¹⁷ Integrate Zemon Davis 1987; Stoler 2000; Ginzburg 1980; Richards 1993.

At the same time, authors who wrote for the *Mogoera* placed themselves into a national level Christian discourse.¹⁸ In this sense the articles grant insight into how Christians from the Zoutpansberg positioned themselves as Christians on a national level, what issues they shared with and where they differed from Christians from other denominations and geographical areas. The analysis needs to take cognisance of the nature of the publication and/or the intended audience, in order to establish how this context might have influenced the manner in which the authors presented their texts.

From the late 1920s onwards, all contributions to the newspaper that were written in TshiVenda were assembled and edited by the missionary at Beuster, Karl Drescher. It is unclear at the moment whether any previous missionary engaged in a similar task. His papers contain the original submissions that he received from authors, into which he made quite extensive corrections and changes – and this right from the beginning of his time as a missionary in the Zoutpansberg (1927-1938), only just having learnt TshiVenda. There is no article by Dzivhani amongst these and, interestingly, most of the articles edited by Drescher were not published and many of those that were published are not amongst the Drescher papers. It might be that not all of Drescher's papers ended up in the archive, but could also indicate that there were ways of circumventing Drescher's role. Or Drescher neglected his responsibility and did not forward the articles – but that is unlikely due to the highly authoritarian and organisationally structured character that Drescher was. [Analysis of the

¹⁸ It is debatable as to how national that discourse was for the TshiVenda authors. To date I have not found any evidence for possible connections except for the fact that one evangelist whose son I interviewed had been trained in a trade at Lovedale. Men from the Zoutpansberg had been to Natal in the second half of the 19th century to find work, often returning baptised before the arrival of the BMS missionaries in the Zoutpansberg. The questions that need to be posed here are: How did Zoutpansberg authors follow the debates happening amongst educated Christians in Natal and the Eastern Cape? Are those debates something that reverberated with the Zoutpansberg authors? Did Zoutpansberg authors try to enter these debates and how? Did Zoutpansberg authors try to get published outside of the confines of BMS publication processes? What was the political climate in the Zoutpansberg at the time when, for example, Lamula was critiquing adaptationist approaches among educated Africans in particular to government laws in the 1920s?

basis on which he made editing changes and what it reveals about his understanding of language, narrative and form.]

Chiefs and the Mission

One of the marked themes in these articles is the involvement of political leaders (chiefs or kings as well as headmen)¹⁹ in these events and the manner of their involvement.

In general, Dzivhani's articles indicate a close relationship between the political leaders and church congregations of the BMS church. In this, Dzivhani's account mirrors a concern of the missionaries.

The missionary writings portray the relationships between Christians and mission stations as being located in and determined by the relationship between the individual missionary at the mission station and the particular political leader of the area. While the missionaries attempted to build up good relationships with political leaders on all levels, they placed particular emphasis on the relationships with those with the highest political leadership, the kings or later the chiefs. The reason for this was their conviction that if these individuals could be gained for Christianity, then their followers would open up to the church much more easily.

In Dzivhani's articles, however, a different image of this relationship is depicted. one in which the agency and control over the relationship is much more diffuse. The missionaries are mentioned as one of the figures in the events, but they are never depicted as holding control over the manner in which events or relationships unfold. In one article in particular, the relationship is one between church congregation and chief rather than missionary and chief.

¹⁹ At the moment I am unclear about the use of leadership titles. Not only were they reformulated by the segregationist and apartheid governments, through which previous kings became chiefs, but they were also disputed and challenged within and amongst the three dominant Venda royal houses, the Ramabulanas, the Tshivhases and the Mphaphulis at to who should and does hold political authority over whom (Kirkaldy 2002:63). Today disputes have erupted between the Ramabulana and the Tshivhase house for accreditation by the national government as paramount or king of Venda.

From Dzivhani's personal documents we receive the additional information that the relationship seems to have been in particular one between Dzivhani himself and various political leaders. Thus we find that it is Dzivhani who at various times is in connection with chief Mphaphuli, chief Ramaremisa Thohoyandou Tshivhase and headman Ngovhela (under chief Tshivhase) as well as a series of other unnamed headmen to build schools in their areas, in a relationship that seems to have been independent from the mission. As a result, Dzivhani is credited with having founded and built the Mphaphuli African School, schools in the villages of Dzingahe, Tshamavhudzi, and Tshilivho (Dumasi) that went up to Standard 6 or Form I, as well as (primary)²⁰ schools in the villages of Tswinga, Lufule, Maniini and Mangondi, many of which were community schools and independent of church control²¹.²²

*a. Welcoming of chief's family*²³

The closeness of the chiefs to church congregations is indicated, for example, in an event on 1 January 1927 when there was a big celebration at the home of king Tshivhase²⁴ to welcome his wife and three children, to which the church congregation from Beuster, with all its children and singers, as well as church congregations from other BMS churches were

²⁰ check

²¹ It is very likely that all of these school were independent community schools. Those for which I have found proof to date that they were community schools were the schools at Tshilivho/Dumasi, Dzingahe, and Tswinga and the Mphaphuli African School (n.a., Map of community and church schools, n.d., Dzivhani Papers A1075:B6).

²² There is indication in an honours thesis that the fact that Dzivhani was involved with these community schools that were under the auspices of local-level political leaders was not approved of by the BMS which tried, at least in relation with the Mphaphuli African School, to use government procedures of registering schools in order to get the school under their own authority. The information is accredited to three interviews with retired teachers who had been younger colleagues and, in some cases, church members with Dzivhani. I am hesitant to use this information, however, without having seen transcriptions of the full interviews. In addition, I have to date not found any indication of this dispute in Dzivhani's personal papers.

²³ Dzivhani 1927a.

²⁴ The document states that this celebration took place at a village by the name of Mulambani. It is unclear which village this is as there is none of that name in the vicinity of King Tshivhase's court. It might be that the name was misspelled during the printing process (as the articles contain frequent spelling mistakes) and that it refers to the village of Mukumbani, the home and court of the Tshivhase house.

invited. Dzivhani describes that this was the first time that “we witnessed something like that”. A church service was held during which the chief and his family were welcomed, and afterwards there was a celebration for which the chief had food cooked and an ox slaughtered “because of happiness”.²⁵ The chief is described as having been happy that his family had been “accepted”.

b. Prayer service for rain²⁶

In 1927, a serious drought was plaguing the Zoutpansberg and the church²⁷ organised a series of prayer meetings for rain which culminated in a large meeting of all “unbelievers and their kings” on 27 February 1927. At this meeting, the political leader of Ngovhela-Phindula, Tshamandando Ratshikhopa, whom Dzivhani described as being “an active man when it comes to God’s word,” said a prayer. When he said “Amen” to conclude the prayer, “there was a sound which sounded like it was saying: “I have heard your prayers! I have heard your prayers! Have faith and you will see, I will give a gift to your prayers, Don’t loose hope, Don’t loose hope, Don’t loose hope!”.” Promptly it began to rain when the participants at the prayer meeting were returning home.

This event suggests that the local political leaders were happy to use church events, as well as the framing by the church, for certain events.

If the missionaries had told this story, they would have written the story towards a moral ending, that the falling of the rain proved the reality and power of the Christian God. Dzivhani does not formulate his text in this manner. Instead, the text seems to draw attention to the power of the prayer of Ratshikhopa, for it is exactly after his prayer that the sign came that the prayers would be heard. What does it mean that this sign was recognised right after Ratshikhopa’s prayer – a church member but also a political leader – rather than after the prayers and sermons of any of the other participants?

²⁵ Do I need to put in the quotations in their original languages as well???

²⁶ Dzivhani 1927b. Original in Sepedi. All translations from Sepedi are by Esther Manabile.

²⁷ The BMS is not clearly identified as the organiser of the prayer meetings in the document, though the context and a reference to a “we” suggests that it was the convenor.

