

**CONTEXTUALIZING THE USE OF BIBLICALLY DERIVED  
AND METAPHYSICAL IMAGERY IN THE WORK OF BLACK  
ARTISTS FROM KWAZULU-NATAL: c1930-2002**

by

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## **Abstract**

As art historians uncover the many sources and catalysts that have contributed to the emergence of black contemporary art in South Africa, one of the principal influences is that derived from the Christian mission churches and breakaway separatist groups - the African Independent Churches (AICs). Histories of African art have failed adequately to consider the art that emerged from these contexts, regarding it perhaps as too coerced and distinctive – merely religious art subject to the rigours of liturgical or proselytizing function. The purpose of this dissertation is to foreground this art and its position in the development of both pioneer and contemporary South African art and to identify the many features, both stylistic and thematic, which distinguish this work.

The incidence of religious based imagery in the work of black artists from KwaZulu-Natal is substantial, reflecting the abovementioned patronage as well as a post-colonial context of education, ethnology and alternate theologies that reinforced such content. However, as this art functions and was initially nurtured within both a liturgical and secular context, different readings and applications have accrued in relation to it, depending on its reception and shifting patronage base. While the focus in this dissertation is on the work of black artists, essentially it also considers the nature of church patronage and intervention, the influence of national and international developments in acculturated religious forms, educational developments and a historical context of theological revision from which it drew.

My research has led me to examine some of the major art training initiatives in KwaZulu-Natal from which such art emerged, as well as independent initiatives by artists and patrons. I examine these diverse contexts with a view to establishing an understanding of initial motivations and the many expectations that have accrued around such art. I consider further how Biblically derived imagery became increasingly autonomous, personalized and idiosyncratic as artists implicitly challenged the ethos of the mission church and considered the applicability of religion to a context of state autocracy and segregation.

Further, it will be shown, some art from the region addresses affinities between Biblical mores and

practice and traditional belief systems and cultural practice. Reflecting at times both the desirable cross-culturalism that was later mooted by the church and its developing theologies, such art was mostly prompted by the skepticism and assertiveness of those individuals who challenged the suppression of indigenous belief systems in the regio

It is further argued that religion inspired art requires foregrounding in that it established important precedents for the function of art, its iconography and the positioning of the artist in relation to a given community. This thematically specific art also provides insight into the dialogue between the colonial centre and its periphery, and that far from being critiqued as merely another sign of colonial invasiveness, such art needs to be re-examined as a reflection of the syncretic vitality that is highly visible in all spheres of contemporary black culture in the region. It is also an art form that parallels and even precedes discourses in literature, theology and religious practice. In this it functions as an important articulation of the centrality of belief in African cultures.

In this dissertation I have largely confined my research to a rather narrow definition of art, focusing primarily on graphic art, painting and carving, well aware that many other media have been used and developed by artists in the region. These require further scrutiny in subsequent research.

## **Declaration**

This dissertation is based on my original research unless otherwise stated and acknowledged, and has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.

**Juliette Cecile Leeb-du Toit**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Much early pioneer contemporary black South African art was nurtured within the confines of the mission context. It was here that artists were educated and their artistic capacities recognised and largely channeled into the production of sacred art. In KwaZulu-Natal this pattern continued from c 1930 until the 1980s, and still continues in a few church contexts, albeit to a much lesser extent and informally. However the region has simultaneously seen the rise of a Biblically or religion derived art that has a far broader and more complex origin, based in separatist churches and independent groups, emergent theologies and idiosyncratic preference. The rise of such art, it will be seen, is further intrinsically linked to religio-political events that marked South African history during the designated period

In this dissertation I examine aspects of the intersection of beliefs - mostly Christian and some Zulu indigenous or traditionalist - manifest in the visual arts as reflected in the work of black artists who lived or worked in KwaZulu-Natal. This relatively unexplored dimension in the visual arts is set against the interrelationship between religion, culture, and politics, and it will be shown how biblically derived motifs and concepts are adopted, modified and syncretised into new manifestations, often including indigenous belief and practice.

The time frame for this dissertation (c1930 – 2002) might at first appear to be somewhat extensive, but can be justified by the fact that initially during this period little contemporary western influenced African art was produced in South Africa or Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal). It was really only after the 1940s that any major undertakings in western art training occurred in the region, much of which was initiated by missionaries or within the embrace of the church.

In the post enlightenment, increasingly industrialized and urbanized context in the west, religion has become almost anachronistic. Church and state are separate and Christianity, rather than being perceived as central to western culture and its moral authority, hardly pertains, becoming increasingly marginalized as merely one of many world religions. In Africa, however, the centrality of belief and persistent recognition of the realm of the metaphysical remains an indivisible part of human experience. In the current context of desacralization of art in the West, it is therefore significant that many of Africa's contemporary artists continue to focus on cosmogonies and belief



systems in their work, albeit hybridized in the wake of colonialism.

Colonialism, described as an 'economic and political structure of cross-cultural domination' (Slemon 1995:47), left in its wake a cross-cultural amalgam of various dimensions, driven by new priorities and political and economic needs, leaving few indigenous religio-cultural systems intact. After the gradual dismantling of the imperial authority of colonial powers in Africa, many western cultural influences remained, dependant largely on the degree to which they were assimilated and implicitly valued or deemed useful. Some were retained as expedient signifiers of colonial cultural values, and, when deployed by indigenes, reflected attempts to reconstruct the power enclave and hierarchies of colonial authority. Included in these values and vocabularies, was religion. Others, such as language and visual art, besides enabling a degree of access to colonial power, often functioned simply as the voice through which a critique of colonialism could be lodged.

Mission enterprise (and implicitly Christianity) has been singled out as one of the central colonial constructs which, through the intolerance of its office bearers, and their abhorrence of specific cultural practices, had a devastating effect in undermining traditional cultures and their cultural production. While it sought to initially impose its values where possible, Christianity, as conveyed by the mission church, was either rejected or independently and selectively absorbed and later transformed into a different cross-cultural amalgam, the latter often to the dismay of the original mission churches. Missionary enterprise was largely a prelude to an equally erosive and ultimately irreversible influence, namely trade and the development of a commodity market. (Beier 1968:7-8) It was therefore not only missionary proselytizing, but also the efficacy of the combined impact of western religious, cultural and early capitalist interventions since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that resulted in the realization of imperialist rulers' legitimacy and authority. (Haynes 1993:15)

Although partly intrigued by aspects of Christianity, the Zulu were loath to desist from cultural practices such as polygyny, *lobola* (bride price) or ancestral veneration, all of which were unacceptable on becoming *kholwa* (convert to Christianity). The resultant social and cultural isolation was deemed too costly a price to pay by many who eschewed Christianity. Many traditionalists were nonetheless fully aware of the practices and even the religious motifs to which

*kholwa* were exposed, as contact with Christian practice was pervasive, expressed in plays and music in the church environs, hospitals, schools, trading outlets, exhibitions and employment contexts.

With their internal cultural integrity under threat, several groups in colonial Natal, including the dominant Zulu, later selectively assimilated invasive western cultural paradigms and its belief system, Christianity. However, proselytizing having had no immediate impact on the Zulu nation as a whole, converts mainly emerged from defeated or marginalized clans and disaffected escapees who were readily embraced as prospective *kholwa* on the many mission stations that proliferated in the region from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even after the destruction of Zulu power in the wake of the Anglo-Zulu war (1879), the majority of Zulu avoided conversion.

The invasive western cultural context brought by missionaries to the region, resulted in the partial erosion of indigenous religious and customary practice among its converts. One of the casualties of this cultural assault among *kholwa* was the suppression or loss of a vast mythological vocabulary and oral tradition. This tradition had functioned as a practical mythology allied to Zulu cosmology that charted the lives of communities in the region. In the wake of this erosion, Hebraic and Christian myths supplanted or existed side by side with traditional ones. In the belief that the myths of the Zulu provided one with beliefs and desires central to its culture, several 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries (such as Callaway, Tyler and Colenso) set about drawing analogies between the two belief systems and cultural practices. (Callaway 1970:55) However, while this might have partly facilitated conversion, such parallels and analogies between the two mythical systems later doubtless contributed to a reinforcing of traditional practice and cosmogony. In effect neither of the aforesaid belief systems has remained unaffected by colonial interaction.

Biblical stories (or myths), like Zulu cosmogony, comprise an amalgam of narrative tales and history that provide the substance of myths: a cosmogony, heroes, and the presence of the metaphysical, and ideal mores. They also function religiously in that they evoke mystery and ‘create existential realizations’. (Strenski 1992:xiii) For the *kholwa*, Biblical myths were adequate alternate cultural myths: they could only become acknowledged as such if they were relevant, functional, pragmatic and in fact part of the performed dimension of culture - that is, that they conveyed certain values for

the community in which they were assimilated, enabling it to cohere and function. (Strenski 1992:xi and xvii) However coerced the original sourcing was, the fact that Biblical mythography prevails indicates its continued significance.<sup>1</sup>

Concurrently, besides the mission church context, a new partly Christian or Biblically influenced wave of African Independent Churches (AIC's) and movements emerged at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these developed independently, the result of individual encounters with mission teachings and traditional belief practice, as well as being influenced by the ideas of a black God and nascent Ethiopianism, which emanated from African American quarters, influenced by figures such as Marcus Garvey. (Pobee 1979: 16-17) Others derived from mission practices (as occurred in the Methodist church) which encouraged lay preachers with rudimentary training to proselytize on their behalf. Separatists, or AICs, drew loosely on biblical injunctions and themes when deemed applicable or parallel with fundamental values central to indigenous Zulu belief systems and practice. It was among the latter, as well as in established *kholwa* circles, that a new neo-religious (Christian or syncretic) culture emerged, which variously manifested mystical belief, a loose adherence to biblically derived values and a varied amalgam of western beliefs and traditions coupled with indigenous practices.

The Independent Churches have flourished in KwaZulu-Natal, where movements such as the *Ibandla lama Nazaretha* (popularly known as the Shembe Church) are currently among the fastest growing religions in Southern Africa and the region. The development of these independent churches, it will be seen, is intimately linked to the rise of nationalism on various fronts that emerged in the wake of sustained colonial efforts to suppress and ironically also maintain selective elements of Zulu power. African Independent Churches have proved popular simply in that they mostly acknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Although Malinowski is regarded as an outdated source, his views on myth are significant in this context. He regards myth as vital in any society: 'Myth expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of men...a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.' (1926:101) Even though the mythic tale is recognised as false, it functions ably as a moral or practical guide, as occurs in Greek myths, Bible stories and European folk tales. He maintains that myths are relevant because we have natural in-built desires and an instinct for the afterlife, a better life, or happiness. Myth is particularly also born of our reaction to the ultimate truth - death - which in African societies is particularly feared. (1926:110) Myths further make people more accepting of their present conditions and their inevitable fate, boosting one's morale and enabling one to function well in the present, and keep alive hope.

traditionalist practice, centre on healing, glossolalia and exorcism, among others, as part of their practice, aspects deemed essential to many Zulu. (Haynes 1993:35) The approach of many Africans to the Bible is fundamentalist, in that the Bible is read and applied literally in terms of their world view or in relation to specific circumstances in the interests of providing solutions to, or an understanding of, current realities. (Haynes 1993:34)

Not surprisingly this syncretic religio-cultural context, consisting of *kholwa* and sectarian practitioners from the AIC's, has contributed to the rise of more diverse visual manifestations in contemporary art in KwaZulu-Natal. The intended purpose of such art is devotional, votive or educational or results from a deeply felt personal religious influence and experience. In many cases, too, such art is a metaphor for current dilemmas or conflicts. In addition, many images informed and inspired by indigenous belief systems have occurred, often in combination with Biblically derived narratives and mythography. Intriguingly the two have often co-existed, not least because of the syncretic nature of belief among local populations.

Over the one hundred and fifty years since colonization, African members from various belief systems and specific groups or churches, have felt compelled to manifest the experience, morality and tenor of their beliefs in written, oral, choral, musical and visual forms of expression. These diverse voices from the periphery express an important aspect of the post-colonial voice that was silenced, both metaphorically and literally. (Ashcroft 1995:4) In colonial Natal a body of art, music and drama resulted both from the mission churches' ambit and from independent initiatives (other sects or individuals), reflecting both the influence of an international revival in sacred art that emerged in the 1940s, and the centrality of distinctive syncretic religious beliefs that emerged in the wake of colonial proselytizing. Artists utilizing the pictorial vocabularies of the colonial missionary churches in a sense fixed their work under the sign of the other. Yet in the process many artists utilizing such content, modified and later even subverted the central tenets upheld by this adopted belief system, by applying it to the circumstance of Zulu experience and aspirations. In so doing they subtly countered the colonial values imposed on them, and consequently were in fact visually 'picturing' back to the colonial centre.

Further, black artists in colonial Natal were subject to diverse attitudes to religion and art. Many colonial missionaries were steeped in the Reformed tradition: the mission churches were mostly protestant and were subject to strict codes regarding any forms of embellishment. (Dillenberger 1989:1 and 9) However, imagery was widely used to illustrate biblical verse and sermons in both Catholic and Protestant mission contexts, despite the relative iconoclasm of the latter. Thus while imagery was sanctioned for inclusion in the Catholic Church, it had a more restricted usage in Protestant contexts, an aspect which gradually changed.

There were several initiatives, by the Catholic Church and other denominations that sought to elicit an expression of religious and cultural assimilation in their charges. In this dissertation various forces have been identified that led to the profusion of sacred images in the work of black artists, both within and outside the aegis of the church. I have attempted to trace the ideological premises that nurtured such imagery, by patrons, artists, educational institutions and socio-political forces. In addition an attempt has been made to determine preferences by artists and patrons and what these may convey in terms of the ideological underpinning of such themes.

In the belief that the appearance of neo-biblical/religious imagery conveyed conversion and cultural assimilation, the Catholic Church initially vigorously sponsored any art forms that had a fundamental biblical character, particularly from the mid 1950s. Fostered by coincident Encyclicals and the Holy Roman Year decrees of 1950, together with various individual patronage ventures, such art flourished relatively uncritically until the 1970s when new associations and meanings emerged within such imagery. The gradual rise of political dissent in South Africa was widely supported by most clergy, especially from the English-speaking communities, challenging the racist segregationist policies implicitly sanctioned by the official Dutch Reformed state church. The politicising of the fundamental moralities entrenched within Christianity provided a significant springboard for political dissidence throughout the country. However, as will be seen, in South Africa religion was often used to bolster state power and support its questionable policies.

As the social, religious and moral traditions of the indigenous peoples of South Africa were challenged by the spread of Christianity and by the zeal of the missionaries, the latter's enterprise has

often been derogated by historians for its alleged connections with the prevailing colonial and racist policies of the day. In the final appraisal, however, missionaries made valuable contributions in the course of their work, in that they established new educational values, not least in the arts and crafts, new centres of training, a new patronage, and a new audience for art (in a Christian social and secular context) developed from their work. In reconstructing and examining this history it will become apparent how individual religious in their attempts to inspire African artists to utilise religious themes, were largely conscious of the fact that they were simultaneously drawing these artists into an international context of art practice. These artists were represented at several international exhibitions in the 1950s, as well as others held in South Africa in the 1960s. In both instances important links were made with religious and educators in Africa and in other so-called third world centres, which in turn informed and reinforced similar developments in South Africa.

An investigation into biblically influenced art contributes to an understanding of religious change in the context of social and political dynamics in the region. Such art is not merely to be viewed as an expression of religious culture, or as a mere tool of religious institutions 'but also as an agent of reflection, critique, and transformation in its own right'. (Hackett 1996:204) Religion inspired art increasingly emerged as a spontaneous expression in which artists 'provide creative channels for the interpretation, contestation and adaptation of the changes people face in their religious and cultural environment'. (Hackett 1996:204) It therefore increasingly reflects the changes that occur in 'people's social and religious worlds, notably those which have occurred in the twentieth century, namely under colonialism, missionization, political independence, as well as the demands of post-coloniality and global market trends'. (Hackett 1996:193)

The South African state was one of only a handful of countries in the world that considered itself to be Christian in essence. This character accrued gradually in the period subsequent to colonization, yet was understandably perceived as problematic, especially in view of the intransigence of apartheid from c1948-1994. The very root of South Africa's governance and associated ideologies was thus flawed by a colonial ethos, segregationist policies and practice. In the post democratic period in South Africa (since 1994), church and state are again separated and all religious denominations and practices are deemed relevant and constitutionally share equal status. Current leaders are more

concerned with building socially cohesive, economically successful regions, with the result religion has until recently been deemed largely peripheral. Currently a rise in interest in religious belief and its centrality in the wake of pressing economic, health and social exigencies has obtained.

In reality, South Africa is the complex product of diverse religio-cultural influences and aspirations. In a context of diverse cultures in KwaZulu-Natal, most Zulu nationals have retained both traditionalist based cosmogony centered on the acknowledgment of a creator god as supreme power, the celebration of ancestral intercession and mediation, as well as syncretic or conventional Christian practice. (Goge, personal communication, 2001) In this region, religion is multi-faceted and is not relegated merely to a church and its adherents but to an entire cultural formation, which permeates every aspect of daily life. Far from being the result of coercion, these syncretic forms of practice reflect the receptivity to change and absorption that is diversely manifest in the region, particularly in arts and culture. The term *kholwa*, which is still used in some quarters to describe the Christianized Zulu, is in fact a misnomer and a restrictive term, as most informants have indicated that they practice a syncretic religion.

As interest in Christian practice and the Bible increased among *kholwa* later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even passively among other urbanised Zulu, such interest ironically reinforced traditional cultural practice and belief, due in part to the recognition of certain shared similarities or differences between the two culturally based practices. Such paralleling was initiated both by early missionaries and more recently by various denominations intent on acculturating (termed incarnating in some quarters) or indigenizing belief in the hopes of further implanting Christianity or a sectarian system in the region. New elements in belief systems (and associated imagery) were readily absorbed and innovated, and were soon regarded as ‘traditional’ or at the least as being deemed communally significant in that they provide new ways of approaching the world. This new hybrid religio-cultural vocabulary and its imagery can be considered as a new repository of power, ably manifesting culturally based belief. (Hackett 1996:194) A return to traditional practice and belief was spurred both by the invasiveness of the missions, Christianity and western culture (as will be seen in the work of Laduma Madela), and as a result of recent nationalist and Africanist tendencies initiated in the 1960s and again in the post election period of 1994.

By the 1990s religious imagery in KwaZulu-Natal was largely the result of uncoerced assimilation and a spontaneous response to the absorption and translation of Christianity (or aspects of it), often coupled with indigenous religion. It also appeared in relation to and as a reflection on the devastating effects of economic decline, sporadic internecine conflict, social change and the AIDS pandemic, among other things. Such art is also the result of a cultural and personal need to articulate individual experiences and values, in which people are engaged in trying to make sense out of experience. Ultimately religion remains central to cultural identity and practice in the region, its interface with culture manifesting the aims, aspirations, fears, discontent and worldviews of the community. It remains there 'in the wings' to challenge individuals and the state based on a consensual code of ethics. (Haynes 1993:18)

It will be argued that one cannot entirely reject or condemn the early and continued presence of sacred imagery in contemporary art from KwaZulu-Natal as merely an unfortunate sign of coerced colonialist inspired image making. Rather its continued presence (albeit idiosyncratic and syncretic), is a manifestation of the need to adhere to a belief in the metaphysical or at least an acknowledgment of its authority in material existence. In this it will be suggested that despite alternative secular ideological belief structures, such as those provided by political systems and ideologies, a religious ethos, as part of human nature, denotes a continuity that is often overlooked and its centrality underestimated.

In time, as artists selectively incorporated indigenous elements in ostensibly religious work, this cross-cultural aspect, rather than indicating corruption or decline, was perceived as the most common and effective form of cultural subversion, since it displays the 'necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination'. (Bhabha in Ashcroft 1995:9) More importantly such syncretism challenges the assumption of the 'pure' and the 'authentic', concepts that reflect the power of the centres - in this instance both colonial culture and belief.

As will be seen, the manifestations of religious practice in art reflect this cross-cultural articulation



and response to belief, situated in a matrix of complex cultural power relations. The way in which the 'master discourse' (colonialism and Christianity) has been 'interrogated by the colonized in native accents' is a central aspect of this dissertation. (Parry 1995:41) This process of 'writing back', or in this instance picturing and preaching back, far from indicating a continuing dependence, is an effective means of escaping from the binary polarities implicit in colonization and its practices. (Ashcroft et al 1995:8) Post coloniality has provided an interesting analytical framework in this research in that it examines the exchange between two unequal systems and cultures. It also considers the imbalance in power relations, and the linkages and articulations (which are not always oppositional), as resistance to imperial power was not always to result in 'resistance as a simple binarism'. (Ashcroft 1995:3-4)

Researchers are increasingly aware that the emotional experience of religious belief cannot be understood by outsiders to a culture, or by scholars who give primary emphasis to the formal and aesthetic features of a work. (Hackett 1996:15) Conscious of this, I have tried to situate my research within the framework of two processes: a critical historical reading and contextualization of art stimulated by belief, and an analytical reading. Consequently my methodology in this dissertation is primarily historically based and deductive, attempting to present contextualised accounts of sacred art ventures against the backdrop of motivations, both personal and institutional, that prompted such work. Increasingly however, my accounts center on the subtexts, previously relatively unexplored, particularly those allied to patronage, or the subversively intended function of Biblically derived work. In particular the latter was prompted by theological exegesis that dealt concurrently with socio-political issues (especially in the 1960s and 1980s) and the rise of associated contextual theology.

Within the framework of post-colonial criticism I was initially drawn to critical readings of colonial and missionary intervention by authors such as Nosipho Majeke and more recently John and Jean Comaroff. Yet I gradually came to question the criticality of their readings, which were often countered by information gained in the field from Zulu artists and theologians who more fundamentally acknowledged the cross-cultural syncretism that prevailed in their ideas and practice.

The post-colonialist position that 'the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a racially degenerate population in order to justify conquest and rule' might once have obtained in most colonial and even some mission contexts. (Parry 1995:41) However it would be rather problematic to aver that this attitude applied in the mission context throughout, and especially in the art training initiatives that originated from within its ambit.

I was initially tempted to regard much mission church art training and patronage as suspect and coerced, or at least as being covertly subversive of a flawed prevailing hegemony. This view was further exacerbated by the fact that in the early 1990s, many white 'liberals' were adamant that religious 'indoctrination' in education, as a last vestige of colonialism, was destructive and would end as soon as a new regime came into being. The incidence of sacred imagery, it was held, was inevitable in Black art, as religion had regrettably supplanted most other cultural manifestations. While I to some extent briefly shared such views, events in the region further influenced a shift in my erstwhile critical stance.

I have also taken account of a Marxian perspective, given its influence in emergent theologies, and its status in the region and internationally in third world contexts in the late 1960s. Many Marxists would subscribe to a repudiation of all religion, especially an imposed foreign one, regarding it as the opiate of the people, and several leaders of African states, which gained independence in the 1960s, similarly denounced this religious foreign import. However the well documented association between Marxism and religion, Christianity in particular, in which Marxist and Christian humanism have been compared, has been addressed by several theologians. The moral code of socialism and communism, its asceticism, mysticism and spirit of total sacrifice to the cause (Pius XII referred to this in his Christmas message in 1954) was appealing in the 1960s in a form of socialism especially in underdeveloped countries in the third world. Marxism is essentially a philosophy of praxis: its aim to transform the world, nature or society, and render it worthy of mankind. In this it shares many similarities with Christianity and other religions, and influenced liberation theology (manifest locally in Black Theology) that shared and was inspired by many of these ideals.

I however became increasingly skeptical of critical neo-Marxian perspectives that unraveled missionary coercion in proselytizing, and which gave little credit to extra-missionary syncretic movements that had generated new practices and vocabularies. Post colonialism as a 'critique of totalising forms of Western historicism' and an oppositional form of reading practice, adequately explored the economic and political structure of cross-cultural domination, providing a well used methodology for art historical writing in the 1990s. (Slemon1995: 45) However, the political agendas of post-colonialist reading, which were so appropriate in the 1990s have palled somewhat. A shift in critique has become evident, leveled at the idealism of a new nation that is being eroded by divisive elements, predictable and unpredictable calamities in society, as well as state inadequacies.

The early 1990s in KwaZulu-Natal was characterized by a bitter internecine and politically motivated conflict, which resulted in brutal killings and intimidation throughout the region. New imperatives prompted the continued development of art that drew on locally practiced belief systems. These imperatives, located in waves of unrest, resulted in sustained power lobbying and resultant violence. After the first democratic elections in 1994, which issued in a new political dispensation, euphoria was widespread only to be tempered by the Aids pandemic, escalating poverty, crime and unemployment. Aids has one of the highest national statistics in KwaZulu-Natal at present, and it is here that artists began to situate a new offensive to overcome this scourge through various religious based reconstructive programs. In response to this there emerged, uncoerced, a plethora of imagery derived both from biblically inspired sources and from traditionalist belief systems. Several major new artists came to fore, such as Zomokwakhe Gumede, Trevor Makhoba, Sibusiso Mapumulo, Dominic Cele, Sithembiso Sibisi and Israel Mathenjwa, among others. Their religious origins were diverse, many hailing from separatist churches, their work reflective of the centrality of religion in the wake of the devastating suffering that affected them and their communities. They developed unique responses to the crises by highlighting the need for recourse to a higher metaphysical order in times of need.

Literature on Christian based art and/or architecture produced in non-western countries first emerged in the 1920s when several articles examining the impact of Christianity on Japanese, Chinese (from

as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century) and Indian art were published.<sup>2</sup> Literature on the role of the mission churches and Christianity in the development of contemporary African art first appeared in the 1960s, none of it by art historians. This is not surprising as Hackett points out that for many art historians at the time the ‘association of art with religion nullified its status as art.... For others, the close association between the realms of art and religion is methodologically problematic for the Western researcher.’ (Hackett 1996:13) Prior to this religion in art had merely been examined as an iconographic dimension by art historians, and for many years church historians too had ‘largely ignored the visual arts’. (Dillenberger 1989:1)

The 1950s saw the emergence of a spate of publications, doubtless inspired by the interest expressed by the Vatican and other churches in such art. Probably the major publication at the time was Lothar Schreyer’s *Christliche Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts in der katholischen und protestantischen Welt*, published in 1959. The 1960s also saw the publication of numerous articles, mostly in sectarian religious journals, and a few texts. A book found at Rorke’s Drift which would have been accessible to staff and students alike, is Arno Lehmann’s, *Christian Art in Africa and Asia* (1969), which included several images by Mariannhill artists. More recently the work of Theo Sundermeier on Azaria Mbatha (1971) and the appearance of *Christliche Kunst in Afrika* (1984), by J F Thiel and H I Helf, contributed anew to the historical and theological readings of such art. These texts had a twofold purpose: to celebrate the central role of the church in art patronage in recipient cultures, implicitly the extent and depth of conversion in these countries, and the interest in ethnology within the mission church.

Theological interest in sacred art was on the increase in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when authors such as Leon Bloy, Jacques Maritain and theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich envisaged a new centrality for art within the church. More recently, local and international theologians and art historians have again begun to pay attention to contemporary visual interpretations of belief in art,

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<sup>2</sup> In 1927 Fr R. Heras wrote *Indian Art in Catholic Churches* for The Examiner; while in 1934 an article appeared in the Times of India titled *Catholic Church in Indian Style* (July 23, 1934); Pasquale M. d’Elia wrote *Le origini dell’arte cristiana Cinese (1583-1640)*, published in Rome in 1939.

regarding them as seminal texts in the understanding of religion's significance and its interpretation in a distinctive South African context. Theologians such as Theo Sundermeier and Werner Eichel have examined the work of Azaria Mbatha and John Muafangejo, Fr Kinch focused on his own proteges (Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu) in the 1960s in articles that appeared in *Liturgical Arts*, and former religious Dina Cormick also focused on the latter in a book on Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu (1993). John Dillenberger and Rosalind Hackett have provided important readings on contemporary religious-inspired art in the west and Africa respectively.

Art historian Elizabeth Rankin has researched the work of the artists such as Job Kekana and others, as well as the art and training at Grace Dieu (near Pietersburg) initiated under Father Edward Paterson and Sister Pauline (Rankin 1991:15), and Michael Godby and Brenda Danilowitz have recently looked at the work of Azaria Mbatha. I have explored the incidence of sacred art in KwaZulu-Natal in an exhibition *Spiritual Art of Natal* (1993), and have focused extensively on the work of Mbatha, the Ndaleni art school and the Mariannhill and Hlabisa art training contexts.

While it is often difficult, if not impossible, to attain an overall view 'which incorporates the emotional experience of the work of art with the cult framework in which it is imbedded' requiring too much abstraction from interpreters, and too much 'devoutness from the art experts' (Hackett 1996:13), this study has attempted to straddle both insider and outsider perspectives. I have also been persuaded by Hackett's suggestion that one should not overemphasize the religious, ancestral and magical paradigms in relation to African art at the expense of suggesting that a purely aesthetic motive may have applied. (Hackett 1996:13) An oversimplified reading, of art as religious, can be described as a hegemonic act, which overlooks the fact that one should also gauge the secular functions even in ostensibly religious objects and works. Ultimately this dissertation will speak for itself as a survey of the interface between extra-cultural belief systems, contextualizing the emergence of Biblically and religion based imagery, emphasizing how such imagery was utilized as a vehicle for conveying cross-cultural perceptions of the centrality of its encoded narratives in a changing context in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Religion refers to religious establishments, their religious and officials, and to models of social and individual behaviour that assist in directing one's life, as well as concerns about ideas of transcendence (the supernatural), sacredness, and ultimacy. (Haynes 1993:28) Before examining the rise of art spearheaded by missionaries and/or religious in KwaZulu-Natal, it is imperative briefly to explain central issues pertaining to belief systems in Africa and the changes that affected these in the wake of contact with world religions.

Laitin presents an interesting model which approaches the impact of religions in three ways: he identifies a pure model of religious doctrine, the product of a specific culture; a practical religion 'which emerges out of the interaction of the doctrine and people's interpretations of it'; and the 'practical religion of the converted' which reflects religion's interaction with the 'cultural conditions' of converts from a different culture. (Laitin 1986:12) This example has provided a useful model with which to assess the development of religion and its associated artistic manifestations in Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal, where all three models apply.

While many African religions have a monotheistic core, often resembling the functioning of Christianity and other Abrahamic religions, African religions have other very specific functions. Religion in Africa responds to specific needs in society, determined in part by individuals and their questions relating to identity and their relationship to the world and universe. Further it provides a sense of belonging to the 'ultimately real', to that to which adherents feel they want to belong in order to realise a sense of being at once secure, meaningful and enriched. Further, in most African belief systems, spiritual and physical healing are interlinked and deemed highly significant. Religious movements are revelatory in that they often address human malaise and societal disorder, so that their adherents may call for a new world order, or may demand a redistribution of wealth to 'heal'

the imbalances they perceive.

## **1.1 The intersection of religions in Africa**

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Africa had a long history of the absorption of deities, 'supernatural agents' and rites derived from other societies with whom they came into contact. This reflects the dynamism in African belief, where the universe is seen as being in a 'continuous process of change', where any supernatural power can be harnessed or challenged by man. (Herskovits 1963:419)<sup>3</sup> As will be seen later, this is also reflected among those Zulu who embraced a syncretic belief system, drawing on Christianity and other sectarian practices to create several new systems.

Africa has been visited by two of the great proselytizing world religions, namely Islam, from about the 10th century, and Christianity which came to Ethiopia via missionaries sent from the East by the Emperor Justinian, and later in the 15th century, when the Portuguese established stations along the African coasts to facilitate entrepots on their trade routes to India. (Herskovits 1963:177) However it was not until nineteenth century colonial expansion into Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, that active proselytizing by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries occurred.

It has been argued that both Islam and Christianity were at times perceived by indigenes to be more 'comfortable' to adhere to because of the fundamental humanist tenets and divine goodwill of Abrahamic religions, when compared with native religions. (Beier1968: 10) Some contend that the reception of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa could not have occurred had there not been a potential syncretism within the general principles of the many belief systems of cultures the missionaries proselytized to. (Herskovits 1963:178) It will be seen, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, that various attempts were made by missionaries to compare and align Christian dogma with Zulu belief systems and concepts, in the interests of conversion. Herskovits upholds a still widely held

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<sup>3</sup> He notes that alternatives to the dominant culture are 'subject to continuous scrutiny. In this way the members of a society are psychologically prepared to reconcile innovation with prior principles and practices, with resulting complexity in their core institutions'. (Herskovits 1963:177-178)

view that broadly categorizes the hierarchies in African belief thus:

‘The categories in which are grouped the supernatural forces most African societies conceive as exercising control over the universe, illustrate the areas of compatibility. This fourfold division, comprises first a Great God with subsidiary beings to whom executive powers have been delegated; then the collective powers of antecedent generations, often manifested in worship of the ancestors; thirdly, destiny as it relates to problems which can be clarified by divination; and finally, magic’. (1963:178)

None of these is absent from Islam, while only a third of these is absent from formal Christianity, although it is present in popular Christianity. While ancestral veneration is less immediately apparent in Protestantism than in Catholicism, it is nonetheless implicit in both. However both Christianity and Islam had one major similarity, namely that they both claimed that beyond their doctrines, the practice of their respective faiths demanded a particular adherence to a way of life. This resulted in an acculturative development in which religion is only one of the elements involved’. (Herskovits 1963:179) Implicitly too, therefore, cultural practice would be altered or modified.<sup>4</sup>

As a direct consequence of colonial expansion, Africa was divided up by several dominant European nations at the Berlin Conference between 1884-85, in which territories and spheres of influence were designated to each member. This colonial division finalised a process of colonialism by western Europeans spanning five centuries, in which most of the countries of the Southern hemisphere were subject to their control. (Hillman 1993:7)

Christians in Africa brought with them a very different cultural orientation coupled with colonialism. The perceived hypocrisy of Christianity was that it could associate with colonial authority which had goals that contradicted the principles of Christian belief, such as universal brotherhood. As a result

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<sup>4</sup> The introduction of Islam in Africa was ‘effected with far less cultural dislocation than marked the introduction of Christianity into African societies’. (Herskovits 1963:180) This appears to have been due to the fact that what he terms ‘acculturative shock’ is proportionate to the degree of difference between the respective cultures concerned. Moslems had in fact absorbed much of the cultures of those they wished to convert in Africa, which included language. Another positive factor was that the skin colour of Islamic peoples was similar to that of the Africans, and race (and class) had always been at issue in colonialism where whites dominated and ruled indigenes. (Herskovits 1963:179)



Christian missionary enterprise became more suspect, especially as cultural and political controls inevitably came in their wake. Not surprisingly this resulted in critics regarding Christian missions as merely one of the agents of subjugation on the continent of Africa. (Majeke 1952: 6 and 18)

The missionary, like other colonials confronting the African, faced an alterity in the other that was approached in two ways: either in terms of identity or difference. (JanMohamed 1995:18) On the one hand the missionary recognised some similarities in the identity of the other and glossed over the differences, judging the other in terms of his own cultural perspectives. When the colonist or missionary recognised that the other was 'irremediably different' he adopted and even imposed his own cultural perspective.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly the attempts made by several missionaries to proselytize among the indigenes with fervent attempts to compare indigenous belief systems, was impaired by their adherence to European cultural and social mores, which invariably clashed with African ones. Syncretism was thus initially virtually impossible 'within the power relations of colonial society'. (JanMohamed 1995:20) Consequently in Africa, Christian missionizing has resulted in a major decentering and undermining of indigenous practice and worldviews, with the result that these marginalised cultures feel that they are culturally and spiritually bereft. Many new independent religions, however, offer a response to such decentering.

While it must therefore seem astounding that African peoples ever adopted or were influenced by Christianity, considering the generally negative attitude of missionaries to 'pagan' practice, such adoption could only have been realised when a shared mythography and cultural values were broached. (Hillman 1993:3) The colonial missionary deployed myths of universality to proselytize, well aware that the African initially remained fundamentally in awe of aspects of western culture, while at the same time desirous of retaining her/his own cultural values. Several syncretist sects deployed the same tactics in reverse, when they upheld the similarity between indigenous and

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<sup>5</sup> The colonial could only approach the other if he could 'bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture' Such is the belief in his superiority that this is seldom done, and the 'worthless alterity of the colonized' remained a dimension that was to be altered or suppressed. (JanMohamed 1995:18 and 22) The colonial essentially desired a 'reformed, recognizable, nearly-similar other' which resulted in the re-articulation of this vision by the native as 'parody, a dramatization to be distinguished from the exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification'. (Parry 1995:42)

## Biblical practice and belief.

Historical events later prompted new applications and meanings to be associated with western religious systems, as well as the resuscitation of many indigenous ones in Africa. As the decolonizing process began in the Middle East after the First World War ‘religion and politics were drawn closer together as indigenous cultural identities began to predominate’ and challenges to western cultural authority ensued. (Haynes 1993:15) In the Third World religion and politics became increasingly entwined, either in terms of conflicts between rival religious groups or in terms of the support given by religious to dissident or oppositional groups, especially those that challenged authoritarian or unconstitutional rule.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of colonial control, developing countries have emerged as culturally fragmented, often politically unstable and economically diverse. (Haynes 1993: 2) Here religion, caste, and ethnicity were simply seen as part of tradition, and were downplayed or ignored in the heady days prior to and post independence. (Haynes 1993:7) Often religion and ethnicity in the postcolonial context changed their forms and functions resulting in new ethnic or religious ideologies.

In the 1970s the ‘politics of religion’ became most apparent, coincident with Iran’s Islamic Revolution (1978-80) the Afghanistan War (1978) and the establishment of the Sandanista Government in Nicaragua (1979). The latter included radical Christians influenced by Liberation Theology. In South Africa in the 1970s the climate was particularly ripe for a liberating theology and other quasi-Marxist religious ideologies, as the country was headed by a government of low legitimacy and high authoritarianism. (Haynes 1993:16) The church became more militant as young black theologians, such as those in KwaZulu-Natal who gravitated to the Mapumulo seminary, addressed prevailing political oppression in terms of Biblical revelation. Opting for a quasi-Marxist ideal vested in Liberation Theology, many church leaders were swept up in a retributive wave of biblical moralising which indicted every aspect of government policy and oppression. Religion provided a buffer to state aggression and intransigence, while Liberation Theology displayed ‘a

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<sup>6</sup> The perception held by some is that there is relatively little ‘general academic awareness of the importance of religion in most studies of politics in the Third World’. (Haynes 1993:1)

concern with equity, anti-imperialism and general radical political change ie the need for structural transformation over charity'. (Haynes 1993:14)

Despite the central role of various religious in the struggle for liberation in South Africa, on the political front religion and culture were regarded as epiphenomena, and 'as remnants of tradition which would inevitably and invariably decline in significance as cultural rationality and national integration developed'. (Haynes 1993:6) The aspirations to westernize and modernize thrust religion, culture and ethnicity into the periphery of politics, a position that still maintains in some circles in South Africa. New nations and countries were obliged by their governments to modernize their peoples along Western models. In the face of this many have since struggled to retain their cultural identity, just as others have in the face of colonial change. (Haynes 1993: 2) They face new hardships of increased industrialization, job losses, and crises of identity.

While for some time subsequent neo-Marxist perspectives dominated, research failed to recognise the relevance of religion and ethnicity in relation to changing identities and resistance to modernization after independence in many developing countries. (Haynes 1993:6) Religious ideology provided a major 'alternative ideological referent to those championed by government, including nationalism, liberal democracy and socialism'. (Haynes 1993:6) Worldwide disenchantment with communism and revolutionary socialism has seen the rise of greater morally bound conservatism, and a problematic return to free market capitalism. Earlier recourse to secularized solutions resulted in a void and secular ideals have become 'alienating and unsatisfying', with the result that there is a return to religious ideology, so that even in the present 'religious groups use religious themes in their attacks against incumbent governments' especially when governments fail to ensure economic development. (Haynes 1993:6)

At the same time communalistic traditions such as ethnicity and religion were reassessed and reinterpreted in terms of their relations with modern institutions such as the state and political parties. (Haynes 1993:6) Peoples tolerated secular ideologies such as nationalism and socialism if authoritative and legitimate governments administered them. When economic failure ensued and

state legitimacy waned, people turned to other sectors ‘to champion their interests’. (Haynes 1993:7)

The inevitable result in Africa has been a need for a ‘religious-ideological reorientation’. (Haynes 1993:4) Religion often appeals to those who have been alienated and dispossessed, especially the youth and those in urban contexts ‘buffeted by forces beyond their control’ such as westernization and more recently by disastrous social repercussions, such as those currently experienced in the wake of crime, violence and the Aids pandemic. (Haynes 1993:31) Not surprisingly, though, there has also been a worldwide move to protestant fundamentalism. (Haynes 1993:5)

In the current context of increasing political authoritarianism, failed modernization and ideological dead ends, many people are increasingly sympathetic to messages of salvation. Haynes points to the fact that while not all secular ideologies have failed, ‘people’s world views are generally local in context rather than moulded by state ideologies of nationalism, statism or socialism’. (1993:10) As will be seen, art from KwaZulu-Natal reflects many of these factors in the wake of colonial, religious, political and social change.

## **1.2 Indigenous belief in KwaZulu-Natal**

In KwaZulu-Natal belief systems are vital and pervasive. Indigenous Zulu cosmogony is not only centered in a creator god, uMvelinqangi (hailed by missionaries as a creator god), but also in other powers manifest as individuals. These, together with an entourage of metaphysical forces (in natural phenomena), provide ideals related to identity and situate the individual in relation to the ultimate force of the creator god. Well-being is further realised by the intervention of ancestors or *idlozi*, who are intercessors between the living, the realm of the creator god and the dead. What is deemed ‘sacred’ in African culture, does not have fixed boundaries. (Hackett 1996:11) In Zulu culture, for example, the sacred can vary from the invocation of the ancestors to the solemnity of beer drinking, the distinction between the physical and the metaphysical that applies in the west being less distinguishable in African thought systems. (Hackett 1996:11)

One of the earliest accounts of Zulu belief was by A T Bryant, religious and anthropologist, who in 1920 presented an interesting and positive response to it. He later published his renowned *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929). The whole Zulu 'tribe' was regarded as a 'priestly caste', all married men and heads of households as priests, and their temple the cattle byre (*isiBaya*). The sacrifice of cattle for the ancestors (*idlozi*) was intended as a commemorative act when meat was put aside for them and is 'spiritually' partaken of. He even went so far as to applaud the intercessionary function of the *abaNgoma* (or *sangoma*) or *umLozi* (whistling spirit) who functions as an intermediary between god and man. Bryant added,

'It was a religion that never burdened mankind with any scheme of moral rules and penalties. Not that morality did not exist among the Zulus, for in that respect they had reached a high stage of development. But their moral code was based upon social needs and experiences, upon family discipline and self-control' (1920:50)

To the Zulu, the approval of neighbours and one's own conscience was deemed relevant, and their divinities (the ancestors or *idlozi*) were human with human views and passions. The Zulu was able to 'evolve and to live up to a system of moral conduct, and to develop an ability of character, such as, I believe, no other race of man has been able to excel'. (1920:50)

While Bryant's data cannot in its entirety be used as a yardstick for contemporary traditionalist belief, it nonetheless represents what has remained an authentic account of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century perceptions. Admiring their beliefs, he saw no reason to insinuate another religious system on them, although this was the nature of his duty. The fears expressed by Protestant missionaries of Catholicism's interest in and acceptance of Zulu culture and practice was perhaps justified, in view of Bryant's writing, although it took years for this benign attitude to be broached or put into practice.

Subsequently, Eileen Krige published *The Social System of the Zulus* (1936), and Axel-Ivar Berglund's text *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (1976) provide detailed accounts of the many facets peculiar to Zulu belief and its cultural associations. In the 1970s the anthropologist Katesa Schlosser began to publish a series of texts on the writings of the inyanga Laduma Madela. Madela

provided one of the most comprehensive accounts of Zulu cosmogony, albeit from an individual perspective, some of which will be considered in a later chapter. Oosthuizen has considered the development of many of the AICs and in particular the followers of Shembe. Further details pertaining to Zulu belief will be considered where appropriate and when related to specific images and/or concepts.

### **1.3 The mission context in Natal (KwaZulu-Natal)**

Missionary endeavour in Africa must be seen against the backdrop of a major crisis in the church in the west. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, a questioning of the authority of the church and its practice began. The resultant decentering of the church, of which the French Revolution has been argued to have been a product, was further exacerbated by the rise of concepts of a free economy, or ‘as capitalism developed without a conscience’. (Hurley 1982:22) The church however seemed unwilling to respond to the growing secularism, in which God was seen to be redundant to human endeavour.

When the church finally acknowledged its precarious position it began desperate attempts at self-preservation by ‘appealing to Christian conscience’, and from 1891, established a social restorative ideology. It simultaneously embarked on a program to evangelize beyond its borders, especially in the third world, which they perceived to be a more receptive terrain than Europe and the Americas. (Hurley 1982: 23) But contact with Africa by religious had earlier precedents.

Africa became a central focus of Christian missionary endeavour, initiated in Southern Africa as early as 1560 with the arrival of Father Gonzalo da Silveira who landed at Sofala. In South Africa in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, South Africa Georg Schmidt established a mission station in the Cape on behalf of the Moravian Mission Society. Missionary enterprise in Natal only began somewhat later in the nineteenth century after which missionary activity knew unprecedented growth. (Marquard 1948:70) While the primary objective of the missionaries was to spread Christianity, they were also effective culture brokers, where western cultural priorities were synonymous with its belief systems.

(Marquard 1948:71)<sup>7</sup>, and western superiority and cultural authority went unchallenged by most missionaries:

Beginning from the southern point of Africa, they pushed northwards, usually in advance of the rest of European civilization. They opened up vast tracts of new country; they explored new rivers and lakes; they discovered tribes of whose existence no one had dreamt. They built mission stations that became centres of the Christian religion and of European culture. They reduced Bantu languages to writing; they were the pioneers in the education of the Bantu. (Marquard 1948:70)

While most writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century painted a predominantly positive picture of the missionary role, this was soon tempered by more critical approaches to their interventions, as reflected in the writings of N Etherington, S R Barber, J Guy, and many others. Their views vary in part yet most contend that missionary endeavour in the region was seldom imposed - rather negotiated. Many missionaries, too, were not allied to colonial missionary enterprise, such as the Norwegians, Swedes and Moravians. (West 1989:46) In attempting to contextualise their influence, I have inevitably been drawn to the many histories of individual mission enterprise in the region. While it is not intended to provide a detailed historical account of these, it is necessary to briefly consider the nature of such activity and to highlight the ways in which cultural contact and interpretation might, even at an early stage, have led to an imprinting of image-based association in the colonial missionary enterprise.

The first missionary to arrive in Natal, it appears, was Captain Allen Francis Gardiner in 1835, (Barber 1975:33) to be followed by many others in rapid succession: The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent Newton Adams, Daniel Lindley and Aldin Grout at the end of 1835. Methodists James Allison, W C Holden and J Richards came to the Natal in 1841, a group of Roman Catholics in 1852, German Lutherans in 1847 and Norwegian Lutherans in c1847. (Barber 1975:33) Lutherans, sponsored by the Berlin Missionary Society (1847) and the

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<sup>7</sup> Marquard notes further: 'The Christian religion and Western civilisation are interwoven that it is difficult to separate them. So, too, are the primitive Bantu religions and Bantu social ideas. In attacking Bantu heathenism with the instruments of religion and civilisation, the missionaries also attacked Bantu social institutions and thus set up very serious conflicts in the minds of the Bantu. Converts to Christianity were called upon to give up customs which often meant that they had to renounce their tribal and family obligations'. (1948:71)

Presbyterians, sponsored by the Free Church of Scotland, were to an extent fairly successful in their ventures. By making land and security available to all comers, the Lutherans steadily gained converts. Norwegian Lutherans, under Hans Schreuder were also relatively successful (albeit briefly), especially after Schreuder assisted Mpande in 1851 with medicines and secured permission to establish several missions in the Zulu kingdom, decidedly wary of British invasive intentions in 1861. (Etherington 1971:123) Another Lutheran venture, by the Hermannsburg Missionary Society was initiated in 1854, under A Hardeland.

English Methodists were also relatively successful. While their missionaries had poorer training than their American counterparts, they developed a system of ‘circuit’ stations and were inclusive in their embrace of all individuals in their communities. Unlike the Americans who wished to evangelize to whole nations, the Methodists were content to merely appeal to individuals. Their schools were multiracial and multilingual and they encouraged local lay preachers to emerge from among the indigenes to enhance their network. (Etherington 1971:94, 96) This prompted the Anglicans to complain that they entrusted very inexperienced blacks, who knew only the rudiments of Christian religion, with Apostolic Ministry. (Etherington 1971:96) This practice was a vital element in the spread of a more accessible Christianity, as was the interracialism of Methodism, which was, however, often threatened when white colonists increasingly objected to sharing ministers or venues with Africans. (Etherington 1971:96)

The biggest fear among Protestants was the arrival of Catholics, whom they believed would seduce the Zulu with ‘ostentatious ritual’, baptize them too readily and incorporate the beliefs of the Zulus, thus leading them ‘astray’. (Etherington 1971:125) This comment coincided with the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) under Jean François Allard. None of the above was to take place under the OMI who soon departed having found their task in Natal too daunting and the Nguni lacking in ‘moral responsibility’. (Etherington 1971:128)<sup>8</sup> Protestant missionaries had every reason

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<sup>8</sup> The OMI were more intransigent about Zulu cultural practice than many other missionaries, seeing Nguni customs as sinful and the people in need of contrition. The OMI left for Lesotho afterwards where they had more success. (Etherington 1971:128)



to fear the appeal of the Catholic missions, as by the turn of the century they were actively engaged in some of the ‘excesses’ and assimilation tactics outlined above. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the Trappist mission at Mariannhill and its many outstations made a considerable impact on education and art production in Natal, albeit selectively.

By the time Natal was annexed as a British colony (1845), a missionary presence became increasingly desirable both in Natal and in the rural regions of Zululand for Zulu and colonist alike, but for quite different reasons. The missionary was intent on ‘improving’ his charges (with conversion and training central to his endeavour), which resulted in the missionary being regarded as a major controlling and transformative force in training the Zulu to be subservient and self-controlled. Missionaries functioned as a buffer between colonist and Zulu (both detribalized and traditionalist), and in diplomacy between them, as well as providing rudimentary training to a much needed labour force. However many colonists were deeply suspicious of the political and humanist ideals fostered at many stations.

Mission presence was particularly relevant in view of the rapidly altered demographics in the region. In colonial Natal the rapidly increasing native population, consisting of ‘detribalized’ persons rose from 20,000 - 30,000 in 1840, to 190,000 by 1864. (Barber 1975:69) Such early relocations to the colony and to mission stations were initially the result of the rise of the Zulu house and its associated *mfecane*, when thousands of individuals and groups who had not been assimilated under Shaka were dispersed, and either fled to the colony, other regions or to the missions in the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Wright and Hamilton in Duminy and Guest 1989:68-69) In addition missions also continued to attract many dubious characters who had fled justice in their own communities or who had been obliged to flee there as they had been ostracized from their groups. Consequently colonial authorities became increasingly perturbed by their presence, regarding the missions as sources of criminal activity. (Etherington 1971:202)

Colonial regions, such as Natal, attempted to gain Christian congregations as this ‘lent an aura of respectability and a cloak of legitimacy to the morally reprehensible enterprise of colonialism’.

