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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
MAY 2023



## CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Problem and Response Statement.....	7
Definitions.....	12
Delimitations .....	13
Assumptions.....	14
Subproblems .....	15
Setting of the Project.....	16
The Importance of the Project .....	28
The Importance of the Project to the Researcher .....	28
The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry in the USA .....	31
The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large .....	36
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION.....</b>	<b>37</b>
Narrative Genre of Genesis 1 .....	37
Key Characteristics of a Narrative .....	40
Genesis 1 – Narrative Analysis .....	43
Key Elements of the Creation Story.....	45
Cultural Creation Stories .....	47
Alternative African Creation Stories .....	48
Comparing the African and Hebrew creation Narratives .....	49
African Myths About the Physical and Immaterial.....	52
African Creation Myths .....	55
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RELEVANT LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>72</b>
Narrative Literature.....	72
Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Narratives .....	76
Interpreting the Bible in a Cultural Context .....	84
Cultural Perspective and Illustration .....	91
African Worldview on the Bible and Creation .....	99
African Myths on Creation Stories.....	109
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS.....</b>	<b>113</b>
Research Methodology and Approach .....	113
Research Instruments.....	114
Project Overview.....	114
Interviews .....	116

Theological – The Way the Bible was Taught, Interpreted, or Applied Was Not from an African Perspective.....	118
Cultural- Western Ways Being Imposed on Shona People .....	122
Political - Losing Access to the Best Land.....	126
Prejudice - Missionaries Looking Down on Africans or Mistreating Africans.....	127
Shona People Can Transform and Re-Write Their Theology.....	137
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>118</b>
Finding 1: Challenges faced by Pastors .....	118
Culture and Worldview.....	144
Racial Supremacy.....	147
The Gospel and Violence on Black People .....	150
Before the Invasion.....	152
Colonial Perspective of Africans as Animals .....	153
Totems (Animal names as identity for different clans).....	155
The Challenge of Syncretism.....	159
Language Barrier.....	161
Fighting for Freedom.....	163
Shona Kings and the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe .....	165
Analysis .....	168
<b>CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>171</b>
Strength and Weakness of the research.....	171
Weaknesses of the Project.....	175
Suggestions for Improvement.....	180
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS .....</b>	<b>187</b>
Personal Growth .....	187
Further Study .....	192
Conclusions and Recommendations .....	198
<b>APPENDIX A. COLONIZED AFRICAN COUNTRIES .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>APPENDIX C. CONSENT FORM FOR LEVEL 3 INTERVIEW RESEARCH...</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>203</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. How Milk Droplets Created the World.....	56
Figure 2. Image of the kingdom of great Zimbabwe (The house of stone) before colonization. ....	167
Figure 3. Nyatsimba Mutota, the first King and the queen of the Shona people, modern-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and Malawi. ....	168

### ABSTRACT

The African Shona have yet to find a religion that accepts and cherishes their spiritual and cultural heritage. A theology that accommodates their social and cultural progress while allowing them to express their cultural evolution and practices is needed. As Zimbabwe was colonized by the British from Britain or the United Kingdom in Western Europe, this research will investigate if British colonial periods impacted traditional Shona perspectives about God, beliefs, humanity, and their role in the context of globalization. Christian Shona Africans are still undergoing an identity crisis due to the unfavorable concepts and actions of British colonialism as well as the actions of some missionaries. Because Africans are no longer an afterthought when it comes to Bible study and attempts to establish theology on the continent, the research will strive to suggest that there be an endeavor to create a theology that correctly recognizes the Shona African people's spiritual and cultural history. That is, Shona African people should communicate their Christian philosophy and theology in culturally relevant ways. If the gospel is to be authentically proclaimed in Africa, Africans must have the freedom to read and reinterpret the Bible in light of their culture and worldview within the confines of the scriptures. This includes seeing significant individuals and events in the Bible from an African perspective while combining narratives or storytelling, African customs, and traditions that have been altered to fit within their cultural framework and given access to their African narrative worldview.

## DEDICATION

My thesis committee has been crucial to my development as a scholar, person, and theology student. Dr. Eric Bryant, chair of the committee and thesis advisor, deserves my gratitude. I appreciate his encouragement and support on this path. I am grateful to Dr. Andre Ong for encouraging me to follow my ambition and interest in African Theology. I was blessed to have Drs. J. Carroll, J. Parolini, and K. Scorgie as mentors and role models; they taught me the complexities of conducting quality research. My gratitude to Drs. T. Mucherera and G. Muzorewa for their assistance. Dave Berryman and has worked tirelessly to assist me with this endeavor. I appreciate the patience and support of my husband, Archie, and my children, Nash and Michelle. My husband's counsel and involvement have been helpful to me in all of my endeavors.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Problem and Response Statement**

The problem this project will address is understanding ways to culturally adapt the gospel to be understood from an African worldview, with specific reference to Zimbabwe.

In response to this problem, the researcher will a) explore the Culture and cultural relevancy found in Genesis, b) review relevant literature on the African worldview on creation in narrative theology, c) conduct qualitative research through interviews, and d) identify methods to culturally adapt the gospel, so that it is understood through an African narrative worldview.

The difficulty this research will attempt to comprehend is how to culturally transform the Christian message so that it may be comprehended from an African perspective, with specific reference to Zimbabwe. The British colonized Zimbabwe, a nation in Southern part of Africa, to seek power and influence over the local Shona people. Following them came the missionaries, who, legend has it, were sent to preach Christianity to the dark continent of Africa. The most pressing or prominent issue is the potential role of missionaries in colonization. The events that transpired during the rule of colonial oppressors the British, who imposed their worldviews with the help of missionaries, represented their perspective of the indigenous proprietors of the land they colonized. The Shona people of Africa were viewed as "primitive, savage, primordial, creatures to be tamed, educated, directed, opened, and altered by British white European

colonial masters through western science, Religion, civilization, trade, and colonialism." The indigenous Shona Africans have been making substantial contributions in a range of disciplines for thousands of years, long before the arrival of British colonizers.

The Shona people lost faith in missionaries during colonialization, on the other hand it is true that the missionaries introduced some good to the Shona people, leading to a greater respect for Christianity but this is not the focus of this study today. This research will try to investigate ways to culturally adapt the gospel to be understood from an African worldview or in an African context. The research will try to look at historical biblical belief systems and the African worldview, heritage, and way of life in order to address the influence of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the practice of biblical interpretation.

Knowing what is meant by "culture" is crucial to this research, because there is no use in conducting this research if we fail to account for cultural differences. Maybe the single most influential factor in interpersonal communication is the cultural setting in which the parties involved operate. Culture provides an organizing principle for how individuals learn to feel, think, and act in response to their surroundings. Cultures are acquired during a person's life, not at birth, therefore giving identity to each individual. Culture is teachable, people learn how to think, feel, and act via their interactions with others and by the language they use. Culture, however, has a peculiar effect on interpersonal behavior. While most of us don't give much thought to our cultural backgrounds, they still shape our every sentiment and action.

The concept of culture is understood variously in each language. A person who is fluent in both Shona and English, for instance, is aware of the challenges inherent in

translating certain terminology. As English does not make use of vocabulary from Shona culture, the researcher can convey more information by using Shona rather than English. A person's conversational style might be influenced by their surroundings. The cultural, environmental, social-relational, and perceptual settings, as well as the spoken and nonverbal signals exchanged between individuals, are the most essential characteristics of a communication context.

The African worldview is the expression and embodiment of African philosophy and perspective. Afrocentric ideas and worldviews are reflected in and articulated through African cultural expressions. As African Christians, they have a worldview that distinguishes between cultural and ideological differences; they are a part of this worldview and of who they are. As a people, they combine Christian beliefs with those of their indigenous Shona culture. The problem was not simply the imposition of Western culture by missionaries; it was also the wiping out of indigenous peoples' histories and traditions and cultural practices.

Hence, Christians should not really substitute their values and customs for those of other faiths and cultures. Differences in culture and perspective are explored within the African worldview. The Shona has a uniquely African perspective on life notwithstanding their Christian faith. They incorporate Christian teachings and traditions into their everyday lives. Thus, a Christian's worldview should be expanded to include how their cultural identity and rituals contribute to and point toward God's larger kingdom.

Because of colonialism, many Africans have been informed that they have not contributed to global culture. They have been led to believe that Africans or the Black

race have nothing to offer or contribute to the improvement of humanity in terms of the historical development of biblical studies. Unfortunately, whenever they publish academic publications employing the methods of African Biblical Studies, they are criticized as fetishistic, mystical, barbaric, and unscholarly. Hence, ancient Egyptians could not have been Black Africans. The belief that Africans had nothing to do with the story of redemption, despite their widespread presence and significant contributions to the Bible, is another example. The researcher seeks to encourage Shona Africans to re-read the Bible from an Afrocentric perspective. Interpretation is contextual because it is always performed within a particular situation. It means that the African worldview and culture be considered when reading the Bible

The goal of this research is not to impose the gospel on Africans, but rather to see how they would adapt if provided with a familiar narrative. Based on Scripture, a way of seeing God's story in connection to people and all creation is through the perspective (point of view) of a group or an individual. The researcher's objective is to discover more about the theological framework of African Christianity so that the body of Christ may better serve Shona African people, many of whom are still resisting Christianity and blaming it for their current plight on colonialism by the British and Western culture. As a result, there is an urgent need to establish a new approach to interpreting the Bible in light of African cultural norms and values, including those of the African Shona people of Zimbabwe. Understanding the African worldview is critical to making an impact with the gospel in Africa, and because the narrative structure in an African way can be used to analyze the universe, help solve natural and physical phenomena, teach morality,

preserve cultural values, and pass on survival techniques, the narrative theology strategy appears to be one of the most important ways to break into Shona African culture.

When a nation or people are colonized, they incur losses that are difficult to compensate for even after they regain their independence "a breakdown of collective, social, and individual identity and history. Colonialism broke long-established Indigenous rights and traditions across Africa, but particularly in Zimbabwe, and imposed Western ideals and beliefs on the inhabitants. When civilizations are disrupted, reconstructed, and reinterpreted, people have lost contact with their history. As an oppressive force's efforts to eliminate traditional culture bear fruit, people grow progressively distant from their ancestors' customs and history. Because each new generation is indoctrinated with colonizer-brought customs rather than their historic roots, they are unable to assess their education and beliefs. The continuation of Western practices that have been effectively absorbed into Indigenous cultures, which have been accepted as social and cultural standards throughout the liberation fight and the departure of invading armies, may have ramifications for modern-day Zimbabwe.

The African voice of the African people is a vital contribution to the Global theological conversation, also the church as it stands according to the researcher currently stands like a half-finished song. Unless the global church embraces African contribution to the theological platform it will never realize Africa's full potential. Currently, the church leaves Africans yearning for more and it is time for the Africans to be given an opportunity to the global theological conversations.

### *Definitions*

Adapt – (Shanduka): to change one’s behavior to make it easier to function in a particular setting or set of circumstances.

African context – (Mashandisirwo murudzi rwedu): the circumstances that make an event, statement, or idea make sense and allow Africans to fully understand and evaluate the idea at hand.

Culturally relevant – (Zvinoenderan muchivanhu): the ability to interact with and engage other people in a manner that reflects their values, beliefs, and traditions.

Narrative theology – (Nhoroondo dzezvechitendero): According to Stanley Hauerwas, narrative theology is the study of the Bible through the lens of stories rather than facts. Rather than learning God’s laws, concepts, or facts from the Bible, narrative theology seeks to learn about and relate to God as the protagonist of a beautiful story in which we are to learn how to play our role.<sup>1</sup>

Perceiving – (Maonero): the ability to be aware of or feel or comprehend something.

Tradition – (Tsika ne magariro): the practice or adherence to long-established rules or procedures.

Myths – (Ngano, nhoroondo): A myth in an African context is a story that has been passed down through centuries and acts as a cultural touchstone for the present civilization in which it is still relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Jones, L. Gregory, *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 1-8.

Contextualize – (Kurongedza): Positioning anything or someone inside a certain context or perspective.

Riddles – (Zvirahwe): Riddles are a popular kind of art in most African tribes. They are simple yet lovely methods of stating a lot with few words. Riddles play an important part in African speech and debate.

Proverbs – (Zvirevo): Proverbs are simple traditional sayings that give advice based on real-world experience. They are typically in the form of metaphors or allegories. They are ubiquitous in spoken language and are part of folklore in many cultures.

#### *Delimitations*

The first delimitation is that the study will focus on Africans (the Shona) who have immigrated to the United States and live in Florida, North Carolina, Minnesota, Texas, and Pennsylvania. (The Shonas are primarily found in Zimbabwe and other bordering countries since colonization enacted borders without consideration of traditional boundaries that were in place before the arrival of Europeans in Africa). Zimbabwe was colonized by the British who came from United Kingdom or England).

The second delimitation is that the research will include interviews with Shona pastors who have served as missionaries to Zimbabwe between (1965-2022). These will all be Zimbabwean (Shona) African pastors who migrated to the United States of America. The pastors will dwell solely on the missionaries' flaws or errors, rather than their many accomplishments.

The third delimitation is that the literature review will focus on narrative theology sources by authors using, in particular, the narrative theology approach of Stanley Hauerwas. A narrative, according to Hauerwas, is the most efficient way of

comprehending and explaining previous events. He contends that the use of narratives enhances Christian theology immensely. This technique demonstrates why a narrative framework predominates in the Bible and is more helpful and suitable for an African context. This is because Hauerwas's narrative theology method is consistent with and relevant to Western culture and tradition and can function as a bridge to African culture and tradition.

The fourth delimitation is that it will not be discussing black theology and womanist theology which has roots in the United States.

The fifth delimitation is that this is a keyway to understand culture: African proverbs, sayings, and riddles will be employed as a source of theology, reinforcing local idioms, tales, myths, dramas, prayers, and theological concepts.

#### *Assumptions*

The first assumption is that Christianity should not be substituted for a new worldview and way of life. The African worldview examines the distinction between culture and perception; consequently, you are both African and Christian and have an African worldview. You integrate Christianity and culture as components of your identity. Christianity should extend a person's view so that they can see how their cultural identity and rituals fit within and even point to God's more expansive kingdom. This will help to remove the myth that people are integrating their beliefs or accepting Western Christianity. Africans characterize their thoughts and perspectives as their worldview as expressed and lived out through their culture. African culture expresses and embodies the African viewpoint, representing African values and worldviews.



The second assumption is that all the participants will respond truthfully to all questions.

The third assumption is that older Shona pastors will provide a view about theology that existed during colonialism and after the 1980 independence of Zimbabwe. This will help us to know the actual challenges faced by Zimbabwean African people.

The fourth assumption is that (Shona) Pastors who have worked as missionaries in Africa and the USA will be a great resource when they explain what challenges they faced when communicating the gospel. These pastors have witnessed firsthand the colonial period and post-independence in Zimbabwe, Africa.

The fifth assumption is that the church, as the body of Christ in Africa, will benefit from this research as they adapt to new methods of preaching the gospel of Christ.

### **Subproblems**

The first subproblem will explore the Culture and cultural relevancy found in Genesis.

The second subproblem will review relevant literature on the African worldview on creation in narrative theology. The focus will be on works about the Shona context in Zimbabwe and any other relevant literature from any other African context. The work of Stanley Hauerwas will also be highlighted.

The third subproblem will be to conduct qualitative research to better understand strategies used by local (Shona) African churches to spread the gospel, as well as the difficulties that make adaptation difficult. This research will be conducted through interviews.

The fourth subproblem is to use the information gathered to determine the best methods for culturally adapting the gospel so that it can be understood from a (Shona) African perspective.

### **Setting of the Project**

The setting of this project will include Shona pastors who were missionaries in Zimbabwe. These participants faced challenges and resistance to sharing the gospel among the Shona people because of the conflict between cultural and so-called Christian demands. They further claim that under the guise of the Christian faith, people have distorted and despised their own culture. Their claims are that Africans have lost their Ubuntu, a part of their history, due to Christianity from the West. The interviews will be done virtually or through telephone calls to those who are in other states.

Africa is home to tens of thousands of unique ethnic groups, each with its language and culture. Each of these ethnic groups has an extensive collection of traditionally and musically transmitted poetry, narrative, drama, and historical information. These oral traditions, which span centuries, constitute African literature. Shona people in Africa have always been wary of embracing Christian teachings because they regard it as an attempt by the West to impose their culture on them.<sup>2</sup>

Colonization of a country or a people results in losses that are difficult, if not impossible, to recover after the country regains its independence" a loss of communal, shared, and personal identity and purpose as well as history. The colonization of most African countries, particularly Zimbabwe, disturbed long-standing Indigenous rights and

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<sup>2</sup> Preben Kaarsholm, "Mental Colonization or Catharsis? Theatre, Democracy and Culture Struggle from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 246–275.

ceremonies, resulting in the imposition of Western beliefs and ideals. When cultures are disturbed, reshaped, and reinterpreted, people lose a sense of how life used to be.<sup>3</sup> The longer an oppressive force succeeds in eliminating traditional culture from the public, people feel further removed from their past and genealogy. They fail to question their education and beliefs as successive generations are taught new colonizer-brought practices rather than their ancient foundations. Western practices that have been successfully absorbed into Indigenous societies gradually come to be accepted as social and cultural standards, surviving both the liberation fight and the withdrawal of conquering powers.<sup>4</sup>

After a country has been liberated, the cultural legacies of colonization changes in the indigenous way of life remain. Religion is the most visible legacy that European settlers left in post-colonial Africa. While Christians have been traveling and spreading their views for millennia, colonialism in Africa throughout the nineteenth century expanded the scope of Christian missionary work. With European supremacy of the African continent, the Christian faith became the dominant and superior doctrine. Even after a nation has been freed from its oppressors, Christianity is still the center of African religion, with traditional philosophy surviving on the periphery.<sup>5</sup>

Missionary efforts in Africa have not contextualized the gospel. The relationship between the gospel and the local culture both now and in the past, is one of the most important parts of contextualization. The word “contextualization” summarizes how hard

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<sup>3</sup> Pathisa Nyathi, *Zimbabwe's Cultural Heritage* (Ascot, Bulawayo: Zimbabwe'ama Books, 2005), 34-42.

<sup>4</sup> Kaarsholm, 249.

<sup>5</sup> Kaarsholm, 250-251.

it is to adapt the gospel to different cultures. It also describes both the way to do it and the outlook that comes out of it. As a result, the gospel continues to remain “foreign” with Western baggage. The conventional reaction is that Christianity is a white man’s religion, and this is an exceedingly widespread belief in Africa. The basis of the resistance by the Africans to the gospel is based on the fact that Christianity came to Africa packaged together with colonization.<sup>6</sup>

People commonly say, “The difference between a colonizer and a missionary was that the colonizer carried only a gun, while the missionary carried both a gun and a Bible.”<sup>7</sup> Due to the fact that both colonizers and missionaries carried firearms, it was hard to distinguish between the two groups. Therefore, they argue that, in most instances, this was the tool used by colonizers. The Africans, therefore, became suspicious of the missionary and “his” gospel message, since he was seen as part of the colonizers and expansion of the European empires.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the gospel must be communicated to them in a way that is (free of the unintended consequences caused by the early missionaries) and understandable to the African perspective in their modern-day culture.<sup>9</sup>

This study will take an established theological tradition known as narrative theology (based on Hauerwas) and pivot it toward an African context. The researcher will examine narrative theology as a more proper approach to recontextualizing the gospel for Africa. As a collection of distinct kinds of writing, the Bible consists mainly of

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<sup>6</sup> Tapiwa N. Mucherera, *Meet Me at The Palaver: Narrative Pastoral Counselling in Postcolonial Contexts* (UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Tapiwa N. Mucherera, *Counseling and Pastoral Care in African and Other Cross-Cultural Contexts* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock press, 2017), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Mucherera, *Meet Me at The Palaver*, 24-27.

<sup>9</sup> Mucherera, *Counseling and Pastoral Care*, 123.

narratives. In fact, the primary way the Bible is put together is as a story, going through creation, the fall, redemption, and the end.<sup>10</sup> Some aspects of African traditional religion will also be used as “raw material” for theological, ethical, and spiritual manifestations in narrative theology.<sup>11</sup>

The creation story will take center stage. The book of Genesis is relevant to this project because it explains the universe and defines the meaning of existence, human nature, and uniqueness across cultures. Genesis contains creation myths that have similarities in the Shona African creation myths, as in other ethnic groups in Africa. The most significant portions of the Bible, including the creation of man, his fall, and his redemption, are revealed in Genesis. The Shona and Genesis creation narratives concur on two significant points: man was created by the direct action of God, and he possesses a part of God. The human race is more than just a physical creature that exists. God created humankind, carrying a portion of Himself (themselves).<sup>12</sup> As a result, life is highly valued throughout Africa, including Zimbabwe. According to Mbiti, the creation story is essential because it serves as the cornerstone for all humanity. The creation narrative is found and utilized in every culture. Every society has a tremendous need for creation myths, which are passed down from generation to generation and serve as a means of transmitting vital information about the community’s history, values, customs, inhabitants, and natural environment. The creation stories and myths of human cultures served enormous and crucial functions, making them indispensable to the Shona cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Hauerwas and Jones, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Hauerwas and Jones, 45-47.

<sup>12</sup> Dickson A. Kwesi and Paul Ellingworth, *Biblical Revelation, and African Beliefs* (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 65.

community. They have established the meaning of existence and explained everything in the cosmos. They have brought us joy and opened our eyes to the remarkable people and things in the world.<sup>13</sup>

There are different and diverse African views of creation. African myths begin with the genesis of humanity and assume that the world existed at its start. The preponderance of creation myths assert that heaven came before earth, but there is no prescribed order in which other things should have come into being. At least three African societies have been documented as possessing the concept of ex nihilo creation, and there may be others, but the concept appears to have been uncommon. The sun and moon are commonly revered in African traditions. According to the Balese people of Congo, the Ila people of Zambia, and the Gullah people of Ethiopia, the moon represents God's left eye while the sun represents God's eternity.<sup>14</sup>

The sun was unclear to the Shona people of Zimbabwe; they claimed it was God, while others claimed it was merely a manifestation of God. This uncertainty has been observed in various ethnic groups, including the Karanga, the Korekore, and others. Despite the ambiguity, African scholars disagree with the broad definition of "sun worship."<sup>15</sup>

Rain is a valuable resource that many African societies rely on. According to Mbiti, few communities "associate God with rain so intimately that the same word, or its cognate, is adopted for both." Shona people consider rain to be one of the gods. Rain, for

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<sup>13</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford, UK: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 47-61.

<sup>14</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 57.

<sup>15</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 41-44.

example, was considered as God's urine by people in Nigeria's Plateau State, while it was perceived as God's saliva by others. Rain, according to Mbiti, is always seen as a symbol of God's protection and providence for people and the environment. Throughout Africa, bodies of water are thought to be home to strong spirits or divinities.<sup>16</sup>

The Shona creation story and the two creation narratives recorded in the book of Genesis share certain parallels. As a religious group, the Shona believe that God is the supreme ruler and the creator of both the universe and humankind. This idea is fundamental to the Shona people's religious systems and is engrained in their beliefs. Certainly, this holds true about the value of human life. There is no mistaking that God created man in his image and likeness (Hebrew: *tselem, elohim*) from the very beginning (Genesis 1: 26-27). God formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, or a spark of Himself, in the second creation story so that he would come to be (Genesis 2:7).<sup>17</sup>

In many aspects, the creation myth from Genesis is essential and relevant to the Shona people. When we compare Genesis 1:1-3 to John 1:1, we observe that in the Creation, both God the Father and the Holy Spirit are identified. It is apparent that Jesus is the Word, and if God spoke the words that brought about creation, then the name of Jesus could have been one of those words. John authored his Gospel to demonstrate how Jesus fulfills Old Testament images. The majority of the chapters in Jesus' gospel serve as mirrors to indicate that he is the fulfillment of that Old Testament event. In Chapter 1, John illustrates how Jesus fulfills the Creation account in Genesis 1. We may see that

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<sup>16</sup> Mbiti, *Religions and Philosophy*, 51-54.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Agyarko Owusu, "God of Life, Rethinking the Akan Christian Concept of God in the Light of the Ecological Crisis," *The Ecumenical Review* 65, no. 1 (2013): 51-66.

John begins his Gospel by paraphrasing the first verse of (Genesis 1:1), “In the beginning...” Then, like the Creation myth, John compares Jesus to light entering darkness. John also begins to speak to Jesus as “the Word,” which connects us to Creation in Genesis 1.<sup>18</sup>

According to the Creation myth, God speaks everything into existence, implying that God’s word brought about the Creation. This material illustrates a trend confirmed by Paul in Colossians 1:13-14, which reveals that God liberated people from the domain of darkness and transferred them into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom people have redemption and forgiveness. He is the firstborn of all creation and the image of the invisible God, according to Colossians 1:15-16 points out that everything seen or invisible in the heavens or on earth, including thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, was created by Him. Everything was created by and for Him. According to Paul, the Person of the Godhead who performed the act of creation was Jesus. God created everything by himself. After looking over these points again, Jesus is the fulfillment of Genesis 1. (That is, Genesis 1 details point to Jesus.)<sup>19</sup>

God the Father and the Holy Spirit were present during Creation, according to Genesis 1. In John 1, Jesus is mentioned as being present at Creation as “the Word,” the One who spoke creation into existence. According to Paul, Jesus was the one who created everything. John 1 was written to establish that Jesus was the One who spoke at Creation. Because it was Jesus who said, “Let there be light,” John refers to Jesus as the Word to stress that Jesus was the Creator. Although Genesis 1 does not directly identify Jesus by

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<sup>18</sup> Maarten J Menken and Steve Moyise, *Genesis in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2012), 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> Menken and Moyise, 36-39.



name, John's Gospel confirms that he was present. In reality, he was the one who spoke.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Shona myth of creation, Man was fashioned partly from God or (Mwari, Musikavanhu), the Shona name of God. There, the male and female elements of God or (Mwari Musikavanhu) met and produced the first humankind. The Genesis creation tales or (Ngano) and the Shona creation myth have two significant points in common: a) That God or (Mwari, Musikavanhu) created man directly, and b) That man has a piece of God within him.

The human race is something more than a collection of biological organisms. God created human beings in his image or (Mwari, Musikavanhu) with a piece of God within him (themselves). Like the rest of Africa, the Shona holds life in high regard. The Genesis creation stories, and the beliefs of Shona communities inform our examination of the sacredness of human life in the Bible. For the sake of enhancing the standard of living in the African community, a comparison is crucial.<sup>21</sup>

Shona African communities have "myths" or (Ngano) about which we can learn. Africans teach using myths (ngano), passed down from generation to generation. According to the correct theological definition of mythology, it is "a story designed to teach a truth that is otherwise too complicated to understand." This is a made-up narrative, not a history lesson.<sup>22</sup> This is why many individuals believe a myth to be false. "This is much like Jesus' parables which were fictional stories told to make a point." The

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<sup>20</sup> Enoch J. Powell, "The Genesis and Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13, no. 42 (1991): 5–16.

<sup>21</sup> Owusu, 61–62.

<sup>22</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 122.

genesis myths or narratives are presented as history lessons, but the goal is to teach that everything originated with God. According to Shona African traditions, everything began with God, “Mwari” pronounced as, “MU-Ari” also known as “Musiki asina kusikwa,” “Nyadenga, Dziwaguru. “Ndiye Asina mawambo muwambi,” meaning “He who has no beginning or an end,” Zimuyendanakuyenda, “The everlasting and unending God,” all these are the titles of the creator in Shona.<sup>23</sup>

A great deal of traditional theology has been written in an attempt to examine, describe, and explain the biblical narrative, but it has yet to be published in the form of a narrative. Even though the Bible is a grand “narrative,” it has been argued that narratives are rarely presented in theology.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the academic writing style is more widely utilized. This critique contends that it frequently relies on a series of logical arguments to explain universal truths that are independent of time or place in the past.<sup>25</sup>

Narrative Theology readings are intended to demonstrate the concept of storytelling theology and to highlight its significance in Christian theology and ethics. After studying the use of narrative in numerous disciplines, according to Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones, the element of narrative has been used to explain why people do the things they do, to describe the formations of human consciousness, to show the identities of agents (whether they are human or divine), to explain how to interpret (either specifically for biblical texts or as a more general hermeneutic), to demonstrate

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<sup>23</sup> Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *Mwari, the Great Being God, God Is God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 83-85.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph G. Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 122-123.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth W. Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle, UK: HippoBooks, 2019), 34- 39.

the importance of “storytelling” often in religious studies by using the language of “fables,” and to demonstrate the importance of “storytelling.”<sup>26</sup>

The geographical setting would be limited to Zimbabwean Shona Pastors from Africa. Africa is the second-largest continent after Asia. It is surrounded by the Atlantic, the Indian, the Mediterranean, and the Red Seas. The Equator roughly divides it in half. Cape Verde, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and some of the islands that form the continent include Comoros. Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, is a landlocked nation in southern Africa. It shares borders with Mozambique on the northeast and east, Zambia on the north, Botswana on the southwest and west, and the Republic of South Africa on the south. The capital city of Zimbabwe is Harare (formerly called Salisbury). Its population is 15,436,173 people. In Zimbabwe, Christianity is the predominant religion. Thirty-seven percent of the population is Apostolic, 21 percent Pentecostal, 16 percent other, 7 percent Roman Catholic, and 5 percent another Christian, according to the poll.<sup>27</sup> The Shona people, who belong to the Bantu African group, are primarily found in Zimbabwe and parts of its neighboring countries due to artificial boundaries established by the British in the 1800s.

Bantus are so named because of their common ancestors and the shared meanings of some words in the Bantu languages and sociocultural similarities. Zimbabwe is located in Africa’s southernmost and middle regions. According to Africa’s established sociocultural norms across nations of Africa, you will find that the Shona people in

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<sup>26</sup> James O. Duke, review of “Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology,” by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. *Interpretation* 45, no. 2, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00209643000450022>;

<sup>27</sup> Mucherera, *Counseling and Pastoral Care*, 12.

Zimbabwe everyone is required to conform one's behavior to a predetermined set of guidelines. Some of the ethos emphasized in Shona culture are compassion, kindness, truthfulness, respect for the older people, covenant adherence, perseverance, the requirement for every girl and boy to keep their virginity or practice abstinence before marriage, and exceptional conduct. The Shona are very spiritual people who believe in the supernatural, as well as the visible and invisible worlds. The unseen world is a reality, and current encounters with spiritual or supernatural beings have reinforced this belief system. Many Shona, particularly Christians, are extremely spiritual. As a result, if you are a Christian, you must have an encounter with the unseen world at least once in your lifetime. If you do not have an experience with the supernatural on your altar of prayer, the Pentecostal refers to their congregants as lukewarm believers with no depth. As a result, knowing Shona Christians' identity involves understanding that they are extremely spiritual and believe in miracles, witchcraft, ancestral spirits, demons, angels, healings, visions, and experiences during worship.

The period from 1965 to 2022 was crucial for the study of Shona pastors who served as missionaries in Zimbabwe since it was at this time that colonizers and missionaries were most active and public hostility was at its highest peak. The Shona leaders educated at missionary schools, the majority of whom were preachers like the former president of Zimbabwe, John Nkomo, were responsible for starting the Chimurenga or Guerilla War in 1965. Among those who resisted colonizers included lay preachers. From 1980 – 2022, the church began and continues to grow because there were more Shona leaders who rose to take positions and fewer missionaries in positions of leadership in the church.

According to Mungazi, concerns regarding colonialism's impact on the Shona people's freedom, culture, and religion initially arose when Zimbabwe was conquered as Rhodesia in 1890. The British did not colonize Zimbabwe without opposition. Shona natives' resentment at Zimbabwe's colonization led to uprisings in 1896 and 1897. The formation of political organization by the Shona people and finally, a liberation war began 1965-1979 that ended in independence in 1980. The Shona people have been concerned about the effects of colonialism on their capacity to freely exercise their culture and religion and their overall freedom since the British began invading Zimbabwe in 1890.<sup>28</sup>

On November 11, 1965, Southern Rhodesia's minority-white government, led by Prime Minister Ian Smith, unilaterally declared its independence from the United Kingdom. This occurred when neighboring Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were governed by African-majority governments. When the white minority was in control, he issued the declaration of independence. The United Nations placed punitive sanctions on them in response to the incident, which sparked global indignation. In 1972, guerilla warfare was launched against the Smith administration. Robert Mugabe became the leader of the liberation ZANU-PF movement in the mid-1970s. Britain convened a conference of all the organizations involved in Rhodesia in 1979, where they brokered a peace accord and drew out a constitution for an independent Zimbabwe after the independence war intensified. The ZANU-PF party won the elections for independence from Britain, its former colonial overlord. On April 18, 1980, Robert Gabriel Mugabe became prime minister of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is the new name for the country that

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<sup>28</sup> Mucherera, 5.

replaced Rhodesia, which was named after the colonial ruler Cecil John Rhodes in 1889.

The term *Zimbabwe* means “the house of stones.”

