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TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIOSITY AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP: AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

One of the leading African theologians began his book by asserting that "Africans are notoriously religious."[1] Religion is life in traditional Africa. Good or bad behavior may be informed by religion. As Christian educators, it is vitally important for us to understand African religiosity because it affects behavior and character formation. In other words religiosity may be a hindrance to genuine Christian discipleship.

The purpose of this essay is to explore selected aspects of African religiosity and cultural dynamics within it. The dynamics therein may hinder genuine Christian discipleship, and yet some of them may actually benefit character formation.

In this essay three things will be done: First, the need for the teacher or minister to understand the African religiosity are highlighted; second, selected aspects of African religiosity which hinder discipleship are briefly explored together with those that enhance discipleship.

A. Description of the Essay

The essay is developed by exploring the biblical mandate for disciple-making as stated in the Gospel Commission given by Jesus, examining the African response to the Gospel Commission, highlighting hindering and enhancing aspects of African religiosity, and suggesting ways of addressing this religiosity.

B. Statement of the Problem

It has been disturbing to observe two major tendencies among the people ministered to. On numerous occasions the average African Christian contends with serious spiritual problems which are rooted in the core of his being. Many people in Africa who publicly vow to live for Christ and follow Him are not always loyal or faithful to their baptismal vows. They are involved in what Mbiti, an African scholar, regards as "religious concubinage." Religious concubinage is the disturbing frequency of vacillation between Christianity and African traditional practices, especially in times of crisis or deeply felt need.[2] A certain bishop remarked that "we manufacture Christians but life takes them away from us", because their cultural substrata were not converted.[3] It is quite clear that unless the African is reached at the core of his being, "religious concubinage" will continue.

There is another disturbing trend among the same people who behave in self-defeating ways on the basis of their religious or cultural heritage. The effects of "global village", cross-cultural communication and mass media seem to have had a way with the Africans in general. It is amazing to observe the erosion of many African cultural values, and the embracing of alien and negative values. There are places in Africa, for example, where it is no longer true that Africans have a high respect for their elders and parents. It is disconcerting because it looks like the minister or the teacher serves a people who are losing on both counts: They revert to traditional practices that negate their allegiance to Christ in times of crisis and need; Second, the mass media is powerful enough to push the

people out of those positive cultural values which enhance their loyalty to Christ.

The following section briefly explores what the Bible says about discipleship.

II. THE BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING

Christ gave a command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:15-20), including Africans. God's people, or Christ's disciples are to be made among all nations. What is happening to Africans in general indicates that there is a need for a new emphasis of discipling and ministering that will help African Christians to be authentic disciples of Christ. To avoid misunderstanding in connection with this, it must be stated that there are Africans who have become true disciples of Christ in spite of the odds associated with their culture. But many are still hijacked in their Christian experience. Hence, this essay. The biblical passage which spells out the mandate to make disciples is one that has already been referred to (Matt. 28:15-20). In the Revised Standard Version it reads:

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always to the close of the age.

This passage is a direct quotation from Jesus Christ Himself. It is a statement that is usually referred to as the Gospel Commission. The Gospel Commission as it reads in Matthew carries four verb forms, namely: poreuo (to go), mattheteuo (to disciple), baptizo (to immerse or baptize), and didasko (to teach or indoctrinate).[4] It is very significant that among the four verbs used the command or imperative is "to make" disciples. Three of the verbs are in participle forms and the one to make disciples is in the imperative. So, Jesus' command is "to make" disciples. The purpose of going is to make disciples, and so is the purpose of teaching and baptizing. Therefore the church should not focus on going and baptizing only as is usually the case. The wrong emphasis in some cases has resulted in too many baptized heathens. Kuhne makes a pertinent point when he states that "the focal point of the command is that the main goal is to make disciples."[5]

Disciple-making is also described as "learning," which goes beyond gaining insights "to a knowledge of morality so as to be able to act according to ethical principle." Thus a disciple who is fully learned will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40).[6] The goal in the Gospel Commission is to help people become more like Jesus Christ who is their teacher. This calls for adequate Christian formation to become authentic disciples of Christ. Writing along the same vein Watson quotes Cassidy: "Obedience to the Great Commission demands going beyond proclaiming to winning and discipling. We must not settle for pew-warmers, but for disciples."[7] The great event of the incarnation of Jesus must also translate into incarnation in missions. The Gospel must become flesh in the lives of men and women who have received it. Men and women who have become disciples are to be loyal to Christ, and they are the ones to be used by Christ to make more disciples. As Jesus was trusted enough to be sent o this world, disciples must also be trustworthy to be sent to this world. Jesus put it more concisely: "As the Father

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has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21).

The New Testament evangelists conceptualized the Good News of the Gospel as having transforming power to change lives. Paul said that when a person is in Christ he is a new creation, (2 Cor. 5:17). Something is wrong if those who receive the Gospel are not transformed. Believers in Christ (disciples) are to be qualitatively different even in a culture whose values are at cross-purposes with the biblical new order of being. By the mercy and grace of God, Christians are to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, (Rom. 12:1, 2). The Greek term used for transformation is "metamorphoo;" and its basic meaning has to do with changing into another form or image. Paul uses this expression to signify the moral/spiritual change whereby the believer is renewed to become like his Lord, (2 Cor. 3:18).