(Etherington 1971:202) Missionaries needed to gain converts to justify funding from the mother country sent to sustain their role in the colonies. It will later be seen how art production was yet another way of illustrating the success of missionary endeavour and the transformation of heathen populations. Yet for decades conversion to Christianity in Natal was extremely rare, to the extent that many missionaries felt their endeavours had been pointless.

Yet the lack of success in missionary activity can in part be ascribed to the fact that missionaries working both within and beyond the colony of Natal, were obliged to 'work within the confines of prevailing political and social realities'. (Etherington 1971:76) Initially chiefs were intransigent with regard to any suggestions of missionary activity, and it was only occasionally, for personal gain, that the Zulu monarch allowed missionary activity in Zululand. (Etherington 1971:86) Proselytizing to the Zulu who were under the monarch's protection and control was difficult, as any attempts at conversion were seen as subversive, as Zulu could not make individual decisions.

In what was a constantly fluctuating relationship, the Zulu monarchy utilised the services of the missionary, with whom they had been in contact over several decades. In 1835 Dingane expressed an interest in Christianity, more so in European technology, recognizing the value in having missionaries as emissaries in diplomatic relations between him and the colonial authority, and in assisting in the controlling of trade. (Etherington 1971:137) However, hostility towards Christianity and settlers grew, with the result that Dingane refused to allow conversion or permission for converts to subscribe to traditional *ukukhonza* (the paying of homage) practices, thereby implicitly ostracizing them. No longer deemed Zulu, converts were disallowed military service, and implicitly the absence of royal protection. (Etherington 1971:117) The Zulu thus spent decades vacillating between acceptance of Christianity and suspicion of its practice and relevance. (Etherington in Duminy and Guest 1989:275)

Chiefs also continued to request missionary help for welfare purposes and medicinal help, and for liaison both with colonists and other powerful neighbours. (Etherington 1971:140 and 147) Often such favours were rewarded with promises of abandoning heathen practices. However the Zulu

monarchy's attitude prevented any large-scale Christianization in Zululand and was also intrinsically opposed to the individualism promoted by Christianity. (Etherington 1971:123 and 192), Cetewayo having claimed that a Christian Zulu was a 'Zulu spoiled'.<sup>9</sup> (Wilkinson 1882:261) By 1873, therefore, official restrictions and popular resistance resulted in an impasse in missionary activity in Zululand for some time. (Wilkinson 1882:196)

The tepid reception of Christianity among rural Zulu can be ascribed to their resistance to major cultural erosions expected of the convert, as well as the demand that the convert rescind polygyny and the custom of *lobola* (bride-price).<sup>10</sup> To the Zulu, such expectations constituted a major erosion of familial authority and labour practices and the severing of communal bonds among families. Missionaries were largely unaware that *lobola* constituted a highly significant social bond in which mutual obligation was a major force binding familial groups, regarding it instead as a purchase transaction. Only later did Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians accept such practice on 'practical grounds'. (Etherington 1971:163-164) In addition most missionaries considered any veneration of the *idlozi* (ancestors) as tantamount to idolatry and found recourse to healers and medical practitioners to be equally taboo, failing in the process to recognise Biblical parallels in any of these.

Given the restrictions above, Zulu who came to the mission were thus already likely to already have been ostracized from the group and were perceived to be 'rebellious, unstable or rejected'. (Etherington 1971:170)<sup>11</sup> To the Zulu traditionalist the *kholwa* seemed strange and dangerous and

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9 Ironically Cetewayo's sister was converted and he too was close to conversion later in life.

<sup>10</sup> The former was argued to be un-Christian in that it merely catered for the sensual appetites of the male, and was deemed tantamount to slavery, the purchaser having virtual control over his spouse and relying on her for purposes of manual labour.

<sup>11</sup> Those who gravitated to the missions came there for various reasons: some sought refuge there from fear of death; still others wanted education; others were persuaded at 'revivals' held at the missions. (Etherington 1971:204) Some were the families of those condemned as witches, or those who left home as a result of the 'stresses of puberty'. (Etherington 1971:216 - 217) Old women who had reached menopause, and were considered dangerous and redundant, found protection at the mission stations, while in some instances young girls were sent to the mission for 'training' by Cetewayo and other leaders. (Etherington 1971:224 and 212) On some occasions people with infirmities were sent to them, as were one of a twin birth (which was considered an ill omen), or petty criminals and families of convicts. Above all, residents on the missions were almost entirely there of their own free will, the few

were perceived as pariahs, amoral or as thieves, free from the rules and boundaries applicable to the traditionalist Zulu. Not surprisingly the mission was a source of cross-culturalism, as not all missionaries demanded that mission residents, such as labourers, become converted. Usually if they wished to remain on the mission stations they were expected to be baptised, failing which they were retained as a labour source, and were inevitably influenced, even if only partly, by the mission lifestyle and aspects of western culture. Colonial missionaries were intent on proselytizing endeavours, which included both religious and cultural conversion. They were therefore at pains to see tangible evidence of their enterprise both to convey to their churches or orders abroad as well as to other prospective converts among the Zulu.

Perhaps the greatest attraction of the missions was linked to economic prospects and personal freedom. Many prospective converts were drawn to the missions by the prospect of arable land. (Etherington 1971:207) As a result a new social order replaced that of the traditional one on the missions, and new economic relationships were formed due to the fact that farming encouraged the mission dweller to become at least self-sustaining. Mission residents soon benefited from the education and economic freedom they gained, many becoming quite prosperous as farmers, traders and in other professions. (Etherington 1971:263 and 247) Economic independence gained at the missions through training and access to land led to independence of trade and inevitably independence of religion. *Kholwa* assumed that they were no longer subject to Native Law once they became Christians. (Etherington 1971:330) <sup>12</sup>

What prompted future conversion was an amalgam of persistent exposure and example, together

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exceptions being where missionaries paid for girls to come to the station to work or be trained. (Etherington 1971:213-214) Other mission residents were said to have 'fled the princes' seeking refuge at the missions (Wilkinson 1882:140 and 148) while some came from further afield, such as the refugees that accompanied the Rev Allison to Indaleni (see Chapter 4) to escape persecution.

<sup>12</sup> However after the Langalibalele<sup>12</sup> affair, many colonists supported Shepstone's ruling that Native Law apply to all Africans in the region. As a result many *kholwa* who had previously been able to buy land and trade freely now found themselves subject to Native Law, which resulted in complete dependency on chiefs and the monarchy for rights to land and trade. (Etherington 1971:319) Inevitably unrest and dissent emerged sporadically from *kholwa* quarters as they had everything to lose in the face of white separatism on the one hand, and the prospect of being subject to Native Law or the ire of the Zulu leaders on the other. (Etherington 1971: 335)

with the contributions of individual converts to Christianity. Thus while the missionary endeavour in the 19<sup>th</sup> century initially appeared doomed insofar as conversion was concerned, a perceptible change seemed to have emerged in the late 1860s when the demand for the secular benefits offered by mission stations superceded the sacred ones. (Etherington 1971:149-150) For example the American missionaries had hoped to gain converts and train them to assume proselytizing activities, with little success, their main legacies being educational (as evidenced at Inanda seminary and Adams College). It was rather in providing such educational services that missionaries were regarded as most relevant to the Zulu. Many Zulu who received education were, however, ostracized, with the result that this can also be regarded as an inhibiting factor.

By nature the *kholwa*, educated and nurtured within the mission context, was raised with a spirit of initiative and enquiry and was convinced by thoughts and ideals of equality in the eyes of God. Significantly the seeds for African nationalism were nurtured in these ideals. However the church preached innate cultural inferiority first and then equality. Even more troubling to the conservative colonists, was that the missions taught the *kholwa* that ‘all Africans were one people, regardless of tribal origin’ based on a biblical text for African solidarity, Psalm 68 - ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God’. (Etherington 1971:338) As many of the stations were multi-ethnic, a new unity to bind them would be political and religious, fostering nationalist ideas. (Etherington 1971:339)

However, the enlightened and democratic ideals of the missions were short lived as many missionaries sided with the colonial forces after incidents such as the Langalibalele affair and eventually in the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Many Zulu subsequently perceived the church as partisan and suspect. The ‘theological groundwork of human equality’ seems to have gradually given way to racism as one after another, missionaries complained about the intransigence of the Zulu, their lofty assumptions of status once educated or trained, and problematic perceptions of the Zulu ‘stronger animal nature’ and sensuality. (Etherington 1971:86)

This picture of missionary endeavour would be skewed, however, were it not for the fact that many

missionaries variously adopted a more enlightened approach to their charges and their cultural practices. While most missionaries refused to consider any syncretism in practice, a few suggested that traditional beliefs were ‘prismatically distorted glimpses of Christian light’. (Etherington 1971:310) One such ‘enlightened’ missionary was Bishop J W Colenso, an Anglican who fundamentally believed in the common fellowship of man under God whose spirit was evident in the hearts of all men. (Barber 1975:23) In his book *Ten weeks in Natal* (he visited the colony in 1853 and 1854), he wrote of the Zulu as a worthy people - more so than realised by the colonists. His ‘gradualist’ approach entailed attempting to come to terms with and understand traditional customs, change some gradually, but not to abolish them. (Barber 1975:26) So-called uncivilized practices, in western terms, were not considered sinful. He condoned polygamy, although he hoped it would die out, as his sympathy lay with the wives and children of converts on becoming baptized. (Barber 1975: 63-65)<sup>13</sup> Colenso’s ideas and his educational schemes for Africans met with little support, and often condemnation from the colonists. (Barber 1975:71)<sup>14</sup> It was also widely held that William Ngidi, a convert, had inspired Colenso to re-examine and question the literal truths of the Bible. Ngidi left his station in 1867 and became a celebrated defender of traditional customs. (Etherington 1971:278)<sup>15</sup>

Other missionaries such as Henry Callaway, had an anthropological interest in the Zulu, and initially intended to preserve as much of their culture as possible in his missionary endeavour. Yet he

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<sup>13</sup> Colenso assisted in the development of education in Natal, which consisted of instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic and a little drawing as well as building and agricultural skills. To him all men were eligible for salvation even heathen in their ‘natural state’ who possessed ‘a dim sense of righteousness’. Only those who disobeyed this were ‘doomed’. (Barber 1975:42)

<sup>14</sup> Such was the opposition to his ideas (especially those on funding native education and on polygyny) in 1855, that his effigy was burnt in Durban amidst public riots. (Etherington 1971:82) His support of the Africans in the Langalibalele affair was to exacerbate issues further, as many colonists felt that he was encouraging native unrest. (Etherington 1971:14) Colenso did all he could to appear liberal and non colonial to the indigene. According to Etherington, he ‘...kept hell out of his sermons, opened the door to polygynists, and respected traditional Nguni patterns of life and authority’. (Etherington 1971:111) However it appears as if he never baptised any converts, preferring an educational and cultural assimilation to occur organically over time.

<sup>15</sup> It is not certain whether this was the same Mbianga Ngidi who later formed the Congregational Church, an AIC.

eventually turned against the Zulu partly as a reaction to disappointment at the failure of his proselytizing. (Etherington 1971:112) He later maintained that the only way that polygny and lobola could be eradicated was by undermining and even destroying the African economic system. <sup>16</sup>

However even ‘enlightened’ missionaries were ultimately to exert no real change in Natal, both in terms of colonists’ attitudes and race relations, nor in advancing the cause of Christianity. (Etherington 1971:116) Besides the many problems, of perception and practice, a select few of which have been outlined above, the missionary enterprise was further problematized by the fact that the missionaries brought a particular variant of Christianity to the indigene. It was typified by an emphasis on a form of individualism: this was ‘...propagated by a narrow concept of sin with little social consciousness, and reinforced by the western acquisitiveness inculcated through schooling’. (Hillman 19993:22) It amounted to little more than the privatizing of religion, in which the traditional social order is atomized, and in which religion undermines cooperative practices. Rather than foster predominantly Christian virtues, they offered western ones. <sup>17</sup>

It was arguably only after the Zulu War of 1879, by which time no real change had been effected in the region over the past three decades of missionary activity, that gradual absorption of aspects of mission Christianity occurred. Not all of it stemmed directly from the mission enterprise. In the absence of some degree of monarchic authority, several separatist movements were initiated, providing alternate social structures for displaced and fragmented communities. There are also accounts of individual Zulu who had been variously exposed to Christianity who, uncoerced by missionaries, took it upon themselves to ‘spread the word’ (Etherington 1971:205) even prior to the

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<sup>16</sup> Callaway had studied medicine before taking holy orders in the Church of England. In Natal he befriended an African doctor and studied his compositions of medicines, was interested in recording Zulu mythology and concluded that the Nguni were intellectually, morally, and in their religious potentiality equal to westerners (Etherington 1971:113-114) His text, *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (1884), presented a largely sympathetic view of Zulu belief and practice.

<sup>17</sup> This also relates to what West describes as the historical crisis, one of the methodological problems in the interpretive crises relating to the role of Biblical influence in South African history. (1989:45) West contends that missionaries were wont to evangelize and provided a theological interpretation of Christianity. It is not clear to what extent the Bible was used in evangelizing. What is clear is that what resulted eventually was a divided church between black and white.

1879 Anglo Zulu War. Separatist sects, it will be shown, functioned as significant catalysts in the development of quasi-Christianized communities.

#### **1.4 The African Independent Churches**

As most indigenous peoples in Africa do not separate the religious and the secular (to the extent that this occurs in the west), there was no firm rootedness for secular ideologies. Christianity, however, was able to survive in Africa, despite its colonial associations, because it became attached to already extant religious and secular systems, which were central to the functioning of post-colonial reality. Thus in effect, as will be seen, the AICs represent a truer reflection of the impact of western belief in Africa and the region.<sup>18</sup> Haynes raises an issue which is central to the post-colonial context in KwaZulu-Natal and that of many third world countries, in which the relationship between religion and community, closely integrated in pre-colonial times, has in effect been restored in the aftermath of colonial occupation. In Zulu culture, religion was at the centre of the political and social process, and in effect validated politics. (Haynes 1993:29) With the advent of colonial intervention a degree of both the spiritual and political power of the Zulu was reduced, with the result that secularization or doubt in belief and cultural values ensued.

While western Christian colonizers and missionaries only appeared to change the central core of belief in Third World cultures, rather the opposite has in some instances occurred. The colonial period was a hiatus during which traditional institutions may have been changed, but these were not entirely transformed or abandoned, and their power structures were in part reconstituted within alternate new belief systems, such as the AIC's. (Haynes 1993:29) While the official churches' empathetic and active involvement in attempting to influence social and political change in South Africa attracted many followers who might otherwise have resisted church affiliation, and who only paid lip service to its beliefs as a ploy to effect change, the AICs were emerging as a major force in

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<sup>18</sup> According to Haynes 'We should not see contemporary religious concerns in the Third World as a result of colonialism, but rather as a development of pre-existing belief patterns which were moulded but not destroyed by the European influx'. (1993:29) This view is shared by James Clifford, and will be discussed further in the Conclusion.



South Africa, and today numerically represent the largest denominational followings in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> Kiernan has ably described their emergence: ‘Almost surreptitiously, a religious revolution has taken place in South Africa over the past ninety years, the dimensions of which are fully appreciated only by a comparative few’. (Kiernan 1982:99) This revolution has been explored in part by Sundkler (1948 and 1976), West (1995) and others. The AICs (‘spiritual’ or separatist churches) have given rise to a ‘different type of protest’, which is centered in the search for a more relevant and appropriate Christianity. (West 1996:198)<sup>20</sup>

As in Latin America, there is a tendency among many Catholics and former mission church members to switch to independent churches or to fundamentalist Protestantism, attracted by both their promises of salvation and redemption and more particularly of physical and spiritual healing. (Haynes 1993:95) Such was their rootedness in African tradition and their modification of the belief system of the colonial conquerors, that the AICs have been described as ‘religio-ethnic movements’ which ‘used both Christian and traditional religious beliefs to forge a syncretistic ideology of anti-Europeanization’. (Haynes 1993:112) Some of the AICs in South Africa are even thought of as interpretations of prophet movements that had originated elsewhere in Africa, such as the Zionist and Ethiopian movements. But primarily the rise of the AICs was also the result of various sociological and theological conditions.

In the AIC’s, the centrality of religion in the wake of cultural fragmentation and impoverishment was particularly significant in providing support for people in need of healing and centering in a post colonial context. In this they reflect the realities of many Africans who live dualistic or ‘contradictory lives’ in which both traditional religions and Christianity are practiced or shared. A

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<sup>19</sup> The two main separatist churches in South Africa (in terms of support) are those of Isaiah Shembe (*Ibandla lama Nazaretha*) in KwaZulu-Natal and Rev Lekganyane’s Zionism in Mpumalanga (formerly the Northern Transvaal). In 1970 at least 25% of the black population belonged to one of these and that at the time collectively they command greater support than any single missionary church (Kiernan 1982:100), but there were at least 4000 other sects by 1982 and possibly a lot more.

<sup>20</sup> This is manifest in Africa in Bwiti, a syncretic art form the result of a fusion of Fang culture and Christianity or as in the Nackabah People (the Twelve Apostles Church) in west and central Ghana who have monumental cement sculptures of Christ and various saints. (Hackett 1996: 197-198)

more negative perception by Hillman, suggests that such dualism illustrates Christianity's 'unintegrated and extrinsic character'. (Hillman 1993:47)

Thus while the colonial missionary in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century assumed that the resocializing of the Zulu was on course, even if conversion was minimal, traditional institutions, although apparently eradicated, 'served as defensive bunkers for indigenous cultural values and social structures...the indigenous symbol systems, such as the major rites of passage and the local religious celebrations, served powerfully to sustain the integrity of the besieged communities'. (Haynes 1993: 9) Given the problematic relationship between missionary endeavour and colonial authority and power, it is hardly surprising that while some African groups accepted Christian belief and practice,<sup>21</sup> often selectively, they soon felt the need to form breakaway churches rooted in Christianity, or at least Biblical sources, but freed from both colonial authority and association, where Africans could realise greater opportunities in leadership, power structures and control. (Herskovits 1963:421) Many African pastors and kholwa saw the mission as authoritarian and assuming an unnecessary sense of superiority and control. (Etherington 1971:301)

Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century alternate groups were formed. As early as 1875 *Uzondelelo* was founded by Zulu men from the township of Edendale<sup>22</sup> near Pietermaritzburg, not as a sect but as an 'Evangelistic enterprise' believing that Africans should be the purveyors of the message of Christ. (Etherington 1971: 302) It became a highly successful force in Evangelism and in moneymaking, and its doctrines did not differ totally from the Methodist one from which it sprang, supporting a similar puritanical and fundamentalist theology. (Etherington 1971:307-308)<sup>23</sup> In the two decades prior to the Anglo Zulu war, political activism coincided with the emergence of such independent initiatives in religion, yet it appears that no independent church per se emerged until after the Zulu war (1879).

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<sup>21</sup> However, in the wake of colonialism, Christianity became 'inseparable from secular political power in the minds of the colonized'. (Haynes 1993:29)

<sup>22</sup> Edendale, established in 1851, is a township outside Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal.

<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly many sermons they conducted were quite subversive, citing that they had nothing to fear, and could rely on their power, love and sound minds to confront their situations. (Etherington 1971:308)

(Etherington 1971:294)

A further catalyst appears to have been the formation of the Tembu Church in the Cape in 1884, by Nehemiah Tile. (Etherington 1971: 318)<sup>24</sup> This was followed by the Tswana and Pedi who also established breakaway churches before the turn of the century. (Sundkler 1961:39) In the urban context at the turn of the century, there arose in Johannesburg the Ethiopian church. Other similar churches were ethnically and regionally specific. Many mission trained kholwa, such as Tile, left the enclave of the mission church, inspired to do their own spontaneous evangelizing and training, in contrast to those that went out to evangelize under the auspices of the missions, who were very poorly paid. Thus monetary gain as an incentive was often considered a motive for independent enterprise.

In Natal the formation of breakaway 'sects' ideologically challenging the whiteness of mission church authority, derived in part from the arrival of African American religious activists, known as American Negro Baptists, who had established numerous independent churches there by 1899, leading to additional offshoots. (Xakaza 2001:50) One of these offshoots was the African Native Baptist Church founded by Rev. W M Leshega, who was responsible for the baptism of Isaiah Shembe in 1906.<sup>25</sup>

Although Etherington maintains that many kholwa were able to retain 'old customs' without severing their Christian ties, (1971:279), AIC and mission churches were later sundered indefinitely, largely due to the degree of incorporation of indigenous belief and ritual the AICs absorbed. Ethiopians were largely assimilationist, whereas the Zionists were more conservative in terms of '...the fundamentals of Zulu society'. (Herskovits 1963:423) The persistence of an indigenous world

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<sup>24</sup> In 1882, the year Mariannhill was founded, Nemehiah Tile (said to have been a Tembu chieftain) emerged as an African leader in the Wesleyan Methodist church. However he was criticized by a European missionary because of his Tembu nationalist sympathies, as a result of which he left the church two years later and founded the Tembu Church. (Sundkler 1961:38)

<sup>25</sup> Leshega, ordained a minister in the same church, was a functionary for five years before establishing his own church. (Xakaza 2001:50)

view in the AIC's saw Christian dogma attached to indigenous belief systems, and many AICs used Biblical sources to justify indigenous cultural practice, indicating inter alia that Christ knew how to exorcize demons, and that, amongst others, consultation of the equivalent of a *sangoma* was sanctioned. (Etherington 1971:280)<sup>26</sup>

The rise of the AICs was also the result of segregation in the mission churches, overt racism, paternalism, objections to the erosion of traditional cultural practice and the need to express an African religious autonomy. Their development was further prompted by the fact that for decades no black South Africans were able to realise their capacities or achieve any real authority in the mission churches, let alone in politics or any other sphere. Thus many Africans with an interest in realising control or leadership elected to form a breakaway religious group. Primarily the AICs have a wholly indigenous African leadership, which leadership is not achieved as a result of educational abilities or success, but rather due to a prospective leader's prophetic and spiritual capacities. Separatist churches have understandably, in their directness and relevance, provided a main challenge to mission churches, which regularly lose members to them. They have grown in number in a period of social dislocation where they function as 'religious solidarity networks' and in this they constitute a form of resistance. (Kiernan 1995:107)<sup>27</sup>

Ethiopianism was largely blamed on the post-Reformation emphasis on private and personal interpretation of scripture, when parts of the Bible were translated into the vernacular from as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trained clergy or lay preachers led some Ethiopian churches. (Etherington 1971:

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<sup>26</sup> John Langeni, for example, compared the 'Word' with a 'large fold of cattle in which every man may enrich himself' (Etherington 1971: 295) or as comparable to the sweetness of sugarcane *amasi* (soured milk). He was also known to have blessed all Zulu kings. (Etherington 1971:296) Ira Nembula for instance, was trained by Americans to distinguish between heathen and Christian belief, and regarded sacrifice to the ancestors acceptable as they were also satisfied by the 'glorified Saviour' in a like manner. (Etherington 1971:295)

<sup>27</sup> 'In the era where the *commodity form* reigns supreme they have carved out a control base in which they manipulate the most important commodity in the lives of the *commodityless, the landless, the capitalless* masses of African descent, namely the Spirit- *uMoya*. This spirit is blocked if one attends an ordinary Christian church, and it can be manifest in all things. Mosala saw the AICs as important in controlling the spiritual 'production' of African peoples. (Mosala 1989c:14) Most AICs had men's guilds (*Madondana*) and women's guilds (*Manyano*) which have since become part of a reading culture of the Bible.

309) But Mosala points out that many leaders and members of the AICs have an oral rather than a literate knowledge of the Bible, conveyed in prayers and sermons, which represent a canonical authority. (Mosala 1989c: 16) Many AICs form Bible reading groups, and armed with this fundamental oral knowledge, members are enabled to 'negotiate their reality and even to resist the forces of brutalization with which the whole class is faced'. (Mosala 1989c: 17) Sources are often partly understood or recalled and individually or collectively amalgamated with traditionalist belief or other oral traditions. Not surprisingly a syncretic hybrid ensues, which amalgam has inspired much contemporary art.

The AICs have been loosely divided into Ethiopianism and Zionism. Ethiopianism and the founding of the Ethiopian Church occurred in 1892 on the Witwatersrand, distinguished by the fact that it appealed to people across African ethnic divides, its authority said to derive from Psalms 68:31 "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God", which was interpreted to mean that there would be self-government of the African church by African leaders. (Sundkler 1961:39) Ethiopian churches were offshoots of a mother church, and although viewed with some concern earlier by the apartheid regime, the church was in fact realised as a direct result of state segregationist policies and restrictions.

Ethiopianism had early political ideals, as in 1906 Ethiopian preachers were known to have enthusiastically supported the Zulu Rebellion and were listed among its leaders. (Sundkler 1961:69) Further several Ethiopian church leaders were associated with the African National Congress, but apparently this political affiliation was weakened later, resulting in more tolerance by the state. (Kiernan 1982:100) Many black South Africans supported the Ethiopians in the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935, and prayed for the Abyssians, while Marcus Garvey, the Afro-American prophet and agitator, directly influenced the church in Kimberley.<sup>28</sup> Referred to as the 'Ethiopian problem' by whites and missionaries, it was feared that 'the Ethiopian movement was an African political

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<sup>28</sup> God was regarded as the father of Ethiopia who, with the angel Douglas and power of Holy Ghost, came to save 'the down-trodden children of Ethiopia that they might rise to be a great power among the nations'. (Sundkler 1961:58)

underground movement, aiming at ousting the White man from South Africa, or, at least, that it might establish a pan-African National Church which would cause harm by hampering the evangelization of the Bantu peoples.’ (Sundkler 1961:13) Ethiopians often claimed that they wanted Africa for the Africans (Sundkler 1961:54) and as members of a church, they were able to qualify for land and settle on farms.

Zionist churches were usually built around visionary leaders or prophets who embrace many elements of traditional belief<sup>29</sup>, as noted in the visionary or charismatic figures of the Shembe church, among others.<sup>30</sup> Describe as apostolic, Pentecostal or gospel they were influenced in part by black American churches, with a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit mediated by various symbols including clothes,<sup>31</sup> flags, water, ashes, and other items. (Kiernan 1982: 102) Prophecy and glossalalia is strongly manifested, and via visions,<sup>32</sup> dreams and voices, the prophet gains insight into the

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<sup>29</sup> Sundkler even goes so far as to say that nativistic branches of Zionism ‘in the end become the bridge over which Africans are brought back to the old heathenism from whence they once came’. (1961:55)

<sup>30</sup> Zionism also had an American impetus when in 1904 representatives of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church of Zion, Illinois, came to South Africa with the result that several neo-Zionist churches emerged tempered by local qualities and translations.

<sup>31</sup> John Alexander Dowie’s book *Leaves of Healing* seems to have set the precedent for dress modes among Zionists and other AICs, with a preference for white robes, white headscarves and later coloured sashes, their colour often associated with healing activities. (Sundkler 1976:48) Most early Zionists preferred green or blue sashes, chosen as a result of messages in visions. Others (such as Cekwane’s group) wore red. (Sundkler 1976:117) According to Sundkler the wearing of white is typical of dream stereotypes, and Nomkhulwana (the daughter of Mvelinqangi) also wore white. Further, white is also said to attract angels (or ancestors), and white was reinforced by its usage in Revelation. (Sundkler 1961:213-214) Green is regarded as the colour of spirituality, while red and black is taboo as black represents death (ibid). Such largely negative associations with the latter two contrast with the positive meanings associated with them in traditionalist Zulu interpretations of colours. Sticks are also given to initiates and are referred to as weapons, often having been dreamt about before selection. They have various purposes, such as the warding off of lightning, to access the godhead, or to drive out demons. (Sundkler 1976:49) Ones with a cross are regarded as particularly precious as they are said to have spiritual power. They are sometimes whitewashed before every Sabbath. (Sundkler 1961:214) Members are also known to carry staffs, and some claim that angels (perceived to be ancestors) direct these.

<sup>32</sup> Most sects included visions as a major aspect of their practice. Many initiators had visions which led them to access or form a particular group. Sundkler also points to numerous instances in which visions were the order of the day in healing. (Sundkler 1982:73) The importance of dreams relates to Zulu traditionalist belief, and these can be sent by ancestors, wizards or can merely be spontaneous. Conversion in fact often demands the ability to dream. (Sundkler 1961: 216 and 266) Such dreams often center on two objects, such as water/a pool, animal hills, persons in white, or colours (as noted earlier). Zionists at times smear themselves with ashes and water to facilitate their visionary capacities. It was regarded as highly important to dream of Jehovah, an angel or Jesus.

afflictions of the individuals and congregation, who often help in the reading or decoding of the messages. Literate Africans soon began to make 'ingenious and original readings of scripture' especially in areas, which supported *lobola* and polygyny, finding scriptural ratification for these practices. (Etherington 1971: 312)<sup>33</sup> It is in this cross-cultural assimilation that Ethiopianist separatist churches were regarded by theologians such as Bengt Sundkler as being based on two extremes - Christianity and 'heathenism'. He too was further concerned that the syncretist AIC could function as a bridge to heathenism. (1961:297)

As with Ethiopianism, the various sects provided one of the only legitimate outlets for the urge for leadership, which was denied Africans in the civic and political sphere. Here in the relationship between religious leaders and followers, the AICs could to some extent recreate desirable structures of authority aimed at guiding their communities. (Sundkler 1961:102-103) Often such leaders were initially called to become diviners or prophets, who could rise in stature should they have healing or prophetic capacities, often akin to those of a *sangoma*.

They are also known to have strict taboos<sup>34</sup> reminiscent of Biblical ones. While they draw on some traditional cultural elements, they deplore all forms of sorcery and see all non-Zionists as potential sorcerers. (Sundkler 1961:26) Their power resides in the fact that they can heal without this and are therefore often perceived to be in direct competition with *sangomas*. (Sundkler 1961:26) In Zionism, too, less power is given to the ancestors who are seen as protective but not instrumental in healing,

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<sup>33</sup> They tended to discuss issues such as these at length and would 'go back to the Old Testament history, to Jacob and others, and they will say that they find these customs were approved by God and nowhere in the Bible do they find them forbidden, and they will argue with zeal and boldness...They may say the same of the practice of beer drinking, of dancing and other evil customs', as well as refer to the teachings of Bishop Colenso and others. (Etherington 1971: 312) Even the practice of *hlobonga*, a spirited sexual encounter short of intercourse, was related to 1 Corinthians 7:25 in which Paul says 'Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord'. (Etherington 1971:309 and 313) While some *kholwa* wanted to enforce a more Victorian mentality with Christian temperance societies, others argued for the retention of old customs. (Etherington 1971:291)

<sup>34</sup> There was a taboo on the owning or consumption of pigs or white chickens, as they were perceived to smell, and had been introduced by whites. (Sundkler 1961:217) Taboos against blood, or the consumption of animals that had died were also upheld. The use of sackcloth and ashes (also used by Jonah of Nineveh) was common among Zionists. Chastity was regarded as important and no menstruating women were allowed to prepare food, as was customary among Zulu traditionalists. (Sundkler 1961:218-219)

regarded rather as part of the 'angelic intermediaries between God and man'. (West 1975:181) Significantly, the term angel or *ingelosi*, is used by Zionists to describe a spirit which can appear in dreams and during prayer. (Sundkler 1961:249) An angel's intervention or appearance is regarded as similar to the message of the ancestors (usually conveyed by diviners), and angels also require sacrifices in the same way. (Sundkler 1961:250) Sundkler cites several examples where angels play a prominent part in their visions and also in their hymns (1976:107)<sup>35</sup>.

A significant aspect of Zionist churches, and typical of their anthropocentric character, is that of healing. (Mosala 1989:19) and to those in need thereof it 'offered relief and support and the possibility of self-improvement'. (Kiernan 1982:104) Healing varies and so do taboos associated with it.<sup>36</sup> For example Isaiah Shembe disallowed the use of western medicine or surgery (this has since been rescinded).

Zionists still function in small units and assist in a programme of economic survival strategies, especially aid for women,<sup>37</sup> with a support base backing and solidarity. Mostly apolitical, with exceptions, they are concerned with private rather than public problems, and in this are socio-religious manifestations of the contemporary black South African experience.<sup>38</sup> Most Zionist

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<sup>35</sup> He quotes one such hymn with the words: 'There is an angel flying, Calling the Black nation'. (Sundkler 1976:107) George Khambule's group allegedly had a secret vocabulary derived from secret angelic sources.

<sup>36</sup> Zionists explain evil or barrenness as a result of *abathakathi* (evil forces) and therefore also believe in *ukudlisa* (sorcery). They prophesy, which is in effect a form of divining in a Christian form. This arises as a result of their pounding the ground, similar to the practice of *ukubula* (smiting or hitting the ground by sangomas), and they also use *intelezi* (protection charms), eg poles with white flags to guard against lightning. (Kiernan 1982:104) Not surprisingly theologians such as Sundkler contend that the AICs are leading their flock back towards 'paganism'. (1961:297)

<sup>37</sup> Women constitute a large proportion of adherents of these sects, the reason being that they are subject to a patriarchal society; are often left alone to fend at home while their husbands engage in migratory labour; they are able to use the sect as a context in which to unburden their woes; where they are able to support each other and possibly assistance from a male leader. In this they regain a sense of community which has been lost, and women are also able to regain positions and status that they enjoyed previously. (Sundkler 1976:77)

<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly many Zionist leaders, like their Ethiopian counterparts, were also politically involved, such as Elias Mahlangu who became a member of the ANC. While this caused trouble for his flock, Sundkler notes '...this endeared him still further to his faithful. They appreciated his leadership and message'. (Sundkler 1976:61)



churches emerge near urban peripheries where they provide forms of association that facilitate people's adaptation to urban conditions, enabling a new sense of community to be forged outside of the bounds of traditional ones. (Kiernan 1982:106)

Many AICs, especially Zionist groups, are closely Christian based and conduct baptism, Eucharistic celebration, use the Bible<sup>39</sup>, practice healing (which has biblical precedents), communal prayer and preaching. However central to Zionism is a belief in the power of Christ, who is seen as the redeeming, suffering Saviour whose death releases affliction and hardship, an aspect with which the poor can identify, deriving comfort from this example. 'Furthermore, the death of Christ has particular resonance for African cultures in which the management of the transition from the world of the living to the realm of the dead has been a dominant concern. There may, therefore, be some truth in the suggestion that Christ has usurped the traditional role of ancestors and that an equivalent role, much extended in scope, is now attributed to him'. (Kiernan 1982:108-109) These direct analogies are vital to understanding the significance of the AICs as reflected in the work of several artists from KwaZulu-Natal.

As will be seen in Chapter 3, many theologians such as West, contend that the AICs constituted 'the roots of black theology' and are an important resource in theological reflection'. (West 1989:103) Despite their relative conservatism regarding the liberation struggle, they retained a strong position in the community and embraced a broad African nationalism.<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly, the first development of Zionism in Natal was initiated by the lapsed Dutch Reformed missionary to the Zulu, P. L. Le Roux, at Wakkerstroom, supported by Daniel Nkonyane, Charles

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<sup>39</sup> The use of the Bible by AICs is largely fundamentalist. They consider the Bible as a significant book from God and many consider its word literally.

<sup>40</sup> The AICs were the first to advocate a broad African nationalism. They are also revolutionary in terms of their impact on society providing their congregations with a sense of hope for the future. They also situate their members in a specifically structured order, providing them with a counter to the dehumanization that permeates their lives.

Sangweni, Michael Mgone Zulu and others in the 1920s. Here he established a strict Zionist sect, the Christian Catholic Church of Zion, where he conducted healing services, expected followers to be abstemious, disallowed infant baptism and enforced strict behavioural codes. (Sundkler 1976:16-28,39,45) Le Roux was ostracised by whites and when the Zulu Rebellion broke out in late 1905, the result of protest against the 1905 Poll Tax, it was claimed that *khulwa* were the instigators, which was partly true.<sup>41</sup>

Zionists have developed an extensive symbolic vocabulary, which is readily recognised in the art of its followers, or even those that are merely familiar with its practices. Many of these are shared with or derive from Zulu traditionalist practice or belief, as indicated above. Aspects of their terrain is incorporated into their practice, and many groups recognise two geographical sites as central to Zion dream life: a mountain for fasting and praying and a deep pool. In addition new and unusual signs and symbols emerged among Zionists, one of which was that of Khambule's<sup>42</sup> Heavenly Telephone, with a line, which extended from Telezini (in Zululand) and Msinga to the Throne of Heaven. (Sundkler 1976:127) This was seen as a supernatural device for accessing the godhead, and it certainly appears to have inspired Mbatha's serigraph, *Heavenly Telephone/ Telephone call* (c1970).

Khambule also used so-called 'holy stones' (similar to the practice of Shembe followers) that were placed on the area occupied by one to be healed, and also a new Bible, the Holy Piby influenced by Afro-Americans in the area, as well as a special alphabet (Sundkler 1976:130). Revelations was regarded as an important source for Khambule, doubtless due to its prophetic nature and the dramatic mystical elements in the text (Sundkler 1961:141) As will be seen later, many artists use Revelations as a source for their imagery. In addition themes frequently addressed in hymns related to the Passion and the heavenly Jerusalem. Zionists frequently used Biblical verses set to Zulu tunes. (Sundkler

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<sup>41</sup> After le Roux left for Johannesburg and became involved in pentecostal belief, Nkonyane took charge. Later Nkonyane was based at Charlestown (on the border between the Transvaal and Natal) and from here reached out to Nongoma, Swaziland, and Johannesburg) Nkonyane finally broke away from le Roux in 1922, forming the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. (Sundkler 1976: 57)

<sup>42</sup> After a near death from influenza in 1919, Khambule was inspired to form a group of Zionists in Zululand.

1961:194). The Old Testament was a preferred source in Zionism and Moses as lawgiver is often prominent as are his taboos and commandments. (Sundkler 1961:277-278) His thematic importance is also frequent in artist's works.

As with Ethiopianism, Zionism too was perceived by many to have suspect ideological affinities. Not surprisingly the state has taken years to recognise their presence and authority, often due to their seemingly suspect affiliations and intentions. From the outset the state suspected that the AICs and 'Ethiopianism' were a political threat. As a result it appointed a commission in 1925 to determine methods to recognise so-called 'Native Separatist Churches'. New laws were promulgated to restrict the size, training, ethical standing and age of the independent church before it was accepted. (Sundkler 1961 73-74) In Natal in the 1930s, AICs were again suspect especially those with Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union links (the union was formed in 1919). Even among Zulu chiefs the AICs were sometimes regarded as suspect as they usurped their authority, opposed the practice of *sangomas*, and were considered far too influential among women. (Sundkler 1961:96)

Later the AICs felt the stranglehold of the apartheid regime, and in 1955 A W G Champion, the Zulu politician, met Dr Verwoerd in Nongoma where the former pleaded with him on behalf of thousands of AICs for recognition.<sup>43</sup> This led to an easing of tensions, but also introduced further restrictions with the result that many Zulu, who practiced a dual religion, boycotted the mission churches. (Sundkler 1976:305) The political standing of the AICs increased steadily, and as will be seen, they were regarded as having equally significant theologies of resistance when represented at the 1972 Consultation at Mapumulo.

## **1.5 Isaiah Shembe and followers of *Ibandla lamaNazaretha***

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<sup>43</sup> In 1957 new legislation allowed only churches with more than a million members to have a site for a building, which affected all AICs as most had fewer than this number of followers. Apparently the then Prime Minister H F Verwoerd wanted them to unite to form five main churches. (Sundkler 1976:283-284) In Durban the reaction by blacks was to boycott all European-controlled Churches.

One of the predominant Zionist AICs in KwaZulu-Natal is the *Ibandla lama Nazaretha* (ILN), whose followers are popularly known as Shembe or Nazarites, after its founder member Isaiah Shembe (hereafter referred to as Shembe I). Seen by other Zionists as not sufficiently Biblically centered or Christian (Sundkler 1976:161), in structure it is Zionist, with a central emphasis on healing, fellowship, the wearing of white garments (on specific occasions), as well as the wearing of traditional attire as envisioned in dreams. They also use a designated sacred site for their practices.<sup>44</sup> While the scope of this dissertation does not allow for extensive detail on the Shembe, only those aspects that are central to its belief and that have influenced artists will be focused on.

Born into a Hlubi family near Harrismith, Shembe I, like many Zionists heard voices and went to a mountain cave, where he dreamt that he was carnal and would as a result not see Jehovah. On becoming ill, he was seen by an *inyanga* (traditional healer) but a voice is claimed to have announced that only Jehovah would be able to heal him. He subsequently became baptized and functioned as a Wesleyan preacher, and was again baptised by Rev WM Leshega. (Sundkler 1976:164-165) He formed his own church in 1911 near Ohlange, Durban, and from 1913 took his flock to the mountain where he baptized, healed and drove out demons.<sup>45</sup> He encouraged industriousness and self-sufficiency in his flock, rejecting the need for dependance and servitude.<sup>46</sup>

The coincidence of Shembe's establishing a church and the rise of the African National Native Congress in 1912 cannot be overlooked. In the wake of the Bambatha rebellion of 1906 and land ownership restrictions that were promulgated under the Native Land Act of 1913, most Zulu felt

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<sup>44</sup> The Nazarites have two main sites, one at Ekuphakameni near Durban the other at Inhlangakazi 150km away to the south.

<sup>45</sup> Shembe was tormented by evil in the form of lions, leopards and skeletons.

<sup>46</sup> Shembe's attitude to work is well known: he believed in industriousness at all times, detested laziness, and encouraged worship. He refused to allow some women to take up employment as domestic servants in white households, as he abhorred servitude, and the consequent neglect of the home by women: 'They had acquired various skills such as carving, pottery, grass-weaving for the making of mats, baskets and other products. He argued that women should therefore, make and sell their own cultural products, to white people in exchange for money.' (Mthethwa 1996:3-4) He was even said to have taught them to weave as a reminder of the worth of their culturally-based skills. Nazarites are entrepreneurs of note who produce their own uniforms, beadwork, basketry and other ceremonial items. His attitudes are conveyed in his Morning Prayer, verse 19-21. (Mthethwa 1996:10)

particularly threatened by escalating racial tensions in Natal. The disappointment that followed World War 1, when political change did not materialize, contributed further to tensions in the region. He began preaching at a time when Zululand was still experiencing the ramifications of the British Invasion of 1879 ‘and a variety of social and political hardships’. (Mthethwa 1996:1) More particularly with the ratification of Union in 1910, black South Africans had hoped that promises regarding the franchise and increased rights would be considered, only to find that their interest were yet again overlooked. Mthethwa therefore considers ILN (as conveyed in their hymnal) ‘as a broad cultural response and resistance to the imposition of outside forces of change through processes such as colonisation, missionisation, education, government legislation and war’. (Mthethwa 1996:1) Vilakazi regards the ILN as one of the many nativistic, revivalist movements providing religiously inspired responses to the stresses of colonization and acculturation (1986:x). It emerges as a form of revitalization, in which individuals perceive some aspects of their culture as being in need of reform, with the result that they invent a new cultural system as part of a reformation.

Shembe I developed a new, albeit syncretic moral and socio-economic order based on aspects of Zulu culture that were compatible with aspects of the Bible (based in part on a literal reading of the Old Testament) and Christianity. In essence Shembe I asserted the African’s claim to the right to interpret the Bible as she/he sees fit, in the belief that white churches are apostate and are mere agents of imperialism under the guise of religion, especially in the cultural sense, having introduced into Christianity elements that are not necessarily Christian but derive from western traditions. (Vilakazi 1986:1) <sup>47</sup> Indigenous cultural traditions and aspects of its belief system, thereby challenging western Christian cultural bias imported by the mission church, dominate Shembe’s church.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> ‘God is praised by Shembe because he encourages Africans to worship Him in their own free and natural way, and not according to the heavy, artificial rules of the Whites’. (Vilakazi 1986:1) In one of their hymns the praise to Jehovah is: ‘He remembered Africa, for he is righteous; He has not forgotten his people for he is righteous. (Sundkler 1971:194)

<sup>48</sup> Select aspects of the Bible or specific figures are upheld. John the Baptist is considered important as he was part of the old order and conducted baptisms, and was linked to an ancestral cult.

Just as Zulu religion is based on ritual and commandments, he amalgamated aspects of these with Christian practice. (Vilakazi 1986:37) As political and religious leadership coincided in Zulu society, Shembe I upheld the authority of the Zulu king, and focused more on God the Father rather than on Christ the son in his reverence.<sup>49</sup> In so doing he simultaneously reinforced Zulu kingship<sup>50</sup> and its associated divine authority, but rejected those kings of the past who had not conducted themselves appropriately, alerting his followers to desist from emulating them.<sup>51</sup>

Challenges to Christian Biblical interpretation and practice abound in Shembe's injunctions. Having been taught, on conversion, to shed the *ibeshu* and the *isidwaba*, Shembe revoked this injunction by citing the Biblical reference which indicates that the first coats worn were of skin and revoked the erstwhile taboo, insisting that members of male and female age grade regiments retain traditional dress.<sup>52</sup> (Vilakazi 1986:37) In particular Shembe rejected the teachings of St Paul, as it was he, not

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<sup>49</sup> The trinity in which the equality of father and son occurs is seen as problematic as it counters Zulu cultural practice and so Shembe favours the Father, reinforcing traditionalist patriarchy. (Vilakazi 1986:20)

<sup>50</sup> He also adopted the long defunct First Fruits ceremony, which both celebrated the authority of and allegiance to the King and God's benevolence, and substituted this for Christian celebrations on the 25<sup>th</sup> December (the Bible providing an analogy with Kings and their rule). On the Sabbath they address the 'dispersed house of the Zulu' (Sundkler 1976:180), and in Hymn 110 he uses the format of a praise song to refer to the leaders who contributed to this great nation which God loves, and asks for God's continued protection. It also reads like an Old Testament text. (Mthethwa 1996:67)

<sup>51</sup> Shembe regrets the role of past leaders who rejected Christianity in the Sabbath Prayer v.21: 'Do not behave like your fathers the Dinganas and the Senzagakhona's, our fathers who hardened their hearts. Jehovah eventually punished them in this manner, now today we bear their sins. So observe Jehovah's Sabbath' (Shembe in Mthethwa 1996:21) In verse 31 he, however, notes that the Zulu were protected by powerful kings, with the result that God liberated them, and again invokes Him as a leader: 'Let us know the ways of our Liberator'. ( Shembe in Mthethwa 1996: 22)

<sup>52</sup> The Shembe member is well versed in the dress codes that are prescribed according to gender, age grade and rank. Particular clothing combinations will be worn at special ceremonies and times, and can be seen as the artistic expression of the Shembe followers. Aspects of the dress that suggest that the traditional dress code has been modified to express liminality and religion are the headband which is worn over the women's beaded *isicolo*. This band is directly associated with the married woman's dress and with the custom of *ukuhlonipha*, when the woman is expected to show complete submission to her husband, her father-in-law and most adult male relatives. This practice is also associated with the authority of the shades in Zulu traditional belief. The shades emerge from the male line and in marriage from the husband's lineage. The headband has until recently been dominated by a cross pattern, which has a Christian origin. The small crosses are interlinked, with at the centre a cross of transparent yellowy-gold coloured beads, representing God or Mvelinqangi. One of the garments worn by male and female members, consists of a white flowing robe resembling a surplice. Its whiteness and lightness is related to the realm of the creator god.

Christ, who spoke of monogamy. Not surprisingly Shembe therefore retained polygyny for ILN followers. Other elements derived from Zulu veneration or cultural practice included the use of *impepho* (a herb burnt by diviners for invoking the ancestors), now used in the church altar, as suggested in the Bible (Exodus 30), as well as the retention of Zulu concepts of the sacred concerning the ancestors, such as transcendence and immanence.<sup>53</sup> The ILN introduced sacred, almost primal dancing<sup>54</sup> and the use of a wooden drum (*isigubu*), widely used among Zionists.<sup>55</sup>

Increasingly in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shembe I has come to be known as a messiah among many of his followers, who regard him as both the ‘promised one’ and as liberator. (Sundkler 1961:280)<sup>56</sup> Referred to later as a prince of Judah who will save Ohlange, where he heals and gives life to the Zulu (Sundkler 1961:284-5), Sundkler maintains that Shembe he functioned as a messiah. This he did only in the sense that, like Christ, he is the black eikon, or ‘in this case the mask of the Black Christ’. (1976:193)<sup>57</sup> Christ too is not identified with *uNkulunkulu* but with *uMvelingqangi*, the preferred name for God among traditionalists. They also regard Shaka as a Zulu deity. (Sundkler 1961:287)

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<sup>53</sup> Shembe was said to have heard a young girl or woman’s voice, ‘singing new and unexpected words’. He heard these after dreaming, or when he walked and meditated, and would have the words and tune recorded. (Sundkler 1976:186) In this his calling was largely akin to that which the sangoma receives.

<sup>54</sup> When one becomes a Nazarite one is allowed to (after several years practice) participate in the sacred dance the *ukusina*, a dance based in part on *ihubo* (regimental chants and dances), which constitute a form of worship, and is preceded by ritual cleansing. (Mthethwa 1996:7) The dance is believed to be a form of cleansing and a process of preparation for heaven. It is said to be angelic and Mthethwa cites several informants who claimed that angels dressed in *ukusina* regalia intervened on the part of the dead.

<sup>55</sup> The Shembe treat this drum as an ‘ark’ or sacred object. (Vilakazi 1986:67)

<sup>56</sup> A verse from hymn 214 proclaims:  
Our Liberator  
We Dingaan’s people  
We have heard him, He has come  
The Liberator has arrived,  
You, Zulus, we have heard him.

<sup>57</sup> An increasingly messianic dimension emerged in some of Shembe I’s writings: in Hymn 85 (v3-4) he asks that he become like the Lord, unafraid of anything despite being persecuted (Mthethwa 1996:59) and in Hymn 103 he asks that he, albeit poverty stricken, be allowed to preach the word to all nations. (Mthethwa 1996:64)

However, despite his suggested acceptance of traditional cultural practice, Shembe was a contentious figure that was often despised by local chiefs, husbands, fathers and even missionaries, who resented his role in increasingly usurping their authority. The black mission elite found his suggestion that Christianity and traditional cultural practice, such as dancing and drumming, be amalgamated, unacceptable. Rather most *kholwa* aspired to western ways and ideologies, rejecting what they perceived to be regressive ‘tribalism’ which they largely rejected in the 1920s, at least until later, under the guise of acculturation.