Mungazi, a Shona historian, observes that the first two governors of colonial Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), Leander Starr Jameson from September 10, 1890 to April 2, 1896 and Earl Grey from April 2, 1896 to December 4, 1898 shared Cecil John Rhodes’ 1853-1901 beliefs about colonizing all of Africa and establishing British rule over the continent for at least a millennium. However, it was the other colonial official from William Milton, who served from December 5, 1898 to October 31, 1914 to Ian Smith, who served from April 1, 1964 to March 3, 1979. Ian Smith lived and operated in accordance with Victorian perceptions of Africans, causing the two racial groups to collide.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Importance of the Project**

#### *The Importance of the Project to the Researcher*

The researcher is highly enthusiastic about the study and feels strongly connected because she grew up in Zimbabwe. Regular churchgoers were vilified in the community as “sellouts” because of their perceived involvement with the “white man’s religion. They found themselves at conflict with their family members, who were regarded as “heathens” by those who had converted to Christianity. According to Stillwell, church attendance was frowned upon due to the ethnocentrism of the colonialists, which manifested itself in the manner in which Europeans treated Africans. While the African continent was being plundered for its riches, the colonial mission was viewed partly as an

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<sup>29</sup> Donald Sybertz and Joseph Healey, “A Narrative Theology of Inculturation-Evangelizing Through Proverbs, Sukuma Wisdom About Food,” *AFER* 26, no. 1-2 (1984): 70–74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581807>

endeavor to cure Africans of their primitivism. Christianity was a crucial component of their efforts to assimilate Africans into their more sophisticated ways of life. Stillwell claims that it was possible to rate the various human races from most primitive to most advanced on a scientific basis. This ideology contributed to the legitimization of European expansion by asserting that the conquest of Africa was predetermined by nature and science since Africans were inferior to Europeans. Even though these missionaries were not sent out as agents of colonial governments, Christianity can be regarded as a pacifying factor that allowed for Africans' colonization and cultural assimilation.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to understand identity in its broadest sense. Identity is made up of a person's or group's traits, beliefs, personality traits, actions, and/or words that show who they are. A person or thing's identity is what or how they are. Who you are to other people and how you see yourself are both parts of your identity. A person's characteristics, abilities, preferences, values or worldviews, and motivations are the four pillars around which their identity is built. Each of these contributes to a sense of security in one's own identity. Those who have a solid sense of self may confidently express these qualities. Mbiti highlights that the fact that Africans often have dark skin acts as a defining characteristic and a distinguishing feature. Other African cultural traditions and values include hospitality, goodwill, respect for elders and authority, the sanctity of life, the sacredness of religion, morality, language, myths, proverbs, and time, among others. African communitarianism is the root of almost all of the cultural ideas that people in Africa have. Africans, particularly those of Black African heritage, are renowned for their

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<sup>30</sup> Toyin Falola and Emily Brownell, *Landscape, Environment and Technology in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 68-73.

compassion, tolerance, and warmth and they are very welcoming. These characteristics explain why they were so open and receptive to colonialism and neocolonialism. Africans value their own selves in a spiritual sense, but they see themselves primarily as a resource for other people.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Western individualism and consumerism, African identity is founded on a sense of being with (Ubuntu), or communalism, rather than "collectivism." The family is central to what it means to be African. Racism, colonialism, and other Western concepts annihilated or destroyed the African worldview and cultural legacy.

According to the researcher, anything cultural was stigmatized, and most lay leaders and pastors frequently fought with the community's traditional leaders. Observing the opposition that arose whenever preachers preached the gospel, it was evident that they lacked an understanding of the African worldview, which was the very sense of identity, calling, and meaning. African worldview looks at the difference between culture and worldview, they are African Christians, they are both, they carry it, it is part of them, and it is part of their identity. They integrate both Christianity and Shona culture as part of their identity.

It was not just the imposing of Western culture by missionaries but also the eradication and erasure of culture and memory. The missionaries removed Africa's traditions but could not remove people's memories. They attempted to impose their culture, but it did not succeed since people were Christians in the afternoon but practiced their African rituals at night, to the detriment of their Christian values. Their objective was to conquer Africans first, and then the gospel would follow. Men were mostly targets

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<sup>31</sup> Mbiti, *Religions and Philosophy*, 94-104.



because they were the ones who went to battle, while women stayed at home caring for their families. As a result, after women were threatened with weapons, they yielded, and most of them attended church more than men. As a result, missionaries found their seats filled with women and children, mostly on Sundays, which continues to this day throughout Africa.

Conflict continued in the community because missionaries zealously preached and imposed what they considered these Africans ought to do. However, Africans began to reject the kind of Christianity that Europeans were spoon-feeding them and saw it as a method of obtaining their own freedom from their colonial oppressors over time. Africans disliked and opposed the conventional method of preaching the gospel because they believed they were being compelled to maintain a foreign culture Mburu highlights.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the researcher recognizes that in order to achieve a breakthrough with the gospel in Africa, we must first understand the African worldview before preaching to them, and narrative theology appears to be one of the most essential strategies for breaking into African culture because storytelling in an African way can possibly be used to analyze the universe, resolve natural and physical phenomena, teach morality, preserve cultural values, pass on survival methods, and worship God.

#### *The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry in the USA*

This study is important to ministry in the United States of America as it aims to stress to the church, the body of Christ, members, and leaders from distinct parts of Africa that presenting the gospel in a style that Africans have historically understood from ancient times would allow preachers and missionaries to penetrate the hearts of

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<sup>32</sup> Mburu, 51-53.

Africans. The purpose of this study is not to impose the gospel on Africans but to investigate how they might adapt if presented as a familiar story. A way of understanding God's story in relationship with humanity and all creation based on Scripture from the perspective (point of view) of a group or an individual. As a result, different people will read the Scriptures in ways based on their perspectives, assumptions, and preconceptions.

Because understanding what went wrong in presenting the message is the key to unlocking acceptance of this gospel, developing methods to communicate the gospel to Africans in a culturally sensitive manner is advantageous to them. It is crucial to know the history and responses of African people while presenting the gospel. Understanding what went wrong in delivering this gospel and understanding the African worldview will go a long way toward resolving the issue, which is why this research is essential in today's contemporary mission.

The barrier that exists in the local church for Africans to understand the gospel is what took place during the scramble for Africa era (see Appendix A). The Bible has been read in Africa during pre-colonization, independence struggles, post-independence, western imperialism, and globalization. As a result of this post-colonial history, Africans interpret the meaning of the Bible as a Western culture being imposed upon them. African Christianity comprises numerous rites, movements, and Bible interpretations that take place across the vast continent at various eras, denominations, nations, personalities, tribes, socioeconomic classes, ethnic communities, and cultures.

According to Stelios, the official rush to Africa began in the 1880s. In 1914, only Liberia and Ethiopia were independent African nations. Things began to change, however, as missionaries, explorers, and traders spread the word of the raw material

riches in Africa's interior. These minerals were in high demand among European entrepreneurs. Italy, Belgium, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, and France were among the European countries that pushed forth tentative claims in Africa. This process through which European nations successfully incorporated the entire African continent into their empires is known as the "Scramble for Africa."<sup>33</sup>

Mucherera argues that in the endeavor to settle African concerns, neither Africans nor their lands were discussed or invited to the Berlin Conference. Western European powers, entrepreneurs, and missionaries participated in the Scramble for Africa. Africa was surrounded by suitors, but she could not choose or reject any of them. This was not a love story. Historiography has its own story to tell. The West took control of Africa by force, which was a difficult process. It was, in some ways, a gang rape. Suffering in history is not merely a record of the past but also a continuing story.<sup>34</sup> Falola argues that the interaction between Christian missionaries and colonial rulers was mutually beneficial. Africans argue that missionaries "provided geographic and cultural information, weakened indigenous states, undermined Indigenous culture, and enforced colonial law" and that Christianity "became the supernatural source of the white man's power and helped delegitimize indigenous sources of supernatural power such as kingship, chieftainship, and priesthood." It may be important to address the question of intent in this context because, while missionaries undoubtedly contributed to uprooting African civilization and weakening the concept of resistance, it can be argued that this

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<sup>33</sup> Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou, "The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa," *The American Economic Review* 106, no. 7 (2016): 1802–1848.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond F. Betts, *The Scramble for Africa: Causes and Dimensions of Empire*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1972), 37–41.

was merely an unintended consequence of their primary duty, which was to save the souls of Africans.<sup>35</sup>

African culture was radically impacted by European colonization. Africa lost control of its own affairs. They engaged in conflicts, were exposed to novel diseases, and saw their traditional way of life drastically disrupted. European countries gave up control of their colonies over time but left behind a legacy of problems. The “Scramble for Africa” caused scars on Africans’ bodies, souls, and lands, making it extremely difficult for Africans to embrace Christianity as their religion in light of their history.<sup>36</sup>

Introducing missionaries bearing Bibles has been explored as a technique of discouraging Africans from speaking out against Westerners. The Bible has been demonized as a tool that a white man may use to silence and oppress a vulnerable African man. The greatest challenge confronting the church today is how missionaries imposed their own culture on Africans while striving to promote the gospel of Christ; African culture was judged evil and replaced in the church by Western forms of worship.

According to Khapoya’s research, “humiliation and agony, like those Africans went through throughout colonialism, were considered uplifting and spiritually purifying.” In actuality, collaboration benefitted both missionaries and colonial governments.<sup>37</sup> In a roundabout way, Khapoya examines how aspects of Christianity seemed to assist Africans to feel better about the suffering and humiliation they endured due to colonial powers, assuring them that these things were good for their standing with

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<sup>35</sup> Vincent B. Khapoya, *The African Experience: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662596>

<sup>36</sup> Betts, 46-48.

<sup>37</sup> Khapoya, 102-105.

God. Africa's ideas were colonized more than its land. The ability of the people to revolt was viewed as a threat to the imperial acquisition of the continent's territory and resources; thus, imperialists attempted to eliminate that threat by spreading Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa dates back between two and five hundred years. Colonial missionaries were surprisingly interested in education. Literacy was developed so that the Bible could be translated and interpreted, people could be converted, and preachers could be instructed. In addition, schools were founded to educate people on how to read the Bible and cultivate Bible readers. Sub-Saharan Africa has fewer African biblical scholars than one might assume. Understand that there are only a handful of young Black Sub-Saharan biblical scholars. People from prior generations commonly held positions in academia, ecumenical efforts, and religious administration.

The project is very important in ministry in the USA, and it is relevant to the church because it will help Africans and any missionaries who wish or are called by God to serve in Africa to communicate the gospel in a way that is culturally relevant to Africans in Zimbabwe. Understanding African culture and tradition through narrative theology is critical to establishing bonds with Africans. Separating the truth portrayed in the narrative from the eternal truth that led to the narrative would be a significant error on our part as gospel communicators. Narrative theology will enable the body of Christ to properly share the gospel in the right way and not make the mistake of rejecting the biblical view of objective facts and drifting into secular humanism.

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<sup>38</sup> Khapoya, 107.

*The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large*

The project is relevant to the church at large because it will help not only Africans but also any missionaries who wish or are called by God to serve in Africa to communicate the gospel in a way that is culturally relevant to Africans in Zimbabwe. Understanding African culture and tradition through narrative theology is critical to establishing bonds with Africans. Separating the truth portrayed in the narrative from the eternal truth that led to the narrative would be a significant error on our part as gospel communicators. Narrative theology will enable the body of Christ to properly share the gospel in the right way and not make the mistake of rejecting the biblical view of objective facts and drifting into secular humanism.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

### **Narrative Genre of Genesis 1**

The question in this section is whether Africans can understand and appreciate theology in an African context, and whether their worldview can impact their theology. As a result, because Genesis deals with humanity's fall and redemption and has connections with African Shona origin legends, we shall examine its culture and cultural relevance. The researcher will look at a range of creation stories, not just from Zimbabwe's Shona people but from various African ethnicities that are similar to those of Shona African origin. A “narrative” is the re-telling of a story or experience based on a culture’s worldview regarding the creation of existence. The narrative genre in the Bible is defined as storytelling as well as the reporting of accounts or occurrences, and it can be found in every book of the Bible. There are times when it provides historical context, and then there are times when it provides spiritual connotation. The narrative genre in the Bible is the easiest to comprehend, as it is separated into law and history. God’s instructions on how to conduct oneself, worship, and govern one’s nation are codified in the research will look at a range of creation stories, not just from Zimbabwe's Shona people but from various African ethnicities the law. The first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are referred to as “the law” (also known as the Pentateuch in Christianity and the Torah in Judaism).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> David Alexander and Pat Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2017), 23-26.

When understanding Genesis 1:1–2:4a, there are three main genre options: prophecy, poetry, or narrative. Genesis 1 is a “narrative,” whatever else it is, because it combines characters who grow and change, development, a narrator who is telling the story, and dramatic tension represented by a historically organized sequence of events.<sup>40</sup> The Bible is divided into genres. Sailhamer explains that the biblical content in Genesis 1 is a crystal-clear example of historical narrative.<sup>41</sup> According to Marteen, it was “factual recounting of what actually transpired.”<sup>42</sup> Herbert describes it as a narrative account,<sup>43</sup> While admitting the passage’s narrative aspect, Allen argues that as an asymmetrical illustration of God’s omnipotence, i.e., “God executes wonders unseen by humanity everywhere.” This feature would distinguish it from later symmetrical narratives observed by humankind.<sup>44</sup>

Brueggemann declares that the portion is narrative before arguing that it is neither history nor myth.<sup>45</sup> According to Athalya, it is a non-mythological story. It differs from the subcategory of narrative known as story since there is no tension to be resolved. In contrast, the “narrative of Genesis 1 is distinguishable from the drama described in Genesis 2-3 so obviously by its onward, unstoppable, and majestic flow.” In his

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<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas and Jones, 75-77.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 1995), 109.

<sup>42</sup> Maarten Wisse, “Narrative Theology and the Use of the Bible in Systematic Theology,” *Ars Disputandi* 5, no. 1 (2005): 237–248.

<sup>43</sup> Herbert Chimhundu, “Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor During the ‘Invention of Tribalism’ in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of African History* 33, no. 1 (1992): 87–109.

<sup>44</sup> James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 39-41.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2010), 67-69.



conclusion, he stated that it “has acquired this odd narrative shape that is really no narrative at all.”<sup>46</sup> Both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible contain guidelines and concepts for living. These regulations no longer apply to Christians because they were created for a different community. The truth is revealed through historical writings. Both the Old Testament and New Testament mention those multiple times.<sup>47</sup> They serve as a record of the history of God’s people, detailing events that occurred at particular times and places. They involve individuals, nations, and events. The creation of the universe in Genesis, the origins of the Israelites, their exile in Egypt, and other events are described in other books.<sup>48</sup>

According to the researcher, historical context “brings to life” the Christian religion inside a particular culture because Jesus came into the world as a role model. He somehow bridged the gap between himself and others. “He became human and lived among people” (John 1:14). The Eternal One, “Jesus became nothing, taking the exact character of a servant” and took on the position of a servant (Philippians 2:7). When Jesus connected with people, he was present, and he is present now as his Holy Spirit plans and guides cross-cultural encounters. As he sat down among sinners and wounded people, Jesus stated that he came not to call the good but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). The sinless Jesus took on the sin in order for the people to become God’s righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). He ate with a despised tax collector, touched lepers,

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<sup>46</sup> Athalya Brenner-Idan, *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 89-91.

<sup>47</sup> Hauerwas and Jones, 79.

<sup>48</sup> Sailhamer, 78.

and forgave an adulterer. His generous, intentional presence in people's lives has impacted today's cross-cultural disciples.

Agbonkhianmeghe points out that the way Christ prayed for unity speaks to the heart of Africans due to their traditions. God expressed relationships through precise language. In John 17:20–26, Jesus elaborates on this relational concept by declaring, “I am in them, and you are in me,” so that “the love you have for me may be in them, and I may also be in them.”

#### *Key Characteristics of a Narrative*

The five distinguishing critical characteristics of any narrative are plot, setting, character, conflict, and theme. Every writer must be aware of these critical elements to conceptualize their story together, even if they are rarely explicitly stated in the story and are revealed to the readers in subtle or not-so-subtle ways.<sup>49</sup> The plot is the primary sequence of events in a story, which includes background information, conflict, the story's peak, and finally, the story's resolution.<sup>50</sup> The setting refers to the location of the events in both time and space. Setting establishes the operating environment of the main characters or the narrator. Characters are the protagonists, those affected by the plot, and even bystanders. Narratives reveal the characters' backgrounds, actions, circumstances, and motivations by answering the following questions:

- 1) Who are the main characters?
- 2) How do they behave and interact with the story as a whole?

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, review of “Theology for the Community of God,” by Stanley Grenz, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (1999): 384–386.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobsen, 385.

3) What are the parallels between the protagonist and the antagonist?

4) What sets them apart from one another?

Investigating the characters' backgrounds, actions, circumstances, and motivations are critical.<sup>51</sup>

The scenario affects the characters in the story, who, in turn, affect their decisions. The conflict is the problem that is being resolved. Plots necessitate a moment of tension, which includes a problem that must be solved.<sup>52</sup> The theme is the most important but least apparent part of a story. It shows the story's moral and what the author wants the reader to learn. A distinct point of view is required for a story: Who is telling the story, and why are they telling it? This lets the people reading the story know why it is being told. Even though it is an essential literary component, the theme aids in sharpening a story. When answering the question about the most important lesson to be drawn from the story or poem, it is critical to understand which lessons your characters will learn.<sup>53</sup>

Conflict motivates characters, influencing the plot and determining the story's topic. What is the central conflict of the story? What was the poem's source of inspiration? When there is a clearly defined conflict, the reader can better comprehend

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<sup>51</sup> Jacobsen, 386.

<sup>52</sup> Michael R. Allen, ed. *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 212-214.

<sup>53</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, "Matthew," in *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, eds. Burge Gary, and Andrew Hill, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 36.

the work, empathize with the characters or the narrator, and eventually appreciate the intricacy of the plot.<sup>54</sup>

According to Michael, the typical characteristics of creation myths prevalent in African cultures, humans have an inherent curiosity for the unknown and a desire to solve problems. Every society has a creation myth that tells how the earth's wonders came to be. These myths have a tremendous impact on how people perceive the world. They influence how people perceive themselves in relation to others and the world. Despite being separated geographically by other barriers, cultures have produced creation myths that share the same fundamental elements.<sup>55</sup> Herbert argues that the typical beginning point for creation myths is birth. This could be because birth represents a new beginning, and the beginning of life on earth could be equated to the beginning of a child's life. This is intimately linked to the idea that a mother and father were there during the planet's creation. Life on Earth does not always start with the mother and father.<sup>56</sup>

Birth is highly valued in African creation myths. The element repeatedly appears, sometimes as an egg and other times as a mother giving birth to progeny. In other cultural versions of the creation myth, such as that of the Varembe ethnic group in Zimbabwe, the chaotic assemblage of components at the birth of time was shown as an egg. Birth is also mentioned later in the plot since Izanami gave birth to the sun and moon as her kids. At the start of the Greek myth, the bird Nyx laid an egg. This egg gives birth to Eros, the god of love. The shell fragments were then turned into the Earth, the sky, and Uranus. Once

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation. A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011), 89-90.

<sup>55</sup> Allen, 216.

<sup>56</sup> Allen, 183-185.

again, the egg is vital. Her husband pushed the Iroquois Sky Woman off the movable island in the sky. Her pregnancy was the cause of all of this. It was essential in the story.<sup>57</sup>

A superior deity appears in every narrative. He is the one who initiates the series of events that creates the world. On rare occasions, a passive and active creator coexist. Cultures believe that life was not established on Earth. It is believed that it began above or below where we currently reside. Other myths claim that the Earth was submerged in water before emerging to the surface. They are named by cultures as Diver-myths.<sup>58</sup>

According to some African cultures, humans and animals once coexisted peacefully. They are, however, divided as a result of human transgression. Their sin is often related with fire and is caused by obscurity. At times, a deity will strip humanity of its innocence. In the twenty-first century, we still have hypotheses about how the world came to be. These are our modern creation myths. To substantiate this hypothesis, there must be reliance on empirical facts. On the other hand, the creation stories were based on what people saw.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Genesis 1 – Narrative Analysis*

There can be no historical context for this first documented act of God because history begins with Creation. The reader does not know what happened in the past that led to the Creation. Nevertheless, from that point on, Genesis talks enough about the

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<sup>57</sup> Susan VanZanten, "Storytelling and Identity," *Christianity & Literature*, 61, no. 3 (2012): 369–376.

<sup>58</sup> Del H. Tarr, "Narrative, Tripping the Memory Banks of the Audience," *Trinity Journal*, 33, no. 2 (2012): 247–256.

<sup>59</sup> Thayer Salisbury, "Testing Narrative Theory," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2004): 86–92.

historical background of what happens next that can follow the story and see how God's relationship with people changes over time. It is essential to realize that the book of Genesis is set in more than one time period. Instead, the mood changes as the story of Genesis goes from beginning to end. However, it will be known and used when necessary to understand the novel as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

The original character of God is revealed through the book of Genesis. The creation story in Genesis 1 sheds light on God's character and shows how He longs for us to actively participate in His purpose and plan. He is a being of creativity and highly personal.<sup>61</sup> He is a devoted parent. God is known in all cultures as a creative Being. The first facet of God's nature revealed to us is His capacity and passion for creation in Genesis 1. God made the earth and the heavens at the beginning of Genesis 1:1.<sup>62</sup> The first three days set the tone for a plot that is quite repetitive and highly well-structured. Each day of the creation includes three essential components: (1) God's declaration of what is about to be produced; (2) its successful completion; and (3) God's personal evaluation of the handiwork, which God believes is fantastic.<sup>63</sup>

Genesis' account is split into six critical contexts: before and after creation Genesis 1 and 2, the fall Genesis 3 and 4, Noah and the deluge Genesis 5–9, the tower of Babel Genesis 11:1–9, and the patriarchal age Genesis 11:1–9. Each of these scenarios considers four theological categories: God, Humanity, Creation, and the Creation

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<sup>60</sup> VanZanten, 198.

<sup>61</sup> Remi Akujob, "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2011): 17.

<sup>62</sup> Allen, 123.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 23.

Mandate. There is a progression of theological revelation even within the framework of these settings, and any given theological context comprises both the prior theological contexts and theological revelations for that setting. Even so, the researcher will only cover Genesis 1 in this paper.<sup>64</sup>

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The book of Genesis establishes the foundation for the origin notions of the fantastic things created by God. In Genesis 1:1, the heavens were made, and in Genesis 1:2, the earth was created. Genesis 1:4 demonstrates that God understood something clearly at last and thought it was good. The land and sea are visible in Genesis 1:10. Vegetation is seen in Genesis 1:12. The sun, moon, and stars are formed in Genesis 1:16-18, 21.<sup>65</sup> There are no exclusions for aquatic or avian species. In Genesis 1:25, all ground-species, including livestock, wild animals, and crawling creatures, are created. Man's creation was noted in Genesis 1:26 and in Genesis 1:28, the blessing was bestowed upon man. Genesis 1:31 noted that God created everything that is pleasing and appealing to Him.<sup>66</sup> The narrative descriptive approach is a set of Shona creation analytic tools for understanding story-style textual or visual data. One of the fundamental assumptions underpinning narrative techniques is that Shona Africans used storytelling to organize and make sense of their lives.

#### *Key Elements of the Creation Story*

The researcher will be addressing the key elements of Genesis 1 and bringing up cultural creation stories with similar themes. Other stories, however, show evidence of

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<sup>64</sup> Blenkinsopp, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Alter, 31.

<sup>66</sup> Alter, 35.

moral order in the universe. African emphasis on culture has a connection to Genesis in the belief that individuals were created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). The fundamental key elements of creation show us that God created everything alone.<sup>67</sup> That God is sovereign over everything, that God created with wisdom and order, and that God made man as the culmination of His creation.<sup>68</sup> Genesis 1 gives a brief description of God's creation God creates both nonliving matter (heaven and earth, the sun, moon, and stars to give light and mark the passage of time as well as the sky, dry land, and seas as dwelling places for living things) and living matter (plants, animals, and humans). The fact that God's command was conducted when He spoke demonstrates God's sovereignty.<sup>69</sup>

According to Robert, creation is the Creator's act of making something out of nothing. In the Bible, "beginnings" refers to the moment when God or man launches a new undertaking. Creation of the universe occurred in (Genesis 1 and 2). Thus, "creation" refers to the universe as a whole, whereas "beginnings" focuses on the activities of a single individual. Regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or any other distinction, all cultures share a special significance that distinguishes them from other creatures and unites all of humanity, even though the precise meaning of being formed in the image of God has been extensively debated.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Virginia Simmons Nyabongo, "The Origin of Life and Death," in *African Creation Myths*, ed. Ullie Beier, (Books Abroad: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 45.

<sup>68</sup> Alter, 37-39.

<sup>69</sup> Nyabongo, 167-168.

<sup>70</sup> Alter, 58.



Notably, the description of the development of a single marriage (one man and one woman) in the chapter does not resonate with an African reading of the text. That is, the biblical story does not go beyond the model of a monogamous nuclear family consisting of a husband, wife, and child. In African culture, the extended family is significantly more prized, as is polygamy, neither of which is addressed in Genesis 1-3.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Cultural Creation Stories*

The Shona believe that creation can occur in one of two ways: by a single birth, a sequence of births, or a cosmic war. Construction and fabrication are also kinds of creation and words or commands will suffice. One might also consider the origin myths of societies, one example is the Greek myth about the Titans giving birth to the gods. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the creation of the gods coincides with the creation of the world. In Sumerian, myths, births also result in a final war. The Maya has extensive family trees that can be traced back to the roots of maize. There is only one God in the Bible, but patriarchal households and family trees along with divine dynasties are transported into the sphere of humans.<sup>72</sup>

God declared, "Let there be light," and light appeared in Genesis 1:3. This pattern is also followed by the formation of the sky, dry land, plants, heavenly bodies, fish, birds, land animals, and man (Genesis 1: 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). God's omnipotence is also demonstrated by the naming of various aspects of creation (Genesis 1:5, 8, 10). This

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<sup>71</sup> Emmanuel N. Onwu, "The Current State of Biblical Studies in Africa," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 41, no. 2 (1984): 35–38.

<sup>72</sup> Blenkinsopp, 78.

statement shows that God “named the light Day and the darkness He called Night” (Genesis 1:5).<sup>73</sup>

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God said it six times and one of those times was at the end of the creation account. He said that what he created was good or exceptionally good, which indicates that he did it with knowledge and order (one time at the end of the creation account). Another example is how a previously formless and empty universe gradually gained structure Genesis 1:2. The creation is then depicted as an ordered sequence of events. He emphasized that spaces for the creatures to live in (sky, land, and oceans) were created before the creatures themselves.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Alternative African Creation Stories*

There are so many alternatives when it comes to Africa creation stories, according to the Iroquois Native Americans, before there was land, water animals populated the Earth. When a Sky Woman dropped from her nest above and dove into the waters to bring up muck, they grabbed her. They smeared mud all over Big Turtle’s back. It began to spread from there and finally became North America. According to the Japanese creation story, the world was covered in murky water at the beginning of time. Izanagi and Izanami, God and Goddess, became curious about what was beneath the sea. After taking his staff, Izanagi flung it into the sea. As he raised it again and into the sea, a few earthen chunks fell. These became the islands of Japan. There is the element of water covering the earth and a being mentioning the earth, not a being delving beneath the

<sup>73</sup> Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis with an Appendix: A Fragment of Part III* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984), 179.

<sup>74</sup> Paul K. K. Cho, “Job 2 and 42:7–10 as Narrative Bridge and Theological Pivot.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 4 (2017): 857–877.

oceans to find dirt. Although Genesis 1:2 says that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the seas,” Christians and Jews believe God did not plunge into the river to draw up muck. As a result, the Torah and the Bible state that the Earth was once entirely covered by water.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Comparing the African and Hebrew creation Narratives*

Genesis 1 is the first chapter of the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible. Composed by Moses, Genesis 1 begins with the narrative of God and His relationship with His people, the Israelites. God’s role as Creator is essential for establishing His work in subsequent chapters and His superiority and authority over all other words in the Bible. God desires primarily to be acknowledged by all cultures as the Creator of everything, including the sun, moon, stars, and source of all human life. Furthermore, because He is the Creator, all of His creations, including humans, owe Him worship. The psalmist describes the creation in a celebratory song to nature and its Creator in Psalm 104. However, in the Book of Job, the Lord reveals the wonders of Creation so that Job can come to terms with his enormous suffering by learning that God’s methods are beyond his comprehension.<sup>76</sup>

Each of the three manuscripts has a particular style and language that is appropriate for its intended audience. The name of God appears more than thirty times in Genesis chapter 1 alone, in the account of Genesis, which is written in an elegant, majestic way. It is organized and logical, highlighting the Creator’s vital role in the

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<sup>75</sup> VanZanten, 399.

<sup>76</sup> Francois P. Viljoen, “Reading Genesis as a Historical Narrative,” *Die Skriflig: Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 52, no. 1 (2018), 123-126.

creation process.<sup>77</sup> History is defined as any account of historical events. Genesis is history in the sense that it describes historical events such as God's creation of the world and humans. On the other hand, Genesis is religious history, and its details are meant to be metaphorical. The person who wrote Genesis does not want to tell us how or how long it took God to build the universe.<sup>78</sup> In Genesis 1, an Israelite author tells an Israelite audience about God's creation deeds. Because we believe it was given to him by God, we accept the narrator's explanation of the world in Genesis as authoritative and factual. It was not intended to allow us to recreate the creation events using current scientific knowledge or to meet the needs of our modern worldview.<sup>79</sup> This has resulted in the meaningless and rootless replication of other people's lifestyles, making it difficult for Shona people to contribute to human development in innovative and original ways.

According to Dickson, Africans were exposed to a dry Christianity that repressed their cultural originality and inventiveness while promoting a life lived according to Christian moral precepts, missionary Christianity is responsible in certain respects for their cultural impoverishment. This has resulted in all of this; Africans have developed a moralizing kind of Christianity. As a result, they lack a complete devotion to the development, revolution, and preservation of their African dignity, majesty, and grandeur.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Fred Gottlieb, "The Creation Theme in Genesis 1, Psalm 104 and Job 38-42," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2016): 29-36.

<sup>78</sup> Wisse, 99-101.

<sup>79</sup> Maarten, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, 104-105.

According to Dickson's exceptional research on the parallels and differences between the Hebrew and African Ewe creation myths, creation is a continuous process of potential that gives rise to transcendence in contrast to a single occurrence. According to his definition, living is continuously exploring new levels of existence. To be culturally loyal, African Christians must use their Christian heritage and traditional African religious background to govern and guide their lives in the modern world.<sup>81</sup> Kofu relates selected creation stories from both religions because African Christians had both Christian and African cultural and religious traditions. Because they believe they can live life from the outside in, Africans are responsible for the poverty and disgrace of their present cultural condition.<sup>82</sup>

Mbiti asserts that when researching African religions, most African religious academics agree that phrases like "secular humanism" and "creation ex nihilo" should not be adopted. Although African Traditional Religion finds God or evidence of God in everything, there is an epistemic hierarchy in which certain things are more important than others. God, spirits, people, animals, plants, phenomena, and non-living objects are placed in a hierarchy. As a result, the "life" or "force" of a stone is theologically inferior to that of a plant, animal, or human. With this hierarchical system, broad words like "secular humanism" or even "conventional theology" are unnecessarily simplistic since they ignore the complex details of the transcendental hierarchy.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Kwesi, 98-102.

<sup>82</sup> Kofi Opoku, "Cabral and the African Revolution," *Présence Africaine*, no. 105/106 (1978): 45-60.

<sup>83</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 33.

*African Myths About the Physical and Immaterial*

In this research we will look at African myths and how they are used in different African cultures including Shona culture. Myths are key in every Shona African culture, and by extension all black African cultures, a myth is a traditional story or narrative that is told in prose or poetry and passed down from one generation to the next in an effort to explain the mysteries and strange things that happen in that culture. Dickson emphasizes that this is a religious sphere for Africans, who characterizes it in this way. Nature, in its broadest sense, is not an impersonal, useless substance or phenomenon; it is rich in religious significance. These (natural) objects and happenings bear witness to God; they are His creation, reveal Him, and serve as a substitute for His reality and presence. Because the visible and tangible worlds are in constant communication with one another, Africans “see” the unseen cosmos when they see, hear, or feel the visible and tangible universe.<sup>84</sup>

The material cosmos has a mystical character in African thought. It is not “dead,” Mbiti goes on to say that, in addition to the five sorts of beings, the universe as a whole is imbued with a force, power, or energy. Although the spirits have access to this force, God is its ultimate source and controller. People, such as traditional healers, witches, priests, and rainmakers, have the knowledge and ability to tap into, manipulate, and exploit it for the good of their society and others for their disadvantage. He adds that this “power” is about what archaeologists call mana, but it has nothing to do with the “vital force” concept of Descendant Temples.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> David T. Adamo, “The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s),” *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 1 (2015): 31–52.

<sup>85</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African*, 16.