The manner in which Dzivhani writes the text describes the chronological process of events leading up to this plenary prayer meeting, as well as the process during the prayer meeting itself. Within this process it mentions the biblical texts on which the three sermons were based – Mark 11:24 (Dzivhani), 1 Corinthians 13 (Philip Maphangwa), and Luke 18:39 (Abram Gumi), exactly who spoke after each other, who said prayers and when the hymns were sung.

*c. Singing at chief's gathering*²⁸

On 9 June 1931, the Labour Recruiting Company organised what Dzivhani called “games” at Gambani in the Tshivhase area, giving the chiefs maize to brew beer and cows to slaughter for the celebration. At the celebration, traditional dances were performed and it attracted a large amount of people. Dzivhani records that the children from his “troop” were singing their songs. This was either his children’s choir, or it was a group of boys from a Boy scouts group. This suggests the close allegiance between Dzivhani personally and the Tshivhase chiefly house.

Education, chiefs and Christianity

In four of his articles published in the *Mogoera oa babaso*, Dzivhani discussed the theme of education. He reported on events where chiefs, in particular those of the Tshivhase house, explicitly supported education. The articles suggest that for the author, as well as for the people on whom he reported, education and Christianity were absolutely part and parcel of each other, with education as the ultimate expression of Christianity.

a. Wedding speech

In a first article, published without title in November 1928 Dzivane 1928a, Dzivhani described the wedding of Ephraim Mutsila, a Christian man, and Johanna Mainganya, presumably a Christian woman, in Ngovhela, a small village in the Tshivhase area. At the

²⁸ Dzivhani 1931

wedding, the political leader of Ngovhela-Phindula, Tshamandonda Rasikhopha, who is identified by Dzivhani as “the one who built the school of the children,” gave a speech in which he highlighted that the chiefs, including his own brother Tshivhase, “loved”²⁹ education and had supported the missionaries in their educational ventures by building schools. He argued that the problem now was that people were not sending their children to school. He explicitly blamed these parents by stating that “Now I am saying God will find them guilty because they deny bringing their children to school.” In this Rasikhopha used the Christian metaphor of sin to scold those of his subjects who were not sending their children to school: by saying that God would find them guilty he posited that those people who did not send their children to school were disobeying the explicit will of God. This is a conflation of education with Christianity.

The headman continued his speech by holding up Christian marriage as exemplary, that they were “transparent” because the whole ceremony was held in public and during the day, without any fear. He emphasised that Christian marriages did not involve women eloping from home, which he argued was a bad aspect of marriage among non-Christians. He continued to say that a woman should not elope as she was not a cow – only cattle eloped when they walked away on the grazing area and could not be found when the shepherd wants to drive them back into the kraal in the evening.

Rasikhopha then requested to be baptised by the pastor present at the ceremony, Stephanus Masiagwala, as only in Christianity can good things be found, suggesting that Christianity had become a crucial ideology through which to express values and perhaps even legitimacy of authority. He then went on to argue that the pre-Christian beliefs held by people in Venda were wrong and misconceived:

He said that God is one. He [God] is for Christians. God created everything and even people. We just sit and relax - that god is goats and cow that we slaughter when we want meat to eat with porridge. Small children are better than us. Does it not lead to laughter? I mean to slaughter and eat God. Or giving him beer; is our God drunkard? God whom we eat is not the true God -

²⁹ Analyse this use of the word “love”.

Who does not know his children, True God of Christians can see his children and bless them. I saw it that we were robbed in many things by the sinners. Let us leave them and believe in God of the Christians. Also we ask Christians to pray so that the rain shall fall.

In this passage the speaker, the headman ridicules Venda beliefs, suggesting that believing that God is in animals, e.g. a goat or a head of cattle, and then slaughtering this animal and eating it was ridiculous; similarly, offering beer to God was suggesting that God was a drunkard, again ridiculing God. He thus indicated that the Venda beliefs of where God is located and how he can be reached by people were wrong. By arguing that even young children could see the mistakes in these Venda conceptions he suggested that Venda religious conceptions were naive or even stupid. [But Christianity in itself used very similar symbols in the Holy Communion – why did he see this as different?]

In his speech the headman also suggested that the Venda God was not a true god as he could not “know his children,” but that the Christian God could “see his children and bless them.”

Missionaries do not play a role during this ceremony. In the last paragraph of the report Dzivhani states that there was even a visitor from Pietersburg present, missionary Wedepohl. But Wedepohl is not given any voice, influence or weight during the ceremony.

b. Installation of chief

In the second text, entitled “The Venda Chiefs” and in the format of a letter, Dzivhani describes the installation of a new chief at Tshivhase’s place after the death of Chief Ramaremisa Thohoyandou Tshivhase in March 1930.³⁰ At the installation, the brother of the late chief, Luphai Nephale, stood up to call upon the new chief to support education just as the deceased chief had done when he had welcomed the missionaries into his area. He described how the late chief had placed a lot of emphasis on education and on pastors. Nephale instructed the new chief to “love education so that his leadership will be excellent and he will be happy and wished long life by his people.” This suggests a conception of legitimacy and authority of rule via education, but also success of rule through education

³⁰ Dzivhani 1930a.

only. His reference to pastors in the statement that “the late chief appreciated the pastors and education” is the only one to Christianity, yet there is a sense in the statement that Christianity is conflated with education so that it did not require to be mentioned explicitly and separately. By talking of education, the Christian aspect was presumed understood.

Dzivhani ended his report on the installation by stating that the new chief, Ratshimphi Tshivhase, was a young man in his early twenties who knew how to read and write. “If he wants to reconstruct Venda, he can because his is gifted and knowledgeable.” Here Dzivhani is drawing a parallel between education and the development of Venda. So we have a combination of three concepts: Christianity, education and development that seem to be conflated in Dzivhani’s mind as well as (probably) in the understanding of other people.

c. Role of teachers

In a letter to the *Mogoera* entitled “VhaVenda” or the Venda people Dzivhani drew attention to the importance of teachers.³¹ He called upon people not to get disaffected with teachers as their job was very heavy. He called upon parents to give their children some money so that they can buy pictures from the teachers. The pictures he referred to are most probably small printed drawing of biblical figures and events that the missionaries often received from Germany for the children. Dzivhani argued that parents should give the children money for this so that the children would “follow” the teacher as the pictures and the teacher would make the children happy.

He then called upon the kings to “buy” teachers for their “princes”, suggesting that the chiefs should pay the teachers to build up schools in the areas of their headmen. The headmen would then be able to read and write and would then be able to help the kings in writing letters. He reminded people that several texts were now available in TshiVenda translation (New Testament, Catechism, Hymnal, and a book of psalms) and that they could acquire them through the missionary at Tshakhuma, Ludwig Giesekke. Parents should also

³¹ Dzivhani 1930b.

support their children singing songs about education, as this would strengthen the “book workers” or teachers.

In this text Christianity is not mentioned but there is the suggestion of a parallel between Christianity and education through the reference to the pictures for the school children. I would argue that Christianity was considered as the indispensable basis for education. In the conception of Dzivhani and his readers, for a person to be educated meant to be baptised. The values associated with education were thus the values they saw embedded in being Christian.

The text too reveals an importance laid on political rulers for the spreading of education. It suggests a close relationship between teachers and rulers, rather than between missionaries and rulers. Dzivhani, too, is assuming that the rulers in the Zoutpansberg will be reading the newspaper and his article and will thus hear his call. This liberty he takes to address the rulers suggests a certain familiarity with them.

*d. Chief Tshivhase's membership in the church*³²

Dzivhani reports that on 2 April 1920,³³ on the Christian feast of Christ's Awakening, all school teachers and pastors congregated at the homestead of Chief Takalani Joel Tshivhase. The chief spoke in front of all assembled saying that “I would like to return to Berlin church, our mother church”. The king had been a member of the BMS church from 1902 to 1912, when he broke away to join the Church of England with his whole village. Now he was asking to be readmitted to the BMS church, identifying it as the first and original church.