Disciples are what make up the church. The New Testament describes the church in numerous images which are very informative. For instance, the Body of Christ, the church is portrayed as a living organism, and not just a lifeless machine. It means that the church can adapt to varying circumstances and cultures without losing its identity. Thus, no culture or environment can impose its own value system on the church. There can be genuine disciples of Christ anywhere in the world and in any cultural context. Therefore, there should be a basic commonality among all the disciples of Christ , wherever they are. A likeness of Christ, and unquestioning obedience to Him should characterize all the disciples of Christ.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has taken the Gospel Commission seriously, and many people in Africa have responded positively. In examining the general Christian Church experience in Africa, however, one comes across certain aspects of the church's life which leave much to be desired. Seventh-day Adventists are no exception. The following section deals with the general experience of the church in Africa that needs to be addressed by serious Christian professionals and educators.

III. AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL COMMISSION AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH'S EXPERIENCE

Like many other Christian denominations, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a significant presence in Africa. On the basis of her unique ecclesiological self-understanding, the Adventist church has grown and has a presence in about 209 countries of the world. In Africa alone there are more than 3 million Seventh-day Adventists. It is the self-understanding and self-image that has kept the Adventist Church on the cutting edge of missionary advance. Moreover, it is a zeal that comes from the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:6-12. It boils down to a mission that prepares people to know God in the last days. Seventh-day Adventists must, therefore, remain on the cutting edge of making disciples for Christ.

In preparing people to meet God, the church must not settle for mere verbal proclamation. People must be taught how to become like Jesus and to be loyal to Him. The rapid growth of the church in Africa must be welcomed with gratitude and praise to God. However, this growth should not be a cause for complacency. Padilla warns about mere numerical growth: "In speaking of the numerical expansion of the church it is not out of place to ask what kind of church is being

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multiplied. It may be that such multiplication turns out to be a multiplication of apostasy."[8] It is tempting to be satisfied with many people coming into the church, yet neglect the aspect of complete maturity in Christ. Authentic Christian formation and discipleship should not be interpreted in terms of numerical increase of membership, but rather in inner spiritual maturity in Christ. Adventists must also heed the warning of one missiologist who says that "uncontrolled success could result in either undisciplined and unmanageable mixed multitude or baptized semi-heathenism, and such a situation could easily become fertile ground for schism and offshoot movements."[9] One wonders whether this has taken place already.

It is sobering to realize there is evidence that some aspects of disciple-making have not been adequately dealt with by the church in Africa. Many evangelical churches in Africa, including Adventists, need to improve the task of disciple-making. It is this aspect of culture that has not been adequately addressed for maximum benefit in the African church. African religiosity that informs African culture has been a major challenge to Christians helping professionals and African Christians themselves. Early missionaries and contemporary gospel workers fail to take African religiosity seriously. In general, the Christian faith that the African received, has not been sufficient for the religious impulse and need of the average African. Mbiti states: "Mission Christianity failed to penetrate deep into African religiosity."[10] Van Der Walt and many other scholars also seem to concur with what Mbiti observed much earlier. He indicates that by refusing to take seriously the African's religion and worldview, the gospel workers actually weakened the impact of Christianity in Africa.[11]

The weakness of the Christianity that many Africans embrace is manifested whenever times of crisis and deep needs surface. When crises come it becomes obvious that only the outer layers of a person have been changed and superficial Christianity has been received. The deeper core of the person is not touched and this leaves a person without the dynamics that lead to complete "transformation and all-embracing religion that influences all of life from a reborn heart."[12]

The religiosity of the African leaves him with spiritual yearning, not because the content of his faith is inadequate, but mainly because of the practice and experience of the religion that has been embraced. A religion that is practiced for only about 2-3 hours a week is inadequate for the African whose worldview is holistic and whose religion permeates every aspect of life.

The omission of crucial aspects of religiosity and culture in educating and evangelizing the African has had three major unfortunate outcomes: First, there has been a proliferation of what used to be termed African Independent Churches. The new term for this is Africa Instituted Churches. Numerous such churches have mushroomed all over Africa and continue to grow rapidly. Although these Africa Instituted Churches do not have correct doctrines and are quite syncretistic, they incorporate African religiosity and culture which appeals to many traditional Africans. Second, many African Christians remain in what Mbiti has already described as religious concubinage in times of crisis and need. They go for help to other religions or traditional helpers to satisfy a need or to solve a problem. This usually happens in times crisis connected with growth, sickness and death. Third, there is another unfortunate development whereby the values that enhance the African's Christian formation and morality have been abandoned. The following

section deals with those aspects of African religiosity that must be addressed in order to help African Christians to mature in Christ.