Opoku asserts that on the one hand, the literature typically references Africa's assertion of the physical world, which parallels the ancient Hebraic perspective. Compared to the disdain for the material world associated with certain strains of Gnosticism, this is true. Although most African traditions support the general quality of life on earth, African creation stories represent God explicitly affirming the world's goodness, such as through direct remarks from the creator God.<sup>86</sup> In one Shona folktale, the goodness of creation is remarked upon, while for the Zimbabwean Shona people, the Fang people of Gabon, Nzame, Mebere, and Nkwa constitute a trinity. According to Beier, Nzame created all life on Earth, including plants, animals, the sun, moon, and stars. After completing everything visible to us today, he called Mebere and Nkwa and demonstrated his work. "This is my occupation," he remarked. Is it appropriate? They replied, "Yes, you've performed admirably."<sup>87</sup>

According to Opoku, the Akan of Ghana have a proverb regarding the goodness of creation, which they place in the mouth of a hawk (sansa): "Everything God created is good!" In contrast, the universe is frequently formed by accident in African Shona creation stories, lending them a fatalistic tone. Creation myth consists of this oral narrative: Heaven was so close to earth that one could have reached up and touched it.<sup>88</sup>

A variant of the Garden of Eden or the Golden Age existed then something transpired resulting in an angry and exasperating rift between heaven and earth. In one narrative, a gluttonous individual is said to have consumed too much food from heaven,

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<sup>86</sup> Opoku, 65-71.

<sup>87</sup> Opoku, 81.

<sup>88</sup> Opoku, 103-104.

while in another, a woman with filthy hands is said to have touched the pristine face of heaven. As a result, the opportunity to indulge in unrestricted sexual activity and freely enjoy heaven's riches has vanished.<sup>89</sup>

The Genesis chapter makes it evident that God considers humanity as the pinnacle of His creation and the focus of His attention. The idea that God created man in His own image is unique and fundamental to Christian doctrine (Genesis 1:26–28). In light of the fact that God is a spiritual being, the Genesis account of man implies that man is both a material and spiritual being. Consequently, there is a broad theological consensus that a person is both a material and immaterial being.<sup>90</sup>

According to Olódumare, the contrast between a physical and inner spiritual aspect of human nature, which can be observed in both creation stories, is not merely a perspective unique to these accounts, but also a fundamental aspect of the Old Testament understanding of humankind. Spirit, soul, and heart are three anthropological concepts that often convey a biblical notion of the immaterial aspect of human existence. The fact that God charged him with tending to the Garden and conducting His instructions is proof of this. God created man in His image, endowing him with the capacity to choose between good and evil and the capacity to rebel against Him.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Robert Letellier, “*Creation, Sin and Reconciliation: Reading Primordial and Patriarchal Narrative in The Book of Genesis*.” (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015), 109.

<sup>90</sup> Oldsmar Olódumare, review of “God in Yoruba Belief,” by E. Bolaji Idowu. *African Affairs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962): 89.

<sup>91</sup> Olódumare, God in Yoruba Belief, 109-111.

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### *African Creation Myths*

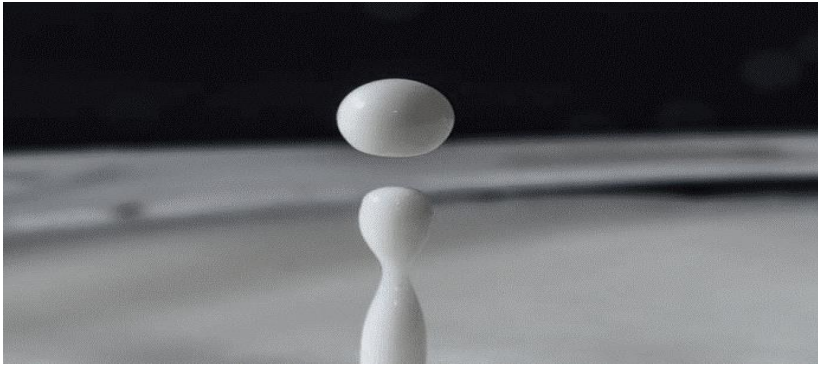
Shona Africans believe in creation stories, which are well-known even among those who do not accept Christianity. Others are more complicated and eccentric, using powerful narrative techniques to resolve challenging moral and spiritual quandaries by storytelling. Regardless of how universally accepted a creation narrative is, it always seeks to address the same questions: where did we and everything around us originate from, and why? The following are the creation myths found in other African countries, including Zimbabwe. Because these mythological narratives have undergone alterations and modifications, the content may have changed.<sup>92</sup>

According to one creation story, the god (Doondari) created the world out of a single milk drop. Around forty million Fulani live as nomads across West Africa's Sahel region. They can also be found in Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Guinea, and Cameroon. Although the specific location of their genesis is unknown, North Africa has been postulated. They were effectively the first occupants of that continent, according to their murals in Nigeria, which have been dated to 6000 BC in North Africa. Their history is extensive and varied. The Fulani believe that the earth was created by a supreme deity known as Doondari.<sup>93</sup> Here is a creation story from Mali (Fulani People):

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<sup>92</sup> Nyabongo, 122.

<sup>93</sup> David J. Atkinson, *Message of Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 24-28.



**Figure 1. How Milk Droplets Created the World**

There was a considerable quantity of milk at the beginning.  
 Doondari (God) then fashioned the stone and then arrived.  
 Stone was once used to create iron.  
 Iron was the source of fire.  
 The fire produced water.  
 Water was the source of air.  
 The Doondari descended again.  
 In addition, he seized the five components.  
 Then, he turned them into men.  
 The man, though, was insistent.  
 Then Doondari caused blindness, which triumphed over man.  
 Nonetheless, when blindness became too conceited.  
 The Doondari created sleep, and it cured blindness.  
 However, when sleep became too haughty.  
 Doondari generated anxiety, which impeded sleep.  
 However, anxiousness became too haughty.  
 Doondari produced death, and death defeated anxiety.  
 Despite this, when death became too haughty, life prevailed.  
 Doondari dropped for the third time.  
 Then, he manifested as Gueno, the Eternal One, who defeated death.<sup>94</sup>

In African creation myths, humanity is rarely depicted as having been made in “the image of God.” Moreover, they do not explicitly or simply assert that humans have “dominion” over the natural universe but include the Shona people and the Fang of

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<sup>94</sup> Nyabongo, 89-90.

Gabon.<sup>95</sup> African religious practices are described under the term fatalism. Because the narratives and overall perspective of African Traditional Religions express a sense of enormous doubt and futility over humanity's future following the end of the "Golden Age" or "the Fall," as Christians prefer to refer to it, it may be a valid one to apply. Obviously, "fatalism" occurs in cultures, which can be a formidable obstacle to social reforms in the West and elsewhere. Mbiti said that the lack of a solution to the challenge posed by the Fall was the most severe "dead end" in African religion. According to him, this is African Traditional Religion's "primary weakness," rendering it susceptible to the spread of major world faiths like Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. Mbiti and others argue that this void makes African Traditional Religions fatalistic and vulnerable.<sup>96</sup>

According to the Akan, God created the cosmos in the following order: heavens, earth, rivers, waterways, plants, animals, and man. The order of creation reveals that man is at the center of the African cosmos since God produces everything else before man's well-being in the world. This is analogous to the Christian belief that creation took six days. According to an African proverb, if you do not know where you are going, you should at least know where you are coming from.<sup>97</sup>

This African myth may not make sense to most people who are not of African descent, especially those from the Western countries. However, most people from Africa would relate, and they would understand that when God created man in His image

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<sup>95</sup> Dorothy Bea Akoto, "Hearing Scripture in African Contexts: Hermeneutic of Grafting," *Old Testament Essays* 20, no. 2 (2007): 209-211.

<sup>96</sup> Mbiti, 99.

<sup>97</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Ethics Brewed in an African Pot," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 3-16.

(Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, and 9:6). He endowed him with characteristics unique to Himself, though not to the same degree. This demonstrates God-man connections. This has significant consequences for God-man interactions, as only man possesses the inherent capacity to relate to and interact with God in a way that the rest of creation cannot. The inference is that, although God presents Himself as a social, relational being within the Godhead's trinity, man is also a social, relational being and can thus engage in this way not only with other people but also with God, according to Edwards.<sup>98</sup>

The Incarnation is the most compelling biblical example of God wanting and establishing a personal relationship with humanity. This is evidenced by the mission of the incarnate Son, and this concept is mainly used and believed among the African people, which included revealing the Father to man (John 1:18, 12:45, 14:7-9, 17:6, 25-26; 1 John 5:20) and then offering himself as a sacrifice for sin (John 10:11, 15, 27-28) so that those who received Him could be reconciled to the Father (Rom 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20) through faith in the Son (John 1:12; Acts 16:30).<sup>99</sup>

The African Shona do not believe that the creation of the highest deity happened by chance. The majority of people agree that the events happened in a particular order. God created the spiritual realm in which man lives before creating the physical world. For example, the Ife and Efe creation myths presume that the spiritual realm existed before God began creating the human world, implying that God had already proved the spiritual realm and all of its inhabitants before beginning to construct the physical

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<sup>98</sup> Royce G. Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: a Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 104-106.

<sup>99</sup> Gruenler, 190.

universe.<sup>100</sup> According to the Basare creation myth, God created the cosmos in four stages. God built the cosmos following a four-day plan he devised in the (Fonyongo) creation myth. Even though days are rarely specified in literature, the creative process is planned. According to the Vugusu, before creating the planet and humanity, God created the spiritual realm, the moon, stars, and sun.<sup>101</sup> Harold Scheub, a scholar of African languages and literature, has compiled many myths from the Shona people of Zimbabwe.<sup>102</sup>

Mwari, the highest being, is the fertility deity, the sower, and the source of rain in Shona culture. He is known as Dzivaguru, which means “big pool,” since he brings rain to the people. Mwari is believed to be a bisexual individual. Mwari (Samusikavanhu), the god of the Seas and Oceans, (Muridzi we Gungwa ne nzizi), meaning He is engrossed in the pool’s shadow and mystique. (Mwari), the god of the heavens (Samatenga) is also male who lords over the heavens. He is the deity of light, the father of creation, and appears as lightning or shooting stars (Anopenya se Mheni). He is a dualistic god, transcendent and omnipresent at the same time. One cannot help but note that these African folktales have features that are all too familiar to certain westerners.<sup>103</sup>

Myths and parables about the world’s creation can be found in every African culture including Shona culture. These legends explain the beginning of the earth and all

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<sup>100</sup> Nyabongo, 102-112.

<sup>101</sup> Victor I. Ezigbo, and Andrew Finlay Walls, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus Christ in African Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 102-108.

<sup>102</sup> Harold Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Mythmaker as Storyteller* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80-91.

<sup>103</sup> Scheub, 87

humankind, as well as their cultural traditions and origins. Unlike Western mythology, which is typically presented as a continuous narrative story, African myths are not collected into a single body of literature yet, due to the way that Africans comprehend their theology, myths are ingrained in and spread through culturally customary activities in an African context. Below we have examples of Shona myths.

A First Zimbabwe Shona Myths:

The creator was named Modimo (Mwari, Musikavanhu).

All the people related to Modimo. He brought prosperity, manifested in the early morning, and belonged to the fluid realm of water.

However, he was also a fearsome killer who brought about natural disasters like drought, storms, hurricanes, and volcanoes.

During that time, he manifested in the west as a part of the fire element.

The qualities of Modimo (Mwari, Musikavanhu) included the stars, the sun, the ground, and the roots. He stood out as one-of-a-kind.

Without a beginning or ending, he was utterly alone. He was everywhere, a part of everything.

His name was forbidden (taboo), and only the High priests and the seers were allowed to pronounce it.

A second Zimbabwean Shona Myth:

God created a man and gave him the name Moon before there was any life on the planet.

Moon wanted to live on land, but he was sent to the ocean below instead.

Moon moved to live on land despite God's warnings that life would be difficult.

Moon eventually grew so depressed by the desolate environment that he began to cry.

God bestowed upon Moon a bride named Morningstar to keep him company for two years.

Since fire had never been on earth, Morningstar brought it with her when she descended to live with Moon.

She built a fire in the middle of Moon's cabin and slept on the opposite side of him.

Nevertheless, he crossed over and had sexual relations with her in the middle of the night.

As she got bloated by the next morning and gave birth to the grasses, trees, and other plants, the world swiftly became verdant and teeming with life.

After the trees had grown to the point where they touched the sky, the first showers fell from the clouds they had touched.

As a result, the ecosystem flourished, and Moon and Morningstar flourished in their new paradise.

Morningstar returned to the heavens after a two-year sojourn and will live there eternally.

Again, Moon wept because he was lonely.

God gave Moon another bride from whom to pick but told him that the husband would die within two years.

Moon and Evening star began to coexist as a result.

After their first kiss, she gave birth to goats, lambs, and cows the following day.

The next day, she gave birth to antelopes and birds.

Both boys and girls were born on day three.

Despite Moon's desire, God prevented Moon from sleeping with Evening star again.

However, because Moon disregarded the warning, the following day, Evening star gave birth to the lions, leopards, snakes, and scorpions that plague humans.

#### A Third Zimbabwean Shona Myths:

Mwari put his creation, Musikavanhu, to sleep and then let him fall from the heavens.

When Musikavanhu awoke while falling, he noticed a white stone falling from the sky rapidly.

God told Musikavanhu to point his finger at this rock.

The stone came to a halt when Musikavanhu agreed.

As Musikavanhu began to soar toward the stone, it became larger and larger until he could not tell where it ended on either side.

When Musikavanhu's foot touched the stone for the first time, it softened and began to emit water.

Musikavanhu touched the stone and heard God's voice.

This place evolved into the pool's stone, now revered as Matopos.  
Musikavanhu became bored and began to glance around.

As darkness fell, he drifted off next to the stone where God had spoken.

In his dream, he saw birds flying through the air and creatures rushing  
from one stone to the next.

When Musikavanhu awoke, he was astounded to see that everything he  
had wished for had come true.

God decided what Musikavanhu was authorized to eat and what he was  
not permitted to eat.

He was not prohibited from eating fruits and vegetables, but he was not  
allowed to butcher or consume any animals.

The animals were not allowed to eat each other.

While Musikavanhu was resting, a snake crawled over his loins and  
caused wounds.

When he awoke, he fought to breathe, and his genitalia twitched  
unnaturally when he opened his eyes.

A voice told him that going to the water would relieve his agony.

On his way there, he noticed a beautiful young woman sitting on a stone  
near the pool.

She was similar to him, but she was quiet and immovable.

Musikavanhu heard the voice again, commanding him to touch her with  
his hand.

The girl sprang to life when he did, and a serpent passed through her loins.

The same emotions that washed over Musikavanhu washed over her as  
well.

The voice told Musikavanhu to be gentle with his wife and all animals.

He also had to set aside one day each month for God's honor.

After performing the tasks entrusted to him by God, Musikavanhu was  
forced to return to paradise.

Before he left, he cautioned his children to obey God's rules or else God  
would punish them.

Symbol of the Scorpion People had been at peace for a long time.

One day, the Musikavanhu kids were haughty and intoxicated.



They notified the other humans and animals that God had died and that one of them would now be in charge of his stead.

God warned them, but their pride kept them from hearing it.

In a moment of fury, God cursed the earth, causing the land to dry up, the sea to turn salty, and thorns to flourish.

During the wet season, individuals were lost in the rivers, and crocodiles were seen in the water.

When the sun became too hot, animals began fighting each other and men.

And humanity began to slay one another.<sup>104</sup>

According to Harold, the Bantu migration is mentioned in African legends, a Venda epic from Southern Africa, for example, portrays a journey from the north that may have ended a millennium ago, based on historical facts. He spent his career studying African myths and stories, uncovering strange correlations that confirm Greenberg's notion that each civilization has its native language.<sup>105</sup> He says the Venda story carried a precious relic similar to the Jewish Ark of the Covenant. This portrayal of the Venda people, like the Ark itself, was eventually destroyed. Harold sees the similar elements of African stories as portals into the deeper regions of the human mind. He began collecting around 10,000 African myths, legends, and folklore 30 years ago, hoping to discover "kaleidoscopic diversity." Instead, he continued finding similarities between the stories. The more material he gathered, the more he became aware of these startling commonalities.<sup>106</sup>

Harold and Greenman integrated these ideas into what they called a "grand myth."

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<sup>104</sup> Scheub, 87.

<sup>105</sup> Scheub, 97.

<sup>106</sup> Scheub, 127.

Beginning: When God created the universe and life, chaos and order clashed.

Disobedience, strife, or fate destroyed the bonds that connected God, Earth, and humankind. As humanity strove to reestablish its connection to the cosmos, good and evil clashed on Earth.

Second connections: Heroes fought to restore the lost harmony with the skies.

Conclusion: Death and chaos reigned supreme. Although there are occasional signs of a reunion with God, it is thought humanity was set adrift from God and left to their own devices.<sup>107</sup>

Harold posed a significant question: Is the presence of a “great myth” and its striking likeness to Western religious beliefs and narratives a coincidence or an intentional attempt to explain something? The apparent reasoning is that languages share elements with their ancestors. Mythical similarities reflect human experiences and desires, and these archetypes reverberate as the collective unconscious. We have similar experiences and visuals to account for them. Diverse people find it upsetting that people react to stereotypes in an era where diversity and culture are celebrated. Harold arrived at these conclusions after traveling hundreds of kilometers across southern Africa in search of stories and legends.<sup>108</sup>

Ruth reveals another engaging creation narrative, the hoe pulled itself through the furrows to provide food for people during the Golden Age, before the end of the world, according to the Angas people of Plateau State in Central Nigeria. The hoe was sitting in the hut when the woman noticed it and picked it up by the handle to use in the furrows herself. The hoe felt so angered by this that it ceased cooking traditional food for people.

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<sup>107</sup> Scheub, 101-107.

<sup>108</sup> James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 109.

People have had to work to sustain themselves since then.<sup>109</sup> Given that God did not command a man or a woman to use the hoe in this fashion, we can assume that humanity's fall was unintentional. As a result of an error, people look to be in a terrible predicament. You might conclude that fate has a twist because you never know when something will bite you back.<sup>110</sup>

Opoku tells a story from the Akan people of Ghana: The Akan believed that God and humans formerly shared an intimate relationship and that both could be physically touched. Then an older woman began regularly pounding her fufuu with a mortar and long pestle. Every time she pounded fufuu, God was hit, and as a result, He rose upward and away from people.<sup>111</sup> Fatalism is quite apparent regarding morals and perceiving the world as a place of chaos and unbelievably lousy luck that you can defend yourself from through magic.<sup>112</sup>

According to Mbiti, unlike in European mythologies, African creation stories rarely depict humans as being made in God's likeness. Also, they do not claim what amounts to "ruling on this world" or "sovereign control over the physical cosmos" for human beings, even though Pentecostal-believing churches in Africa make such claims as man having been given "dominion" today. As we saw in the Shona myth in Zimbabwe because the stories and overall view of African Tradition Religions appear to impart a sense of immense uncertainty and hopelessness about the future of humanity since the

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<sup>109</sup> Edwards, 109-110.

<sup>110</sup> Andrew F. Walls and Mark R. Gornik, eds. *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in The History of World Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 45-47.

<sup>111</sup> Opuk, 23-24.

<sup>112</sup> Stanley J. Grenz (Stanley James), *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 201-204.

end of the “Golden Age,” or “the Fall,” as Christians prefer to refer to it, the term “nihilism” may be a valid one to use. Naturally, “nihilism” exists in all cultures, and it can be a substantial obstacle to social reforms in the West and elsewhere. As mentioned previously, Mbiti claimed that the lack of a solution to the problem that humankind faced after the Fall was the most severe “dead end” in African religion. He says that this is African Tradition Religions’ “main weakness,” making them vulnerable to the spread of major world religions such as Islam, or Buddhism. Mbiti and others contend that this vacuum makes African Tradition Religions misanthropic and vulnerable.<sup>113</sup>

The Yoruba creation myth does not explicitly offer humanity “dominion” over creation, as does Genesis 1. This is also true for the vast majority of other African creation myths; however, it may be argued that humanity’s position regarding the created world was often one of ontological dominance. Mbiti believes that humans are the only ontologically superior entities; hence animals, plants, and inanimate objects cannot perform the critical role of functioning as mediators. In each case, anthropological literature from a diverse spectrum of African ethnic groups supports this finding.<sup>114</sup>

The relationship of animals and humans focuses on the significant role that animals played in creation myths. They were treated as equals by humans. The stories depicted a time when men and animals coexisted without sex or social or economic difficulties.<sup>115</sup> The animals’ parts in the stories may have reflected how each society felt about animals. The water animals save the Sky Woman from falling into the Earth’s

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<sup>113</sup> Mbiti, 99.

<sup>114</sup> Scheub, 87.

<sup>115</sup> Mbiti, 71.

Ocean in the Iroquois creation narrative. After rescuing the Woman, the animals built an island for her to live on. Without their assistance, the Sky Woman might have died, and the human species would not have existed. Iroquois Native Americans have a high regard for animals. They acknowledge how much they rely on animals to meet their needs.<sup>116</sup>

The African Bushmen thought there was a time when all of the earth's species lived underground. In this location, animals and humans coexist peacefully. They were not afraid of one another since they could understand one another. The Bushmen, like the Iroquois, did not squander nature's gifts. They hunted and gathered only what was necessary for their survival. The Bushmen place more importance on animals than is customary in the West.<sup>117</sup>

The animals' presence was significant in both of these stories. The Iroquois and Bushmen creation tales would be incomplete without the creation of territory in the former and the creation of pain in the latter. They stood for the function animals had to play in these people's daily lives.<sup>118</sup>

According to Bartle, certain ethnic groups in Zimbabwe worship a "mother earth goddess," while others do not. Groups that honor her perform sacrifices or pour libations in her honor. Certain customs, such as indulging in sexual activities on the naked ground, irritate her. In such cases, specific ceremonies and reparations must be performed in order to regain her favor. Mother Earth appears to be worshipped as more important than all

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<sup>116</sup> Merrill F. Unger, "Rethinking the Genesis Creation Account," *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, 115, no. 457 (1958): UP, 1986.

<sup>117</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 108.

<sup>118</sup> Mbiti, 145.

other deities in Shona ethnic groups and villages. It is worth noting that African matriarchal (Vambire) people regard God as both male and female.<sup>119</sup>

For Africans, trees and woods held special significance. While other cultures designate sacred groves for sacrifices, offerings, or prayers, the Ngombe live in a dense forest and refer to God as the everlasting One of the forests, the One who clears the forest, or the One who started the forest. Societies were terrified of water and woodland ghosts, according to Mbiti.<sup>120</sup> There have been reports from parts of Africa of trees that refused to be shifted despite using specially developed modern machinery. These trees are said to have magical qualities. There are even examples of past “natural preserves” in a few African Traditional Religions, albeit their exact purposes may not be the same as today. According to the ancient African concept, the chief had a tract of land set aside for him to use on hunting expeditions. In this scenario, the outcome of safeguarding wildlands occurs simply by chance with the intent.<sup>121</sup>

Ngcobo argues that land was not regarded as “owned” by anyone, in contrast to the Canaanite (and later Western) understanding of land as a saleable commodity, which was quite strange to the Shona and many other African communities. However, it became popular after the beginning of the colonial period.<sup>122</sup> Regarding agriculture and hunting methods, it is essential not to romanticize the image of the “primitive living in perfect peace with his surroundings.” According to archaeological evidence, 30% of Africa’s

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<sup>119</sup> Philip F.W. Bartle, “The Universe Has Three Souls, Notes on Translating Akan Culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, no. 2 (1983): 85-114.

<sup>120</sup> Mbiti, 109-125.

<sup>121</sup> Selby B. Ngcobo, review of “Africans on the Land,” by Montague Yudelman, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 2, no. 4 (1964): 609-613.

<sup>122</sup> Ngcobo, 604.

wildlife species felt extinct as early as 50,000 BCE, primarily due to human civilization. The most plausible reason is the use of fire to hunt game animals.<sup>123</sup>

According to Parratt, burning crop detritus and brush to make room for new land has been a widespread practice from the continent's early agricultural ventures. It is well known that West Africa's former tropical rainforest once spanned from Liberia to Cameroon. On the other hand, the savannah belt vegetation now extends all the way to the Atlantic coast in the territory currently held by Togo and the Benin Republic.<sup>124</sup> Historical documents from the fifth century BCE, Carthaginian explorer Periplus of Hanno portray a large stretch of bushfires during harvest festivals in what is now Sierra Leone. In 1588, Seamen described the coast of what is now Togo and Benin as having an impenetrable, dense forest throughout its entire length, but by 1722, travelers reported that the region was lush and green with no trees. According to Gayibor's extensive research, many climate and human factors contributed to Benin's total deforestation. This complex includes livestock grazing and other agricultural enterprises.<sup>125</sup>

Traditional agricultural methods usually involved the felling and burning trees, with the wood ash used as fertilizer instead of manure. Under these conditions, the land would often become unfit for cultivation in four years or less, and the family would then shift to the uncultivated territory. Scientists in West Africa have recently discovered that slash-and-burn agriculture is to blame for acid rain pouring on the remnant rainforest.

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<sup>123</sup> George A. De Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross, *Ethnic Identity, Cultural Continuities and Change*. (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1975), 102-103.

<sup>124</sup> John A. Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, North American ed. (Denver, CO: Academic Books, 2001), 95.

<sup>125</sup> McKinnon Susan, "Domestic Exceptions, Evans-Pritchard and the Creation of Nuer Patrilineality and Equality," *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2000): 6.

Although harmony through control was considered a positive goal, the Shona and other African cultural traditions rendered the relationship between humans and the environment more controversial than harmonious. Therefore, in African philosophy, there is a conception of “kinship” between humans and the natural world.<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, creation myths have variations throughout Africa as we can see in all these narratives. African stories from the Shona culture included a priceless artifact very much like the Ark of the Covenant in Jewish tradition. In other versions, God appears to leave instantly when he hears a sound on his floor. In other circumstances, the lady persists despite being recommended to stop. The contrast may be relevant because the version without warnings may be perceived as having a more fatalistic view of the universe and its tendencies than the version with warnings. The narrative descriptive approach is a collection of creation analysis methods used by Shona people to understand narrative-style textual or visual data. One of the basic assumptions behind narrative approaches is that Shona Africans utilized storytelling to organize and make sense of their experiences.

The fundamental concepts of Genesis 1 and other creation stories with comparable themes give evidence for a morally ordered universe. The notion that peoples were made in God's image is central to Shona African theology and cultural beliefs, which traces back to the book of Genesis. We observe that the key elements of creation demonstrate that God alone created everything. God is sovereign over all, God created with knowledge and order, and God created man as the culmination of His creation.

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<sup>126</sup> De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, *Ethnic Identity*, 115-119.



The Shona Africans strongly believe that creation can happen in one of three ways: through a single birth, a chain of births, or a conflict in the universe. In the same vein as creation, we also find construction and manufacturing. All you have to do is say the word or give the order. Also relevant are the stories people tell about how their cultures came to be. Common creation myths can be put into six groups: creation by the creator, creation by emergence, creation by world parents, creation from the cosmic egg, creation by Earth divers, and transformation of the corpse. It is important to know that the book of Genesis is history because it talks about things that happened in the past, like when God made the world and people.

### CHAPTER THREE: RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### **Narrative Literature**

There is a wealth of material available to assist Shona Africans in rebuilding themselves. The data available to theologians and scholars in the past may be utilized as a ladder and mortar to recreate Shona African narrative theology. This is why it is critical to adapt an existing theological tradition known as narrative theology (founded by Hauerwas) for an African setting. The Bible consists mainly of narratives as a collection of distinct kinds of writing. In fact, the Bible is primarily put together as a story, even as we look at creation in Genesis 1.<sup>127</sup> Some aspects of African traditional religion will also be used as “raw material” for theological, ethical, and spiritual manifestations in narrative theology.<sup>128</sup>

The African traditional religious stories with the Creation narratives can be traced to the city of Alexandria and to such names as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the others who lived and worked there. The foundation laid by this tradition, which was allegorical and uncritical in the modern sense, lasted in the Western Church until the onset of the enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, the historical-critical approach came to supplant it, and in the twentieth century, literary theory took its place.<sup>129</sup> This

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<sup>127</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Jones L. Gregory, *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 45.

<sup>128</sup> Hauerwas and Jones, 45-47.

<sup>129</sup> N. Onwu, “The Current State of Biblical Studies in Africa,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 41, no. 2 (1984), 35.

correspondence is with the period of political independence and the founding of African universities where these methods were taught. By the 1970s, the use of these methods in the academic interpretation of the Bible in Africa had become widespread.<sup>130</sup>

Hauerwas argues for the significance of narrative theology in Christian discourse and daily living. In conversation with other theologians, he shares his understanding of and application of narrative theology. According to him, the purpose of narrative preaching is to adopt an expectant, imaginative position before the biblical text in the hope that the sermon would be a transformative experience for both the preacher and the congregation.<sup>131</sup>

People are able to tolerate suffering with the assistance of narrative theology, which situates them within the greater narrative of redemptive history, notably the Incarnation. Pastors employing narrative theology are adept at connecting an individual's story to the faith communities.<sup>132</sup> Theological scholars in Africa today are, therefore, to the extent a child of these modern methods of Western biblical scholarship. Despite this, theological scholars in Africa have created an alternative approach. The particular characteristic of this method is the concern with creating an encounter between the biblical text and the African text in the African context. This is accomplished in methods that relate the biblical text to Africa such that, unlike the Western paradigm, the primary

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<sup>130</sup> Rasiyah S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 12-50.

<sup>131</sup> Hauerwas and Crites, 65.

<sup>132</sup> Hauerwas and Lash, 89-91.

focus of interpretation is on the communities that receive the text rather than on those who created it or on the text itself.<sup>133</sup>

According to Muzorewa, incorporating ideas such as “God, ancestral spirits, the concept of good and evil, and humanity” in traditional religion provided African theologians with a framework for their theology. There is strong evidence in favor of a ‘Theologian Africana,’ which would work to reinterpret Christ in a way that is acceptable to Africans so that Christ can fit comfortably within the emerging African Christian tradition. For an African, being at home implies maintaining traditional life and Christian faith. Traditional religious beliefs in the Creator may be traced to traditional African theological growth. This implies that an effort is being made to grasp Christian principles theologically from an African perspective.<sup>134</sup>

According to the researcher, African Christians are less likely than Christians in the United States and other countries to believe a literal view of Genesis. There are distinct reasons for this. First, Africa has much lower esteem for the written word’s authority because of its far shorter writing history. Unlike in Europe, where a written, signed document is considered authoritative, Africa does not. Second, while the universe’s birth was recounted in unusual ways throughout European religious and literary history, these myths have been lost through time, partly due to dismissal as mere tales. On the other hand, while people do not embrace traditional African origins tales that explain why Shona people’s hands are not colored, they are commonly recognized.

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<sup>133</sup> Sugirtharajah, 51-52.

<sup>134</sup> Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins, and Development of African Theology* (Oregon Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 7-8.

Haws argues that as a result, African Christians' natural response is to regard the Genesis accounts as "white" myths. The Bible is still widely regarded as a "white" book and hence not truly an African product; as a result, African people regularly reject it.<sup>135</sup> The African context can teach us things about Scripture that other cultures would misunderstand. By examining the laws God gives his people in the "Testament," notably the food-related commandments, we can learn from diverse cultures worldwide and identify our shortcomings as we share the word of God corporately. These guidelines are not disclosed since they are confidential health standards. Instead, they are intended to distinguish God's people from those from other nations.<sup>136</sup>

Hauerwas demonstrates a genuine concern for how the Church is depicted in the Christian narrative in his sermons and interpretation of the Bible. Narrative preaching aims to take an expectant, imaginative position before the biblical text for the sermon to be a transformative experience for both the listeners and the preacher. Hauerwas frequently employs the story preaching technique, despite not being a narrative preacher by definition.

To avoid limiting the scope and impact of his message, Hauerwas opposes the "translation" of biblical texts and uses the historical-critical method in his sermons. Communion, in which we encounter a merciful and loving God, and we are fed and transformed, is intrinsically linked to good narrative preaching. We can only ask spiritually related questions in the context of our surroundings: our friends, our

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<sup>135</sup> Charles G. Haws, "Suffering, Hope and Forgiveness: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 4 (2009): 477-489.

<sup>136</sup> David J. Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 13-18.

community, and our story. He argues for the importance of having a sense of a shared narrative when making moral decisions in pastoral and medical care.<sup>137</sup>

As a result, even in the early church, the gospel was interpreted variously depending on the cultural setting. Culture is viewed differently in different languages. For example, if someone speaks both Spanish and English, they are aware that terms are difficult to translate between the two languages. Because words from Shona culture are not utilized in English, the researcher can communicate more effectively in Shona than in English when educating. Sometimes one language is better suited to expressing a message than another.<sup>138</sup> Despite variations, the Spirit descends on people and begins translating the gospel, the good news, into all the various languages. Because this is who they are, people linked to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, all readings of Scripture that are authentically Christian will lead them further into Jesus Christ's life and path. As a result, even in the early church, some element of the scriptures was interpreted differently depending on the cultural context.<sup>139</sup>

#### *Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Narratives*

Knowing how to interpret these narratives without compromising the original intent of the Bible is critical. People in ancient times read the Bible so intently that it made them desire to discover answers to questions that impeded their comprehension. This marked the beginning of biblical interpretation. "Since it was written, people have been trying to understand the meaning of the Bible. Even if the Bible is God's word, God

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<sup>137</sup> Hauerwas and Lash, 101-104.