The chief then continued talking about the importance of education: “I give to boys and girls of my land teachers to teach them. As for me, if my child doesn't attend school, 3 pounds must be paid as a price. Teaching only boys doesn't built the nation. We always see

³² Dzivhani 1929.

³³ check date in original

gentlemen coming here with their educated wives from townships and women here are not being educated.”

Dzivhani reports that the teachers were very happy to hear the king’s speech and appointed the teacher E. Dan³⁴ to start the school in the chief’s village. After two weeks, 110 children were already attending the school. Dzivhani takes this to indicate that the whole country is desperate for school teachers. He reports how the missionaries as well as African pastors and teachers of the BMS thanked the chief for his decision. He ended the report by stating: “Venda people are now up, God has now started speaking to them.”

In this report, Dzivhani records that the missionaries were present and that they were amongst those who thanked the chief for his decision. Yet, the report does not give the missionaries any influential role, higher than that of anyone else. In fact, it seems that the decision of the chief was taken completely independently. This, however, is challenged by the fact that the meeting at his place was organised for a very significant day in Lutheran church calendar – which suggests that the missionaries would have known of this announcement beforehand and that it was staged to happen in this manner.

What it does is confirm the close relations between the Tshivhase chieftaincy and the BMS church.

There is one important point in this passage: the direct parallel that the chief draws between being readmitted to the BMS church, and education. In the chief’s understanding, I would argue, Christianity equals education. Dzivhani takes this approach elsewhere too, and his position is indicated here in his final statement that “Venda people are now up, God has now started speaking to them.” The statement is opaque as to whether it refers to the Christian aspects of the chief’s message or his educational aspect. I would argue it refers to both, and that it reveals the conflation of Christianity and education as being one.

There is an interesting parallel between the school built by Dan and the Mphaphuli African School built up by Dzivhani in 1920 upon the request of chief Makwarela

³⁴ Probably Emanuel Dau. check.

Mphaphuli. In a “memorandum of Chief Phaswana Mphaphuli and his councillor on the history, laws and customs of the Vhavenda people” authored by Dzivhani, he records that after two weeks he had already enrolled 108 students.³⁵ The rate at which Dzivhani and Dan attracted scholars was very different from the manner in which the missionaries struggled to attract scholars to their schools. This suggests that in the building up of these schools, the chiefs could be convinced that education was not something that would lead their subjects away from them. In parallel, parents could be convinced that education was something that could be incorporated into their worldview rather than being something strange.

Being a Christian through church contributions

On a small, about 7.5x20.5cm blue card, Dzivhani’s church contributions were listed for the years 1958-1963. There were three types of contributions that were marked: church dues, at ten pounds for 1958 to 1960 and 15 pounds for 1961 and 1962; Holy Communion contributions, the amount of which is unspecified on the card; and *zwifhiwa*, or gifts, divided into the four categories of “la morena” (for God), “pun[illegible] khano” ([?])³⁶, “Missione thumo” (mission work) and “Thuto pfunzo ya bibile” (bible translations), for which Dzivhani paid a sum of £3/20 in the years 1958-1962.³⁷

Without considering the Holy Communion contribution, the height of which is not indicated on the card, the amounts paid by Dzivhani seem to have been very high. A sum of £10 in 1964/65 would be the equivalent of about R1500 on the 1.1.2005, a very high amount for a retired person.

This suggests that membership of the church was “calculated” in terms of the monetary contributions a member made to the church. It also indicates that someone like

³⁵ S.M. Dzivhani, n.d., “The memorandum of Chief Phaswana Mphaphuli and his councillor on the history, laws and customs of the Vhavenda people”, Dzivhani Papers A1075:[file no:7:41].

³⁶ get possible translations

³⁷ is this sum correct? 2x£1 and 2x 60 (I presume 60 pence).

Dzivhani was happy to pay this amount, thus to be evaluated on this scale. Monetary contributions were central to being a Christian.

Dzivhani, however, did not pay contributions for Holy Communion regularly, though he paid the other two contributions regularly each quarter of the year. He did not pay anything for Holy Communion for the first and second quarters of 1958, for the second quarter of 1960, for the last two quarters of 1961 and the second and third quarters of 1962. What does this mean? In terms of Christian theology [???], attendance of Holy Communion means expression or demonstration of the belief in the sinfulness of man and the fact that mankind had been saved through the death of Jesus Christ. Non-participation can indicate a person decision that one is not worthy of God's grace, something that in Lutheran theology is not acceptable: it is God who decides who is worthy of his grace and who not, and is not in the hands of people to judge on. ...

What does it mean, theologically as well as sociologically, if someone does not attend Holy Communion? It could mean very simply that Dzivhani was not in town. In 1963 he received a travel document which allowed him to travel to Southern Rhodesia, a permission which was repeated several times.

It could mean that the person has been excluded from the church from some grave sin such as adultery. The excluded member would then have to repent the sin in front of the whole congregation and would then have to attend penitence classes for a couple of weeks or months before being allowed back to attend Holy Communion.³⁸

Letter by Ntsandeni

On 4 May 1968 Solomon T. Ntsandeni wrote a letter to Dzivhani in which he requested Dzivhani to remove him from the list of lay-preachers for the church, most probably for Beuster church where Dzivhani was attending.³⁹ Ntsandeni argued that he was

³⁸ Interview with Rev. Hermann Seaba, 5.6.2003, Thohoyandou.

³⁹ Solomon T. Ntsandeni, 4 May 1968, Letter to S.M. Dzivhani. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:14].

too young to be a preacher. Preaching, he stated, not only had to do with ability, but that the most essential thing for a preacher was to have “the respect and acceptance by the community. Religion is such a delicate and most respectable of subjects that it is very essential that respectable people should be the proper counsellors.” Ntsandeni argued that he did not want to “be a party in discouraging members of making our Church less respectable”, referring to an event in the previous year that had shocked the community.

Ntsandeni stated several times in his letter that he did not want to show disrespect to Dzivhani or hurt him by putting forward this request. He argued that he wanted to save his own reputation as well as that of Dzivhani. He emphasised that he was not trying to shy away from his responsibility.

In the letter Ntsandeni placed respectability into the centre of the discussion. His discussion suggests that at least he himself considered it as very important for members of the church to be respectable, thus to behave properly and according to the principles of the church. A lay-preacher, thus, had to gain the respect of his co-members at church through his behaviour and actions, to become a role model, before he could stand up to preach to them. This suggests that in Ntsandeni’s understanding not only did actions have to precede words, but that actions rather than words marked a person’s faith. This focus on actions was repeated in interviews with members of the Lutheran church in Venda in 2003/2004 who emphasised the importance of a person’s behaviour – that it was the behaviour of a person that marked him or her as a Christian (e.g. Interview with Dau).

- i.e. that respectability is crucial for conceptions of what it means to be a Christian

Accounts of Dzivhani’s marriage

Dzivhani wrote one long and two short accounts of his marriage. The accounts are very strongly written from his own perception, and they do not give any insight into his wife, who she was, her biography, why (he thinks) she married him, the nature of their marriage, the children they had.

The three accounts of the marriage each emphasise different aspects of the marriage process.

The first, long account, was written approximately in 1967, judging by a letter that is included in the same pages and shows the same pen and ink-flow as well as style of handwriting.⁴⁰ It gives a detailed description of the various steps that Dzivhani went through in his marriage proposal. It begins with Dzivhani going to Kratzenstein (the local names of the place are Masealama or Mphome), a mission station of the Berlin Mission close to Tzaneen, where he visited the local missionary, Reverend C[arl?] Hoffmann, to ask for permission to approach a certain lady with a marriage proposal. When Reverend Hoffmann asked whether there were no possible marriage partners in Sibasa, the town closest to Beuster where Dzivhani was employed by the mission, Dzivhani handed him a letter from the missionary he was under in Venda, Reverend Theodor Schwellnus, that explained Dzivhani's entreaty. After reading the letter, Hoffmann agreed to Dzivhani's quest and referred him to an elder in the congregation to take him to the woman Dzivhani wanted to approach.