IV. ASPECTS OF AFRICAN RELIGIOSITY THAT HINDER CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND THOSE THAT CAN ENHANCE IT

A. Aspects of African Religiosity Which Hinder Maturity

In its approach to evangelism, the ministry and teaching the church has not been very successful in helping professing African Christians to be loyal to Christ. This is specially true in times of crisis. Gehman quotes Djongwe to emphasize the point that many African Christians do not have a mature biblical faith. Their immaturity manifests itself in times of suffering, sickness and death. Suffering and pain lead many Christians in Africa back to African traditional practices.[13] With all of this vacillation it is necessary to understand the underlying cause. Among aspects of African religiosity which hinder Christian maturity may be included the following:

1. General Orientation to Power

Ncube quotes Bucher who asserts that the main ancestor cult of Zimbabwe "is a religion that revolves around the quest for power - how to acquire and retain power for protection and prevention against the forces of evil."[14]

In one way or another this power must be acquired and retained. Many Africans believe that there are persons and other invisible entities who wield this power.[15] In the traditional African religiosity power is conceptualized as emanating from Mwari (God), territorial spirits, spirit mediums, and ancestral spirits.[16] The power acquired helps counteract other evil powers from avenging and alien spirits. Moreover, magic, demon possession, sorcery and witchcraft are mystical powers which must be counteracted and overcome. The traditional African will do anything to acquire the power to counteract other evil powers which they believe bring about misfortune and suffering.

When the traditional African ignores the clear word of scripture to consult with "experts" in manipulating power, he is actually seeking for power to counteract evil. There are some who are aware that their behavior is unbiblical , but they rationalize this by telling themselves and others that God helps those who help themselves.

Most students and observers of African religiosity concluded that the traditional African believes that what matters most is power. According to Gehman African Traditional Religion centers on man. The whole emphasis "is on man gaining power needed to live a good life."[17] It is not too surprising that the African who joyfully receives the Gospel quickly relapses to his traditional beliefs when the going gets tough. This person does what he does in search for power to alleviate suffering. In the traditional belief system there are mystical powers that cause suffering and there are also people whose work is to counteract the evils of mystical powers. Such "specialists" in counteracting evil mystical powers are to be consulted when misfortunes come. So, in order to deal with sickness, pain or death, certain rituals are performed and "specialists" are consulted. The painful

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reality is that there are many Christians in Africa who profess to be worshippers of the true God y, but secretly visit medicine-men and other specialists in times of crisis. Allegiance to Christ is then abandoned in times of crisis.

Recently, a prominent professor at the University of Zimbabwe stunned some Christians when he asserted that Christians must recognize Traditional Healer within Zimbabwe and in the rest world. This professor actually demanded that the World Council of Churches delegation which meets next month in Harare, Zimbabwe to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its organization must invite Traditional Healers Association members to participate. Professor Chavunduka told the nation in no uncertain terms that many Christians secretly visit them as traditional healers secretly. He said, they might as well go public and acknowledge that Traditional Healers have power, and that co-operation with them is vital.[18] This bold assertion, by a university professor who is an avowed traditionalist embarrassed many Christians. However, what this professor said with regard to with secret visits is true. Thus Christians need to take the challenge and re-examine their ways of discipling.

Even in normal everyday living there are other traditional practices that are religious to the core, but they affect many Christians negatively. Christians encounter challenges from African traditionalists in connection with rites of passage or rituals and ceremonies that have a religious significance, and have to be performed to mark each stage of growth. For example, rituals may be performed at birth, puberty, marriage and death to fortify the individual and the community. At puberty there are rituals to prepare the sexual organs as gates of life. Circumcision and the rituals that go with it signify readiness to be the channel of life which is a blessing from God. Appropriate rituals are performed at marriage, death or any other major event in a person's life. As already stated, all the ceremonies bear a religious significance.[19] Many Christians find themselves under pressure to comply with family rituals even if these rituals are not performed on them. Such Christians probably understand that what their family members practice may not be Christian. So, some of them compromise, while others participate with no pangs of conscience. There are a few who may stand for their new Christian faith, but such members of the family may actually suffer severe ostracism and loss of other social privileges. There are many lapses, and yet still, there is not much that has been done to address this reality.

Mystical powers even make the traditional African want to protect himself against evil powers. To the traditional African mystical powers are a reality although naturalists may deny them. In the area of mystical powers, the traditional African is closer to the Bible. The Bible shows clearly that mystical powers are real. The enemy of God, who is also the enemy of God's people, has many names, among them may be "Satan", "Devil", "Deceiver" and others. Satan is a real being who deceives and misleads human beings. He led the first human pair to sin (Gen. 3:5). God's people are warned about witches and sorcerers who are not supposed to be allowed to live (Ex. 22:18). In the Bible, practicing augury and witchcraft are forbidden (Lev. 19:26); spirit mediums and wizards were supposed to be stoned (Lev. 20:6, 27); all pagan practices were forbidden (Deut. 18:9-14). Furthermore, God's people are not to consult with those who deal in mystical powers of any kind (Isa. 8:19).

We read also in the New Testament that Satan is the adversary who tempts

people (1 Cor. 7:5). Satan can also perform wonders and signs and transform himself into an angel of light (2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:14). There are also other spiritual powers against whom we contend (Eph. 6:12). The passages referred to, and many others that can be cited, indicate clearly that there are supernatural and mystical powers. The power behind them is not always God's power, but another source of power. African religiosity makes many practitioners of the African traditional religion vulnerable to numerous Satanic forces. Because of fear to remain "naked" or without power many traditional Africans revert to the traditional ways of acquiring power. By vacillating between Christianity and African traditional practices, they make a mockery of the Gospel. Christian ministry and teaching must deal with this issue urgently in order to help many Africans become genuine disciples of Christ.