<sup>138</sup> Onwu, 49.

<sup>139</sup> Jones, 51-53.

inspired individuals to write it and adapt it to fit the needs of people and their world. History demonstrates that the West introduced the good news to the African continent of Sudan more than once. The man Philip referred to as “the treasurer of Ethiopia” (Meroe in modern Sudan) received the good news, was baptized, and spread the gospel throughout Africa. As a result, the research provides a comprehensive explanation of biblical studies and the critical need for African Biblical studies.<sup>140</sup>

Over the years, people have debated the meaning of God’s word based on how it is interpreted. Africans are well known for their inability to talk about life without bringing up religion and spirituality. Africans learn about themselves and their place in the world through their culture, which encourages a holistic worldview. Hyde indicates the use of approaches that do not appear to be suited for the African setting in some way. The strategies’ effectiveness and value are unaffected by whether or not they are relevant in an African environment. However, initiatives that address African mindsets and situations are required.<sup>141</sup>

Over the years, there has been significant discussion over how to understand the Bible. As a result, different schools of thought have created distinct approaches to understanding the Bible.<sup>142</sup> According to Thiselton, schools of thought are not in conflict; they do not appear to take Africa’s perspective into account. This is a result of the fact that these approaches were not established in Africa, where worldviews and conditions

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<sup>140</sup> John S. Pobee, “Church and State in Ghana 1949-1966,” *In Religion in a Pluralistic Society, Studies on Religion in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 121-44.

<sup>141</sup> Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), 78-89.

<sup>142</sup> Hyde, 92.

are distinct. How can this perceived void be filled? Can contemporary hermeneutic techniques capture the African worldview? How does one understand the Bible in the context of Africa? These questions were posed by African and non-African scholars in an effort to answer or give a framework for discussion among varied researchers.<sup>143</sup>

Although hermeneutics is a large subject, it is used in this study to discuss how the Bible should be understood. According to Terry, hermeneutics is the study of how to read a specific text. It is a way of looking at things and being unbiased and intellectually honest. Hermeneutics is the study of “how we read, understand, and engage with writings, particularly those published in a different period or area than our own,” according to Thiselton. In this context, “hermeneutics” refers to “the method of interpreting a biblical text” or, more succinctly, “how we read, grasp, and communicate with biblical literature composed in a different time and place (far removed from our own in every way than our own).”<sup>144</sup>

According to Resane, biblical hermeneutics is the practice of understanding the Bible in light of its historical and modern contexts.<sup>145</sup> To put it another way, the goal of biblical hermeneutics is to equip the exegete with the tools, methods, techniques, or principles needed to identify the original author’s actual meaning or intention for the original audience or recipient.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 102.

<sup>144</sup> Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A treatise on the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 11.

<sup>145</sup> Kelebogile Thomas Resane, “Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of Biblical Texts: African Approaches,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 99 (2018): 1-9. doi: <https://doi.org/https://doaj.org/article/84ac900e0c7b4aa6b5c39eef85cb677d>.

<sup>146</sup> Resane, 112.



McKim feels that the author's goal is an essential aspect of biblical interpretation. As a result, a competent biblical hermeneutic provides the conceptual foundation for interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the concepts, techniques, and strategies used to decode what the Bible intended to impart but that we could not understand.<sup>147</sup>

Academics have prejudices and views concerning African Biblical studies. People have called this way of reading the Bible fetishistic, magical, primitive, syncretic, and unchristian. Nevertheless, how credible are these claims? Do they genuinely depict how the Bible is interpreted in Africa? Is it true that African culture would be lost entirely if Western missionaries did not assist in the evangelism and gospel movement in Africa? The assumption that culture is just a people's way of life simplifies African Biblical studies. Because there is no clear line between African culture and religion, this interpretation style will be difficult to understand.<sup>148</sup>

The original African culture believes that enemies are the root of all evil. This indicates that nothing happens without the help of a spirit power. Enemies produce dreadful things like accidents, infant deaths, and infertility. Africans had a cultural means of dealing with enemies and evil individuals long before Christianity. All of these were rendered unlawful and ceased when Christian missionaries arrived. Unlike African religions, missionaries did not address the immediate spiritual needs of the people except for prayer.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Donald K. McKim, *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 111-112.

<sup>148</sup> McKim, 112.

<sup>149</sup> Draper, 90-98.

The researcher argues that how can Africans live if what they get does not compensate for what they lose? Simply put, the type of Christianity delivered to Africans did not suit their needs. Too many Western missionaries dominated. This prompted the African convert to seek strength and insight into the Bible, which the missionary had hidden. After reading about miraculous healings and imprecatory psalms, they later realized that the Bible must have a secret power. Adamoh stated that this search brought the imprecatory psalms (35 and 109) to the notice of more people because he believed they could keep foes at bay just as well as naturally potent words, charms, and talismans.<sup>150</sup> An African perspective on the Bible is one that “seeks to recognize and appreciate divine uniqueness by delving into traditional cultural resources and opposing the overwhelming proclivities and biases of Western intellectual inheritance,” as stated by Sugirtharajah.<sup>151</sup> That is to say, the problems are dealt with in a way that is more familiar to Africans in this reading of the Bible. As a result, it appears incorrect to label this interpretation of the Bible as “local.”<sup>152</sup>

These historical examples demonstrate how early Western missionaries were not particularly adept at their jobs and frequently misread what was going on. It is vital to remember that the recipient’s lifestyle influences how the message is received and interpreted because these people have not always been passive. The Western academy’s conviction that its interpretation of the Bible is acceptable has harmed Bible readings in

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<sup>150</sup> David T. Adamo, “African Biblical Studies: Illusions, Realities and Challenges” *Die Skriflig: Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 50, no. 1 (July 2016): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1>.

<sup>151</sup> Sugirtharajah, 11.

<sup>152</sup> Sugirtharajah, 19.

Africa. This is because these interpretations result from the Western Enlightenment and have been significantly affected by individualism, capitalism, and print culture.<sup>153</sup> Thus, it is the responsibility of African biblical hermeneutics to:

1. Develop a method of Bible interpretation that is both “challenging” and “transforming”
2. To disrupt the ideological bonds and hermeneutical power that European-centered biblical academics have long held.
3. To comprehend the Bible and God in light of the Bible as well as African culture and tradition.
4. Examine the Bible from the standpoint of existence.
5. To bring the Western Interpretation of the Bible into disrepute.
6. Reevaluate the Bible to deal with the consequences of Africa’s and Africans’ cultural and ideological conditioning in the area of biblical interpretation.
7. Advance African identity, culture, and tradition.<sup>154</sup>

Adamoh claims that African biblical hermeneutics makes use of the following approaches: communitarian reading and translation; the Bible as a source of power; Africa and Africans in the Bible; African correlational; interpreting the Bible through the lens of Africa and Africa through the lens of the Bible; African evaluative; and promoting a wide range of life interests and African identity.<sup>155</sup>

According to Adamoh, the purpose of African biblical interpretation is to make the Bible both implicitly and explicitly relevant to Africans’ lives. As a result, “no one has yet been able to construct such language to convey God’s totality.” The most crucial

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<sup>153</sup> George Mulrain, “Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context,” In *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 116-132.

<sup>154</sup> Vincent Wimbush, “Scripture for Strangers: The Making of an Africanized Bible” In *Post-colonial Interventions* (ed. Tat-Siong Liew) Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 162-177.

<sup>155</sup> Adamo, 18.

aspect of this understanding is how African identity appears in the Bible.<sup>156</sup> Because Africa and Africans are mentioned frequently in the Bible, the obligations and goals of African biblical hermeneutics are not frivolous. To argue that this method of viewing things is restricted, fetishistic, inconsequential, local, or primitive would be an understatement.<sup>157</sup>

According to the researcher, the foundation on which this satisfaction is now based is quite different from African religion, which shapes the African interpretation of the Bible. Like followers of other faiths, Africans who have converted to Christianity look to the Bible for the answers they seek and the fulfillment of their needs. Adamoh believes the “African social-cultural framework” should be considered while interpreting the Bible. This is referred to as “African hermeneutics.” African cultural hermeneutics, African biblical, transformational hermeneutics, and African biblical studies are all titles for what he dubbed “African biblical hermeneutics.”<sup>158</sup>

According to Adamoh, African hermeneutics is crucial since understanding must occur in a particular context.<sup>159</sup> Yorke provided further elaboration on this approach, which, analogous to Adamoh’s, examines the Bible text through the prism of African worldview and culture.<sup>160</sup> It rereads Christian Scripture from an Afrocentric perspective to better understand the Bible and God in the context of African life and culture. It also

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<sup>156</sup> Adamo, 22-23.

<sup>157</sup> Gosnell L. Yorke, “Biblical Hermeneutics an Afro-centric Perspective,” *Journal of Religion and Theology* 2, No. 2, (Spring 1995): 145-158.

<sup>158</sup> Adamo, 25-29.

<sup>159</sup> Adamo, 28.

<sup>160</sup> Yorke, 26-27.

wishes to end the long-standing domination of Eurocentric biblical scholars in terms of interpretation and ideology.<sup>161</sup>

Yorke then defined African hermeneutics as a means for reevaluating old biblical legacy and African worldview, culture, and life experience. He did this to mitigate the impacts of cultural and ideological conditioning that Africa and Africans had experienced. He referred to this as “Afro-centric Hermeneutics” because all interpretations and theologies are contextual.<sup>162</sup> Resane discusses three strategies that impact African hermeneutics in his book “Afro-centric Hermeneutics and Exegesis.” Liberation, inculturation, and contextualization are examples of these. Remember that Resane refers to the “African context” as the “connective tissue” of the African biblical interpretation methodologies she discusses. As a result, without “the African context,” African biblical hermeneutics will be destroyed, like a flower without its vase.<sup>163</sup>

According to African academics, biblical idioms are evident in the continent’s proverbs and idioms, and they play an essential part in knowledge systems. In other words, Africans’ worldviews, beliefs, and conceptions can influence how they read and understand the Bible (explaining biblical reality).<sup>164</sup>

Elizabeth Mburu believes that when it comes to hermeneutics and the interpretation of narratives, we need to be able to provide a more detailed description of what a story is, how they are presented, and the motivations for doing so.<sup>165</sup> Osborne

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<sup>161</sup> Yorke, 34-35.

<sup>162</sup> Yorke, 45-48.

<sup>163</sup> Resane, 104-105.

<sup>164</sup> Resane, 44-66.

<sup>165</sup> Mburu, 107.

explains that there are two parts to every narrative interpretation: poetics, which examines the story's aesthetic dimension or the way the author constructs the text, and meaning, which re-creates the author's intended message."<sup>166</sup> According to Enuwosa's worldview, all things, including people, animals, places, and objects, can and should point to God.<sup>167</sup> According to Muzorewa, a significant notion in the religion of these African speakers: God, according to Muzorewa is the ultimate entity that finds ultimate expression in everyone and everything that has ever caught man's attention in creation.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, African biblical hermeneutics, which is founded on African realities, holds Africans accountable who frequently interpret the Bible. It allows regular African translators to contribute to the field of African biblical studies.

#### *Interpreting the Bible in a Cultural Context*

African interpretation of the Bible is distinguished by a profound awareness of the disparities between how the Bible is read in other parts of the world and how Africans understand it. Contextualization refers to the act of making the gospel and the church feel at home in a particular cultural setting. Contextualization, however, is a daily effort for every Christian in today's environment. In first-world countries, Europe, and elsewhere, every Christian worships in a contextualized church. The key and deep question are whether or not we will contextualize accurately. Because no church in the world is made up of first-century Palestinian Jews, every believer today contextualizes the gospel in

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<sup>166</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 154.

<sup>167</sup> Joseph Enuwosa, "African Cultural Hermeneutics, Black Theology," *An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (May 2005): 86-88, <https://doi.org/10.1558/blth.3.1.86.65454>.

<sup>168</sup> Muzorewa, 109-110.

their own way, or in ways that fit their own culture. The only challenge that every culture in the church has today is its capacity to adequately contextualize. Syncretism may develop in any culture, whether in Africa or the West if people fail to effectively contextualize.<sup>169</sup>

According to the researcher, contextualization is both essential and advantageous. Every culture may and should embrace the gospel's truth without modifying the completed work of the cross. Regardless of how uncomfortable people may feel in the cultures, clergy and other gospel preachers must identify with the people they are aiming to reach and adapt to their culture. The gospel, on the other hand, condemns and challenges all traditions, including Shona culture and Western culture. It is critical that the Shona people draw the boundary where the Bible directs. The purpose of this research is to attempt to contextualize narrative theology in an African culture, with the objective of making everyone aware of adhering to the integrity of the gospel.

The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:12-21 reveal Paul did not want anything to obstruct the dissemination of Jesus' gospel. He was willing to put up with any discomfort in order to preach the gospel more effectively, even if it meant foregoing the enjoyment of his own legal rights. He even stated that he had the freedom to eat meat, be accompanied by his wife, and be financially supported by the church even if other apostles were doing so, but he voluntarily gave up his privileges to prevent any barriers from standing in the way of the gospel, all while refusing to compromise any bible doctrine or prerequisites in the process. On verse 19, Paul becomes a servant to non-believers, simply because he was serving those he wanted to win back to Christ. He

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<sup>169</sup> McKim, 156.

placed himself underneath them. In doing so, he preserved his Jewish cultural heritage while freeing himself from the weight of the law. He preferred the gospel over his own privileges and the comfort of his own society. Verse 21 demonstrates Paul's incredibly clear comprehension of the contextualization process of the gospel, and he maintains his integrity while remaining within the limits of the same gospel. He refused to submit to this "knowledge" because he recognized how the widespread Hellenistic worldview around him contradicted the gospel at its foundation. Every believer, who makes up the body of Christ, must follow the same set of guidelines when ministering to people in different cultures. Every human culture, including the Shona African culture, must be fully conscious that common grace exists, but that every culture falls.<sup>170</sup>

Missionaries to Africa carried their own interpretations of the Bible with them. As a result, most African Bible readers had to bridge a "double" hermeneutical gap between ancient texts and contemporary living, as well as between Western interpretations and African reality. As a result, African biblical interpreters have established their ways of reading the Bible in order to make it more accessible to African Christians in their daily lives. Comparative studies have revealed links between African culture and the Bible. African cultural history is currently acknowledged as a rich resource for studying the Bible. Along with these advances, people are becoming more aware of the importance of the reader's cultural and social background in Bible interpretation. In various aspects, African readers may find the Bible more intelligible than Western readers.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> McKim, 169-171.

<sup>171</sup> Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 112-114.



People from diverse cultural origins perceive the world through vastly diverse perspectives. As a direct result, their knowledge of the Bible is influenced by the culture in which they were nurtured. Reading the Bible together in various cultural contexts may be a blessing and a gift because it enables us to acquire insight into how other people read the Bible in the context of their own culture (and vice versa). However, Christians must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to critique their own culture as they read the Bible. This is vital for spiritual transformation into Christlikeness. Idolatry is present in every culture on every continent. All people possess fundamental ideas that inhibit them from becoming more Christ-like individuals.<sup>172</sup>

On the one hand, the Holy Spirit utilizes the Bible to speak with people from various cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the Word of God, through the Holy Spirit, addresses the brokenness in every cultural context. Since the Bible was written for people from diverse cultural backgrounds, its content is interpreted in various ways. When a person's culture prevents them from correctly interpreting the Bible, they must learn from various cultural perspectives and be willing to be challenged by them. As a result, it is necessary to understand the Bible in various historical and cultural settings.<sup>173</sup> According to West, the general context for Christians to comprehend Scripture is inside their community and culture, and it is something they accomplish together. This comprehension occurs during a shared activity.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Mburu, 98-103.

<sup>173</sup> Serequeberhan, 108 – 109.

<sup>174</sup> Gerald O. West, "Towards an Inclusive and Collaborative African Biblical Hermeneutics of Reception and Production: A Distinctively South African Contribution" *Scriptura* 119, no. 3 (2020): 1–18. 10.7833/119-3-1765.

The researcher comments on a challenging African subject, which effectively declares, “Eat this and not that.” The topic was the Old Testament of the Bible’s eating laws. Old Testament dietary regulations were difficult to comprehend. When this argument is brought up in the United States, most individuals believe that there are unspoken regulations that define which meals are healthy and which are unhealthy, and another explanation is also possible. Each tribe in Zimbabwe follows its unique set of dietary laws and customs, which serves to distinguish them from one another. Certain foods are avoided by tribe members, while others are commonly consumed. The fact that they consume specific foods indicates that they are members of this tribe and not another. Dietary restrictions are frequently a representation of a person’s sense of belonging. These rituals are fundamental to the identity and culture of a particular tribe.<sup>175</sup>

African theology’s ‘cultural anthropology’ preoccupation to rehabilitate Africa’s rich cultural heritage and religious awareness’ has been an attempt to demonstrate the authentic character of African Christian identity culturally. When examined through the eyes of African theologians, the traditional religions of Africa are part of African religious history (that is, as Christian scholars).<sup>176</sup> This, however, is an “ontological” past rather than a chronological one, accounting for the history of African Christians’ religious consciousness and their declared Christian religion. In this regard, African

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<sup>175</sup> Adekunle O. Dada, “Culture in Biblical Interpretation: The Use of Yoruba Cultural Elements in Adamo’s African Cultural Hermeneutics,” *Old Testament Essays* 34, no. 2 (March 2021): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.696>

<sup>176</sup> William S. Campbell, “*Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul: In Context - Collected Essays*,” (Havertown: The Lutterworth Press, 2017), 225-256.

theologians are concerned with the pre-Christian religious legacy as they attempt to clarify the nature and meaning of African Christian identity, according to Tutu.<sup>177</sup>

Archaeological discoveries in the Ancient Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries altered biblical studies in various ways, providing new challenges for interpreters. Such discoveries have rendered it impossible to study the Old Testament without them. Deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics and ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, and Canaanite languages enable the reading of manuscripts written before Abram's time, as well as texts published during the lifetimes of biblical writers. This wealth of material is invaluable for providing historical and religious background for Bible interpretation.<sup>178</sup>

The basis of the resistance by the Shona Africans to the gospel is based on the fact that Christianity came to Africa packaged together with colonization.<sup>179</sup> The Shona Africans, therefore, became suspicious of the missionary and "their" Gospel message since they were seen as part of the colonizers and expansion of the European empires.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, the gospel must be interpreted and communicated to Africans in a way that is free of the unintended consequences caused by the early missionaries and in a way understandable to an African perspective in their modern-day culture.<sup>181</sup>

The study of the universe has long attracted humanity's interest. From the earliest speculations found in Sumerian and Egyptian mythologies to the modern debate about the

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<sup>177</sup> Kwame Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (1989), 58-65, <https://doi-org.czproxy.bethel.edu/10.1177/239693938901300203>.

<sup>178</sup> Hauerwas and Gregory, 209.

<sup>179</sup> Tapiwa N. Mucherera, *Meet Me at the Palaver Narrative Pastoral Counselling in Postcolonial Contexts* (Havertown: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>180</sup> Mucherera, 24-27.

<sup>181</sup> Mucherera, 29-31.

relationship between science and faith and the controversies surrounding Progression and Scientific Theories, people have proposed a wide variety of theories of beginnings and, at times, have argued heatedly about the superiority of one view over another.<sup>182</sup>

Sociological and historical interests have been the primary motivators in modern African hermeneutics. This has resulted in post-colonial interpretations of the Bible.<sup>183</sup>

It is critical to highlight that Shona African pastors or the African church cannot develop people; instead, people must grow themselves after they get accurate knowledge. Africa's future transformation, growth, and history are simply dependent on the recognition, validation, and mainstreaming of Africa's own traditional, authentic, unique indigenous knowledge in religion, culture, education, research, and across sectors. It is true that the researcher is aware that it will not be easy for Africa, but it will also not be easy for the Shona African people because they have long been subjected to the intellectual guidance and direction of Western colonial invaders or colonial masters, and some missionaries, including the long broadcasted international new media. However, this is a task that Africans must undertake in order to progress; the task ahead of biblical scholars can never be greater than the power within; thus, the researcher is fully convinced that the Shona African people and the body of Christ in Africa can unlearn looking directly on themselves, they can learn to place value on their reality and knowledge, and yes, they can turn around their history with this commitment.

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<sup>182</sup> John, H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 214.

<sup>183</sup> Jean C. Loba-Mkole, and Ernst R. Wendland, *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2005), 201-203.

### *Cultural Perspective and Illustration*

To recognize the African Christian's cultural history, discussing forms of inculturation within the context of African theology means looking for a specific and dependable perspective within which African life and response to the gospel can be summarized and symbolically expressed. It is critical to resist the temptation to perceive model types as reality. A "model" in this regard is a preliminary frame of mind that can pave the way for a genuine and seamless union of the gospel and African culture. The obsolete missionary technique is thought to have outlived its effectiveness because it no longer reflects Africans' current experiences. Adult Christianity, they believe, must replace the infant Christianity practiced in Africa. The old missionary paradigm was focused on bringing Christianity to non-Western civilizations.<sup>184</sup>

According to Chukwuma, reading the Bible necessitates at least three approaches: the ability to evaluate written words for meaning, explain the meanings of those words, and support the interpretation through practice and action. The phenomenon of reading the Bible in Africa is polythetic rather than monolithic. Reading the Bible in an African setting is complex, diversified, and challenging. The complexities of Bible reading in Africa stem from the nature of "the Bible" and "the African culture."<sup>185</sup>

According to Ukpong, the Bible's ambiguity allows for a wide range of applications. The use of the Exodus tale in South Africa by Afrikaners to explain apartheid in the early twentieth century and by Black theologians to resist apartheid

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<sup>184</sup> Susan VanZanten, "Storytelling and Identity," *Christianity and Literature* 61, No. 3, 2012: 368–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014833311206100301>.

<sup>185</sup> James Chukwuma Okoye, *A Narrative Theological Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 112–114.

beginning in the middle of that century is an excellent example. Each side read from a different ideological perspective. According to him, Africa's social, economic, political, and religious landscape is complex, diversified, and frequently vexing. Furthermore, while using the word "the context," keep in mind that Africa has a variety of historical eras, geographical locations, and cultural affiliations. It is impossible to properly define the nature of Bible reading in Africa, but what has been stated thus far should give an idea of how complex it is.<sup>186</sup>

Cragg explains that the goal of African Christian theologies is to show that Christianity must go hand in hand with cultural continuity. Prior to recent years, African theologians made few attempts to comprehend the great range of Christian ideas throughout Africa's numerous civilizations. In a different context, it might refer to the pursuit of "integrity in conversion" or a total identification with one's present commitment. As a result, the crisis of repentance and faith that turns us into Christians actually connects our past and present selves.<sup>187</sup>

Even though the narratives were told or taught differently in distinct parts of Africa, they all share a common cultural perspective and example of a variety of African myths. However, the belief that there is a creator above who created the universe in an orderly fashion is consistent throughout Africa. This culturally contextualized theology can be employed equally well in an African Shona culture. Dube-Shomanah, a Zimbabwean postcolonial African feminist, explores topics of economic, social, political, cultural, androcentric, and ethnocentric justice as they relate to hearing or reading

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<sup>186</sup> Justin S. Ukpog, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 108 (2000): 148- 163, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004497108\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004497108_005).

<sup>187</sup> Ukpog, 150-152.

Scripture in Africa, alongside other postcolonial African feminists. Because Western missionary churches were “intolerant of African religious worldviews and cultures as a whole,” Dube says that Shona people are craving spiritual satisfaction that was lacking in the gospel preached by those churches.<sup>188</sup> As illustrated in the following examples, the Shonas, like the Asians, adopt what they call the “hermeneutic of grafting,” blending their dynamic African spirituality with what they learn from Western missionary churches to achieve fulfillment in their form of worship.<sup>189</sup> The following is an excerpt from a widely disseminated narrative mythology in Africa and Asia that tells how God created the heavens and the earth:

People did not always live on the planet’s surface. Kaang (Kang), the Great Master and Lord of all life, once shared the planet’s surface with humans and other animals. People and animals coexisted happily in this location. Nothing was ever lacking, and even when there was no sun, there was always light. During this beautiful period, Kaang, the Creator God, began contemplating the wondrous wonders he would construct in the world above.<sup>190</sup>

First, Kaang made a massive tree with branches that reached across the whole country. Kaang dug and constructed a hole at the base of the tree that led down to the area where people and animals lived.

Once he was happy with how the globe was set up, he led the first person up the hole. After he sat down on the hole’s edge, the first woman emerged.

Everyone gathered at the base of the tree, startled by the new world they had entered. Kaang then began assisting the animals in their escape from the hole. In their excitement, the animals discovered a way to ascend through the tree’s roots and emerge from the branches.

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<sup>188</sup> Musa W. Dube-Shomanah and Gerald O. West, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 111-129.

<sup>189</sup> Sophia Lyon Fahs and Dorothy T. Spoerl, *Beginnings: Earth, Sky, Life, Death* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 129-130.

<sup>190</sup> Fahs and Spoerl, 159-176.

They continued their race once all the animals emerged from the planet below. Everyone and everything gathered around Kaang. He gave them the command to coexist peacefully.

He then turned to face the people, warning them not to ignite any fires or they would experience terrible evil. Kaang left to locate a hidden location to monitor his world after they pledged to maintain their word. As darkness approached, the sun began to set lower on the horizon.

Animals and humans stood and watched the drama unfold, but as the sun fell, people's hearts were filled with terror. They could no longer see each other since they lacked the animal eyes that could see in the dark. They also lacked the animals' warm coats, so they rapidly became cold. To get warm, one of the men offered the desperate proposal that they light a fire.

They disregarded Kaang's warning and their orders. They quickly warmed up and were able to see each other again. The fire, on the other hand, scared the animals. People have been unable to connect with animals since disobeying Kaang's order.

They took refuge in the caverns and mountains. Fear has now replaced the friendship that the two groups once had.<sup>191</sup>

Another illustration in the beginning:

God created the earth and the heavens. The enormous rivers were wrapped in darkness, and the land was formless and empty.

Moreover, the surface of the waves was covered with the presence of God's Holy Spirit. After that, God said, "Let light be," and there light appeared.

God noticed that the light was good. He then distinguished between light and darkness. God called the day "now you are day" and the night "now you are night." As nightfall ended and daylight arrived, the first day began.<sup>192</sup>

African people have a unique way of understanding days and seasons. The creation narrative below explains when the day begins in African countries.<sup>193</sup> In Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, a wedding on a Friday night is referred to as "the evening of

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<sup>191</sup> Fahs and Spoerl, 165-167.

<sup>192</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Mythology* (New York: P. Bedrick, 1986), 45-48.

<sup>193</sup> Fergus King, "Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective," *Mission Studies* 24, no. 2 (2007): 353-354. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338307X235012>.



Saturday.” Days begin at sunset, just as we learn in Genesis 1:5 that the first day consisted of an evening and a dawn. Even though a day technically begins at midnight, most people in North Africa, particularly those living in rural regions, consider the evening before nightfall to be the start of their day. God created the lovely lights in the sky as signs and seasons to help his people live in harmony with their surroundings. Farmers and anglers still organize their days around the movements of the sun, moon, and stars. They divided their days and seasons in a way that resembled ancient Hebrew culture.<sup>194</sup>

In this third illustration of Yao’s creation narrative, we see humanity challenging the god Mulling to climb to heaven. Only Mulling and the animals are present at the start. The environment is peaceful. The chameleon then decides to go river fishing one day.<sup>195</sup> On the first day, he makes a good catch and eats well. On the second day, he discovers a small boy and a woman in his trap. Mulling instructs him to set them free after the chameleon brings them to him. The chameleon watches them grow to the size of humans at this point.

Then they start a fire by rubbing two sticks together, which swiftly spreads into an uncontrollable forest fire that threatens all of the animals. After that, the couple kills and cooks a buffalo. Mulling is enraged because people are destroying his invention. All of the animals flee. The spider soars to such heights that it vanishes into the sky whilst the chameleon enters the high branches of a tree. As he ascends and remains in the skies, the spider lowers a line for Mulling to catch. As a result of human sin, God is exiled from the

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<sup>194</sup> King, 354.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 102-105.

world. The god Mulling is bewildered by his creation in this case. His only option is to run.<sup>196</sup>

In English, the full significance of these myths is challenging to comprehend. In this ancient African story, a man and a woman emerge from the ocean, which is significant because most contemporary scientists think water is the genesis of life on Earth. Given the importance of water to their way of life, it is not surprising that they included this in the myth. Even God is confused by the behavior of the people in this story, which raises questions about free will. Why isn't God stepping forward to stop the couple? Does he behave similarly to other gods mentioned in literature? Do the novel's characters obey God?<sup>197</sup>

There is only one essential character in all of these narratives, and that is God. The goal of these narratives is to glorify God, as evidenced by the incredible things he accomplished in that He did what had never been done before (as Creator). However, there are multiple main characters, and each one acts or talks at a different period of time. In other words, the stories are about how the world came to be and how individuals became the way they are. This myth above explains how much influence we have over the environment and how we can be forces for good or evil. The people cook meals and construct fires, but they also start fires in the forest, nearly killing everything in their path.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Parrinder, 51-52.

<sup>197</sup> Mildred M. Wakumelo-Nkolola and Felix Banda, "Theoretical and Applied Aspects of African Languages and Culture: Festschrift in Honour of Professor Mildred Nkolola-Wakumelo," *Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society*, Cape Town SA, March 2019, DVC.

<sup>198</sup> Parrinder, 62.

Another fascinating story about the sun, moon, and sky, as well as the origin of the earth, is from Cameroon.

One day, the sun suggested to the moon that they take a river bath with their family.

The sun suggests that he go upstream where he will have more solitude and that each family takes turns.

He tells the moon that the sun will be present when the water begins to boil.

He then leaves, but he has no intention of keeping his pledge.

When the sun and his family have vanished from view, he directs his family to take any dry branches from the trees, light them on fire, and pitch them into the river.

When the moon discovers the steamy water, he enters the pond, supposing the sun has had a bath.

When the moon comes out, he has lost his heat and is quite pale.

When the sun appears, he chuckles that he is now brighter than the moon.

After understanding he has been tricked, the moon tries to seek harsh punishment.

There is a severe famine later on.

Because they are unable to feed such a vast population, the moon encourages him and the sun to kill all of his wives and children.

The moon states that he will proceed upstream and that when the sun sees blood in the river, it will recognize that the moon has slain his family.

The moon does not kill his family.

When he is out of sight, he orders his boys to toss red soil into the river until the water becomes crimson.

When the sun sees the blood river, he murders every member of his family.

Even if the moon appears pale and cool during the day, he still shines brightly and is surrounded by his wives and innumerable offspring.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Nkansah Samuel Kwesi, "The Quest for Climatic Sanity: Re-Reading of Akan Creation Myth," *Language in India* 12, no. 8 (2012): 370.

The researcher explains that various African cultural traditions reflect how Africans conceive of the world's creation. More than fifty African legends all discuss how God created the world. The account of how the world was created in Africa is told in a variety of ways, but one thing unites them all. Because God is the highest entity, it makes sense that all creation can be traced back to him. He cannot be God unless he creates something, and if he did not create something, he would not be God; therefore, creating things is considered as something He does naturally. According to Mbiti, the belief that there is order in creation represents the connection. Even though diverse cultures talk about varying numbers of days, some think the universe was created in four days, while others say it was created in six. Others believe that the heavens came first, followed by the physical cosmos, while others believe the opposite. Whatever the myth claims, it is evident that there was order when God created the universe.<sup>200</sup>

According to Ukpong, the researcher points out that we can tell that there is a hierarchy in creation based on the order in which God created the earth in Africa. The physical world is created first, followed by the spiritual world, and finally by the humans occupying the world. In the hierarchy of beings, the spiritual creatures who appeared initially when the spiritual world was created have more power than the physical entities who also appeared. So, it is not surprising that God is at the top of Africa's list of living things, followed by gods and spirits, humans, and other visible and touchable things. Another approach to perceiving the order of creation is through the relationship between distinct levels of existence. God, the other gods, and spirits, for example, all have a fixed

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<sup>200</sup> Mbiti, 45-46.

relationship with humanity. The continuance of creation is made possible by God's providence in this interplay.<sup>201</sup>

#### *African Worldview on the Bible and Creation*

Understanding how Africans perceive creation is fundamental. Their view of creation appears to diverge from the Western conventional view of creation. Mbiti explains that no logical person can exist without developing a view of life and the world. Ideas formed by human thought spread to others through discussion, dialogue, artistic expression, and other means. Africans have a wide range of worldviews and ideas on creation. They express themselves through myths, stories, riddles, proverbs, rituals, symbols, the universe of beliefs, and wise sayings.<sup>202</sup>

According to Ukpong, the distinctive point of view that an individual brings to their exploration of the world is referred to as their "worldview." It is critical that those in this cross-cultural milieu understand the African worldview to communicate the gospel effectively and strategically. A person's worldview is a collection of beliefs and assumptions about how they see the world, whether or not they are aware of them.<sup>203</sup> Kraft stresses that it provides the critical framework for actions, ideologies, and assumptions that guide people's lives. A person's worldview is the underlying set of beliefs that allows them to function in a specific culture.<sup>204</sup> Akanji explains that it allows people to lay the groundwork for their worldview, including whether they believe in the

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<sup>201</sup> Ukpong, 155-156.