The text does not record whether Dzivhani approached this elder at all, but only notes that he approached a lady by the name of S. Bopape to introduce him to Selina Manyakanyaka, the woman he intended to ask for marriage. Whilst the account is written as if the process of approaching Manyakanyaka was completely controlled and guided by the missionaries, it becomes clear at this point that Dzivhani had to have had previous contact with Bopape about the matter. In his account Dzivhani recorded that Bopape had already "interviewed" Manyakanyaka, and had "asked her not to speak too harshly to me".

Bopape took Dzivhani to the room of Manyakanyaka and, after introducing them to each other, left the two on their own. In his account he described his marriage proposal in the following manner: "I explained my mission of coming to her that I am a teacher and I want to marry a mistress who shall be doing the same thing that I do, - to teach the children and the grown up at the community where I stay in Sibasa." This explanation of his request for

⁴⁰ [S.M. Dzivhani], n.d., [Account of Dzivhani's marriage]. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:2].

marriage indicates that the determining criteria for Dzivhani in the choice of a wife was that the woman needed to be a teacher – a “mistress” or female school teacher – and needed to be prepared to work as a teacher in his home town of Sibasa.

In a different, undated autobiographical account Dzivhani records how he identified Selina Manyakanyaka.⁴¹ Dzivhani made contact with the Bopape family in two ways: first he studied with Peter Bopape, the son of Reverend F. Bopape, and second, when he taught at Beuster, an evangelist was appointed, Paul Makwela, who had married Thabitha Bopape, the second daughter of Reverend Bopape. When she came to Sibasa, she was accompanied by her younger sister, Sara – most probably the S. Bopape who introduced Dzivhani to Manyakanyaka in the first account – and her cousin Lekwetse. In a long talk with Makwela, Dzivhani reports, they discussed the issue of a “mistress of good conduct”, and Makwela mentioned that there was one teaching at Kratzenstein. When Makwela added that the woman was a Xhosa, Dzivhani states that he answered, “Christianity is the quality I value much” [emphasis in original]. Similar to the first account Dzivhani wanted to marry a teacher. In this account he adds the quality of being a Christian, one which was not mentioned in the previous text.

Whilst this looks like a selective mentioning of Christianity, I suggest that the quality of being a Christian is part of being educated and being a teacher. At the time of the late 1910s, Christianity and education went hand in hand, in particular for women whose ability to enter into professional training would have been dependent on them being Christian.

The third account of the marriage is given in a letter by Dzivhani to P. Makwela, most probably the evangelist Paul Makwela to whom Dzivhani had accorded a large role in the choice of a bride in the second account.⁴² The letter is dated 30 May 1973 and is addressed to Makwela in Sovenga, east of Polokwane and not far from Kratzenstein. In this letter Dzivhani writes that he had had a dream in which he was told to marry a teacher. He then requested

⁴¹ [S.M. Dzivhani], n.d., “Ndimya ya I.” Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:8].

⁴² [S.M. Dzivhani], 30 May 1973, Letter to P. Makwela. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:29].

some people to go to Kratzenstein and to look for a teacher there. If the Bopapes taken over this role of approaching the woman Dzivhani wanted to marry, and if Makwela had been married into the Bopape family at that time, and if Makwela suggested the specific woman to whom Dzivhani would propose marriage, then it is curious that Dzivhani writes in such general terms here and that he does not refer to the role of the Bopapes directly.

In addition to the curious reference to the Bopapes and to Paul Makwela's own role in the marriage process, what is striking in this account is the reference to a dream which told Dzivhani what kind of woman to marry. This dream is not explained or described any further. The reference to the dream in this account raises the question as to why Dzivhani recorded this dream only in this account. There may be several possibilities for this. First, it might be that Dzivhani did not have a specific dream but that, more than fifty years after the marriage took place, he captures the conviction he feels about the rightness of the marriage in the symbol of a dream. This might be linked to the fact that in 1973 Dzivhani is a very old man, probably around 90 years old which might influence his memory of the role of the Bopapes and Makwela himself (though I find that unlikely as old people often remember their youth exceptionally well whereas memories of more recent years fails them). Secondly, it could be that Dzivhani did in fact experience the dream but that he did not mention it in his previous accounts of the marriage because of the intended or possible readers of the accounts. In this third account, the reader is clearly identified as P. Makwela, who in the 1910s had been an evangelist in the Berlin Mission church. It might be that Dzivhani felt that he shares assumptions and understandings which other readers would not.

The latter interpretation is supported by the location where the three accounts place agency during the marriage process: who is described as having been instrumental in the process and who is accorded only a small role? In the third account, Dzivhani writes that "the people were received well and they got him a wife with the assistance of some priests". The priests referred to here are identified clearly in the first account as Reverend Theodor Schweltnus, superintendent in the Berlin Mission church in Sibasa, and Rev. C[arl?] Hoffmann, the missionary pastor at the Berlin Mission station in Kratzenstein/Masealama.

Here they are referred to slightly disparagingly as “some priests”. This suggests that towards the end of his life, Dzivhani was no longer on a good footing with the Berlin Mission. If this is correct, it is, however, not an impression he gives in his other accounts on the marriage or in his other autobiographical texts.

In addition, in the first account Dzivhani grants the missionaries much more agency in the marriage process. The process is described in such a way to leave the impression that the missionaries guided and controlled Dzivhani in his choice of wife. His own agency in the process only emerges when it becomes clear that it is likely that he had had contact with Sara Bopape beforehand and had discussed the matter with her as she had already contacted Manyakanyaka before the arrival of Dzivhani. In the second account, on the other hand, the Bopapes emerge as the central organisers in the selection and meeting of Manyakanyaka, whereas the missionaries are given an accompanying, though not necessarily uninfluential role: “I was also given Sara their daughter [of the Bopapes] who would introduce me to the mistress at Kratzenstein. We went to the mission station to the relative family of the Bopape, and I,[sic] had to see the Rev. C. Hoffmann, the missionary in charge of the mission reporting myself to him, that I had to produce to him a letter from my home missionary, Rev. Schwellnus.”

If the intended readers of the various accounts might explain why the dream is only mentioned in one of them, and if the intended readers might also explain the emphasis or de-emphasis on the role of the missionaries in the process, they do not explain why, in the third account, Dzivhani hides the fact that it was he himself who went to Kratzenstein to meet Manyakanyaka and who proposed marriage to her, but puts the responsibility and agency of the whole process on the Bopape family: “they found him a Xhosa-speaking lady from Kingwilliamstown”.

Only the first account of the marriage continues to describe the marriage process after Dzivhani spoke to Manyakanyaka at Kratzenstein. Manyakanyaka answered his marriage proposal by saying that she could not take that decision herself but had to refer it to her parents. If her parents accepted the proposal, then she too would accept. If they, however,

declined, then she too would decline. This suggests that Manyakanyaka, though a professionally employed woman, still considered herself to be embedded in her family

Manyakanyaka instructed Dzivhani to write a letter to her family with his proposal. As recorded in this account, Dzivhani approached Reverend F. Bopape, pastor at the mission church of Kratzenstein, to write a letter on his behalf, as mediator, putting Dzivhani's proposal to Manyakanyaka's parents. The response from the parents, a couple of weeks later, was that they accepted the marriage proposal under two conditions: they demanded that lobola of eight heads of cattle be kept, and that the marriage should be blessed by the pastor at Burnshill [Burnhill?], Rev. W. Stuart, in the eastern Cape. This as well as other documents do not describe whether Manyakanyaka's parents were Christian, but the second condition for marriage of their daughter suggests that they had been baptised. Whether they were Christians or not, the fact that they demanded the keeping of lobola suggests that they had achieved for themselves an understanding that the keeping of aspects of the traditional marriage process and of the Christian process were not mutually exclusive.