2. Conceptualization of Community

A strong sense of community also contributes to religious concubinage. There are no clear boundaries between religion and the typical Shona (Zimbabwean) culture. There is a "close family bond characterized by the phrase *mwana wamai (mother's child)* extending beyond even the visible family to include the unborn and the dead.[20]

What makes it good and bad at the same time is that in this type of arrangement a person belongs to the family, to the community and to the clan. A person exists corporately as a member of the extended family. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the corporate group. Mbiti rightly views this as the "cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man," that is 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.'[21] Thus, it becomes difficult for the individuals who have accepted the gospel to live a truly Christian life. The expectations of the family and community members put enormous pressure on this "individual" Christian to comply with those unchristian expectations and obligations pertaining to the corporate group. For example, if a young man marries and his wife gets a child, close relatives will expect "their" child to be protected from evil forces. The child belongs to the family of the living, the living dead and the unborn, and not to the young man and his wife only. If appropriate rituals are not performed and the child dies, the Christian individual may forever be ostracized from the community as one who behaves like a wizard or witch.

If an old man dies and is not buried according to stipulated family rituals, it is believed that misfortunes may follow and the living suffer severely. So, those who refuse to participate in family rituals because they are Christians experience severe suffering socially. At present there are not many who are willing to suffer ostracism. Many average Christians comply and compromise in order to belong. Unless, the Christian ministry and teaching address this aspect of Africa religio-cultural heritage, vacillation between Christianity and African traditional practices will continue.

3. Traditional African Worldview

There is not much that may be accomplished towards helping the traditional African unless his worldview is taken into consideration. Among the aspects of

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African religiosity, which contribute to spiritual hijacking, many African Christians is the aspect of worldview.

Among the basic elements that are identifiable in the traditional belief system include the following:

Belief in God
Belief in divinities
Belief in spirits
Belief in ancestors
The practice of magic, medicine, mystical powers
Sacred dogs, features and events
Rites of passage
Religious specialists and their functions
Sacred, social, ceremonial laws and prohibitions (taboos)
Belief in sacredness of interpersonal relationships and kinship

Individuals and communities operate within this systems, and to live a good life, harmonious relationships must be maintained with benevolent entities of power, and malevolent forces must be kept in check. The relationship between the community and the different entities of power is illustrated by Ncube [22]

THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENTITIES OF POWER

<u>Mwari (High God)</u>
(Good and Evil)

<u>Territorial and</u> <u>Family Spirits</u> (Good and Evil)	<u>Alien</u> <u>Spirit</u> (Good and Evil)	<u>Avenging</u> <u>Spirits</u> Evil
Diviners Healers Mediums	Individual/Community illness death Misfortune	Witches and sorcerers

Note: The evil that is meted out by Mwari and family
　　　ancestors against the living descendants is to be

　　　understood in terms of disciplinary judgment designed
　　　to maintain traditional relationships.

In this set up there are basically three constraints that make it difficult for the African to break ties with his people. First, there are evil mystical powers against which the African needs to be protected - there is no protection outside the community. Second, both Mwari (high God) the family spirits and ancestors may mete out a punishment as a disciplinary measure to the person who does not cooperate with the system and hierarchy. Third, the individual may not approach God directly and plead his own case. Divinities, spirits and ancestors

are the only mediators between God and the individual. So, the individual who seeks to make it autonomously does not seem to have a chance. The person must "tow the line" so to speak. This is a worldview which has not been adequately addressed by mission Christianity.

B. Aspects Which May Enhance Christian Formation

While African religiosity may greatly or seriously hinder authentic Christian discipleship, it carries some aspects which may be used to promote Christian character formation.

In its belief system African religiosity has cultural values which may be used to promote Christian character formation. It encompasses values such as respect for elders, love for community and solidarity, fellowship, hospitality, a sense of the sacred and many others. Unfortunately, the mass media and other forces have been successful in eroding the good from the African traditional system by embracing the negative from other alien cultures. Speaking from a missiological perspective James Okoye makes this point: "African solidarity, love for community, and respect for the aged as the most honored members of the family could be a significant contribution" by Africans to the world.[23] Thus, Africans could have maximized in order to internalize Christian values of love and care for other human beings.

1. The Value of Being Human - *Hunhu/Ubuntu*

In the typical Zimbabwean tradition there is an outcry against the eroding value of *ubuntu* (Zulu/Ndebele, an expression for being human) or *hunhu* (the Shona expression for the same). The terms *ubuntu* or *hunhu* really can not be translated into English. "The ideal Shona (munhu chaiye, 'real person') is humble, kind, ready to share with others and never greedy for more than is his or her due in life."[24] These expressions encompass a view of life with deep respect for people, and conditions that make life bearable. It emphasizes a spirituality of belonging to the community and to the soil itself.[25] The Christian church would be attractive to the African if it provided for this full expression of being human. African Instituted Churches have embraced the African religiosity, are thus winning over many traditional Africans. Why should mainline Churches allow doctrinally deviant movements to gain the upper hand in meeting human needs?