The ILN, like other AICs, was regarded as largely apolitical, their function intended primarily to offer healing and succour to their communities. However there is ample evidence in their activities<sup>58</sup> and hymns to suggest that the process of healing easily extended to the political sphere. In many instances Shembe I’s self-composed hymns, held to be sacred and treated with respect, confront current issues.<sup>59</sup> Some of his hymns were widely heard on Radio Bantu, such as *Lalela Zulu* in the 1940s, while others were banned by the state in the 1960s, only to be broadcast and sold after 1994. Their banning was to result from the strong nationalistic and even confrontational nature of many of the hymns.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> They were the only church to celebrate Dingane’s day as a day of mourning when sackcloth and ashes were worn, but this practice was later abandoned. (Vilakazi 1986:19) Dingane massacred a party of Voortrekkers for whom they had reclaimed cattle, as a result of which he has long been regarded as the epitome of deceit and betrayal by many Afrikaners.

<sup>59</sup> Hymns by Shembe are contained in *Izihlabelelo zama Nazaretha*, published in 1940. (Sundkler 1961:194) Muller notes : ‘As spiritual and poetic texts, Shembe’s hymns are remarkable for the way in which they weave together Biblical Christianity, traditional Nguni beliefs and expressive forms, and the political context in which Isaiah Shembe and his followers were located. He combined the function of traditional Nguni praise poetry - which was to both critique and honour political leadership - with the expressive form of the Biblical psalms to create a completely new and hybrid cultural form’ articulating ‘deep emotional responses to the historical moment’. (1996:x)

<sup>60</sup> In Hymn 210 reference is made to how the Zulu have been provoked, that their tempers are raised and they are irritated: ‘How will you extinguish [the irritation]?’ (Mthethwa 1996:99). Shembe I also refers to ‘our beast’ which will rise and cast its eye on the enemies, which ‘ate and dispersed all of them’, and Christ is also invoked to stand up and crush the enemy. (Mthethwa 1996:59-60). References to enemies that need to be vanquished, are reflected in verse 23 of the Morning Prayer:  
Walk with us on the path on which we shall travel  
And protect us from the fangs of those enemies of ours (Mthethwa 1996:11)



In Shembe I's Independent Hymns (those not written for specific occasions) there is frequent reference to liberation and the defeat of the enemy (Hymn1v5). <sup>61</sup>In Hymn 5 he sees Christ as a liberator,<sup>62</sup> and in Hymn 226 he exhorts his followers to sacrifice themselves without fear of any mortal laws, striving rather for equality knowing that God makes no distinctions between rich and poor, the chief and the servant. (Mthethwa 1996:105) Further he suggests that they must carry the cross and die for what they were promised (amongst others liberation). (Mthethwa 1996:36) In others, (Hymn17), he entreats his fellow Africans to awake and not despair, despite the fact that 'the shape of subordination' has humbled them, referring to the oppressors as 'the enemies of Jehovah'. (Mthethwa 1996:39) In Hymn 21 he refers to the land and homesteads laid to waste (as a result of conflict and land appropriation), invoking the 'Liberator' and 'God of Adam' to set them free. (Mthethwa 1996:41) He also alludes to images of angels (Hymn 56) that he has seen beating their wings in victory. (Mthethwa 1996:51 and Sundkler 1976:201)

Imagery in his hymns focuses on two aspects - Ekuphakameni (the elated place) where pilgrims visit

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More specifically in verses 4 and 5 of hymn 54 of the Sabbath Prayer, he notes:

He defeated the schemes  
of the conspirators'  
Because His mercy  
Endures forever.

He turned their slavery into  
A kingdom,  
Because His mercy  
Endures forever.' (Mthethwa 1996:24)

<sup>61</sup> 'Today our enemies are disappointed,  
They who ridiculed us,  
While we were still wandering in the wilderness  
Sleeping in the forests.' (Mthethwa 1996:35)

<sup>62</sup> To the congregations,  
congregations of heaven  
About Jesus the Liberator  
Who does not perish Amen, amen, my Lord' (Mthethwa 1996:105)

on a regular basis and on the condition of the people.<sup>63</sup> The former is seen as an edenic place of springs and living water; and the actual hill as a hen of heaven (Sundkler 1961:198), entry to which is gained via *amasango* (gates) by the faithful. (Sundkler 1961:200) There are also many references to nature, its being created by God, its beauty celebrated and its preservation desirable. (Sundkler 1961:194)

Shembe realised the need to have widespread support and called on other groups to join him. He also sought monarchic support for his church and directed his call for conversion and acceptance of his church to the Zulu Royal family (Hymn 116), calling on King Solomon to ‘Behold the glory of Jehovah Is at Ekuphakameni’, where all nations in Africa are invited to rise and bask in the fire of the godhead (Mthethwa 1996:68 and 70) The Zulu royal family has over the years established links with Lutherans<sup>64</sup> and Zionism early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>65</sup>, and increasingly developed links with the ILN, attending their ceremonies and being blessed by their leaders. Solomon was in fact the first Christianised Zulu monarch, embracing Christianity and traditionalism. More recently informants suggest that the monarch visits the ILN to keep their authority in check, reminding them that he is in fact supreme authority of the creator god, and not the ILN leaders. (Goge, personal communication, 2002)

The significance of the ILN, as well as many other AICs, lies in the fact that long before mission church incentives to acculturate, they were instrumental in creating a cross-cultural belief system which embraced nearly all aspects of Zulu cultural practice and belief into a syncretic whole, one in which its followers are accepted as Zulu and embrace aspects of western religious practice. At the

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<sup>63</sup> This indiscriminating voice from ‘heaven’ calls all people (Hymn 147) especially the needy and the poor (Hymn 151), and the infirm (Hymn 153). (Mthethwa 1996:79-81)

<sup>64</sup> In 1898 King Dinizulu, charged with treason, returned from exile on St Helena. A Swedish missionary recalls that on his deathbed (1913) Dinizulu said: ‘Let my people turn to God’. (Sundkler 1976:245-247)

<sup>65</sup> Archbishop Elija Mdlalose, a Zionist ordained in 1915, felt he was directed to serve the Zulu royal house. King Solomon eventually married one of his sisters, thereby further cementing their relationship. (Sundkler 1976:69) The support for Zionism was continued by Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu (1915-1943) and chiefs are said to have eventually chosen to become Zionists to justify, or perhaps reinforce, their roles. (Sundkler 1961:31)

same time its emphasis on traditional cultural practice has gradually been embraced by urbanised followers, prompted in part by various Africanist aspirations, such as those manifest in the post 1994 elections and the emergence of a so-called African Renaissance.

As will be seen, artists reflecting ILN and AIC influences have usually departed from Biblically sourced imagery utilized by *kholwa*, preferring instead to center on images of angels, divine intervention, miracles, healing or the presence of evil forces. They also tend to record AIC practices, incidents, preachers or prophets, reinforcing the centrality of these in their lives. These images are also associated with the tacit subversiveness and Africanisms that were central to AIC practice.

## CHAPTER TWO: Contextualising the rise of art training and patronage

### 2.1 Contemporary art in Africa

While missionaries are justifiably indicted for having contributed to the decline in African culture and religious practice, the impact of industrialization and a capitalist system was far more devastating: in its wake, creating new jobs, a new economic structure, new needs and new desires. These changes also had an inevitable impact on the positioning and nature of artistic creativity on the continent.

For years after colonial penetration into Africa, the creative arts were largely disregarded as inferior to western high art and its associated realist proclivities, and further demonised because of associations with perceived animistic practices. African art was described in terms that ranged from childlike and grotesque to savage, their oral traditions, music and dance as naive, cacophonous or lascivious. (Herskovits 1963: 41)

Indigenous art and religion are thus commonly viewed as victims of the spread of Christianity and Islam,<sup>66</sup> and the political, economic, and cultural developments of the twentieth century. (Hackett 1996: 192) This was an inevitable occurrence, prompted not only by most missionary zeal and abhorrence for all perceived pagan practice and associated objects, but was also due to fragmentation of society. In addition migration, opposition, a lack of interest and cultural fissures that ensued due to economic and political constraints, resulted in many works being destroyed or prohibited.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Islam was also to exert considerable influence over indigenous material culture especially graphic and plastic arts and music, due its iconoclasm that disallowed any graven image. (Herskovits 1963:429)

<sup>67</sup> 'What is the guilt of the missionary? He has been accused of misunderstanding and misinterpreting African culture, of unintelligently denouncing African art as 'idolatrous' and of brutally burning it. This is correct, but it must also be seen in a wider context. The prejudices the missionary brought with him to Africa were not simply Christian, but European prejudices. The missions were mainly established in Africa during the nineteenth century, when European prejudice was at its peak. In those days even the artists saw nothing of interest in Africa' (Beier 1968:5). Europeans regarded themselves as a superior race, because the rate of their 'progress' and the power they

(Hackett 1996:192)

While in parts of Africa religious cult figures and masks were sold to traders or given to missionaries by new Christian converts, there has also been a ‘gradual erosion of belief in the efficacy of carved objects and masks’ which is mainly attributable to the inroads of Christianity over the last century. (Hackett 1996:192) Currently the relative lack of interest in traditional art among many Africans, is regarded as a result of ‘the loss of cosmological and practical relevance of such objects and their attendant cults to life in the cities, and the changes wrought by formal Western-style education, nationalist, particularly socialist governments, changing health care patterns, and the growth of the market economy’. (Hackett 1996:192)

For Africans who went abroad, missionary and colonists’ selective evaluation of their material culture was confirmed when they saw their carvings and other forms of art exhibited only in ethnographic collections as items of the material culture of their people, and not in art museums.<sup>68</sup> It was only in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century that colonial collections began to include the imagery and material culture of the converted, consisting of acculturated neo-western and at times Christian-inspired art, while western collections of African art were relegated to specially designed ethnographic museums.<sup>69</sup>

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wielded seemed to support such a view. (Beier 1968:5) He adds : ‘Seen in this context, the early missionaries’ activities were entirely legitimate. African religions did not appear to them as different views of life, but simply as bewildered, confused attempts to grope for the one truth that Christianity had to offer. The stylizations of African art appeared as the failure of the crude craftsman to represent his objects faithfully. What was there to preserve?’ (Beier 1968:5) Many KwaZulu-Natal missionaries saw to it that remnants of pagan practice and its accompanying material culture were destroyed, but also that the best examples were preserved in ethnographic collections at the missions or abroad. At Mariannhill, such collecting has been ongoing at least from the 1880s, when Fr Hess salvaged some artefacts from prospective converts. (Pientia, personal communication,1995)

<sup>68</sup> Sometimes the appraisal was made explicit in discussion and criticism, at times it was reflected in the unspoken attitudes of Europeans, but it was rarely absent: ‘It is understandable, then, why those Africans who did not reject their heritage were placed on the defensive, apologizing for their own pleasure in their arts where, as was more often the case, they did not conceal it’. (Herskovits 1963:429)

<sup>69</sup> In April 2001 it was noted that a ceramic vessel by Magdalen Odundo, a contemporary ceramist of Kenyan origin, was included among the ethnographic collections housed at the British Museum among so-called ‘tribal art’.

Several factors prompted a change in perception by missionaries and more enlightened colonists. One was the increasing interest in ethnography, briefly outlined further in this section, the other the modernist interest in, and inspiration from African material culture that influenced contemporary Modernists such as the Fauves and German Expressionists who variously acknowledged that formally their work was influenced by aspects of African conceptualism, simplification and their aesthetic appeal. Western artists were equally engaged by the conceptual expressiveness of African art. To them this betokened an ideal elementarism attached to philosophical idealism, countering a western sense of alienation in the wake of industrialization, urbanization and associated atomisation.<sup>70</sup>

The coincidental appearance of several ground breaking texts and events further conveyed and influenced western opinion regarding African art. In 1915 Carl Einstein published his seminal text *Negerplastik* in Munich, and in 1919 Henry Kahnweiler curated the first exhibition of African and Oceanic sculpture. By bestowing on African ‘primitive’ art an aesthetic worth, such enterprise ‘stimulated a reexamination of aesthetic theories that broadened the scope of art history to include the entire range of aesthetic activity’. (Herskovits 1963:431) This 'discovery' ultimately resulted in the recognition of African art as one of the major arts of mankind, thereby restoring the value of African creativity now deemed on a par with that of their conquerors.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> To the Modernist, fraught with a sense of alienation particularly in terms of relations with western materialism, rationalism, urbanization and technological advancement, any culture which appeared to be steeped in a more elemental order, in which religio-cultural dimensions dominated social praxis, was seen as a revered alternative to the estranged relationship they experienced within their own cultural milieu. There were however many misconceptions about African art as little was initially known of their cultures. Suggestions that their works were merely conceptualised renderings of nature gave way to a realization that they were in many ways very realistic. A rarity value was placed on 'old pieces' whereas more contemporary manifestations were regarded as being tainted by problematic foreign acculturation. It was only many years later that the syncretic nature of African art as well as its modern manifestations was to be valued besides the so called classic older objects and styles. The continuities in African art in terms of repetition and seeming copyist activities were only recognised later. (Herskovits 1963:432-434)

<sup>71</sup> Herskovits notes: ‘For African intellectuals, particularly after the Second World War, who in Paris and London were exposed to the idea that for creative expression the artists must seek out the mainsprings of his own cultural tradition, the values laid on African art had immediate relevance. As members of groups denied significant achievement, whose cultures had been consistently depreciated, this was a profoundly moving revelation. This facet

Thus ironically, while Europe began to embrace the traditional art of Africa, Africans were simultaneously beginning to create new art forms directly influenced by their encounter with western colonialism. It is generally considered that contemporary (i.e. westernised) art practice began in Africa in the 1930s when a number of initiatives began in mission based sacred schools of art, in secular art training centres, or as a result of individual enterprise and patronage. Two of the earliest of these initiatives were Achimota College near Accra, Ghana in 1936, and the School of Fine Arts at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda in 1939. It was at the latter that art teacher Margaret Trowell introduced art teaching based on European formal principles, while at the same time encouraging the use of African subject matter. This endeavour was to act as a significant model for several other initiatives throughout Africa, not least in KwaZulu-Natal.

The training outlined above coincided with several other art training initiatives in various areas of Africa, some of it by religious: Susanne Wenger began art training in Oshogbo and Ife, other initiatives followed in the Congo (Kinshasha and Brazzaville), Nigeria (Zaria and Lagos) and Senegal. Religious such as Frere Marc-Stanislas, a Catholic priest, initiated the Ecole St Luc outside Kinshasha in 1943 (later renamed the Academie des Beaux Arts)<sup>72</sup>, and Father Kevin Carroll established a training initiative in Oye Ekiti in Western Nigeria, described in his book *Yoruba Religious Carving* (1967). (Beier 1968:6)

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of African culture, not only accepted but acclaimed, became a symbol of identification, of pride. Beyond this, it led to a growing affirmation of African traditional values, perhaps one of the greatest contributions to a changing Africa'. (1963:431)

<sup>72</sup> In 1946 the Department of Art and Crafts at the Khartoum Technical Institute was founded; in 1951 Laurent Moonens a Belgian artist founded the Academie des Beaux Arts et de Metiers D'Art in Lubumbashi (Zaire). It was later to include the famous workshop/school established in 1944 by Pierre Romain-Desfosses (an experimental school where mainly decorative work was produced). Also in 1951 in Congo, The Centre D'Art Africaine (known as the Poto-Poto School, was founded in Brazzaville Congo by Pierre Lods who attempted 'an African approach', with a good deal of decorative and repetitive art, much of it entering and inspiring the tourist market. In 1953 the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (now the Art Department of Ahmadu Bello University) was founded in the Nigerian city of Zaria, and from 1960 its graduates influenced others throughout the continent. In 1955 the Yaba College of Technology's Department of Art Design and Technology was established in Lagos, Nigeria and in 1959 a Fine Arts School was established there. In 1966 the Manufactures Nationale des Tapisseries was established at Thies, Senegal. (Kennedy 1993:16)

In Southern Africa, to name only a few, the Polly Street Art Centre opened in 1948, Frank McEwen established a workshop for art in Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe) attached to the National Gallery in 1954, Amancio (Pancho) Guedes informally assisted artists in Maputo (then Lourenco Marques) in the 1960s, and workshops by Julian Beinart were held in Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. In Centecow, in the Bulwer district of Natal, Dr Max Kohler began his patronage of Gerard Bhengu in 1928, Sr Maria Pientia Selhorst (of Mariannhill) began art teaching and training apprentices from 1948, Fr Edwin Kinch initiated his patronage of Bernard Gwensa and Ruben Xulu in the late 1950s, and Sr Pauline began training students in advanced carpentry, and from 1934 Fr Paterson initiated a training program at the Anglican mission of Grace Dieu near Pietersburg. Job Kekana later pursued training there, Paterson making a number of designs for him to carve. (Rankin 1991:15) There appears to have been such a plethora of mission and secular training that a healthy rivalry ensued among teachers and religious to have 'their' work included in the many publications on contemporary African art and sacred art in particular, which is discussed later in the dissertation.

In re-contextualizing the role of the missionaries in view of continued critical perceptions, Ulli Beier who lived and lectured in Nigeria for seventeen years, suggested that many African cultures and their art (such as was noted in Benin after the punitive expedition in 1897) were 'degenerate before the decisive European contact', and that their art too was in decline, much as had happened in cultures worldwide at some stage or another. (Beier 1968:3) This argument therefore suggests that a new contemporary art, motivated by new sources and with different functions and an alternate audience was perhaps immanent, and that the perception of the 'erosion' of art by western culture perhaps requires some reconsideration.

While I will later argue that changes in the church contributed to revised perceptions of other cultures, Beier contends that the west's acknowledgment of Africa was partly based on a loss of faith in its own culture and perceived superiority, and a loss of control over its own development. The missionary too became more doubtful (and more conscientious), many missionaries engaging in valuable studies of the African populations they ministered to. Later they began a process of mild



acculturation, which saw the introduction of indigenous music and drumming in the church, and patronised local carvers whose styles were appropriately modified and adapted for religious imagery in the interests of developing ‘a new Christian art’. (Beier 1968:6) The notion of the missionary as ‘saviour’ of the very aesthetic, cultural practice and belief that he was eroding may seem hypocritical, and can only be clarified when seen against the emergent changes in perception that were being addressed by the church.

While critical of mission interventions in artistic practice, Beier noted that ‘the fact remains: African art has been accepted and respected by the mission. Moreover, the Church has become the most important patron of a dying craft’. (Beier 1968:6) The problem of the extent to which such artistic capacities were modified under church patronage, what was ultimately produced and for whom, remains. A widespread perception was that European-run mission workshops had mediocre results. Kennedy notes that as carvers were no longer carving for their original cults or groups, but for Christian contexts, their work lacked intensity, and with few exceptions, such as will be seen in the work at Rorke’s Drift, missionary training, because it was geared towards repetitive work that was destined for a liturgical or sacred function, was problematic. (1991:16) Her contention is somewhat flawed, as several ventures have given rise to exceptional work, and in addition much contemporary art that is thematically sacred has been self-motivated. Her views., somewhat generalizing (and misinformed), will be considered below. As contemporary religion-inspired art has become increasingly self-motivated its sources derive from outside the aegis of the mission church, reflecting more syncretic African religious experience. In this the artwork no longer functions as a signifier of Christianity but as a reflection of lived religio-cultural practice that is multi-layered and complex.

Other writers recognise that new ‘artistic thresholds’ emerged in contemporary African art, in response to various changes and forces that reflect the rupture of the colonial and post-colonial world. Recognising three current trends in contemporary African art: ‘tradition-inspired, modernist and popular’ (Mudimbe in Hackett 1996:287), Mudimbe sees tradition-inspired and modernist art by trained artists as being concerned with the creation of beauty (the second group more particularly searching for a ‘new aesthetic’), while he sees Christian religious art and tourist art as situated

between the tradition-inspired and the modernist. (1991:280) In this, the latter is more akin to popular art, which is more 'locally oriented' often conveying an important historical and political narrative. Further, religious inspired artists tend to be self-taught and less motivated by the international market.

By the early 1980s art training and development in KwaZulu-Natal was largely controlled by secular authorities, and virtually all mission-based art specialization and training had ceased. Training in urban centres was sporadic and the quality of work varied. By the 1990s education was open to all and prospective art students were allowed entry into previously 'white' universities and technikons. By the turn of the century a new body of artists emerged who reflected on and had absorbed international currents in art, while at the same developing locally specific aspects in their work. Those artists who still used religion-based imagery decreased, but a predominantly rural-based and self-taught body of artists has persisted in this thematic emphasis.

Besides the role of missionaries in art training, other factors in art education and the rise of new disciplines such as anthropology, contributed further to the development of contemporary art and perceptions regarding its increasingly significant role in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2.2 The interface between art, education and religion**

One of the main incentives to invite missionaries to the region was to gain from the educational benefits they offered. For missionaries education at the missions served two functions: pedagogy and exposure to Christian ideals. Missionaries recognized the importance of education, both in the broader sense of acquiring technical and agricultural skills, and also in the narrow sense of school education. Education included the three r's, in addition to language, morality and culture, all of which were western in cultural and ideological bias. Missionary education also introduced new potentials and the possibilities of employment, money and new pleasures. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century similar

curriculae were followed at most mission schools.<sup>73</sup>

Missionary control of black education in Natal was partly due to the fact that early governments in South Africa had no interest in providing or financing such services. (Marquard 1948:73) The state was only later to contribute subsidies to these schools, and recognise the advantages in directing education policy, controlling its administration and fostering separatist ideologies in an organised schooling system, which became entrenched from 1953 with the passing of the notorious Bantu Education Act. (Marquard 1948:73)

Besides the contribution of other disciplines such as anthropology and ethnography in fostering an interest in and understanding of the Zulu, and in providing some art patronage, the role of education authorities, both secular and religious, further advanced the development and shaping of art, often with a bias towards religious themes. Evidence regarding such development is abundant in the pages of the *Native Teachers' Journal* (NTJ), which first appeared in October 1919, only a few years before the first anthropological journal, *Bantu Studies* (1921). The journal was intended to share knowledge and exchange ideas and experiences, both through the dissemination of the journal as well as at conferences organised by it.

Jack Grossert, a later Art Inspector for Natal, notes that as early as the 1850s it was felt that 'some form of industrial or trade instruction' should form part of the syllabus for Zulu pupils to give vocational training enabling them to gain useful employment and to contribute to the 'civilizing' function of education in the region. (Grossert 1968:58-59) These courses were intended to eventually include 'art and free expression in any suitable media obtainable, together with the practice of traditional crafts'. Such ideals were however only to be ratified in 1916. (Grossert 1969:58-59 and Cottrell 1929: 67) By 1855 manual work was introduced into the curriculum and included clay modeling, grasswork, mat-weaving, wood carving, agriculture, carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring,

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<sup>73</sup> At four of the more advanced secondary schools, namely Amanzimtoti Training School (later known as Adam's College), Inanda School for Girls, the Edendale Training Institution and the Pietermaritzburg Training School, the curriculum was similar and included arithmetic, Biblical and secular history, geography, zoology, English grammar and reading in English and Zulu. (Etherington 1971:271)

and sewing and domestic work for girls. Such was the calibre of the work produced, that in 1898 mission industrial schools were prohibited from selling their products for fear of competition with white traders.

In 1904 J B Sargent advocated the introduction of 'Native Crafts into the curricula of all High Commission Territories' that was probably only put into practice in 1916. One of the objects of the manual work course was to revive what were termed the 'dying arts' among the Zulus. (Dumbrell 1919: 44) In the first publication of the NTJ (October 1919) the educator H J E Dumbrell wrote an article, 'A Plea for Handwork in our Native Schools', continued in the January 1921 NTJ, in which he referred to the Montessori educational system as the basis for his ideas. He noted further that as at least eighty percent of pupils would earn their living performing manual activity, it was important that their innate skills for 'manipulation and construction as evidenced in their clay-work, constructing wagons, fashioning shields and carving spears, should be developed. (Dumbrell 1921: 44-45) Girls too were seen as adept in weaving, making pots and other handwork, which further developed co-ordination and motor skills. Dumbrell also noted that children were able to sell their goods profitably, often paying for their schoolbooks with the proceeds, and in the process creating a market for their goods. (Dumbrell 1921: 44-45) Aware of the poverty in rural areas and the need for manual skills, these courses were regarded as educational, practical, and economically relevant.

While students excelled at crafts, drawing was deemed to be particularly poor at Native schools in Natal in the 1920s, due in part to the lack of trained teachers and the paucity of materials. In 1920 the editor of the NTJ observed that drawing at schools was intended to train accuracy of observation, and enable students to express their thoughts, record facts, and to provide a pleasant means of recreation, all further contributing to art appreciation among pupils. (Dumbrell 1920: 2-4) Mission schools were adamant that they would improve art teaching, well aware of the conceptual, imaginative and creative skills that would be developed in their pupils. Such was the increase and calibre of craft production eventually, that many schools contributed work to the Empire Exhibition in 1924 at Wembley, London, including 'articles associated with Native primitive life' as well as 'changing forms of more educated Native life', presumably the chairs, shawls and other articles mentioned as

well as ‘Native pottery’ and ‘paintings of Native Houses and local scenery’. (James 1925: 10-12)<sup>74</sup>

There can be little doubt that these early initiatives, in manual and art training, began to have repercussions for black pupils. As will be seen later, artists such as Gerard Bhengu drew on these rudimentary school based skills that were subsequently developed by enlightened patronage. However no really significant art instruction occurred at ‘native schools’ in Natal until the formulation of a more defined syllabus, and then only when more qualified teachers were available (a result of training by Sr Pientia at Mariannahill and teachers from institutions such as Ndaleni). This occurred from the late 1940s and 1950s, only to be restricted somewhat soon after the establishment of a separate Bantu Education Department (1953) when art was included in the syllabus for primary schools but no longer allowed as a matriculation subject.

It was, however, through education that a great degree of ideological control was exerted on the Zulu pupil. Colonialist education was steeped in European cultural practice, reflected in the literature read, methodologies utilised and language of instruction. What resulted was a body of educated mediators who functioned between the colonialist government and the Zulu. It was also in the school context that some of the most sustained indoctrination of a Christian religious nature occurred. (Slemon 1995:49)

By 1919 the position of ‘native schools’ was precarious. Most of them were either solely mission run or were later partly Government-aided. While the latter were expected to continue for some time to come, there were indications that the state eventually wanted to take these over as well, when religious instruction would be conducted based on a Government approved syllabus (James 1920:16). At the time education and the proselytizing function of the church were synonymous. Again the NTJ provides ample evidence of this synthesis.

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<sup>74</sup> By 1925 the NTJ included a detailed review in which James commended teachers noting that their ‘people’ were ‘..endowed with certain powers of development and self-expression’ which would have positive results: ‘ There will be a deeper interest and a more sympathetic attitude from many’. (James 1925:11-12)

In the first publication of the NTJ (1919), several precedents were set. A prayer appeared on the first page in which pupils were asked to dedicate themselves and their education to God, as well as to lead exemplary lives. To be educated and *kholwa* was seen as synonymous: religious instruction was obligatory in all ‘native’ schools in Natal and the teacher’s task was to instruct the pupil in western educational methods and to embrace Judeo-Christian principles.<sup>75</sup> Thus even without being *kholwa*, the black student in search of a sound education was invariably subject to a considerable degree of exposure to Christian narratives and their implicit moral directives. In the same issue of the NTJ, the African teacher was identified as a pioneer whose task was divinely inspired: ‘God’s whisper has come to you to be the pioneers in the advance of a great people’. (Moore-Smith 1919:1) In addition the centrality of Christianity was reinforced at the annual winter schools.<sup>76</sup>

For white students this affinity was to later result in Christian National Education, associated more particularly with the segregationist state supporting Dutch Reformed Church, which remained in force from c1948 until the early 1990s when the long disputed culturally biased religious dominance in education was reviewed and replaced by a secular ethos.

The NTJ provides numerous references that underline the centrality of Christian teaching in education. At a Winter School held in 1920 at Adam’s Mission (Amanzimtoti), inspectors of Native schools conducted an opening religious service where it was noted that ‘the ideals of Christian Social Service were paramount’, and that the whole machinery of the Education Department existed to ‘turn out Natives of high character and noble aims’, other speakers discussing the moralising function

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<sup>75</sup> Early examples of the practical celebration of Christianity among rural Zulu was also discussed in the NTJ in 1921 by the Rev Phillips, who pleaded for a more joyful Christianity when he compared the celebration of Christians and ‘heathens’ at a rural wedding. Taking it for granted that most teachers were Christian, he maintained that teachers had a duty to encourage a sense of community and community service and foster love between neighbours who adhered to different religions. (Phillips 1921:150-151)

<sup>76</sup> At the annual winter school for teachers in 1919, held at Mariannahill, teachers were entertained with plays in Zulu, which included one on the ‘Prodigal Son’. (James 1920:41) Such plays were regularly composed and performed on feast and holy days, together with newly composed musical scores. Even art teacher and religious Sr Pientia was renowned for her original scripts and plays.

of educators.<sup>77</sup> (James 1920:16)

By 1927 a 'scripture syllabus' had been drawn up for teaching in all Government Primary Schools and was recommended also for state-aided schools. Attached to that intended for Sub-Standard A, which consisted of Old Testament tales from the Creation to the story of Joseph and the New Testament accounts on the early life of Jesus, was a section on 'Moral Lessons' which included tidiness, manners, truthfulness, courage, kindness, fairness and other 'moral stories'. For Standard one, moral lessons included justice, gratitude, fairness, courage, and self-control, and for Std 3 obedience, order, perseverance, honour, prudence and work were added to the list. (Malcolm 1921:174-176), thereby reinforcing the association between Christianity and appropriate behaviour. Teachers were also invited to contribute to a songbook for native schools, and it was suggested that a committee of teachers, inspectors and religious decide on the choices proffered. Included would be 20 sacred songs in Zulu, 20 Negro songs (secular and religious), and other secular songs. At least a quarter of the songs would be religious.

It was not unusual for the first column of each volume of the Journal to consist of a sermon or moralizing article. Significantly some of these evidenced the paralleling of Christ's martyrdom and his doctrine with the oppression experienced by black South Africans. In 1927 M J Nabinde noted that Christ set an example and had 'solved the problem of living for us. He met hard and painful experiences, but never was harmed by any of them'. (Nabinde 1927:1) Christ was thus early cited as a martyr and victim who resisted humiliation, oppression and enmity, calling on all to accept opposition and one's lot, to which Nabinde added that this waiting has an anticipated end, conveyed in his comment 'we want rest and change'. (Nabinde 1927:3)<sup>78</sup> The link between justice and belief

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<sup>77</sup> A Dr Taylor later gave a lecture on the life of Christ, and other addresses included 'Teaching of Scripture and Morals'. Other speakers discussed prohibition, the need to see Christ as the 'ideal teacher' who inculcated love and sympathy, and the need to inculcate a 'Christian outlook' in all teaching, if the 'natives were to progress'. Other debates included a heated one on *lobola* and another on the emancipation of native women. (James 1920:11 and 13)

<sup>78</sup> This sermon was followed by one on 'Social Ideals' by Bernard Huss of Mariannhill, which was a slightly veiled talk on socialism, a universal brotherhood, a critique on inequality among the races interspersed with biblical references. (Huss 1927:5)

was evident when J E K Aggrey (well known American educationist sent to Africa to examine mission education) came to South Africa in 1921, and his address at Lovedale college was included in the NTJ. In it he expressed his abhorrence of injustice and encouraged blacks to take ‘God’s chance; something that has a purpose in it for the good of mankind’ (Malcolm quoting Aggrey 1921:177), hoping that South Africa would become the best that it could be.

One might assume that the articles in the NTJ would merely uphold Judeo-Christian mores and narratives, yet some articles in the NTJ were surprisingly balanced, addressing the interface between Christianity and Zulu belief. The second issue of the Journal contained current anthropological writings by the renowned scholar and religious, A T Bryant, on ‘The religion of the Zulus’ (referred to in Chapter 1). Bryant argued for respect for Zulu beliefs which he indicated were no less credible than those of Christians (eg hoofs in hell and angels with wings).<sup>79</sup> (1920: 44) The possible links between ‘native custom’ and Christian religion were frequently debated in the NTJ, again in 1920 by E M C Msimang (a teacher at the Edendale Training College, Pietermaritzburg), who recognised that while it was ‘the duty’ of every teacher to give pupils instruction in the Christian religion, certain customs practiced at home needed to be addressed and the position adopted by the teacher spelled out. (1920:148-149) This was important as customs such as polygyny, *ukugena* (marriage to one’s husband’s brother when widowed) and *ukuhlonipa* (respect by a woman for her husband’s family), *ukuhlobonga* (illicit sex before marriage) and others still prevail, reflecting the reality that the Zulu are ‘a people who have one set of customs imposed on us by our race history and another by

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<sup>79</sup> Bryant indicated that the views in his text are not his but represent simply ‘the strivings after truth of the unaided Zulu intellect, whose conclusions we are here endeavouring to fathom and to understand’. (1920:44) This must be seen as a rather apologetic preface, doubtless to placate conservative readers and possibly protect his own position and that of his order. Bryant maintained that far from being godless the Zulu are in fact endowed with ‘the compactest little religion conceivable, with creed and cult, priesthood and gods complete’. (1920:44) They recognized an ‘ethereal double’ approximating the soul, (spirit or personality), known as *an isiTunzi*. The *isiTunzi* at death is severed and becomes an *iDlozi* (a shade or disembodied spirit) which does not pass on to heaven or hell but remains on earth to be remembered at the *uku-buyisa* (or calling back) that is held every year. This applies only to males who were family heads. The *iDlozi* can be turned into or entered into a harmless animal or a snake. Readers were however alerted to the fact at the outset that they should regard the text as ‘purely an ethnological study’ and that the *uNkulunkulu* here referred to was not the ‘God of Christianity’ but simply the *uNkulunululu* of Zulu mythology, the remotest ‘god’ or great father. (Bryant 1920:45 and 46)



Christianity' (Msimang in NTJ, 1920:149). Anticipating issues debated by the church throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Msimang felt that the solution lay in casting out those that were 'bad' and retaining others that can be 'developed to become Christian customs', suggesting too that in so doing they could remain 'natives' and not 'become Europeans'. (1920:149)

These early references to debates on syncretism between Zulu and Christian or at least the acknowledgement of the relevance of such practice, is of particular interest, as it underlines the emergence of a continuing debate on the ways in which hybridity occurred or was mooted, even among *kholwa*. Appearing as it does in the NTJ, is indicative of the relevance of such debate, and that solutions were already in place. As noted earlier, such debate had been initiated by enlightened missionaries, and is to this day central to ongoing debates in Africa on acculturation and inculturation. It will also be seen how separatist churches and sects, which have from the outset selectively drawn on traditional and Christian religion in practice, readily adopted a syncretistic approach.

Education in Natal continued to reflect this debate and duality. Art in education, however, was relegated to an inferior role, at least up until the 1960s when extra educational art training ventures emerged to challenge the dearth of art education in the region and South Africa as a whole. The new art programmes sought to improve the calibre of art teaching and to distinguish between the production of craft and western inspired fine art. The role of the missions or mission-affiliated bodies was central to this development.

### **2.3 Ethnography and Anthropology**

Since the Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the western world has experienced a surge of interest in other cultures, prompted partly by the escalation of imperial colonial enterprise. Subsequently in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were new doubts in the western world, prompted by a questioning of evolutionary theories of progress and the superiority of the west. As a result there was an increasing appreciation of the complexity and character as well as aesthetic expression of so-called primitive

societies, which contributed to ideas of cultural relativism. (Hammond-Tooke 1997:9)

This coincided with a significant surge in new disciplines, such as ethnology and anthropology that attempted to decipher and explore other cultures. Both disciplines contributed substantially to an interest in African material culture and belief systems. Prior to the advent of anthropology as a discipline, many amateur ethnographers, such as travelers, missionaries and colonial officials, contributed to the collection and interpretation of ethnographic data in South Africa, their knowledge of other cultures far surpassing that of colonial officials. (Radcliffe-Brown 1922:38-39) Missionaries in particular were in more direct and sustained relationship with indigenes, and hence an understanding of recipient cultures was often deemed essential to their proselytizing endeavours, enabling them to know what to embrace or reject in their subject cultures.

While these disciplines led to a greater understanding of the value, integrity and capacity of the Zulu, they perhaps also skewed their interpretation, in that they, initially at least, contributed to a static view of culture, mostly ignoring the absorption of western colonial aspects. In many ways, however, anthropology echoed colonial relations in reproducing colonial strata in society and implicitly the superiority of the west. (Slemon 1995: 47) In this the study of the Zulu became little more than a scientific 'object of scholarly knowledge' (Slemon 1995: 48) They also provided the state and missionaries with relevant information which facilitated eventual colonial administrative control and authority, and helped in establishing the nature of indigenous law, in succession disputes and in determining native policy. (Hammond-Tooke 1997:15 and Radcliffe-Brown 1922:38)

The early decades of this century, saw the emergence of a golden age of anthropological research with eminent South African anthropologists such as Isaac Shapera, Monica Wilson, Hilda Kuper, Eileen Krige (renowned for her book 'Social System of the Zulus' (1936)), A T Bryant<sup>80</sup> and many others, producing internationally recognized contributions to the field of anthropology (Hammond-

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<sup>80</sup> The inclusion in the NTJ of an essay by the renowned Mariannhill priest and Witwatersrand lecturer, AT Bryant in the first volume of the Journal in 1919 systematically traced the origin of the Zulu and also upheld the position and authority of their belief system. (Bryant 1919: 9-16)

Tooke 1997:2). Their intentions, structural functionalist in essence, were to record ‘as full a description as possible of all aspects of the culture of the people with whom they dealt’. (Hammond-Tooke 1997:2) Well aware that their subjects were hardly culturally intact and that many customs and institutions were rapidly disappearing, they set about painstakingly recording their findings in, among others, the newly established journal *Bantu Studies* which first appeared in 1921.

The earliest known patronage of an artist as ethnographic illustrator was the largely self-taught artist Gerard Bhengu who from the mid 1920s was assisted in his training by Dr Max Kohler. An amateur ethnologist, Kohler published several volumes on Zulu beliefs and culture, illustrated by Bhengu. Such art patronage was vital in reinforcing Zulu culture, and as will be seen, Bhengu easily moved between images for this and Christian patronage. In 1930, Prof NJ van Warmelo was appointed Government Ethnologist attached to the Department of Native Affairs. Many of the latter department’s employees became amateur ethnologists in their own right, such as Mr Williams who introduced Hezekile Ntuli to the Natal Museum where he received commissions, and Siegfried Bourquin, an employee of the Department of Native Affairs, who photographically documented Zulu ceremonies over a thirty-year period and at times patronised Gerard Bhengu by purchasing his work in lieu of rental for provincially-owned property. (Bourquin, personal communication, 1992)

From the early 1940s, Dr Killie Campbell, an amateur ethnologist based in Natal, was patron to several artists over the years, her interest in Zulu culture stemming initially from her parent’s anthropologist friends. She drew on Gerard Bhengu to replicate historically significant images, customs, rituals and images of Zulu figures. Many anthropologists such as Katesa Schlosser, and E J de Jager, among others, assisted in sustaining this focus on contemporary artistic patronage and development through their interest, documentation and numerous publications.

Thus together with an educational bias towards Christianity and the development of new disciplines that initiated new perspectives and increased interest in African art and culture, the climate in South Africa was well situated to engender new contemporary art form that initially reflected these emphases.

## CHAPTER THREE: The church and art patronage in KwaZulu-Natal

### 3.1 Missions and art

While in the rest of Africa missionary intervention resulted in the decrease of production by sculptors for works associated with secret societies, ancestral and other cults, in South Africa a less pronounced impact on the arts occurred, at least initially. Here few objects were produced for ritual or religious practice, and those that were, such as the *ukhamba*, for ritual beer drinking, were hardly deemed offensive. External manifestations associated with Zulu belief are varied, as Zulu cosmogony is centered on belief in a creator god who is seldom directly addressed, while ancestors are seen as the links between man and this metaphysical realm. Thus objects linked to Zulu religious belief and practice would be the home and its sacred realm the *umsamo*; the *ukhamba* and *uphiso* and their role in intercessionary access to the *idlozi*, and even items such as the various *induku* (ceremonial sticks), the *iqiki* (headrest) and the *ithungu* (milk pail). Many of these articles and structures continue to be made, utilised by traditionalists and some non-traditionalists, mostly those who live in rural areas. What was discarded on being embraced as *kholwa* was primarily dress and ritual. On a positive note, therefore, the divide between *kholwa* and *amabhinca* (traditionalist) in material cultural production was hardly perceptible, resulting in continuities in traditional creative practice in the region.

What gradually emerged from the mission context was a new westernised art form that was in part a reflection of newly acquired faith and associated cultural contact, but that had little rootedness in traditional art forms associated with belief. Some of the teachers of this new creativity embraced diverse idioms, both European and African, which they felt approximated a neo-African reductive conceptualism that was appropriate to the narrative capacities already manifest in the work of their students. Initially little attempt was made to retain any elements of African material culture or religious practice, but there were exceptions, as will be seen, where local materials and an African idiom were upheld and at times incorporated into mission based work.

The art that emerged was also reflective of limitations in mission and settler perspectives on art. As noted earlier, most missionaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century Natal were of staunch Protestant origin in which the ostentatious use of imagery of any kind was not acceptable in their liturgy and only cautiously used in church decoration and architecture. This derives from a fundamental conception of the Christian life as reflecting moral nature: ‘Moral in this sense, means simplicity of life, as contrasted with the opulence of church and state, associated with speculative knowledge and with alleged magical power in images and symbols’. (Dillenberger 1989:10) This attitude derived initially from the Wycliffe and Lollard traditions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which influenced the readings of continental Protestantism in England, in which scripture provided direct models for life.<sup>81</sup>

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this attitude was also linked to class division. Dillenberger notes that the Lollard and Puritan objections to images and the visual arts also resulted from the belief that the arts belonged to ‘an upper-class life in both church and state’ and consequently condemned art ‘as promoting luxury, avarice, and vainglory.’(1989:11) The resultant virtual iconoclasm, one of the markers that distinguished Protestants from Catholics, persisted in much of the colonial missionary enterprise.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Dillenberger notes that: ‘.. in the Lollard tradition scriptural statements provided direct models for the life of the contemporary church. Moreover, each individual’s personal, unique relation to the text was considered appropriate for discerning its meaning. While the continental reformers also stressed the centrality of scripture for understanding the locus and nature of faith, for them, again with the exception of the Anabaptists, scripture was neither a necessary model for the life of the church, nor personally or privately interpreted. Scripture was interpreted in the continental church with the help and guidance of tradition’. (Dillenberger 1989:9)

<sup>82</sup> Henry VIII had suppressed the monasteries, and confiscated their art liturgical articles. As a result of

While Anglican's later sanctioned some art for use in their churches, it was always to play a secondary role as it represented the 'older ordering of the life of the church', and was not regarded as a central expression of religious perception. (Dillenberger 1989:15) As a result Dillenberger claims that in effect English Christianity did not have a tradition in the visual arts by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the colonists to impart to subject nations in the colonies. (1989:20) it was only in the Victorian era that some religious art with popular appeal began to appear and only at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that English colonies began to produce paintings with religious themes. Images and motifs from the Victorian era were typified by a narrative realism and sentimentality that in some quarters persists to this day. In Europe, and particularly in Germany, several traditions of a proto Baroque realism were continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in some Protestant and almost all Catholic churches.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was no colonial painting tradition to speak of in South Africa, art being mainly produced by traveler-artists such as Frederick I'Ons, Thomas Baines and Thomas Bowler. Art imported into the colonies consisted mainly of functional ware such as porcelain and silverware, articles that elevated settler lifestyle above the banalities of the pioneering endeavour. A tradition of landscape and portraiture emerged in colonial Natal based on predilections established in England, and later influenced by emergent Modernist elements in select artist's work in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the missions the use of narrative art (for liturgical purposes) persisted.

Despite the availability of historical records from some missions in KwaZulu-Natal, it has been difficult to find many references to the visual material used in proselytizing by protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. Much material used was based on cheaply reproduced images that were easily worn through usage, and discarded. The Rev Scriba (a Lutheran pastor) showed me an illustrated Bible (c188...) with images by the well known Romantic artist Julius Schnorr von

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this destruction, both as part of an iconoclastic ethos and for revenue, virtually no art was accessible to the ordinary layperson in the churches as had previously been the case. In Protestant Europe a general suspicion of the visual arts in the church ensued, with both Erasmus and Luther convinced that the visual imagination was suspect. Reformed protestants held rather that the 'moral nature of humans was to be addressed'. (Dillenberger 1989:11)

Carolsfeld, with dramatic etched images that centered on key images from the Bible such as *The Flight into Egypt* (**Figure 1**), and *Jacob sees the heavenly guide in a dream* (**Figure 2**). Wholly Eurocentric in their translation of Biblical figures, the images would have appealed to missionaries (and converts) because of their evocative quality alone, and were dramatized to emphasize their moralizing purpose. A Mrs Wilkinson, wife of the Reverend Wilkinson, Anglican minister at Kwamagwaza, gives one of the earliest accounts of the use of imagery (1882) within the context of mission enterprise. She notes, in reference to the mission church, that it was 'planned like Rickinghall' and included a triple lancet window at the East end with a crucifixion at the centre, all in imported stained glass, with imagery which she describes as follows:

'Simon the Cyrenian bears the cross on one side, and Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian taking Jeremiah out of the dungeon on the other; at the west end, over the door, the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch; and three windows on either side filled with cathedral glass'. (Wilkinson 1882:156)

The selection of these themes is significant: the inclusion of black persons central to Biblical narratives would immediately indicate to the Zulu parishioners that they were deemed historically significant and held in high regard because of their actions. They further acted as significant models of duty, morality and humanity. She comments further on the reception of these works by kholwa in the area:

'The native Christians at Kwamagwaza were much pleased at our introducing into our stained glass window the three African subjects referred to. They were delighted to know that on the only occasions upon which Africans are spoken of in Holy Scripture they are represented as being engaged in good works'. (Wilkinson 1882:157)

Simon of Cyrene is conventionally regarded as a symbol of selflessness, conversion and devotion, while the Ethiopian Ebed-Melech represented self-sacrifice, and the Ethiopian eunuch, dedication. It was the latter who asked Christ whether salvation was for him as well (which was affirmed), thereby further reinforcing his relevance in this context. But while most figures are associated with the suppression of the will and self for the benefit of others, or with conversion, the actions of the protagonists also appear to reinforce a sanctioning of labour and subservience. Ultimately, however,

the appeal of the windows lay in the fact that the Zulu were able to identify with fellow Africans, a reason often proffered later by missionaries who patronised black artists or insisted on African protagonists in their imagery.<sup>83</sup>

Another early example of religious imagery in a Swedish Lutheran church was recently found at the mission church of Ntunjambili, near Empangeni, the centre of a formerly bustling missionary hospital complex. While Lutheran mission churches in South Africa (unlike their more elaborate Swedish ones), are usually devoid of anything other than rudimentary embellishments, such as a plain wooden cross, this church has remnants of an oil painting that was suspended over the doorway behind the altar. Only the upper part of the image survives, consisting of Christ flanked by two disciples, but there may originally have been more disciples lower down in the format. The Rev Goge, a Lutheran who ministered in the region, recalls having heard that the altar (of which only a few pieces remain), came from Sweden in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as did the painting. (Goge, personal communication, 2000) The image is painted in a typical neo-romantic realist tradition that was widespread in Europe at the turn of the century, in which a bearded Christ is depicted as Aryan, with light hair and aquiline features..

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<sup>83</sup> The use of images of the Martyrs of Uganda is widespread in Africa. In KwaZulu-Natal an enamel image of the Martyrs, produced in Germany in the 1960s appears in one of the nave chapels at the Inkamana abbey church, near Vryheid in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, while George Kubeka painted the martyrs for a church near Hluhluwe.



A culturally alien quality initially also dominated the Catholic and Anglican mission church in colonial Natal: ‘The anomaly is dramatized in some mission stations and parishes by imported statues of lifelike painted plaster. Devoid of artistic merit even by western standards, these curiosities are more reminiscent of Mediterranean polytheism than of the New Testament. Widely presented in the dazzling garb of foreign wealth and power, Christianity appears as a superior tribal religion striving to displace, and substitute for, the traditional religions of the peoples.’ (Hillman 1993: 18) Despite the widespread use of such imagery in Natal missions, such condemnatory views were widely held in Europe (and later South Africa too) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century by figures from both Protestant and Catholic bodies. The Catholic reformer Leon Bloy called contemporary pictures of the saints ‘inferior representations in the poorest taste’, and Catholic missionaries such as Thomas Ohm, deplored the ‘...coffee pictures of the heart of Jesus and Mary that are found so frequently in the missions’. (Lehmann 1969:17) As will be seen, enlightened missionaries soon challenged this mass produced art, drawing on local African artists instead to produce more compelling art.

Another popular source for religious imagery was to be found in the mass-produced illustrated religious tracts (**Figure 3**) and imagery used within both the Catholic and Protestant mission context, and also doubtless in the homes of colonists where illustrated biblical texts were often found, rather than in churches. Many of these were popular images, produced in liturgical workshops, while others derived from fine art copies.

An illustrated Zulu catechism used in the Catholic missions includes various images from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic tradition, yet it continued to be reproduced until at least 1965. It was this that provided a direct source for copyist work by artists such as Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu (which will be referred to later in Chapter 3). Several books in the Monastery library at Mariannhill suggest that their illustrations were used as examples for copyist tracings for murals, probably by Br Ludger or Anton Schmidt. Among those copied were images from Joseph von Fuhrich’s woodcuts illustrating his book, *Die Geistige Rose*. Produced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Munich, they were clearly influenced by Nazarene and late Romantic art. These images, among others, inspired the

murals depicted after 1882 at Mariannahill and its outstations. More recently, too, modernised illustrated catechisms have also been influential in work produced in the region.

Besides imported imagery, the missions soon began to produce their own imagery, albeit loosely derived from European prototypes, and also began to gradually function as patrons of the arts. As will be seen, this development was directly linked to changing perceptions, political and social change and developments within the church.

### **3.2 Early mission-inspired art**

As protestant missionaries had feared earlier, Catholicism was to persuade and proselytize by example and visual splendour. While a Catholic presence existed in Natal from about 1850 for the benefit of white colonists, a mission to the Zulu was first initiated in 1855, only to be abandoned within a year. (Brain 1975:27). Meeting with infinitely more success, the Mariannahill mission was established outside Pinetown in Natal in 1882, by Trappists led by Father, later Abbot, Franz Pfanner. They set about almost immediately with elaborate plans to build relevant structures and to embellish them with murals (dry painting), altars, sculptures and liturgical furniture. (Leeb-du Toit 1984:211)

Abbot Pfanner soon drew on local Zulu to assist them in their enterprise. The Trappists considered visual examples of biblical narratives as a key source of inspiration for the black communities they served. It must be remembered that they originated as a contemplative order (Trappists being closely allied to Cistercians), which strictly subscribed to the Benedictine Rule. They made no direct attempt to convert local Zulu, but subscribed to the motto 'Ora et Labora' - prayer and work - content to accept invitations to those areas where arable land was available and where chieftains desired educational benefits. The Trappists cultivated fields, built dwellings and eventually a large Monastery Church (St Charles Borromeo – completed in 1892) was built and decorated (with paintings by Br Otto Mader), to house both priests and laity. Their emphasis on order and

architectural splendour was also meant as a cultural prototype, not necessarily intended to be emulated, but regarded as inspirational to the Zulu community and congregation. This was followed by several outstations and eventually a highly ornate St Joseph's Cathedral (1907) at Mariannhill itself, decorated with murals by Anton Schmidt and Br Ludger.