According to the first account, Dzivhani then discussed the letter from Manyakanyaka's parents with Schwellnus, his pastor, who suggested that they try to intervene in the process. Schwellnus wanted to approach Rev. W.A. MacDonald of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in South Africa, stationed at Donald Fraser Hospital a couple of kilometres north-east of Sibasa, and who, according to Schwellnus, knew the Xhosa customs better, to discuss the matter with the pastor in the Cape. The suggestion was that Rev. Stuart to whom the letter from Manyakanyaka's parents referred to was also a member of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in South Africa.

When Rev. Stuart responded to their request, he wrote that he had visited Manyakanyaka's parents and because Dzivhani was a Christian teacher, they would only ask for R80 for lobola or £40 at the time. The indication from this is that Dzivhani struggled to find provide eight head of cattle for lobola and asked the assistance of the missionaries to negotiate this figure.

The fact that Manyakanyaka's parents accepted to receive money as lobola instead of heads of cattle suggests, again, that they were Christians and that for them money had acquired the respectability of signifying symbolic transactions.

At the beginning of the Christmas break, Dzivhani and Manyakanyaka travelled together by train to her home town of Wolf River Lower. The lobola transactions, which included additional payments of a number of gifts, were initiated on the morning after their arrival. The account records that Manyakanyaka came to see Dzivhani early in the morning to explain to him the whole process. This, as well as their travels to the eastern Cape together, is surprising as at least in Venda tradition the bridegroom and the bride do not see each other privately, nor do they speak to each other. It is possible that Manyakanyaka had to accompany Dzivhani, and introduce him to the Xhosa lobola process due to the fact that no one else was able to speak a language he understood. It could also be, however, that this breaking of traditional taboos was possible due to the Christian frame that was given this marriage process.

The account does not continue to describe the lobola process but goes on to record that Dzivhani rode to meet Rev. Stuart who praised the fact that he was coming to marry Manyakanyaka in church: "This is the first who went up country and returned home to be blessed in the prence[sic – presence] of the parents ... in the church". I find this surprising as I would have expected that Christians in particular would have made a point of marrying by what were considered the proper procedures. Does this mean that other Christians did not come home to be married? Does it mean that other Christians who had left home did not marry in church? Or that other Christians married without the knowledge and sanction of their families and church?

As a result of this meeting, and after the payment of R2 to Rev. Stuart for officiating the marriage ceremony, the marriage bans were published both in the eastern Cape and in Venda on three subsequent Sundays. During this period Dzivhani went to East London for a week. Upon his return to Wolf River Lower he exclaims in the text "How glad I was to be a Wolf River lower again meeting my fiance once more!". This is the first indication in the

letter of an emotional response by Dzivhani to the marriage proceedings. The wording reminds me of how the missionaries tended to describe their feelings when leaving their mission stations to meet their brides (often for the first time) and to get married to them. The formulation suggests a conception of a marital partnership which the missionaries would have had.

The marriage itself is only described shortly as having taken place Wednesday, 16 January 1916, with singing, chanting and dancing having begun already at home. The pastor had come to the home of the bride for “tea and preparations” and had then, on horseback, preceded the wedding party to the church. Dzivhani was led to the church by a group of young men whilst Manyakanyaka was accompanied by a group of young women, all of them followed by a crowd of people. On the following day the newly-wed couple returned to Sibasa where “we assumed duty and God blessed the work”. This suggests that married life is all about duty to God.

All these accounts on the marriage were more probably written in the late 1960s or early 1970s, thus 50 years or more after the marriage took place itself. What does that mean for memory?

What is the same in all 3 accounts is that Dzivhani wanted to marry a teacher; that his network of educated Christian friends and the missionaries of the Berlin Mission church played a role in the marriage process; that Dzivhani handed over lobola; that he married Manyakanyaka in a church ceremony at her home; and that she hardly features in the accounts.

What differs is how he reports on who were the active agents in the marriage process. In the first account the missionaries stand in the foreground and are given the role of gatekeepers: they direct Dzivhani where to find a wife, test him as to why he wanted a particular wife, helped in the lobola negotiations, and finally married him. He did not seem an agent in the process. In the second account the role of identifying a particular woman is given to fellow Christians, the Bopape family. Dzivhani still has to get the missionaries' approval,

but the Bopapes are the ones driving the negotiations and marriage process. In the third account, Dzivhani reports that it was a dream which told him to marry a teacher. He speaks of “people” who got him a wife and were assisted by “some priests”. The agency is far more diffuse, including his own.

What is also different in the third account is the reasoning Dzivhani gives for his choice of wife. In the first account he states that “I explained my mission of coming to her, that I am a teacher and I want to marry a mistress who shall be doing the same thing that I do, – to teach the children and the grown up at the community where I stay in Sibasa”. In the second, he is discussing a “mistress of good conduct” as potential wife and exclaims that “Christianity is the quality I value much”, underlined in the original.

We can explain these differences by arguing that the accounts were written for different audiences: for example, the first more for a missionary audience, the second for fellow Christians who valued the mission, and the third for an audience that understood the more mystical components of a dream. At the moment, however, I don’t have any identification markers of the audience of the first or second accounts. The third account was a letter addressed to a P. Makwela, most probably the evangelist Paul Makwela to whom Dzivhani accorded a large role in the choice of bride in the second account. So at the moment, an analysis of the intended audience does not help conclusively, it rather throws up more questions about Paul Makwela and why Dzivhani felt comfortable to discuss a dream with him.

What surprised me in these accounts was that Christianity was mentioned only once explicitly. What is, rather, emphasised regularly is rather the aspect of education. I suggest that Christianity is such a fundamental basis of being an educated person that it (nearly) did not need to be mentioned anymore. Being educated meant one was a Christian.

Second, what the material – these accounts and his papers more generally – suggests is that education was linked to conceptions of civilisation and modernity, of being en”light”ened as well as developed and having left “darkness”. Dzivhani thus seems to fit into the larger cohort of educated African Christians in the early part of the 20th century for

whom Christianity was (still) an expression of progress and liberal politics.⁴³ At the same time Dzivhani transferred lobola and seemed happy to combine traditional features of a marriage process with Christian features.

The accounts throw up several queries:

Why, for example, did Dzivhani write a letter to Paul Makwela in the third account, describing his marriage, when Makwela had been the one – according to the second account – who actually proposed that very particular woman to him as potential wife, the woman Dzivhani then eventually married?

Why, too, does the dream not feature more? In the Lutheran theology of the missionaries in the late 19th century, dreams were a manifestation of faith and sincere conversion. Had this changed by the time Dzivhani would have had the dream, the 1910s, or by the time he wrote his account, the 1960s, so that it was no longer correct or appropriate to report a dream as a Christian experience?

Why were the missionaries in the first account involved in the lobola negotiations, when the missionaries, of the BMS at least, abhorred lobola as a commodification of women?

How do Dzivhani's accounts link to his Lutheran beliefs, the fact that he belonged to the Lutheran church rather than any other one? Dzivhani's determination that his wife would be a partner and support in what he did is a typical feature of Lutheran missionary marriage. Yet at the same time the Berlin missionaries saw the role of wives more in the home and family than outside of it, whereas Dzivhani was looking for a wife who would work.

Finally, what are the silences in Dzivhani's texts? It seems to me that orthodox Lutheran practice and theology places expressions of faith and piety much more into the centre than the curt references by Dzivhani that "their work [that of Dzivhani and his wife] were blessed by God". In comparison to Dzivhani's way of writing, the missionaries would regularly insert phrases in their writings to indicate that everything ultimately was in God's

⁴³ Can Dzivhani be compared with Petros Lalume in *La Hausse de Lalouviere* 2000?

hands. Their writings make more explicit the belief by the missionaries of being just tools in the hands of God rather than agents of their own will.

In conclusion, it seems to me that for Dzivhani faith and piety were something that did not need to be demonstrated or expressed at least in these autobiographical writings. The reference to education presumed Christianity – Christianity did not need to be proven if someone was educated.