2. Community Solidarity and Respect for Life

Africans are looking for a home church where they can experience solidarity with their fellow church members as they would family members. What Mbiti recognized as the African traditional view of human beings can be positive. He writes: "The individual can only say: `I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'"[26] This sense of inseparable bond with the community goes together with the sense of sharing, hospitality and a strong desire for truth and reconciliation when conflicts and fights occur. Again, Toit writes: "African societies are family centered. Human life exists only to be shared. This naturally incorporates the idea of extended family, where life is shared for whom you have

to take responsibility."[27] With this kind of system, the many orphans and widows, in Africa, are taken care of, and loneliness and alienation are diminished. Today Africa is a bleeding continent with many social problems such as tribalism and refugees. However, there might have been a difference if moral values inherent in the African religiosity were not allowed to erode.

These are some of the values that are inherent in the African religiosity that can enhance Christian formation. In light of what is happening among African Christians, and in the light of the Gospel Commission which must be fulfilled, what can the concerned church do? The next section is devoted to making practical suggestions for a mission-oriented church that seeks to accomplish the task which God has given them.

V. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR MORE ADEQUATE DISCIPLING

There is still much that the world church can do to help the maturing church in Africa to be truly rooted in the African soil, yet still maintain its identity.

A. The Church Must Establish A Sound Theological Framework

It is critical to address the aspect of the shaping of the church in Africa. Those who are called to be ministers of the gospel must be adequately educated and prepared to enable the church to discover its identity, direction and mission in the world.[28]

The education and preparation of ministers must be adequate to enable the church to reflect and cope responsibly, and to accomplish its God-given task. As de Gruchy further points out, "Theological insight often arises out of struggling with the meaning of Christian faith at critical moments in the life of the church, moments when the Biblical tradition and its symbols come alive with new transforming power. But the process should be going on all the time in the regular life of the church, otherwise congregations remain theologically dormant and undirected in their pastoral practice and mission... Theological education thereby becomes a dynamic process."[29] Although de Gruchy is concerned about a different issue, what he says applies in principle to the traditional African setting where the practical theologian contends with painful realities.

Theological education on the African continent is led by the Holy Scriptures, but the different methods of expressing it still reflect concerns of culture which may not matter much to the average African. For example, Africans pastors rarely deal with naturalism or liberalism. They mainly have to deal, with the abundance of religiosity that hijacks their commitment to the Christ they so gladly accept. Pastors in Africa have to deal with the issues of plural marriages, mystical powers of witchcraft, demon possession, sorcery, ancestral fears and other mystical powers. Traditional Adventist interpretation of prophecy used to specify three major forces that will lead to major deceptions of the last days namely: Roman Catholicism, Apostate Protestantism, and Spiritualism. It may not be wrong to point out that what will be a major snare among Africans is the third force, which has to do with supernatural powers that are opposed to Christ. Theological education that is contextually relevant will produce pastors and laity who will help fortify the saints against the deceptions of these last days. The curriculum of

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theological institutions must be strengthened so that it addresses the stated issues, and reflects the genuine need in the fields in Africa.

B. The Church in Africa Must Provide a Forum for Exploring Facilitative Ideas

It has already been indicated elsewhere that serious engagement in missio Dei calls for active as well as reflective engagements. Pastors and other church professionals must be reflective practitioners. Therefore, there is a need to provide a forum for thinkers who can adequately reflect on the realities of Africa that affect African Christians and come up with facilitative action plans which will adequately address the realities of the African experience. The Institute of Christian Teaching, organized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist is a good example of what can be done to equip and sharpen the skills of church professionals to minister more effectively. For any one who is fully aware of the painful realities that face African Christians the time is long overdue to get to the root of the challenges and address them in a Christian way. The church in Africa cannot mature fully in Christ if the issues that affect it are not addressed. Both the Education and Ministerial Departments of the church may have to come up with appropriate manual for the church in Africa that can be used to instruct baptismal candidates on issues like those that I have been highlighted.

C. Construct a Biblical-Undergirded Framework of Ministry That Includes Healing, Exorcism and Other Special Services

It has already been stated that the current modus operandi of the church does not adequately meet the needs of the who profess Christianity in Africa. Involvement as educator of Church professionals makes one see the a need to include or re-emphasize special services like healing, exorcising demons and helping people manage crises in a Christian way. African Instituted Churches have been doing it, and it appears to be one of the secrets of their "success."

Studies in the Gospels actually show that Jesus Christ Himself engaged in holistic ministry as specified in (Luke 4:16ff). In some ways we must admit that the African Instituted Churches have been doing what the Bible teacher. By incorporating healing and other ministries they have built on what has been termed "African religio-cultural heritage," and the church can also do a good job of it. We can lay hands on the sick and

pray for them as spiritual leaders and church members so that the sick may be healed. Those who are possessed by demons and mystical powers that warp and twist human life may also be liberated through the power of prayer. It is not enough for us to be strong only in proclamation--teaching and preaching, but also must serve in tangible ways and provide a warm fellowship that is an antidote against lapses into spiritual diseases.