While local Zulu chieftains directed persistent requests to the Trappists to establish educational institutions for their people, they were loath to allow any further cultural transformation, discouraging conversion. (Brain 1975:164) Based therefore on the size of their congregation, not of converts but rather adherents, by 1887 Mariannhill was numerically the largest abbey in the world, and no fewer than ten schools and outstations had been founded in response to the appeal for education. (Dahm 1950:57)<sup>84</sup> Their schools were multiracial from the outset and the local Zulu were immediately drawn into the activities of the mission in providing a much-needed labour supply.

From about 1907 work began on the construction of a cathedral designed by Br Nirvard Streicher. The proto-Romanesque St Joseph's Cathedral and most of the outstations were elaborately decorated in foliate motifs typical of Germanic churches, while images of angels and Biblical narratives often in a neo-Nazarene realist style were central motifs. **(Figure 5)** In addition elaborate stained-glass windows, neo-Gothic altars, plaster casts influenced by the Beuron school and Maria Laach liturgical art centre, and wooden and plaster sculptures from other German schools of sacred art were selectively included. **(Figure 4)** With these, the Mariannhill churches sought to impress the splendour of an essentially western Christian heritage on the African proselyte. One can only speculate about the impact of such work, but as will be seen below in the work of Gerard Bhengu,

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<sup>84</sup> The input of local Zulu and the attitude of the Trappists is revealed in the following excerpts: 'The Trappists have well sustained the reputation for enterprise and industry ... At the Monastery I found the same scene of activity - buildings in course of erection, shops in full work, and schools where the scholars (both native and European) seemed happy and contented, and making good progress under the careful tuition provided for them... The buildings in course of erection create a considerable demand for labour, and masons, carpenters and others are busily employed in completing workshops, stores and a church of large dimensions.' (Anonymous, The Natal Record 15 January, 1888, 1V year, no 38:12) At the time a photographic studio had also recently been established. Since its inception in 1882 Mariannhill education was mixed and children learnt songs in Zulu and English, and its interracial policy was often highlighted, as in a report in 1888 entitled 'The Ethiopian again' which relates how a Trappist Father took with him a 'Youthful Kaffir' to the Papal Jubilee festivals to be held in Rome, having to defend the young Zulu from the prejudice of fellow passengers on the sea voyage to Europe. (Anonymous (a)1888: 28-29)

stereotypical figures of the devout, hands held in prayer as well as tract-derived imagery such as the bleeding heart, were soon copied.

The floral motifs and possibly other minor parts of the larger paintings, while designed and produced by Anton Schmidt and Br Ludger (later assisted by Br Otto Mader), were often painted with the assistance of adept Zulu painters. Ludger, a Bavarian artist, was called to decorate both Mariannahill and the many mission outstations which mushroomed throughout Natal, and would never have been able to complete the task single handed, had he not been aided by Zulu assistants. It appears that they may have been among those originally trained in situ by Schmidt and Ludger to assist in the construction, decoration and maintenance of the various Mariannahill churches. Given this experience, they were increasingly used in areas requiring repetitive painting, mostly of the decorative friezes, which are such a prominent feature of the nave (especially the arches) and wooden ceilings of St Joseph's Cathedral, as well as the Monastery Church at Mariannahill and its many outstations.

A Zulu male, whose name is not remembered by informants, assisted in the actual painting of the decorative motifs and even partly some of the background in larger works at several of the Mariannahill outstations at the turn of the century. (Pientia, personal communication, 1980) The extent to which he was called on to assist in the religious imagery is not clear, or whether he did any other painting or carving, but apparently he was employed as an artist/painter for several years and was known to have accompanied Ludger to several of the outstations to paint. One such was at Maria Ratschitz where an elderly nun recalled he had worked when she was there in the 1930s. (Pientia, personal communication, 1982) This artist's capacity doubtless developed as a result of his schooling at Mariannahill, as Mariannahill schools included the prescribed industrial training and encouraged illustration.<sup>85</sup> His involvement in the production of such imagery is important: such art provided a major source of the central dimensions of Christianity, as well as realist stylistic preferences to local Zulu and prospective converts alike.

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<sup>85</sup> In the late 1970s an elderly nun at Mariannahill clearly recalled the presence of this painter at Maria Ratschitz, but could not recall his name, noting nonetheless that he was highly skilled. (Pientia, personal communication, 1979)

A photography studio was started at Mariannhill in the late 1880s, and in 1888 a lithographer's shop. It was at the latter that further evidence of the creation of locally produced sacred imagery has been found. Probably referring to lithographs, a writer for the Natal Record noted: 'There are prints in seven or eight tints, ordinary Roman Catholic subjects, with the execution rather coarse, and one magnificent portrait (a real work of art) of the Father Abbot, who was then away from home'. (Anonymous (b) 1888:77) These prints would have been disseminated to local outstations, schools and other centres in South Africa, and local assistants would have been associated with their production, again albeit anonymously.

An early photograph from the 1880s depicts a Mariannhill artist before an easel pointing to what appears to be an Egyptian landscape, possibly as a prelude for an image of the Flight into of Egypt. It may well have been a sketch intended for translation into a lithograph, as mentioned above. Standing in admiration to the left of the easel is a young Zulu boy. Typical of the posed images of mission photography, and strikingly similar to Courbet's *Artists's Studio* (c1855), the image identifies the receptive heathen child as the prospective convert, swayed by visual evidence of its message. In another early photograph (**Figure 6**), Br Otto Mader is shown painting at an easel flanked by two young Zulu children, also engaged in painting, possibly an image of an art class in the open air.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century several Mariannhill outstations were still being decorated. Nuns were trained to assist in the production and embroidering of liturgical vestments, which garments are renowned throughout South Africa to this day. In this the sisters increasingly drew on the assistance of Zulu women. However in the early 1940s a Sr Cassiani initiated a weaving section, which is currently situated in Ixopo where Zulu women were involved in both the design and production of these weavings. All of these ventures required exposure to the rudiments of design and drawing. While there is no scope in this dissertation for focusing on these ventures, suffice it to say that these too constitute a major contribution in the field of liturgical art that warrant further research.

Mariannhill came to recognise the potential of skilled artists in the development of an indigenous

sacred art, when they temporarily employed the pioneer black artist Gerard Bhengu from 1932-1933. Bhengu's talent had been recognised at the Mariannahill outstation of Centocow, initially by his teacher, Mr Duma, who gave him a box of crayons, as well as by the school inspector Mr Jowett who gave him watercolour paints and a drawing book. (Savory 1965:9)<sup>86</sup> The support he gained at school was hardly surprising given that Mariannahill mission schools had a long tradition of a well rounded education in which design, calligraphy, crafts, drawing and painting were taught. (Pientia, personal communication, 1979) In 1925 he came to the attention of the mission doctor Dr Max Kohler, who had treated him there for tuberculosis.

The encounter with Kohler led to an important aspect of his training. Impressed by his young patient's talent, Kohler, an amateur ethnologist, was keen to assist the artist both in furthering his talent and in employing him eventually to assist in illustrating many of the writings he produced on the Bhaca and Kuze, and on the medicinal practice of local *sangomas* (diviners) amongst others. His position as illustrator lasted until 1931,<sup>87</sup> during which time Bhengu was given a small studio next to Kohler's operating theatre, where he worked daily. Inevitably his style and imagery was also inspired by surroundings at Centocow, especially the popular realist narratives and religious imagery in the church. Bhengu and his family were practicing Catholics, which was hardly surprising as the Bhaca were among those groups obliged to flee during the Mfecane, settling in southern and western Natal

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<sup>86</sup> Bhengu recalls '...the teacher...put something before us that we should draw...a bud or a leaf- I was always the best at ...drawing'. (Schlosser 1971:122) Typical of most African rural boys, he made clay oxen, horses, buffaloes and human heads. As a youngster he drew images in charcoal of football games and animals, in particular horses, on the walls of his parental home. Bhengu was further trained at Esibomvini, the local mission, where he would have been exposed to the religious bias in teaching. (Schlosser 1971:122)

<sup>87</sup> Kohler provided Bhengu with the best Bavarian art materials available as well as imagery from the Munich Academy, images of Old European masters including paintings of Renaissance madonnas and landscapes. Bhengu was also prone to copying advertizing images, and engaged in a number of copyist exercises depicting human features such as eyes and hands, as well as the work of Leo Samberger, a well known realist portraitist who had trained at the Munich Academy. Kohler also used Bhengu to illustrate his research on medical disorders, and he also illustrated Kohler's *Marriage customs in southern Natal* (1931), and his *The Izangoma Diviners* in (1941) and various other articles by Kohler. Kohler also showed many anatomical images done by Bhengu to teachers and students in the physiology lectures he gave, such as the one given at the *Fifth Annual Catholic African Social Course* in 1927, at the mission station of Lourdes, Natal. (1927: 60.)

where they often actively sought the protection of mission settlements. Many were later to embrace Catholicism, while others were nominal *kholwa*, combining traditionalist and Christian practice.

Two of his early derivative images are of *Sacred Hearts* (c 1926) (**Figures 7 and 8**) typical of the Catholic popular imagery widely available in illustrated tracts - deplored by critics such as Leon Bloy and Sr Pientia. It contains all the details peculiar to this idiom: a red heart surmounted with a cross, surrounded by a foliate design with a scroll below. Two other images inspired by his mission-based setting and experience is of a mature *Woman praying* (c1928-9) (**Figure 9**) a rosary clutched in her hands; the other is of *Two men saying the Rosary* (c1928-9). (**Figure 10**) Both images were doubtless based on local sitters, and would have been inspirational to local *kholwa*. A small black and white sketch, *The Archangel Michael and Satan* was also possibly produced at this time, (**Figure 11**), as was another image, recently found at the Campbell Collections archive, depicting a *Church Interior*, possibly that of Centecow, with the congregation fervently at prayer.

The function of most of these images was not sacred or liturgical. Rather they were among those Bhengu made especially for the few visitors to Centecow, yet they illustrate the impact of popular mass-produced imagery available at the mission. In the images of individuals praying, they clearly indicate their convert status in that they wear Western clothing (the woman wears a headscarf), both as a sign of traditional respect (*ukuhlonipha*), and in subscribing to expected wear, as *kholwa* (a head covering) and in terms of colonial prerequisites (neck to knee covering for Zulu was requisite after 1854, resulting in the widespread wearing of discarded western clothing). To the missionary, the devout in these images could also be seen to signify conquest and the suppression of perceived heathen cultural belief systems in favour of Christian Catholic ones, and represent a more benign and unthreatening 'Zulu'. To a black audience such works could also have functioned as significant substitutes for the commercial imagery of praying western figures that were popularly available to inspire piety, and they were possibly made for this purpose at Kohler's instigation. Ultimately they remain the earliest images of piety by a local black artist.

By 1931 Kohler was unable to continue employing the young Bhengu merely as an artist/illustrator,

with the result that he was sent to Kokstad to learn to drive with the intention of, in addition, becoming Kohler's chauffeur. The venture was aborted and Kohler appears to have found alternate employment for him in 1932 with Bishop Fleischer at the small Mariannhil outstation of Mariathal, near Ixopo. This in all probability marked the first direct patronage of a black artist by the church, his artistic skills to be deployed in fulfilling their expectations.

Bishop Fleischer was regarded as an insightful leader of the Mariannhill order, and had written numerous articles calling for the need for black education and development. He had often visited Centecow, and had met Bhengu on several occasions. The young talented artist in every way fulfilled notions of fostering indigenous talent and culture within the embrace of the church. He worked at Mariathal for just over six months, recalling that there he produced images 'for the saints' (Schlosser 1971: 133), as well as some secular work. The expectations of the Church were somewhat prescriptive, however, and Fleischer plied him with images by Italian masters, presumably of a religious nature. (Schlosser 1971:133)

Mariathal was typical of most Mariannhill outstations in that its interior was covered with neo-realist religious imagery and decorative motifs, described earlier in relation to Mariannhill itself. As a nominal Catholic,<sup>88</sup> Bhengu was here again, as at Centecow, exposed to popular realistic imagery in a variety of forms. Neo-Nazarene realist imagery displayed at Mariathal acted as a significant prototype for Bhengu's early work, reinforcing a tendency he already gravitated towards in his copyist work. Although there is no record that he ever copied these, he may have adapted some of the images, such as praying angels and venerating shepherds in his early works.

It was during this period that he produced several sketches on the theme of the *Martyrs of Uganda* (1932) (**Figure 12**) for what might have been intended to be a large mural or painting for Fleischer.

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<sup>88</sup> While all contemporary texts describe Bhengu as a Catholic, it seems probable, given his subsequent iconography, that he straddled a traditionalist and Catholic allegiance. For the remainder of his long and prolific career, his work was dominated by images of Zulu warriors, inyangas and sangomas that were intended primarily for the tourist market.



Fleischer who may have presented Bhengu with both inspirational imagery and an account of the Martyrs probably inspired this image. The martyrs were a group of converts in Uganda, who in 1885, refused to rescind their belief, and were killed as a result. Imagery relating to this event was widely used among missionaries in Africa and other ‘foreign’ lands as an example of supreme commitment and sacrifice to the newfound religion, Christianity. (Thiel and Helf 1984:19) Bhengu elected to convey the martyrs’ plight by situating them in the upper half of a cloud-filled rose and golden sky in which they ascend heavenwards accompanied by angels and the holy spirit. Below he interprets the heathen persecutors as partly naked, spear-wielding males of an indeterminate group (although they seem to resemble Zulu warriors), who are in the throes of incinerating the martyrs’ remains in a fire. The theme is historically based: in 1885 persecutions of Christians began in Uganda. The twenty-two Martyrs were murdered between 1885 and 1887 and Bhengu’s images appeared just over a decade after their beatification in 1920 (they were canonized in 1964). (Thiel and Helf 1984:19) The image is significant in that it represents an early proselytizing theme derived from an African context. However it is also problematic in its stereotyping of non-Christian Africans as irreligious and merely capable of savagery, the theme critical of traditional African culture and its intolerance of any foreign religion. The theme constitutes part of a number of images of martyrs used by the church to erode indigenous and traditional belief systems in the wake of Christian proselytizing. The final work of the Martyrs, it appears, was never completed, as Bhengu was soon obliged to leave the mission.

Possibly while still at Mariathal, Bhengu was commissioned to paint a large monochrome image of *Abbot Pfanner*, the founder of Mariannahill, in his Abbot’s attire. Clearly derived from an official photograph, it required Bhengu’s excellent copyist skills as well as revealing his capacity for enlargement, his attention to meticulous detail, and strong sense of form. Again one can only speculate as to whether this was to be a prelude to more substantial projects. Nothing has to date been found about Bhengu’s links with any other Mariannahill artists (perhaps Br Ludger or any of the other artist-labourers trained earlier at Mariannahill). Bhengu was in all probability assisted in the enlarging of the image, as the complexity involved, and the sheer scale of the work is unprecedented.

Bhengu’s stay at Mariathal was curtailed, allegedly because of aspects of his personal life and what

was perceived as a drinking problem. The church has tended to apply a strict code of conduct at its missions, such that many an artist has been found wanting and subsequently dismissed. Understandably for artists to be subject to such strict expectations was difficult, and Bhengu was never commissioned to work for the Catholic Church again. However a later image of Methodist missionary women, recently recovered at Grahamstown, may have been produced when he worked for them briefly on murals in the early 1940s, discussed below.

Later Bhengu included motifs sourced in a sacred context in other, mostly secular works. In 1942 he produced a cartoon in which a white-winged *General Smuts as the avenger* (then South African Prime Minister) (**Figure 13**) resplendent in military uniform and brandishing a sword in his right hand held the chain suspended from the neck of a prostrate Hitler's collar. Hitler's dark ribbed bat-like wings are contrasted with the white-feathered ones of Smuts. By a simple analogy Smuts functions as the protective good over Hitler's evil.

At the same time he was commissioned to produce a series of murals for the Wesleyan Methodist Institute in Durban (1942-1943). Bhengu was recommended by his patron at the time, the amateur ethnologist Killie Campbell, to the Reverend Warmington who wanted a mural frieze for the recreation room of the black voluntary army recruits at the Institute. The mural had the legend 'Welcome soldiers, rest a while' above their emblem, and the frieze consisted of ten panels, nine of which were by Bhengu, the tenth by Arthur Butelezi, a contemporary of Bhengu's. (Schlosser 1971:135-6) Besides the input of the Rev Warmington, Bhengu mainly liaised with Officer Hulley, in charge of Native recruitment, and it appears that he suggested many of the themes for the murals: they were to be inspirational and moralising, intended to bolster support and increase enlistment. (Dhlomo1942)

Well aware that the audience he addressed was black, Bhengu negotiated the issue of black participation in what was essentially a white man's war, with remarkable insight and with an agenda that surpassed that of his patrons. Claiming to have been inspired by a dream vision, in which he anticipated the rebirth of the Zulu nation, he believed this national rebirth would be effected as a

result of participation in the war and the promise of a new democratic order.<sup>89</sup> (Dhlomo 1942) Several of these mural panels included images of angels as avengers, ancestors, leaders or advisers. In the first panel, *Umkosi Wamakosi* (proclamation of the chiefs), an officer (Hulley) in the midst of a group of ‘houseboys’ and rickshaws (said to epitomise the cultural and moral demise of Zulu warriors), points to a spear-wielding African angel or ancestor (*idlozi*) with large spanned wings, wearing a headring (*isicoco*). **(Figure 14)** This ancestor-angel emits a white ray of energy which it is claimed urges the ex-warriors to regain their fighting spirit. Hulley also insisted that the ‘boys’ (prospective recruits) be alerted to the dangers of the devil, symbolised in turn by the enemy. (Schlosser 1971:138) The precedent for using angels was identified in the *Martyrs of Uganda*, referred to earlier.

In the third panel, *Umkhosi wenkosi yamakhosi* (Proclamation of the Paramount chief Mshiyeni), he depicts cities and villages in flames with three Nazi bombers emerging from a cloud of smoke in which Hitler, Mussolini and the Emperor Hirohito appear. Here an avenging angel, said to represent the ‘spirit of all kings’ brandishes a sword as it approaches them. (Schlosser 1971:138) The angel is white, dressed in a red garment with blue wings and moves towards a conical tower topped by a swastika. According to Bhengu the angel symbolised the coalition of the church with Britain and her allies, which prevented the destruction of St Paul’s (seen in the distance)<sup>90</sup>

In a fourth panel, entitled *Ayikhho into ehlula iqiniso* (There is nothing better than the truth), two thirds of the image is occupied by a red demonic figure with black hair, which symbolises Hitler and the enemy. Flanking this are two groups of Europeans: those white men who encouraged alcoholism as opposed to those whites who help in hospitals and churches. The satanic figure has a swastika

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<sup>89</sup> Significantly in the endless debate on whether to enlist Africans in the war, many argued against such inclusion fearing that training and possible engagement in defensive killing of white soldiers might encourage a fighting spirit in the Zulu when they returned to colonial reality in Natal. As a result black troops were mainly relegated to non-combatant duties. (Ilanga Lase Natal, 2 November 1942)

<sup>90</sup> Bhengu here referred to the prince regent Mshiyeni who, with the aim of encouraging recruitment, was made an honorary member of the Native Military Corps, paid a retainer of 20 pounds and provided with a special military uniform. For a brief period he was made Acting Paramount Chief, therefore tacitly acknowledging the future restoration of the monarchy. (Leeb-du Toit 2002 (g):4)

drawn on the earth beside him and nearby a white man offers alcohol to already inebriated Africans. A large winged angel swoops down with flowers, brandishing a sword, in protection of the soldiers and 'good' whites.

In the fifth panel (untitled) (**Figure 15**) a blue-winged angel presides over a traditional scene of rural life in which the chief on his way home is said to have communicated with the *idlozi*, symbolised by the angel. The figure points the angel to the cattle, a clear reference to the traditional acknowledgment of the intercessionary function of cattle sacrifice to invoke and appease the ancestors. The sacrifice would bring the *idlozi*'s protection to the clan as a whole and in particular to those who were about to or had fought in the war. The angel hovers above them as they regain their warrior spirit. (Dhlomo in Ilanga Lase Natal, 1942)

The sixth panel depicts the return home of the warriors, where prosperity now presides. In a landscape, that includes churches and universities, are women in typical African Methodist dress consisting of a red blouse and white collar. This ideal sadly reflects the hopes and aspirations of the troops who were promised a better life as reward for their contribution to the allied struggle. Panel nine includes images of a church and homes, further reinforcing the desired stability and prosperity in the post war period.

According to Hulley the African soldiers were highly moved by the murals, regarding the room as being imbued with the spirit of their ancestors: 'One native who suffered from stuttering came into this room a few days ago' said Sgt-Major Hulley, 'he was so struck with the message of Bhengu's paintings that he was cured of stuttering on the spot'. (Dhlomo 1942) The panels and their angelic imagery appear to be the first ever depictions of angels incarnating the *amadlozi*, the innately good and the defenders of the living, and testifies to the possible analogy of angels to *amadlozi* that may have been devised by the Methodists, or could of course have derived from the numerous AICs who used this parallel.

Bhengu's work is blatantly propagandist in two aspects. It is supportive of enlistment and the war

effort as well as emergent African nationalism, the work functioning also as a stark reminder of the hollow promises of the state to reform the condition of African recruits after the war as recompense for their participation. While these are not religious images *per se*, Bhengu's angels embrace good, embody the *idlozi*, and function as avengers. The symbiosis of these qualities reinforced their role and significance within Zulu cultural experience (as *idlozi*) and equally embraced the cultural contexts and western values that they shared. The images must be seen as the earliest instances where sacred beings (angels) function in black South African art in what is essentially a political context, and one in which they have acquired a cross-cultural interpretation.

While Bhengu was subsequently increasingly involved in the production of ethnographically influenced imagery, other directions in patronage and teaching of liturgical art were being initiated by individuals at Mariannhill, especially by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.3 Mariannhill**

Natal in the 1950s was dominated by a somewhat conservative aesthetic derived from popular colonial taste that inclined towards romantic academic realism and a relatively conservative and limited art training context. The position of art training in Natal in the late 1940s was changing, however, as the influence of figures such as Mary Stainbank (at the Natal Technical College), and Jack and Jane Heath (at the Fine Arts Department of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg), introduced students to the more experimental tenets of English modernism. (Hillebrand 1986) Interestingly, many English modernists, too, were influenced by a post World War II revision of humanism and spirituality, as evidenced in the work of Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer and Cecil Collins. (Harries 1993:2) In Europe similar modernist influences affected liturgical art, which tendencies were variously to influence the simultaneous development of liturgical art in various parts of Africa, and locally at Mariannhill and in northern Zululand. The importance of this modernist liturgical influence in the development of contemporary pioneer art in the region should not be underestimated, as it sanctioned major stylistic and conceptual interpretive aspects that came

to distinguish such art for decades, and inevitably influenced contemporary artists trained by the church.

The major development in liturgical art was initiated by one of the sisters of the Congregation of the Precious Blood (CPS) some years after the patronage of Bhengu. The sisters originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, after lay members and later nuns were called in to assist the Trappists in education, nursing and other general tasks.<sup>91</sup> The educational input of the sisters and other forms of instruction were well received. As indicated earlier, in sources such as the Native Teachers' Journal, the Mariannahill schools were at the forefront of industrial training which included drawing and other practical skills. By the 1940s they included extensive craft and art in their school curricula, but no specialised training in art.

A new member of the order, Sr Maria Pientia Selhorst, was sent to Mariannahill in 1938. Pientia had entered the missionary and educational tradition while still in her teens. Hailing from a family of liturgical artisan-artists, she received initial artistic training in her father's studio at Rietberg, Westphalia and at Aarle Rixtel (an outstation of the Mariannahill order in Holland) where she had trained in design and calligraphy. (Pientia 1965 (a):1) Initially she was merely expected to do requisite calligraphy, and the design of vestments and embroidery,<sup>92</sup> but by 1942 she was asked to add the teaching of art to her many tasks, and taught at St Francis' College at Mariannahill (a teachers' training college since 1915). Pientia furthered her own education by completing her Fine Arts degree at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, where she was, inter alia, further exposed to current art historical debates on modernism and its African-derived influence.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The sisters became an order, the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, in 1909. (Leeb-du Toit 1984:211)

<sup>92</sup> She trained further in South Africa at the Teachers' Training College in Pietermaritzburg, and completed a Bachelor in Fine Arts Degree from the University of Natal in 1947. At the latter she had studied under Geoff Long and Rosa Hope. Pientia's art historian brother Stefan further encouraged her, and he too had an interest in 'primitive art.' (Pientia, personal communication. 1979)

<sup>93</sup> Later in 1956-57 she was sent to study at the State Academy in Dusseldorf, under the guidance of professor Georg Meistermann, who emphasised a modernist painterliness and neo-abstraction which influenced her

Pientia's activities at Mariannhill and elsewhere, provide another important perspective on the role of the mission in art patronage, both stylistically and thematically, and also indicate the degree to which local art patronage and training was intricately linked to international developments in the field of sacred art. As will be seen, she was determined not only to develop a cross-cultural African sacred art, but was also instrumental in responding to what she regarded as the innate capacities of her students, with the result that a new aesthetic was simultaneously negotiated.

There was no real opportunity to train Zulu in westernised art practice, except for the optional two-year drawing course offered to prospective teachers by the Natal Native Education Department (which she taught at St Francis College).<sup>94</sup> As a result Pientia, she together with Jack Grossert (former Art Inspector appointed Art Organizer for Native schools in 1946), shared and developed many ideas and a vision for future art training, and course and curriculum development.<sup>95</sup> A devout Catholic, Grossert also shared her concern regarding the advancement of both secular and liturgical art.

Her envisaged educational task was twofold and interlinked: secular art training at St Francis College and the development of an indigenous sacred art. She consequently regularly proposed religious themes for illustration by her students, aimed at encouraging their imaginative skills and to elicit a personal response to Christianity.<sup>96</sup> Initially she was disappointed in her African students' copyist

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considerably. (Pientia, personal communication, 1979)

<sup>94</sup> The course comprised 'the ordinary subjects, as required by an art-teacher in Primary schools e.g. Illustrations of lessons, simple water-colour painting, design, lettering.' (Pientia 1945:1) In addition students did blackboard work, chart-work, weaving, modelling, or some other Native craft, leaving no time for any meaningful art training. Only a few students took this course, acquiring limited art training..

<sup>95</sup> Both she and Grossert were convinced that fundamentally there was no difference between the ability of an African or European student. However she considered that her students' abilities seemed to be for flat patterns, line patterns, minute detail, and a fondness for repetition. (Pientia, personal communication, 1980)

<sup>96</sup> In a 1963 lecture she notes: 'My aim in giving Christian topics was always to find out in how far they had assimilated Christian truths. As we live in an age which likes to teach by pictures I like to show on hand of these illustrations how the African mind responds to the interpretation of scripture.' (Pientia 1963 (a): 1) and noted, 'Art

tendencies, especially when derived from poor imagery in churches and cheap mass produced religious trinkets (Pientia 1950(b): 2).<sup>97</sup> Therefore she set about forging a new stylistic idiom and liturgical art that was cross-culturally based. Aware of the established oral tradition in which accounts from the past are upheld as moral guides to the community, Pientia also produced a number of plays associated with religious or traditional themes for theatrical performances at Mariannhill. Most of these recalled the centrality of belief but some also upheld ideas of cross-cultural parallels and the validity of traditional Zulu moralizing.

Pientia did not arrive at these ideals in isolation, as by the early 1940s she was well aware of contemporary art developments in Africa. She recognised that the Church of England was ahead in fostering the development of art among Africans, which she noted at first hand at an exhibition of the Cyrene art school from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) held in 1945 in the hall of the Pietermaritzburg University College (later Natal University) when she was a student there.<sup>98</sup> She was also impressed by Margaret Trowell's teaching at Makerere College in Uganda (founded in 1921), in particular her reference to mission art. (Court 1995: 291) Trowell maintained that the realism of their religious work was based on a belief 'in the indwelling of the spirits' in the objects around them, and that objects associated with ancestors are not changed by this association, but are simply depicted in their

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flows from the urge to express and create. If they have absorbed their faith they will express it in their idiom. Their art expression will be a criterion of their faith. Because art is always a mirror of culture.' (Pientia 1963 (a): 2)

<sup>97</sup> She notes: '...radical changes have to take place in the representation of religious symbols which we offer the African. The remark, made by a manager of a devotional shop (which was full of sentimental rubbish imported from European money-making manufacturers) "Oh, this is what the natives and Indians like", or "This is good enough for the natives", shows the radically wrong attitude of Europeans, who are only out for profit, but do not care for an improvement of taste. As the African has no religious symbols of his own, he has to take them over from the Missionaries. But the prevailing taste in our churches in South Africa (which drew the following remark from a South African university lecturer in Fine Art: 'The tasteless, sentimental, inartistic outfit of your churches repels one from your religion, which had such a wonderful tradition of art in the past) cannot have a beneficial influence on religious African Art'. (Pientia 1950 (b): 2) At this early stage she envisaged the building of an African church with indigenous craft work in the interior.

<sup>98</sup> Father Ned Paterson founded a carving school at Grace Dieu in 1925 (Pietersburg), and later the Art Centre at Cyrene in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1939.



original state.<sup>99</sup> She held that her students (at Makerere) responded to religious themes in what she regarded as a ‘non-mystical’ way.

Pientia, however, attempted to elicit instead a ‘mystical approach’ from her students, in opposition to Margaret Trowell’s perceptions, and notes that: ‘... I always did get a different response in a religious painting, of course, after I had given them a little talk on the subject. When giving the topic of the Madonna I always explained first the exalted position Mary has over an earthly Mother, and invariably the students did bring out the difference’. (Pientia 1950 (b):3)<sup>100</sup>

Pientia was soon enthralled by the calibre of her students’ work, and sent many examples to her art historian brother, Stephan Selhorst, who was fascinated by their ‘primitivism’ and ‘conceptualism’<sup>101</sup>. (**Figures 16-21**) Together they had intended to publish a book, to be called *Unkulunkulu* (God) (1950), based on a consideration of her students’ work (especially its religious content), at a time when these works were considered little more than naive or child art and art historians were not certain of their exact place and worth. (Pientia, personal communication, 1990)

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<sup>99</sup> While Trowell recognised that the work of young Africans was inevitably influenced by modern western culture with which they come daily into contact, she notes ‘.. yet in the field of religious art they have something peculiarly their own to offer, and this is their realism. It results from their belief in the indwelling of the spirits in the objects around them. This indwelling of the spirit of an ancestor does not change the object so possessed. There is no moral value connected with the incarnate spirit. Therefore, in painting Christ, the God-man, the idea that perfect goodness should be embodied in his painting is beyond him. He paints a Very Man of Very Man, but fails to portray Very God of Very God.’ (Pientia 1950 (b): 2) To this Pientia responded: ‘I find Margareth (sic) Trowell’s explanation of religious realism in the African very plausible, yet I have come ...across work which was decidedly away from realism.’, doubtless referring to the work of her students. (Pientia 1950 (b):2)

<sup>100</sup> Although Pientia never mentioned it in her writings (or verbally in the many meetings we had), she may have been aware of the murals painted by the Church of England sisters of the Community of the Resurrection of our Lord in Grahamstown and at various churches in the Eastern Cape (formerly Transkei) such as those at Mount Frere, which included images of Africans, albeit in a sentimentalising realism that she would have been critical of.

<sup>101</sup> The term conceptualism is frequently used by Pientia. In my understanding it refers to the tendency to abbreviate detail based on the mental concept of an object. In the translation of an object therefore, the artists will emphasise key features and elements rather than particularize the rendering. In so doing the artist, as in the mediaeval period, would subject the particular portariat to the rudimentary formulae that applied to the depiction of the human head. In many areas in Africa, artists similarly create a reductive convention which is applied to the rendering of various forms and images. In several discussion with Pientia I have assumed that this is what she refers to.

Her own work at the time focused extensively on African figures, often within a religious context as seen in *African woman praying* (1967) (**Figure 22**) and in *Icon and Idols* (1968). (**Figure 23**)

Regrettably her art teaching at school was curtailed when in c1953 the new Nationalist regime disallowed art for matriculation at black schools. There would be no official art training for Africans by the church, nor was there any Catholic centre for the developing of African liturgical art in South Africa at the time. (Pientia 1950 (b): 3) Using this turn of events to her advantage, however, she accepted commissions such as that for the cathedral at Queenstown under the patronage of Bishop Rosenthal, and later also elsewhere. Her commissions incorporated the training and work of African assistants or apprentices, who would form a nucleus for a desirable ‘regular Catholic African Art Centre’, subsequent to which she continued to further assist such artists with commissions for the church on a more informal basis.

Pientia was widely read and inspired by a number of key debates at the time, notably the concern to revitalize Christian art in reaction to poor commercialized liturgical art, the need to embrace modernist art practice in liturgical art, to contemporise it, and to acknowledge the input and cultural practice of local cultures, to whom missionaries ministered. She subscribed to the widely disseminated journal *Art Notes*, a publication compiled by the London-based St Michael’s Workshop and Church Artists’ Agency, which solicited texts from eminent authors and specialists such as the philosopher Jacques Maritain and the anthropologist William Fagg. The journal included regular references to sacred art exhibitions, literature reviews, and articles on contemporary sacred art.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> In 1946 Pientia underlined sections in Eric Hemingway’s article ‘Notes on Expressionism’ in which the author pleads for an acknowledgment of expressive tendencies in art which he describes as being more intellectually informed than representational art. Such art would be more mystical as it is freed both of conceptual knowledge and of ‘sensuous attachment to the appearance of things’ (Hemingway 1946:42-45). Her ideas on the rejection of commercialized imagery was also addressed in the 1946 *Art Notes* journal in Edmund Harrison’s article ‘*Art. The Scholastic View*’, based on a lecture given to clerical students in which he deplored the harmful commercialization and ‘lack of practical intellect’ in such art. Quoting substantially from Jacques Maritain, who shared his views, he cites the latter’s views that art can only reflect beauty when ‘the mind also is in some way rejoiced’. Ultimately he pleads for expression in such art not to be considered a deformity of beauty but an indication that suggests tremendous intellectual power, and notes: ‘In a former age when symbolism was so rich, the significance of such a work (he alludes to a crucified Christ) would have been grasped immediately’ (Harrison 1946:52-54). The 1947 *Art Notes* included an article on the sacred art of the Futurist Gino Severini, indicating how

At the time Maritain's influence was important in the development of a receptive understanding of the innate universality in all creativity. In *Art and Scholasticism* (1933) he expounded a natural theology of art, recognising that art in its innate structure is oriented towards and open to the revelation of divine grace, and that it has 'a natural affinity with the contemplative spirit'. (Maritain in Pattison 1991:36) More importantly to Pientia, Maritain was prepared to sanction modernism and some non-traditional art forms, believing that 'wherever art....has attained a certain degree of grandeur and purity, it is already Christian'. (Maritain in Pattison 1991:41) He therefore held that all art was implicitly acceptable if sanctioned by the church.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the modernist theologian Paul Tillich supported a new role for the arts in theological work (Pattison 1991: 100) But it too would be art of a particular character, radically contrasted with the 'beautifying realism' that John Ruskin had identified as apt for religious expression. In *On Art and Architecture* (published in 1987) he upheld expressionism as his preferred style in that it reflected a collapse of bourgeois values and ideals. To him expressionism reflected a mystical religious character which provided contemporary artists with an articulate mode to interpret their religious anxieties and beliefs. (Pattison 1991:108) The sanctioning of such expressionism, augured well for modernists such as Pientia. Not only was this style dominant in her work but it also represented a model for her students and apprentices. Significantly this occurred within a church-based context and set a precedent for the conceptual emphasis that typified much contemporary black art at the time.

At a time when Tillich was developing a radical fusion of Christian and Marxist ideas under the banner of 'religious socialism', religious inspired art further ideally reflected his views of a new anti-materialist/capitalist utopia. (Pattison 1991:101) The expressionist work he favoured challenged reality and reflected rather a 'metaphysical longing for a new mysticism' and implicitly a new world

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his modernist background had been ably adapted to sacred art, resulting in a form of neo-cubist stylization that resembles early Christian art. (Maritain 1947:20)

order. (Pattison 1991:106) As will be seen below, Pientia echoed such ideals in the new religious art she envisaged, persuaded in this by what she saw in African culture and her student's work.

Far from functioning only as an art teacher, Pientia frequently debated such theological issues, especially in view of the multi-racial composition of the convent. She felt the need to discuss the idea of God as understood by the African sisters' forefathers, whom she acknowledged had '...always believed in one God. They were not pagans in the strict sense of the word' and perceived God as '...the kind but somewhat unapproachable Father. God, a kind strong man with big shoulders to carry the miseries of the world'. (Pientia 1963 (d): 4) In this Pientia was also influenced by Tertullian the Montanist, who noted that '...the human, man, the human soul is by nature Christian. I could not believe in Catholicism, if it did not believe in this statement'. (Pientia 1963 (a): 4-5)<sup>103</sup>

Pientia had developed a deep respect and affinity for African culture, born of her intimate contact with her African students in Natal and Transkei.<sup>104</sup> She saw the African as being in a transitional

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<sup>103</sup> She felt therefore that she could 'baptize' genuine Nguni work as it was, in the firm belief that they were a people who had migrated from the North and had similar customs to the Jews. While this claim was disputed by some of her critics she maintains that she was supported by some (unnamed) Swiss ethnologists. (Pientia, undated (a):1) Such justifications have since been rejected or at least disputed by several anthropologists.

<sup>104</sup> She notes: 'Our country is multiracial and this fact creates problems and burdens every group with serious moral responsibilities. What makes struggle worthwhile is that the mastering of our problem will be a precedent towards the solution of a world-problem: the future will bring about more internationalism!' (Pientia, undated (a): 2) Many of her comments reflect her keen understanding of the situation in which Africans found themselves. Convinced that a complex yet vital contemporary art was emerging in South Africa, (Pientia, undated (d):1) that recognised indigenous culture and practice, she cited the example of such renewal in modernism. Just as European modernism had been drawn to primitivism, so 'Europeans of South Africa should not find it difficult to incorporate the primitive vigour of their fellow Africans into their own way of life. Western peoples are, so to speak, ready for a fruitful union with the strength of Africa'. (Pientia, undated (a): 2)

Pientia was notoriously outspoken with regard to misconceptions about Africans and openly challenged prejudice and what she regarded as a misplaced sense of superiority by Europeans, especially in view of the fact that many had made no attempt to communicate with Africans. (Pientia 1963 (d): 2) She contended that whites should be reminded that they are guests in the country and should make an effort to know their fellow men. (Pientia: 1963 (d): 4) Convinced that Africans have an enduring tradition which was only superficially supplanted by western culture, she recognised an 'innate superiority' of the rural African who was secure in his traditions 'We sisters are certainly not meant to start a revolution, but God in his goodness will certainly give us chances to alleviate the racial strain, if we open our eyes to the existing situation without waiting for big events to change matters.' (Pientia 1963 (d): 4)

The view of many art teachers (such as Sr Pientia), of the African as essentially primal and content in this condition

phase where racial groups had not yet coalesced. Believing that each group should become conscious of its cultural identity, she insisted that her students examine all forms of indigenous artistic expression both for their intrinsic beauty and also for their potential inclusion into forms of Christian sacred expression. In order to arrive at a new indigenous sacred art she recalled that contemporary western Christian art is characterized by the fact that it assumes a new or modified pictorial expression with every age or historical period. Accordingly, a seminal aspect of her artistic philosophy is that the black artist should forge his own idiom. (Pientia 1951 (a): 1) <sup>105</sup>

Pientia's views of a prevailing indigeneity as a desirable model to draw from, echoed similar developments and perceptions in West African art. Nigerian Ben Enwonwu, regarded as the first post-classical artist, broke away from the academic realism of Aina Onabolu, inspired to do so first by his teacher Kenneth Murray. The latter's emphasis on conceptualism and his own interest in Negritude, led him to look to Igbo motifs, design and spirits for inspiration. Enwonwu's translations and incorporations resulted in works that hardly resembled their original sources, but echoed their decorative and spiritual aspects.

Well aware, too, that many of her students came from urban environments or *kholwa* ones, in which traditional practice had been supplanted by acculturated practice, Pientia however insisted that her students look to all forms of indigenous artistic expression, particularly in functional and decorative objects. She upheld these for their intrinsic beauty and their viability for inclusion into any form of

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was merely a projection of an ideal that emerged from her European world view, typically nurtured in German romantic and much post Enlightenment thought (and reiterated in some modernist initiatives), in which man was seen to be alien to self, spirit and nature. The traditional practice, lifestyle and work of the African indigene functioned as a metaphor for the perceived need for restoration and renewal of the sundered links between personkind and nature. Here the indigene functions as 'a mediator of European desires'. (Jan Mohamed 1995:19).

<sup>105</sup> In developing a new art form rooted in indigenous traditions, Pientia suggested that '...we have to start from the beginning, watch the women making pots and mats, sometimes with beautiful, simple patterns, or the little herdboys carving their sticks with interesting lines and triangles. Here the school should be the originator. The craft lesson offers an ideal opportunity to impress the young children with the soundness and beauty of craftwork of their own race'. (Pientia, 1965 (b))

Christian sacred artistic expression or decoration. <sup>106</sup> This Africanising must be seen in the light of new Africanist ideals, and as a result of her modernist understanding and appreciation of African art and culture:

‘My endeavours in the field of African art have been guided by the following considerations: Art is the mirror of Christian culture. If the Christian faith is absorbed and loved it will express itself in the art forms. The absence or presence of African Christian art is the criterion of African Christianity’. (Pientia 1962 (b))

Pientia’s ideas must be considered in the context of other key debates in the church at the time, one of which centered on incarnation. The term incarnation is more commonly used in its neologism ‘inculturation’, meaning cultural exchange (drawing on the dominant culture). The most notable commentary in this regard emerged after the second World War when in 1947 Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, wrote in his pastoral letter that incarnation was the essential law of the apostolate. This appeared again in the writings of Popes Paul VI, John Paul 11 and in the Vatican’s International Theological Commission on *Faith and Inculturation*. (Hillman 193:2-3) These ideas had a profound effect on missionary endeavour in Natal, especially at Mariannhill.

The central premises of incarnation are ably expressed by Hillman: ‘In becoming Christians, therefore, far from stepping out of their real life situations, the peoples of the world are expected to be fully themselves in their respective historical contexts, and to enrich the universal Christian community with their particular cultural patrimonies’. (Hillman 1993:2) His contention is that by incarnating ‘the message of Christ into the lives and cultures of people it is hoped to bring forth living traditions and original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought’. (Hillman 1993:3) However Hillman alerts one to the fact that it is not sufficient to present Christianity to people in merely ‘a semantic or literary sense’ but that a comprehensive language in the ‘anthropological sense’, as Pope Paul VI envisaged, must be developed, appreciated and deployed. (Hillman 1993:68) This would include indigenous cultural symbols, signs, myths, rites, images, customs, gestures and praying, as well as the worldview, which distinguishes these cultures.

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<sup>106</sup> These ideals were particularly realised later when Pientia worked at Lumko.

Pientia cites an example of the hybridity that incarnation could result in, which had a precedent in the use of a cameo of Augustus in the mediaeval period in a processional cross. Here Augustus, a Roman emperor was celebrated in terms of the concept of kingship he embodied. So too the early Christians used pagan symbols such as the amoraetti mythical figures in their illustrations in the catacombs. (Pientia, personal communication, 1990) In the same vein she embraces the concept of ancestral acknowledgment in Nguni culture, and comparing it to their acceptance of Christ, notes:

‘The Ancestors, whom he has know (sic) on this earth are his chief friends or enemies. In that sense he also takes Christianity. The humanity of Christ, the fact that he redeemed us in His Blood, has a great appeal to the African mind. God has done something concretely for us. We can see and touch Him. He is living among us’. (Pientia 1963 (a): 4)<sup>107</sup>

Pientia was not only concerned with the development of an African liturgical art, but recognised the possible role of the church in developing a new expressive language rooted in traditional creativity that would simultaneously provide a voice for an increasingly altered African community. She maintained that in so doing the church should support artists with commissions while also fostering a new secular art. To Pientia therefore,

‘our Christianity must produce Art, for Art is the criterion of our Faith. And the Africans love Art, they must only be given the opportunity, as Maurice Lavanaux (sic) writes in his article on African art in the quarterly “Liturgical Art” edited in New York: For the talented African direct commissions are (sic) needed, not benevolent condescension’. (Pientia 1963 (a):5)

Pientia was well aware of the need to have an indigenous liturgical art as ‘African illustrative material’ for missionaries, doubtless for scriptural instruction, and noted that this was available in an

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<sup>107</sup> It is in this context too that one can compare her rather daring combination of the theme ‘Icon and Idols’ (an image sent to Rome in 1950). Sometimes called ‘The King holds court’, she depicts an icon of Christ surrounded by totemic figures, a theme which runs like a leitmotiv through all her mission work. (Pientia, personal communication, 1990) The theme addresses the issue of ancestral veneration and totemic presence as a shared concept comparable to the celebration of the Christ as physical and metaphysical presence. Her parallel highlighted the extent to which she embraced two different cultures’ perceptions of protection by what is essentially an ancestral being.

‘experimental form’. (Pientia 1963 (a): 3)<sup>108</sup> Emulating the ideas of William Fagg, the renowned art historian, she held that the missionary should make full use of the ‘African’s vigorous urge to express, be it in music, drama, or dance, or pictorial art. His heart will dictate the methods. The products might not be of a lasting nature, but they are a step towards further growth, and that is all we may look for at present’. (Pientia 1963 (a): 3)

Fagg’s essay, *The sibylline books of tribal art*, appeared in *The Catholic Quarterly* in 1952, a copy of which was found in Pientia’s Mariannahill studio files. Fagg argued what has since become a standard perception, that it is erroneous to see African culture as static. Much as anthropologists bewailed some of the changes effected through colonial contact, he maintained that art was particularly fragile and that change should be evolutionary ‘if valuable elements of the culture are not to be lost’. (Fagg 1952:142) In his view no real Christian art had been produced for the last two centuries (the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>), believing that a new African liturgical art, drawn from ‘tribal art’ was immanent and desirable. Indigenous art was well suited to liturgical art because of its poetic and conceptual nature.<sup>109</sup>

‘...tribal art is among the most beautiful and impressive of God’s works through man, and that it can and should be turned to account in his honour. I believe not only that Christianity needs tribal art, but that tribal art itself is dependent on Christianity for its only chance of survival, as its old sustaining faiths disappear’. (Fagg 1952:142)

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<sup>108</sup> She was determined that this should not be merely patronizing art produced by others, but should emerge from and for Africans: ‘The problem is not solved by letting a European artist take African models for Christ and other Scripture figures. The result will certainly not be African Christian art. A picture drawn by an African student using European models, might be more truly African. The real African Christian art is not born yet. It has its roots in the secular experimenting which is going on very actively among educated Africans all over the continent. - A beautiful spiritual art expression one still gets among primitive tribes, which is reminiscent of African traditional art, most of which fills now the museums of Europe. But for a stability, similar to that found in the old art, we still have to wait a long time’. (Pientia 1963(a):3)

<sup>109</sup> Fagg regards African art as ‘poetic’ and evocative, intended to suggest and symbolize in a purposeful distortion rather than to portray the person or object concerned and ‘at the same time to produce in the observer certain feelings which it is desired to associate with him or it’. (1952: 143) Rather than assume that Africans had to adapt he noted that it was only by understanding African culture and belief that a new liturgical art form could emerge: ‘African and other tribal peoples have each their own established ways, founded in their own historic life and culture, of producing similar emotional responses, and it is only by understanding and making use of these that Christian arts worthy of the name can be developed among Africans according to the principles laid down by Pope Pius XII’. (Fagg 1952:144)



Fagg noted that ironically the ‘African faithful’ initially objected to the use ‘of anything which reminds them of the old religion’ (1952:145), and he regretted that the introduction of a foreign religion results in a form of iconoclasm. He felt that even the ‘fetishist’ and sorcerers’ works could be instructive in that

‘they could remind us of an art that is truly sacred, i.e., an art in which - without any concern for beauty or for realistic representation - the character of the shapes and distortions, has for sole purpose the expression of the sacred mystery and its direct action upon the senses and the imagination. The paganism and the naturalism of the Italian Renaissance has made such a conception of the sacred disappear completely from the Christian West’. (Fagg 1952:145)

As noted earlier, Pientia had heeded Fagg’s condemnatory attitude to acculturated mission art produced to date, which he regarded as having hardly approached the quality of the traditional sculpture of the group from which it came: ‘...the great majority seem to me without artistic merit either by European or by African standards’. He noted further that: ‘Assuredly the Christian faith is not at fault; but it is disconcerting that it cannot yet stimulate its converts to artistic creations comparable to those with which their brothers worship Shango and Ala’. (Fagg 1952:142) Yet Fagg too was well aware that by calling on an African carver to carve for the church, the missionary ‘...may be in danger of killing outright an art tradition of a thousand years’ standing - and that such an act may be uncatholic’. (Fagg 1952:142) The precarious role of the church as either patron, perpetuator or destroyer of indigenous art traditions remained problematic for decades.<sup>110</sup>

Fagg however recognised exceptions in mission art, and was particularly supportive of the work of Fr Kevin Carroll at Oye-Ekiti in Nigeria where emphasis was on maintaining the traditional

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<sup>110</sup> Fagg referred to an issue of *L’Art Sacre* (March-April 1951) in which articles by Fr M A Couturier and Fr Pie-Raymond Regamy addressed the deplorable state of missionary art was debated. Regamey had shown : ‘that the sole restrictions placed by the Popes on the use of traditional native arts in the Christian faith are negative ones and provide only that they shall not be contrary to the essentials of that faith’. (Fagg 1952:144) Couturier further held that African traditional belief systems and practice have engendered art forms that are vital because they have captured the essence of belief and metaphysicality that they wish to convey. A new art form, in Fagg’s view, would therefore need to be sufficiently vital and relevant to a community, regardless of its hybrid composition, to engender an equally vital and expressive art form. As will be shown, it was only when mission Christianity was absorbed and transformed into a new indigenized variant, that art likewise manifested this dynamic with conviction.

economic basis of the carver's livelihood, the retaining of the apprenticeship system and the avoidance of all but traditional materials.<sup>111</sup> Pientia shared some of these ideas, hoping as he did that the church would encourage secular art while at the same time developing a liturgical art derived from the former, so that both would be economically viable. (Fagg 1952:145)

The sanctioning by Fagg of indigenous art and its associated conceptualism, was crucial in its support for similar ideas being proposed by Pientia. In the 1940s and 1950s Pientia's own work was characterised by its loose emulation of an assimilated early Christian, Romanesque and Byzantine manner, her painting revealing a predilection for flat saturated colour, emphatic contour and a reductiveness which is both aggressive and compelling. (Pientia 1959(a):1) To her this syncretic conceptualism ideally conveyed desirable mystery, spirituality and transcendentalism, aspects largely lost in the sentimentalizing realism that dominated church art at the turn of the century and well into the 20<sup>th</sup>. Central to her art, too, was its sourcing in Modernism, especially Expressionism, which she considered best reflected the realities and anxieties of the time.