Dzivhani and his children

Stephanus Dzivhani and Selina Manyakanyaka had five children. Ulrica, a girl and the eldest child, was schooled in Grace [Grace Dieu Diocesan Training College?] in Polokwane, did her Forms (Form 1-6) at Rosettenville [St Peter's Secondary School?] in Johannesburg, matriculated at Inkamani [full name?] in Natal, and studied for a B.A. at the Fort Hare University in Alice. The second child, Herbert, a son, became blind in his youth and matriculated at the Eerste River Blind School [name?] in ... [?]. He died in a car accident in Natal, though I could find no year for when he died. The following two daughters died whilst still young and are not recorded by name in the documentation. Their last son, Bennett, trained as a teacher and worked at Mphaphuli Memorial School where his father had also taught.⁴⁴

In contrast to his marriage, Dzivhani's relationship with his children, and with his daughter Ulrica in particular, features much more strongly in his personal papers. Not only are there numerous letters from Ulrica to her father, indicating that she supported him financially in his old age, as well as copies of letters from Dzivhani to Ulrica in which he calls on her and her son to focus on their futures and their education and to ignore the bad influence of people, but in his personal accounts of his own life Dzivhani regularly emphasises the achievements of his daughter. Thus we are quickly informed that his daughter

⁴⁴ S.M. Dzivhani, n.d., [Account of marriage of Dzivhani to Manyakanyaka]. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:2].

has a Bachelor of Arts degree, whereas there is only one text that indicates that his son, Bennett, is a successful teacher in his own right.

Discussion of letter of Ulrica to her father in 1969 in which she discusses why she was not attending church regularly, in opposition to her father's entreaties.

God is alive. And he cares for people. I know you think that Christianity - I hate to go to church. No father, I go to church when my heart feels I must go. My heart does not allow me to go to church with hypocrites. I know you will say that I am a bad example to others, but I find I cannot do it. My God and I know each other's good sides and bad sides.⁴⁵

The letter seems to indicate that Ulrica has her very own understanding of faith; she does not go to church regularly, because she feels that there are hypocrites at church. This suggests that something happened in her life which her father knows about that has made Ulrica weary of church and church members -- that they did something to her which was not in keeping with the strictures of the church or the principles of the Christian faith. Her father, however, if he knows about what happened, does not agree with his daughter and feels that she should be attending church more regularly as she was a bad example to others. Ulrica nevertheless sees herself as a Christian and as having a close relationship with God [this is a phrase taken from charismatic Christianity -- how else can I express this?]. She states that she and God understand know each other's good and bad sides, though this feels a little presumptuous as she seems to indicate that she knows beyond doubt who God is and what God is about.

In her letter Ulrica states that "in any case one is never really appreciated by the people amongst whom you were born", thus referring to the bible where it is said that Jesus was not appreciated by his own people. Ulrica is illustrating that she feels she is not recognised and respected back home in Venda, a respect that she receives plentifully in Bulawayo where she lives and works as a teacher. Here Ulrica is drawing a parallel between her suffering and that of Jesus. The quote is, however, taken from a text in the Bible that

⁴⁵ Ulrica Dzivhani, 20 February 1969, Letter to her father, S.M. Dzivhani. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:19].

illustrates how Jesus is the saviour of all human kind, and it sounds a bit presumptuous and arrogant of Ulrica to cite this text with reference to herself.

An question that is raised by this discussion of faith is what the event was that led her to feel that all people attending church are hypocrites. It could be that it had to do around the birth of her son, who now is finishing school, as it seems that Ulrica was either never married or had divorced her husband.

In the letter Ulrica also indicates that she is concerned about the grave of her mother and wants it tended. This suggests that she is concerned about the memory of her mother. She states that whenever she visits home, she normally goes to the grave to polish the stones and to replace the flowers, but that on her last visit she had no opportunity to do so. She asks her father to instruct her brother Bennett to take the three flower containers to have the artificial flowers replaced and to have three cards added stating “Always remembered by your family and friends on earth”, and “Hope to meet in the life to come”. She indicates that she would reimburse Bennett for the expense. In addition she asks her brother to have a picture taken of the tombstone on the grave.

In this account, it seems surprising to see that Ulrica’s father does not know of the fact that Ulrica tends the grave of her mother. Why is it that Ulrica feels a need to mention this fact here?

The texts on the cards suggests that the Christian belief of a life after death is central to Ulrica’s understanding of death.

At the same time, however, the flowers, the tombstone and the pictures of it, as well as the cards are all social markers that carry their meaning for present-day life rather than for the person in death. It is important to note that at least Christians already had quite elaborate markings of death in the 1960s, similar to today where many pastors of the Lutheran church consider the practice to have gone overboard.

In a letter by Dzivhani to his daughter Ulrica in 1973, Dzivhani asks his daughter to encourage her son, Mashudu, in his studies.⁴⁶ He advises her to keep away from people who are lazy, drunkards and smokers as these things affect a person's health. He also advises her to focus on her studies and to think about her future. As in the letter by Ntsandeni to Dzivhani, discussed above, the focus here is on behaviour and the call for a person to behave properly. Proper behaviour is defined in particular in terms of what should not be done, namely drinking, smoking, and being lazy. Again, this reflects the opinions of church members during my fieldwork who defined proper behaviour through the same avoidances. The letter suggests that Christianity is assumed.

Dzivhani as composer

The source that gives us the most direct access to Dzivhani's personal conception of faith is songs. There are indications in his autobiographical accounts that Dzivhani was musically inclined already in his childhood and was composing from at least the 1920s onwards. Many of his biographical accounts emphasise his musical abilities and interests.⁴⁷ This emphasis on music in his autobiographical accounts might be because in the late 1960s and early 1970s Dzivhani was submitting several of his compositions to music competitions, the time when, I suggest, he was writing these autobiographical accounts.⁴⁸ They record how he, as a child, had made and played various Venda musical instruments and that his father had bought him a xylophone to play at festivals. The accounts go on to describe the musical lessons in violin, organ and brass instruments that Dzivhani took at Botshabelo Training

⁴⁶ S.M. Dzivhani, 1973, Letter to Ulrica Dzivhani. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:26].

⁴⁷ S.M. Dzivhani, n.d., [Biographical account]. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:5]; S.M. Dzivhani, n.d. "Botshabelo Teachers Training Institution, Transvaal." Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:4].

⁴⁸ S.M. Dzivhani, 27 July 1965, Letter to the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:6]; T.N. Maumela, 25 May 1972, Letter to S.M. Dzivhani. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:31BV]; S.M. Dzivhani, 5 June 1973, "Unisa hundred years old." Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 7:2]; S.M. Dzivhani, 1975, "Songs for Eisteddfod Competition for 1975." Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:31BF].

Institution when studying to become a teacher. Dzivhani became the conductor of the brass band at Botshabelo and later, when teaching at Beuster, conducted the Beuster church choir that was known as the best in the Zoutpansberg.⁴⁹

Some of the songs Dzivhani composed were on Christian and religious themes, though others, late in his life, were inspired by the creation of the homeland, and later Republic, of Venda. Thus, Dzivhani wrote “Lalamaa Venda!”, the national anthem of the Republic of Venda.⁵⁰ Dzivhani also translated about 350 lyrics of hymns for the 1960 edition of the *Difela tsa kereke tse di nago le dinota tsa tonic sol-fa*, the Sepedi hymnal of the Berlin Mission that included the TshiVenda texts for all songs.