Douglas Chalale, a contemporary veteran Adventist pastor suggests, that Adventists can expand their ministry since they have counsel and guidance to do so. Thus ministries such as healing, baby dedication, crisis management, seed-sowing and harvesting, casting out demons may be re-emphasized in order to reach the African mind.[30] Chalale quotes Ellen White to support his argument for

expanding our ministry.[31] So, as Adventists, we have the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White which inform us about the different approaches to ministry. If the blue print followed, there might have been a major difference. Traditional Africans would have seen us as a church with a theology that is relative to their lives and all their problems.

As has already been pointed out, traditional Africans are oriented to power. Missiologists tell us that this seems to be the characteristic of people of the developing world which includes Africa. Charles Kraft tells us that the "power focus" is common in the developing world. He goes on to point us to a ministry that does not compromise with truth and allegiance to Christ, yet demonstrates that Christ is more powerful than all the powers of the world combined.[32] Kraft further refers to biblical examples such as Moses before Pharoah and Elijah before the prophets of Baal. The devil must not be the only who manifests power. God has superior and ultimate power and His people can ask Him to do great things through them.

D. Introduce Culture Education in Institutions of Learning

From the elementary to the university level culture education must be a part of the curriculum. Many Christian professionals find themselves a sea of trouble as they endeavour to educate and minister in some cultural contexts. They cannot deal with cultural problems because they don't know or understand the particular culture. Therefore, it is vital to know and understand the culture of the people to whom they are ministering to for the sake of effective ministry. A knowledge of the culture can be a hindrance to Christian discipleship, but it can also enhance discipleship.

Jacobs' statement concerning culture is pertinent: "The believing community will identify and confront those aspects of culture which are detrimental and not consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[33] The detrimental aspects of culture must be rejected by the Christian, and the evils, thereof, exposed. In the same manner "the believing community will affirm those aspects of culture which please Jesus Christ."[34] This can not
be successfully done unless those ministering know and understand the culture.

It would also help if institutions of high learning in Africa would have departments of African studies or centers for African studies so that the students in those institutions acquire the necessary skills to minister effectively.

The knowledge and understanding of African culture becomes even more crucial today since, there is obviously a revival of African Traditional Religions. It has been said that Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, in his zeal to restore the African "soul", went to extremes by replacing prayer at Parliament with the pouring of a libation to the ancestors.[35] In the new South Africa Traditional Religions are being revived, and African Traditional Religionists are now given a chance to practice their religion and conduct services on national television. Christians are shocked as they see it happen openly on TV. The revival of Traditional Religions is here, and those who have a shaky connection with Christ may not survive Christianity.

Some Christian leaders in other denominations have been advocating inculturation and contexualization of the Gospel. Inculturation and contextualization must be done responsibly and with the understanding that the dangers of

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syncretism and compromise exist. Christian professionals need to be fully aware of the possibilities of compromising the Gospel. While it is commendable to contextualize the Gospel, great care must be exercised in doing so in order to maintain the distinctiveness of the Gospel and to avoid syncretism.

What Rasi proposes as responsible approach to culture may be quite helpful. He proposes that the approach must: (1) Nurture a biblical worldview that includes the Great Controversy motif; (2) Seek a critical engagement with the surrounding culture which requires balancing separation, affirmation, transformation and contribution; and (3) Studying God's Word, praying for discernment and listening to the insights of other committed Christians.[36]

E. Introduce Structured Post-Baptism Growth Lessons.

Many people who are baptized into the church are spiritually too young to understand the implications of being a brand new child of God. Thus, there is a great need, especially in the African setting, to give the people who are baptized a structured program for them to grow to be mature Christians.

The newly baptized need to understand that when they are baptized they have taken an important step into a new life in Christ. In order to grow, the spiritual life needs to be nurtured, just as the physical life. There are specific items of the spiritual diet which must be ingested to ensure a healthy spiritual life. For every baptized member, the church must have a structured program, which should never be overlooked. This program should consist of a series of lessons which deal with specific areas of growth in the new life of the Christian person. For example, a person may need to be taught how to relate to the new family of Christ and to the newly baptised person's own nuclear or extended family. Furthermore, some of the newly baptized may be students or employees in private or public sectors. So all these areas of involvement need biblical guidance and instruction as to how the new person in Christ can relate to them.

Structured lessons should draw from insights from spiritual theologians. For instance, concepts from what is described as spiritual direction may be applied in helping new members to mature in Christ. Barry and Connollys define spiritual direction as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication with him or her, to respond to this personally communicating with God, growing in intimacy with this God, and living out the consequences of the relationship.[37]

According to this definition the ministry of spiritual direction comes under the category of what the Bible depicts as the purpose and obligation of the church to its members. Barry and Connollys actually see spiritual direction as a core in Christian ministry from which "all forms of pastoral care should radiate."[38]

Although there are controversial issues concerning the ministry of spiritual direction, it must be kept in mind that all Christians need guidance and direction as they grow in their experience with Christ. It may be that the biblical intent of what it means to help one another in the spiritual journey is not understood and, therefore, misapplied.