While rejecting academic realism for her students, Pientia recognized the similarity of their work to Romanesque and early Christian Art. Early Christian and Romanesque art, deriving as it did from and exemplifying the impact of Christianity on established artistic traditions such as near eastern, Celtic and Viking elements. Such art had evolved from a Hellenistic tradition of realism, which had been adapted to the needs, and emphases of new converts. Essentially it was a synthesis of the old with the incorporation of new beliefs, and values. Referring to an Irish miniature from the Abbey of St Gall, she likens the cultural influence of the 8th century artist to that of the African in the sense that both identified in Christianity a vital new force and express this interaction in terms, which synthesize several traditional cultural elements and modes of expression. (Pientia 1954(a): 1)<sup>112</sup> She

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<sup>111</sup> What he especially deplored were the realist works such as those in non traditional ebony produced at Bura in northern Belgian Congo. (Fagg 1952:145)

<sup>112</sup> Stylistically Pientia identified certain comparable qualities in their work which she later encouraged: some resembled Romanesque manuscripts (*The despoiling of Christ*), another was more akin to a Henry Moore (*The women at the sepulchre*). Pientia tried to effect a particular character on the work of her students, both pictorially and conceptually, in which a neo Romanesque and Modernist monumentality resulted in a compelling conceptual

compares a madonna painted by one of her students (later exhibited in Rome in 1950) to the Irish miniature in the following terms:

‘To my mind this Madonna has the same primeval strength and simplicity as the work of the Celtic artist. It is also a synthesis of Christian iconography (assimilated from churches the missionaries built for him), but has discarded the sentimentality of the plaster casts - (and the artist has rendered) his own conception of the majesty of the Mother of God, seeing her rather like a chieftainess in frontal position. This is to be the new Christian art which has its natural roots in our soil’. (Pientia 1954 (a): 1)

Another source that appears to embrace the conflation of the Romanesque with the conceptualism of her African students, was sourced in Herder’s catechism (illustrated by Burchardt) which was widely used by her students. She notes:

‘The Catholic catechism of Herder has sound rather “timeless” illustrations, which remind one of Romanesque drawings. We found in Mariannahill that the African students take easily to them. They copy them often on the blackboard, adding some African accessories on their own initiative. I have said elsewhere that mediaeval and the modern way of European illustrating is more congenial to the African mind than work produced during the Renaissance, Baroque, or romantic periods of European history. As we cannot avoid the use of pictures from the European market in our scripture lessons we should select illustrations from these periods.’(Pientia 1963 (a):1)

As can be seen in images by Sr Pientia’s students, the influence of Herder’s catechism was substantial, manifest in strong delineation and modernist attenuation typically found in the publication’s illustrations. **(Figure 24)** These reflect a growing tendency of modernist stylization in sacred imagery in the late 1950s and 1960s that will be examined further in relation to the journal *Liturgical Arts*, below. Her upholding of modernism in liturgical art as a more accessible example to her budding students had earlier received a degree of Papal support, when in 1903 in the *Motu*

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rendering of themes. A 1952 report from Grossert, then Organiser of Arts and Crafts, expressed his support for her teaching but also gave directives to influence her. (Grossert 1952:3) He envisaged visual parallels for students to draw from which were cross-cultural, but which to him shared similar ideals. These included Paleolithic art, Bushman art and Christian art up to the Romanesque period., which paralleled the distinctive clarity and conceptualism in the work of the students: (Grossert 1952:4) Pientia directly echoed these She referred her students to indigenous 'Bushman' paintings which she considered supreme examples of perceptive ability and reductive spiritual subtlety. (Pientia, undated, (d))

*Proprio* encyclical, the position of the Church in relation to the arts was outlined, reflecting a new attitude to changing stylistic trends in liturgical art. Still later, Pope Pius XII, in his Encyclical dated 2 December 1947 noted with caution:

‘Modern art should be given free scope in the due and reverent service of the Church and the sacred rites, provided that it preserve a correct balance between styles tending neither to extreme realism nor to excessive “symbolism”, and that the needs of the Christian community are taken into consideration rather than the particular taste or talent of the individual artist’. (Moevs 1969:4)

These references provide a significant perspective on the increasing support and expectations from the Papacy, stimulating the development of sacred art. Careful to justify her views and subsequent actions, Pientia made frequent reference to the many Papal directives regarding all missionary enterprise in the early twentieth century, a period that initiated major changes in the church regarding missionary endeavours and relationships with other cultures and faiths. The impact of the Catholic Church on art in Africa was directly associated with their changing attitudes to African and other cultural congregations.

Changes in the church initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are reflected in the publication in May 1891 of an encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII, which marked a radical change in the involvement of the church in secular and social issues.<sup>113</sup> (Hurley 1982:23) In the early decades of this century a program known as ‘Catholic Action’ was initiated which desired a re-Christianizing of society and

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<sup>113</sup> In this encyclical the church for the first time began a systematic formulation of Catholic social doctrine, which addressed the intellectual and social turmoil caused by liberal capitalism. While the church rejected the secular solutions of socialism and capitalism, it suggested instead a return to religion and Christian love and justice, the plight of the worker in the face of industrialization, protection for the poor, property rights, the right to wage earning and unions. (Hurley 1982:23) (13) The church also began to recognize that their previous attempts to invade other cultures was tantamount to a vast psychological assault on original cultural identity. Cardinal Paul Marella of the Secretariat for Non-Christians wrote a book ‘*Meeting the African Religions*’ (date untraceable) which conveys an anthropological understanding of African religions in keeping with Vatican II’s idea that African religions might contain an element of revelation and the help of divine grace. (Hillman 1993:39) The acceptance and study of African religions was furthered by a Synod of Bishops in 1974, again by Cardinal Maurice Otunga (a Kenyan) in 1977, and further by Cardinal Francis Arinze (a Nigerian), in 1988. (Hillman 1993:39)

renewal of Christian practice, and included temporal concerns and the support of worker unions.<sup>114</sup> The church became increasingly concerned with human rights, personal and human relations, and for many clergy the ideals of Marx and Engels were inspirational.<sup>115</sup>

In the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, 1962-1965) relations between the church and the world were again clarified, with issues regarding race and nationalism being addressed in response to abuses during the terror of the Nazi regime (Pius XI) (Hurley 1982:32). The church was also increasingly aware of the need to address third world needs and realities in a post-colonial era, and thus reconsidered the application and relevance of the scriptures in such contexts. (Hillman 1993:28-29) What resulted was a new ecumenism among both Protestants and Catholics, as a result of which a new Christian theology emerged based on the encounter of faiths, as the church divested itself of its erstwhile power. Vatican II raised the need for ultimate acceptance of humanity's cultural pluralism and acknowledgment that Christianity must be expressed in the historico-cultural framework of the

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<sup>114</sup> *Catholic Action* was especially strong in Germany, and in South Africa was promoted by the *Catholic African Union* (later known as the *Catholic Africa Organisation*) founded by Mariannhill priests Frs B Huss and E Hanisch in 1927. Initiated in Belgium by Fr Joseph Cardijn, who founded the *Young Christian Workers*, small religious groups met and engaged in social transformation, their motto being 'see, judge and act.' (Hurley 1982:29) In 1903-1914 Pius X and again in 1922, Pius XI, and Pius XII (1939-1958) supported Catholic Action's attempts to foster a re-christianising of society. The new Christian humanism that emerged included the duty to assist others '...in the sense of helping and serving, with the object of fulfilling his own and other personalities according to the Christian pattern'. (Schimlek 1949:55) In France Jacques Maritain was central in upholding the new Christian humanism, while Pierre Teilhard de Chardin centered on the temporal and salvation, linking science and faith. (Hurley 1982:29)

<sup>115</sup> The world was seen as intrinsically important in all its facets, no longer being regarded as merely sinful. Increasingly the onus was put on the laity to manifest Christian ways, rights and duties. The laity was regarded as the church, and not merely the religious. In 1848 the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels resulted in the anger at injustices being galvanized into a coherent 'intellectual and moral thrust'. (Hurley 1982:24) The materialist conception of history that ensued held that history consists of a series of struggles for power over the means of production, and identifies class struggle and the need to resolve this via revolution. While the church found that it shared the ideals of pragmatic socialism with the socialist and communist movements, their denial of God was obviously incompatible with Christianity. As a result Pius XII first referred to a need to formulate a list of human rights in 1942, while John XXIII published the encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* in 1961. This document was important in pursuing personal rights and human relations and reinforced Cardijn's philosophy encapsulated in 'see, judge and act'. Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* dealt with the encounter between the church and the world, while his *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church in the modern world, was seen as the greatest transformation in the church since the Council of Jerusalem in AD 49. (Hurley 1982:24)

receptive cultures. The latter contributed to the development of contextual theology. (Hillman 1993:34)<sup>116</sup> Significantly Denis points out that Archbishop Hurley, a Natalian, made substantial contributions to Vatican II, particularly regarding issues of race and human rights. (Denis 1997:5-17)

This new spirit of optimism eventually resulted in important studies on African culture, the introduction of an Africanist element to church services, including drums and music, and intentions ‘...to use African carvers, and even traditional African styles in an attempt to evolve a new Christian art’. (Beier 1968:6) As indicated above, Sr Pientia had attempted similar cross-cultural ideals much earlier, in the 1940s and 1950s. In response to the church’s position on the development of contemporary art Pientia notes:

‘It has shown that the Church is no obstacle to the native talent of any nation, but rather perfects it in the highest degree. Thanks to the activity of the missionaries, the Gospel spirit has been able so to imbue the minds of the people of different customs, that it has borne eloquent testimony of a new flowering of the Fine Arts. Once again it has been proved that the Christian Faith, when cordially accepted and lived is the one thing, capable of inspiring the finest works of art, which works redound to the praise of the Catholic Church and lend beauty to divine worship’. (Pientia 1950 (b): 1)

Christians were no longer to assume any superiority of their religion or their culture in its interpretation. (Hillman 1993: 30) The church was also conscious of an awakening African nationalism, which provided a fertile area for growth in the practicality of belief and in art. In the 1940s Pius XII issued the following injunction, as if in direct response to this: ‘Let not the gospel, on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish what is naturally good, just or beautiful’, and added the following in a later encyclical: ‘Whatever there is in the native customs that is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error will always receive kindly consideration and when possible be preserved intact’. (Pientia 1954 (b): 3)<sup>117</sup> Pientia was however well aware that when

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<sup>116</sup> A quote from the ‘Constitution of Sacred Liturgy’ of Vatican II reads: ‘...the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or good of the whole community; rather does she respect the genius and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people’s way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact...’ (1968:5-6)

<sup>117</sup> It was especially in the 1967 *Populorum Progression* (Paul VI) that the official Catholic attitude to

these principles were applied in practice, especially in art, both black and white would initially find it ‘...hard to associate these to us strange forms, so different from our traditional Christian symbols, with Christian worship’ (Pientia 1950 (c): 1)

The widespread impact of Vatican II was felt in South Africa, not least in terms of the sanctioning of and support for art education and training, despite state restrictions. On a more informal level, as will be seen, many Catholic religious supported individual artists or groups, or assisted in setting up exhibitions or providing venues for foregrounding local artistic production, both sacred or secular in content. Pientia’s colleague Sr Johanna Senn provided important ongoing support for black artists after Pientia left for Europe in the early 1980s. She also variously debated the nature of contemporary sacred art, suggesting the ongoing need for supporting local artists. (Senn, personal communication, 1990)

Pope Pius XI ordered a missionary exhibition to coincide with the Holy Year of 1925 in an attempt to provide tangible proof of the vital unity of the church among all nations and to examine the fruits of missionary endeavour. (Pientia 1954:2) Even at this early stage he called on the Catholic missions to respect the artistic ‘predilections and traditions of the many tribes and nations whom they serve’.(Anonymous 1949, Southern Cross). No evidence has been found of any South African contributions to this 1925 exhibition.

Again in 1950 a Holy Year was declared by Catholicism, coincident with which another mission-derived exhibition was arranged. Each country exhibited individually as well as being identified as part of a continent, while the work of ‘foreigners’ (ie missionaries or art teachers) was accepted for inclusion in the exhibition, provided that it was inspired by native art. This provided yet another significant incentive to Sr Pientia to pursue her own syncretic iconographic and stylistic ideals. (Costantini 1948) Ironically in South Africa, 1950 was also the year that saw the ratification of the

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nationalism and racism was clarified. Nationalism is only condoned when it is ‘ennobled by that universal charity which embraces the whole human family’ and should not be isolating, and racism was still seen as an obstacle in disadvantaged nations and ‘a cause of division and hatred within countries whenever individuals and families see the inviolable rights of the human person held in scorn, as they themselves are unjustly subjected to a regime of discrimination because of their race or their colour’. (Hurley 1982:41)

Group Areas Act which further entrenched segregationist legislation and humiliated the African population by imposing on them further restrictive rights based on race. (Brookes 1968:131-2) The coincidence of these two positions, by church and state respectively, were radically different and marked the beginning of a schism that was to persist for several decades.

Pientia recalls that on his return from Rome, Bishop Fleischer (of Mariannhill) noted that the perception in Rome was that while the Mariannhill missionaries had done much for the Zulu, more should be done about 'art making' especially that which reflected the 'mentality, taste and style' of the local Zulu. (Pientia 1950(b): 1) However this seemingly liberal view was tempered by the comment that initially such art should be based on a Christian iconographic tradition, albeit translated in an 'original way', one that reflected the peoples' culture, disallowing any copyist work. (Pientia 1950(b): 1) <sup>118</sup>

Pientia's reaction was initially one of concern.<sup>119</sup> She knew that many *kholwa* and urban westernized Zulu initially considered their cultural products to be inferior, and that most African artists in South Africa were working in a European style. She was well aware of the competitiveness that would be present at the exhibition and cited examples she knew of from the Congo, where there were fewer Europeans, and where traditional art flourished, and a greater pride is shown in traditional creativity, where churches included weavings and artifacts based on traditional forms. (Pientia 1950(b): 1)

A small collection of drawings, paintings and lino-cuts of her students' work from St Francis

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<sup>118</sup> He further contended that his definition of indigenous art must be: 'Ingeborenen Kunst muss inspiriert sein von der Mentalitat, den Geschmack und Stil der entsprechenden Rasse. Die christliche Ikonographische Tradition muss die Grundlage sein fur christliche Eingeborenen Kunst. Letztere soll aber doch ursprunglich sein und die Eigenart des betreffenden Volke widerspiegeln. Kopien von eingefuhrten Modellen werden nicht als Eingeborenen Kunst betrachtet'. (Pientia 1950 (c))

<sup>119</sup> Her concerns were based on the fact that stylistically the work of her students and other contemporary African art was yet to reflect an authenticity that she considered desirable. She notes: 'Though apparently it shows leanings towards modern Western art, in its essence it is different, though as yet it is difficult to define this difference. Just as all Africans now want with all their heart the Western way of life, but at the same time do not want to give up their "African-ness", so resemblance to Western modern art is only superficial'. (Pientia 1963 (c):1)



College, as well as vestments and weavings from mission workshop was taken by Pientia to the Mission Art Exhibition (arranged by Bishop Costantini). Interestingly work with both sacred and secular themes was included, her students' work largely secular, while her own was mostly biblically derived.<sup>120</sup> The criteria for selection to this exhibition anticipated the future direction of mission art-teaching and church patronage. 'Native art' was understood as being 'the art inspired by the taste, style and genius of the natives.....which should be inspired by the iconographic Christian tradition, but expressed in an original fashion', while 'Native architecture' signified 'structural forms which take into account the elements of style, ornament and material prevalent in the country'. (Costantini, 1948:1)

The contribution of both Pientia and her students enjoyed enormous success in Rome (Pientia 1950 (b):1), and was highly commended by Costantini, heralded as exemplifying both a new sacred and secular art. Ironically at the time this work was hardly known in South Africa beyond the confines of Mariannhill. The exhibition was displayed in Madrid and Paris (Pientia, c1950) and most works remained in Europe, housed in the various mission houses of Pientia's order. News of the success of her venture reached South Africa and on her return there she was inundated with requests for commissions from Catholic churches countrywide, few of which she could initially accept, owing to her teaching duties at Mariannhill. After another trip to Rome in which she visited numerous centres of sacred art, she was deployed locally, responsible for the redecoration of the St Mary's Hospital Chapel (Mariannhill), completed in 1952.

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<sup>120</sup> Student works included *Mother and Child*, *Mother of God*, (by the same student -unidentified), *Horse and Rider*, *Two monkeys*, *Fishes in a pond* (it was said to resemble a Klee work), *Christmas*, *Woman making pots* and *Three blind mice*. Pientia's own works included linocuts of *Mother and Child*, *African "Orante"*, *Zulu Girl*, *The Christ Child* and paintings such as *Studies for the Stations of the Cross*, *Christ falls for the third time*, *The Pieta*, *Christ falls for the second time* and *The sorrowing Women*. Also included were paintings of *A Christmas Angel* and an *Icon*. Pientia was granted an audience with Bishop Costantini, then secretary to Cardinal Fumasoni Biondi of the Propaganda Congregation, who was extremely complimentary about her work and that of her students. Costantini who had a 'keen interest in indigenous Christian Art', had been a missionary in China. She notes: 'Everything interested him: Vestments decorated with African patterns, purely primitive African expressions, but especially the first gropings of a young Christian people after a Christian Art expression.' (Pientia 1950:1) Pientia notes further that she left the audience with Costantini 'with a sense of joy and satisfaction, because I had the sanction of Rome for the pionier (sic) work of trying to establish a more congenial Christian Art for South Africa.' (1950 (b):1)

Doubtless spurred on by the success of the mission exhibitions in 1950, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (Rome) released an *Instruction to Catholic Bishops of the World on Principles of Sacred Art* in 1952. However the instruction cautioned against the use of too much ‘new art’ (modernism) in churches,

‘...a sincere welcome to every good and progressive development of the approved and venerable traditions, which in so many centuries of Christian life, in such diversity of circumstances and of social and ethnic conditions, have given stupendous proof of their inexhaustible capacity of inspiring new and beautiful forms’ (Anonymous, 1952:130)

The ambiguity of this comment is typical of the cautious attitude of the Church despite its overtures to modernist art: modernism was sanctioned, as was ethnic distinctiveness, as long as it was manifest within thematic and proprietorial conventions long established by the church.

Soon after her return from Rome, however, Pientia became the centre of a widely publicised controversy the result of a series of articles she wrote for the national Catholic newspaper, the *Southern Cross*. No doubt inspired by debates she had engaged in Rome, her articles upheld the synthesis of Christian and pagan symbols. According to her, in the example she chose, the incorporation of cameo of Augustus in the Lothar Cross (Aix la Chapelle) was justified as being symbolic of the concept of kingship, albeit in another era and derived from another culture. (Pientia 1951 (a))<sup>121</sup>

Some of her critics expressed views that were tantamount to racial bias, rejecting not only her work but also that of her students - wholly condemning any vernacular translations of Biblically derived themes. She was, for example, criticized for her own work, *Madonna and Child* - which was said to have failed to reflect the beauty the writer perceived Mary to have had: to him she was ‘physically

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<sup>121</sup> Sr Pientia’s own work *Icon and Idols* exemplifies this interaction in which her chosen symbols share a common concept of veneration and commemoration. (Pientia, 1951(a))

and spiritually the most beautiful creature He ever made'. (Sellicks 1951)<sup>122</sup> She was also accused of painting sacred figures black and encouraging the same in her students. The writer claimed to have read a letter of a contemporary of Christ, who noted that 'his hair was chestnut or auburn, and the eyes blue. If therefore, an African Negro were to depict Him as a black man with negroid features he would be wrong in every possible way, just as many of the Italian Old masters were wrong when they painted Him from dark-eyed Italian models.'(Sellicks 1951)<sup>123</sup>

While her views evoked both criticism and support, ultimately she was suspended from teaching duties at Mariannahill for a short time. She notes: 'Painting Jesus and Mary and the Apostles in African costume was considered demoralising for my students' (Pientia in Miles-Cadman, 1970)<sup>124</sup> She was however reinstated at the beginning of the following term, after being interviewed by the papal delegate (Archbishop Lucas). (Pientia, personal communication, 1988) Seen in context, this suspension was probably also associated with the fact that at the time the Catholic church was under close scrutiny by the new Nationalist government, and had just been subject to the early segregationist education policies of the state. Any hint at cross-cultural absorption was initially seen

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<sup>122</sup> Sellicks continued: '...neither of the fat-faced, thick-lipped creatures in the aforementioned design comes anywhere near my idea of beauty.' (Southern Cross 1951), while another respondent countered her ideas that local religious art should express the 'truth of Christianity' in the local colour of its environment, by citing the much disputed image on the Veil of Veronica as testimony of Christ's semitic, yet essentially Aryan features. (Agape, 1951)

<sup>123</sup> Some of Pientia's critics condemned any forays by liturgical artists into modernism, describing it as 'this crazy trend to queer and crude art' which they felt the average person condemned. (Agape 1951) However Pientia was supported by several critics who felt that her search for a new African Christian art and equally a new modern one was justified. One critic noted that she was justified in countering in liturgical art what Jacques Maritain, author of *Art and Scholasticism* called the '...devilish ugliness, an offence to God and much more harmful than is generally believed to the spread of religion, of the great bulk of contemporary objects manufactured for the decoration of churches.' This he noted was in keeping with the wishes of Pope Pius X who wished to rid churches of '...the products belched out of the cellars of religious commerce' (known by the French as 'l'art Saint-Sulpicean'. (Kraft, 1951). Other sources went so far as to indicate that it was the responsibility of Catholics to cease relying on the cheap plaster casts (loosely based on sacred art from the Renaissance) and to create instead a newly inspired art and a new 'intellectual art.' (Harrison 1946:49-50)

<sup>124</sup> In an interview decades later she admitted that this setback only resolved her perseverance in acculturation in her own work, but that she was also deeply affected by the suspension. (Pientia, personal communication, 1995)

as potentially provocative, and the ‘demoralizing effect’ on students was likely to have been associated with latent pan Africanism.

These discouraging developments, although speedily resolved, precipitated Pientia’s decision to abandon her teaching at Mariannhill for a time and accept commissions elsewhere. An invitation (in 1952) with the promise of several commissions was extended to her by Bishop Rosental of Queenstown. He had long intended establishing an African Art Centre at Lumku Mission (in the eastern Cape),<sup>125</sup> which would combine with the catechetical institute there. (Pientia 1963 (a): 4) The purpose of the centre was threefold: to foster an African Christian culture; to provide possibilities for developing the innate artistic abilities of the African; and to preserve indigenous customs and incorporate them into the new Christian culture, thereby instilling a new pride in African indigenous forms of art and craft. The church, as the patron of such art, would see to its marketing in the hopes of providing a regular income for artists. (Pientia1960:1) The Lumko Institute was later moved to the former OMI Noviciate and Conference Centre in Germiston on 15 October 1985, where a substantial amount of religious literature, much of it illustrated, is still produced.

Apart from her teaching at Lumku, which embraced the abovementioned ideals, one of Pientia’s most noteworthy achievements was the design and decoration of the church at McKay’s Nek, colloquially known as ‘The Hut of the Great King’. Although this project was constructed outside the borders of Natal and will thus not be considered in detail, a few points need to be made as in many ways it was the realization of a vision nurtured by Pientia while in Natal. She was well aware of similar projects initiated at Regina Mundi in Zimbabwe, and Lumku coincided with the construction of the church of the Good Shepherd at Hlabisa church (to be examined below) produced under the auspices of Fr Kinch and completed in 1960.

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<sup>125</sup> She also addressed the issue of who would finance an art-training scheme. Would it be private or government controlled, and who would be the patron of native art? In her mind the church was the ideal patron. Unfortunately political events were about to radically affect the future of art training, when what remained was soon subject entirely to state control. A major opportunity was lost, but understandably the church had to focus on the very survival of its mission and above all of its educational structures which were threatened by a loss of subsidy under the new Nationalist regime, should they challenge the state. (Pientia 1963 (a):1)

The McKay's Nek church was intended as a project for the Lumku Art School students: they were to act as assistants in both stonework and murals. In explanatory notes written in 1954 Pientia emphasized that 'the whole building should be an adaptation to answer the needs of the African psyche. The erection of a church of this type is absolutely imperative if we missionaries want to build a lasting Christian culture'. (Pientia 1954(b): 1-4) The church would function as a social centre, thereby echoing the new ideals of secular and sacred care of the indigenous flock outlined by the papacy. In keeping with the ideals set out by Costantini, Pientia insisted that all the material used should be indigenous, if at all possible. Local stone was used for the mosaics and on the walls as far as the frieze, with the intention of resembling a cattle kraal, while the roof was intended to be of thatch. Owing to the danger of fire, however, corrugated asbestos was used. The round Xhosa hut form was also chosen as it resembled the early Christian centralized church plan, and in addition a circle of three rondavel churches was placed around the main apse, so that the altar would be visible from all quarters.

An 'art assistant', Albert Ndlovu, was sent to Sr Pientia by Jack Grossert in 1958, having been trained at Ndaleni (to be discussed below). At McKay's Nek, Ndlovu worked on sacred statues for the church, such as his *Crucifix* (c1953) (**Figure 25**) and taught craftwork to children in the school nearby. (**Figure 26**) After working at McKay's Nek he returned to the Lumku centre and did several works for the church there as well. (Pientia 1959 (b)) A Br Liberatus was also at Lumku for some time working both independently and with Pientia. (**Figures 27 and 28**) Pientia referred to him as having initially trained elsewhere and she was rather unenthusiastic about his realist tendencies.

Along the stone dado was a geometrical frieze of 'African patterns'; while in the sanctuary hut a cross was added to the pattern. (Pientia 1954(b): 1-4) The decoration outside the church was designed and produced by George Kubeka (**Figure 29**), who had joined Pientia as an apprentice while she was doing the mosaics for Queenstown Cathedral. (Pientia 1962) Pientia designed the mosaic of Christ behind the altar, largely of local stone, with the assistance of Kubeka and Michael Mbebe. Rosina Qualana, another one of the art apprentices who assisted at McKay's Nek, was the

only female. <sup>126</sup>

The perception of the locals was probably never fully taken into account in the planning of the church, Pientia noting that they were disappointed when they saw that the design for their new church resembled their own dwellings. (Pientia, personal communication, 1995) Perhaps her ideas were ahead of her time, but the community's reaction is indicative of the initial resistance by *kholwa* to their own cultural practices merely being partly transformed to suit their newly acquired practice and identity. Anything that was not equal to what their white counterparts had or expected was unacceptable. (Pientia 1958: 3)

After her work at Lumku, Pientia returned to Mariannhill to work on various projects, and continued to accept students whom she termed 'assistants' or apprentices. In the 1960s three of her students - Duke Ketye, Franz Hodi and Michael Mbebe - evolved what could perhaps be referred to as a distinctive Mariannhill style. While all three hailed from the Eastern Cape, they practiced mostly at Mariannhill after initially working with her at Lumku. Their work includes not only sacred and secular graphic art, but also sculpture, and clearly reflects the programme of teaching which Sr Pientia initiated, while also partly emulating her distinctive style.

Duke Ketye had completed his schooling at St Francis College and worked as one of Pientia's apprentices at Lumku, returning to Mariannhill where he worked until 1965. (Sack 1988:106) His early student works such as *The Good Samaritan* (c1965) (**Figure 30**) and later work such as *Women from Jerusalem mourn for our Lord* (1980) (**Figure 31**) partly emulated Pientia's style, another source deriving from Burkhardt's modernist imagery in Herder's Catechism. (**Figure 24**) Sr Pientia's stress on contour, emphatic shading from one side to suggest volume, and her hieratic forms remained influential in his work, based on her predilections for early Christian and Romanesque art, mentioned earlier.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> She later died of complications associated with witchcraft.

<sup>127</sup> The African idiom (together with an early Christian and Romanesque aspect), with an emphasis on pattern and clarity of form, derived from the 'African's ...innate ability ... for flat patterns, line patterns (as found on

Ketye's peer, Franz Hodi, a Xhosa by birth who had first worked with Pientia at Mc Kay's Nek, Lumku and then Mariannahill, was another of the exceptional talents attracted by Sr Pientia's teaching and activities. After working with Pientia at Lumku he was her apprentice at Mariannahill from 1960-1967. (Sack 1988:105) His emulation of her methods in *Christ Preaching* (c1965) (**Figure 32**) soon gave way to a distinctive style that characterized his work of the 1960s. His *Last Supper* (c1965) (**Figure 33**) and *Praying Figures* (c1965) (**Figure 34**), and *Stations of the Cross* (c1965) (**Figure 35 and 36**), are examples of his assimilation of traditional sacred iconography rendered with the distinctive clarity and simplicity that embraced early Christian art tempered by African conceptualism. Though there is frequent reference to a neo-Romanesque manner and format as a prototype, this has been fully synthesized and personalized.<sup>128</sup> Michael Mbebe, a St Francis' College matriculant, transferred to Lumko as Pientia's assistant, subscribing to the hieratic idiom emerging in the work of his peers, further substantiating the view that a distinctive Mariannahill style was developing in the 1960s. This is discernible in his *Annunciation* (c1965) (**Figure 37**) and *Expulsion* (c 1965). (**Figure 38**)

The work of Pientia's students requires more scrutiny in further research. They produced a unique body of robust work that loosely drew on the emphases outlined by and reflected in Pientia's own work. Thematically their emphases were drawn from those associated with the liturgy, practice and the moralizing emphases in the catechism, coupled with compelling empathic imagery in which key

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pottery), love for minute detail, fondness for repetition, and skillful rendering of animals in movement'. (Pientia 1948:1-4) Given this perception, Sr Pientia made no attempt initially to teach perspective to her students. Such aspects were only included in her program later, but even then there was no insistence that this be reflected in their work. Pientia suggested the use of new symbols in artists' work: 'Eventually the Africans must develop their own symbolic forms, and they will be less abstract than ours'. The extent to which she accepted even a more conceptual rendering of religious themes is exemplified in reference to the theme 'In Paradise', in which a young schoolgirl had illustrated the theme by depicting a large ear, eye and writing tablet. The girl explained that she drew them because 'God sees, hears, and knows everything.' (Pientia 1948:1-4). This is a significant example of the way in which Africans responded conceptually to such themes, the significance bestowed on it by Pientia indicative of her receptiveness to such interpretation.

<sup>128</sup> Little is known about Brother Liberatus. Pientia claimed that he hailed from the Cape and that he at times produced liturgical art for missions in the eastern Cape. (Pientia, personal communication, 1993)

figures dominated. Besides conveying biblically-derived figures in appropriate flowing robes, many artists situated their figures in contemporary dress and settings, resulting in an applicability to local experience and exigency. More particularly their work read as modernist, the broad planes, emphatic contour and conceptualism distinguishing their work from that of much other mission patronized art.

Besides these trained apprentices, Sr Pientia also attracted ‘informal’ self-taught artists, such as her last apprentice, Joseph Dlamini. Born in Mnycimana (sic) c1928, he was schooled at the Mariannahill outstations of Mariahilfe and Einsiedeln. Sr Cortona recognized his sculpting ability at the latter outstation, and he was sent to Sr Pientia in 1967 for further assistance and direction. (Anonymous, 1968) (a) Sr Pientia’s teaching of Dlamini was merely by encouragement, as she was careful not to modify what she recognized as a mature and unique intuitive talent, seen in his *Crucifixion* (c1967) (**Figure 39**) and *Disciple with animals* (c1967). (**Figure 40**) Ironically it is this ‘unschooled work’ that Sr Pientia most appreciated, reflecting what she regarded as a spontaneous and intuitive response to African and Christian traditions of figuration. (Pientia, personal communication, 1995)

Pientia’s students were prolific. They worked both on commissions and it appears were expected to contribute work for sale to the missions. Although there is a distinctiveness in each individual’s work, there is also a clearly discernible influence of Pientia’s own work, coupled with early Christian, Romanesque and African influences. After about 1968, the Mariannahill art students dispersed, many being assimilated into the commercial sector. Qualana died in the mid 1960s, Joseph Dlamini in the 1970s; and Mbebe has not been traced. Hodi was traced to the Eastern Cape in the late 1980s where he was said to have worked for the Xhosa Development Corporation as a designer for a weaving studio. George Kubeka continued to work in Inkamana as artist and teacher, producing numerous murals and sculptures for churches in the region, and has since retired (Kubeka, personal communication, 2002), while Duke Ketye often worked on church commissions, and in the last fifteen to twenty years was contracted to the Lumko Institute in Germiston until his recent death in the late 1990s. Lumko was based on the original Lumko Art Centre that relocated to Gauteng (formerly the Transvaal), and continues to produce images for tracts and other religious publications, among other things. The original Lumko Art Centre in the Eastern Cape (formerly Transkei) now



functions merely as a school, with only some craft activity remaining. (Gereon, personal communication, 1993)

Subsequently Pientia made certain that her students have as much exposure in the mission art world as possible.<sup>129</sup> Together with them she participated in a number of annual locally held exhibitions (many held at Mariannhill) which included school art as well as art from other institutions in the region (including Ndaleni and Rorke's Drift). However one of the most significant exhibitions she assisted with was the *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition* held at the Durban Art Gallery in December 1965, which brought together some of the best African and South African liturgical artists who worked at the time. At the time few exhibitions that focused mainly on African art took place, making this a landmark exhibition. However, earlier that year in August, Michael Zondi held his first one-person exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery, much of his work also biblically sourced.

The Interfaith exhibition was organized by Mr Hall Duncan, Director of the Africa Art Project, of the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association<sup>130</sup> (who will be referred to later in the section on Ndaleni) with the assistance of Sr Pientia and the Rev Maurice Fearn of the Methodist Church.<sup>131</sup> It appears that the works were submitted by art teachers, the church and many also came from private collections, such as that of Dr Bodenstein (a close friend and mentor of Michael Zondi), and a Mr H Boyce of Durban.

The exhibition was accompanied by lectures at the Gallery by Hall Duncan on '*Contemporary*

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<sup>129</sup> Pientia was asked to comment on recent trends in contemporary church art, and her reply reflects her position and implicitly that of the church. Importantly she noted that in many ways secular and sacred in art are no longer separate: 'Religion, and especially Christianity, is an incarnation. And the forms and shapes of this material world are used as symbol, were used by Christ himself, to convey and also give the divine. So the church has to use during her pilgrimage through the ages the culture of that particular age, and speak through it, her saving messages'. (Pientia:1965(b):1)

<sup>128</sup> Little is known of this organization, but it appears that it often absorbed artists as illustrators.

<sup>131</sup> On November 18, 1965 the Rev Cyril Wilkins of the Methodist Church and Jack Grossert, representing the Catholic Church, jointly opened the Inter Faith Exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery (it closed on 15 December that year). A text accompanying an audio/slide show of the exhibition was compiled by Sr Pientia and Sr Adelgisa, with slides made by Fr Lautenschlager.

*African Christian Art*, one by Sr Pientia on ‘*The modern movement in Church Art*’, another by Jack Grossert on ‘*Creative Intuition in Bantu Christian Art in South Africa*’, while the Rev David Poynton spoke on ‘*Church Architecture as expressing Christian Community*’. (Adelgisa and Pientia:1965) The aim of the exhibition was to ‘show how the different Christian Bantu groups interpret the Gospel message’ in the hopes of enriching the Christian heritage. (Interfaith brochure, 1965). An excerpt from Hall Duncan’s lecture explains further:

‘Within the past ten years there has appeared an increased interest in the problem of communication within the churches of the world. This interest has rapidly gained momentum with the advent of new nations and the intensified programs for people in the developing areas of the world... The ability of church personnel to communicate effectively is in a crisis stage. The problem is worldwide. Christianity appears to have lost much of its buoyant vitality in its present forms... The clergy badly need more intensive training in the art of communication. But the most crucial problem is that the truly creative people who can most help the Christian churches effectively communicate their eternal truths find little support or encouragement in the present church structures. There are very few exceptions in the quest for church renewal or reform to make way for the creative Christian’. (Duncan, 1965:1-2)

Duncan also quoted William Fagg who contended that the essential ‘truths of art, as a religion, are not explicable in words, and it is for the communication of the ineffable – the *mysterium fidei* – that the true artist must be something of a priest and the priest an artist’. (Duncan 1965:1-2) Clearly the exhibition was intended to encourage patronage and dialogue, but also to promote creativity among black artists and channel this into an Africanised Christian art form.

Jack Grossert’s lecture proved to be an interesting if at times biased assessment of Christian art. In obvious approval of the African art on display, and implicitly attempting to persuade white visitors to the exhibition to respond positively to the new aesthetic before them, he criticized the conventional taste of Europeans (implicitly white South Africans as well) to whom religious art was still largely associated with the Renaissance realism of the Cinquecento experience.<sup>132</sup> Grossert also attempted to

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<sup>132</sup> As a devout Catholic Grossert was partisan in noting that while the assimilation of western culture and ideals had led to great upheavals and even harm among Africans, ‘Christian teachings’ had by and large resulted in ‘a new and more settled way of life’. (1965:1) Grossert contextualized his comment, obliquely alluding to the recent unrest in the country that ensued after the 1961 Sharpeville massacre: ‘I would not like to give the impression that

persuade his audience of a change in attitude to Africans based on similarity in belief and the need for empathy. To him the significance of the exhibition lay in the fact that ‘..it evinces an acceptance of Christianity’ and that ‘it is only when people show an urge to give expression to the spiritual emotions which fill their hearts, that we can know that spiritual growth is taking place’. (Grossert 1965: 3-4) What particularly pleased Grossert was that the African artist retained an African idiom and responded

‘With a fresh vision, usually unhampered by traditional manners of representation which so often cramp European work. This provides vitality and is a constant source of interest. The means by which Bantu artists make their impact are not only by the strength of their style, but also by the very strong aesthetic qualities of design, and bold and significant form which their works display’. (Grossert 1965: 3-4)

All three major centres for black art training in Natal were well represented, namely Mariannhill, Ndaleni and Rorke’s Drift. The full impact of the latter would only be felt later in the 1960s and early 1970s when the school reached its zenith. Significantly the exhibition included work by artists from throughout Africa, and was intended to celebrate contemporary Christian-inspired art practice as a testimony both to the implanting of Christianity, but also to publicize the support of the church

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the clash of cultures has not brought with it many grave problems, or that the transition to a new way of life in urban townships is without pain and sorrow; but occasions such as this exhibition renew us with hope’, arguing implicitly that Christian art can only ensue if the content thereof has been internalised and become sufficiently part of the indigenous culture. (1965:1) He further described Bantu and African art as haptic, given its intuitive and conceptual nature, as also occurred in the Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic periods. Grossert pointed to the very difficult task faced by religious in conveying the essence of, for example, the Crucifixion to ‘unbelievers’, noting however that the comparison between the two cultures was not that remote: ‘The idea of speaking to those who have departed from us in death is not foreign to the people of Africa, nor the idea of sacrifice, nor the symbolical eating of the sacrifice to obtain inner strength, a ritual which is paralleled in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and itself foreshadowed by the Passover of the Israelites. I believe it is in the universality of such beliefs, the perennial philosophy, which has made the evangelisation of Africa so patently successful.’ (1965:5) He too quoted Jacques Maritain’s lectures on ‘Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry: ‘Creativity, or the power of engendering,...is a mark and privilege of life in spiritual things. The intellect wishes to engender not only the concept but both a material and spiritual work into which our soul overflows.’ To Grossert it is this ‘giving expression to what is in the soul’, which he encountered in Bantu Christian art, believing, too, that all creativity suggests an affinity with the Creator, just as in nature a rock formation expresses the force of the power that engendered it.. Individuals with intellect have a ‘compulsion from within for the intellect to manifest externally what is grasped in the mind. Images, like music and dance/drama can work ‘subtly on the human mind and visual communication for the illiterate is a ‘very natural form’. Anticipating criticism that visual imagery would be venerated he notes that in Africa, although ‘idols are produced’ their worship is unknown. (Grossert 1965:5)

in sponsoring and encouraging the development of contemporary art in Africa and South Africa in particular. Some of the work included in the exhibition was made by unnamed schoolchildren at Mariannhill such as a *Crucifixion* and *Madonna* which were termed examples of ‘primitive art’ said to reflect the simplicity of ‘traditional African art’. (Adelgisa and Pientia: 1965)<sup>133</sup>

Rorke’s Drift was mainly represented by Azaria Mbatha and anonymous weavers who produced his images, as well as by a few serigraphs and a linocut by him. These images have not been traced, but images of the tapestries have. The two tapestries designed by Azaria Mbatha are of the *Last Supper* (**Figure 41**) as well as his *Chariot/The Ethiopian*. (**Figure 42**),<sup>134</sup> both reminiscent of his murals produced at approximately the same time. Other works were by artists from Tanzania, Ethiopia, Congo, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.<sup>135</sup> The Ethiopian artist Araya Zadavit was represented by the image *Transcribing the Bible* (said to be in the Coptic style) (**Figure 43**), while Cameroon was represented by Njeng Rigobert’s *Sunday Morning*. (**Figure 44**) The Congo was represented by, among others, Job Mokgosi’s stained glass windows: *The Nativity (in Basuto setting)* (**Figure 45**) and *The Baptism of Jesus*. (**Figure 46**)<sup>136</sup> The artist, clearly of BaSotho origin, is said to have been working in the Congo at the time, but no further information about him has been found. 137

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<sup>133</sup> Included too was a remarkable sculpture of a *Praying man* which was produced by a fifteen year old boy from the Benedictine mission in Nongoma in Zululand, and *The Birth of Christ* which was set in a cattle kraal. (Adelgisa and Pientia 1965)

<sup>134</sup> These were praised as the ‘Christian message is direct and has a central moral idea’ (Adelgisa recording) Grossert in particular praised these works as revealing a sensitivity to design, and praised the strong narrative strain in his linocuts. (Grossert 1965:4)

<sup>135</sup> There were several works from central Africa: *Feeding of the multitude* by Olu Onimole, from Ibadan; Tanzania was represented by several works by N. Nsunza; another Coptic artist-priest Emshaw Tentin submitted *A thank offering from a peasant to his High Priest*; also from Ethiopia was *Peter’s Denial* by Bekela Stephanes; Madagascan artist Helene Razanatefy exhibited the *Good Samaritan*; another *Good Samaritan* was produced by an artist from the Central School of Art for the Church in Uganda; E Lusabisa (from Leopoldville, Congo) was represented by *Jesus and the children*; the Anglican art training centre at Cyrene (Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) was represented by a *Madonna and Child*.

<sup>136</sup> A new technique for stained glass making had been developed by Glassparencies, Ltd, in Johannesburg, in which the colours were melted into the glass.

137 I include some images of these Interfaith works by artists from elsewhere in Africa as a significant body of comparative work which may have been inspirational to some of the many artists visiting the exhibition. Virtually all of

The art teacher training course at Ndaleni, Richmond (begun in 1952), was already well established at the time. Ndaleni submitted works by Peter Madileng (whose other religious art will be discussed in Chapter 3) and Wiseman Mbambo. The latter's work is *Angel and the Devil* (c1965) (**Figure 47**), and an anonymous artist's work, *The power of prayer* (c1965) (**Figure 48**); Eric Ngcobo, an ex Ndaleni student (in 1953-1954), then teaching at KwaMashu, did a *Meditation* in wood. An acclaimed student from Ndaleni, Ngcobo later became an inspector of art for schools in Natal for the Department of Education and Culture of the Kwa Zulu homeland. Even one of South Africa's political activist artists, Selby Mvusi (trained at Ndaleni), submitted a bust of *Moses*, as well as a bust of a *High Priest* (**Figure 49**) and *Nicodemus and Christ*. Rabi Matshaba, described as hailing 'from a township' was represented by *Preaching in the Township* (**Figure 50**), depicting a charismatic Zionist with his followers. Surprisingly a work by Dan Rakgoathe, *Man at prayer*, was included. Given his Rosicrucian inclinations one can presume that this work was sourced in this and not Christian practice.

Mariannhill was represented by several artists: Franz Hodi included some of his first wood relief carvings: a *Stations of the Cross*, *Flight into Egypt* (**Figure 51**), a *Crucifixion*, an *Annunciation*, as well as his panel for Radio Bantu in King Williamstown. Other works included were an *Expulsion from Paradise/Annunciation*<sup>138</sup> by Rosina Qualana, and a *Stations of the Cross* by Michael Mbebe. Louis Mathebula, originally from Johannesburg, did a *Daniel in the Lion's den*, *The Good Shepherd* (woodcut) and *Creation of the animals*. Duke Ketye included a *Last Supper* (**Figure 52**), as well as an image of the *Three Wise Men*. Another student of Pientia's, Patrick Mokhuane, (who later left to study medicine), did an image of *The Betrayal of Peter*, and Michael Mbebe's *Station of the Cross* (**Figure 53**) was also included.

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these works have not been seen since the Interfaith Exhibition.

<sup>138</sup> There are often disparities in the titles given to the works. The taperecording by Pientia and Adelgisa refers to the work by Qualana as an *Annunciation*, whereas the catalogue refers to it as *Expulsion from Paradise*.

Work from other missions was also emerging at the time: George Kubeka, Sr Pientia's co-artist at Lumku, who had begun teaching at the Benedictine Mission at Inkamana, submitted a *Pieta* (**Figure 54**) that was highly praised by Jack Grossert in his lecture as 'revealing in the emaciated features of the cadaver strong emotional identification by the artist' (Grossert 1965:4). This was clearly influenced by sculptors Ernst Barlach and Kathe Kollwitz, whom he admired. Michael Zondi, a sculptor at the Swedish mission at Appelsbosch submitted a *Mary Magdalene*, *The prophet*, *The prodigal son*, and *The Expulsion*. Fr Kinch's protege Bernard Gcwensa, from Hlabisa, submitted his well-known *Praying mother/The rosary/uMama* (**Figure 55**) as well as a *Stations of the Cross*. The former, actually a portrait of his mother, was claimed to resemble the art of Ife. (Adelgisa and Pientia: 1965).

The work at the exhibition was highly diverse with few of the repetitive stylistic features Fagg found so problematic in some mission inspired art. With fewer stereotyped interpretations, repetition only seemed to apply when artists were commissioned to produce work that had a specific liturgical function such as a *Stations of the Cross*, or the more conventional themes, such as the *Madonna and Child* and the numerous *Crucifixions*. More individualistic renderings occurred in work such as that of Lucas Sithole, as seen in his *Christ and the Children/ Altar cloth for a children's church* (c1965) (**Figure 56**); *Family at prayer* (c1965) (**Figure 57**); *Praying figures; Figures receiving benediction/ Family Christmas* (c1965) (**Figure 58**) and *Christmas morning mass with traditional dress* (c1965). The latter two showed ordinary individuals engaged in religious practice, reflecting a desirable cultural and religious contextualization and syncretism. Sithole was a member of the Polly Street art school, his modernist realism reflecting the extent of his expressive graphic interpretation acquired as a student of Cecil Skotnes.

The significance of the *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition* cannot be underestimated. It set the tone for a series of smaller exhibitions within the ambit of the church (eg those held annually at Mariannahill until the mid 1990s), and was the first major sacred art exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery and in Natal. It came at a time when emergent contemporary African art in the region was still dominated

by the church. Further the exhibition was also one of the first in South Africa to include contemporary art, albeit liturgical, from the rest of the African continent, and in this it functioned as a valuable catalyst (albeit minor) in the development of contemporary African art in the region. It also reflected the idiosyncratic styles and interpretations of diverse artists inspired by Christianity. More particularly it set a thematic precedent for art among aspirant artists that has had numerous repercussions in the region and inevitably reinforced such thematic focus among other artists. At the time the Rorke's Drift Art School was in its infancy, and the Ndoleni Art School in existence for only a decade. Inevitably the focus, reception and success of the Interfaith Exhibition spurred both institutions to persevere in their activities, and the artists to persist in their thematic emphasis. Coincident with the rise of organised political resistance to the intransigent segregationist state - the events of 1961 (the Sharpeville massacre), the formation of a Republic (1961) and the emergent urban dissent that occurred in the 1960s, these works functioned as reminders of the centrality of belief among the oppressed.

But another factor must not be overlooked. A few months earlier (in July 1965), the second *Art South Africa Today* (ASAT) exhibition opened at the Durban Art Gallery. Initiated by the liberal (deemed suspect by the state) Race Relations Institute, this exhibition also set an important precedent for several subsequent exhibitions of the same name. By 1971 (the third exhibition of its kind) many works at the ASAT reflected a critical stance directed at government policy, and as in the two previous exhibitions, some of the works were also religion based. Primarily, however, *Art South Africa Today* foregrounded contemporary art, embracing the work of artists from all sectors of South Africa. A few months later Michael Zondi was granted a one-man exhibition at the Gallery, and many of his works were also biblically sourced. The Interfaith exhibition understandably opened closer to the Christmas period, perhaps partly eclipsed by the impact of *Art South Africa Today*. At the time there was a healthy rivalry between religious and secular art patronage groups, but, as noted earlier, this soon gave way to a predominance of secular art and the development in the 1960s of a white secular art market for black contemporary art.

Art teaching in South Africa was constantly under threat, however. While art was subsequently

removed from the Black matriculation curriculum in the early 1950s, it continued to be taught at Mariannahill only at primary level, with some classes continued into secondary (high) school. A venue at Mariannahill for art production and exhibitions, begun by Duke Ketye in 1977, was also closed in due course because it was deemed financially unviable. Visited in 1978, I was told by one of the artists that the church was not particularly pleased with the behaviour of some of the resident artists. (Anonymous, personal communication, 1978) The church was adamant that those artists who were in any way associated with it in the form of patronage, training or given residency and exhibition space, should basically conform to a tacit code of conduct, such as abstinence from excessive drinking and the adherence to a moral and ethical code. The failure of the 1970s residency and exhibition program can be directly ascribed to several artists' resistance to this form of prescriptiveness. Earlier, too, in 1985 the artist Ruben Xulu (discussed below) was murdered at Mariannahill after a celebratory outing, which inevitably contributed to the intransigent attitude of the Mariannahill Mission regarding the presence of artists in the confines of the mission.

The Mariannahill venture was also ultimately short-lived because of other factors. The church was limited in its ability to provide endless patronage for its qualified and talented students, and it was also aware that students/apprentices were often attracted to work in the secular market, after being trained by the church. The Catholic Church was fundamentally opposed to legislated segregation by the state, and under Archbishop Denis Hurley embarked on sustained opposition to state injustices, which had made the church increasingly suspect.<sup>139</sup> Sympathy for African political aspirations was often cautiously met by Catholic and other clergy. From 1948 the Nationalist government set about a program of reducing the scope and quality of African education to include training in only basic skills. Yet while art for matriculation was officially no longer allowed for black students after c1953, the training of art teachers to teach at primary level continued, but now primarily conducted at

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<sup>139</sup> Born of a long-standing antagonism between the State Dutch Reformed Church and the Catholic church, all Catholic institutions cautiously sanctioned only a degree of resistance in their institutions, for fear that they would be censored or even closed. This became apparent when St Francis College attempted to continue teaching art despite the withdrawal of State sponsorship for these courses. After a short time, however, the school realised that it could no longer subsidise the courses and therefore cancelled any further teaching of art as a matriculation course. Pientia continued to assist apprentices who were referred to her (eg Joseph Dlamini). (Pientia, personal communication, 1995)



Ndaleni under the auspices of the Bantu Education Department.