<sup>202</sup> Mbiti, 182.

<sup>203</sup> Ukpong, 157.

<sup>204</sup> Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, Worldview and Contextualization," in *Perspectives on The World Christian Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library 1999), 384-391.

afterlife and whether they value their nuclear family over their extended family. Their worldview influences their perception and interpretation of the nature of reality. It is what helps to untangle the underlying complexity of life, just like a Gordian knot, a plane's black box, or the kingpin log.<sup>205</sup>

Eurocentric interpreters' notion that the Bible is universal is another fallacy. Countless Western interpreters continue to assert that the Westerner's methodology of interpretation is the only authentic, accepted, and valid one; they discussed the ideological conditioning of Africans and people of color, claimed that Eurocentric discourse had a significant impact on academic paradigms by making the West (Europe and North America) the focus of knowledge production. This action was taken to uphold the notion of superiority and the subjugation of the other. The belief that Western history, philosophy, theories, methods, texts, stories, cultures, and structures are the best and most advanced was termed "Eurocentric."<sup>206</sup>

African Biblical Studies argue that the Bible should be interpreted to aid Africa's transformation. The Eurocentric approach to interpreting history comprises the allegorical technique, the literal method, historical criticism, form criticism, tradition-oral criticism, textual criticism, structural criticism, social criticism, rhetorical criticism, authorized criticism, and additional critique. All of the above are honest attempts by scholars with a western worldview or culture to interpret the Bible in their terms; nonetheless, they do not suit the demands of the African people. Since these studies focus mainly on Europe,

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<sup>205</sup> Israel Akanji, "African Christianity: An African Story," ed. by Kalu U. Ogbu. *Journal of Religious History* 32, no. 4 (2008): 495-496.

<sup>206</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15.

they have not discussed the number of Africans living in extreme poverty. The genuine suffering and persecution that witches and wizards endure in Africa have not been discussed.<sup>207</sup>

These kinds of research do not address the concerns of African ancestors and the question of who owns the land on the African continent. In addition, African culture and religion are rarely accorded the consideration they merit. Any form of Christianity or academic discipline that disregards the reality of living in Africa is irrelevant to Africans and African Christianity. This is because the experiences of Africans and Europeans are distinctive. Africans must establish their own methods for understanding the Bible. They must use their intelligence to create an original Bible study.<sup>208</sup>

When they discuss research that can change Africa, they are talking about biblical research, which is particularly important to the health and well-being of African people today. Most people call this field of research African biblical studies or transformative biblical studies in Africa. Regrettably, individuals are attempting to argue against research that may help alleviate poverty in Africa and free people from the grip of witches and wizards, in addition to the impacts of sickness and the mentality of colonialism that still affects the majority of the continent. “African social and cultural context” is a subject of biblical interpretation<sup>209</sup>

This research attempts to examine ancient biblical traditions and African worldview, culture, and life experience to “address the influence of the cultural

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<sup>207</sup> Ukpog, 91.

<sup>208</sup> Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz, *The Bible in a World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 139-151.

<sup>209</sup> Ukpog, 127-132.

ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the practice of biblical interpretation.” Many Africans have been informed that they have not contributed to global culture. They have been led to believe that Africans or the Black race have nothing to offer or contribute to the improvement of humanity in terms of the historical development of biblical studies.<sup>210</sup> Unfortunately, whenever they publish academic publications employing the methods of African Biblical Studies, they are criticized as fetishistic, mystical, barbaric, and unscholarly. Enuwosa reveals that he was accused of trying to smuggle Africa and Africans into the Bible after submitting diverse essays to Western journals for publication, and his work has not been reviewed a lot.<sup>211</sup> Egypt has never been a part of Africa in terms of its people. Hence, ancient Egyptians could not have been Black Africans. The belief that Africans had nothing to do with the story of redemption, despite their widespread presence and significant contributions to the Bible, is another example. African Biblical Studies aims to reread the Bible from an Afrocentric perspective. Interpretation is contextual because it is always performed within a particular situation. It means that the African worldview and culture be considered when reading the Bible.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> July Robert, “Africa Discovers Her Past,” *African Historical Studies*, The African Studies Center of Boston University 14, no. 1, (Spring 1971): 178–178, <https://doi.org/10.2307/216291>.

<sup>211</sup> David J. Enuwosa and T. Adamo “The Prospects of Intrafaith Dialogue in Nigeria,” *Missiology* 29, no. 3 (2001): 331–342.

<sup>212</sup> David T. Adamo, “A silent unheard voice in the Old Testament: The Cushite woman whom Moses married in Numbers 12:1–10,” *Die Skriflig: Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 52, no. 1 (2018): e1–e8.



The objective is “to eliminate the authority and intellectual stranglehold that eurocentric biblical scholars have long had” and to interpret the Bible and God in the context of African experience and culture.<sup>213</sup>

African cultural studies and African biblical studies are mostly centered on three factors: It liberates, transforms, and is sensitive to cultural distinctions. Musa Dube highlighted a former Indigenous doctor (nganga) as an example of research that is liberating, transformative, and culturally sensitive.<sup>214</sup> Vita attempted to decolonize the gospel by placing biblical locations in the context of her homeland and recognizing the presence of Black people in the Bible. Even though she was just 20 years old, she preached that the colonization of Christian symbols was wrong, and that God would restore the Congo, which had suffered due to colonialism.<sup>215</sup> It accomplishes this by employing indigenous cultural resources to aid theology and by utilizing liberation as a case study.<sup>216</sup>

African Biblical Studies also examines the Bible through theopoetic, oral explanation, and narrative. By “narration,” we refer to a method of interpreting the Bible as a collection of God-centered stories. This could also be referred to as research on storytelling. When I say that African Biblical Studies have a theopoetic aspect, they can

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<sup>213</sup>John Enuwosa, “Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa,” *Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies* (Ibadan, 2005): 130-136.

<sup>214</sup>Dube, 101.

<sup>215</sup>Marcel Boivin. “Missionaries Go Home?” *New Blackfriars* 53, no. 630 (1972): 494-502, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1972.tb08063.x>.

<sup>216</sup>David T. Ngogi, “Reading the Bible in Africa,” *Exchange* (Leiden, Netherlands) 43, no. 2 (2014): 174-191. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341316>.

interpret and comprehend religion artistically.<sup>217</sup> This could be any rhythmic music, such as singing, dancing, or chanting. This entails specifically reciting and singing the Bible as though it were God's inspired message. These are known as "God's songs" or "songs to God." The oral component of African Biblical Studies involves the public reading and analysis of a religious text. The stories that have been passed down orally from one generation to the next must be diligently committed to memory.<sup>218</sup>

The culture in which a person grows up, as well as the lessons they receive from their family and teachers, all impact their worldview.<sup>219</sup> Repetition of familiar behaviors reinforces a person's worldview, which is usually taken for granted until they are exposed to an alternative worldview, which forces them to question why they act or perceive the world the way they do. Culture and worldview are inextricably linked. Cultural traditions shape and dictate a person's perspective. In other words, a person's faith fundamentally shapes their worldview. As a result, a person's worldview effectively represents their core cultural religious belief system. Any Bible teacher must be conscious of this strong relationship between cultural traditions and worldviews because it implies that they should not only work to win over followers while ignoring the underlying worldviews.<sup>220</sup>

The ultimate purpose of studying narrative theology is for all Christians to have a biblical worldview that is both clearly defined and lived out in their culture as they go

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<sup>217</sup> David T. Adamo, "Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10-14," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 49, no. 1 (1992): 33-43.

<sup>218</sup> Andrew M. Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149-178.

<sup>219</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, review of "Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 67, no. 3 (2014): 43-45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930612000609>.

<sup>220</sup> Adamo, 52.

through different stages of their spiritual journey and win more souls into God's Kingdom. Certain assumptions are also at the root of African culture and worldview. Throughout the hermeneutical process, it is vital to ensure that these assumptions do not encourage Africans to make wrong decisions. You must notice these assumptions to avoid ending up misinterpreting the meaning of the text. We lose sight of the author's original intention when we do this, whether in a story, poem, or proverb.<sup>221</sup>

There are diverse African viewpoints on creation in the book of Genesis. African myths begin with the genesis of humanity and assume the planet's existence from the start. Although there is no commonly agreed sequence for the creation of other things, the majority of creation myths suggest that the formation of heaven occurred before the development of the world.<sup>222</sup> The notion of creation *ex nihilo* has been described in at least three African societies, possibly more, but it appears to be a rare one.<sup>223</sup> According to Kwiyan, the creation story may be given schematically, and even the youngest and most impressionable listeners will be enthralled and intrigued by the narrative.<sup>224</sup> A straightforward example of Genesis 1:1–12 is as follows:

God created the planet and the rest of the cosmos from nothing.<sup>225</sup>

The earth was desolate and engulfed in darkness.

And the Spirit of God was over it.

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<sup>221</sup> Elizabeth, W. Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle, UK: HippoBooks, 2019), 9.

<sup>222</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions*, 34–39.

<sup>223</sup> Mbiti, 60.

<sup>224</sup> Harvey C. Kwiyan and Joseph Ola, "God in Oral African Theology: Exploring the Spoken Theologies of Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 31, no. 1 (May 2021): 54–66, <https://doi.org/10.10520/ejc-conspec-v31-n1-a5>.

<sup>225</sup> Jacobsen, 128.

When God commanded, “Let there be light,” he instructed there to be light.

And God looked at the world and pronounced it to be good.

Then he explained the distinction between darkness and light.

The hours of the day were designated “day,” while the hours of the night were named “night” All of this happened in a single day.

“Let there be separation between the waters,” God commanded, so that water would not mingle with other water.

What was expected occurred. God created this space to prevent water from above and below from mixing.<sup>226</sup>

“Heaven” was God’s new term for space.

This occurred on the second day.

“Come, collect up the waters beneath the skies so I can make dry land emerge,” God said. That is how it turned out.

God gave names to the land and the sea. And God made it so.”<sup>227</sup>

Let there be a lot of each sort of grass and plant that makes seeds in the land,” God said. Allow plants to produce fruit and seeds.

The seeds will grow into plants and trees that resemble the ones from whence they came. That is how it turned out.

There were various diverse types of trees and plants that produced seeds, and those seeds produced more of the same type.

God approved because he believed it was a good thing.

On the third day, everything reached its peak.<sup>228</sup>

The story of creation in this study is being drawn from African history and other real-life stories that will talk about people and real-life events. The narrative of creation is

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<sup>226</sup> Adamo, 134-135.

<sup>227</sup> Moiseralele Prince Dibeela, “A Setswana Perspective on Genesis 1:1-10,” *The Bible in Africa* (Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends, 2000), 384–99.

<sup>228</sup> Kwiyanani and Ola, 54–66.

told in Genesis 1:1-26. When Africans consider it, they produce a variety of creation stories or myths origin. They talk about the origins of the creation, the earth, animals, and humankind. They depict the separation of God and humanity. Unlike the creation and fall tales in the Bible, which describe God expelling men from paradise, most African versions depict God retiring into heaven because humans had done something wrong.<sup>229</sup>

One of the myths recorded by Father Alexander Chima from the Borana-Oromo ethnic group in Ethiopia and Kenya. This narrative is comparable to that of the Shona and is easily comprehended by the majority of Africans. He narrated this way,

Once upon a time, God created man and an elephant in Africa. Then he planted a beautiful garden, and he walked with them daily. A river contained pure water until the elephant began to muddy the water.

He refused to listen to God or man when they told him to stop. In the end, man killed the elephant. God, however, was angered by this behavior and expelled man from the garden.

Consequently, the Borana people in Ethiopia and Kenya are now engaged in a relentless search for water in parched regions to this day.<sup>230</sup>

The narrative above illustrates God the creator, Genesis 1:1-25; man's creation, Genesis 1:26-28; and the communication or connection between God and man Genesis 1:29-30; in the beautiful Garden of Eden. Adam's life was perfect, and he had all he needed until he declared his independence from God in Genesis chapter 3. This generated a breach between God and man, resulting in man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, according to Healey.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Joseph, G. Healey, *Once Upon a Time in Africa: Stories of Wisdom and Joy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 11.

<sup>230</sup> Healey, 34.

<sup>231</sup> Healey, 45-47.

The Shona creation myth does not explicitly state that humankind has “dominion” over creation, as does Genesis 1. This is true of most other African creation myths, including those of the Yoruba of Nigeria; nonetheless, humanity’s position concerning the created world was frequently considered as one of epistemic domination. Animals, plants, and inanimate objects, according to Mbiti, “are in an ontological category inferior to that of man, and so cannot have the vital duty of operating as intermediates, according to Mbiti.”<sup>232</sup> Hauerwas claims that anthropological literature from several different African ethnic groups supports this fact.<sup>233</sup>

Since the researcher is originally from Zimbabwe, she has personal experience with several of these myths as her great-grandfather passed on myths. Although the researcher could not take it seriously because she was just 14 years old, more research has proved that the old man was on the right trajectory. Ancestors passed down the stories across the centuries orally. The quantity of undocumented Shona history fascinates the researcher.

The Shona people of Zimbabwe are a culturally and historically rich people group. Eighty percent of the people in Southern Africa are members of this ethnic group, which is also found in Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and South Africa. The stonework from Zimbabwe is famous all over the world. The Shona use sculpture to depict the harmony between the physical and the supernatural. Sculptors can use this expertise of storytelling passed down through generations to study heritage, myths of creation stories, beliefs, and even the human spirit. There are varieties of the Shona

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<sup>232</sup> Mbiti, 71.

<sup>233</sup> Hauerwas and Burrell, 191.

language, including Korekore, Karanga, Nda, Manyika, and Zezuru. This poetic tongue is descended from Central African Bantu languages and has terminology in common with Swahili, a language widely used in East and Central Africa. People's speech patterns can give away their origins or the group they belong to.<sup>234</sup>

#### *African Myths on Creation Stories*

Africans utilize myths, or ngano, to instruct their children about real-world matters. Theologians define mythology according to this definition as "a story intended to explain a truth that is otherwise difficult to comprehend."<sup>235</sup> This is a made-up narrative, not a history lesson.<sup>236</sup> This is why individuals believe a myth to be false. We are examining and reflecting on Jesus' parables because, as we all know, it never happened, but it does offer a lesson. The genesis myths or narratives are presented as history lessons, but the goal is to teach that everything originated with God.<sup>237</sup>

Most of the time, the historical information in the Bible is told in the form of a story, but it does more than just teach or even look nice. These stories should be seen as teaching, praising, and theological to help us learn about God in the context of our lives (teaching us how to stay in love with our creator). While Africans see things holistically, they tend to give precedents to theological aspects of a story.

That is, what happened the "first time" occurs every day; therefore, creation occurs all over again. Yahweh's continual task as creator is shown in the Hebrew Bible to

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<sup>234</sup> Muzorewa, 14-23.

<sup>235</sup> Sue Dickson, "Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity, In New York City," *Reviews of Religion and Theology*, May 13, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ri.12259>.

<sup>236</sup> Mbiti, 67.

<sup>237</sup> Muzorewa, 69.

maintain the structure, he established in Genesis 1. This is in stark contrast to the African Egyptians' belief that creation occurs on a daily basis. Still, the idea that the universe was created in a brief amount of time creates a strong link between Genesis and Egypt, making the similarities between Genesis and Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation story, appears insignificant.

Similar to the Zimbabwean expression, the Egyptian phrase references the moment when the initial creation pattern was formulated and implemented. In English, we would refer to such an early time as the primeval period. All of this suggests that the phrase "beginning" refers to the seven-day period of creation described in the rest of Genesis 1, rather than a moment in time preceding the seven days. It does not describe the creative activity as a separate clause, but it does provide a literary introduction to the period of creative work, which flows into the tôldôt sections comprising the remainder of the book. Therefore, Theologians define mythology as "a story intended to explain a truth that is otherwise difficult to comprehend."<sup>238</sup> While Africans see things holistically, they tend to give precedents to theological aspects of a story.<sup>239</sup>

When you look at northeastern Africa, the word "creation" is used differently in Egyptian religion than it is in the Hebrew Bible, where it is used over and over again in connection with the story of how the world was made. That is, what happened the "first time" occurs every day; therefore, creation occurs all over again. Yahweh's continual task as creator is shown in the Hebrew Bible to maintain the structure, he established in Genesis 1. This is in stark contrast to the African Egyptians' belief that creation occurs on

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<sup>238</sup> Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academia Books, 1987), 89-93.

<sup>239</sup> Mburu, 124.



a daily basis. Still, the idea that the universe was created in a brief amount of time creates a strong link between Genesis and Egypt, making the similarities between Genesis and Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation story, appears insignificant.<sup>240</sup>

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One "seeks to identify and appreciate divine individuality by diving into traditional cultural aspects and battling the overpowering inclinations and biases of

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<sup>240</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 125.

<sup>241</sup> James Allen, *Genesis in Egypt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 57.

<sup>242</sup> Walton, 127.

<sup>243</sup> Walton, 156.

Western intellectual legacy" while studying the Bible from an African worldview. To "address the influence of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the practice of biblical interpretation by colonialists," the researcher focused on historical biblical traditions as well as the African worldview, culture, and life experience. Africans commonly believe that they have made no important contributions to global culture and philosophy. They have been persuaded that as Africans and people of African origin, the Shona people have been persuaded to believe that they have nothing to offer to the growth of Christian theology and, by implication, humankind as a whole. Africans must create their own systems for reading and understanding the Bible. They'll have to use their brainpower to develop their own theology based on their African worldview.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

### **Research Methodology and Approach**

This project has given us great insights into what happened during the colonial era. The researcher shared responses received from the interviews that were conducted with six Shona African pastors. The interviews gave a deeper understanding of the challenges African Shona pastors encountered when simply trying to preach the gospel during the colonial era, especially in light of their ties to missionaries and dependence on their worldview. A qualitative case study method was used for this study. Interviews were used to get the information. For this study, interviews were conducted with pastors (of the Shona ethnicity) who served as missionaries in colonial-era Zimbabwe, Africa. During the colonial era, these pastors, some of whom were still in seminary at that time, witnessed it all unfold. In addition, these ministers are all Zimbabwean immigrants residing in various states throughout the United States. The perspective of Shona pastors on theology before and after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 would help us comprehend the genuine challenges faced by Zimbabwean Africans. Despite the fact that colonization established borders without taking into account customary limits in place prior to European arrival in Africa, the Shona are primarily located in Zimbabwe and other neighboring countries; thus, they will be interviewed, making the case study the most effective research model to use.

A case study, according to Leedy, is used when extensive data is collected about a specific person, program, or event in order to understand more about an unknown or

poorly understood subject.”<sup>244</sup> The purpose of this event is to understand how to culturally adapt the Gospel with an African worldview, with particular reference to Zimbabweans in Africa.

#### *Research Instruments*

The primary source of information came from interviews with six Shona pastors who were born in Zimbabwe and migrated to the United States, and they are still active in ministry on various levels. One female pastor and five male pastors were participants in this interview. They are between 60 and 92 years old. All six pastors were active in the church during the challenging times of colonialism and were attached to various churches where they interned during the colonial era. They were more conscious of the obstacles and challenges faced by the church in Zimbabwe. They have experienced different treatment from the Shona community and traditional leaders when spreading the gospel using traditional methods. This research met the standards and was certified as level 3 research by the Bethel University Institutional Research Board (IRB) for research involving human beings (Appendix A). For this reason, the identities of those interviewed will not be revealed.

#### *Project Overview*

The first step is a biblical and theological exploration of the Creation story in Genesis 1. The second step is to conduct a literature review on African worldview and narrative theology. In the third step, the researcher sent out a guided informed consent form for participants to read, sign, and return before the interviews in order to conduct an

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<sup>244</sup> Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research, Planning and Design* (New York: Pearson, 2019), 42.

interview. We requested the participating pastors to share their experiences as pastors who have led several churches in Africa while utilizing traditional models to spread the gospel to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. The majority of the questions asked by the researcher were open-ended, allowing for follow-up inquiries for data collection and clarification. The researcher advised the participants to be candid about their time as a pastor in Zimbabwe during the colonial era. According to Leedy, in a semi-structured interview, one or more specifically constructed questions may be added to the standard questions in order to elicit clarification or probe a subject's rationale.<sup>245</sup> Due to the additional follow-up questions, the researcher was able to obtain more information from the participants. Vyhmeister acknowledges that a well-designed questionnaire can collect data describing reality. A better and broader knowledge of a respondent's attitudes is possible through interviews. He thinks a secure face-to-face interview would provide a more organic outcome.<sup>246</sup> The qualitative research interview is further defined by Creswell and Poth as "attempts to comprehend reality from the participants' perspective, to reveal the meaning of their encounter, and to reveal their lived worldview."<sup>247</sup>

The topics covered in the questions included how they applied the Scriptures to meet people at the point of their needs, challenges, or resistance they faced from their communities when delivering the gospel, and frequent disputes they had with traditional leaders. Based on these interviews, an analysis will be done to identify how to modify

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<sup>245</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 152.

<sup>246</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, 2nd ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 153-154.

<sup>247</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 155.

current methods and innovate new ones that will increase Africans' openness to the Gospel from an African perspective. Leedy asserts that the researcher will take into account issues like signed consent, privacy, and confidentiality ethics seriously.<sup>248</sup> The majority of the questions the researcher engaged in were open-ended, allowing for follow-up inquiries for elaboration and data collection.

In the fourth step, the researcher obtained signed consent forms from each of the six pastors who were to be interviewed, and each pastor offered their individual consent to participate in the interviews. Interviews began in September 2022 and continued through the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2022.

The fifth step involved interacting with these six pastors over the phone or via zoom. These pastors are located in different locations within the United States. The sixth step was to analyze the data for themes. The seventh step was to analyze all the produced data and identify methods to culturally adapt the Gospel so that it can be understood through an African worldview.

### **Interviews**

The researcher devised the three interview questions after studying about Zimbabwe's history, colonialism, and the role of missionaries throughout the colonial era. The researcher wanted to hear from all six pastors about the challenges they experienced and how people reacted to their gospel message, especially because they were working with missionaries who were seen as a vital part of colonialists. The six Shona pastors who

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<sup>248</sup> Leedy and Omroad, 98.

took part in this interview had four common concepts or themes. Throughout the interviews, the participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

Questions:

1. Based on your experiences as a pastor under colonialism, what kind of challenges did you face with the Shona people and traditional leaders during your ministry as you introduced Christianity?
2. How did the Shona people respond to your message after seminary, did you ever feel you had all the tools you required to study the Bible and develop systems and solutions that made sense to the Shona African Congregation?
3. If colonialism was to blame for the integration and transformation of Shona culture into Western culture, what changes did it bring about in the character and substance of Shona cultural practice in everyday life, what can be done to restore this anomaly?

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### **Finding 1: Challenges faced by Pastors**

Below we find the four themes that were received from the six Shona African pastors who participated in the interviews. All our findings came from these themes.

#### *Theological – The Way the Bible was Taught, Interpreted, or Applied Was Not from an African Perspective*

The challenge of the establishment of Christianity by missionaries occurred at the same time as colonialism. The challenge of the depictions of “Jesus Christ” as a White man with blonde hair and blue eyes, many Shona people saw Christianity as a “White man’s” religion. Pictures on the church walls and his twelve blond European disciples eating supper with Jesus were incomprehensible to Shona Africans.

The challenge of preaching Christianity as a faith that liberates the soul or liberation theology. People did not take the implications of scriptures like Galatians 5:1; Luke 6:21 seriously when Jesus would declare that He had come to liberate the prisoners, the sick, and the afflicted, and the oppressed. In Luke 1:52–53, Mary praises the Lord by saying, “He has thrown conquerors off their thrones, but he has lifted up the humble. He has fed the hungry well, but he has sent the rich away empty.” Liberation theology tries to understand the Bible from the point of view of the poor and hungry. Liberation theology says that Mary is happy that God has freed the financially poor, fed the physically hungry, and brought down the materially rich. In other words, he is a God who helps those who are poor more than those who are rich.

The Bible reveals that Christians should help the poor and speak out against wrongdoing Galatians 2:10; James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17. Several times in the Bible, it says that wealth can be a trap. Unfortunately, the missionaries were also focused on the



money they could make in Zimbabwe Mark 4:19. Even though the most important need of humanity is spiritual and not social. The gospel is for everyone, even those who have a lot Luke 2:10. God doesn't favor some people over others, so it wouldn't be right to treat some people better or say that they are God's favorites Acts 10:34–35. Christ brings His church together instead of dividing it based on money, race, or gender Ephesians 4:15. That was the center of attention and the answer to the real problems that people still have today. The Gospel would be more welcoming if missionaries had stressed that we are all the same and that this Bible verse is not just for one group of people, but for everyone.

In any case, white missionaries had already introduced Christianity to Rhodesia, or what is now Zimbabwe, at the time the interviewee entered the ministry. However, they had purposefully decided not to teach or preach a relevant gospel that would make a people whole again. Therefore, many congregants preferred to separate political liberation from spiritual liberation. For them, going to heaven had nothing to do with being “free indeed” here on earth. In fact, “liberation theology” was a dirty word. But with the interviewee's exposure to liberation theology and contextual theology, he struggled to preach the “whole gospel” which was relevant to the African people. For example, as a Theology professor at a school in the United Kingdom 1983- 87, one challenge was trying to introduce an African perspective to his theological students. They would want to know which book he got and what information he used. If it was written in English, then it was “valid theology.”

The challenge posed by a lack of trust between pastors and community leaders due to their affiliation with missionaries. According to Kay, while colonial times were in effect, her father served as a Senior Pastor, and she had just finished seminary. She was

also serving in the church's leadership at the time as the youth chairperson. The interviewee's father had several challenges from Shona and traditional leaders and chiefs throughout his time as a church planter.

One good example was when she had to organize a youth revival, and a team of missionaries was bringing generators and a movie for them to watch during the revival. The fact that white people were coming did not go well with the leaders of the community because for them the white people were a curse to their traditional teachings. The leaders did not want their children to be taught by these foreigners who were "bringing a foreign God." A word went around that the youth should not attend this revival because they feared that they would be indoctrinated to disrespect their culture. It took weeks of persuading the king and the community leaders to hold this revival.

The fact that her mother shared the same totem with the King saved the revival program. The king released a statement to the pastor and told him, "Vadzimu vangu vanochengeta vavo, wakaroorwa mwana wangu saka uri mukuwasha, so nemhaka iyi endererai zvenyu mberi" (My ancestral spirits care for their own). Now because your wife has the same totem with me, she is my daughter, and she is the only reason I will allow this to go on as you are my son-in-law. (You will do what is good for the Shona people and protect our values.) However, not everyone was pleased with the King's verdict. The Shona communities reacted violently to the king's choice. The revival was disrupted by a large number of community teenagers who just wanted to see the revival fail due to the influence of chiefs and traditional elders. Violence erupted from that day between Christians and the community people.

Another interview described a time when one day two students actually walked out of his class because they alleged, what he was teaching about “presence of evil spirits and mashavi (spirit mediums),” which disturbed their “Christian faith, just by mentioning the word “African”. To fast forward, this particular incident, when these same students became senior pastors, they wrote them letters regretting that they had not learned to understand “African spirituality.” That, for example, the parable of the Prodigal son could be taught and interpreted to teach the father’s love. In Shona: “Kudza baba wako na Mai kuti mazuwa ako awande panyika ayo Jehovah anokupa” (Deutonomy 5:16). They had not mastered the art of “contextualizing” the Gospel. They preferred to regurgitate rather than reflect on the Word. They did not believe that an African can be a faithful Christian without denouncing their African cultural identity.

Pastors were faced with the challenge of Westernizing the Gospel. Pastors who approached their preaching in a western cultural manner without contextualizing the Gospel were ranked as more effective by missionaries, which was more Christian, than people like those who tried to “contextualize” the gospel. An excellent example of “contextualizing the gospel” was how one interviewee would ask the congregation to sit down on their benches or kneel down to pray. They had been taught that standing up was the best way to “honor” God at the seminary. But in the presence of the African chiefs, all the subjects were required to sit down to show respect to the chiefs. To stand up in front of the chief was “daring” and disrespectful.

Reference to phrases like “as white as snow” did not mean much to the Shona people who had never seen snow. Yet that was the Christian vocabulary. “Jesus cleanse me so that my heart can be a white as snow.” Most Shona people had never seen snow.

Instead, the interviewee encouraged phrases like “as white as milk” or “as white as the full moon.” The Shona knows the whiteness of milk and its purity. They were all able to get connected to this.

The challenge of preaching the gospel from an African perspective after missionaries had cleared the path. It was not easy for pastors to preach the Gospel from an African perspective because the people had been “brainwashed” to think that anything African was evil and anything Western was good (colonial mentality) therefore Christian religion was reduced to materialism. Yet for the Shona life is not “either/or.” Instead, life is holistic. Good is white, and evil is black. The color of darkness was black, whereas the color of the light was white. Missionaries did not challenge colonists even when they witnessed abuses committed against Black people. Today, the Shona people grieve the hymns they sang during colonialism, such as “Give me Jesus and take the World.”

*Cultural- Western Ways Being Imposed on Shona People*

The challenge of imposing Western values on the Shona people became a great hindrance to the spreading of the Gospel. The Western values of the colonizers were also opposed to the communal values of the Shona whose values were likened to the Jewish people. It was also hard because some of the religious and cultural practices of the Shona Africans were conflicting with those of the Colonialists. The Shona people knew God before colonialism; it was not anything introduced by the colonizers. They worshiped God in their own unique way via their forefathers. The challenge of the ignorance of the Shona culture by the colonialists, the Shona culture was very similar to the Jewish culture depicted in the Bible. The researcher cites a few examples that are still performed by Jews and Shona people, such as when the brother dies, the surviving brother gets the

deceased's estate and marries the widow (kugara nhaka). If the late brother had children, the elder or younger brother instantly adopted both the children and their mother, and if the children were young, they would never be aware that either of their parents had passed away because they would naturally blend into the family.

There was no word called adoption, or orphan, the children would simply be grafted into the family, Deuteronomy 25:1. If brothers are living together and one dies without a son, the widow of the deceased brother may not marry outside the family. The brother of her spouse shall marry her and execute his duties as her brother-in-law. Due to their opposition to this culture, missionaries began to establish orphanages in which children were taken from the community and placed in separate orphanage children's homes. No longer were children permitted to live with their relatives or to be surreptitiously adopted by families. It was made possible for mothers to return home and resume their lives. Those without families were now responsible for their own survival. The deceased husband's family was no longer responsible for the widow.

Another example is that the Shona people still pay the dowry or bridal price (Roora) for their new bride in the same way as Jewish people do. They married and celebrated weddings in the same way. In Shona society, if you did not have enough money to pay the bride price, you would choose to labor for the new bride for a certain number of years like what Jacob did for Rachel, which was considered barbaric and sinful by the missionaries (Kutema ugariri). A dowry was a gift paid by a man to the family of the girl he desired to marry, according to Deuteronomy 22 and 29. It was sometimes referred to as the wedding price or bride wealth. Jacob confessed his love for

Rachel in Genesis 29 and offered to serve Laban for seven years in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage.

This is an example of a dowry tradition from the past. In Shona culture and community, it was unacceptable for a newlywed woman to have sexual relations with a man before marriage. This was a great disgrace, and the family would face great disgrace if this happened. Therefore, in Shona culture, a cloth as evidence that your daughter was a virgin was valued in the event that the husband may falsely seek a divorce on the grounds that she was not a virgin (Deuteronomy 22:13-22). The missionaries condemned this culture for violating girls' rights and invading their privacy. In Shona tradition, this marked the beginning of several divorce lawsuits. Unfortunately, a significant portion of those getting divorced were from families that claimed to be Christians and often attended church. Because of this, there was a great deal of contention between Christians and traditional leaders.

The challenge of the conversion of Kings, Chiefs, and traditional leaders. These community leaders had a hard time trying to reconcile being a "Christian" and being a "traditional" leader because chiefs were expected to uphold the African culture. They were the guardians of morality. For example, regarding the dress code, the chief was expected to dress in a certain way, certainly not wear a suit and tie. They should wear a piece of leopard skin or python skin which shows royalty. Unfortunately, this would be regarded as the height of paganism, even if the chief confessed Jesus Christ as Lord.

This is where the practice of referring to Africans as animals with no souls who must be exorcised in order to become real Christians began. As a result, traditional leaders responded that they couldn't relate to a white God or a white Jesus. They would

explain to their communities that it signified that whites were superior to their Shona counterparts and that Africans needed a white man to be saved and civilized. Pastors, together with missionaries, were accused of sitting on their people's consciences by failing to condemn the injustices that were being perpetrated against the Shona people.

When missionaries attacked the Shona people for some of their traditional practices, such as playing African Shona instruments such as drums and the popular mbira (thumb piano), gourds with seeds inside, leg rattles, and many others in the church, some people stopped attending church and continued to practice their traditional beliefs out of fear of brainwashing.