The New Testament gives us a mandate for helping one another in the spiritual journey. Jesus Christ taught and modeled spiritual direction. And in various images and parables He taught spiritual growth. Such teachings

presupposed a need for a process that brings about growth. It is also clear from the New Testament that Jesus called His disciples and guided them spiritually. There are numerous references in the New Testament which indicate that Jesus was a spiritual director to both individuals and to groups. It is not uncommon to read about Jesus' one-to-one conversations with others for spiritual reasons. People like Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the Woman of Samaria (John 4:7-26), and many others are good examples of this approach to ministry.

When Jesus gave the "Gospel Commission" He used expressions which suggested a need for the process of spiritual direction. He commissioned the disciples to go out in order to make more disciples, as was pointed out earlier. His main emphasis is on making disciples, which are made through the process of spiritual guidance and discipline.

Paul also promoted spiritual direction, guided those who were young in the faith, and gave instructions on spiritual maturity. Paul's concerns for spiritual maturity among believers are exhibited in different ways. His letters to churches and individuals are, in some ways, spiritual guidance. To the Ephesians, for example, he expressed a desire to see members of the family of God filled with the fullness of God, formed in Christ and grounded in love (Eph 3:14-19). Paul prayed that they would attain the spiritual goals as specified in this passage. In building up the Church as a people, there should be an ongoing structured program of directing and guiding. Discipling is another popular term now popular in Christian circles, and making disciples, or discipling is also a must for the African church. Kuhne summarizes the process of making disciples by pointing out that the single most important factor affecting disciple-making is "the role of the fellowship of Christians, the body of Christ, in the effective growth of a new Christian."[39] Thus, the following section addresses the importance of fellowship in the church.

F. Promote the Fellowship Dimension of the Church

A word needs to be said with regards to the importance of fellowship that enables every person to feel at home in the church. The imagery of the church as the body of Christ, and of Christ as the head of the church convey a profound message in connection with corporate nature of the church. Such images are reminders that the church depends on Christ, and that there is interdependence and mutuality among church members who constitute the body of Christ.

There should be a bond of fellowship and communion with God and with one another. God Himself establishes this fellowship. John mentions the Christians' fellowship with God the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). And Jesus also declared that He is in His Father, that Christians are in Him, and that He is in them (John 14:20). The same message comes from (John 15:1, 5) where Jesus says that His Father is the vine-dresser while He is the vine, and that Christians are the branches. This imagery tells us that God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and members of the church are to live in community and intimate fellowship with God and with one another. The church as a community, established by God to accomplish God's redemptive purpose, is the matrix for the formation of the spiritual life. God created life in such a way that it requires community. Thus, the

church is sometimes referred to as the intentional community. Schramm says: Intentional community gives us the possibility of experiencing ourselves as part of a people—a people affirmed, forgiven, and gifted. In such places we don't lose ourselves in some corporate identity. We find ourselves as unique persons but freed from the individualism so prevalent in our culture.[40]
Thus the need for community to facilitate spiritual development is affirmed here.

The universal need for community is felt acutely in most African communities. It is recognized, for instance, that technology has had a way of depriving people of human community. High tech and other modernizations have led to the loss of support in human community. It is, therefore, important that the church become an intentional community to replace the extended family system which has been eroded. Daneel underlines a need for koinonia, or fellowship, in the African setting. The "need for warmth and fellowship is not only a spontaneous religious impulse among Africans, but expresses a yearning in the midst of the disruption and confusion of modern Africa."[41] The church needs to be aware of this and maximize on the fellowship dimension to be relevant and facilitative in Africa. Many Africans join independent movement churches, or Africa Instituted Churches to meet their need for emotional security and certainty which these movements provide. Africans need a "place to feel at home" in the sea of an alien environment of the modern technological civilization.

A combination of intentional establishment of new members into the warm fellowship with other members of the body of Christ and specific spiritual direction can enhance discipleship. The present situation in Zimbabwe and most parts of Africa can be described as religiously fertile. People in Zimbabwe are highly receptive to the Gospel. It must be borne in mind also that receptive people are quite vulnerable to other alien ideas and counterfeits of genuine spirituality. Religious fertility in Zimbabwe needs careful cultivation.

A recent development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe is quite revealing. It is the development of what is termed "ZUNDE"[42] The movement that grows by this name is a lay movement which is growing by leaps and bounds, and it is winning many souls into the church. The theology of the movement has left much to be desired, and the administrative unit of the church has had to take steps to help curtail proliferation of distorted theological ideas. The phenomenal growth in membership of the church has left the Adventist church in Zimbabwe with at least one major lesson: the mainline church has not capitalized enough on the richness of the African culture as Zunde has done. Like numerous African Instituted Churches, Zunde may be commended for having succeeded in adapting its religious expression to the culture of the people. When one lay person was asked by the writer of this essay as to why he was involved with Zunde, his answer was: "There is comradeship in Zunde. One senses spiritual warmth in Zunde meetings." The main church must learn a lesson from Zunde in connection with what is of fundamental concern in this whole essay, and that is to engage in Christian ministry of teaching/preaching, service and fellowship that will bring about , not a doctrinally orthodoxy church, but also one that is relationally sound with members who truly feel at home in it.