However, Sr Pientia's importance must lie in the fact that for nearly three decades she was responsible for art teaching to trainee teachers and later apprentices at Mariannhill, many of whom will have disseminated at least some of her ideas and ideals to several generations of fellow artists schoolchildren. Particular credit must also be given to her for attempting to nurture diverse stylistic and iconographic syntheses in her students' work, in which conceptual modes of expression from two continents were assimilated and ultimately contributed to the rise of an indigenous idiom in both sacred and secular art. She was vital in foregrounding debates surrounding the development of contemporary art in the region, in particular the need to change perceptions regarding its sources and the need to both modernise and Africanise contemporary liturgical art. Further, from the late 1940s she was almost solely responsible for foregrounding South African art, both sacred and secular, in the international sphere.

Pientia left Mariannhill permanently in 1981 to oversee the arrangement of mission exhibitions at the mother house in Rome and at other mission houses throughout Europe. She finally retired to the Missieklooster at Beek-en-Donk in Holland where she still worked and conducted research until her recent death on June 11, 2001.

### **3.4 Father Kinch and artists from Hlabisa**

Fully aware of papal initiatives, the work of Pientia and her students and the international movement in fostering contemporary indigenous art cultivated by various denominations in Africa and elsewhere, Fr Edwin Kinch must be considered as another major figure in spearheading Biblically inspired art and a culture of church patronage in KwaZulu-Natal. An American Servite, he arrived in KwaZulu-Natal in the mid 1940s settling eventually at the Servite mission at Hlabisa in northern Zululand. While untrained in art, he had several artist friends, such as Leopold Hafner, and was also acquainted with Maurice Lavanoux, the editor of *Liturgical Arts (LA)*, an American liturgical art

publication.

Both Kinch and Pientia subscribed to this American-based journal (LA). It was established in 1931 by the Liturgical Arts Society, Inc., whose purpose was to ‘devise ways and means for improving the standards of taste, craftsmanship, and liturgical correctness current in the practice of Catholic art in the United States’. (LA foreword).<sup>140</sup> Besides its focus on the arts, LA promoted current theological debate, challenged the production of poor liturgical art and became one of the major mouthpieces for the developments that changed and modernized liturgical art from the mid 1950s.<sup>141</sup> These developments coincided with a major new thrust to change the liturgy, which had remained virtually unchanged for four hundred years, and was in need of accommodating changes in contemporary culture. They also coincided with changing perspectives issued by the Vatican, outlined above. The arts too were expected to reflect contemporary culture and the practice of the variety of peoples who were Christians.

Liturgical Arts often included articles and imagery on liturgical art projects and architecture in other cultures that had embraced Christianity and Catholicism in particular. It was here that Fr Kinch saw examples of Nigerian and other African art, allowing his students access to copies of LA and the use of such imagery for inspiration. Other articles dealt with projects with Native Americans, which provided important precedents for art training.<sup>142</sup> (Kinch, personal communication, 1992)

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<sup>140</sup> This foreword appeared on the inside cover of all the LA publications.

<sup>141</sup> This is borne out by the 1941 report: ‘It is not improbable that present change was activated by material which appeared in this publication over the years’. (Godfrey 1971:18). Its editorial committee was drawn from nearly every part of the world. (Godfrey 1971:18)

<sup>142</sup> The August 1970 publication on Liturgical Arts included an article on *The Institute of American Indian Arts*, a National school for Indian youth founded in 1932, which provided interesting parallels for cultivating the arts in ‘heathen cultures’. (New 1970:117) New suggests that in any art training venture among groups subject to colonial ‘deculturation’, the emphasis should be given to indigenous traditions ‘...as a basis for creative expression... As a result of the Institute’s heritage-centered approach, students discover who they are and where what it is they have to say in the world, and thus develop the self-respect and self-confidence necessary to expression’. (1970:117)

In response to the church's embracing of non western cultural manifestations, outlined earlier, Kinch encouraged two Zulu carvers who displayed artistic talent to work for him and develop their carving skills. One, Bernard Muntuwenkosi kaGwensa,<sup>143</sup> particularly impressed Kinch by the quality of his walking sticks and motifs of hands, animals or women, as a result of which he was asked to do a Virgin Mary for the Women's Guild. (Cormick 1993:12) Kinch showed the work to Jack Grossert, a friend of his, who agreed that the young sculptor should be encouraged. Brother John Bardoni, Italian lay brother in charge of maintenance at Hlabisa, agreed to employ him as a labourer, thus enabling Gwensa to work on liturgical commissions when not required by Bardoni.

Gwensa's religious imagery was mostly dictated by the requisites of the Servites and the Catholic Church, and other commissions (such as those from Anglicans). The demand for images of the Virgin and Child, the Crucifixion, Stations of the Cross, and Nativity scenes was substantial. Gwensa, it appears, was initially quite dependent on Kinch and others for thematic suggestions, but Kinch gradually let him work independently. (Kinch, personal communication, 1993)<sup>144</sup>

The style that initially emerged in Gwensa's work can be described as realistic, which soon gave way to a more idiosyncratic stylization that drew loosely on various West African and western sources. Gwensa was initially inspired by images he was familiar with, such as the Illustrated Zulu Bible (*Izindaba ZaseBhayibheleni Elingcwele*). These images derived from western etchings typical of the late romantic period (such as those by von Carolsfeld mentioned in Chapter 1), as evidenced in some of the panels for the doors of the Good Shepherd Church at Hlabisa, such as *The Paschal meal*

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<sup>143</sup> He was born near Pomeroy in 1918 the son of Kholwa Zamindaba Johannes Gwensa and Nonkantola Maria Ntuli, who were from Tugela Ferry (Mabomvini Emsinga) in 1918. Mildly infirm (an asthma sufferer as a child and with an infirmity in the legs), he left school with a Std I qualification, having also made clay figurines at school. He worked on the mines and as a night watchman in Johannesburg until 1953 when he returned and lived by making walking sticks and spoons. (Cormick 1993:12). The family fled to Mgangatho near Nongoma, then later closer to Hlabisa

<sup>144</sup> An early work, included in the Republic festival exhibition in Bloemfontein in 1961, was *Christ the King* which received a highly commended second prize. (Cormick 1993:14)

*of the Israelites, Mary Magdalene bathing the feet of Christ* (Figure 59) and *The Last Supper*. (Kinch, personal communication, 1993).

Gcwensa's work was, however, also influenced by several calculated interventions. Kinch's influence consisted in suggesting themes and readings, and he also presented Gcwensa with numerous images he found suitable, especially those in LA. (Kinch, personal communication, 1993) Grossert was also approached by Kinch and rejected the latter's proposal that Gcwensa be sent to England to further his art training. (Kinch, personal communication, 1992)<sup>145</sup>

Kinch noted that Gcwensa initially only depicted his images as western and white (although he had done several figures of Zulu women). Gcwensa was apparently unwilling to give his figures African features as he saw these as contrary to his experience, such commentary reiterating the experiences of Fagg, noted earlier. (Cormick 1993:8) Concessions appear to have been made, however, as some of his figures have slightly more Africanised features, discernible in the mouths and noses, but these could equally read merely as stylized features. Kinch was well aware of Nigerian and Ghanain religious art and would have liked him to carve similar images of an African Christ. (Kinch, personal communication, 1993) Kinch had acquired a sculpture of a black Christ and Madonna, which he put in the church at Ingwavuma, but was asked by the congregation to remove it as they had been taught about a white Christ. (Cormick 1993:8)

This attitude had also been reflected by white critics (as in the case of Pientia's work), and is hardly surprising as Zulu *kholwa* who embraced Christianity were simultaneously embracing cultural and class differentiation. It was only later when the church, too, embraced inculturation openly that Africanising was deemed acceptable. In another instance both Kinch and others attempted to

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<sup>145</sup> In this Grossert was typically subscribing to a widely held view that the African artists should be encouraged to retain their indigenous self-taught capacities. While this view might seem to merely reflect the separation and difference that was being mooted by the state to retain the status quo, to Grossert and others such as Sr Pientia, the use of indigenous practice must be seen in the context of the Papal encyclicals and their appreciation of current developments in liturgical art throughout the world where indigenous cultural identities were being upheld and their art sanctioned for use in the church.

stylistically mould and modernize the work of Gcwensa, much as Pientia did with her students. Later, when in Johannesburg, Kinch met Cecil Skotnes, who in response to seeing the work of Gcwensa, suggested that he be persuaded not to sand his work so smoothly as this detracted from his personal imprint, reflected in his chisel marks. (Cormick 1993:16) This intervention was initially unacceptable to Gcwensa, but he later acceded and occasionally this resulted in a greater expressiveness so desirable to modernist inclined western taste at the time.<sup>146</sup>

Interestingly Kinch, seeing how prolific Gcwensa was in producing work, attempted to find a market for his work in Johannesburg at art galleries and curio shops, and had earlier even approached Mrs Oppenheimer for assistance.<sup>147</sup> (Kinch, personal communication, 1992) The galleries he visited were only prepared to offer a pittance for the work, with the result that Kinch decided to return the works to the community at Hlabisa and the region, and rely on commissions in order to support Gcwensa. As a result several works were sold to European and American collections. This incident is indicative of the fact that most black artists, particularly those predominantly patronised by the church, found it difficult not only to market their work but also to sell thematically religious work in a secular market. It was widely held too, that when an artist was identified by the secular ‘art market’, he was ‘lost’ to the church. (Pientia, 1979 and Kinch 1992, personal communications)

The Good Shepherd Church at Hlabisa (1960) was the first major project that involved Kinch and the artists he patronised. Among the many decorative carvings for the church, were the doors, which consisted of between four and eight panels depicting both biblical events as well as the activities, and personages at the Hlabisa mission. **(Figure 60)** Clearly sourced in the Zulu Bible imagery (cited

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<sup>146</sup> Ironically for Skotnes this preference for expressive texturing was the direct result of, among others, the an influence of African art and Modernism. However, as will be seen at the Ndaleni Art School, students often similarly gravitated to a highly finished surface, suggesting that in many instances smoothness and a reflective surface were deemed desirable and aesthetically pleasing to the African student, an aspect seen elsewhere in Africa (eg among the Asante (Ghana).

<sup>147</sup> Mrs B Oppenheimer, wife of mining magnate Sir Harry Oppenheimer of the Anglo American and de Beer’s group.

above), the figures similarly display a tentative realism. However when Gcwensa drew on his own experience his work was far more interesting and unique. Images such as *Nun taking choir practice*, *Nun preparing vestments for service*, *Sacrament of matrimony*, *Catechist Instructing Catechism class*, *Nun teaching sewing*, *Women collecting stones for the church*, and *Men mixing cement* reveal a greater naturalism, less rigid compositional organisation and greater attention to incidental detail. In the *Catechism* scene, for example, he included traditionalists, such a woman typified by her *isicolo* headdress, and a male in traditional clothing surrounded by younger adults and children in western clothes. This vernacular context was echoed in other images he produced such *Boy with a football*, *Zulu mother suckling child*, *Man drinking beer*, *Man with an ukhamba of beer*.<sup>148</sup> Several of his works were exhibited at Mariannhill in 1977.

Gcwensa was trained and assisted intermittently at Hlabisa by the young Ruben Xulu.....

In 1973-4 Xulu produced what appears to be one of his first images of a Zulu virgin mother in *Zulu Queen of Heaven and Child (Figure 61)*, which he made for the Church of St Clement, Clermont, just outside Durban. The church interior also has Zulu motifs such as shields on the doors and altar. On the west facade is a single door of three panels, the left of which is an image of the *Martyrs of Uganda*. Gcwensa's martyrs are distinctly Zulu, the woman wearing an *isicolo*. As seen earlier, this theme was often used in African churches by missionaries, and was appropriately reproduced here shortly after the canonization of the Martyrs, which took place in 1964.

Gcwensa was joined by the deaf mute Ruben Sezi Xulu when working on the Hlabisa church. Xulu had been injured in a fall as a young child, subsequently becoming deaf and with a speech impediment.<sup>149</sup> The young Xulu emulated Gcwensa when he first arrived at the Church while they both worked on a commission, and Xulu lived at his home while being trained. Xulu was not a

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<sup>148</sup> One of the panels of Schoolboys carrying buckets has been attributed to Ruben Xulu (Cormick 1993:88)

<sup>149</sup> Born in 1942 at Hlabisa, Xulu was a talented carver of wooden spoons and also did prize-winning carving at the Mgangatho school he attended. He was also encouraged by a Mrs Seraphina Ngubane who 'taught him to read by drawing pictures on the blackboard to illustrate the meaning of words'. (Cormick 1993:26)

Christian when he arrived, and influenced perhaps by Gwensa, was later baptised. His work was seen by an artist friend of Kinch's, Leopold Hafner who encouraged his expressiveness. (Kinch, personal communication, 1992) Xulu did a *Stations of the Cross* (c1961) for the Church at Hlabisa in clear emulation of Gwensa's work.

Xulu also produced several murals at the Hlabisa church, one of a series of mountains which accommodated his reliefs for the *Via Matris* (*Flight into Egypt and The Entombment*). **(Figure 63)** These, painted in red and black, were variously detailed with plants, trees and animals and acted as 'mounds' on which the *Via Matris* figures could conceivably walk. Another mural was painted at St Theresa at Emachibini (c1963), which included traditionalist men and women in front of a huge *uphiso* (a brewing vessel), some with gourds, preparing to drink *utshwala* (sorghum beer). The drinking of *utshwala* is associated with the veneration of ancestors and significantly here Kinch allowed the incorporation of Zulu practice (with shared allusions to the veneration expected of Christ), to function within the confines of a Catholic church. The incidence of St John's crosses on the *izinkhamba*, situate these vessels as appropriate within a Christian context as well as a Zulu one. The *umsamo*, or raised platform of the Zulu home could equally be read as comparable to the apse which houses the altar.

Again the issue of an indigenized Christ was contentious. Unlike Gwensa, Xulu readily agreed to the Africanising of his images, asking Kinch whether his Christ was to be represented as black or white. (Cormick 1993:8) However, Br Andy Motsko revealed that the local Zulu parishioners were often disappointed to have a black Christ as they felt this demeaned the representation of Christ. Both priest and laity found the African idiom problematic and would have preferred to have Christ figures in particular rendered as Caucasian. (Cormick 1993:8)<sup>150</sup> Xulu, however, became renowned

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<sup>150</sup> 'Brother Andy had noticed how the local people, given the choice, had always preferred representations of Christ made by Europeans', and she notes further, 'When another Zulu priest joined us I asked them both for their opinions on the suitability of depicting Christ and the Madonna as Zulus. They both agreed that such "African art" was not to their taste. "We are not accustomed to it"; I grew up with the other (European)"; "It does not appeal", were some of the comments. One of the priests said that the people wanted to be "uplifted" by the representations of Christ and the saints; they thought that the faces on these carvings looked like "ugly old" men and women.' (Cormick 1993:8)

for his expressive images of an African Christ. A good example of the many he produced is that for *Ukwenyuka Kwenkosi (The Ascension of Jesus)* in 1976 (**Figure 63**), for the church at Njengabantu (a church of the Seven Oaks mission) near Kranskop. The latter church replicated a Zulu *indlu* (or beehive hut), albeit in lead rather than grass cladding, with the left and right hand sides separating the sexes, and the holy of holies at the rear like the traditional site of the ancestors, the *umsamo*. This Catholic outstation was the brainchild of Fr Anton Maier, together with the architect Brian Kearney (who assisted in its design). (Kearney, personal communication, 1992) Maier had come to hear of Kinch's patronage of Gwensa and Xulu some years earlier and was keen to have them work on an impressive project on the steep hillside that descends into the Kranskop valley.

Outside above the entrance is the crucifix of the sacrificial Christ, positioned precisely where the horns of the sacrificial beast would be placed by the head of the household as a sign of respect for his ancestors. Opposite the entrance is the figure of *Nina weghawe sikhulekele* (Mother of the hero, or Madonna and Child (**Figure 64**), depicted as a robust Zulu mother holding her son protectively in front of her. She is kneeling and wears a cape over her arm, while Christ wears an *isicolo* (headring) with feather, an *ibeshu* (frontal apron) carrying a shield in his left hand and a cross in his right. At his feet he stands on a writhing serpent. Several traditional Zulu cultural connotations are vested in this work. The matron is wearing a cloth over her shoulders as part of the *hlonipha* tradition of respect for her husband's family as betokens a married woman. The wearing of this bestows legitimacy on the status of both herself and the Christ child. The *isicolo* on the Christ child is here incorrectly worn by so young a person, and is only appropriate to mature men, yet it anticipates his authority and status, albeit prematurely.<sup>151</sup>

A paschal candle for the same church consists of a procession of people representing the *Exodus* (c1976). (**Figure 65**) Waters swirl over chariot wheels of the Egyptian oppressor, while a line of Zulu men women and children calmly ascend a path that curves upwards around the trunk towards

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<sup>151</sup> The child is almost exactly like a diminutive version of Shaka that Gwensa produced in the early 1960s and like a similar one produced by Xulu for Zoltan Bogliari in Swaziland. The snake represents both evil and possibly the amadlozi whom he is here in effect embodying.



salvation above, led by Moses who stands before the bush receiving the word of God. The theme of *Exodus* was highly appropriate at the time, coincident with the Soweto uprisings of 1976, Moses the proverbial leader of the oppressed being led to freedom.

Xulu's many images of Christ crucified are highly individualized. Most represent a black Christ, and increasingly degrees of vernacularising occur, besides the obvious physiognomic detail, as some wear *isicolo*, and are bearded. While only a mere selection has been made of the work of Gcwensa and Xulu, these were made with the intention of underlining the stylistic interventions that resulted in both artists work, emphasizing the increasing liberty with which Xulu in particular was able to work despite the repetitious commissions and expectations of religious. In this one could challenge the comments made by Fagg and others who condemned Christian patronage as stultifying. However there was a degree of restriction in format, scale and desirable monumentality, and in this the secular works of both artists evidence a far greater experimentation. Given the fact that both artists were almost entirely dependent on church patronage, any license in interpreting themes was treated with caution, as they were intent on retaining their only means of earning a livelihood.

Breaking the mould of liturgical conventions in dress, his *Mary the Young mother* (date unknown, destroyed in 1987) (**Figure 67**), depicts a modern Zulu woman wearing a short western garment, carrying the Christ child holding a stick of sugar cane, a typical treat for rural children. With no allusions to the Madonna or Child's status, she simply emphasizes maternal love and vulnerability. Another similar work, but with the Madonna wearing a longer dress, was produced soon after, however, as it was felt by prospective purchasers that the short dress and contemporaneity in the former work was not altogether appropriate for a rendering of the Madonna. (Cormick 1993:129)

The increasing tendency to introduce vernacular parallels in their art was initially the result of patronage preferences. In the process both Gcwensa and Xulu were able to insinuate the significance of Zulu culture and to an extent Zulu concepts of spirituality within the context and framework of the church, despite occasional opposition from parishioners and clergy alike. However, ultimately the work produced by Gcwensa and Xulu in particular, was widely appreciated, prompting ongoing

commissions.

The reintegration of the arts- in this instance sculpture- into the church had several important dimensions. On the one hand '...it was here that Africans were first able to restore a sense of cultural achievement (Herskovits 1963:429). While Gwensa and Xulu's work occurred initially predominantly in Zulu Catholic churches, it soon found its way into white urban churches, and into collections abroad. The sculptors soon came to the attention of a white audience, at a time when interest in African art was primarily the domain of art historians who disregarded the merits of liturgical art.

Kennedy's perception that missionary training and contexts, because they were geared towards repetitive work that was destined for a sacred function was spiritless and weak, may have applied to endeavours elsewhere, but in South African contexts this was not always the case. Missions often represented the only training and marketing contexts for African artists, and the insight of missionaries such as Kinch and Motsko in fostering individualism, despite the requirements of liturgical art, contributed substantially to the sustained development of a culture of contemporary creativity. Kennedy also fails to consider that many African artists deploying sacred themes have done so of their own volition, and based on long held traditions and practice inculcated after decades of colonialism and its belief systems, which have been variously adapted and transformed. (Kennedy 1997:62)

While Catholic art patronage has diminished considerably, individuals still continue to function as intermediaries in promoting such art. Br Ostheimer also notes that most black clergy, while they appear to appreciate the work of past and present Zulu carvers, show no interest in art patronage or in including any new work in their parishes. (Personal communication, 2001) This is hardly surprising as they are obliged to see to the more pressing needs of their congregations, but inevitably, as a result, most of current work is sent abroad for sale at much higher prices than could be gained here. The European reception of such works continues to function as it did in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the art considered as an African vernacular interpretation, reflecting a desirable

expressiveness and possibly conversion and incarnation.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Secular training and religion-inspired art**

The church and its offshoot independent movements have long been regarded as the centre for cultivating dissent in South Africa, perceived by both colonial and subsequent governments as the seed beds of nationalism and insurrection. Those Africans who through choice or accident arrived at the missions were, amongst other things, expected to achieve a degree of education, and were also introduced to ideas of human rights, equality and justice. As noted earlier, these educated Africans

acquired increased status among the broader community, based on their educational abilities and their access to land on mission-controlled territory, many becoming wealthy and others forming an educated elite. It is hardly surprising therefore that it was from the ranks of these empowered communities that criticism of state policies and failed promises emerged. The official churches were later often subject to scrutiny by colonists and later the state, with the result that partisan support of Africans by the church was often a key factor in retaining its flock in the face of overwhelming cultural differences and opposition.<sup>152</sup>

The legacy of the missions, however, was a church divided along racial and class lines, reflecting a complex and unequal post-colonial society. Many religious and laity in the church increasingly challenged the status quo and opposed the narrow, essentially racist views of the colonial church. (1989:47) By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, soon after the Nationalist government came into power, the church articulated its oppositional stance more clearly. In 1950 *The Christian Council of South Africa* (CCSA) held a major conference on ‘*The Christian citizen in a multi-racial society*’, which included all denominations except the Catholic bishops (who were nonetheless later directly influenced by its proceedings). The CCSA later became the *South African Council of Churches* (SACC), becoming a major critical voice in South Africa. (Verryn 1982:56) With each new discriminatory, draconian legislation enacted by the state, this body voiced its opposition. Later groups such as the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC), the Christian Institute (CI), and the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), continue with prophetic readings and utterances that have challenged the state, situating the church directly in opposition to its policies. In 1957 the Catholic Bishop’s statement, declared apartheid ‘intrinsicly evil’, followed in 1968 by the *Message to the people of South Africa*, rejecting apartheid as a pseudo-gospel, and in the same year the *Belhar Confession* declared apartheid a sin, heresy and a mockery of the Gospel. The WCC convened at Cottesloe, Johannesburg in 1960 to further unite to combat, through Christian witness,

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<sup>152</sup> Most whites were more conservative and interested in spirituality and salvation, and many churches were divided on issues pertaining to state policy. As will be seen, however, this attitude and general passivity was gradually to change as theologians and religious, even those from the State supporting Dutch Reformed Church, under the direction of enlightened theologians, began to question the validity of apartheid and re-examine their seemingly entrenched support of what were essentially non-Christian mores and beliefs.

the evils of racism. (De Gruchy 1984:2)

In the 1960s some theologians in South Africa were drawn to the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Reflecting his own ethical dilemma during World War 2, when he was imprisoned and eventually executed because of his opposition to National Socialist policy and oppression, his thoughts heightened local reflections on the need to challenge both state and society in South Africa. Bonhoeffer recognised that no Christian could withdraw from the world, but that a contextual approach to historical events and injustice is required. (De Gruchy 1984:38). Not surprisingly Bonhoeffer's theology was important in the development of Liberation Theology.

The church was increasingly perceived as problematic in its constant oppositions that challenged state policies and practice. Not surprisingly this 'militancy' within the church has been spurred by its black membership, statistics revealing that several churches, especially Methodists, Anglicans and Catholics, had a predominantly black membership by the late 1970s.<sup>153</sup>(Nxumalo 1982:45) Congregations were therefore overwhelmingly drawn from the poor and oppressed, while most churches were still governed by a predominantly white clergy. As various churches became more inclusive and critical, even belonging to certain churches resulted in the assumption that one was 'liberal' or at least sympathetic to 'the cause', and therefore suspect. Many clergy were banned or were asked to leave the country after their banning orders expired. Others chose to go into exile, but the vast majority remained to challenge the state at every turn. In direct contrast, the state Dutch Reformed Church wholly endorsed segregationist policy in South Africa until the reversal of its views in the 1990s.

Other clergy, such as Rev Axel-Ivar Berglund, who taught at the Mapumulo Theological College in the 1970s, determined to shift their emphasis from that of conversion, to addressing more pressing needs in their students. Berglund maintains that his essential task was to encourage students to acquire a sense of their essential humanity and dignity, which he believed would enable them to

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<sup>153</sup> For example, by 1982 eighty percent of Catholics in South Africa were black.

realise their identity when confronting an intransigent state, which at every turn humiliated and disempowered them. (Berglund, personal communication, 2003). While at Mapumulo he was regularly visited by security police and questioned about church matters, his views, students and foreign visitors. He later became spokesperson for the South African Council of Churches, and was thrice detained and subjected to torture. (Berglund, personal communication, 2003)

Black political resistance had emerged earlier at the turn of the century, principally after the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging (1902) at the conclusion of the Anglo-Boer war. Blacks felt they had been betrayed by the British, in the belief that the latter would grant them more rights, promised in exchange for black participation in the war. While whites planned the formation of Union, blacks met in congresses to formulate petitions to the British government, all of which were ignored. The Act of Union was implemented in 1910, and in 1912 the South African Native National Congress was founded (later known as the African National Congress-ANC). The latter consisted of ‘lawyers, teachers, ministers of religion and traditional chiefs - almost all products of missionary education’. (Nolan in Prior 1982:12) Their aim was to unify black and white, by absorbing blacks into white society and government, whereas Union had allied Boer and Briton against blacks.<sup>154</sup> Understandably the black majority variously attempted to enter into negotiations with subsequent white regimes, but to no avail. Even the intimations of some political relief as a promise for assistance in World War 2 were not realised.

The apartheid government legislated racist policies that had in effect prevailed since colonial times, ratifying them after their rise to power in 1948. By 1960 all black political groups had been banned by the state and driven underground, which saw the rise of a more militant form of black nationalism

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<sup>154</sup> The ANC adopted an Africanist approach in the 1940s, initiated in the Youth League by among others Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Robert Sobukwe. Sisulu, Sobukwe and others formed the PAC which was Africanist and anti-communist. (Nolan 1982:13) The ANC position was modified somewhat when it adopted a Freedom Charter in 1955, which called for the extension of the franchise to all and a de-racialized legal system, nationalization of some industries, and extension of liberal freedoms to all. (Nolan 1982:15) In 1960 both groups became more militant: a campaign against pass laws begun by the PAC, and joined by the ANC, resulted in police brutality at Langa, Nyanga and especially at Sharpeville, where 60 were killed and 180 wounded. Both movements were banned and subsequently went underground. (Nolan 1982: 15)

under the auspices of various political forces. While Black resistance became articulated through various channels - political, social and religious - the church as a site of resistance remained covert for some time, it also being regarded as a less likely source for any substantial threat to the state. However, from 1948 the church became increasingly articulate as various denominations challenged state policy and its abysmal legacy of human rights.<sup>155</sup> The church and Christianity as oppositional emerged simultaneously in America and Africa, but in South Africa there has been a sustained link between religion and politics, and by the 1960s Black Theology emerged, co-existing with many diverse religious groups for whom religion was a direct way of alleviating the problems of living. The religio-political movements that emerged were typified by their desire to transform prevailing socio-political conditions, their desire for power, a putting into practice of a religious ideology, even using religious myths and symbols to influence the process of allocation of funds. (Haynes 1993:30)

A decade later, in the 1970s, a new subversive yet constructive movement arose, which had an enormous impact on political and religious practice in South Africa, namely the Black Consciousness

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<sup>155</sup> Several religious denominations in South Africa had variously begun to protest against the discriminatory practices of the Nationalist state from as early as 1948. Initially their reactions were moulded by the direct impact on them or their congregations. Examples are numerous: when restricted and reduced funding for black education was mooted, the Catholic church in particular challenged the state as its schools were under threat. In 1954, the state announced its intention to take over all mission schools (many schools were eventually forced to close when their subsidies were withdrawn) and most schools had to submit to the dreaded Bantu Education curriculum (Verryn 1982:57). Later pass restrictions were challenged by many churches, and detention without trial was widely condemned. In 1952 the first of seven major statements on race relations appeared ('Statement on Race Relations') in which it was reminded of the Christian injunction to love one's God and one's neighbour. (Verryn 1982:54-55). The Bantu Laws Amendment Bill, passed in 1964, was perceived as the most damaging of human rights in that it deprived blacks of rights to residence, movement and work other than in their Bantu areas. (Verryn 1982:60) Recognizing that segregation was nonetheless practiced in many churches and church schools, the bishops noted (1957): 'In the light of Christ's teaching this cannot be tolerated forever. The time has come to pursue more vigorously the change of heart and practice that the law of Christ demands. We are hypocrites if we condemn apartheid in South Africa and condone it in our institutions' (Nxumalo 1982:51) In 1977 a 'Declaration of Catholic Commitment on Social Justice' was a call on the entire church to struggle against apartheid. The church also agreed to accelerate its promotion of black persons in the church hierarchy in order also to convey the multi-cultural spirit of South Africa. This was to be seen as liberating also for whites and as a clear signal of its sincerity to break away from the social practice of the state. (Nxumalo 1982:52) The challenge by the churches sometimes resulted in internal conflict as white members felt that support of the black cause, or even more mildly, that opposition to the powerful apartheid state might seem unwise, and constitute an engagement by the church in party politics. In 1977 the Catholic Defence League, a conservative group, accused the Bishops of party politics, and at the same time the Genoot van Afrikaanssprekende Katolieke followed suit. (Nxumalo 1982:46)

Movement (BCM). Its main intentions were to restore African pride and dignity, as had been suggested by Aime Cesaire and Leopold Sedar Senghor years previously in the 1950s, expressed in their ideas on Negritude. Stephen Bantu Biko, a graduate of St Francis College in Mariannhill, was the main spokesperson for the BCM until he was murdered in detention in 1977. Inspired by North American black consciousness and black power movements, it was adapted to local conditions, and gave rise to the student protests in Soweto in 1976 with devastating consequences.

The BCM was born from a Christian base and established black theological projects. (West 1989:100) Its rise proclaimed an ‘alternative consciousness’, which centered on an awareness by blacks of their humanity, a restoration of self-esteem and a reclaiming of black history, culture and ideals that were different from those of the whites. In this sense Black Theology cannot be separated from Black Consciousness.<sup>156</sup> Further dissent was nurtured within the context of the 1971 Black Theological project of the University Christian Movement (UCM) whose main aim was to restore black dignity and self-confidence, in this opposing both white oppressors and white liberal paternalism which tended to usurp black initiative. (Nolan1982:13-14) The latter particularly gave rise to a militant youth who variously challenged the state’s segregationist policy in order to lay claim to their civil and political rights. Again in the early 1970s, many religious added to the wellspring of oppositional voices.<sup>157</sup> Rick Turner, a Catholic academic at Natal University in the 1970s allied to struggle politics, invoked a policy of justice and equality rooted in Christian doctrine but inclined to socialist ideals. He was later assassinated, allegedly by state forces.

Black Theology in South Africa (sometimes termed African Theology) emerged as a direct result of

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<sup>156</sup> Many young black Christians were part of NUSAS (The National Union of South African Students) but, disenchanted, they soon left. In 1968 the University Christian Movement was established (UCM). Black students and pastors from the UCM founded SASO (South African Students Organization) which was the first expression of Black Consciousness.

<sup>157</sup> In 1974 a statement on Black Consciousness by Bishop PFJ Butelezi was indicative of a new voice among Catholic bishops. He spoke of the agonies and hopes of his own people, prompting a new more active phase of debating the need for social justice. (Verryn 1982:61)



its relationships with the Civil Rights, Black Power and other African-American protest movements of the 1960s, driven by a similar search for civil justice.<sup>158</sup> West adds that the roots of Black Theology in South Africa can also be traced to African Independent Churches, which had, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, been intent on interpretation of the Bible on their own terms. (West 1989:49) In addition black leadership in mission churches also contributed to the foundations of Black Theology, as exemplified by the work of DDT Jabavu, ZK Matthews and Albert J Luthuli, who often made prophetic readings of the Bible.

Cone, one of the early African American protagonists of American Black theology, noted: 'Black theology must take seriously the cultural expressions of the community it represents so that it will be able to speak relevantly to the black condition' (Cone 1986:27) Tillich, however was mindful of the fact that in the ensuing cultural syncretism the authority of the Biblical sources may be lost. (Cone 1986:28) In 1969 American Black theology was defined as a theology of liberation. As a theology of blackness it affirmed black humanity, emancipated blacks from white racism and in the process provided both with freedom. Central to Black theology is the notion that Christian theology is never neutral (Cone 1996:1 and 9) and that liberation is consistent with the gospel. The Christian community, deprived of social and political power, is seen as the 'community of the oppressed, which joins Jesus Christ in his fight for the liberation of mankind'. (Cone 1996:3 and 14)<sup>159</sup> Rather than being rewarded 'in heaven', the oppressed were encouraged to focus on the future and 'refuse to

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<sup>158</sup> The rise of pentecostalism and fundamentalism in Africa can be associated with a politico-religious ideological drive from America: 'Christianity, long regarded in the West as non-political or apolitical, became a vehicle for political ideas from the 1960s'. (Haynes 1993:95) Ironically in America (unlike a politicized religiosity in South America) these movements were regarded as anti-communist, supportive of the spread of free markets, and anti progressive movements. (Haynes 1993:96)

<sup>159</sup> God is perceived to take sides - he cannot be for the oppressor and for the oppressed, and is therefore never neutral. (Cone 1996: 8) and God, it appears has chosen to make the black man's condition God's condition (Cone 1996:12): 'The task of theology, then, is to explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity so that those who labor under enslaving powers will see that the forces of liberation are the very activity of God.' (Cone 1996:3) Cone regarded theology as 'the continued attempt of the community to define in every generation its reason for being in the world.' (Cone 1996:8) Taking black oppression as the starting point for analyzing God, Black Theology thus seeks a theology of self-determination for blacks 'providing some ethical and religious categories for the black revolution in America', referring to it as a survival theology. (Cone 1996: 10-11)

tolerate present inequities’, with the result that the oppressed community ‘will risk all for earthly freedom’. (Cone 1996:3-4)

The upholding of racial difference and integrity is identified by Cone as a salient feature in the new theology, where the God of the oppressor is eliminated in favour of a black concept of God, and blackness is regarded positively.<sup>160</sup> There have been many similar calls in South Africa from activists to reject the ‘oppressor’s religion’ in the struggle, but as Cone points out, in America, African Americans needed to retain old symbols that people could recognize. The new God of ‘blackness’ would be revived to assist in focusing on the real problem, which is the human condition (Cone 1996: 84-85). Similarly the South African theologian Mofokeng has also suggested that the Bible and Christian faith should be ‘disavowed’ and expelled from the oppressed community, yet recognizing that this was unrealistic in the wake of colonialism and conversion. To him African traditional religions were too remote and seemed regressive to most blacks, and Marxism was too idealistic:

‘In the absence of a better storeroom of ideological and spiritual food, the Christian religion and the Bible will continue for an undeterminable period of time to be the haven of the Black masses par excellence’. (Mofokeng 1988:40 in West 1989:129) The Bible was ultimately recognized as a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed, and until recently it was both a source of power and oppression.

Art too was deemed important in this task, as to Cone God’s revelation comes through the cultural identity of the community:

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<sup>160</sup> Cone frequently questions whether the use and acknowledgment of the religion and God of the oppressors (white colonists) is acceptable to blacks, and indicates that he rejects the ‘uncle Tom’ approach of black churches and the acceptance of a meekness that demands that one turns the other cheek. In opposition to this Cone recognises the rise of a new concept of God, in which the God of the oppressors is implicitly ‘destroyed’. (1996:57-58): ‘To be human in a condition of social oppression involves affirming that which the oppressor regards as degrading...Black, therefore, is beautiful; oppressors have made it ugly.’ (Cone1996:15) Central to Black theology, Christ is examined in relation to a given historical period and situation, and limited to cultural conditions and even a specific community. Theology to Cone, therefore, is not a universal language, but is always contextual, and further is never non-partisan. (Cone 1996:6) To many Americans there was a need to destroy the ‘white God.’

‘ Black art will elevate and enlighten our people and lead them toward and awareness of self, i.e. their blackness. It will show them mirrors. Beautiful symbols. And will aid in the destruction of anything nasty and detrimental to our advancement as a people’. (Cone1996: 29)

As will be seen in the following pages, many local artists (such as Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo and Michael Zondi, to name a few) similarly utilised religious imagery that was pertinent to both individual and community, and as a result narrative and contextualization became central to such art, as did biographical analogy. By seeking parallels within the Bible, artists were able to recover past or recent histories of oppression and injustice and chart future ideals.

Besides American Black Theology, Liberation Theology was also well known in South Africa. While it was never central to church opposition in South Africa, it was nonetheless regarded sympathetically as it shared many of Black Theology’s ideals. Emerging in Latin America in the 1960s it was predominantly applicable to Third World countries. In the main it emerged from within the Catholic Church, particularly in response to the Second Vatican Council and its associated encyclicals (discussed earlier). Its progressive theologians soon encountered opposition from the Church and Papacy (Haynes 1993:98), yet mostly this opposition was from conservative governments who recognised the close allegiance between Liberation theology and Marxism. Like the latter, it also demanded a humanising of people and ultimately a release from degradation and poverty, regarding economic equality and social reforms as synonymous. In particular Liberation Theology urged resistance to the mindset of enslavement and fatalism, encouraging the poor to free themselves through their own actions and with the backing of Biblical scripture.<sup>161</sup>

By the 1970s most local Christian communities in South Africa, whether consciously or not, could

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<sup>161</sup> Liberation theology was born of the suffering and injustice of the poor in a situation of power imbalance. While after WW 2 many world powers were party to the issuing of the declaration of human rights, there was little to enforce these. Thousands of religious, seeing the struggle for survival in their communities, reconsidered their vocations, seeking to proclaim God in a world that was inhumane.

be said to have subscribed to the fundamentals of Liberation Theology, as seen in the AICs where the Bible functions as a catalyst related to everyday travails. In this sense Liberation Theology resembles the earliest forms of Christian practice in which worship, service to humanity and charity were uppermost. (Rowland 1999:4).<sup>162</sup> The Liberation theologian read the Biblical text and interpreted it from the position of ‘contemporary-historical understanding’, which included the historical and political contexts of his time. (West 1989:66)<sup>163</sup> Like the contextual theological readings of the time, questions of racism and capitalism were addressed in the light of biblical teaching. (Clark 1992: 34) As will be seen, many artists read the Bible in this manner, where the ideological commitment of the reader is central to biblical hermeneutics of liberation and the Bible is seen as a record of class struggles of the oppressed and those who exploit them. (Mosala 1986:71)<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Christians were originally identified by their conduct and lifestyle. Liberation theology sees to it that the flock rediscovers this, believing that this rediscovery will lead to social and attitudinal change. The need for a new method of doing theology has dominated the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. They regard current western theologies as a form of cultural domination, where the Bible has been misused. (West 1989:84) While in the west the ‘chief interlocutor’ of western ‘progressivist’ theology has been the ‘educated nonbeliever’, in Liberation theology its interlocutors are the poor exploited classes and cultures who were often deemed non-human. (West 1989:85)

<sup>163</sup> For example, Ithumelang Mosala makes a contextual and historical-critical exegesis of the Cain and Abel story, in which he recognises issues such as the division of labour and the Davidic-Solomonic monarchy in which time the event took place, in order to remind the reader that a simplistic reading fails to take account of the fact that other issues equally inform this text. (West 1989:69,35-36) In this he too recognises that one must be aware that the Bible is a ‘ruling class document’ which represents their ‘ideological and political interests’. (Mosala 1986:196 in West 1989:126) What Mosala contends is that the Bible per se cannot be the ‘starting point of black theology’, but rather those that are committed to the struggle, noting that many of the ‘liberative themes’ in the Bible that can be ‘rescued’, but that not all aspects are redeemable. (Mosala 1987:27-28 in West 1989:127) Artists using biblical themes have also been rather selective in their thematic choices.

<sup>164</sup> This reading can be likened to a feminist paradigm shift, where a similarly oppressed person (woman) in a sexist cultural and theological institution rejects an androcentric reading of the Bible, or the theologian (often a nonbeliever) reads the Bible outside of the context in which it was written. (Schussler-Fiorenza 1983:95 in West 1989:89) Just as the feminist cannot ‘absolutize the culture in which the Bible was written’ due to the patriarchal and cultural background of the Scriptures, so the black South African cannot but read from beyond the cultural contexts of both the original Biblical culture and the more recent western interpretations of it. (West 1989:114) More importantly, as in feminism, the marginalized discourses and marginalized groups become ‘counter-discourses and counter-movements.’ (West 1989:169)

Local theological seminaries, such as Mapumulo, were the main centres for the dissemination of Black Theology, but more particularly it was nurtured in part among the oppressed and poor communities and in the many AICs in all areas.<sup>165</sup> (West 1989:50) Well aware that Black Theology was developed as a tool for the struggle, although not an entirely autonomous one, Mosala points out that it remains the monopoly of educated and middle class black Christians, as the working classes were mostly members of the African Independent Churches. (West 1989:51)<sup>166</sup>

A climax of opposition was reached in 1977 when the Catholic bishops engaged in a greater drive for social justice in South Africa. Ideals to change social attitudes, advance blacks to responsible functions, reassess distribution of personnel in church, communalise church funds, and the pastoral function to black masses to develop policy in church, were debated.<sup>167</sup> They also discussed conscientious objection. Christians were no longer to see the practice of Christianity in terms of 'individual virtues' but to consider religion as part of one's social and moral duty, the role of the individual being to perfect this world. (Verryn 1982: 64-65) Failure to do this was regarded as sinful. The state church remained ominously silent. Needless to say a Calvinist state which was traditionally suspicious of popery, perceived such calls as highly provocative.

In the 1980s various clergy continued to be actively engaged in supporting any destabilizing methods

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<sup>165</sup> The church's attitude to Black Consciousness (which to some appeared to be little more than an inverted apartheid) was supportive, yet it condemned any exclusivity and prejudice. Further, Christians were called on to 'humanise revolution by recalling its humane purposes.' (Nxumalo 1982:47) Fundamentally the church shared in the desire for salvation in whatever form was desirable: for the poor, food, for the incarcerated, freedom and ultimately social righteousness. (Nxumalo 1982:48)

<sup>166</sup> West notes that as a result a methodological crisis emerged within the historical crisis, namely how could Black Theology become a liberating force. Understanding that people's 'reading of the Bible is framed by their history and culture' (Mosala 1987:x), Black theology therefore had to openly declare where it stood ideologically and theoretically. It was not sufficient to merely engage in 'existential commitments, to the liberation struggle' as often those who are committed in this way are still subject to mainstream discourses. (West 1989:52)

<sup>167</sup> Inspired by the Second Vatican Council the church in the 1960s and 70s set up national councils of laity and of priests in order to examine the application of Catholic morality in public life. (Verryn 1982:60)

such as civil unrest as long as they did not entail violence.<sup>168</sup> This coincided with the publication of significant documents that challenged the state and prevailing practice: in the *The Kairos Document* (1985). For example, it was suggested that it was imperative to side with the oppressed and poor and their struggle for liberation, and with Apartheid declared a heresy, the church had to return to the Bible ‘to search the Word of God for a message that is relevant to what we are experiencing in South Africa today’. (Anonymous in *The Kairos Document* 1986:17)<sup>169</sup>

Inevitably art from KwaZulu-Natal reflected some of these aspects to a greater or lesser extent, both as a result of individually derived motivation, influenced by current theological debate, as well as by mediators who felt variously impelled to challenge conventional readings of culture and its associated belief systems. Coincident with the initiatives of the Catholic Church, outlined earlier, there were two primarily secular art-training initiatives in Natal in the period c1950 to 1980. These were the Ndaleni Art School and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Craft Centre at Rorke’s Drift. In both instances these were situated on Protestant missions and while the training offered there was secular and based on aspects of current art-training practice, religious influences inevitably emerged in the work produced there. This was associated with both individual perspectives, prescriptive religious activities to which students were subject, or merely collective responses through analogy to biblical narratives that aptly reflected historical and political exigencies of the time. In addition individual artists emerged who developed strong religion-based vocabularies from a range of sources.

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<sup>168</sup> At his trial in Pretoria, for publishing and disseminating banned publications, in 1977, Fr Dominic Scholten noted : ‘Only the insincere and mischievous could describe as political our defence of the poor in their essential rights to family life, work, a living wage and participation in public life. These are matters of primary justice, of rights written by God into human nature from the beginning, before political parties were born.’ (Nxumalo 1982:45)

<sup>169</sup> This was followed in 1986 with the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa, Relevant Pentecostal Witness* in 1988 and in 1989 the *Road to Damascus* which called for conversion for those who have sided with the oppressor. (West 1989:47-48) These were not intended to be academic exercises but rather prophetic theology in which themes that had a bearing on the current situation were explored and applied as examples to follow.

#### 4.1 Ndaleni in context

It is hardly surprising that one of the major art training initiatives at the time, the Ndaleni Art School (as it is popularly named), would also engender a considerable body of biblically inspired art. Although the school was essentially intended as a training centre to qualify art teachers, various factors linked to regulations and religious practice coalesced resulting in numerous biblically inspired works. These included the religious ethos in black education and at the Ndaleni mission, the input of the mission staff, the inclinations of individual students and in addition the soliciting of religious art by outside initiatives. The predominance of a religious-based ethos in education has been addressed earlier. The students who gravitated to the Ndaleni art training course, were teachers training as specialist art teachers. They were therefore already familiar with and subject to the all-pervasive influence of Christianity in education in the various colleges and schools from which they hailed. Many students had also been exposed to the increasing social relevance of Christianity among black South Africans, which is outlined further in this chapter.

The Reverend James Allison, who settled there with a group of Swazi refugees, originally founded Ndaleni as a Wesleyan Methodist Mission Station in 1847. (Mears 1967:176-177)<sup>170</sup> Soon after, Allison established a small Industrial School at the mission, which included domestic and ‘special’ training (the latter can be assumed to have been vocational training). His main aim was to train African teachers and to have his wards become intelligent and orderly members of the community in addition to receiving religious training<sup>171</sup> Little has been found regarding any training in the crafts or art that may have occurred in the education of Allison’s charges.

A specific emphasis on art at the mission emerged with the establishment of what is popularly

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<sup>170</sup> Allison, previously stationed at Mount Mahambana Mission in Baraputseland, Swaziland, led a group of refugee Swazis (mostly converts, including teachers and followers of Mswazi Malambula) who were being persecuted by rival chieftains and factions during the reign of Sikonjela.

<sup>171</sup> The rules at the station were typical of most missions and prohibited liquor, dagga-smoking, polygamy, immoral persons, idleness and ‘heathen practice’. (Jikelo, personal communication, 1998)

known as the Ndaleni Art School. At the time art and craft was an obligatory subject for all T3 and T4 student-teachers, this despite the fact that they received little or no actual art training at the colleges they initially trained at. Jack Grossert was so impressed with the calibre of student work he came across in schools, and intent on improving the standard of teacher training, that he set about investigating the possibility of establishing an art teacher training school. This was also in response to many black teachers' requests for more specialised art training. (Grossert 1953:1) Grossert was acutely aware of the fact that Zulu creativity had been either eroded or manipulated (for example in tourist related production) as a result of the impact of colonialism and especially missionary intervention. He also knew that although western teaching curricula included art training, this had been neglected in favour of what was termed 'industrial and craft work'. (Baloyi, personal communication. 1999)<sup>172</sup>

In order to realize his dream at Ndaleni, Grossert drew on the assistance of Ann Harrison, a recent graduate of the Slade School of Art, who accompanied Grossert and his wife on a fact-finding tour in 1949 to other established programmes. Their tour took them to the Middelburg Training College as well as the Diocesan Training College at the Anglican mission of Grace Dieu, near Pietersburg in what was then the Northern Transvaal. (Rankin 1991:15) There they saw the achievements of the Rev Patterson who worked there, having introduced carving in the carpentry worksop before he moved to the Cyrene Mission in Bulawayo (Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe). They then proceeded to Bulawayo where they met Patterson in person, discussing his teaching programme. Patterson's students at Cyrene were mostly physically challenged African youths, who were consequently mainly

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<sup>172</sup> Grossert wanted to create new incentives, believing that creativity in mankind was a vital factor central to the progress and development of peoples. He was convinced that the artistic embellishment of one's surroundings would improve one's aesthetic sensibilities and quality of life. Further he was concerned that many westernised Zulu were losing their creative skills and merely emulating poor western modes. Grossert also opposed many misconceptions such as those manifest in the Eiselen (the state anthropologist) report's disregard for art training in black schools, in the western sense, which recognized only the value of craft work intended to perpetuate traditional skills, and retain the emphasis on manual labour with a view to training the most skilled students to make articles for sale (in all probability for a tourist market). Grossert also firmly opposed the Hudson report (1962) on the perceptual incapacities of Africans, indicating that exercises such as the rendering of perspective was equally problematic for white students to learn. (Grossert, personal communication, 1989)



involved in painting, linocuts and some sculpture, drawn predominantly from African legends and Biblical themes. Besides Mariannhill (which was soon to discontinue its teacher training), Grace Dieu and Cyrene were among the main contemporary art producing centres in the region, the Polly Street art centre, in urban Johannesburg, being initiated in 1948 (Cecil Skotnes strengthening its programs in 1952). The Ndaleni task team was highly impressed by the standard of the work there and eventually based some of their ideas on what they saw.<sup>173</sup>

After their research expedition, Harrison drew up a foundation course for the school, roughly based on Itten's *Vorkurs* for the Bauhaus, with a strong emphasis on design, carving, modelling, use of materials, and painting. She taught briefly in the general teachers' training course. However the specialized teachers' training course was initially taught by Alfred Ewan and Peter Atkins, neither inculcating any sacred thematic bent in their teaching.<sup>174</sup> Atkins, who taught until 1960, a sculptor best described as an eclectic English modernist, developed the three dimensional strengths at Ndaleni, as exemplified in the work of students such as Solomon Sedibane. Peter Bell was the third art teacher at Ndaleni, and had been trained at Rhodes University (Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape).