It seems, however, that even though Dzivhani is described by many as having been a prolific composer – with his personal papers are filled with pieces of papers on which he sketched music or texts – only few of his religious songs made it into the official hymnals of the BM church. The 1960 edition of the hymnal *Difela tsa kereke tse di nago le dinota tsa tonic sol-fa*, of the Northern-Sotho hymns of the Berlin Mission church, contained one of his songs entitled “Mafhungo a ndi fhelaho” which is reproduced both in Northern Sotho (under the title “Lentsu ke le monate”) and in TshiVenda.⁵¹ In contrast, the mission hymnal in TshiVenda, that has hardly changed from its 1924 edition to the 2001 one, does not contain any of Dzivhani’s original compositions in any of its editions, but only translations by Dzivhani of the texts of four English or German songs: “Vhonani hee, ndi muthu-de” (No.63), “Vuwa Muya wanga” (No. 180), “Ane a kunda” (No. 233), and “...” (No. 156).⁵²

As the aim is to use Dzivhani’s compositions to get at his personal conceptions of faith, I am only able to use songs where Dzivhani has freely written the lyrics of the songs. The aim is to see what Christian imagery, metaphors, symbols, analogies and themes Dzivhani would use in the songs to address certain issues. As a result, any lyrics which

⁴⁹ Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani, n.d., Ndima ya I [Story I]. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:8].

⁵⁰ Birou ya Tshivenda Vhulunga Zwau, n.d., “A list of Tshivenda writers”. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 7:39].

⁵¹ [Berlin Lutheran Church] 1960: 335.

⁵² Schwellnus 2001.

Dzivhani translated from pre-existing lyrics in another language are not useful for this analysis.

To date I have found and translated one song on the theme of Christianity that he composed in full, melody and text, the song “Mafhungo a ndifhelaho” [The sweet words for me], published originally in 1960.⁵³

Lentsu ke le monate/Mafhungo a ndi fhelaho

1. The sweet words for me,
I feel them and hear them,
Jesus who died for us,
Until I die.
2. This beautiful fountain
That flows,
I don't know any other like this one.
I drink and satisfy my thirst.
3. Those provisions on my way,
Manna which satisfies.
This is my soul's porridge,
That I can cry for.
4. What am I complaining about
With my Jesus?
What world can give?
With my father.
5. It is only Jesus who gives
Tasteful things,
Good things / pleasures,
To those who listen.
6. Happiness is unspeakable
To those who work.
To get in for those who are not countable
With those who are coming.

In the hymnal, the song is accompanied by notation of the melody in tonic-sol-fa, a sophisticated but simple-to-read system of music notation devised in the 1840s by John Curwen to assist singers who did not have any musical training in reading music in the more common staff notation Hindley 1971. It was a system widely employed by the missionaries

⁵³ For reference see footnote 8. I have left the text of the song in even though I give a summary below of the whole song. I am not sure yet whether I will need the full text for the reader to make sense of the analysis. An appendix might be more appropriate for the full texts, especially of songs that have never been published.

of the Berlin Mission church and is still employed today by choirs all over South Africa. The melody is based on the hymn “How sweet the name of Jesus”,⁵⁴ the text of which was composed by John Newton in 1779 and the melody by Alexander Robert Reinagle in 1836.⁵⁵ The original song was based on the biblical book Song of Solomon 1:3, “Thy name is like ointment poured forth.”⁵⁶ Though Dzivhani’s song takes up the theme of the song from the original song, it is a completely new composition and is not a translation of the original song.⁵⁷ As a result, we can use this song to gain some insight into Dzivhani’s approach to Christianity.

As with most other choral music of the time, the melody of the song is very metropolitan and does not reflect African concepts of melody and harmony.⁵⁸

In this song Dzivhani uses the metaphor of sustenance to illustrate that Jesus, the son of God, fulfils all the needs of the singer. In the first verse Dzivhani presents the death of Jesus as being “sweet words” for him, sweet words that he feels and hears, and will feel and hear until he dies. This indicates that for Dzivhani the salvation from sin, thus ultimately to be released from the consequences of doing wrong – which, in Christian belief, is what Jesus’ death brought about – is critical to his understanding of Christianity. His reference to

⁵⁴ [Berlin Lutheran Church] 1960: 380.

⁵⁵ <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/s/hsweetnj.htm>, downloaded 18.11.2005.

⁵⁶ get ref.

⁵⁷ The text of the original song is: 1. How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds /In a believer’s ear! / It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,/ And drives away his fear. /2. It makes the wounded spirit whole, /And calms the troubled breast; /’Tis manna to the hungry soul, /And to the weary, rest. /3. Dear Name, the Rock on which I build, /My Shield and Hiding Place, /My never failing treasury, filled /With boundless stores of grace! /4. By Thee my prayers acceptance gain, /Although with sin defiled; /Satan accuses me in vain, /And I am owned a child. /5. Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend, /O Prophet, Priest and King, / My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, /Accept the praise I bring. /6. Weak is the effort of my heart, /And cold my warmest thought; /But when I see Thee as Thou art, /I’ll praise Thee as I ought. /7. Till then I would Thy love proclaim /With every fleeting breath, /And may the music of Thy Name /Refresh my soul in death! Downloaded from <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/s/hsweetnj.htm>, on 18.11.2005.

⁵⁸ cf. Olwage 2003.

“feeling” these sweet words suggests a different understanding of the power of words than that of the missionaries.⁵⁹

The second verse compares Jesus, or his actions, to a beautiful fountain that flows like none other, and that satisfies the author’s thirst. The thirst referred to here is not a physical thirst but a metaphorical reference to the “sweet words” of the first verse, thus to salvation, similar to references in the bible to belief in God being like consuming food and drink.⁶⁰

The third verse extends the metaphor of Jesus being food for the soul by stating that the words from the first verse are the “porridge” of his soul, that they sustain his spiritual being, and that they are “manna” for his soul just as the physical manna sustained Moses and his people in the desert.

The fourth verse states that there is nothing to complain about when a person believes in Jesus. The fifth verse continues this theme by stating that all good things come from Jesus and only from him, but that they are given only to those who listen to him, thus accepting his authority.

In the sixth verse the author claims that it is impossible for those who are not counted, thus for those who had not been chosen by God, to get in. In the TshiVenda version the word used to express “to get in” and “those who are coming” refers to cattle being called into the cattle enclosure.⁶¹ Thus, only those who worked for God could find happiness in God.

I find it difficult in this song to pinpoint anything specifically Lutheran: what is surprising for a Lutheran composer, perhaps, is that there is no direct or conscious reference to sin and to the resurrection which, I would argue, are crucial in Lutheran thinking.

The focus of the song is on Jesus, to the exclusion of the other two forms of the Christian God, the Father as the creator and the Holy Spirit as the comforter or the giver of faith. This is particularly notable as in the Catechism Luther places a lot of emphasis in the

⁵⁹ Keane? (Keane 1996; Keane 1997a; Keane 1997b; Keane 2001). Keane ; Keane 1997a; Keane 2001

⁶⁰ Insert references – and draw out parallels and differences

⁶¹ u orowa: to bring animals back from grazing to the kraal. Mpho Rathando pers. comm.: only those who are counted are allowed to come in, i.e. only those in touch with God are those that are allowed to enter.

equal importance but different roles of the three forms of God. In fact, in the creed God the Father is credited as the giver of everything that a person needs.⁶²

In verse 5 Dzivhani speaks of “tasteful things” or “zwithu zwi difhaho”. In TshiVenda, “difha” means to be sweet, taste nice, be good and to be pleasant to the senses. This suggests that the benefits that the composer imagines as coming from faith, from listening to the message of the death of Jesus, are material or physical benefits, as something that the body can feel.⁶³

In the Lutheran creed, Jesus is presented as the new Lord of a person, that Jesus now holds the lordship or rule over a person. The recognition of this lordship is indicated to some extent in the word “listen” in verse 5. Yet, the TshiVenda word “thetshelaho” used in the verse, which comes from “thetshela” and means to taste, does not hold any connotation to listening and submitting to someone else’s authority. Rather, it indicates an active stance taken by the believer, something the believer does, rather than something the believer submits to.

There is also no sense in the song of a believer realising his or her disobedience towards and sin before God and the recognition that lead to eternal damnation. The song does not represent human beings as in recognition of the fact that human beings are by nature sinful and that this demands that they repent before they can reach God. There is thus no sense of repentance, a critical feature in Lutheranism.