17
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This essay shows that inherent in the African religiosity are cultural dynamics which throw a serious challenge to the church that seeks to be obedient to Christ and make disciples for Him. The essay calls for a fresh but responsible examination of selected aspects of the African religiosity/culture which hinder authentic Christian commitment. Christian education in Africa is not accomplishing its purpose if it does not address the traditional African worldview and the cultural dynamics which go with it and affect disciple-making in one way of the other. Bengt Sundler was concerned about a number of issues that affect the Christian ministry in Africa. Among the issues that he discussed was one of tribalism. He pointed out that the best way to fight tribalism is to sublimate it by emphasizing that the Christian church is the new tribe or family of God.[43] African religiosity is one of the challenges. The best way to deal with African religiosity is to sublimate it by replacing it with genuine and satisfying Christian experience and practice.

Christian educators in Africa cannot afford to turn a blind eye to that which hinders Christian discipleship as some of the African cultural aspects do. They must maximize the discipling of Africans by using the cultural aspects that enhance the development of genuine Christian values. It is of crucial importance, now that we better understand the methods of teaching faith, to deal with realities that affect the development of that which Christian education seeks to enhance - a truly Christian character. The world church, and the universe as a whole, have yet to see more disciples being made for Christ in Africa. If the realities connected with African religiosity are adequately addressed, there will be an emergence of sons and daughters of God who are anchored in Christ, and who are the beautiful flowers as a result of the seeds of the Gospel that have been sown and have germinated in the African soil.

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NOTES

1. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* (Nairobi: Heineman, 1969), 2.
2. Mbiti, op. cit. 264.
3. R. Bureau, *Essays in Christianity in Africa,* 180. See also Mbiti, op. cit.p. 108-109.
4. These Greek definitions are taken from G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual of Greek Lexicon of the New Testament,* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921).
5. Gary Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Disciple Training,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 12.
6. D. Muller, *"Disciple"* in Colin Brown (ed.) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* 3 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company), 2:483-490.
7. David Watson, *I Believe in the Church,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 307.
8. Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 33.
9. Russell L. Staples, "Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the 80's," *Servants for Christ: The Seventh-day Adventist Church Facing the 80's,* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1980), 120.
10. Mbiti, op. cit., 233.
11. Van Der Walt, *A Christian Worldview and Christian Higher Education,* (Potchefstroom, Republic of South Africa: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1991), 8.
12. Ibid. 9.
13. Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religions in Biblical Perspectives,* (Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989), 20.
14. Hubert Bucher, *Spirit and Power:An Analysis of Shona Cosmology,* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15. (See also Z. M. Ncube's "Ancestral Beliefs and Practices: A Program for Developing Christian Faith Among Adventists in Zimbabwe" A Doctor of Ministry Project, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1988), 57.
15. Bucher, 189.
16. Ncube, 62-67.
17. Gehman, 50.
18. This statement was published and broadcast through the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation on November 15, 1998.
19. Gehman, 20.
20. S. A Thorpe, *African Traditional Religions,* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994), 52.
21. Mbiti, 108.
22. Ncube, 61.
23. James C. Okoye, "Mutual Exchange of Energies, Mission in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An African Point of View," *Missiology* Vol. XXV, October, 1997, 474.
24. S. A. Thorpe, *African Traditional Religions,* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994), 53.
25. Cornel du Toit, "African Spirituality and the Poverty of Western Religious Experience", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* 100. March, 1998, 49.
26. Mbiti, 108, 109.

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27. Toit, 49.

28. J. W. De Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis.* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 125.

29. Ibid., 146.

30. Douglas Chalale, "The Challenge of the Year 2000," *Journal of Adventist Thought in Africa,* Vol 1, November, 1995, 25-28.

31. Ibid. (A number of Ellen White's works are cited like: *Testimonies for the Church* Vol 9, 112-113; *Welfare Ministry,* 325-326; *Sons and Daughters of God,* 279; *Ministry of Healing*), 143-144.

32. Charles Kraft, "Allegiance, Truth and Power Encounter in Christian Witness," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly,* 27:258-265.

33. Donald Jacobs, *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Missions,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 242.

34. Ibid.

35. Gehman, 22.

36. Humberto Rasi, "Adventists Face Culture: Should We Love or Hate the World," A Paper presented at the 23rd International Seminar on Integration Faith and Learning, University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, November 22-December 4, 1998, 5-7.

37. William A. Barry and William J. Connollys, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 8.

38. Ibid, 44.

39. Kuhne, 145.

40. John Schramm, "Intentional Community and Spiritual Growth," *Word and World 8,* No. 1 (Winter 1988): 52.

41. Inus Daneel, *The Quest for Belonging* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), 272.

42. "Zunde" is a Shona word that is not translatable to English. It carries the idea of members of the community working together to help someone accomplish the task he/she is engaged in. Thus, each member of the community may invite members of the community of his/her "Zunde." After 1980 some Seventh-day Adventist lay persons organized themselves into a "ZUNDE." They added a phrase "RA MWARI" (of God) to the phrase in order to show that it was a "gathering together in service to God."

43. Bengt Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa,* (London: Charles Birchall and Sons, 1962), 57.

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