At both Ndaleni and Rorke's Drift, the students who gravitated to these centres for art training came from all areas of South Africa, each bringing with them different cultural and belief systems. While

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<sup>173</sup> Grossert had also been directly involved in the art teaching curriculum development at Mariannhill for St Francis College (initiated by Sr Pientia in 1948), as well as the foundation course established by Christina Brueckner (Bruchner?) when she was art teacher/lecturer at Adams College near Amanzimtoti outside Durban. Lorna Peirson, who later taught at Ndaleni, was at the time art teacher at Umpumulo Teacher Training College in North Eastern Natal. As noted earlier, Grossert was also fully aware of art training ventures undertaken by the church in the rest of Africa, as well as the international interest and exposure that such work elicited in exhibitions worldwide. (Grossert, personal communication, 1989)

<sup>174</sup> The curriculum was accepted by the District Inspector of Native Education, Mr S R Dent. Harrison was to only teach two brief in-service courses for teachers in July 1949 and in January 1950 at Adam's College, before she left to be married. Alfred (Chink) Ewan taught in 1951 and Peter Atkins in 1953. Neither of these able British trained students teachers appears to have had any interest in any specific thematic direction. Atkins in particular was sympathetic towards the liberation struggle in South Africa and was consequently obliged to resign.

most work from Ndaleni, whether three or two-dimensional, was based on particular projects devised by the various teachers, there was also a considerable amount of leeway for students who were encouraged to draw from their own experiences. In addition students often carved independently in their leisure hours (Rankin, personal communication, 2003) and many of these works would have reflected their personal preferences. Among students' work, religious themes were often preferred, due to factors outlined earlier. In addition the impact of living on a remote mission station, where access to any form of entertainment was restricted, meant that church attendance, although prescriptive (twice on Sunday, regardless of one's religious beliefs), and other church-related activities, were one of the few forms of recreation. (Baloyi, personal communication, 1999)

In addition to prescribed Sunday services, students attended 'Manyano services' which took place every Sunday afternoon. Here students learnt how to 'lead services and witness for Jesus Christ'. (Mtshali 1980:11) In the hostels, family prayers took place every evening before supper, while morning assemblies took place every weekday before classes began, conducted by the Institution's ministers or teaching staff. Further 'church classes' were held for students preparing for confirmation after the morning service on Sundays and student volunteers taught Sunday School, as well as 'homiletics' classes for male students who were 'interested in preaching and Holy Communion' which took place every first Sunday of the month. (Mtshali 1980:11) In addition choir practice was extremely popular with students, often resulting in independent choral and instrumental groups initiated by students during their vacations. (Khoza, personal communication, 1999) Obviously not all art teacher candidates joined in these activities but most participated or were at least were exposed to the entertaining elements associated with mission church activities.<sup>175</sup>

The mission enforced a strict code of conduct on students occupying its premises, which also applied to student-teachers studying art, who were in addition already subject to the expectations of the

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<sup>175</sup> Religion permeated most ventures, and with the opening of a new sculpture workshop in 1969, the Rev Ntuli conducted a short service. (Anonymous 1969:11)

Bantu Education Department.<sup>176</sup> When the Bantu Education Act was put into practice by 1953, the hostels became the church's responsibility and the school the department's responsibility. (Miya 1980:7) The Rev Miya, a somewhat overzealous minister, applauded the institution's 'moral and religious influence upon the Blacks', and noted: 'We call upon all Blacks and possibly also all the Whites of our land to pray for this Institution so that it can be used in another God-directed form'. (Miya 1980:7)

The control of the hostels by the church inevitably resulted in some tension and conflict. Many of the Art School students were married adults, who found some restrictions stifling and there are several accounts of students' indiscretions and opposition to the mission's behavioral expectations. (Peirson, personal communication, 1999) Others, such as Selby Mvusi, who was involved in resistance politics and eventually, went into exile in the mid 1960s (he died in 1967), contributing to the perception that the Ndalení Art School might be associated with subversive political activities.<sup>177</sup> Students and staff were well aware of the tensions implicit in the authoritative role and expectations of the Bantu Education Department, especially in later years when the quality of their inspectorate declined and their real understanding of issues at the Art School deteriorated considerably. (Peirson, personal communication, 1999) Such antipathy resulted in teachersfyu7 Ewan and Bell leaving Ndalení 'under a cloud', the former perceived to have been too supportive of the students' political cause, and the latter critical of Nationalist authority in the district and 'guilty' of fraternizing with students. (Bell, personal communication, 1999)

It appears, however, that students struck a balance between prescriptiveness in religious matters at the mission, and the more pleasurable activities associated with such practice. A well documented production of a Passion play, 'Easter Story' (scripted by the Rev J Ntuli) was performed by the Art

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<sup>176</sup> The Bantu Education Department subsequently leased premises from the mission on a renewable two-year contract.

<sup>177</sup> He was allegedly 'spoken of in hushed tones' at Ndalení. Further many clergy were sympathetic to the liberation struggle and political aspirations of the students, as indicated by the report that in 1961 the chaplain at Ndalení had organised a 'revolt', doubtless associated with the Sharpeville riots. (Moll 1980:5)

School students in 1966, indicative of the degree of their involvement in church-related issues (Lorna Peirson assisted with the choreography and costumes).<sup>178</sup> Further, many religious at the mission were influential in that they were sympathetic to students, while others represented Christian intransigence. Most students fondly remember the Rev Sidney Smith, a Methodist warden at Ndaleni from 1960, whereas others, such as the Rev Elphas G E Miya (at Ndaleni in the late 1970s) were disliked by many. (Baloyi, personal communication, 1999)<sup>179</sup> Many students had also come to Ndaleni with well-established religious backgrounds and it is this, which inevitably influenced their work. Even a Catholic nun, Sr Camilla Ndaba, studied at Ndaleni in 1969, but little is known of her work and subsequent activities.<sup>180</sup>

While themes were often prescribed in sculpture, some lecturers, such as Peirson, are adamant that they never suggested Biblical ones. (Peirson, personal communication, 1993) It has been impossible to gauge the input of Atkins and Ewan regarding thematic influence, as they have not been traced, but it was during Bell's tenure that major works in cement, derived from Biblical sources, were produced. Bell acknowledges that he was well aware that Biblical themes functioned as a covert mythography for the local community. (Bell, personal communication, 1999) Cement sculptures were mostly situated outdoors in the grounds of the school, and a series of rectangular relief panels were placed

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<sup>178</sup> Ten male and five female students performed the thirty different parts. The script was written and directed by the Rev J Ntuli, while Lorna Peirson assisted in choosing the characters as well as enthusiastically assisting and advising students in the making of costumes including hats, shoes, armour and swords. She also assisted in the painting and choice of scenery, rocks and trees (painted on cardboard), papier mache bowls and ladies' headdresses. During the interval appropriate texts were read from the Bible and the choir sang. Apparently the play was so moving that at its conclusion many students and members of the audience were in tears. While only one reference to such a performance has been traced, others were performed by the community from time to time. (Peirson 1966:9-10)

<sup>179</sup> An image of a jovial Smith appears in the 1962 mural by Emmanuel Xakaza.

<sup>180</sup> Over the years only one religious, Sr Camilla Ndaba, studied at Ndaleni (in 1969). Immediately after her training she was sent to the Mariazell Mission, an outstation of Mariannhill. (Ndaba 1970:10) She was a regular contributor to the Contemporary African Art Exhibition at Fort Hare University. Her work was not always based on biblical themes, as is apparent in a linocut 'Homewards' (1969) which depicts itinerant workers returning to their homes, laden with trunks of goods acquired. It might seem surprising that she went to Ndaleni and was not under the tutelage of Sr Pientia, but this was doubtless because Ndaleni offered formal teacher training which the Bantu Education Department recognised, at a time when Sr Pientia merely had apprentices who worked with her on commissions and who received no formal certification.

around the main hall. Abiah Ramadi's *Sower* (1965) (**Figure 67**), at the front of the Primary School, shares both a secular and sacred function. A theme from the New Testament, the sower functions as a symbol of mankind's journey through life, who literally reaps what he sows, made aware of the consequences of his sowing on arid, stony, weed-filled or fertile land. The interpretation by Ramadi suggests that the sower, clearly shown as an African, is physically capable and in control of his destiny, a reading which may suggest that his thematic choice was associated with African nationalist realities of the time, or simply the educational ethos of Ndaleni.

In 1961 Samuel Zondi made two monumental figures for the large pillars flanking the hostel gateway. One, popularly known as *St George and the Dragon* (**Figure 68**), depicts a monumental male figure whose arm describes an arc as he holds firmly onto the rear leg of the dragon he is about to assail. The theme of the third century warrior saint and martyr defeating evil (symbolizing paganism)<sup>181</sup>, has come to be associated with the prevailing of good over evil and in this would have been apt given the moralising tenor at the hostels, and the abovementioned political context.

In 1964 cement sculptures included the poignant figure of *Christ* (**Figure 70**) with his hands outstretched, constructed in front of the chapel by Philip Ndwandwe. The centrality of Christ in Black Theology as martyr of injustice, which will be discussed in more detail below, is suggested by this early rendering. Over the last forty years this Christ figure has frequently been a rallying point during political riots and meetings. During the bloody internecine conflict in Richmond near Ndaleni in the 1990s, when United Democratic Movement and African National Congress supporters rendered the area ungovernable, Ndwandwe's Christ was defaced by being covered in red paint, recalling the bloody conflict. The figure became symbolic of the chaos and bloodshed, with Christ as peacemaker echoing the need an end to the violence.

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<sup>181</sup> St George, born in the third century in Cappadocia, Asia Minor, was venerated in the Greek church as one who converted the heathen, winning Cappadocia 'for the faith'. (Hall 1974:136) He was adopted as patron of England in 1222, and this may have reinforced his association with Methodism. Primarily he alludes to the victory of the Christian faith.

Some of the most compelling and contextually significant imagery at the Ndalení Art School occurs in the cement relief panels erected at shoulder height on either side of the main entrance to the Boy's Dining Hall and along the east wall of the rectangular hall. Made under the technical guidance of Peter Bell in 1962 by Francis Halala, Jacob R Masike, Joseph Mabaso and others, they are thirty-eight centimeters in height and were made in sections each about three metres in length. The first relief by Halala is a three-part image of the *Exodus* (**Figure 71**) (in continuous narrative) consisting of the children of Israel approaching the Red Sea (in the centre of the panel), while to the right the monumental angel of God holds back the Egyptians, their soldiers and chariots.

The reverend Smith showed an interest in the venture and provided assistance in the interpretation of further appropriate biblical passages. (Bell, personal communication, 1998) The *Birth and passion of Christ* (**Figure 72**), one of the scenes from the New Testament was made in 1963 by Joseph Mabaso, while at the same time a scene of the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (**Figure 73**) was produced by Reuben Ndini Mabaso. Of lesser quality are two panels flanking the side entrance of the hall. They appear to represent a garden, possibly Eden, and there is no certainty as to who produced them.<sup>182</sup>

The assistance by Smith and Bell notwithstanding, the reliefs are outstanding examples of their kind. They convey an energy born of free expression in interpretation, the imagery doubtless selected because of its significance both in terms of its religious and secular authority. Themes from the Old Testament related the liberation of the Hebrews from oppression, providing an obvious analogy with the current situation in South Africa. The date of the works is also auspicious, 1962 and 1963, the years immediately after the Sharpeville riots (1961). While the themes relate to escape from oppression, the move into exile and the suffering of victims, they also, however, suggest salvation in the form of the martyrdom of Christ who is sacrificed for the good of all mankind. Said themes are also particularly applicable to the situation at Ndalení where, as mentioned earlier, Selby Mvusi, a political activist and artist, was obliged to leave the Art School and soon after flee South Africa into

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<sup>182</sup> There is, however, a photograph of Lucas Moerane in front of these, which might suggest that he was the artist ( he was a student at Ndalení in 1963).

exile.<sup>183</sup> Besides the tacit resistance vested in many biblically derived images, several images that appeared in Arttra over the years reflected a tempered critical tone.

In South Africa and in Natal, Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans had become increasingly critical of state policies which opposition was collectively expressed by the Christian Council of South Africa, which rejected apartheid and its related legislation. (De Gruchy 1997:160) As noted earlier, their views were also greatly influenced by the announcements in Vatican II (1962-5) and later by the 1966 World Council of Churches' sponsored Geneva Conference on Church and Society. In the latter Christians were called on to take an active role in the struggle for justice (De Gruchy 1997:163). In 1967 the South African Council of Churches was established (SACC formerly the Christian Council) and soon published *The Message to the People of South Africa*, which rejected apartheid as a false gospel. (DeGruchy 1997:163).

Religious themes also appeared in monumental woodcarving reliefs in 1964-5, produced in a so-called traditional method of intaglio burnt-wood relief carving.<sup>184</sup> SJD Makhinya's *Revelation* panel (**Figure 74**) is one of two made originally for the Chapel. Based on Revelation 18v1,<sup>185</sup> and consists of two images? The upper half depicts an angel descending from heaven to bewail and describe the moral and material corruption of Babylon, while the other half of the panel is based on Revelation 13,<sup>186</sup> in which two beasts, the one emerging from the sea, the other from the land prevail over a

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<sup>183</sup> Admired by staff and students because of his political activism, Mvusi elected to exhibit at the *Interfaith Exhibition* in 1965. As an activist his gravitation to religious themes must be seen as significant: he chose to focus on a bust of *Moses* and another of a *High Priest*. In both instances the themes relate to worthy leaders, the former associated with liberating the oppressed Hebrews.

<sup>184</sup> This method was taught at the Ndaleni Day School, near to the premises of the Art School.

<sup>185</sup> Revelation 18v1 reads: 'After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendour.'

<sup>186</sup> Revelation 13 (presumably he intended to refer to the all 10 verses) describes the emergence of a beast with 'ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2.The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority... The whole world was astonished and followed the beast' (The Holy Bible, New International

corrupt world. A second panel, similarly divided, is by Peter Madileng. **(Figure 75)** Based on Revelation 20v2<sup>187</sup> he depicts a figure of Satan, above, while the second half is based on Revelation 12v2-3<sup>188</sup> and depicts a pregnant woman ‘clothed with the sun’. Textually she is said to cry out as she is threatened by a seven-headed monster (dragon) intent on devouring her son, who is in the process of being rescued and transported to heaven.<sup>189</sup>

Fundamentally each panel centers on the confrontation between good and evil. In this the themes were particularly pertinent at the time when a powerless majority were confronted by an intransigent state. To black theologians and doubtless many scholars, Babylon was already synonymous with the west and capitalism. Scenes from Revelation are seldom depicted in western art, yet African artists have often been drawn to its themes, possibly in that they dramatically relate mystical and demonic experience in a compelling and accessible way. Rowland notes that in Brazil liberation theology activists who had been harassed and imprisoned, often identified with the experiences of John (author of Revelation) on Patmos. (Rowland 1999:1) Domitian, the Roman Emperor who persecuted Christians for their belief, had exiled John to this Aegean island. (Hall 1974:175) Typically, such imagery appealed to adherents of liberation theology, which is rooted in ordinary people’s daily lives and experiences of poverty and oppression and is not merely an abstract reflection on Scripture. It is a theology that engages the whole person’s life of despair and deprivation, and it comes from those who themselves have struggled, identifying the exile and martyr, and the encounter between good and evil.

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Version, 1978:320-321) Essentially this deals with the emergence of Satan as ruler of the earth.

<sup>187</sup> Revelation 20v2 refers to an angel who ‘ seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.’ (The Holy Bible, New International Version 1978:327)

<sup>188</sup> Revelation 12:v2-3 describes a woman with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars: ‘2. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.’ (The Holy Bible, New International Version 1978:319-320) Mbatha also frequently alludes to this beast later in his work.

<sup>189</sup> The imagery is dramatic and compelling, with emphasis on the demonic dragon figure contrasted with the angel and woman. The central issues of the need to acknowledge the shortcomings of individuals and the need to avoid the power of evil are easily decipherable in this image.



Although very little two-dimensional work from Ndaleni has to date been traced, there are some indications of the use of religious themes in these as well. An example is Vivian Nkabinde's *The city of David* (1973) (**Figure 76**), in which a wood enclosed Zulu village containing beehive-huts is protected by a Zulu warrior in full traditional regalia. The theme reflects the protective role of kingship in relation to country and populace. By simply transposing this theme into a traditional rural context, the theme has automatically acquired a vernacular significance. David alludes not only to a comparable ideal and desirable kingship, but also to the need for similar protection from the state (perceived as largely ineffectual or partisan by the majority of South Africans). Significantly in 1973 the new Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelethini, had just been installed, enhancing the topicality of this theme.

Art criticism by fellow students was encouraged at Ndaleni, and those utilising religious themes were not exempt from such scrutiny. Dan Rakgoathe, who after leaving Ndaleni, went to Rorke's Drift for a time and later eventually qualified in Fine Arts at Fort Hare University, often expressed an aversion to Christian thematic content, preferring instead more universal concepts of belief, based on his interest in Rosicrucianism. (personal communication, 2000) While at Ndaleni, he was particularly critical of Cyprian Ramosime's *Crucifixion* in which a group of soldiers intent on the capture of Christ, whom he described as resembling rather 'half-starved, terror-stricken cowards than daring soldiers; Judas himself -nothing but a truly wretched fool rather than the sly, tricky criminal we would expect. As for the victim Jesus, he seemed more satisfied to hide among the rabble.' Ramosime defensively retorted with the words 'Attitude!' expressing his contempt for Rakgoathe's reading. (Rakgoathe 1965:6). Despite his rejection of Christianity, Rakgoathe's observations evidence a clear familiarity with biblical content. As will be seen later, he was instrumental in major debates regarding religious affiliation and prescriptiveness when at Rorke's Drift.

Embroidery produced at Ndaleni also contained biblically derived themes. While it was not part of the Art School curriculum, embroidery had for decades been widely taught at most black schools, with the result that many female Art School students were adept at this. Some female students,

finding the rigours of woodcutting and carving too strenuous, asked whether some of their embroidery could be assessed as part of their creativity at the School. (Peirson, personal communication, 1999) Having conceded to this request, some students produced applique and embroidered hangings for the chapel in 1965. Beatrice T Mtolo depicted *David* (**Figure 77**) as a shepherd protecting three sheep on confronting a distinctly Syrian lion (emulating brick-tile patterning to define the body). Another panel depicting *Abraham and Isaac*, with a ram caught in the thicket, was produced by Cecilia Mququ (who was later employed in biblical illustration, as indicated above). Thelma Radebe produced an image of *Moses* removing his sandals in the presence of the burning bush.

While the thematic content of many students' works was self-motivated, they were also made aware of other incentives to produce biblically derived imagery. In May 1965 the Ndaleni Art School was approached by the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association, which had its local headquarters in Germiston near Johannesburg, requesting contributions for possible inclusion in their various Sunday school teaching materials. They noted in their request to Ndaleni that many African artists were doing illustrative work throughout Africa for their Sunday school projects, while others were doing 'fine art' for exhibitions such as the Inter Faith Exhibition to be held later that year. African editors of the Africa Sunday School Curriculum, their aim being to advance Christian Education in Africa through art research development, founded the Council as a direct result of an appeal.

In response to this request, Ndaleni submitted 'several religious drawings and paintings' for selection for both the envisaged Sunday school 'picture sets' and for the Interfaith Exhibition. Two works by Peter Madileng, based on Revelations 12 and 20, were accepted for the exhibition. A decade later in 1973 the Rev Kingsley-Walker came to Ndaleni with the express purpose of inviting students to contribute to an exhibition he was planning, to be titled '*Purple and all kinds of workmanship*'. It was held from 23-25 August 1974 at St David's Parish Church in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>190</sup> Kingsley-

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<sup>190</sup> He invited Ndaleni students to tea to explain the procedure of the exhibition and to have artists meet each other and discuss exhibition management, and they also paid a visit to Dr Peter Andeson's sculpture workshop.

Walker noted that it was generally believed that a great barrier divided art and the church, and that most artists were not church affiliated. (1973:1) Many Pietermaritzburg artists agreed to contribute to the venture, including the sculptor Peter Anderson and Jack Heath (Head of the Fine Arts Department at the University of Natal) who contributed his painting of *The Crucifixion*. African art was mainly represented by twelve works from the Ndaleni Art School, and mention is made of work that came from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), possibly from Cyrene. (Mpulu 1974:15) Besides painting and sculpture, the exhibition included pottery. Further, in the side aisles of the church there were demonstrations by experienced artists of watercolour and oil painting, wood carving, bronze casting, pottery and etching.

An account of the exhibition by one of the students provides some indication of its impact. On the final evening, Sunday 25 August, Kingsley-Walker conducted a special service on '*Art and Worship*', which a student claims '...inspired us a great deal. During the service when looking around; chisels, mallets, clay, paint and the works, one could really feel that God has given us a lot'. (Mpulu 1974:15) The student claimed that he hoped he and others too could develop their God-given skills and consecrate their abilities to the glory of God, claiming that Kingsley-Walker despised anyone who said God had given him nothing. (Mpulu 1974:15) The susceptibility of students to the coercive idealism of Kingsley-Walker is indicative not only perhaps of their tacit support for his ideals, but also of their conviction that creativity was divinely associated.

Even after leaving Ndaleni many students were drawn to religious art, while others had already earlier gravitated to such themes. Before coming to Ndaleni (in 1970), Samuel Hobyane had won a prize for a cover design in 1964 for the Moriya Printing Press in Basutoland (later Lesotho) of *Jesus washing his disciples* (sic). While still a form five student at Ohlange High School, Derrick Zulu (at Ndaleni in 1971) received an art scholarship to study in Sweden. The scholarship was awarded for his two large paintings to be hung over the altars of two Lutheran Churches (location unknown),

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(Mpulu 1974:15) According to a student he claimed that on entering the exhibition: '...the smell of wood and paint aroused a concept of the creative spirit of God, innate in all hands of all artists. He recognised that as the same spirit that inspires an artist to paint or carve sculpture.' (Anonymous 1973: 26)

which he completed in 1971: one was of *The Last Supper* and the other *The Resurrection*. He later described one of his hobbies as ‘drawing religious pictures according to Higher and Lower Primary School syllabuses’, yet another indication of the school’s emphasis on such thematic focus. (Zulu 1973:28)<sup>191</sup>

Another important graduate from Ndaleni was George Kubeka, who completed his training in the 1950s. Several religious were directly instrumental in his subsequent patronage. A talented carver, Kubeka had initially trained and worked with Sr Pientia Selhorst at Mariannahill and at Lumko, in the 1960s, where he contributed to painting and carving in the church at McKay’s Nek. After completing his art teacher training at Ndaleni, he trained further at Hlabisa with Bernard Gcwensa when the latter was still working there with Fr Kinch. But Kubeka soon found support among the German Benedictines at Inkamana abbey near Vryheid in northern KwaZulu-Natal. As at other missions the Benedictines initially merely imported work from Germany in wood and plaster for use in their churches. Influenced by their close proximity to other missions involved in art patronage, such as Hlabisa under Servite Father Kinch, individual religious soon functioned as important patrons on several mission stations.

Kubeka is an important figure in the region in that not only was he an artist but also an art teacher at the local school at Inkamana, and was commissioned to decorate several local churches, his main patronage by Fr Herold. He produced sculptures for St Joseph’s College at Inkamana near Vryheid, two of a *Madonna and Child*, and another a figure composition in stone (Kubeka 1968:8)<sup>192</sup> One

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<sup>191</sup> Other ex-Ndaleni students were also known to have received commissions for religious art. Samson Mahlobo (a student in the period 1952-1962), when a teacher at Zakheni School near Charterston Location, Nigel, produced a concrete Crucifixion relief for the altar of the school in 1963. (Mahlobo in Artra, no 8, April 1964:6)

<sup>192</sup> Many biblically derived works by Ndaleni students were produced both at the institution and subsequently, such as: *The Good Samaritan* (wood sculpture-artist unknown), Moses Thovhakale’s *The Sister* (wood), Kenneth Molatana’s *Lazarus* and *Adam and Eve* (wood), Phineas Makunyame’s *Praying Man* (wood), *Adam and Eve* (wood sculpture-artist unknown), Sicelo Mgodusa’s *Madonna Hand*, Ryptheth Dlodla’s *Walking on Water* and Justinus Olebugi’s *A Promise with the Devil*. Little is known of the location of any of these works, nor of the exact dates when they were made. I have located most of these in the course of research on Ndaleni art and many of these are in private collections.

commission was in the Nardini church in central Vryheid where he did several oil on board paintings (c1970) representing Bethlehem and the three wise men, among others (**Figure 78**), that are still used as backdrops in the Nativity plays held annually at the church. While subject to a degree of expected geographical accuracy, Kubeka's landscape is somewhat expressive. In the main, however, these images resemble the typical renderings found in children's illustrated Bibles.

He was commissioned to paint decorative murals for the Holy Angels Church in Bhekuzulu township in Vryheid (c1970). (Kubeka, personal communication, 2002 (f)). These were based closely on patterning traditions derived from beadwork and carving from the region, but rendered in a dark beige, white and black, and he also carved a large wooden crucifix for the church.<sup>193</sup> In 1964 he sent a photograph of a clay model of a *Pieta* to Peirson in 1964 (Peirson in Artra, no 10, May 1965:12), which was no doubt the one, included in the Interfaith exhibition in 1965. In the late 1970s Kubeka also produced images for the apse of the Mandawe Cross church (near Empangeni) commissioned by Fr Herold, which depict a Stations of the Cross, as well as a wooden crucifix. Kubeka also did a painting of the Martyrs of Uganda for the church at Qulwana near the Umfolozi game park.<sup>194</sup>

In 1969 Brother George Ostheimer arrived in South Africa and was stationed at parishes at Eshowe, Mahlabatini, Ulundi and later at Inkamana, where he was particularly impressed by the work of Kubeka. He later became acquainted with the young artist Joel Mbuyisa when at Mahlabatini and soon became an informal agent for the artist, which he remains to this day. Mbuyisa, a self taught artist, was invited to Inkamana where he was given access to a workshop in the old refectory and produced work for several years on commission, as well as producing the recent large crucifix in the abbey church at Inkamana.<sup>195</sup> (Figure 80) While church patronage established him as an artist in the

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<sup>193</sup> Writing to Artra in 1970 noted that he had decorated two church buildings using 'Zulu designs' and using Zulu beaded 'ornaments' as examples to emulate. (Kubeka 1970:22) There can be little doubt that his penchant for religious imagery was cultivated while at Ndaleni.

<sup>194</sup> In lieu of payment for most works commissioned by the church, Kubeka's children received free education, and he too was educated further by the church. Such conditional patronage proved unsatisfactory, however, and he no longer works for the church. He also taught at schools at Mahlabatini and for many years at Inkamana near Vryheid, the town where he currently lives.

<sup>195</sup> Most of his sculpture is made of tamboti wood, which is renowned for its resistance to termites, and Br

region, Mbuyisa was seldom able to be entirely self-supporting, and after a failed venture in steel manufacture in Johannesburg, he returned to his home where he works on commissions and independently on works that Br George sells for him (after taking a small percentage), mostly in Germany). He also sculpts secular images, and these too are sent abroad or, more rarely, sold locally.

While Kubeka's imagery was influenced by his extensive experience in several quarters, Mbuyisa continues to be presented with imagery of Gcwensa and Xulu's work by Br George from illustrations in the recently published book by Dina Cormick on the two artists (1993). In addition Br George showed him an image of the Cross of Cologne as a source of inspiration for the Inkamana Abbey church crucifix (**Figure 79**), claiming as so many of his predecessors had, that early Gothic work reflected the same essential conceptualism that African artists' work has. (Ostheimer, personal communication, 2001) The present Abbot, Fr Gernot Wottawah instructed the renovation of the abbey church which was completed in 1998, with tones and a geometric frieze that closely resembles that designed by Kubeka for the Holy Angels Church at Bhekuzulu township (Vryheid), copied by those in charge of the renovation.

Many ex-Ndalení students who failed to find teaching posts, or later left the profession, were employed as illustrators by various Christian publishing houses. Obligated to produce repetitive, probably narrative biblically derived images, they mostly appear to have found such work tedious and unstimulating: Lucas Matlejoane a student at Ndalení in 1964, wrote that he currently worked as an illustrator for *African Christian Literature Advance* near Roodepoort in the Transvaal (now Gauteng), but found the prescriptiveness and the literal nature of his task limiting and frustrating. In a 1966 letter to Arttra he contrasts his current work with the expressive freedom and originality inculcated at Ndalení:

'Of course, as an artist I am not satisfied because I don't express myself as I ought to. Instead I am pressed to do what will please someone else of purely different tastes and artistic eyes'. (April 1966:4)

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George often assists in finding wood from him, often from cattle byres where it is commonly found.

Another artist, Cecilia Mququ (at Ndaleni in 1965), was doubtless subject to the same prescriptiveness when she worked at the Missionary Institute at Healdtown, Fort Beaufort in the Cape. (Mququ 1966:11) Both students doubtless found that their artistic were valued, as such publishers constantly required illustrators. The employment of newly trained black artists was on the increase in the 1960s, few black illustrators being available prior to this. The above also indicates the institutions' views on the need to proselytize in a 'vernacular idiom' by employing black artists.

Indirectly, Ndaleni also inspired other artists. One such was Michael Zondi. Aware of the training offered at Ndaleni, where his brother Mandlenkosi and another younger brother studied (Peirson, personal communication,2003), Zondi worked intermittently within the ambit of the Lutheran and Catholic Church. Trained at the Swedish Mission Trade School at Dundee as a cabinet-maker, he ran his own carpentry shop at Edendale in the 1940s. Clearly impressed by his brother's work he turned to sculpture in the 1950s (Rankin 1989:180). In the 1960s Zondi frequently carved low relief landscape panels, set into the sides of the jewelry boxes and marriage kists that he produced for the local market when working as a cabinet maker in Edendale, as well as carvings of Zulu heroic figures in wood roundels or as freestanding figures. (Zondi, personal communication, 2002)

His biblically derived work was the result both of personal conviction and because he knew that such imagery was always marketable, and was widely supported by a growing patronage base. Zondi frequently marketed his work via Sr Johanna Senn of Mariannahill, but his work also sold from the African Art Centre. (Zondi, personal communication, 2002) Primarily the religious content in his work derived from the fact that he hailed from a devout Lutheran *kholwa* family, his mother being particularly influential in his religious upbringing. Nonetheless the family, like most *kholwa*, practiced a syncretic cross-cultural amalgam, in which, inter alia, celebratory sacrifices were deemed acceptable.<sup>196</sup> Many of his religious works alluded to the political context of the time (such as his

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<sup>196</sup> After completion of the chapel at Appelsbosch, Zondi was inspired to conduct a sacrifice to celebrate the chapel, the well being at the hospital and also his friendship with Bodenstein. The latter was given the gall to smear on his head and the bladders were inflated and worn around his neck. (Zondi, personal communication, 2002

*David and Jonathan* (196...) which addressed the interracial friendship with Dr Bodenstein, and ..... (196), and he was well acquainted with current theological debate and with so-called subversive or suspect theologians such as A-I Berglund. (Berglund, personal communication, 2003)

But more particularly he developed a close friendship with the young medical practitioner Dr Wolfgang Bodenstein, which countered all the racial tensions he experienced in other contexts. (Zondi, personal communication, 2002) Bodenstein, then at the Appelsbosch Mission hospital near Fawn Leas, in the Greytown district, was drawn to the work of Zondi, introducing him to the work of Ernst Barlach, Kathe Kollwitz and Auguste Rodin. He persistently persuaded Zondi to depart from the more representational and finished work he had previously undertaken. His main liturgical project resulted from this close friendship and he and Bodenstein planned the construction of a chapel (c1963-1965) on the mission hospital grounds, assisted by an engineer. Zondi used a triangular shape for the structure (a shape typically used in late modernist churches in South Africa at the time) and the associated numeral three and its multiples in the chapel, recalling the centrality of the trinity. (Zondi, personal communication, 2002). The chapel was partly funded by the Lutheran church, especially by German donors.

Unaware of the work of Kubeka in Vryheid (Northern KwaZulu-Natal) or at Lumko (in the eastern Cape), Zondi was however familiar with the work of Gcwensa and Xulu. In the Appelsbosch chapel art and architecture were fully integrated. In addition an African character was added in the protruding surrounding at the entrance door (resembling a Zulu hut (*indlu*) entrance) and in the reliefs and sculpture in the interior. Peculiar to late 1960s modernism, cement reliefs on the arches flanking the apse entrance, were carved into three layers of tinted cement, the outer cement layer a deep oxide-stained terracotta. The relief at left (by Zondi) is of a monumental prophet and young boy, while that at the right (by fellow artist Eric Ngcobo) is of a Zulu traditionalist woman, child and man, presumably the Holy Family. Zondi also made a beaten copper christening font for the chapel.

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and Nieser).



It was here, too, that his first major carving was produced - the *Christ crucified* for the apse (**Figure 80**). Zondi recalls that he was moved to work constantly and feverishly at this work, as if driven, often carving until late at night. The work is robust and compelling, with rough textured surfaces. Subsequently his freestanding sculpture was often dominated by biblically derived motifs. An earlier work, *Lot's Wife* (1959) (**Figure 81**) typifies his earlier more realist oeuvre. Here Lot's wife turns back and gazes at Sodom, the city from which she and Lot were warned to escape, but having disobeyed God, she is in the process of turning into a pillar of salt. In what had become a typical modernist idiom in his work, her limbs are disproportionately large and her physiognomic details are expressively rendered. His *Expulsion from Paradise* (c1960) (**Figure 82**) reflected the expressive yet poetic capacities for which he became renowned in transcribing biblically derived motifs.

Later Zondi broke from the early academic realism of early African pioneer art, influenced in this especially by the modernist-inspired Natal University sculpture lecturer, John Hooper,<sup>197</sup> who, with the blessing of the head of department, Jack Heath, invited Zondi to work in the Fine Arts Department at Natal University (Pietermaritzburg). Here he was given regular appraisals of his sculpture as well as being exposed to the work of students and the prolific Hooper. The latter's work can be described as late modernist, typified by a broad expressiveness and conceptualism, factors which Zondi recalls were often shared by the two in discussions about the latter's work. Zondi worked prolifically until the 1980s, but by the 1990s he ceased sculpting because of ill health.

The incidence of biblically derived imagery at the Ndaleni Art School derived from diverse sources: individual student interests, the mission environment, and solicited imagery for use in current exhibitions or commissioned works for the chapel or church there. What is of interest, though, is that this imagery largely occurred spontaneously and the interpretations were not restricted by liturgical prescriptiveness. Those religious who invited artists to submit to exhibitions were not apperently

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<sup>197</sup> Hooper emigrated to Canada in the 1960s where he is regarded as a reputable sculptor.

specific in their demands, allowing considerable freedom of interpretation. 198

Ndalen students who used biblically derived themes were given the liberty to do so by the broad-minded teaching staff at Ndalen, more concerned with aptness of form and technique than with priorities in content. As will be seen below, however, the increasing association of the church with opposition to the state, resulted in the church being perceived as partisan. As a result many blacks, albeit non-Christian, used the church and also its biblically derived mythography to preach back to the centre - the state with its church-sanctioned segregationist ideology. The more rare occurrence of the use of biblically derived themes at Ndalen, however, soon gave way to a far more informed and socially conscious biblically derived art that emerged from Rorke's Drift. Here the art that emerged was produced by conscientized students and the influence of a more informed and critical theological quarter.

#### **4.2 Rorke's Drift in context**

In a context in South Africa in which the dominant ideologies were Apartheid, Black Consciousness and Marxism, the church elected to be partisan to none, opting instead to draw biblical teaching into a praxis of fundamental human rights, in which the church acted as healing and reconciling agent. (Nxumalo 1982:46) It is against this backdrop that I consider the art that emerged from the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift, where, besides Mariannahill, the largest body of biblically inspired art derived. As at Ndalen, the mission context contributed in part to the thematic inclination of its students, but several other sources - such as Lutheran Africanist syncretism, personal beliefs, gravitation to various AICs and the influence of a rising oppositional theological context (outlined earlier), were far more significant in shaping the work that emerged from its studios.

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198 I have not found any evidence of specific themes or stylistic criteria expected of qualified Ndalen students.

Zulu conversion, as seen in Chapter 1, was abysmal during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The objections to conversion were obvious: the mission churches insisted that too many aspects of Zulu life and practice be altered. Although Christianity was couched in a western cultural idiom, conversion constituted at least a degree of access into the periphery of the powerful colonial centre. Some historians suggest that a change occurred after the Anglo-Zulu war (1879), when a vulnerable, shattered Zulu nation was eager to restore some of its lost dignity. This saw the rise of Africanism on the one hand, while many others assimilated western religio-cultural systems which resulted in the partial restoration of land ownership, a new order headed by a paramount chief, and a new intellectual force of educated *kholwa*. Yet despite this, there was always an uneasy relationship between western and Zulu cultural practice and values, even among many so-called converts.

Among the many churches that gravitated to Natal, were Lutheran missionaries from different countries - mostly Scandinavian and German- who arrived here from the early 1840s settling in Natal and Zululand, at times having been denied entry into the latter.<sup>199</sup> (Scriba 1997:177) Settling at various stations in Zululand, including Rorke's Drift ( near Shiyane mountain), these missionaries were noted for their strong work ethic. Staunch Protestants, many Lutheran's permitted little decoration in their churches. Imagery, with few exceptions, was limited to illustrations for Biblical tales in catechism and informal meetings. (Scriba, personal communication, 2002) However in Sweden, where Lutheranism was until recently a state religion, many churches were lavishly decorated in a proto-Baroque style derived from its rather recent Catholic roots.

In Natal the Lutheran Church (LC) only gradually adapted to its African setting and experience. Bengt Sundkler, a pastor at Ceza from 1940-1942, notes that he encouraged the Lutheran mission church to make contact with the various Zionist groups in the area, but met with some resistance.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> For example, Hans P S Schreuder was denied access to Mpande's Zululand in 1844, so settled at Umpumulo north of Durban in 1850. (Scriba 1997:177)

<sup>200</sup> Additional links between Zionism and the Lutheran church were forged over the years, with the result that it is hardly surprising that many Lutherans have converted to becoming members of the ILN (Goge, personal communication, 2001). Sundkler, a Lutheran missionary in the Mahlabatini and Nongoma magisterial districts between 1940-1942, recalls that the church was well aware of the desire for a national Zulu or African church. By

Only later was there a natural gravitation towards a more relaxed attitude to Zulu cultural practice by the church. Thus by 1941, when the artist Azaria Mbatha was born, the debate among Zulu was not about conversion as much as it was about an inverse re-acknowledgment of aspects of Zulu cultural practice, and Mbatha's family would therefore have been subject to this more accommodating context.

By 1991, at least 97.6 percent of the total number of Lutherans in South Africa were black, yet Lutheran membership had fallen by at least fifty percent between 1960 and 1990. (Scriba 1997:173) This was clearly apparent in the field, when many churches visited were all but deserted, most of the youth in the region either having gravitated to African Independent Churches (particularly the ILN) or having rejected any formalized religion. (Goge, personal communication, 2001) Often remaining churches were mainly attended by older Lutheran members.

In 1962, an important art training venture was initiated in Natal under the auspices of the Lutheran mission church, which gave rise to the production of a vast body of contemporary art that set the tone for black art in the region for decades. Known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Mapumulo, it was established by missionaries of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, inspired by the Swedish artist Bertha Hansson and supported by missionary (later Bishop) Helge Fosseus. (Hobbs and Rankin 2003: 14)<sup>201</sup> In the 1960s Sweden's own moves towards a social democratic order resulted in active involvement in the anti-apartheid movement, offering support to the struggle and to dissidents and exiles throughout the apartheid years either in terms of financial or educational aid. 1962 also marked the beginning of a period of amalgamation of the various Lutheran missions in the region. (Xakaza 2001:9)<sup>202</sup>

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1942 the Lutheran church there was entirely in the hands of Zulu. Sundkler notes that he tried to introduce 'richer forms of celebrating the liturgy, and invited local Zionists to services and to debates, which shocked black Lutherans who had always regarded them as unacceptable. (Sundkler 1976:255)

<sup>201</sup> The idea for such a centre '...arose out of a committee formed in 1961 in Stockholm, Sweden, for the advancement of African art and craft.' (Sack 1989:20)

<sup>202</sup> These included the Swedish, Berlin. Hermannsburg, American and Norwegian missions. Bishop

Scandinavian countries, and Sweden in particular, had a long tradition of craft production, and in particular experienced a vibrant modernist revival after the war years, exemplified by their weavings, ceramics, cloth and architecture, that soon gained international appraisal. Such development was also ideologically based, as an emergent social democratic state upheld the significance of labour and promoted a return to craft production, in part associated with emergent post war nationalism. The establishment of an Art and Craft Centre under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) was initiated mainly for socio-economic reasons - to develop innate skills in the community and to channel these into the production of marketable goods. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:39) The marketing of such goods was both for South African and Swedish consumption, as well as for liturgical patrons locally and abroad. Zulu in the rural areas were desperate for sustainable local employment particularly since the passing of the Group Areas act in 1951 which disallowed the unchecked movement of Africans to the cities, controlled commerce and trade and property exchanges in terms of racial classification. Mission churches throughout the region acted as significant agents and employers, assisting in training, medical care, and education during these difficult times.

At the time Ndaleni was limited to accepting students who were already teachers, intent on training them to be specialist art teachers, and the need for other training venues in the region, and South Africa as a whole, was desperately needed. It was therefore with skills training and saleable production in mind that the ELC sent Swedish art graduates from the Konstfakskolan in Stockholm for craft training and development in Natal. Initially occupational art and craft therapy was offered to tuberculosis patients at Ceza, under the auspices of art teachers Peder and Ulla Gowenius, who were particularly impressed by the talent displayed by the young tuberculosis patient, Azaria Mbatha. It seems probable that prior to establishing their course, the Swedish teachers accompanied by a student (unidentified), visited Ndaleni to see how they functioned. They were particularly impressed by the linocuts produced by students and general organization of the course, drawing on it in part in

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Simon Peter Zulu was active as Secretary and later Chairman of the Management Board of the Centre, ie before and after his appointment as Bishop. (Xakaza 2001:9)

establishing the ELC course. 203

When the Art and Craft centre moved to Rorke's Drift from Ceza in c1963, the young Mbatha continued there, often acting as a teacher at the new art centre. The Fine Arts section of Rorke's Drift only commenced in 1967, intended to provide trained personnel to schools and arts and crafts centers. As at Ndaleni, the art school included students from throughout South Africa, not merely from the region, but most of the Rorke's Drift craftspersons (such as weavers, cloth designers and ceramicists) were from the immediate surroundings and were either practising Lutherans or traditionalists. As a result a remarkable blend of traditionalism and westernised ideas and practice were syncretised in all aspects of creative practice.

Clergy or Lutheran parishioners dominated the Board of the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre from the outset. Yet while ostensibly there never appeared to be any intention to elicit a liturgical bias in the art and craft production at the ELC nor any prerequisite affiliation for its students, recent evidence indicates that the Swedish Lutheran bishop at the time, Helge Fosseus, was convinced that such a centre would 'imbue the Christian theology with a creative element and thus give fuller meaning to the theoretical concepts of ways in which God is to be worshiped. Fosseus believed that the African Lutherans did not fully appreciate worship modes, which were dominated by excessive theory and excluded the creative, practical aspects'. (Xakaza 2001:10)<sup>204</sup>

Inevitably therefore, whether they subscribed to it or not, students were exposed to an underlying religious ethos at the Centre derived either from clergy or students. But religious access was free and the students were invited, not obliged, to attend church services and participate in religious or quasi-religious services. (Mautloa and Nsusha, personal communication, 1993) Biblical themes therefore at times only became a main source of inspiration for students who had no substitute mythography to

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203 This information has been deduced from an entry in Artra (1961) in which the editor noted that a Swedish couple visited Ndaleni as they were about to start an arts and crafts training centre. I may be incorrect in having identified these as the Gowenius couple, but the coincidence seems possible.

<sup>204</sup> Religious such as the Rev Hans Blum (who practiced in Southern Natal and the Eastern Cape) used wooden sculptures by African artists, based on religious themes, to illustrate his sermons. (Xakaza 2001:10)

draw on. (Xakaza 2001:27)

Some past students indicate that many of the clergy at the Centre were conservative and intransigent, unreceptive to any challenges in relation to ideological or religious issues. (Rakgoathe, personal communication, 1993) This applied particularly to Dan Rakgoathe's work and views in which he elected to embrace the idea of a universal godhead and a mystic consciousness inspired by his interest in Rosicrucianism (notes earlier). Interestingly too some teachers appeared to reject the religious ethos at the Centre. Mbatha noted not only the absence of any real religious coercion at the ELC, but also ignorance on the part of the art teachers: 'No one was interested in biblical things in my surroundings - not even a single teacher ever told me or discussed anything.' (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) He also notes: 'I could get no help from my art teachers, as they had no idea what was fermenting inside me. Or did I ask them for help? Sometimes I wonder whether they knew or even read the Bible. The kinds of ideas I had were very deep and they could not have been discussed with others or solved by other people. I, alone, was the only person who could do this. Such ideas were part of my soul'. (Mbatha, 2001: unpaginated)<sup>205</sup> It must also however be remembered that many Lutheran clergy were second-generation missionaries, who were far more sympathetic to the plight of the Zulu with whom they had been raised. Some, such as Axel-Ivar Berglund, who headed the Mapumulo Theological College nearby, had a long-standing affinity for the local population and he too was one of the early board members. (Berglund, personal communication, 2003)

Artist Azaria Mbatha will be given prominence in this chapter, as he was one of the first artists trained by the Gowenius couple, set important artistic precedents and engaged in religio-cultural debate that influenced several of his peers. Both his and his father's views can also be considered typical of the debates that centered on religion among ostensible *kholwa* at the time. Mbatha's religious education was amplified early in his youth, when after initial schooling at Mabeka, up to

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<sup>205</sup> In daily matters the ethos at the mission is still punctuated by a religious tenor, much as it was at the outset, and all decisions and meetings are commenced with prayer.

standard four, he was sent to live with a teacher, the Rev Xakaza, who was also a Lutheran pastor. (Danilowitz 1998:26) Here, besides a stringent work ethic, he was expected to memorize Bible stories and was exposed to Rev Xakaza's frequent moralising and reminiscences. (Mbatha 1998:63) Besides drawing at school, it was only in c 1961 that he recalls having begun to record stories in visual form. Mbatha senior and Azaria's links to the church were further reinforced by the fact that one of Mbatha's uncles became a Lutheran bishop (the Rev Zulu). Mbatha later entertained the idea of becoming a reverend but was prevented from doing so because his father still 'had many question marks about Christianity'. (Danilowitz 1998:28)

After his schooling Mbatha worked as a clerk on the coal mines in Vryheid, returning home with health problems (heart disease and tuberculosis), which saw him enter the Ceza hospital for recuperation. Here his abilities impressed the occupational art teachers, Peder and Ulla Gowenius, who were about to set up a school of occupational training for women at Mapumulo (Danilowitz 1998:27), and they invited the young Mbatha to join them there. From the outset the young Mbatha gravitated to religious themes, which derived from a remarkable amalgam of diverse religious influences that were pertinent to the artist - such as his immediate community, his and his families interest in separatist churches, Zulu cosmogony and especially his family context.

Central to Mbatha's perceptions is the impact of his father, a *kholwa* farmer from the Mahlabatini district (Mabeka) born into a traditionalist family who converted to Christianity (Lutherans).<sup>206</sup> While father and son are described as *kholwa*, Mbatha emphasises that his father 'doubted' and notes:

'Even if my father was a converted Christian he tried by all means not to accept the whole packet of Western civilization. I used to hear him praying first to our grand-grand ancestors and to God. I felt as if he recognized our ancestors much closer to the Christian symbols he already knew from childhood. My father had a belief that God knew everything

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<sup>206</sup> Originally a veteran of Cetewayo's army, his grandfather converted after the Anglo Zulu War of 1879. A landowner, he remained mindful of many cultural traditions that did not conflict with his new belief system.



including our needs and therefore it was not necessary to spend more time telling God about our everyday problems. Sometimes he would only say “Give us our daily bread, amen”. (Mbatha 2001: 20)

Mbatha held that the Zulu shared many ideals with Christianity with the result that these perceptions enabled Christianity to be absorbed into African traditionalist belief:

‘Christianity took deep root in most of my father’s friends not because it came with the conquering white man, not even because it produced genuinely good men, but because its evaluation of the human personality was to a very large extent in accord with that of the Ubuntu way of life. Christianity was readily accepted because it gave valid interpretation and meaning to the uBuntu evaluation of human personality in the complex fabric of society created by white man; it showed how the individual could try to be better - how he could be humane amidst the conflicts and complex situations which were part and parcel of life imposed on the African by the white conqueror. This acceptance, in my father’s mind meant the blending of humanistic responses evolved in different situations. The result was the enlargement of the African’s personality, leading to the development of one of the most remarkable characteristics of his nationalism - its strongly humanistic bias.’ (Mbatha 2001:25)

This quotation is vital in understanding the syncretic beliefs of Mbatha and many other ostensible *kholwa*, in which Christianity functioned as an extension of already entrenched values and ideals peculiar to traditionalist practice. He and his father were convinced that there were certain fundamental truths that these two traditions shared, particularly those from the Old Testament. In addition the figure of Christ is central to his New Testament derivations, and in this shares the central position of Christ in Ethiopianism (reflected in the African Independent Churches), where He is seen to have parallels with the suffering of peoples subject to oppression and injustice.

In Mbatha’s autobiography (in process) he reveals that his father was disillusioned with aspects of mission derived Christianity, racism within the church and the segregationist practices he encountered in interactions with whites. He was prone to dreaming and his wife was also a well-known dream interpreter. Unable to give accounts of his dreams in the mission context, Mbatha senior went to an African Independent church (the Congregational Church) where he spent hours recounting his dreams. Later Mbatha’s brother became a Zionist bishop, also having found in Zionism a more sympathetic religion. (Mbatha, personal communication, 2002)

As a child Mbatha recalls having heard counter arguments to the absorption of Christianity by ‘the old people...very traditionalist’ who constantly debated the differences between traditional beliefs and those of Christianity: ‘they have their own philosophy about how the world was created...and it was the opposite of this Christian’. Mbatha’s father was well aware that western education and Christianity would draw his children closer to the white community, which was often the negative argument posed by his friends, who indicated further that ‘such persons’ (ie the whites and perhaps also the convert) could not be trusted. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) At the time (c1960), as noted above, tensions between black and white Lutherans were emerging, linked directly, amongst others, to questions regarding support for racial segregation in church and state. This had been experienced at first hand by Mbatha and his father when they had been denied access to a ‘white’ church, and doubtless added to a questioning of their adherence to mission-derived Christianity.<sup>207</sup>

Mbatha’s father forged significant links with students and theologians at the newly established (in 1965) Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo, doubtless through his brother having trained there. In view of his valuable insights into biblical and traditional wisdom, Mbatha’s father was asked to address the students there regarding religious issues. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) Mbatha notes: ‘He was very clever in telling stories in his own way as if he had seen all the events and Africanize most of the stories even though some were originated from other cultures’. (Mbatha 2001:25) The Africanizing by Mbatha’s father was reflected in his emphasis on the significance of the African presence in the Bible, noting, inter alia, that the ‘...one who took the cross

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<sup>207</sup> Being *kholwa* also meant that the hypocrisy of white Christians was puzzling. The experience and practice of being Lutheran was not without incident. The young Mbatha was exposed to the intransigence and inequality of the church-going community and cites an incident in which the hypocrisy of white practising Christians was challenged by his father, who attempted to attend a church service in a ‘white church.’ Mbatha notes: ‘... he (Mbatha’s father) did not like that whites in the cities had big churches, while they had none but being told to be christian.-The big nice churches were only and just only for them. We had plans to surprise them. We thought to visit their church, and we were sure they would appreciate.’ Needless to say the family arrived in their Sunday best but: ‘We were a little bit late. When we entered, all were white people and the priest stopped preaching. We were ordered to go out. His mistrust started that day and he could not believe (sic) what they said about this Christianity and he became interested in the Zulu Christian resistant groups’. (Mbatha 2001: 25) His father had forgotten that there was no equality between black and white in church and state.

of Jesus (Simon of Arimathea) was black'. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) In addition his father explored the commonalities between Christianity and Zulu culture and belief, thereby suggesting that Christian practice could as a result be sanctioned and vice versa.