The challenge of individualism and collectivism was prevalent. According to their Shona culture, Africans were never individualistic. Instead, they were always community-oriented, which made it impossible to highlight the habit of seeking God alone or doing things for God as an individual. The norm was the Ubuntu notion which means expressing humanity towards others. "I am because we are" ("Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"). This was about humaneness among people within a community, about collective togetherness. So, whatever the missionaries were planning to do was supposed to be done collectively.

The challenge of Westernized music became one of the most difficult roadblocks for pastors. Singing Christian songs meant singing hymns introduced by missionaries (albeit translated into Shona). Some of the songs were written to condemn African culture as "darkness," whereas western culture was "Christian/the Light." Since ancient times, Africans have worshiped by clapping their hands and moving their bodies. They dance and ululate while honoring, which was deemed primitive, so people would follow the

western manner of worship on Sunday, but then return to their old cultural way of worship in the evening, hindering spiritual growth in people.

*Political - Losing Access to the Best Land*

*Challenge of being dispossessed from fertile land to arid lands.* The Shona People were also forced to move from more productive arid lands due to climate change and the colonizers took good lands in good regions where there was plenty of rain. The challenge of restricting people's movement and erecting boundaries became a major conflict with the Shona traditional leaders. To the astonishment of the Shona people, the colonialists also granted land to the missionaries. They were also given land on which to construct schools and hospitals without having to obtain permission from the landowners, whose rights had been taken away. Consequently, it appeared that missionaries were participants in the appropriation of Shona land.

*Land dispossession* - The challenge of the Shona people being dispossessed of their land and forced to live on small plots of land and share them with their growing children, who were now married became unbearable to the Shonas. Before the arrival of the colonists, when Shona people's sons became adults, they would be free to leave the family home and start their own families anywhere they desired because the land was available.

*Challenges – Restrictions borders were created.*

The challenge of people being capped on their freedom to travel and the creation of boundaries. Borders were created and restrictions were put in place against the Shona people in their own land, whenever they trespassed into their colonizers' land, they were breaking the law, and borders were established and were to be maintained. The challenge



faced by pastors was that the Shona people were now being called intruders in their own land. If they ever trespassed, they were faced with punishable offenses of prosecution or face being shot to death.

*The challenge of firearms and the gospel.* Both colonialists and missionaries carried firearms to certain church gatherings, making it difficult to determine their motives. The main difference between the missionaries and the colonizers was that the missionaries also carried a Bible, but it became a problem when they brought firearms to meetings. This made it more difficult for Shona pastors (who had converted to Christianity) to proclaim the Gospel as (Good News) given by those perpetrating violence against their own people, the Shona. Numerous traditional village leaders were murdered because they rejected or disapproved of new cultural influences.

*Prejudice - Missionaries Looking Down on Africans or Mistreating Africans.*

The other challenge was that the Shona Christians were taught to adopt Western foreign names during christening and baptism to display their acceptance and their strengthened faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord and personal Savior. African names like Gwinyai, Sarudzai, and others were not considered Christian, but pagan. To be a Christian, one must aim to be as western as possible. Living in brick houses, preaching in English to people who do not know the language, drinking tea for breakfast, not eating mbambaira-sweet potatoes, which were grown in every Shona garden, dressing like a westerner, and so on were all indications of what it meant to be a real Christian.

*The challenge of racial supremacy.* Some missionaries looked down on the Shona people as pagans, backward, and heathens, and treated them inhumanely. This caused some to resent Jesus and accuse Him of bigotry. The other challenge is that so many

incorrect beliefs arose as a result of the Shona people's oppression at the hands of their colonizers. It became difficult to speak of Jesus' love to people who were suffering at the hands of their role models and mentors who were modeling Christ to them.

*The challenge of balancing social justice with the absence of the rule of law.* One interviewee was ordained a pastor at the height of the liberation war in Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia. He was young and enthusiastic about what God had called him to do. Before going to seminary in high school, he was an activist for social justice. When the time came for him to attend seminary, he faced the colonial regime on one side and the traditional culture on the other. The colonial system wanted pastors to comply with their oppressive rules. This clashed with the Gospel and especially with the core values of Christian biblical beliefs. The interviewee chose to be on the side of the oppressed and was six times a political prisoner even though he had never preached a political position.

Some missionaries worked with colonial leaders to keep Africans as slaves, whether they knew it or not. Africans were taught Christian values so that certain goals could be met. One of these was to make the Africans happy so that they would be submissive and stay out of the way while the Europeans went after their own goals for the African continent while looting their resources and land. This doesn't mean that Christianity is being put down in any way. In fact, it has become one of the most popular religions on the continent and has a big impact on how a lot of people think today. During the colonial era, things were very different from how they are now. Unfortunately, when Christianity was first introduced, it was used against Africans, but just like everything else, the factors have changed as well.

One interviewee wrote a theology book titled “The Origin and Development of African theology” (Maryknoll, 1985). Many Christians in Zimbabwe did not well receive the title “African theology” because Shonas had been so brainwashed, and they believed that “anything African” was evil and not authentic.

*Segregation and discrimination of the Shona people by British colonialists was the most difficult component.* First Street in the city center was a no-blacks zone. There were different stores, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure for Shonas different from the white colonists. Colonialists established an empire to which Shona Africans had no access. Every Sunday, people prayed against the colonists’ activities. Since it was assumed that pastors collaborated with missionaries, there were several funerals in the neighborhood. People disparaged the teachings in their communities, claiming that it was a white plan to prevent them from revolting and surrendering to their dreadful dictatorship. Shonas were unable to acquire residential homes in the so-called city or urban places.

*The challenge of perceiving missionaries as part of colonialism.* Unfortunately, whether they realized it or not, the Shona people regarded missionaries as part of colonialism: “The Christian missionaries were as much a part of the conquering forces as the explorers, traders, and soldiers.” Missionaries emphasized to all Shona pastors during seminary training that it was critical that they always preach on humility and obedience in the face of terrible injustice, cruelty, and dehumanization, that it was part of being a true believer in Christ, while British traders took full advantage of their African counterparts. In the face of Africans, criticizing the wrongdoings of missionaries was deemed rebellious, with the repercussions being a punishable offense or imprisonment. As

pastors, they focused on teaching peace, forgiveness, and being good neighbors. Some of these texts were challenging to teach Ephesians 6:5, Titus 2:9; 1 Timothy 6:1; Matthew 10:24; John 13:16; John 15:20. Shona people translated the Bible literally according to their Shona culture. According to the interviewee, such passages inspired most young pastors to push young people to want to join Chimurenga (revolutionary struggle or uprising), and most young people were ready to take up arms and began to fight for their independence and the return of their country.

*The challenge of the war in Zimbabwe arose immediately.* War broke out during early colonial periods. The liberation war from (1965-1979) was mostly headed by Christians who read the Bible for themselves and sort freedom for all (Shonas and Europeans settlers). This marked the start of the Chimurenga conflict, which lasted until the country gained independence from British colonial authority. During this struggle, order and peace were controlled by force, and Shonas were referred to as “guerillas” and “terrorists” fighting against the British people in their own country. At the start of the civil unrest, most community leaders were jailed for speaking out against injustices, especially whenever they quoted from the Bible. This impeded the spread of the gospel; Churches were destroyed and burnt, and Bibles were unsafe to freely carry about. This made it more difficult for Shona Christians to defend themselves or stand up for themselves making them vulnerable, having nothing to defend themselves or their families. Not all missionaries were malicious, but some missionaries worked hard to preserve the master-servant relationship between Europeans and Shonas in Zimbabwe as a way to maintain peace. Despite the widespread disagreement, this is what brought to the realization that missionaries aided colonialism in Africa.

The second interview question looked into how the Shona people reacted to the message preached to them by pastors after they returned from seminary, as well as whether the pastors ever felt they had all the tools they needed to study the Bible and develop systems and solutions that made sense to the Shona African Congregation.

Four pastors agreed that the Shona people viewed all Shona pastors who graduated from seminary with distrust. The Shona community leaders and people frowned upon and ridiculed any family that permitted their children to attend seminary.

Two pastors were accepted with such esteem in their community, and the leadership looked to them for answers whenever problems occurred. When missionaries arrived to establish or attend church in the communities, problems began. The bulk of these issues were alleviated by the construction of hospitals and clinics, as well as the training of nurses and doctors.

Three pastors revealed that when they returned from seminary, it was at the height of the liberation struggle Chimurenga war. Shona soldiers regularly disrupted church services, especially in rural areas. They would demand that pastors pray for the liberation war. They did not care whether you were praying through Jesus' name. They still forced the elderly to help them and pray for them in a customary manner. To bring the war to an end, the elderly were frequently forced to produce African Shona traditional beer (doro) and execute African Shona cultural rites and ceremonies to please the spirits of the ancestors.

This made it incredibly difficult to propagate the Gospel. Because there were so many accusations on both sides, the pastors were finally imprisoned. It was difficult to know which side to stand on as a representative of God's kingdom, and you would only

choose to be on God's side to survive but continued to serve both British soldiers and Shona soldiers. One interviewee explained: "This is something that still shakes the core of my being where such courage came from, but I can only give all the credit and glory to God."

All six pastors revealed that they did not have enough tools to use in their African community when they returned from seminary. The majority of the literature studied in seminary was authored in a Western perspective. As a result, not all of the knowledge gained in seminary was necessarily applicable to the Shona people. A pastor was required to contextualize the material so that it was applicable to each circumstance in their various churches.

All six pastors agreed that another critical challenge they faced after returning home from seminary was that their church members and church leadership lacked access to vital information for them to understand the scriptures. They were having trouble reconciling the text's worldview with their own. Both the application and the interpretation were frequently incorrect. Pastors gathered and determined that the hermeneutics of their church members and church leadership had no bearing on how they interpreted the scriptures. Whenever pastors offered them the opportunity to preach as lay leaders, their preaching reflected the same kind of superficial comprehension of the Bible context. It was common for sermons to be completely disconnected from the realities of the text.

All pastors agreed that syncretism was a major impediment. People would throng to church on Sunday but reject Christianity entirely at night, resulting in a surge in traditional customs such as witchcraft, ancestor worship, and polygamy. Sacrificial rituals

would be performed at midnight while the rest of the people slept in case, they told the pastor on Sunday. The Bible was not well understood. Pastors decided that the application of foreign methodologies was the basis of the problem because they created a twofold hermeneutical gap, making the work look even more removed from the African context.

One pastor highlighted that in Shona culture, you do not preach alone; you preach alongside everyone in every church service. People responded to the message from the preacher by cheering and clapping for the message and for the preacher to continue which was frowned upon as barbaric and primitive way of doing things. This made it difficult to start preaching after seminary because you had to approach things a bit differently.

For example, you were taught exegesis and hermeneutics skills, but the examples and narratives you used had to be contextualized. It was necessary to employ narratives and pictures that were not European in origin but were pertinent to the Shona people's daily realities, which may have been novel in their conventional religion.

Two pastors revealed that in pastoral care and counseling, when people brought their problems to the pastor, one had to be aware of the culturally appropriate ways of resolving the problems. If one tried to use Western approaches, there was the danger of the people not returning since they would not see how the solutions would connect to their Shona cultural processes of resolving problems.

The following is a metaphor that Shona pastors had to use during sermons many years ago, along with some clarification of the context in which it was used: "Musha mukadzi." A literal translation is that: For a home to stand, it's because of a woman who

works hard and builds it wisely and virtuously (Ruth 4:11; Proverbs 14:1; Proverbs 31:10).

One particular passage that has been difficult for Shona pastors to explain includes Genesis 1, when it is said that when God said let us create human beings in our image, the interpretation is that God was referring to the (Trinity - Father, Son & Holy Spirit). In addition, when Jesus says: I am in the Father and the Father is in me, and we are one. The idea again is that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

These were not easy passages for the Shona to understand and accept. They can understand that they might be of the same substance, but the fact that God (Father) and Jesus (Son) are one and exactly the same is problematic. A father can never be the same as a son. A son can represent a father but can never claim to be exactly the same as the father. If Jesus was with the Father at creation, then how did he become a baby born of a woman (human being), let alone being of virgin birth.

All six pastors agreed that there was always a danger because there was a risk of making mistakes in integrating African culture and Western. The potential for error was very high in bringing together African and Western theologies and presenting the message as genuine without fusing different schools of thought or distorting the meaning of the book, thereby avoiding syncretism.

One female pastor who was interviewed by the researcher stated that her greatest problem at the seminary and after seminary was her gender. She was one woman among 99% of male preachers. The joy and thought after seminary that she was ready to go out there and bear witness and lead people to Christ after receiving the prestigious diploma after graduation, but this was proven wrong when she encountered resistance from not



only males but also some of the women like her because she was the first woman pastor in their community at the time, and women were looked down upon. Women were considered inferior to men in Shona society, and they were not permitted to sit alongside men to debate and make critical decisions that impacted the Shona people. Even though she had a direct understanding of how two cultures inside the country, Western and African, intertwined in terms of religion. As an African Shona woman pastor, she was eager to add cultural elements that the seminary did not teach because all of the literature at the time was Western, she was met with a lot of resistance, especially from men.

Her greatest breakthrough was the ability to introduce Shona drums and jingles (ngoma ne hosho) in her church whilst other male pastors were still considering evil instruments, but she was able to gradually persuade a few individuals to use them in church. On the other hand, because the United Methodist Men's constitution recognized the pastor as the organization's president, it was simple to persuade men to sing with drums and jingles. In terms of having all the tools necessary to study the Bible in Africa, there will never be enough tools to go around, but individuals will continue to create additional resources as a civilization grows.

According to two pastors, the lacking tools after seminary was the Greek language. They had studied enough Greek terminology at seminary to comprehend the New Testament Bible, but nothing extremely scholarly. But this made these pastors realize that whenever a message was translated from one culture to another, something was lost, like examining a plethora of secondary comments that assisted in explaining the meaning of any paragraph in Aramaic, Greek, and English (And then in Shona).

For example, in John 20:16, when Mary calls Jesus “Rabboni” in Aramaic, which means “teacher,” it is not the same meaning of a math instructor or a history teacher, or a science professor. So, preaching or teaching the Bible to the Shona involved some shortcomings. Yes, I do not know what the full Shona equivalent would have been for “Rabboni” (Mudzidzi washe), but I know that it had a loaded meaning, not just academic meaning or scientific meaning. It had deep spiritual meaning in Shona.

All six pastors agreed that the literature that was available was works by Western scholars and extraordinarily little, if any, by African scholars. To date, there is still a dearth of this material. Most pastors today trust commentaries written by White scholars rather than those by Africans, if any were available. Publishers also preferred to publish materials by well-known White scholars than new African voices in the field. Of course, times seem to be changing now, the interviewees expressed optimism that this may be changing including this research project by this researcher.

The third question was whether colonialism was responsible for the integration and transformation of Shona culture into Western culture, and if so, what changes it brought about in the character and content of Shona cultural practice in daily life, and what might be done to rectify this anomaly.

All six pastors agree that the Shona culture has been evolving. All cultures are dynamic. Given today’s context, it is necessary for those pastoring in the Shona context to have an integrative consciousness. By this, it means the pastor has to be well aware of both the Western and the Shona Traditional methods, worldviews, and cultures. The challenge of today’s context (given the influence of colonialism) is that it has pushed

modern-day pastors to be able to be relevant to the people who come to them seeking their help.

In addition, even in the preaching itself, pastors preaching in the cities (where there are more Western influences) have to use illustrations that fit these contexts. Those in the rural areas where there might be less Western influence have to be relevant to their context as well.

The main important thing today is for the pastor's methods to be applicable or suitable for their contexts. Westernization and colonialism were both a curse and a blessing. The curse was in the negative way some of the missionaries were viewed by the Shona people, and a blessing on the other hand in that it brought the good news and other aspects of human development and technology.

*Call to action - Shona People Can Re-Write Their Theology and bring transformation.*

All the six pastors agree that the missionaries have responsibility for failing to adopt or study African culture, but it is critical that the Shona African people maintain the primary thing in mind, which is the good news of Jesus Christ and God's kingdom over which He reigns. One of the pastors said: "The gospel of Jesus Christ was sustained by God himself, even though someone tampered with the message. The contents in the envelop looked dirty, but with the same value 'God himself endured in the gospel of Jesus Christ.'"

Three pastors emphasized that every culture is tenacious, and that is true, yet a people can choose to abandon who they are for reasons other than something brought. To blame the Western missionaries for 100% deterioration of African culture is too long a finger to point.

Three pastors feel that the Shona people's finest bait may be globalization as a result of knowledge and the levels to which people are exposed to the internet. Even if there are 'forced, induced, or assimilation processes,' people still make choices and decisions about whom they want to be, and it may not be too late.

Four pastors alluded that apart from a liberation theology understanding of all people, Zimbabweans and Africans in general made decisions to be who they are, and they must accept responsibility and go ahead by rewriting their history. Today, there are young individuals in Zimbabwe who have never gone to America, but they are more American than Americans. It is a matter of making decisions and accepting responsibility for deciding what to eat and what not to consume.

One pastor highlighted that culture is dynamic: The British Queen is no longer alive, but the British influence in the globe and in Southern Africa (particularly Zimbabwe) will linger on for a long time. It's beyond time to blame colonialists; instead, the African Shona people should condemn Christian missionaries who blended a condescending gospel mentality with British authority and western culture.

It is true that some western values have tainted several African values. This is to be expected but not necessarily accepted. Each culture positions its values as superior to those of other cultures. This is especially true given that the British were the colonizers who arrived at "take over" rule and subject the Shona to Indirect Rule. As a result, they legally mandated certain values.

The missionaries capitalized on what the colonizers introduced and brought it upon the "church." So, in order to be a Christian, you had to first pay your taxes and respond to every white man as "yes sir," regardless of how young they are to you (the

boss). Respect for office has replaced African (Shona) respect for age. Regardless of age, the pastor is the “Boss” of the parish. In society, a Ph. D. is given a higher status and even a higher salary than “maturity or wisdom.” Colonialism also introduced foreign values like formal education over humanity (being human). Shona peoples highly regard emotional intelligence compared to a high intelligence quotient.

A person with a good formal education (and who speaks English) was thought to be wiser than someone who does not. Intelligence quotient was more honorable than emotional intelligence, which built the Shona as a people (Ubuntu). A suit and tie make a person appear more “dignified” than a simple outfit. To put it another way, materialism has introduced a criterion for determining people’s worth. You are what you eat, what you wear, what you drive, what university or seminary you attended, and so on. Shona people can genuinely work toward reversing these meanings and work towards rebuilding their culture, theology, and how to interpret their theology in the context.

Three pastors agree that colonialism brought a language that helps people of different “African cultures/ tribes” to communicate. This has its pros and cons, which the researcher is not at liberty to go into during the interview. But anointed above, through language, nuances and values are lost.

For example, a teenage usher can say to a sixty-year-old board member: “You are late for the meeting.” That “you” does not show respect. The Shona would say “Manonoka” to an older person and “Wanonoka” to a younger or same-age person. (Remember the “Rabboni” illustration above). The fact is, whenever cultures meet, there is a battle. One of them will win over the other. In the case of the Shona and the West, there was an element of military superiority over inferiority. The Shona buckled under.

All six pastors agree that what can be done to restore normalcy is to unlearn what has been learned. The question now remains, what practices and beliefs are the Shona willing to unlearn? The Shona should go back to their sense of human respect/ dignity. Shonas respected every human being, even a mentally sick person, old age / senile was respected. This alone would eliminate the need for “human rights” laws. Traditionally the Shona believed that rather than respect a person because they are afraid to break the law, they honored all human beings because they are God’s creation [In ubuntu], and they deserve to be respected.

Shonas should not let materialism set the criteria for human dignity. There is a Shona proverb that says: *murombo munhu*” (Even a poor man is still a human being to be honored). If they follow this African way of respecting every human being, there will be no spouse battering, no child abuse, there will be peace in the family, in the community, in the nation (no political intimidation, violence, etc.) and ultimately “peace on earth and goodwill toward humanity. The Book of Job (among other Scriptures) makes this point that “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I will return...” (Job 1:21). Human worth should not be based on materialism.

All pastors agree that the Shona people should return to a culture of respect for nature. Traditionally, African people only “took” what they needed. The business of hoarding came with colonialism. Greed has caused much crime and hate in society. It all goes back to the Western practice of “property ownership,” individualism, avarice (“mine, mine, mine.”). The Shona could return to the spirit of communalism. Even Christianity tried it and failed. But it is ideal. This is not communism. Communalism means everything belongs to everybody in the community (Ubuntu).

Therefore, everybody is held accountable and responsible. The Shona saying, “it takes a village to raise a child,” means just that. They are all “someone’s keeper.” Violence, crime, and all in this day and age have roots in greed and disrespect for human life, all emanating from a lack of love for God (the Creator) and their neighbor. Loving your neighbor as yourself. Christianity in Zimbabwe, the Shona people would not preach morality every Sunday if the Shona were to return to these values discussed above. Also, some of these values summarize the ‘law, and the prophet’ “love God with all your heart, soul and body and your neighbor as yourself” (John 10:27).

Three pastors highlighted that the Shona culture must cope with Christianity at the level of scriptural interpretation. As the Shona people acquired their political freedom, they should continue to interpret the Bible from a Shona worldview, and the Bible should begin to make sense to the Shona people. They may let Christ communicate revelation to them and their culture without the filter of Western culture.

Two pastors claim that colonialism was more liberal, which harmed Shona culture. The Shona culture was quite conservative. The Shona peoples virtually followed the Bible to the letter after becoming Christians. The Shona people discovered that what the missionaries preached was not what they practiced. There was a great deal of hypocrisy. The Shona people lost faith in missionaries. On the other hand, missionaries introduced some good to the Shona people, such as building schools, hospitals, and clinics, which served to favorably influence the Shona culture, this had a significant positive influence on the Shona people, leading to a greater respect for Christianity but this is not the focus of this study today.

Two pastors agreed that this training of the Shona people, led by kings, chiefs, community leaders, and all people in their respective regions, will bring about the same transformative change that caused them to aggressively demand their independence from British colonizers.

Even though Shona traditional leaders may hold on to their Shona values of respecting and appeasing their dead, more Shona people are more enlightened, and they know and understand Jesus as the Son of the living God, which benefits theologians as they re-shape their hermeneutics to be read in a narrative way according to the Shona African worldview. All pastors agreed that the entire world is changing, ungodly customs are being abandoned, and Christianity has become the major religion in Zimbabwe, thanks to trained pastors.

Due of their connections to missionaries and reliance on their worldview, the six pastors who participated in these interviews helped us gain a better understanding of the difficulties African Shona pastors had while attempting to preach the gospel during the colonial era. They revealed some major themes that drew our attention in this study. Theologically, the Bible was not taught, comprehended, or implemented from an African perspective. The Shona People were subjected to a great deal of imposition of Western cultural practices. The difficulty of putting Western concepts on the Shona people hampered the spread of the gospel significantly. The colonists denied the Shona people political access to their valuable land. It was difficult because they relocated indigenous peoples from fertile lands to arid places. War broke out, and the Zimbabwean people stood up to defend their independence, reclaim their land, and reclaim their identity as an African people. Blood was shed, and the trauma of the conflict continues to



affect Zimbabweans today. All six colonial-era pastors claimed that it was possible for Shona people to change and recreate their worldview theology today.

To summarize, the Shona accepted a foreign culture and may not be trying hard to restore their own culture. As a result, this question is incredibly stimulating. This is why Christians must resist the temptation to continue blaming colonialism, even though the effects of it lingers strongly. The truth remains that anything that has been learned may be “unlearned.” However, colonialism, as we know and feel it now, has left us with a mixed bag. First and foremost, the term “colonialism” has a negative connotation. It cannot thus have any benefits. Perhaps Shona Africans can speak about their “cross-cultural” experiences.

#### *Analysis*

Analyzing the material from the preceding sections and interviews, the researcher will give observational results based on their investigation of the data. The six pastors gave a more in-depth understanding of the challenges African Shona pastors encountered during the colonial era when they were essentially endeavoring to preach the gospel, given their ties to missionaries and reliance on western ideas. The Gospel was powerful, truthful, and sharper than any two-edged sword; the Shona Africans were pierced to the heart, yet in most cases, the message could not take root due to the colonialists’ and missionaries’ collaborative behaviors. During this colonial period, most missionaries and pastors could not comprehend how to integrate the word of God in an African context to instill balance and comprehension. The Shona people responded favorably to the gospel, demonstrating that it was advantageous to follow; nonetheless, a lack of communication and collaboration diminished the effectiveness of the gospel in the lives of many ordinary

Shona people. Christianity became a double-edged sword against the Shona people, rather than vice versa.

The researcher acknowledges that it is true that certain colonialists in collaboration with the missionaries, used the Bible in a negative manner to assist them in achieving their nefarious evil objectives. Also, it is essential to understand that this does not mean the bible is erroneous. It demonstrates that the bible is accurate. In 2 Peter 3:16, the Apostle Peter cautioned his audience that certain of the Apostle Paul's teachings are difficult to comprehend and that the ignorant and unstable will pervert them to their own detriment, just as they do with the rest of the Bible.

#### *Culture and Worldview*

William and Madelon say that the term "cultural pluralism" means that smaller groups within a larger society keep their own cultural identities and that the larger, dominant culture accepts the beliefs and practices of these smaller groups as long as they are in line with the norms and values of the larger society. The Shona culture, for example, includes a traditional regional tribe structure comprising smaller ethnic groups within a broader community, such as the Zezuru, Manyika, Ndaou, Karanga, Korekore, and Rozvi. They can keep their own cultural identities and have their ideas and ways of life accepted by the larger society as long as they follow the rules and ideals of the larger society. Cultural pluralism means understanding and appreciating the different ways people do things.

The main focus is on society and the differences between the many different parts of people. Cultural pluralism develops in a society that works together instead of one that is separate. The focus of the colonizers was to break these groups into different clans that

oppose each other, no longer answerable to be a greater society led by traditional leaders. As a sociological term, “cultural diversity” has changed over time in how it is used and what it means. People have said that it is both a fact and a cultural goal. In anthropology, the idea of “cultural relativism” and the rise of “cultural pluralism” as a way to interact with people were important factors in recognizing and accepting the unique cultural history of Shona Africans.

According to the findings of this research, the arrival of Christianity to Africa had an impact on the Shona culture and altered their way of thinking and worldview. This is the reason why some current Shona African Christians no longer adhere to or honor their old cultural standards and declare them evil on a constant basis, and they still blame this on Christianity. As the colonizers and missionaries saw the Shona people of Africa, who differed from them in skin color, language, culture, and morals, they realized that they were not like them; hence, they persuaded the Africans to abandon their culture as they converted to Christianity. Missionaries introduced Christianity to Zimbabwe, bringing with them a new Western culture that had to have an impact on the psychological, sociological, cultural, epistemological, and religious aspects of the local religious components.

As the researcher continues to look into the relationship between British colonists, missionaries, and the African countries they tried to “rescue” or “civilize.” There is a lot of evidence, and the researcher believes that the missionaries may not have had enough time to look into these Africans’ skills, abilities, talents, and maybe even potential. The beautiful buildings of the Great Zimbabwe kingdom are a visual representation of the historical achievements of Africans, which Rhodesian settlers’ literature does its best to

ignore or try to hide. Even though archaeologists worked on the site for more than a hundred years, many white Rhodesians saw it as a blank canvas waiting to be filled with meaning. Most countries outside of Africa agreed with the interpretations that supported colonialism or the white Rhodesian nation's rule over the Shona people. The texts show how racist ideas are stuck in stories about the "white colonizer's burden," which is a common theme in imperial stories.

"When the white man arrived in Africa, he had the Bible and Africans had the land," declared Jomo Kenyatta, a Kenyan anti-colonial campaigner, and politician who served as Prime Minister from 1963 to 1964. This is an excellent way to characterize the mindset of missionaries and colonists. Most Africans who lived after colonialism still remember the following phrases: "The white man told the Africans to pray, so he gave the African a bible. The white man then prayed for himself to get the land." Most Africans who lived after colonialism still remember the phrases above. In the name of Christianity, missionaries were the first people to make friends with African rulers and monarchs. In response, colonial officials talked about the material and technological benefits of Euro-American civilization. Zimbabweans believed in a supreme god named Mwari, which brought them together spiritually. However, when missionaries arrived, they found that the people had never heard of God they claimed.

Missionaries and colonialists both thought that the Shona people needed to be tamed and controlled and that their gods and spirits needed to be wiped out. In addition, Christian teaching said that Shona practices like polygamy, bride dowries, honoring the late ancestors, and reading the future were wrong. The language of the colonizer became the standard language for converting, teaching, and becoming a part of the culture.

### *Racial Supremacy*

The researcher understood that the idea that Africans are inferior reached its highest point when intellectuals from the Age of Enlightenment spread it around the world. The way colonialists and missionaries talked about Africans showed that their social, cultural, and spiritual lives were not good. The way early colonialists and missionaries saw Africans also made it impossible for them to be tolerant of their religion, ways of thinking, and cultural practices. During the colonial era, this turned out to be a big problem for all pastors. This kind of discrimination was wrong in and of itself because Africans, as a whole, have a rich culture. Culture is at the heart of African identity; Africans must fight hard to protect their cultures and ways of doing things. If they do not, they'll face an identity crisis.<sup>249</sup>

Rhodes was sure that it was the responsibility of the Anglo-Saxon race to help “civilize” the “darker” parts of the world, and he thought that British imperialism was a good way to do this. The people in charge of colonial Zimbabwe shared this view. They thought of native Africans as helpless children who needed to be taught, cared for, and civilized. As a result, the settler state’s policies were based on a sense of racial superiority and a desire to advance white interests at the expense of the non-white population. This was true in politics, constitution-making and government, education, the economy, land and labor policies, social relations, and housing policy. Every part of the colonial system was based on racial segregation, including sports, places to stay, and access to public facilities and services. During the colonial period, white people in

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<sup>249</sup> Derek A. Welsby, Piggott Reg, and D.W. Phillipson, *Empires of the Nile* (London: Folio Society, 2008), 67-75.

Zimbabwe were outnumbered by native Shona Africans by a large amount, and they were always afraid of being pushed out by the African majority. This fear contributed to white racism in the country. This made them more determined to put the Africans in their place and keep them there. In the 1950s, not much was done to bring people of different races together. When Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, the government stopped supporting white racism.<sup>250</sup>

This study also revealed that in colonial Zimbabwe, racial plundering, dispossession, devastation, and claims of superiority were prevalent. There was conflict between the demands of the Christian religion, which teaches that all people are equal before God, and missionaries' willingness to participate in the so-called civilizing mission among the locals. Christianity has been cultured by Western civilizations and presented in the Western mold throughout its evolution and history; anything identifiable to the West has been termed pagan and unchristian.<sup>251</sup> In the words of Banana: "Christianity was not presented in its original purity in Africa, we are unable to trace its roots." The concept of racial supremacy was maintained in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) through policies, establishments, and individual behavior. The white British conquerors who took over Rhodesia frequently did things in order to maintain their "privileged" status. Even while some missionaries opposed colonialism on their own, the majority of people felt that nothing was happening or could be seen by them, and it seemed that

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<sup>250</sup> Manyanga Munyaradzi and Shadreck Chirikure, "Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe Relationship in History: Implications for The Evolution of Studies of Socio-Political Complexity in Southern Africa." *Goodwin Series* 12, (2019): 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.479487954203847>.

<sup>251</sup> Gwekwerere Tavengwa, Davie E. Mutasa, and Kudakwashe Chitofiri, "Settlers, Rhodesians, and Supremacists: White Authors and the Fast Track Land Reform Program in Post-2000 Zimbabwe." *Journal of Black Studies* 49, no. 1 (2018): 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717739400>.

everything was being swept under the rug. Because missionaries did not condemn these crimes, the majority of churches accepted the colonial status quo.<sup>252</sup>

Right off the bat, it should be said that there have been many different ways of thinking about how British colonizers and missionaries interacted with Africans. Jennings says that some of these ideas are inherent inferiority, European conformity, the melting pot, and cultural diversity. Missionaries did not want to have to stop and think about how Christianity spread from one culture to another. They cared more about spreading a false picture of their own intellectual and cultural values than getting the truth out.

Proselytizing was the supremacist way of life of Westerners, who, ironically, were pushing Africans out of their homes, stealing from them, and using them. Africans were supposed to fit in with the White Christian community because, in Christ, we are one body.<sup>253</sup>

Christian Shona Africans found it exceedingly difficult to integrate into the normal community. People who become Christians were drawn in by the surrounding culture. Traditional leaders and other community members of the Shona culture viewed them as confused, feeble, and indifferent to their responsibilities to Shona African customs and celebrations. Instead, they were perceived as having adopted European notions of selfishness and avarice. Because they were forced to live on the periphery of society and were looked down upon by both white missionaries and those Africans who adhered to their own customs, they were marginalized. When the majority of Shona

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<sup>252</sup> Thomas E. Norman, "Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology," In *Missiology: An International Review*. (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969802600222>.