Yet, the song definitely has Christian underpinnings. The first theme is that of sustenance, which is conceived of both in terms of water and in terms of food. In verse 2, God’s word is presented as a fountain. The fountain is an image that is used in the bible for God as the supreme fountain of life.⁶⁴ In verse 3, the word of Jesus’ death is presented as manna. Throughout the bible, manna is used to indicate a blessing from God. Jesus is referred to as the “true bread from heaven” which, if a person ate, he or she would never hunger or

⁶² Luther 1995; Luther 2004; get page numbers.

⁶³ what about the word for “good things/pleasures”?

⁶⁴ See, for example, Psalm 36:9, Jeremiah 17:13 and John 4:13-14 Miller and Miller 1954: 207.

thirst again.⁶⁵ This passage refers to a non-physical sustenance, which is reverberated in the line “This is my soul's porridge”.⁶⁶

There are two important aspects of the Christian message, which are strongly emphasised in Lutheran theology, that are only implied in the song. The first verse refers to the “sweet words” of the death of Jesus for humanity. The implication is the resurrection of Jesus: in Christian thought it is only through the resurrection of Jesus, the fact that he did not remain dead, that humans were saved, and not because of the death alone.

The second implication in the reference to the death of Jesus is, as already discussed above, that of sin: in Christian thought, Jesus died for human beings because of their sin. In the song, sin is not something that demands repentance. It is something a person might have been in, but also something a person comes out of. The fact that the song does not refer to sin suggests that sin does not carry any implications or consequences beyond the act of listening to the “sweet words”. There is the suggestion that sin is something that can be left behind and that it is not a constitutive characteristic of a person – thus a very different understanding from Luther’s conception of the person.⁶⁷

Verse 6 is crucial for its use of an African idiom that refers to cattle and how they are counted before they can enter the kraal in the evening. It suggests that those who are not counted do not belong in the kraal and thus, applied to the Christian context in the song, have not been chosen.

The following two songs are very different in nature. They are songs composed to celebrate the creation of the Venda homeland and its leader, Patrick Mphephu. I am analysing them here for their references to Christianity.

⁶⁵ John 6:32, 35. Also see 1 Deuteronomy 8:3&16; Nehemiah 9:15&20; Psalm 78:24f; John 6:31; Revelations 2:17 Miller and Miller 1954: 207.

⁶⁶ See also John 4:13-14.

⁶⁷ I have a sense that the absence of both these themes – the resurrection and sin – is a wider characteristic of South African Lutheranism at the time and perhaps even today. It is a sense that I am testing but don’t have much active proof for yet.

*Venda lalamaa!*⁶⁸

1. Big king Ramaano Mphephu.
You ruled us, long live.
For us.
Almighty God,
The creator of everything,
The protector for everywhere.
For us.
2. This flag⁶⁹ must wave,
Our strong spear.
For us.
Let us move with beauty.
You made people a nation.
Wind, rule Africa.
With us.
3. All Vendas, what are we saying?
What are we working? What are we building?
For us.
We have given our government.
We work in our place.
Let's adorn our things.
With us.
4. Our land [?]⁷⁰
Our work is enough.⁷¹
For us.
Cultivation land is plentiful,
Where many things are planted.
Vendas are many.
That is us.

This song is undated in Dzivhani's personal papers but must have been written between the first declaration of ethnically based tribal authorities in the 1960s and Dzivhani's death in 1975. It creates the image of a unified Venda population, unified in particular by God and by a political leader.

The first verse is addressed to Patrick Mphephu who was the only leader of the Venda tribal authority and the first and long term leader of the later Venda homeland and independent state. The verse seems to suggest that Mphephu was chosen by God to be a

⁶⁸ Dzivhani Papers A1075: [insert box no 6:31BL].

⁶⁹ This flag -- the one that had been marginalised.

⁷⁰ Probably word praising Venda; or "it is our pasture."

⁷¹ i.e. our country provide us with enough work to sustain its people

leader, though it does not say so explicitly. The second verse refers to the flag of Venda. It refers to Mphephu as the strong spear of the Venda people, as the one who created the nation of Venda, and calls upon the Venda people to “move with beauty”. Finally it calls Mphephu the “wind” which should rule Africa. The third verse is addressed to the Venda people. It asks them what they are doing to improve and beautify their land after they have now been given a government. This government presumably refers to the homeland government of Venda that was created in 1967. The verse calls on every Venda to work on and beautify his own place. The fourth verse praises the area of Venda for providing enough work for everyone, for having productive land which provides proficient harvests, and for holding many people.

The song is a praise song for Mphephu as well as for the Venda nation as a whole. The song assumes and celebrates the entity of a Venda nation. It employs the presumption that people to whom something belongs – namely Venda – should and would be concerned to make this thing beautiful. In this it seems to employ concepts and an ideological outlook as that used by the apartheid creators of the ethnically defined and racially segregated Bantustans. At the same time this entity of a Venda nation as well as its leader are presented as sanctioned by God.

In 1971 the Birou ya Tshivenda, the Tshivenda office in the Department of Education and Culture in the Venda Government Service, organised a competition for a new “Song of the Vhavenda nation”. From 44 submissions it chose that by Dzivhani as the winner.⁷² Below is the Venda translation signed by Dzivhani and presumably prepared by himself or in coordination with him.⁷³

Venda, live long: Vhavenda National Anthem

1. Bless Venda and rule,

⁷² Letter by T.M. Maumela, Secretary of the Birou ya Tshivenda, to S.M. Dzivhani, 25 May 1972. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:31BV].

⁷³ S.M. Dzivhani, “Venda, live long!” Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:31 BQ1 and 6:31BQ3/6:31BO]. See also S.M.D., “Venda lalamaa”, 1972. Dzivhani Papers A1075:[insert box no 6:31AF].

Living almighty,
Blow thy spirit and waken
None can stop you.
Has been granted to Vhavenda.
My we as a nation be just
Venda rule and life long.

2. Venda, work and develop,
Unity should be fostered.
In the villages and capitals,
Laws should be obeyed.
We are your citizens
Due to your resources,
May we as a nation be just
Venda rule and live long.
3. Your/You/Yee mountains and rivers,
And you too Lake Fundudzi!
Through songs let us praise,
and praise without ceasing.
Praise songs and words,
Where are we to find?
May we as a nation be just.
Venda rule and live long.
4. Rulers, as well as subjects,
Let us Venda beautify,
Through work, here are our hands-
We are all Vhavenda,
All things are ours,
We should save ours.
May we as a nation be just.
Venda rule and live long.

This song is very similar to the previous one, only that it does not mention Patrick Mphphu. In the anthem, however, Venda as a nation is clearly described as God-given, even though the administrative unit is man-made. The phrase “none can stop you” in the first verse suggests the perception that Venda became a nation because it was God’s will for it to happen. It was, therefore, unavoidable. This implies that something right was done when the homeland of Venda was created.

In the support for an ethnically based political unit Dzivhani’s song reverberates with the aims of the BMS to create a Venda church for the Venda nation, thus to see Venda as a separate unit, independent from other ethnic entities. This was manifested especially in

language issues, with the translation of the bible, hymns and the catechism into, for example, TshiVenda. Yet here Dzivhani turns the missionary wish on its head, to a certain extent, because he celebrates a Venda nation in which Christianity is not the central trait of identification.

The “almighty” or “ramaanda a tshilaho” in the first verse probably refers to the Christian God, but it can be argued that it could refer to any god. If it is the Christian God, then he is referred to in a quite general way.

The praise in verse 3 for the nation of Venda sounds very much like the call in Christianity and in Lutheranism to praise God unceasingly. Yet here it is applied to the nation rather than to God.

Conclusion

- can the question of what it means to be a Christian function as frame for the analysis?

- is the question of “personal conceptions of faith” the right frame for the information I am getting out?

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