<sup>253</sup> George J. Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions to the American Indians," *Missiology* 11, no. 1 (May 1983): 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182968301100106>.

people who adopted the new faith abandoned their cultural customs entirely, they became ridiculed in society. It was assumed that those who remained in the church would remain black, keeping them below the white colonialists on the socioeconomic hierarchy. Also, due to the white colonists, Africans who had become Christians were unable to enjoy the joy of religious unity, which was disturbing to them.<sup>254</sup>

*The Gospel and Violence on Black People*

According to the findings, the fact that missionaries came to Africa alongside the colonizers and armed with guns was the biggest challenge for all of the six pastors. Even though the missionaries also carried the bible, people were unable to differentiate between a colonizer from a missionary in that retrospect. Overall, it is clear that the conversion of the Shona people to Christianity did not occur because they were free to make their own decisions and accept Christ as their own Lord and Savior, but rather because they were in danger. Guns were used to intimidate the defenseless Shona people, and politicians and community leaders make the argument that the Shona people lacked the freedom to decide for themselves. Therefore, employing military weapons against helpless civilians was inhumane.<sup>255</sup>

They could have been coerced or compelled to attend church because of the language barrier or out of fear of dying from the colonizers. It is a possibility that coming to church was the safest course of action for the Shona people because they were so terrified of the murders and violence they were witnessing within their communities. Is it

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<sup>254</sup> Daniel Tangri, "Popular Fiction and the Zimbabwe Controversy," *History in Africa* 17, no. 1 (January 1990): 293, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171818>.

<sup>255</sup> Basil Davidson, Christopher Ralling, and Andrew Harries, "The Bible and the Gun: This Magnificent African Cake," Accessed September 07, 2022, Videocassette 50:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNWA2cOS7sg>.



possible that there would not be as much syncretism if the Shona people had the freedom whether to not worship the Lord on their own.

The researcher realized that there was a lot of violence perpetrated against innocent souls. Acts of violence against the Shona people caused a lot of mistrust between them and the missionaries. The missionaries were linked to the colonial oppressors. In both instances, their goal was to develop a monitoring system to learn more about the indigenous Shona people who were to be colonized. Moreover, both depict Africans in a negative light from a social, political, economic, and religious standpoint. This explains why the colonial aim to civilize the barbaric, primitive, and backward-appearing Africans was imposed on the Shona people.

The legacy of violence persisted in the minds of Africans as laborers and schoolchildren were subjected to physical punishment. The biblical verse “spare the rod and spoil the child” from Proverbs 13:24, was interpreted in such a manner that parents felt guilty if they did not punish their children’s misbehavior with physical punishment. It was typical and well-accepted in society. In the Shona villages, it became customary and widely accepted. No one would object to this form of punishment being applied to anyone, including adults at work. According to Lain, spanking is a tradition that came from the British colonizers. Missionaries and mission institutions spread the practice of beating children all over Africa, and it became part of the culture there. It is important for the Shona people to remember and use punishments from before colonization. Africans need to go back to old ways of raising, disciplining, and correcting children by teaching morals through narratives and images. Before being taken as slaves, there is no evidence that children in Africa were beaten with sticks or other objects as corporal punishment.

The people who brought corporal punishment to Africa were missionaries, colonialists, and slave traders. When children are physically punished often, they do worse in school than those who are not. Both the slave trade and the colonial influence on slave-reliant states expanded the use of corporal punishment in pre-colonial African cultures.<sup>256</sup>

#### *Before the Invasion*

Prior to the invasion, Africans had ideas about morality (unhu/hunhu), rules (mirawu), the Heavens (denga), and even heavenly spirit mediators (mhondoro dzedenga) similar to the 176 European Heavenly saints. Many religious academics ascribe the Church's close ties with imperialism in Zimbabwe to the participation of Christian pastors in the 1890 Pioneer Column which led to the colonization of Zimbabwe. People such as Cecil John Rhodes viewed colonization as a method to promote British culture, Christianity, and civilization throughout the world, leading them to believe that colonialism was the product of "racist" attitudes towards the dominance of European culture. Many missionaries shared the colonizers' perspectives because they carried the torch for colonialism. In the continuing unraveling of the history of colonialism in Africa, it is important to note that the missionaries who carried the Bible were not a spiritual addition to the colonization team of colonial pirates, exploiters, traders, and explorers, as they were known in Africa.<sup>257</sup>

Oden lists various ways that Africa influenced the thinking of Christians. The concept of universities came from Africa. The researcher was stunned to learn that the

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<sup>256</sup> Iain Whyte, "From Inverary to the Sierra Leone River," in *Zachary Macaulay 1768-1838*, 5: 5-27. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.5949/UPO9781846317057.004>.

<sup>257</sup> "The Age of STEM, Educational Policy and Practice Across the World in *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*." *Choice* (Middletown) 52, no. 11 (February 2015): 52-6001. <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.190878>.

idea of colleges originated in Africa. This new piece of information sparked an interest in continuing her investigation. Also, the growth of Christian interpretation of the Bible called Christian exegesis, the first indications of ecumenical conciliar patterns being church doctrinal traditions, the emergence of monasticism from the African deserts, and the classification of Christian theology all originated in Africa. Christian Hermeneutic Phenomenology was first seen in Africa. Africans learned how to persuade and argue so they could use these skills in Europe. There are many important and influential church fathers from Africa including Mark the Apostle history says he was from Libya; he founded the church in Alexandria, Origen, Lactantius, Augustine, Clement, Athanasius, Tertullian, Cyril, among others.<sup>258</sup>

#### *Colonial Perspective of Africans as Animals*

The missionaries saw Africans as animal beings that Europeans would most likely regard as inferior to or worse than themselves. During the colonial era, multinational businesses that were financing missionaries of Eurocentric education and technology were engaged in contemporary techno colonialism and likewise paid for missionaries. Humanity, religion, and culture in Africa were initially seen negatively by colonialists and missionaries, destroying any prospect of tolerance. Missionaries preached that it was the responsibility of Christian cultural representatives to combat ‘animism’ and “barbarity,” which were presumably prevalent among Africans. Some Eurocentric academics continued to recreate colonial notions of Africans as ‘animism.’ The colonial effort was justified by descriptions of Africans as ‘animists’; genocide, oppression, and

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<sup>258</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 45-56.

dispossession of Africans were founded on the notion that they lacked morality, ethics, natural laws, intelligence, rationality, and organization and did not belong to mankind.<sup>259</sup>

This impeded the Shona people's ability to trust clerics affiliated with missionaries. Even while they were proclaiming the gospel's good news, the brutality made everything appear inauthentic. The important thing to remember, according to one of the interviewees, is that the planting of Christianity occurred concurrently with colonialism. The European colonial powers considered the missionaries as collaborators in an effort to civilize the "native," and as a result, there is a fine line between their intentions and those of the colonizers. As a result, the missionary business had a clear allegiance to the colonial administration. Furthermore, missionary endeavors occasionally became so tightly linked to the colonial authority that they were mostly associated with it. Christianity's rash proclamation and the colonial agenda in Africa provided it with power and motivation to become the dominant religion.

Thus, missionaries' attempt to make Christianity an arbitrator of morals and religious values among the colonial peoples that they paradoxically pillaged while fronting the Bible was linked to evangelization. Missionaries stole, destroyed, or "collected" African artifacts, skulls, and bones that are now housed in Euro-American museums and private "collections," even as indigenous peoples across the world demand the recovery of their treasures, bones, and skulls. The researcher has learned that Africans would make their own clothing, using nature and animal skins, and their medicines from tree roots. They knew which medicine worked for adults and cured different ailments and types of diseases. All this was before the colonialists and the missionaries, something that

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<sup>259</sup> Gwinyai, 24.

changed so drastically.<sup>260</sup> To them, development was not a matter of just civilization or a matter of technological development only, it was social responsibility.<sup>261</sup>

*Totems (Animal names as identity for different clans)*

The Shona people or the Mashona (meaning all clans) use these totems “mitupo,” or totems, to differentiate between the several clans that comprised the ancient religions of the kingdoms. The symbols serve as the social identity of the clan and are typically associated with animal names. Humans used animals as totems because a totem has traditionally acted as a symbol for a tribe, clan, family, or person. Clan members are forbidden from slaughtering or devouring their totemic animal. This is one ancient African strategy to preserve and protect wildlife conservation in Africa. Though some may assume that Shona Africans worshiped animals, the truth is that ancient ancestors employed these mythologies to conserve nature as a part of African culture. A totem animal, according to the Shona beliefs, is with you both physically and spiritually.<sup>262</sup> Some of the roles of a totem among the Shona people in Zimbabwe prior to colonialism that are still in use now are as follows: The totem poem would be recited for three reasons: to avoid incestuous conduct, to enhance the clan’s social identity, and to reward someone for a good action or a job well done. The honorable animal of the forest is the elephant. The elephant totem is known as the Nzou/Zhou are all classified differently

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<sup>260</sup> Barry Munslow, “Basil Davidson and Africa: A Biographical Essay.” *Race & Class* 36, no. 2 (1994): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639689403600202>.

<sup>261</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Mary Baker, *The History of African Cities South of the Sahara: from the Origins to Colonization*. Translated by Mary Baker. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), 121.

<sup>262</sup> Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), 38.

(chidawu). Indlovu or Mhukahuru, which means “big beast,” is his nickname. They may be found all across the country including numerous in the Zambezi Valley in the north. Among them are the Tonga, Tavara, Karanga, Ndebele, and Remba. The totem represents strong people who are well-built, tall, and destructive. The Karanga, Remba, and Tonga are exceptionally skilled hunters, while the Ndebele produce outstanding warriors. Today’s elephant totem is made up of those with great talent in the arts, athletics, and academia. To mention a few, the bulk of Nzou people in Zimbabwe are exceptional athletes, such as Peter Ndlovu (a prominent soccer star) and Oliver Mutukudzi (a music guru and a legend in the music industry). Elephants, despite their large size, are endowed with athleticism and intellect. They are classified as Samanyanga (big Ivory horns/tusks).<sup>263</sup>

The eland totem is known as the Vanamhofu/Mpofu is exceedingly popular with people who live in different places. For women, they are called Musiyamwa, Vahera, or Chihera. They are Mwendamberi, from now on, and for men, they are called Mhofuyemukono (the mighty bull eland). Their women are known for having full control over their homes, and it is believed that they have children who do not believe in upholding marriages. On the other hand, their males are strong, good hunters and well-organized warriors. Even though they are not smart, they are successful because they are determined and work hard. They also turn out great athletes. The women talk about how pretty, desirable, and pleasant sexually they are. Both men and women can be successful if they work hard in this tribe.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Harold Courlander, 49.

<sup>264</sup> Harold Courlander, 87.

Totems were a part of Shona's cultural history. Africans used totems to distinguish themselves from people of other races. "The primary issue with adopting a totem was figuring out what it was. It was like a brand called kuzvishambadza." Since it became another way to call someone, many people have used totems to help them identify themselves and stand out during war and hunting. By sticking to these ideas, the Shona showed that they were smart enough to use symbols to keep their traditions alive, which set them apart from people of other races.<sup>265</sup>

Even though colonialism altered and destroyed many totem-related behaviors, totems were an important part of African history and culture that couldn't just be erased. Totems can help people in the same family recognize and connect with each other, even if they have never met. Misconceptions about Africans can be cleared up by showing that the systems that ruled the people were not as backward as the West said they were. It makes no sense to say that Shona people are like animals.

Since totems and other symbols of African identity and unity have been lost, people of the same blood may accidentally marry or have incestuous relationships without realizing it. Science, not superstition or witchcraft, says that deformities can happen when two people from the same bloodline have children. The scientific value of totems showed how well Shona's ancestors understood the need for intercultural procreation to prevent hereditary diseases that run in families. The idea that "strong breeds" were taken as slaves from Africa is supported by the fact that Shona's ancestors knew how likely it was for "weak breeds" to come from the union of people from the

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<sup>265</sup> John Percival and Basil Davidson, 1984. Africa. Episode Four, *The Bible and The Gun*. Halle, Saxony: ArtHaus Musik (1984), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNWA2cOS7sg>.

same blood. Totems were used to make sure that a large population could enable a human culture to blossom.<sup>266</sup>

Shona people have traditionally treasured animals as part of their legacy and cultural heritage, but today's excessive hunting, deforestation, bushfires, use of synthetic insecticides, and other habitat degradation practices are pushing a considerable number of animals, reptiles, and bird species to extinction. As an integral component of Shona ancient traditions, all cultures whose totems relate with nature would maintain the environment as a holy home and sanctuary for their identity and existence."<sup>267</sup>

There was no orphan, no adoption—there was just family, owing to totems that kept families together. Even if you were not connected by blood, but had the same totem, you had the right to adopt an orphaned kid if no one within the family was eligible to do so. There was no distinction between an orphan and a child of the family once adopted in African society. It was never a topic that was discussed, and some adults are still unaware that they were adopted; it was considered impolite to inform a kid that they were adopted. But today, it is common for an orphan to know they are. Totems generated long-lasting bonds; if an adult met a youngster with the same totem, a link was formed right away. Despite cultural taboos, an increasing number of Black Shona families in Zimbabwe are adopting children now, an idea introduced by missionaries. Advocates for children's rights attribute the shift to a better awareness of children's rights, while the superstitions related to adoption have been eradicated in certain religious systems. Adoption was unheard of and unnecessary before the arrival of missionaries. Due to the strong belief in

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<sup>266</sup> The Washington Informer. "Zimbabwe's Black Families Begin to Adopt," 1998.

<sup>267</sup> Echlter Magnus, "White Men's God. The Extraordinary Story of Missionaries in Africa," *Numen* 58, no. 1 (2011): 129-33. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852710X540186>.



extended family links, an orphan child was placed in the care of its nearest relatives because they had the same totem.<sup>268</sup>

### *The Challenge of Syncretism*

The researcher learned that the Shona people continue to participate in rituals and ceremonies to appease their ancestors during the night or in secret without pastors being aware, while on Sunday they attend church as Christians. They believed that the only way to approach God, according to traditional authorities, was through the ancestors. So many Shona people argued against it (John 14:9; 12:45). Through the person of Jesus Christ, Christianity developed a new method of worshiping God that shed light on the Shona people. The biggest obstacle was for the Shona people to comprehend that Jesus was the Son of God and had access to the Father because in their Shona culture, a son is never considered to be as important as his father and does not usually get involved in such crucial matters as bringing problems before the Almighty God (John 14:8-10; 8:19; Colossians 1:15).

The challenge was that the new approach to worshiping God upset the established customs. The Shona people did not want to abandon their ancestral way of worshiping God. Even if some were converted to Christianity, they later reverted to their old ways, especially the elderly. They had a strong conviction that if they did not follow their cultural norms, something catastrophic would happen. The most difficult challenge was to deviate from the norm.

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<sup>268</sup> Pathisa Nyathi, *Zimbabwe's Cultural Heritage* (Ascot, Byo, Zimbabwe: 'amaBooks, 2005), 39-42.

People who act as if they believe in Christianity or other religions still have a large number of connections to old religious ideas and rituals, and Christianity is being integrated with old religious philosophies and ritual practices. Faith and practice among African Christians are creating an African Christian theology. Africans, in general, tend to look at new religions through the lens of what they already believe. African Christians often talk about Jesus by calling him “global mudzimu.” Mudzimu Mukuru means “the great ancestral spirit.” He becomes a part of African culture so that people can see His role and participation in all parts of life, not just religious or spiritual ones.

The researcher has found that there is a lot of syncretism because of how traditional religious ideas and practices and the influence of Western faiths affect each other. The constant fighting and switching between the two religious belief systems in modern Zimbabwe is to blame for more than just the creation of unique religious rites and beliefs that are a mix of both. Because the ability to talk about the meaning of symbols and find a good middle ground seems to be culturally based, this type of syncretism can be seen both in how religious symbols from other cultures are received and in how symbols from other cultures are talked about in general. Because religion is such an important part of this cultural community and belief system, there may be more ways to understand religious texts than in a typical Western society. But the country’s missionary and colonial past had a big effect on how this mix of cultures came to be.

Even though there are a lot of Christians in Zimbabwe, many of the traditions and beliefs of traditional religions, like the Shona or Ndebele religions, are still practiced. The freedom of religion and worship in Zimbabwe’s constitution gives people a chance to practice traditional religions once more. Without the religious part, especially the

traditional religious parts, it is hard to understand Zimbabwean culture today. One of the respondents mentioned the challenge of contemporary mainstream religions.

### *Language Barrier*

It is indeed true that missionaries had a challenging time communicating with Africans because they didn't speak their language. This made it hard for them to understand Africans' beliefs, values, and way of life before they asked Shonas to give their lives to Jesus. Despite years of racism, political tyranny, social injustice, brutality, and persecution, the Shona people kept their sense of self-worth and independence. This is mostly because some of the missionaries didn't see the people they preached to as real people, even when they were hurt, humiliated, or locked up. It is understood that those missionaries who tried to raise their voices to side with the suffering populace would be deported or killed.

The Shona people believed that their language and way of life revealed their degradation. The British colonialists, together with the missionaries, taught the Shona people their new language. The invader and dispossessor's language was taught to the Shona people in their own country. This was designed to crush their spirit, to harm and humiliate Africans. It was difficult for them to converse because they did not speak the same language. Chilapalapa or Fanakalo was created as a "language" by white missionaries to assist them in communicating with one another. South Africans spoke this language. They devised this language in order to communicate with the Indigenous people.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Barry Munslow, "Basil Davidson and Africa: A Biographical Essay," *Race & Class* 36, no. 2 (1994): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639689403600202>.

In reality, it was solely used to instruct Africans on what to do. According to Davidson, “You can’t even tell a correct narrative in Chilapalapa since it has such a limited vocabulary.” The majority of the words instruct a subordinate or servant on what to do. “Enza so” or ‘Hamba so’ was an order or command. As a result, the Shona people did not accept this language. Every time they communicated in that language with a Shona local, the conversation was unpleasant and inevitably ended in fights or arguments. The colonialists attempted to persuade everybody to speak the same language of Chilapalapa was another example of cultural oppression.<sup>270</sup>

Regional languages like Shona and Ndebele were excluded. There was a great deal of racial rhetoric at the time. The language was initially used in the mining sector of South Africa when many people from other southern African nations came to work. It began as a method for individuals of different races who lived in the same nation to communicate with one another.<sup>271</sup> As a result, it arose from the necessity for a worldwide language among the large number of individuals from various origins who traveled to gold and diamond mines in search of work. Chilapalapa was a simplified language with elements of Afrikaans and English. It was based mostly on the Zulu language. Only a limited percentage of Shona people in Rhodesia spoke a Zulu-based language.

Unfortunately, this language was not always effective in conveying the needs of the White employer, mistress, or missionaries to the Shona employees and other people

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<sup>270</sup> Geoffrey Wheatcroft, “For a Country in Misery, a Messy Election,” *The Wall Street Journal*. Eastern Edition. New York: Dow Jones & Company Inc, 2002, Eastern edition.

<sup>271</sup> John Percival and Basil Davidson, “Africa.” Episode Four, *The King and the City*. Halle, Saxony: ArtHaus Musik (1984). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNWA2cOS7sg>

in general. It contributed to the perception of Africans as primitive, barbaric, and ignorant, which developed a bad stereotype among the Shona people.

### *Fighting for Freedom*

The British, who governed much of Africa at the time, intended to attack and eventually conquer Zimbabwe in order to extend their empire and safeguard its enormous mineral resources. Even if missionary activities were not necessarily related to government acts, they were sometimes lumped in with them as they lived among colonists and only encountered Shona students in seminaries and schools. Despite the fact that missionaries claim this was not their primary goal, some Shona African pastors saw Christianity as a religion that was used to oppress and enslave Shona Africans throughout the colonial period thus breeding of mistrust.

These and many other factors created a platform for the liberation of Africa. In the 1950s and 1960s, Africans increasingly intensified their resistance against colonialism. The Shona systems and known ancient structures had been destroyed, kings had been killed, kingdoms abolished, and the new colonialists appointed what they called chiefs and a new system of community leaders. By putting British-appointed chiefs and headmen in charge of local government, colonialists were able to effectively stop Africans from fighting back against colonialism. As a result, the colonial government tried to improve the living conditions of chiefs and headmen to keep them from joining the Shona people's fight for freedom. Missionaries were the main people behind these efforts. Even so, a number of wealthy chiefs and headmen kept supporting the cause of the liberation war. This shows how flexible traditional leaders were and how often they changed their minds about whether they supported or opposed the freedom movement.

One of the most important non-economic reasons why blacks joined guerrilla warfare in Zimbabwe's defense forces as they fought for independence was that the British Shona appointed chiefs were used to being in charge of recruiting soldiers among the Shona populace. Because of this, the colonialist forces thought that the vast majority of chiefs and headmen had betrayed them. Because of this, some of the chiefs were killed or abducted by the Rhodesian wing with guns. Overall, this means that each place had a different relationship between colonizers and traditional leaders, as well as a different level of support from both common people and revolutionaries.

The Shona pastors opted to train themselves to be proud of their heritage, confident, and self-reliant. Due to their race, Africans were subjected to colonial displacement, extortion, larceny, and plunder. Shona African pastors began to organize themselves in order to combat inequalities and a lack of resources. The church was primarily responsible for the growth of African nationalism in Zimbabwe. There was prophetic opposition against racism and deportation. Pastors such as Shearly Cripps of the Anglican Church and John White of the Methodist Church led the prophetic struggle. Both pastors questioned colonial authority in a manner that no missionary or church voice in colonial Rhodesia had before done.<sup>272</sup>

Dickson Mungazi wanted to emphasize some of the missionary pastors who stood out for their opposition to colonialism, particularly the life of Ralph Dodge, a Methodist missionary who served in Rhodesia from 1956 to 1968 while Ian Douglas Smith was in control of the territory.<sup>273</sup> Dodge was deported from the nation of Zimbabwe because he

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<sup>272</sup> Dickson A. Mungazi, *The Mind of Black Africa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 9.

<sup>273</sup> Wyatt MacGaffey and Dickson A. Mungazi, review of "The Mind of Black Africa." *Journal of African History*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

did not accept the social and economic injustice of the colonial administration and questioned its social order. A prominent United Methodist minister, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, followed in Dodge's footsteps. He entered politics and was instrumental in achieving Zimbabwe's first independence. We might discuss some of these political Shona African pastors, such as Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole of the United Church of Christ, who became active in politics. Webster Shumuyarira, who later became the minister of information and technology after independence, and Reverend Canaan Banana, who became the first President of Zimbabwe, are just a few prominent pastors who joined the liberation struggle and later took political leadership positions soon after independence. Whoever purported to serve the public but ignored the condition of the destitute, exploited, downtrodden, disenfranchised, and silent masses had chosen the wrong career. It was difficult for many pastors in racist and lawless Rhodesia to resist becoming political.<sup>274</sup>

#### *Shona Kings and the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe*

Before the coming of the colonialists and missionaries, Africa had its own civilization,<sup>275</sup> The researcher learned that the Shona people had their governing system, and they were known as the Great Kingdom of Zimbabwe (Madzimbahwe). The nation was a kingdom with a king and also other kings who reigned their own territories but within the Kingdom of Zimbabwe. It is important to note that the Shona identity is not

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<sup>274</sup> Africa's Great Civilizations. Part 4, Cities. *Place of publication not identified*: PBS, (2017).

<sup>275</sup> Christopher Ralling, John Percival, and Basil Davidson. 1984. Africa. Episode One, *Different but Equal*. Directed by Christopher Ralling. Halle, Saxony: ArtHaus Musik.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X75COneJ4w8&list=PL6mz4AK-lTo6KOzj309JKOzsfFARBxiQ&index=1>

enough without highlighting this most important component before colonization and the missionaries.

The Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe, the Mutapa Kingdom, the Rozvi Kingdom, the Torwa Kingdom, and the Ndebele Kingdom were all big empires that grew in Zimbabwe before it was colonized by the British. From about 1290 to 1450, a strong and well organized civilization grew to become the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe, a beautiful old stone, an ancient nation that was near the town of Masvingo. It thrived because it was a good place to farm, and raise cattle, had a lot of minerals, and, most importantly, traded with other countries. Prior to the arrival of European explorers from Portugal, the kingdom of Mapungubwe was the first of a succession of advanced trading nations to form in Zimbabwe. They exchanged gold, ivory, and copper for fabric and glass, and many other things, as discussed previously. Trade was made with places as far away as China, India, the Middle East, and Near East, East and West Africa, and others before the coming of colonizers and missionaries. Trade was also made with places in the same region and between regions. Things like Persian bowls, Chinese plates, glass from the Near East, and other similar items found at Great Zimbabwe show that trade took place with these faraway places.<sup>276</sup> The Great Zimbabwe kingdom also traded things like glass beads of different sizes and shapes, brass wire, seashells, iron wire, ax heads, and chisels. Ivory, iron gongs, gold wire and beads, soapstone plates, and other things were made by local people before the arrival of the colonizers and missionaries. People in different kingdoms wove, and some wore clothes that were made there.

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<sup>276</sup> The Kingdom of the Great Zimbabwe: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_f0fnQVZUc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_f0fnQVZUc)



The six or seven soapstone bird carvings that sit on decorated boulders are some of the best and most permanent Shona art carvings found in Great Zimbabwe. These might have been religious symbols that showed Great Zimbabwe was a major political, economic, cultural, and religious center before colonization. Mutota, a Mbire king, is said to have led his people to create the Mutapa kingdom in the Dande area of the Zambezi Valley in search of water, where smaller and less complex Madzimbahwe were built. The kingdom of great Zimbabwe had lost all of its wealth, trade, political power, and cultural importance by the end of the 15th century when the British settlers came.



**Figure 2. Image of the kingdom of great Zimbabwe (The house of stone) before colonization.**

The house of the stone monument is still there, and it is a very important cultural and tourist site. The impressive site shows what the Shona people created before

colonization. Before colonists and missionaries came, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and Malawi were all part of the same country called Southern Africa.<sup>277</sup>



**Figure 3. Nyatsimba Mutota, the first King and the queen of the Shona people, modern-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and Malawi.**

#### *Analysis*

As the interviews continued the researcher began to gain a deeper understanding of the missionaries, it became evident that they did not all share the same ideas and opinions. This makes it difficult to develop generalizations, as there are frequently a large

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<sup>277</sup> The Kingdom of the Great Zimbabwe: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_f0fnQVZUc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_f0fnQVZUc)

number of exceptions and unique bits of information recorded throughout the history of Zimbabwe. Due to their contact with colonialists, scholars sometimes have a simplistic and conventional conception of what a missionary was like. However, we may learn from colonial-era pastors that they were not all the same but that the actions of a few bad pastors obscured the majority of the excellent work done by the majority of good pastors. One rotten fruit corrupts the entire lot.

In this age of increasing liberalism, missionaries are not always understood or cared for, in accordance with some findings. In addition, as humanity and cultural studies have advanced and helped people learn more about other nations and people and come to know them better, we find the way Christian missionaries think and behave to be increasingly morally reprehensible and disturbing. The researcher believes that missionaries have just lately begun to be studied using more rigorous social and academic research approaches. To comprehend some of the charges made against these missionaries, it is necessary to go further. As a result, there are many assumptions about what transpired, as history was not properly documented throughout this time period due to fear of insurrection by colonialists. Before a certain generation dies, more research needs to be done in Zimbabwe. As new pastors, this is a great way to keep encouraging other young pastors and the next generation to learn more about African Shona history.

On the other hand, there is a way of writing and thinking called “hagiographical,” which tends to make missionaries into heroes who are like saints and should be admired. Some bad ideas about missionaries come from the fact that colonialists caused too much pain for Zimbabweans, and some missionaries got caught in the middle. Some of the interviews helped the researcher rethink what missionaries do and realize how important

it is to let go of too positive or too negative ideas about them and try to figure out where they went wrong and where they didn't have the skills. We should not, in particular, reduce all of them to stereotypes and caricatures.

This research revealed the difficulties African Shona pastors had as they preached the gospel during the colonial era. Colonialists and missionaries worked together, making it difficult for the Gospel to spread despite its power, truth, and sharpness than any two-edged sword. The gospel was received well by the Shona people, proving that it was beneficial to follow, but the absence of interpersonal relationships and collaboration hindered its impact on the lives of many ordinary Shona people. It is true that some colonialists used the Bible negatively to help them achieve their nefarious evil objectives, but the call to action is that Shona theologians must begin contextualizing their theology with an African perspective so that the African Shona people can more readily acknowledge this gospel as their own.

## CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

### **Strength and Weakness of the research**

This section will highlight the researcher's findings of the investigation's strengths and weaknesses. In seven essential areas, the research project stood out. As we saw in the preceding sections, the inaugural project's biggest value was the qualitative interviews conducted with six pastors who had personally experienced the painful hurdles and consequences of pastoring under colonialism. These interviews were a wonderful way to gain a great deal of information. The researcher learned a lot more about colonialism and missionary activities in Zimbabwe by adopting this technique rather than any other.

Second, the strength of this project is that it relied on the first-hand recollections of six pastors who served during the colonial era and who saw or witnessed the challenges encountered by missionaries attempting to work with them to promote the gospel in the villages. For daring to stand between the missionaries and the community, these pastors incurred the wrath of traditional leaders, as well as the ire of the whole Shona community. Participants report that despite these challenges in presenting the gospel, some Shona Africans have truly given their lives to Christ.

Third, the strength of this project was that participants were also given the opportunity to provide information that would not have been possible using another study approach, such as a survey. The objective of the qualitative study was to look into real events as they occurred in time and space. Everything stems from the people involved and how their minds and personalities interact with one another. The patterns identified in

this study were adopted, their significance verified, and the necessary adjustments were made so that the study could achieve its goals and accomplish its mission. The participants were also able to share information with the researcher in their own words and from their own perspectives rather than attempting to fit those worldviews into the researcher's potentially limited response options.

Fourth, this method allowed the researcher to observe beyond what the participants were expressing and obtain more precise information. Interviews were useful to the researcher when she needed to learn more about the mechanics of a relational context or the rationale behind a certain behavior or action, and it was only if they were structured in such a way that helped in exposing hidden information. For example, at some point in time, the missionaries ceased worrying about the salvation of souls and instead focused on the sheer number of people who attended their meetings to get charity, support, and protection. They were responsible for providing weekly attendance numbers to their headquarters. The researcher concluded that this information would be valuable when seeking to win over the hearts and minds of the Shona African populace, beginning with a select few who would then influence others, until a larger group was formed.

Fifth, this method helped the researcher gain an opportunity to see participants' real emotions, such as the anguish in the participants' voices, commitment, as well as their sense of urgency to do more for their Shona African community. This was encouraging and gave a sense of urgency to the researcher to take this project seriously and prayerfully. The researcher was inspired to devote so much time to this project by the fact that she was born and raised in Africa, where she encountered some of the nation's

most pressing issues at an early age. Since the researcher had many unanswered questions and concerns, she set out to investigate them as part of this research.

Therefore, the other strength of this research was that it revealed the importance of teaching people to know their history as Shona African people and who they were before colonization. It is crucial to note that religious ideas and practices affect and shape every part of a person's life. Shona spirituality simply recognizes that they can't be separated from the real world or completely neglected. Many Shona Africans don't like the word "religion" because it makes it sound like religion is separate from a person's culture, society, or environment. Still, for a lot of Africans, religion and these things are strongly connected. It is a way of life that will always be a part of society. In traditional Shona African culture, religion affects every part of life, from art and literature to relationships, health, nutrition, lifestyle, money, and even death. Shona African spirituality recognizes that religious ideas and practices affect and change every part of a person's life, so they cannot be kept separate from everyday life. Africa is a place where you can find true, all-around spirituality. For example, the original Shona African point of view concerning disease is that it is than just a problem with a person's body. It can also be caused by problems with a person's clan, distant relatives, or even their relationship with their ancestors. Another example is an understanding to the Shona people that there is nothing wrong with African Christians dressing in their traditional attire and going to church as long as the traditional outfit is modest according to the word of God 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

Sixth, the interviews helped the researcher to discover some of the key challenges faced and also solutions to these pressing challenges in the Shona African church in

Zimbabwe. The researcher realized the importance of investigating the cultural and historical backdrop, the contextual and historical setting of the gospel message as it should be proclaimed or taught to Shona Africans. Despite the fact that the account of creation given in Genesis is recognized throughout the whole continent of Africa, many regions on the continent narrate somewhat different interpretations of the creation myth or story found in Genesis 1. By adopting narrative theology, but in a Shona African context, the researcher was able to explore different relevant works of literature on African worldviews on creation, as well as Christian cultural practices and interpretation of scripture through the lens of the Shona African people in order to assist the Shona people in conforming to, adapting to, or relating to the Bible.

Seventh, this method revealed one of the strongest hindrances to the advancement of the gospel, and the fact showed that the British conquerors together with the missionaries felt and acted superior to the African Shona people. European missionaries and colonists significantly influenced how Shona communities saw leadership and its responsibilities. It incorrectly implied that those in authority might choose whether or not to enforce the law. In front of the missionaries, the Africans were humiliated, and they never recovered their lost heritage, culture, and identity. Once sin was understood as an activity as opposed to a flaw in character, the soul and body became separate beings. To Westerners, the concept of an act of remorse was much more revolting. The members of the African Shona ethnic group abandoned all of their previous customs. While God was and is present in this country, the missionaries failed to see that God had purposefully placed them there so that the locals might seek and know the genuine God and know Christ in his fullness (Acts 17:26–27).



### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The first weakness is the fact that the researcher had to rely on interviewees' memory to offer comprehensive descriptions of their experiences, ideas, and behaviors. This is one drawback of qualitative interviews. As a qualitative researcher, it is important to make sure that good research is done and that good methods are used. If interviews are not done well, they could lead to wrong results. Most of the time, interviews or qualitative research would not be enough to draw conclusions about a large part of the African population. Even though the goal of this study was to come up with conclusions that could be used for all Shona African Christians.

The second weakness of the qualitative interviews experienced in this project is that they were time-consuming and emotionally draining. Before conducting interviews or using the procedure, the researcher developed sample questions to give participants an indication of what to expect and to provide them with time to prepare. The researcher found she required more time to complete the interviews than more time to transcribe them. Finally, the time-consuming process of coding them was difficult to comprehend what an older participant stated if they used a vernacular language during the interview and then it must be translated into English.

The third weakness of the project was that the researcher needed to be very empathetic and sensitive and have the ability to hear things that were really difficult to hear. The researcher realized that there is a weakness in putting all the blame on colonization and missionaries. African Shona Christians needs to mature and reflect on themselves if they are to adapt successfully to their new culture. Various additional elements can facilitate this process. Even if it could be difficult to make this a concrete argument based on other evidence of the practices of colonialists.

The researcher has come to believe that Christianity did not come from outside of Africa and that it was not imposed on the Shona people. The earliest Christians are the foundation upon which Christianity rests. Clement of Alexandria, Basilides, Valentinus, and Coptic and monastic groups appear to have connected with their North African environment, yet the church did decline because early theologians like Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine did not make an effort to travel to other parts of Africa to continue strengthening the church.<sup>278</sup> The Shona must look at new ideas from an African perspective, no matter how much the West has altered their culture.

The researcher also found that this backdrop will strengthen the Shona African people to know their true history and embrace Christianity, not as a foreign religion but something that actually started right in Africa. Christianity reached Egypt around 50 A.D. Christianity had spread to the area around Carthage by the end of the second century. Christianity had a stronghold in North Africa for several centuries after Christ. From a strong foundation in North Africa, Christianity spread further into the continent's interior. Islam's and traditional African religions' challenges strengthened believers' faith. When Catholicism spread across the continent from Portugal in the fifteenth century, it marked a turning point in history. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses, spreading the word about me everywhere in Jerusalem and all over the world" (Acts 1:8). Sudan was one of the first places the Jesus story traveled when "the treasurer of Ethiopia" (possibly Meroe

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<sup>278</sup> David T. Adamo. "African Biblical Studies: Illusions, Realities and Challenges." *Die Skriflig: Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 50, no. 1 (2016): 1–10. 101-103.

in modern Sudan) accepted the good news that Philip had told him, was baptized, and spread the message throughout Africa (Acts 8:26-40).<sup>279</sup>

According to the Coptic church of Egypt, the apostle Thomas and the evangelist Mark are credited with playing important roles in the establishment of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt. However, the late third century saw the greatest expansion of early Christianity in Africa which was partly attributed to the massive number of Jews who converted in these large Jewish communities. Persecution, however, was arguably the most unexpected factor in the growth of Christianity. Persecution strengthened African believers' faith and gave them the courage to share their faith with an increasingly sympathetic African population.<sup>280</sup> This is why Shona African people must not feel like strangers, being Christians, it is not the white man's religion, but the message of God to all humanity. This is a weak area because the church is not teaching this knowledge, something that weakens the advocacy of Christianity among the Shona African-speaking communities. The Bible reiterates that my people perish for lack of knowledge, therefore if this truth is not taught in African churches to give them their identity and history back, pastors will not be able to win the hearts of most Shona African people. The researcher found that the process by which God reconciles the world to himself in which humans are required to engage as both subjects and objects of mission advocacy, systems that face activities at the boundary line of society, and systemic considerations must be modified.

Fourth, the Shona Africans have not fully taken advantage of social media to bring awareness to the African brothers in the body of Christ the true history of

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<sup>279</sup> Dorothy Bea Akoto, "Hearing Scripture in African Contexts: Hermeneutic of Grafting," *Old Testament Essays* 20, no. 2 (2007): 209-211.

<sup>280</sup> Adamo, *African Biblical Studies*, 98-99.

Christianity in Africa. This has weakened the spreading and embracing of the true Gospel of Christianity among the Shona African people today. If the African church can educate its members and use social media to amplify their theological and cultural views and establish an African theology, it will be a watershed, landmark, milestone, breakthrough, and time for the African Shona Christians. Obviously, this is contingent upon the performance of a critical assignment. Agency, contextual knowledge, ecclesiastical examination, interpreting tradition, discernment for action, reflexivity, and spirituality are all aspects of the “transformative structure” that should be developed for this assignment. As the church expanded throughout Africa in the 20th century, so this should also happen in Africans’ perspectives on religion.

The researcher believes it is not easy for Shona African people to relearn, yet the cultural practices of the Shona people in sub-Saharan Africa had a big impact on how their communities thought about what was important. If someone lived in isolation from the rest of the community, their life would be pointless. Without the hard work of these few, the community as a whole would not have been able to grow. In order to revive the philosophy of “I am because we are,” current African states must relearn the community principles of old Shona African culture (ubuntu). The Shona people are very close to each other and depend on each other. Man does not exist in a vacuum, but rather in the context of society and the environment. (Jesus told his followers that people would know they were his followers if they love each other.) Love for one’s community is a common theme in the Bible, and it’s rare to meet someone who isn’t part of a group of some kind. Ubuntu, which can be said in English as “I am because we are,” comes from these ideas. Individualistic Christians who don’t think their actions affect the church, which is the

body of Christ, are a direct result of modern times. People today have short tempers, get angry easily, cannot concentrate, and are obsessed with materials. Another finding is to deal with the Shona African people's mindsets. In order to get rid of the colonial mindset in Africa, the Shona people need to know that their traditional religions are not inherently bad. They have never been bad and never will be. For all Christians to find their value in God's word and as a country, they need to get back in touch with some of the values in Shona African traditions, and social media is one advantage that can be used to achieve this goal. This would strengthen the African position of spreading the gospel to Africans in their context.

Fifth, another weakness was the fear that Shona African theology would become disconnected from cultural concerns. Even while theology is constrained by its past, in this instance Western culture, it must be liberated in order to realize its full potential. The researcher was afraid that she will not be able to discern the crucial distinction if she fails to recognize that the Bible and theology are not the same things. When the two are together, veneration occurs. One probable outcome is attempting to impose a theology designed for one culture on another. There will be some overlap, but cultural variations may be so great that some religious meanings may possibly be lost. The only thing that can be applicable everywhere is God's Word. However, if these theologies adhere to what the Bible says, they will benefit each other.

Sixth, another weakness in this work is that it paints far too many broad strokes and generalizations while paying far too little attention to the myriad of distinct episodes and lesser-known subtleties or little known intricacies that make up Zimbabwe's history. Scholars' interactions with colonialists might lead to a traditional and oversimplified

understanding of the role of a missionary. The six pastors who served during the colonial era some of them concurred that these missionaries were not all the same but that the poor behavior of some of them overshadowed the positive work of the vast majority. This comment undermines the reliability of the information received.

Some research indicates that in this period of rising liberalism, missionaries found themselves misunderstood and unappreciated. Furthermore, as humanity and cultural studies have progressed, helping people learn more about and get to know people in other countries and cultures, we find the way Christian missionaries think and conduct to be increasingly morally repugnant and troubling. According to this study, it is only recently that missionaries have been the subject of serious social and academic investigation. Further reading is required to make sense of the accusations leveled at these missionaries. History was not thoroughly preserved during the colonial period because the colonialists were afraid of an uprising by the Shona African people; as a result, there are several speculations regarding what actually occurred.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

The researcher will provide nine recommendations to enhance this study. Firstly, interviewing retired former pastors who got involved in politics during the colonial era would be a better place to start rather than the other way around. The project would benefit enormously from discovering why they left the ministry to pursue a career in politics or why they joined the liberation struggle and equality movement.

Second, it would be an honor to meet with missionaries who served in Africa during the colonial era to hear about the challenges they faced, the techniques they found successful, and their perspectives on the condition of the gospel on the continent

currently. The researcher would have appreciated the missed opportunity to ask missionaries whether they recognized the various ways the gospel could have been communicated to the Shona African people back then, given the knowledge and results they have seen from many so-called traditional churches in Zimbabwe today. Hearing the missionaries' viewpoints would immensely benefit our research since they would most likely offer the most honest account of what transpired throughout the colonization period.

Third, it would have been beneficial for the researcher to speak with the traditional chiefs, kings, and cultural leaders of the Shona communities, particularly with the knowledge gained from this research, to hear and see their reactions to the realization that Christianity was not a white man's religion, a cliché used by most elderly nonbelievers. The researcher's findings would have been valuable not only for the church but also for strengthening the Shona African people's self-esteem by casting light on Africa's vital role in the history of Christianity.

Fourth, when it comes to decolonizing the mindset of Shona Africans, it is going to be both a process and a way of life. In order to give the vitality, development, and adaptability necessary in Zimbabwe, this will necessitate adopting, adapting, and integrating different cultures into and through an African worldview. Africans of Shona descent would do well to recognize the difficulty involved in attempting to pin down the essence of African identity and culture. The hostility of the colonial era has given way to a more tolerant, realistic, and cosmopolitan form that the Shona Africans have helped shape through their experiences.

Fifth, the Shona people of Zimbabwe must be able to approach contextual narrative theology with pride as a people with a history, as well as take pride in their African origins and devotion to their own Motherland, Africa. This also includes aggressively connecting with and raising the Shona people of Africa's storytelling religion and culture to the same level as that of the West. If these principles are implemented, it will become evident that being African and accepting some features of Western civilization are mutually incompatible. Failure of graduating Bible scholars to embrace this way of preaching and instructing Africans in their own worldview may have a detrimental influence on them to come to Christ and also on the creation of good Shona African Bible commentaries and other literature in the near future. If clergy are serious about assisting the Shona African people, they must be aware of how their work overlaps with the cultural norms of the people they aim to serve. Educating children from non-Western backgrounds might require managing conflicts between different worldviews, which can hamper learning and even inflict emotional agony.

As a result, the goal of this study is to propose a way of framing things that will be useful to all pastors that God has called to serve in Africa and teach in seminaries.

Sixth, what has been learned about the past and how it has been understood will help both current and future generations. The fact that most of our continent's history has been written by white people from the West influences both how the rest of the world views Africa and how Africans perceive themselves. This has had a profound influence on future generations, as young children know very little about their country's history and heritage. The problem is that those who write the history of Africa only highlight the colonization of Africa as the most significant event that has ever occurred there, despite



the fact that many history books split Africa's history into three major parts: before colonialism, during colonial exploitation, and after colonial rule.

Seventh, it is true that some Western values have corrupted numerous African values. This is to be expected but not necessarily accepted. Generally speaking, every society thinks its ideals are the best. This is especially significant given that the British were the colonizers who arrived and "took over" control and subjected the Shona to Indirect Rule. As a result, they legally mandated particular values. Some of the six pastors who participated in the interviews revealed to the researcher that Zimbabweans and other Africans, in general, had to take responsibility for their actions that have led them to where they are today and go forward with rewriting their history.

One preacher underlined that culture is dynamic. It is beyond time to criticize colonialists; instead, the African Shona people should condemn Christian missionaries who merged a condescending gospel worldview with British authority and western culture.

Eighth, in a nutshell, the Shona have adopted a foreign culture and may not be making significant efforts to revive their own. As a result, this must be very exciting to Bible academics. This is why Christians must avoid the temptation to continue criticizing colonialism, even while its impact of it persists powerfully. The reality remains that whatever has been learned may be "unlearned." However, colonialism, as we know and feel it now, has left the Shona African people with a mixed bag. Shona people from Africa can talk about what they've learned from working with people from other cultures. The word "colonialism" has always been linked to bad things, and this is still true today.

So, it must have bad effects because of this, and maybe some Shona people can help us understand better.

Ninth, however, this research reminds all pastors and church leaders that Christian history in Africa should be centered on what Africans remember, even though much remains unspoken and unknown when it comes to rewriting the Shona African people's history from their own perspective because it was mostly orally passed down, but never lost. Because all of these African countries are on the same continent and they experienced many of the same struggles, it really is critical to emphasize both the details of Zimbabwe's history as well as the similarities it had with other African countries prior to colonization. It is past time for the Shona people of Africa to begin preserving their culture, identity, and great history, which does not begin and end with colonization.

Further details regarding what went wrong and why Shona Africans reject Christianity were provided in this section. Missionary and colonial operations in Zimbabwe led to the adoption of methods that hampered the progress of the kingdom of God. This project's strength comes from the fact that it was based on the first-person memories of six pastors who served during the colonial era and who observed or experienced the difficulties missionaries had while trying to work with them to spread the gospel in the communities. Also, participants had the chance to offer data that couldn't have been collected by another study method, like a survey. Using this technique, the researcher was capable of observing beyond what the participants were saying and getting more detailed data. The approach gave the researcher the chance to see the participants' true feelings, such as the sorrow in their voices, their dedication, and their sense of urgency to do more for their Shona African community. They discussed the

significance of educating people about Shona African history and who they were before colonialism, as well as some of the major problems encountered and their imperative solutions in the Shona African church in Zimbabwe. The approach also revealed one of the biggest obstacles to the spread of the gospel, and the fact that the British colonizers and missionaries perceived and behaved superior to the African Shona people rather than blending in and working with the Shona people, they were trying to impose and override, they failed to integrate or contextualize.

This may possibly be a limitation of qualitative interviews since the researcher had to rely on the respondents' memory to offer detailed explanations of their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors. The researcher had to be exceedingly sensitive and sympathetic, as well as capable of hearing difficult-to-hear things. It is unfortunate that Shona Africans have not fully embraced social media in order to educate their African Christian brothers. This study also demonstrated the danger of Shona African theology becoming detached from cultural concerns. Even while theology is limited by its past, in this instance Western culture, it must be released in order to attain its full potential. This study utilizes far too many broad strokes and generalizations while paying much too little attention to the myriad of distinct happenings and lesser-known specifics that comprise Zimbabwe's history.

The researcher recommended that by encouraging and instructing the Shona people of Zimbabwe to approach contextual narrative theology with pride as a people with a history, as well as pride in their African heritage and devotion to their own Motherland, Africa, adaption to the gospel would be enhanced. In addition, this entails

establishing aggressive ties with the Shona people of Africa and bringing their religion and culture of storytelling or narratives in line with those of the West.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS

### **Personal Growth**

The interviews were essential to the development of an effective research strategy, and the researcher would like to improve personal communication skills as a result of conducting the interviews. When the researcher learned to truly listen to these six different perspectives, she discovered that surface interactions were quickly replaced by deeper causes. The researcher developed a strong rapport with her interviewees as a result of her objectivity and candor. As a result, the combined interview results were significantly more effective and insightful. The researcher allowed for interruptions and recognized that each interview was unique, with interviewees employing their own methods of answering questions.

Throughout the study, the researcher developed a sense of urgency in documenting the history of the Shona people. Just like Judaism and Christianity, ancient Shona African religious systems did not demand adherence to a canonical source, according to the study's conclusions. Indigenous African religion has never been precisely defined since it is mostly transmitted orally (through narratives). Therefore, it is more susceptible to being influenced and changed by other faiths, religious knowledge, and contemporary inventions. The history of the Shona people was transmitted orally rather than in writing. Due to selective dissemination and forgetfulness, oral traditions lose historical authenticity with age. The Shona African people's traditional African religions lack a unified set of fundamental core beliefs. More interviews with seasoned

older, and more experienced pastors are required to further record the Christian religion of the Shona people; therefore, the researcher realizes an urgent need for more research in this area.

Second, the researcher hopes to grow as she gains experience using Ubuntu principles to teach the Bible to Shona Africans. Shona African Christians developed a distinct sense of community, which drastically contradicted traditional Shona African religious and cultural practices. This was replacing the conventional means by which Shona Africans have historically identified themselves. They were pushing Shona Africans to adopt Christianity as a means of achieving this goal. This contradicts the unique worldview of the Shona Africans who consider everything to be intrinsically linked to and one with the earth. The foundational mythologies of a people represent the cosmic proximity of their first appearance, ancestors, and communities. Other cultures' religions cannot compete with the fervor of African religion.

Third, the researcher hopes to grow and deepen her understanding of narrative theology. It is important for a preacher to not only be fluent in traditional Shona cultural preaching but also to be aware of the form of information they consume and the structure in which it is presented in order to connect with and inspire members of their Shona African congregation. The researcher understood that, in the same way, the Bible is a piece of writing that fits into many different categories. God's Word has between six and eight different types, depending on how it is put together. All of these cannot be dealt with in the same way. The genre affects how it must be written, interpreted, and applied. Understanding biblical genre means talking about biblical genres which have a direct

effect on how people understand the Bible. Most of the Bible is written in the form of historical narratives which use stories to teach us about God's truth.

The historical books in the Old Testament, the book of Acts in the New Testament, and several of the gospels all have narrative stories in them. The gospels are a unique mix of old writings, stories, allegories, and other kinds of poetry. Because God is the main character in every Bible story, it is important to find out what the narrative says about God's creation, personality, and purposes. Humans are temperamental and not very important in the book because they are not perfect, but God is the best main character in every Bible story. Therefore, when teaching Shona African people, it's important to think about what the story teaches people about God as they read how He deals with people, and how He uses people to do what He wants. How He uses historical events to accomplish His goals.

A narrative is an account of what happened, not an interpretation of what should have happened. It tells what the characters did instead of what they should have done. Therefore, it's important to look for latent meanings because stories often unintentionally teach things. The researcher wants to learn more about creating stories for Shona African people because the Bible has some metaphors, and stories shouldn't be read as allegories. One example is Jesus' parables. On other occasions, another biblical author uses a metaphor to explain how historical events were guided by God. Paul gives the example of Isaac and Ishmael, two of Abraham's sons, in Galatians 4:22–26. In the light of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, however, these are the exceptions. We don't have the right to figure out what the Bible's metaphors mean in any way we want. Therefore, when teaching narrative theology to Shona people, it is important not to make assumptions about things

that God does not tell them. The stories in the Bible don't always give out all of the information needed, but pastors cannot simply "fill in the blanks" because God has already given His people everything. He wants for them. Sometimes, we have to accept that we don't know something.

The researcher understood that Shona Christians might be able to understand the Bible better and think in a better way if they read it through the eyes of Africans. For example, based on Matthew 5:14–16, the part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, "You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth." The researcher would argue that the Western interpretation of the sermon, "You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth," does not correspond in an African setting. These comments explain how salt makes food taste better and keeps it from going bad. According to the commentaries on the Shona Bible, salt should be like the Shona culture's metaphor of light which shows the way and gives guidance. Here's a short narrative to assist in comprehending the above Bible verses: A mountain village in Africa once had a drought. Even though the monkeys knew where the water was, they wouldn't take anyone there. People were going to die from thirst, so they decided to take a monkey and lock it up. After that, they started feeding salt to this monkey to eat. The monkey was very thirsty after a day. The adults then decided it was time to let the monkey go. When the monkey was set free, it went right to the water source to quench its thirst whether people were after it or not. Here is the take-home message for the church: Your Christianity is meaningless unless it quenches people's thirst, for the river of life must flow out of you. People must be drawn to you because of your Christianity.



As the study progressed, the researcher realized how crucial it was to read the Bible in its original context. The Shona people have a deep devotion to God, but many will fail to reach the rest of Africa unless the gospel is presented in a manner that is relatable to them. Since the meaning of a word in one context might be radically different from the meaning in another situation, it is common practice to interpret words in light of the context in which they are used. As a result, we need to put things in perspective. Indeed, this is true not only of the Bible but of all literature. One's ability to understand and relate to the words of another, as well as the culture in which they are spoken, greatly improves with exposure to a foreign language and its context.

If the Christian religion is not part of Shona African culture, the two traditions may have to coexist, and a person will have to pick one or the other. It is too broad to ask more general questions on the morality and superstition of Shona African culture. The researcher believes that it is necessary to draw from one culture in order to understand another. In order for traditions to be regenerated, they must be exposed to and subjugated to the true Gospel of Christ. The Shona African Christian religion must accept the positive aspects of Shona culture while rejecting its negative aspects. In actuality, the richness of Shona African culture does not need to be exploited to enhance the Christian faith in any manner.

Although the phrase "good" is ambiguous, we are interested in the positive aspects of culture. Western church authorities and Shona African theologians may disagree on what constitutes excellent Shona African theology for a Christian. When it comes to the well-being of Shona Christians in Africa, the West has no business defining cultural theology; it is their job. Unfortunately, the majority of Shona African theologians

have authored works that are not very relevant to the Shona people of Africa, and it is up to the theologians to put their heads together and do the right thing.

### **Further Study**

First, in the area of contextualized hermeneutics, there is a huge need for further study and development. Furthermore, in order to succeed among the African Shona people, one must have a strong foundation in biblical hermeneutics or the study of how the Bible is understood and used. This doesn't mean that decolonization models from other countries shouldn't be used at all. Even though non-African models can't replace indigenous decolonization models, they might help us understand how postcolonial African contexts could use Shona African knowledge systems for social development.<sup>281</sup> The Ubuntu view of Judeo-Christianity is almost always part of an African reading of the Bible. This is a deep Shona saying: "I am because we are." Life's power comes from everyone and everything working together (Ubuntu). This appeals to the social part of Shona African ideology, which says that being human means "being with others." When the Ubuntu philosophy is the basis for an African hermeneutic, people start to see their role in the community as a story to be read. Reading the Bible is more than just reading a book; it makes sense when read with the other oral, written, and modern texts of the community as a whole.

Second, academic research is being conducted on the healing and wellness of the Shona African people. How to recover from the scars that colonialism left behind. The decolonization of Africa is crucial for the spiritual and mental rehabilitation of the Shona

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<sup>281</sup> Kaunda and Kim, 2021.

people. It is true that colonialism changed the way Shona people see God, as well as themselves and one another. Shona African Christians are now going through an identity crisis as a result of the negative attitudes, systems, beliefs, and practices that colonization instilled in the minds of Shona Africans. The researcher hopes to encourage the Shona people to walk patiently with others as they go through new learning experiences and achieve new degrees of self-awareness in order to regain their identities. It entails more than just reading books and biblical texts; it also involves counseling, using social media to express oneself, and establishing connections, especially for the younger generation. This must be done in such a way that people may reconnect with or learn about Jesus Christ as their personal savior while also relating to him. The researchers concluded unequivocally in this study that colonization has a substantial psychological influence since it changes people's thinking, judgment, language, social behaviors, theology, culture, and feeling of self-worth. Because of colonization, Shona Africans have the propensity to look down on themselves, believing that they are humbling themselves according to God's word, that they are unworthy of God, and that their Africanness is not good for God. They talk about having black thoughts, black agony, and how being black keeps them from connecting with and experiencing God again. Everything in black represents wickedness, evil, and evil thinking (Chitema/sin, Chivi/sin, Chakaipa/sin).

They've all been through and are still going through real trauma, such as emotions of self-loathing, self-sabotage, fear, and an inferiority complex, to name a few. True, resistance means getting back what was taken from them, which for these people means getting their inner peace back. So, it's important for them to start trying out the ways their ancestors kept their bodies, souls, and spirits healthy. If the Shona people of Africa

wanted to fix their worldview, these steps might help heal the trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation and make them stronger for the future.

Third, cultural adaptation is a method that can help Shona Africans culturally adapt the gospel in their ancient ways which can be understood using myths and narrative stories through the lens of an African perspective. The terms “adaptation,” “inculturation,” and “freedom” were employed to differentiate between these perspectives. According to the evidence of adaptation, creativity, and introspection, this seems to entail a goal of merging into the local culture. The term “inculturation” can signify a variety of things. The terms “contextualization,” “accommodation,” and “adaptation” fall short of capturing the complexities at play in Shona society. Through the process of inculturation, Christianity was introduced to the indigenous Shona people of Africa, which resulted in a shift in their moral values. Inculturation entails the simultaneous Christianization of culture and the inculturation of Christianity. It is impossible to go through with this without an understanding of the local culture’s worldviews, mental models, sense of community, historical knowledge, and effects of modernity.

Fourth, traditional Shona African customs are another area that should be researched further. The presence of God in man’s heart, as well as the restoration of the home as the locus of practical worship, provide the best chance for a revival of biblical religion in Zimbabwe. During the liberation struggles against colonialism, spiritual beings were frequently discussed. There is a huge contrast between this and today’s highly urbanized, contemporary, and individualistic culture. For the time being, that is the end of civilization as we know it. However, ignoring this history would be disastrous.

When traditional Shona African customs are ignored or only superficially explored, it is difficult to feel like you belong. Prior to colonization, African communities relied heavily on indigenous faiths. The teachings of these faiths provided them with spiritual solace and invaluable life lessons. The indigenous Shona Africans had their own religious traditions. Native Shona Africans follow a wide range of religions, each with its own nuances and specifics based on factors such as family history and cultural identity. Religion has always been concentrated in that part of Africa's southern tip among the Shona people. Shona spirituality recognizes only the inseparability of religious concepts and rituals from daily life. This is because religious beliefs and practices pervade and influence a person's entire being.

Fifth, more study of the Shona African kingdom and rediscovering the kingdom of God among them is necessary. The Shona African people have long been aware of the notion of a monarchy which is a type of government in which one person, the king or monarch, holds ultimate control over everyone else. Although monarchy has existed in Zimbabwe from ancient times (Mambo/Umambo), colonizers introduced the new title "chief" to replace "king" which has lasted in Zimbabwe to this day. In place of a native monarchy, the colonists installed their own system of a kraal chief (Sabhuku) and his courtiers (machinda/Makurokoto). This has tarnished the very concept of a king and diminished the monarchy's strength. Great Zimbabwe had a king, a kingdom, and a lot of descendants. Royal princes and princesses were those born into the monarchy, and subjects were individuals who lived in the king's realm or kingdom. More research on the subject will help the Shona people of Africa remember what a kingdom is, what distinguishes it, how it operates, and all the other factors that go into establishing one.

The differences between a king, monarchy, religion, and democracy, as well as how a democracy compares favorably to other forms of government, will be rediscovered in detail. It is critical to understand the Kingdom's fundamental concepts and how they may be adopted in the context of Shona Africans' daily lives. The Shona people of Africa define "kingdom" as the territory or land over which a king or monarch has total sovereignty. However, Jesus consistently refers to God's administration, autocracy, and sovereignty over the earth. The king's objective, ambition, and strategy have an impact on his subjects or people. God's kingdom includes God's will being carried out by his people, God's influence from on high, and God's administration, jurisdiction, efficacy, and impact. As a result, additional research would help the Shona African people relate better to a familiar situation.

All cultures must have the right to exist independently within Christianity, and the adoption of Christian teachings into a culture should not be interpreted as an attempt to eradicate that culture. It takes the "adoption" of a new culture that preserves the fundamental integrity of the old culture's institutions, practices, and values while allowing them to coexist peacefully with the new ones.

In terms of Shona African mythology, proverbs, idioms, liturgy, sacred music, cultural dance, cultural drumming, and the integration of African cultural practices and local components during worship, the Shona African Christian religion must be fitted to the Shona way of life in practice. Devotional prayers and hymns must also be adapted to African worship configurations and requirements. Incorporating Christian principles into a specific culture should not be interpreted as an attempt to eliminate that culture, but it is true that every culture must be allowed to grow within Christianity on its own terms. To

coexist peacefully with members of other cultures, one must adapt to that culture while keeping the essential structures, practices, and values of the other. Therefore, focusing on narrative theology that is read or written in an African context among the Shona people is advantageous. The researcher found that when she really listened to the participants' differing points of view, underlying reasons swiftly took the place of the participants' superficial interactions. Due to her neutrality and sincerity, the researcher established a solid relationship with her interview subjects. The combined interview findings were thereby much more useful and enlightening. The researcher acknowledged that each interview was different and that interviewees used their own approaches to responding to questions by allowing for interruptions. The incorporation of Christian values into a culture should not be viewed as an attempt to eliminate that culture, but rather as a means of enriching it. Shona Africans should revert to their more traditional means of expression in order to proclaim the gospel and practice Christianity more effectively. A new culture must be "adopted" if the old culture's institutions, customs, and values are to operate regularly while simultaneously enabling the introduction of new ones to thrive in peace.

Shona Africans should return to their more traditional modes of communication when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel and the practice of Christianity. They should investigate the benefits of narratives and storytelling as Africans in order to gain insight into the hidden truth from their own perspective. When the Shona people decide to decolonize their mindsets and accept their God-given dominion mandate, they will be able to reinvent themselves and their history becoming what God intended for them in the first place. It is critical for them to act if they are to rediscover God's kingdom according

to their previous understanding of kingdom rulership. The researcher also believes that acknowledging their past and embracing their new identity and heritage as people in Christ is an important step toward genuine inner freedom. Without this understanding and effort, the Shona will remain their own worst enemy.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Shona people of Africa have not yet found a theology that is acceptable to them, and that acknowledges and appreciates their spiritual and cultural history. There is a possibility that the colonial era had an effect on the traditional concepts held by the Shona people regarding God, humanity, and community. Africans are no longer considered a secondary issue when it comes to efforts to build theology on the continent or to publish the Bible on the continent. If the good news is to penetrate the hearts of Shona African people, the Church in Zimbabwe or the body of Christ at large must learn to contextualize the gospel for them so that it may be understood from their cultural perspective. It has been established that narrative theology when carried out contextually and with a focus on Africa and African culture produces literature of value to Africans. After suffering tremendously under colonial dominance, the Shona people of Africa urgently require decolonization to begin the process of emotional and psychological rehabilitation which should never be underestimated or ignored. There is a chance that colonial periods had an impact on traditional Shona perspectives of God, people, and society. As a result of colonialism's bad ideas and actions jointly with some missionaries, Christian Shona Africans are undergoing an identity crisis. There is still a need for a theology that fully honors Africa's Shona people's spiritual and cultural history. Indeed, they have experienced severe trauma and are currently struggling with the consequences



which include emotions of self-loathing, self-sabotage, dread, and an inferiority complex. After many years of civil unrest and instability, some people found peace through resistance. As a result, Shona Africans must begin experimenting with the ways devised by their forefathers to preserve mental, bodily, and spiritual health and to focus on these areas prayerfully. These strategies can aid the African Shona people in overcoming generational trauma and constructing a theologically and doctrinally sound future if they choose to restore their worldview. If the Gospel is adapted to fit inside their cultural framework and granted access within their African narrative worldview, the Shona people of Africa are easily converted. Africans are no longer an afterthought when it comes to Bible study and attempts to build theology on the continent. They should articulate their Christian philosophy and theology in culturally appropriate ways, and they can implement theology in ways that are compatible with their Christian beliefs and worldview.

Most stories were told from generation to generation orally, and because the generation that knows these stories well is dying off so rapidly, the Shona African scholars must act fast to take advantage of this window of opportunity to preserve what is left in order to make a huge impact. The colonialists, fearful of a popular uprising against them, are sometimes held responsible for the problem of a lack of historical documentation, especially in light of the history and struggles of prior Shona authors throughout the colonial period. More study is needed in Zimbabwe before a specific generation passes away. This is a fantastic approach for us to continue inspiring other young pastors and future generations to study the rich history of the African Shona people.

## APPENDIX A: COLONIZED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Image1. Colonized African Countries:  
<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Scramble-for-Africa/632997>



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Narrative Theology in An African Context Questionnaire**

1. Based on your experiences as a pastor under colonialism, what kind of challenges did you face with the Shona people and traditional leaders during your ministry as you introduced Christianity?
2. How did the Shona people respond to your message after seminary, did you ever feel you had all the tools you required to study the Bible and develop systems and solutions that made sense to the Shona African Congregation?
3. If colonialism was to blame for the integration and transformation of Shona culture into Western culture, what changes did it bring about in the character and substance of Shona cultural practice in everyday life, what can be done to restore this anomaly?

### APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR LEVEL 3 INTERVIEW RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a study of a Thesis Project. I want to learn how to communicate the gospel in a way that is acceptable from an African perspective. You were selected as a possible participant in this Thesis study because you have worked as a missionary/minister of the Gospel in Zimbabwe during the British colonial rule, and I believe you are well aware of the challenges that came with communicating the Gospel with the African Zimbabwean Shona people and traditional leaders.

I Rebecca Makayi will be asking you questions. You have between two to five days to answer three questions provided. Most questions will focus on your church work during the colonial era in Zimbabwe. How the community accepted you after seminary? If traditional leaders and the community reacted negatively to your message? Did you have the tools to engage in self-theology with Africans after graduating seminary? Any recommendation on how can the gospel be more effective in Africa today?

Please note, due to the importance we have on safeguarding the identity of participants and the confidentiality of their responses, no visual or audio recording will be required during these interviews.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified, or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Rebecca Makayi a student of Bethel Seminary in any way. If you decide not to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

This research project has been approved by my research advisor in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans.

By completing and returning the form, you are granting consent to participate in this research.

Please Sign and Return

.....

First and Last Name

.....

Current Role and Ministry

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