Mbatha and his father were also familiar with the ideas of the renowned Laduma Madela, who also hailed from the Ceza district close to the Mbatha home. A lightning doctor and *inyanga*, Madela determined to set about a task of recording Zulu cosmology which he derived from visions of and injunctions by Mvelinqangi, the Zulu creator god, who appeared to him. Primarily Madela, to be discussed in more detail below, wanted to reinstate Zulu cosmogony as a counter to what he perceived as the cultural invasiveness of Christianity.<sup>208</sup> At a visit to him in 1992, Mbatha was impressed by a directive, which reinforced his own views on the inevitable syncretism in belief among the Zulu, as Madela claimed that '...we could not choose but we live here where changes happen out of our control. Does it mean that we cannot construct a perfect world if we feel that our parents lived in a better world with better values? The answer was no. We are here but it is important looking backwards as it is our foundation'. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1998)

These comments epitomized Mbatha's views and those of his father, regarding both Christianity and westernization; interventions had taken place and had to be acknowledged together with Zulu traditions and cultural practice. Like many other Zulu who recognized the impact of two worlds, the western and African, the present and the past, Mbatha approaches this dilemma by establishing a path between the two. He acts as a purveyor of a syncretic worldview in which he embraces a fusion of Neo-Biblical and Christian morality and values together with recollections of his cultural context and practice.

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<sup>208</sup> While Sundkler notes that he found Madela was intrinsically in favour of Christianity, Schlosser counters this. (Schlosser 1997:46-50) According to Mbatha, when he visited Madela in 1992, they discussed the latter's adherence to the idea of *Abantu abamhlophe*, meaning 'there are also people' and both he and Mbatha's father concurred in their belief in the first person on earth as the 'big ancestor' - essentially the human conception of God. (Mbatha 1998:61) Madela presented Mbatha with drawings and also wrote a praise song (*izibongo*) for him - '*Izibing (sp) zi ka Azaria Mbatha*'. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995)

Mbatha's first works in the 1962-3 period were tentative, both pictorially and in their use of predictable, conventional motifs. But significantly, even at this early stage, they include African personages and draw on African traditional practice to reinforce the reception of the images within a Zulu context. Initially most of his personages are white as in *Crucifixion* (c1962) (**Figure 83**), while in *God and angels* (c1962) (**Figure 84**) God is white and the angels are black. As noted earlier, the latter are frequently associated with the *idlozi* by separatist churches.<sup>209</sup> Lettering (and an implicit didacticism) first appears in many of these early works such as in the lower register of another crucifixion - *Jesus died for us* (c1962) (**Figure 85**), which includes a praying man and sacred heart on the one side and a Bible on the other, suspended by two birds. An early image of God (*Untitled*) c 1962-3) depicts Him as a robed male wearing a Bishop's mitre, typical of the king seen in playing cards (the curled hair of the king of spades and the beard of the king of diamonds), and he is set against a dark ground that appears to represent his creation - the constellations above and the flora below. This image is unique in that he depicts God, to the Zulu a central figure in their cosmogony, with all the authority of a king. Only the inyanga Madela had previously produced any imagery of God, which will be examined further below.

Mbatha's admonishing tone in *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me* (c1962) (**Figure 86**), includes an open Bible with what appears to be a calf, below. Here Mbatha alludes to ancestral veneration and ritual slaughter including an *ukhamba* (beer vessel used for ritual veneration) at left, an *uqoko* (meat platter) at right, while on the floor is a snake (conventionally associated with the *idlozi* if it enters or is in the proximity of the home or *umsamo* (sacred area in the home for ritual objects). Further, two shields situated on either side, recall patriarchal authority and protection. Here Mbatha simultaneously celebrates traditional practice, Biblical injunction and the unassailable authority of the creator god in Zulu cosmogony. In *The great success* (c1962) (**Figure 87**) a man holds his arms open in despair in a barren landscape with snakes, locusts and a frog. The full text in the upper register reads: 'The great success wished by this man has not come. Pray I give unto you,

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<sup>209</sup> Another image, *Church* (c1962), simply depicts three white males and two black angels outside a church building

regard not our sins but the faith of thy church'. The source further alludes to the Old Testament account of the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians and their subsequent despair, while some of the creatures referred to - the snake and frog- also have positive and negative connotations, respectively, in Zulu mythology. The frog is regarded as an omen of bad luck, while the snake is usually a sign a bad luck, but in some instances, as noted earlier, is associated with the *idlozi*.

In his *Untitled* (c1962) (a work in the Rorke's Drift Collection, currently housed at Caversham Press), worshipers and angels surround a central angel (white), while three worshipers in the foreground are situated before a fire. As a decorative surround are fourteen bulls, which as sacrificial bulls in the context of worship (of the *idlozi*) seems to suggest that the image relates simultaneously to traditional ancestral veneration which demands animal sacrifice, as well as to sacrifice in the Old Testament, to elicit the powers and protection of those proximate to the realm of the divine.

In response to debates about cultural imposition and fragmentation he had heard debated in his home context and from theological students, Mbatha produced *The Ladder* (1968) ( Cat. No. 55, p63, Retropective Exhibition Catalogue, 1998). Here a figure ascends a ladder with one of its top rungs broken, the ladder used metaphorically to convey the cultural integrity of the recipient audience whose culture is fragmented (Leeb-du Toit 1998:41), while at left a priest snatches away a naked traditionalist woman (referring to the abandoning of polygyny). Huts at right have closed doors, signifying that they are abandoned and no longer function as homes. A wounded naked man, his right eye covered with a bandage, his arm in a sling, hovers ineffectually near the closed beehive huts. Mbatha here alludes to the invasiveness of the mission church in changing traditional practice, polygyny in particular, and to the disruption of a sound social order that has led to sorrow, illness and despair. This is in contrast to the AICs, Zionist churches in particular, which allow many traditional cultural practices. Here he also implicitly critiques western cultural authority in Christianity, and the missionary interpretations that suggest that one cultural practice is allowed to the exclusion of the other.

For Mbatha the Bible functioned in various ways. Much as the folktale functions in traditionalist

society in guiding the community in their daily lives, so it supplied examples that were highly pertinent in potentially transforming a segregated community that had variously wandered from its ethical and moral positions. While Christianity derived from the religio-cultural centre of the oppressor, Mbatha saw its value as a known textual base from which dialogue could be initiated and shared. Convinced that if all people in South Africa subscribed to Christianity there would be peace, he was naturally disappointed by the fact that many who claimed to be Christian were central to the practices of segregation and oppression in South Africa. (Danilowitz 1998:28)

Influenced by his father's intentions to make Biblical themes relevant to the Zulu through his art, Mbatha began to realise this early in his career. He resolved to straddle two tasks: he would function as a teacher and as an artist, producing narrative and didactic work: 'My aim was to travel around South Africa visiting churches in Vryheid, Johannesburg, Rorke's Drift and one near Eshowe and to make pictures which would transform the whole Bible. On my visits to the churches I still did not think in terms of the Africanization of their walls through my pictures'. (Mbatha 1998: 61) It was his initial intention to show that biblical narratives can function positively in everyday practice. One of his earliest works appeared in the tapestry (which he designed) for the church at Rorke's Drift of *Christ and his disciples* (c1964) woven by women from the center, and not unlike the conceptualized renderings in the tapestries included in the Interfaith Exhibition. Another early mural commissioned by the church (recently discovered on a return visit there in 2002) is situated in the room adjoining the refectory near the art school, an extensive narrative that Hobbs and Rankin have identified as depicting the story of Abraham and Isaac (2003: 67), including various scenes from the Old Testament as well as the teachings of Christ, but the details of these narratives have yet to be explained by the artist. This was the first of his painted murals, revealing a conceptualism and narrative clarity that dominated subsequent murals, such as those to be discussed below.

His ambitions were further realised in the mural at Bongosizi church in the Bhokuzulu township outside Vryheid, which depicts various scenes from the Bible, especially those related to Christ's life and miracles (**Figure 88**) Presented as a series of panels, they depict scenes such as *Christ's entry*

into Jerusalem. **(Figure 89)** Later he produced an image of *Christ and his disciples* **(Figure 90)** <sup>210</sup> in a cement shallow relief panel on the north wall of the Esiqhomaneni Church (c1963-4), near Empangeni in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Centrally situated, the figure of Christ is surrounded by his disciples. Situated in the school grounds, this church relief functions as a pivotal decorative site attached to the church. These monumental works have an important communal context or reception and relevance. He saw his role as a responsible one, almost shamanic in nature, as he was able to convey the thoughts of his immediate community. <sup>211</sup> As a result of these he was further sought after to do commissions by Lutheran clergy, few of which were realised as he was subsequently too busy teaching and could not accept more work. He was also soon to leave South Africa permanently for Sweden, and here he produced additional murals, as well as in Germany.

The significance of the abovementioned South African works is considerable, in that they all occurred within black communities in both an educational and religious sphere. They provided these communities with an immediate context and frame of reference, the themes carefully selected to centre on the redemptive power of Christ, emphasizing His healing capacities, power as a leader and nurturer, and ultimately as a saviour from earthly woes. In this they reinforced a more conscientized theological exegesis of the relevance of Christ to an oppressed people.

Themes in Mbatha's linocuts were initially syncretic allegories derived from both the Old and New Testaments. They are not mere replications of narratives of Biblical origin, but have been carefully selected and translated when they have personal significance and parallel contemporary events. In *At 11 o'clock* (1962) he depicted simply that with which he was familiar, namely the local church at Rorke's Drift. While the three persons outside are white, he depicts the angels as black, noting: 'I

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<sup>210</sup> A photograph in Hobbs and Rankin indicates that in this commission he was assisted by Peder Gowenius (Hobbs and Rankin 2003: 68)

<sup>211</sup> 'What is seen in my drawings comes from the hidden part of me. The artist sees things in a fuller, more integrated fashion because they are seen through eyes which belong in the group with which the artist identifies. In reality, then, it is not his vision, but that of his clan, which the artist expresses'. (Mbatha 1998:56)

drew the angels black because the Church was in Africa, and for me angels symbolised African ancestors'. (Mbatha (a) 1998:57) Here, in alluding to metaphysical beings, he opted to draw parallels from his own cultural experience, much as Zionists did.

Whereas Pientia and Kinch, among others, persuaded artists to depict religious figures as African, Danilowitz notes that Mbatha's early work referred largely to images of a white Christ and white congregation. (Danilowitz 1998:28) Later depictions of Christ as black were associated with his own speculation as to whether Christ could in effect be symbolically depicted as black. Regarding Christ as a reconciliatory figure between white and black, he evolved the idea that Christ should be depicted as both black and white, as would Pilate and the crucifiers, in order to be more accessible to a South African and especially a black audience. He notes that at times one didn't question the fact whether the image of God or Christ was black or white. Sometimes his images of black or white were due to use of black backgrounds where the figure was depicted as white for 'aesthetic reasons'. (Mbatha 1998:59)

When Mbatha left high school earlier to work as a clerk on the mines in Vryheid and later on the Witwatersrand, despite his father's objections and wish that he pursue his education further,<sup>212</sup> Mbatha conveyed his father's disapproval in a biblical injunction, comparing his actions to those of the disobedient Jonah. In 1962 Mbatha did two linocuts of *Jonah* as a direct autobiographical reference to Mbatha's opposing of his father, Jonah regarded 'as a sign of all those who do not obey'. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) Jonah disobeyed God's injunction to send him to Nineveh to preach to its heathen citizens, going instead to Joppa.<sup>213</sup> Consequently he faced the wrath of God, almost losing his life. The fundamental message in the Jonah tale closely parallels expected

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<sup>212</sup> Mbatha indicates that when it was discovered that he had a heart defect (which occurred when he was training as a boxer after he had gone to work as a clerk on the mines in Vryheid), his father said that 'it was God's punishment for having gone to work on a mine against His wishes'. (Mbatha 1998:57) He left home again this time for Johannesburg and started studying, but heart disease again made him return to Ceza where he was drawn into the therapy program.

<sup>207</sup> The Jonah theme was regularly used by Lutherans, due to its diverse applicability.



adherence to divine and paternal authority to which traditional Zulu youth would be subject. Zionists often preferred such parallels in the Old Testament, in that they reinforced traditional practice and expectations.

In another image, *Life that defeats death (Jonah 2:1-3)* (c1965), a compact continuous narrative alludes to both personal and national salvation. Here Mbatha depicts the same monster-fish thrice: once in the throes of devouring the robed Jonah; a second in which he depicts Jonah with his flailing arms outstretched; and a third in which a cocooned Jonah, corpse-like, is about to be debouched onto land.<sup>214</sup> The latter resembles Africa, and is peopled by four white and four black persons. In the circular space (composed of fish tails and bodies) are four preaching figures, two with white and black faces, and two solely black. Central to this theme is the metaphor of life overcoming death, the salvation of Africa when its peoples are reconciled, and Mbatha's life as an exile - free both politically and as a creative being. He was also in a sense 'saved' by his father's word, after his near fatal disease and heart condition. The theologian Theo Sundermeier regards this work as a theme of survival over death, suggesting further that the people of Africa are now free from chaos, indicated by the black and white figure of Christ, while those with him are in the 'light'. He further, predictably, interpreted the large figure with white and black face as a priest who also controls chaos. (Sundermeier 1977:34) Such partisan readings (regarding the priest's role and the idea of prevailing chaos) have been rejected by Mbatha who has noted that his works are easily misinterpreted. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) This theme is repeated several times by Mbatha, as seen in his narrative *Jonah and the whale* (c 1962). **(Figure 91)**

In another theme that deals with parental admonition, *The saving of the prodigal son*, (Luke 15,22 and 23) (undated, possibly c 1965), Mbatha focuses on the return of the son to the father, again a poignant metaphor for Mbatha's own experience. There are several signs that allude to its Zulu contextualization: in the bottom left the father is shown with a spear rather than a crook; and above

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<sup>214</sup> Jonah was eventually expelled and preached at Nineveh for forty days, thereby ultimately fulfilling God's earlier request.

right he is depicted again, wearing a headband (*isicoco*) as he stretches out a large welcoming hand to his lost son. The father, like Mbatha's, is depicted as a farmer with cattle, therefore implicitly a man of substance. The son, reduced to being a swineherd, has suffered the ultimate humiliation, as to the Zulu traditionalist (as well as Zionists and Nazarites), swine are regarded as unclean and pork is disallowed for consumption. In contrast the cattle symbolize wealth, legitimacy and cultural order.

Biblical themes also provide Mbatha with themes of betrayal, often within the familial context. In *Joseph* (1964-5) (**Figure 92**), a narrative in nine panels in which he includes selected episodes related to this tale of filial jealousy and greed for power. The estrangement and rejection of a departed son echoes his own position, while the allusion to a power imbalance prevalent under the apartheid state is obvious. Another theme of betrayal in which the family is a metaphor for the nexus of power and fragility, again with personal and national affinities occurs in *Cain and Abel* (1964). (**Figure 93**) Narrated in three divisions across the rectangular format, here again a father favours one son over the other and as a result of jealousy and the desire for power, the family is shattered and parental authority is challenged.<sup>215</sup>

In his *Tower of Babel* (1963) (**Figure 94**), Mbatha depicts a central dual façade rectangular structure (possibly of tin), above which two arcs rise, flanked by smaller rectangular or square facades. The latter both contain the tower and at the apex curve asunder, at the top of which appears a naked black male, his arms outstretched in despair.<sup>216</sup> According to Mbatha the theme is used metaphorically and suggests not language and cultural differentiation, but rather the rending of the Zulu from tradition as a result of western cultural invasiveness, and the implicit neglect of traditional cultural practice. The tower is used symbolically as a syncretic symbol of two cultures blending; and of the path between the old and the new (the traditional and the non-traditional), and as an emblem of destruction and the

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<sup>215</sup> Danilowitz notes that Mbatha's father viewed these early works with pride as they revealed that his lessons and the imprinting of biblically derived values had born fruit. He pinned them onto his walls, inviting friends to view them. (1998:27)

<sup>216</sup> The houses are modified in a later version of this theme to resemble Zulu beehive huts, and in the frontal plane a procession of people collect branches, which, according to Mbatha are intended for use in fires for the

need for renewal. The closed doors suggest that the occupants have deserted their homes (and implicit unity), or could equally be read as being closed to cultural restoration, and in this instance cultural practice such as ancestor veneration. (Mbatha 1986:15 and Mbatha personal communication 1995) Eichel's more naive reading suggests that converts 'are no longer satisfied' with their 'simple mud huts', and 'aspire to greater things', failing to examine the impact of the proselytizing endeavour of the church on Zulu culture. (Eichel 1986:15)

The figures in this image also function metaphorically: they interact as a community, and celebrate together, but communal cohesion, depicted in the foreground, is shattered above, as several groups huddle together separately. Utilizing a biblically derived theme by situating it within a typical Zulu rural or township context (he does both, in different versions), the theme consequently has greater impact and currency as it simultaneously upholds traditional cultural practice, while in the process subverting those aspects, which have eroded it. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:40) In addition Mbatha's intention is to address all those who try to live a 'humane and social life' and those fellow victims who, like himself, 'suffer in this modern world from isolation, alienation and anxiety'. (Mbatha 1986:6) The return to one's roots, he contends, will enable one to engage in a process of recovery, in which essential values and mores can chart a renewed sense of direction.

Not surprisingly, given his own accounts in his autobiography, Mbatha often politicizes Biblical themes. In *Flight into Egypt* (1965) (**Figure 97**) he depicts Mary and Joseph as Zulu: he in a western coat and hat, she wearing a Zulu married woman's *isicolo* headdress (signifying marriage and implicit legitimacy for her child), embracing the infant Jesus. Joseph, dressed in worker's trench coat and hat, seems to suggest that he is part of a marketable labour force (possibly a migrant worker). The infant Jesus is rendered both black and white, reflecting his accessibility to all peoples. The couple negotiate their way through a forest of plants, some thorned, others flowering, which seem to represent alternately, restriction and despair contrasted with renewal and hope. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:41) Against a backdrop of escalating tensions in South Africa, the increasing number of forced removals both in rural and urban areas, the theme of flight, homelessness, and political exile was

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sacrificial preparations for the *amadlozi*. (Eichel 1986:15)

highly pertinent. It also reflects Mbatha's own plans to leave for Sweden. On his return in 1967, he found the relationship between black and white tense, contrasting sharply with his experiences in Sweden. There were also tensions at Rorke's Drift, where several of the teachers (such as the Gowenius couple) were regularly harassed by the Security Police who knew of their opposition to state policy, and who also suspected them of harbouring dissidents. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995)<sup>217</sup>

At the time he wanted to reconsider themes he had done previously on the relationship between black and white, and produced *Sermon on the mount* (1967) (**Figure 96**) and *Crucifixion/reconciliation* (1967-1968) (**Figure 97**). In a direct analogy to the situation at the time, the people in the latter are divided by walls separating each other while beneath this a black male (self portrait) and a white are seen together under the crucified Christ. Mbatha noted that black expectations were ignored and he felt helpless to contribute to their realization. Knowing what restrictions lay ahead should he stay, he finally left for Europe in 1969, although at the time he felt that if all South Africans became Christians then peace would ensue: 'It did not take too long before my thinking changed as I soon discovered that I was wrong' (Mbatha 1998:61). As indicated earlier, Mbatha soon discovered that even so-called Christians were hypocritical. This negativity is again conveyed in the 1980s work *Between hope and despair* (c1980) (**Figure 98**) where two men (depicted similarly in *Crucifixion*), now old, are still not reconciled and free, and in *Group Inbetween* (1980s) unification is still being attempted but the divide between black and white is depicted as an unbridgeable chasm - here the black male has the crucifixion behind him and the white a panel depicting a divided community of black and white.

Mbatha also deployed biblical themes that explore imbalances associated with power, difference, race and culturally based antagonism. In *David and Goliath* (Zacharias 4,5 and 6) he positions the

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<sup>217</sup> When angered by current political events he made a linocut of *Herod and the wise men* (1965). (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) It was unwise to openly challenge the then Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd, as Mbatha was well aware that he was wholly dependent on special dispensation for blacks from the state to have a passport issued to travel abroad. The analogy however was apt: Herod was a supreme ruler, and in order to retain power resorted to ruthless actions, much as the illegitimate power enclave in South Africa did at the time.

two conflicting communities (Israelites and Philistines), as white and black on opposite sides. The Israelites (depicted as black) as potential victors stand calmly as witnesses to the event, which clearly situates them as those blessed by God. (Sundermeier 1977:30) The heroic black/Israelite victor, David, functions as a symbol of resistance against all odds. Highly topical given the current situation in South Africa, David also functioned as a personal analogy for Mbatha to succeed. Mbatha leaves one in little doubt as to his intended use of the theme as a metaphor for the current context in South Africa: the blacks as unarmed, passive, god-fearing victims, God's people, and the white militaristic aggressors who in this instance are humiliated and defeated.

Like liberation theologians, Mbatha sees the godhead as one who takes sides. He has determined the victor and the people of Israel (or anyone who is oppressed) are here transformed into the victims of Africa. Rankin and Hobbs point out that the use of black here for the Hebrews and God's elect, suggests 'a calculated 'African' ideology, reversing the clichéd (and, in the context of Africa, offensive) European metaphor that associates white with good and black with evil (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:67)

Mbatha often reinforces Zulu cultural and traditional ideals and religious practice in his works. In including these aspects within the context of Biblically derived imagery, two things occur: the Biblical theme is indigenized and implicitly Biblical ideology is absorbed by the recipient culture. Secondly, the Biblical theme in its re-situation, becomes associated with the recipient culture and in the process is inevitably reinforced by this extra-cultural truth that it embraces. As indicated earlier this syncretism was influenced by parental views and influence, but it should also be noted that other individuals who promoted such ideas coincided with Mbatha's endeavour. An example is Axel-Ivar Berglund, a renowned scholar of Zulu culture and belief, who was a Lutheran reverend in 1967 when Mbatha returned to the ELC. Berglund taught at the Mapumulo Theological College in 1967 where he lectured on traditional Zulu thinking and contributed to African Christian theology. (Winters 1998:96) He was particularly sympathetic to the elimination or at least reduction of Eurocentric Christian bias in the church, at a time when Lutherans began to actively attempt to understand Zulu culture. (Winters 1998:96)

The social anthropologist Yvonne Winters has recently explored the African roots in Mbatha's works, convincingly identifying these within the context of religious themes. An example in point is *The story of Moses* (**Figure 99**) a three-tiered format of images narrating his achievements.<sup>218</sup> Moses represents the stranger in a foreign land, the chosen leader of his people, who led them out of slavery in Egypt. The parallels with the need for leadership for the oppressed majority in South Africa are obvious. Moses was also significant in that he was initially accepted within the enemy camp (among Egyptians), only to be found to be ethnically foreign and too politically ambitious, which resulted in his being deemed an outcast. Winters' reading of *Moses* centers on a parallel between Israelite and Zulu in terms of their shared political oppression and suffering, and in the value and perceptions of the nature of God and man. The sequence of narrative (emphasized by written injunctions) she sees as akin to Zulu oral story telling, as in each panel Mbatha elects to focus on dramatic scenes and injunctions. In scene two the injunction is 'Kill this one!' in which Moses kills the overseer of the slaves, is a brutal reaction to oppression. The banishment of the Israelites includes another injunction 'Go to Israel', which implies freedom or in this sense could also be read as associated with the relative autonomy of the homelands, of which KwaZulu was one. In scene 7 victory is realised when God allows Moses to drown the oppressor Egyptians 'You are to drown!' (Winters 1998:92) Moses is thus seen as comparable to a Zulu prophet who leads his flock. Mbatha claims he selected Moses as he imagined a Moses who loudly proclaimed 'Let my people go'. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) This theme was frequently depicted in Natal (for example in work at Ndaleni), and was particularly topical among preachers as well. (Rev Scriba, personal communication, 2001)<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> As will be seen Zionists frequently focus on the theme of Moses, as did Shembe.

<sup>219</sup> Winters argues that the concept of strong leadership, admired by the Zulu, is evoked in the Moses narrative. Leadership is legitimate, as is admonition and anger from such leaders, as it would be said to derive or be sanctioned by the ancestors. (Winters 1998:93) Winters also supplies an interesting parallel between the snake and staff that Moses holds up to his people in Scene 10, *Look and be healed*, which God instructed Moses to place before them as a sign which promised life to the repentant. To Christians this prefigures the cross of Christ. She also sees this staff as similar to the *ishoba* (diviner's switch) which is used to ward off evil. Further, the snake would be an obvious reminder to the Zulu viewer as representing the ancestral spirits and their role in renewal and healing, or as the diviner's snake. (Winters 1998:93) In scene 9 *We ask for mercy!*, Winters regards this as a scene of the Hebrews

Winters also points to the symbol of the tiger in Mbatha's work, which, not being an indigenous feline has perplexed some readers. The tiger has been described by Mbatha as 'a symbol of the force that lies within us' and uses it as symbolic of an 'untamed heart' and power that could potentially be evil. (Mbatha 1986:10) Winters interestingly compares this to Berglund's reference to witchcraft (*ukuthakatha*), which 'derives from suspicion, envy, jealousy and results in anger which needs to be 'cooled' in the heart so that it does not become evil action'. (Winters 1998:95)

While Mbatha's work alludes to conflict and opposition, reflecting the realities of South Africa, he has been careful to point out that he had no intention of suggesting interracial conflict: 'This may seem to be a political message. But I was really thinking about the consequences of the Biblical stories being reversed and happening in South Africa, instead.' (Mbatha 1998:59) Yet despite his caution, the very situating of the theme in a local context inevitably politicised it. Further such themes also address ideas of universal justice and human rights. Mbatha claimed that the Bible was interesting to him in that it contained truths and 'it could be used like cement with which to bind societies together'. (Mbatha 1998:59) He explains:

'I thought that the Bible should occupy a prominent place in every society. I felt that there were good and bad religions and that unity in the world arises out of the combination of opposites, good and evil, sickness and health, happiness and misery. My father once told me that unless I had experienced the feeling of pain I could not expect to experience the opposite of this which was for God to love me'. (Mbatha 1998:59)

What Mbatha in effect realized in his work was the practice of contextual theology, which developed in theological quarters from the 1960s. Not surprisingly Mbatha's work has become the focus of several theological interpretations by figures such as Werner Eichel, Theo Sundermeier, and Gerald West, among others. In recent years some these readings have been countered or tempered by Mbatha, who is more concerned about their personal, social and international relevance. (Mbatha,

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asking God for mercy while Moses is on Mt Sinai. They beg for Moses to act as intercessor between them and God., as having sinned they could be seen to ritually impure. This parallels Zionist and Shembe emphases on purification rites and healing. (Sundkler 1961:109 and Winters 1998:93)

personal communication, 1995) While theologians at times read his work within the socio-political context of the time in engendering a new ecumenism, none have linked his work to the pressing internecine conflict within Lutheranism. Lutherans were among the first to acknowledge the need to reassess the nature of their mission in Africa. Like many Protestants they were inspired by Vatican II to rethink their roles vis a vis other cultures, especially in Africa.

As a consequence the World Federation of the Lutheran Church sent the theologian Hans Florin to South Africa in 1964 to evaluate the social impact of the Lutheran Church here. His report indicated that the church had been 'too quiet' and ineffectual in South Africa in voicing opposition to social and political injustices. (Scriba, personal communication, 2001) This position was the result of their narrow adherence to the 'two kingdom's theory' according to which matters of church (God) and state were separate. Florin had pointed out that often there is an overlap between the two that South African Lutherans had failed to recognize, especially given their privilege as whites in a segregated South Africa.

This evaluation caused major schisms in some Lutheran communities, resulting in inevitable restructuring. To others, such as Rev Berglund, such reminders of the actual task of the Lutheran mission were long overdue. One of the results of Florin's survey was the rise of a more critical voice among black Lutherans in the country, especially at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo. It could therefore plausibly be argued that some of this critical debate influenced Mbatha's work in the later 1960s. Mbatha was not averse to the subtle indicting of the apostolic endeavour of the mission church. In *I send you/Sending/Sendung* (1966) (**Figure 100**) he depicts a tonsured priest centrally positioned, surrounded by his flock, with tigers and sheep in the top left and bottom right corners. According to Eichel, Mbatha intended to remind the mission church that they sent out their clergy to all peoples to preach the Gospel and to overcome conflict and hatred (symbolised by the weapons). (Mbatha 1986: 12)

But there is also a slightly critical tone that Eichel overlooks. To Mbatha the tiger represents the cruelty and power of humans, particularly those in positions of power (including the clergy and state



officials), while another tiger is seated with the sheep, indicative of tolerance and desirable peace. The Biblical references for these images are Isaiah 11:6 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the young lion and the fatling together; and a child shall lead them', and Mark 16:15, in which preachers are called to go out into the world, as well as Luke 9:1-2 in which Christ called on his disciples to drive out demons and heal the sick. Healing and well being were especially relevant to the Zulu and were aspects that Zionists centered on, thereby attracting many followers away from the mission churches. The mission churches later explored the centrality of healing in Zulu culture in order to retain their significance in African communities. These issues also tended to distinguish the Zulu Lutheran from his white counterparts.

Theo Sundermeier interestingly considers this work as relating to missionary activity at the service of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 6:4-10). He claims that the Zulu (Mbatha?) has not rejected everything that colonialism has brought with it and sees this work as an acceptance of the mission church endeavour. (Sundermeier 1975:70) To him the image suggests that a paradise can be realised in which the tigers and cattle can coexist, where communities are multi-racial and harmonious. The missions can only exist in partnership between black and white and between the sending and receiving church. Both are in the same boat, which is literally depicted below with a black and white priest saluting the viewer. The missionary is not the supreme ruler, rather missionary service is the service of reconciliation. (Sundermeier 1975:70) While the two interpretations above are similar, Sundermeier tends to emphasise reconciliation and the need to acknowledge the role of the Zulu recipients of missionary proselytizing. His emphasis came a short while after the impact of the 1972 Consultation held at the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo (LTC), which spearheaded major changes that have since impacted on the Lutheran mission church and in the policies and commitment of many other churches as well.

The LTC was well acquainted with the ideals of the Black Consciousness Movement, and Stephen Bantu Biko was often invited to attend such seminars, offering his opinions 'on the ways in which African people could be proselytised without undermining their cultural orientation and depriving them of their legitimate will and right to struggle for the revival of the dignity of their

blackness.’(Xakaza 2001:11) This direct link with Biko, the champion of the Black Consciousness movement, would doubtless have contributed to the perception that Mapumulo was central to the generalised criticism emerging from within church circles. Added to this Rorke’s Drift too was deemed suspect because of the partisan attitudes of some of its teachers, as indicated earlier. Apparently the security police did not interfere directly with activities at the LTC itself, but they followed the movements of foreign nationals teaching there, and at least two German lecturers associated with implementing Black Consciousness within the theological curriculum were dismissed from their positions there. (Xakaza 2001:12)

Mbatha’s early work occurred within this context of much soul-searching within the theological world. In the late 1960s the LTC was experiencing the beginnings of considerable dissidence as students variously challenged the role of the Lutheran church in the face of pressing social needs. Theologians suggested that the church expected greater involvement in the socio-economic and political plight of its communities. African clergy were becoming increasingly disenchanted with the predominantly white leadership in the upper echelons of the church and blacks felt that racialistic issues underlay many of the decisions taken. (Scriba, personal communication, 2002) More recently, the Lutheran church has in effect retained this segregated dimension with the emergence of an African Lutheran church, albeit unofficially. (Goge, personal communication, 2001)

The socio-political events of the 1960s,<sup>220</sup> and general civil unrest, resulted in unprecedented tensions in the country, with clergy and the church often at the centre of efforts to assist the oppressed and other parties. The LTC, founded in 1965, three years after the emergence of an art and craft enterprise (originally located at Mapumulo and later at Rorke’s Drift), served as a training centre for black Lutheran clergy both from the region and further afield. It was also intended to be a centre ‘for an exchange of views and for constructive dialogue between the churches and institutions

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<sup>220</sup> At Sharpeville, a segregated location for black South Africans near Vereeniging (Gauteng), rioting inhabitants were shot at and many arrests were made. One hundred and fifty-six leaders of the *Congress of the People* were released after the overturning of their sentences in the Supreme Court in 1961. In the same year South Africa became a Republic.

in Southern Africa, irrespective of their denomination or policy, racial or ethnic grouping'. (Becken 1973:2)

In fulfilling these ideals the LTC held regular consultations with the intention of addressing prevalent socio-political and liturgical issues, the results of which would be disseminated as widely as possible. One of their main intentions was to encourage the expression of current theology in a way pertinent to Africans and 'to translate this message into all languages and thought structures'. (Becken 1973:5). This would necessitate a variety of terminologies and concepts, but, besides being conveyed in theological debate, it could equally be suggested 'in fine art, dance and music'. (Becken 1973:5) The wealth of debate and ideas that emerged at these consultations reflected current theological debate, everyday practice and experience of many Africans -religious and laity. As noted earlier, many theologians had engaged in debates with Mbatha's father who had spoken there frequently on ideas related to biblical exegesis and cross cultural parallels. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) While it is impossible to gauge to what extent Mbatha's father's ideas and those of other kholwa informed enlightened theologians, consideration must be given to the fact that Mbatha senior was seen as a significant interpreter of belief and its practical associations in the Lutheran church. Further his brother, Rev Stephen Zulu was well regarded at the College, eventually becoming a Lutheran Bishop.

The 1972 consultation at the LTC occurred some five years after Mbatha left Rorke's Drift, clearly reflecting the ethos in which his early and later work occurred. The fact that images frequently precede written texts has been considered at length by Belting and Clifford. Images are regarded as approximating orality reflecting the ethos of the time through individual perspectives, as occurs in Mbatha's work. The contextualising of his work in a theological framework must be seen in this light. Several of the delegates saw the function of the arts as seminal in imparting the new theological ideals preferred at the LTC which could thus be understood and appreciated by church communities to whom it was directed. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:42) There is ample evidence that members of the LTC were already acquainted with the work of Mbatha as he was at Mapumulo in 1962 when art training first started there. Visits to Rorke's Drift by theologians were also not

uncommon, and they would have seen Mbatha's work in the church and refectory hall, hence the subsequent commissions he received. According to Mbatha the theologians were amazed that he had depicted a syncretic and relevant interpretation of Biblical themes similar to that which they envisaged at the LTC. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995)

The delegates to the 1972 Consultation, 'Relevant Theology for Africa'<sup>221</sup> were inter-denominational, including members from the AICs as well as theologians from various academic bodies. The preferred ideal was Black Theology, which, derived in part from its American counterpart, was linked to an awakening self-consciousness and solidarity among black South Africans. (Becken 1973: 5-6) Ideally it resulted in a more decisive link between church and society, and evolved a pragmatic contextual theology that aimed at raising the consciousness of blacks by 'analyzing their socio-cultural experience in the light of Christian revelation'. (Mushete 1994:24) Others at the consultation also identified the radical elements that Black Theology embraced, particularly its ideological strengths and socio-critical potential. (Becken 1973:16)<sup>222</sup> By merely espousing ideals of human freedom, dignity and the right to personal or human significance, many delegates suggested that the Christian doctrine was potentially oppositional. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:43)

Some delegates regarded Christianity as intrinsically radical, in that the Christian will always be in a position to critique the status quo, believing too that Black Theology attempts to remove anything that stands in its way between a Black God and Messiah. (Makhathini 1973:16) Black Theology not

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<sup>221</sup> The Consultation was realized to search for a relevant theology for Africa. Since its inception in 1965, the aims of the LTC were threefold: to examine current issues in theological perspective, to bring international debate on missionary outreach to bear on their situation, and thirdly to engage in constructive dialogue between denominations across racial and other divides. (Becken 1973:5-6) The Rev A-I Berglund, well known for his studies on Zulu thought-patterns, was one of the committee members who prepared for the consultation, as was Rev Dr T Sundermeier.

<sup>222</sup> One of the delegates, DDL Makhathini, noted how a Christian should not be predictable: 'He shall not be a political ideologist....He knows no institution, no ideology, no nation, no form of government, no society, that can heal the brokenness or prevail against the power of evil and death except the Church of Christ. Though the Christian takes a stand and speaks out specifically, he does so not as the servant of some race or class or political system or ideology but as an expression of his freedom from just such idols. Black Theology then cannot be a racist theology nor can it be a Black man's ideology'. (Makhathini 1973:9)

only anticipated rebuilding black dignity, but also was in a sense politically and ideologically neutral. It expected its adherents to speak out against any system, present or future, by constantly examining current realities against the ideals entrenched in the Bible. (Leeb-du Toit 1998:43)

At the consultation Becken held that all people who debate or recount biblical narrative are involved in theology, even the mother who tells her children a tale from the Bible or the Independent church bishop who lays his hands on a patient. (1973:3)<sup>223</sup> Christianity needed to prove its relevance in all situations and countries: ‘By translating this message into all languages and thought structures, a variety of terminologies and concepts will become necessary’. (Becken 1973:5) He saw it as the task of all Christians to make the Gospel relevant to the situation in which they live, especially by those who have found it relevant in their own lives. This would be particularly true of black theologians, while white ones functioned as partners ‘in the ecumenical dialogue’. (Becken 1973:5)

Becken observed that Christianity was brought by missionaries who studied indigenous cultural heritage and used ‘these insights in communicating the Christian message’, yet despite many ‘misjudgments’, they laid the route for Africa to become one of the many strongholds of Christianity today. (1973:6) Subsequently the personal perspective of the African was considered important:

‘He will therefore read the Bible with his own eyes, listen to the Word of God with his own ears, ponder over it with his own brain, respond to it with his own mouth and words. The result is an original theology which has not ‘adapted’ or ‘indigenized’ Western theology, but the echo of the Gospel from the valleys and the hills of Africa’. (Becken 1973:6)

In the above, Becken clearly rejects mere indigenization as a ploy by church authorities, preferring the development of a unique theology as well as other visual manifestations of it, noted earlier:

‘This echo does not only consist of spoken words alone; it resounds by means of new songs and fine art, it moves in dance and in cultic worship. It permeates everyday life by the awareness of the presence of the Lord who promised to be

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<sup>223</sup> Becken notes: ‘All Christian theology worth its name is nothing more than a reflection and a formulation of the same “Word of God” making it incarnate in the living people of God of our time and in our land.’ (1973 (a):4)

with us always, to the close of the age.....This African Theology meets the villager on his field and the labourer in the township, helping him to experience Christ as the Lord in his reborn life as an African'. (Becken 1973: 6-7)

Its visual and cultural manifestations therefore convincing him that Christianity has taken root. In this he shared the identical views of Sr Pientia and others, outlined almost three decades earlier.

To Becken Black Theology is a situational theology, which 'takes its point of departure from the sociological situation in which the "Non-Whites" find themselves in South Africa.' and is characterised by a self-consciousness and solidarity among peoples of colour. (1973:6-7) One of the consultation delegates, Manas Buthelezi, was careful to point out that Black Theology was not merely a covert Black Power call to destroy white hegemony in South Africa nor as a counterpart to white racism. (1973:18) Rather he regarded it as an important tool in the recovery of Africa's past by relating the Bible to both its present and past. Further Black Theology aimed at reinterpreting the Gospel and was concerned with the liberating power of God, recognising the responsibility of Africans in making their faith effective in their own lives and in the social and political sphere. Sin was therefore interpreted as indifference to the plight of others and to poverty and disease. (Makhathini 1973: 15-16)

Delegates at the consultation were skeptical of those theologians who currently attempted forms of conscious acculturation based on a traditional and remote past. Bosch described both indigenisation ('clothing the God of Scripture in the cultural robes of a specific people') and syncretism ('redecorating the traditional God in Christian robes') as problematic. (Bosch 1973:77) While missionaries had at first done all to reject African practice and their past, Buthelezi noted that they were now actively encouraging Africans to look at a past heritage and history to inform and give 'content to the kind of faith a person has about his destiny' (Buthelezi 1973:20) The abovementioned skepticism was based on perceived notions of tribalism and cultural stasis: 'In South Africa an African theology tied to a past traditional heritage smacked of something similar to the Government's attempt to link the political future of the Black man to past traditional institutions like the chieftainship. The African on the other hand wanted to participate in the machinery of the

existing institutions that made a difference to his every day life'. (Buthelezi 1973:20) He and others were well aware that the missionary developed a syncretic Christianity as a response to the radical theologies that he found on his return to Europe, with which he had little sympathy. This questioning response by Buthelezi was in keeping with a long standing opposition to tribalism that had originated among a so-called educated kholwa elite, who rejected separatist notions associated with the Land Act and Native Law Amendment Bill, which saw the Zulu linked in virtual perpetuity to traditional lore. The position of acculturation, variously debated, still remains controversial in some quarters.

An interesting thematic preference among contemporary clergy was identified at the consultation, claiming that Biblical apocalyptic sources which provided mystical revelation of hidden truths. Miracles and mysteries were especially favoured by Africans as they explore the 'known and the unknown'. (Lediga 1973:29) Aspects of African belief that are similar to those in the Bible, for example those associated with the function of religion in healing, were also focused on, as was the similarity in sacrifice to ancestors which was paralleled with venerating God. (Lediga 1973:29) This is significantly reflected in the images from Revelation by Makhinya (while still a student at Ndaleni), and also the many references to the apocalyptic beast in the work by Mbatha, especially his early images that refer to animal sacrifice. Another delegate, Desmond Tutu, later to become Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Prizewinner, was also supportive of an African sense of the godhead as parallel to ancestor veneration. He claimed that an ancient concept of God, *uzivelele* means the uncaused, self-existent one - a metaphysical being addressed unconsciously via the ancestors, which is directly comparable to the Old Testament in which wise ancient men were valued and revered. (1973:41)

Significantly, delegates from the AICs at the consultation underlined the fact that their contribution to Black Theology had been given little recognition in South Africa, this despite the fact that by 1972 there were over 3000 separatist groups in the country. (Sprunger 1973:165) It was pointed out that they too could be deemed Christian in that the Pentecostal churches have as features the charismatic call of the prophet, apostolic zeal and missionary power, new communality and a sense of belonging. They practice tolerance, evangelic simplicity and love, worship, faith healing, counseling, private

and family prayers, sacramental life and ritual, generosity and joyful giving. (Sprunger 1973:165) Mainly the pentecostals, for example the *Ibandla lama Nazaretha* subscribed to divine calling in dreams, therefore an acute sensitivity to the spiritual and metaphysical, and are filled with zeal to spread the word. Their followers reflect a caring for each other in times of sickness and ill health, and in their communities all social and racial prejudice are eliminated in a new sense of community, where worship, faith and healing are an integral part of life.

Many issues raised at the 1972 Consultation are reflected in Mbatha's work. The debate on apocalyptic imagery relates to a motif frequently used by Mbatha - that of the seven-horned apocalyptic beast, as in *The Beast of Revelation* (1960s) which also appeared in *The Cross* (1978), among others. This derives from the reference in Revelation 13:1 in which a many-headed beast is said to have risen from the sea and was worshipped by men (identified as the Antichrist, possibly in reference to the Emperor Nero (or Domitian) and Imperial Rome). It has become a symbol of universal destruction in Mbatha's work where it alludes to corrupt power and persecution. Themes from Revelation often appealed to the Zulu, as this book is an allegorical account foretelling the destruction of 'the wicked' and Satan, to be replaced by Christ's kingdom on earth. (Hall 1974:23) Essentially it related the condition of Christians under the Roman Empire, and easily paralleled the socio-political context in South Africa.<sup>224</sup>

Equally important in many of his images is the figure of Christ. In relation to the LTC consultation and Black and Liberation theology, Christ functioned as a political and religious martyr. In his 1963/64 *Birth of Jesus* (**Figure 101**) and *Passion* (c1964), Mbatha focuses on Christ as symbol of the latter as well as of salvation, and in his *Sermon on the mount* (1962) (**Figure 96**) as a political and spiritual leader who can galvanise and appease his community, providing crucial directives as to who he supports. Often the use of the figure of Christ is almost secular, as Mbatha does not appear to suggest the benefit of salvation as central to His presence in his images, but rather the figure

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<sup>224</sup> The Beast or Antichrist has for centuries been used to designate evil: for the Crusaders the Beast represented Islam; for Catholics during the Reformation it represented Protestant heresy, and for Lutherans a corrupt Papacy. For black South Africans it represented the white oppressor and more particularly the apartheid state.



represents a powerful leader Christ becomes emblematic of opposition in the face of oppression, where he offers resistance, and as a leader declares that justice will ultimately prevail.

In one of Mbatha's most popularly repeated images, the *Birth of Jesus/Nativity* (1964) (Figure 104) (Isaiah 9,5 and 6). Mbatha translated all the figures as black, and the entire image in an African context of witness, consisting of Mary and Joseph, and below them two feline forms and two elephants, together with the three wise men. The situating of the figures is intentionally African, suggested especially by the animals, black figures and the dense foliage. In addition he suggests that all the figures have momentarily, in celebration of the birth of Christ and implicit hope and renewal, arrested potential conflict and opposition. Sundermeier goes further in suggesting that this birth suggests the redemption of the entire cosmos. (1977:38)

Many other biblical images associated with Christ are directly related to the political sphere. In a work such as *The betrayal is sealed with a kiss* (c1970) (Luke 22, 47-48) he depicts a white and black faced Christ being kissed by a black Judas, who has a snake on his head. Both blacks and whites are in fact guilty of betrayal of Christ and all that he upholds. (Sundermeier 1977:60) At the top right is a dead bird of peace and to the right and left of the two central figures is a congregation of black Jews and Romans armed with guns and spears who set out to find Christ. Only a select few will follow the path of peace. Numerous images of the suffering of Christ are both culturally and politically relevant. In Mbatha's *The flagellation of Christ (Human suffering is Christ's suffering)* (c1965) (**Figure 102**), Sundermeier notes that in African religions, pain is regarded as being the result of evil, which must be overcome. To Sundermeier this image of Christ weeping from pain has particular topicality in countries (such as Russia, South America and South Africa) where torture is rife and human rights are implicitly abused. (1977:62)

Other allusions to a political present are readily evoked in an image such as *Jesus before Pilate/Jesus and Mary* (1964) (**Figure 103**), where a bound Christ with Pilate and Mary at his side, is surrounded by a community of black and white accusers at left and right, respectively. While obvious analogies can be made with Christ as a model for suffering and injustice, Mbatha also evokes a further

association in suggesting that both black and white are the accusers and are therefore implicitly involved in the destruction of moral order. Christ as the reconciling force in South Africa, (seen in *Crucifixion/Reconciliation* (1967-8) (**Figure 97**) in which he depicts a white male and a black in conversation, behind which are two separated communities, yet the community at right, where Christ is crucified, combines white and black. (John 19:25-27) The ‘dialogue’ according to Sundermeier heralds a new life, and one in which the cross frees individuals from a slave mentality, subsequent to which politically divided foes find one another again. (1977:68)

Mbatha has also expressed the centrality of the message of Christ in his *Sermon on the Mount* (1967) (**Figure 96**) in which he positions a white and black-faced Christ overlooking a mass of people, heads bowed in prayer. The sense of community is both Christian and traditional.<sup>225</sup> In the biblical text from which this derives, the sermon was significant in that it positioned Christ as irrevocably partisan: here for the first time He expressed His ideology in what are termed the eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). He singles out those for whom He is, in particular those who are despondent or deprived; the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; the righteous; the merciful; peacemakers and those persecuted or insulted. It was here too that He rejected violence, and suggested that one should love and pray for one’s enemies, His message and blessing intended for all beings regardless of their diversity.

Typical of situational theology, Biblically derived themes provide Mbatha with a constant source of symbolic reminders of what an ideal, just world could resemble. Instead of focusing on personal salvation he addresses issues related to everyday concerns and needs. While Mbatha claims to no longer be a practising Christian, preferring instead a universal religion, he claims that one need not have faith or be religious to be inspired by biblical stories. One can choose those that encourage one. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995)

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<sup>225</sup> Eichel notes that Mbatha was to discard this allegory, that Christ was for both white and black, as Mbatha felt that the colour of a person/s skin was no longer relevant, only their character. (1986:17)

In *God is followed by blacks* (c1968) (Matthew 2,16) a township setting, indicated by a uniform row of semidetached houses, contains open doors each with a raised black hand imploring God to hear them in the face of the white oppressor (depicted as a row of tunic wearing and spear carrying Roman soldiers (doubtless those of Herod). To the left is an image of the black Holy Family with a protective angel, while to the right the three wise men, and directly behind them the Holy Family departs on its flight into Egypt. According to Sundermeier it is here, in the township, that God becomes human. (1977:42) He hears the call of the oppressed and He will take sides and come to their aid. This image parallels the life of Christ with that of the oppressed in South Africa, subject to forced removals and discrimination, much as Christ was. Sundermeier also notes how Black Theology as a situational theology is at work here, and art anticipates and precedes theology. (1977:42)

In several instances Mbatha depicts Christ's miraculous events of healing. Healing, both physical and psychological, and the restoration of the fragmented self, can be read both literally and metaphorically. As seen earlier, Isaiah Shembe aligned the practice of healing, with that cited and practiced in both the Old and New Testaments. Mbatha's *Healing the paralyzed man* (1963) and *The raising of Lazarus* (1963) were mainly produced early in his career when he was doubtless more immediately exposed to healing practiced in his immediate family and community contexts.

Mbatha has frequently depicted the figure of a woman talking on a telephone, which does not initially appear to be biblically derived. In one of these *Who hears the voice of my Prayers/entreaty/imploring?* (c1970) a naked young man, about to be sentenced, stands in the dock, while a witness is testifying against him. The woman at right (possibly his mother) wears a traditional *isicolo* yet is naked, thin and elderly. In her need she lifts the telephone and calls for help in an attempt to save the condemned man. God, who cares especially for widows and orphans, hears her. (Sundermeier1977: 56) In the lower register below, two figures (a replication of those above) are seen in front of a beehive dwelling the door of which is closed, implying that it is no longer a home

and place of shelter as the family nexus has been disrupted by the events above.<sup>226</sup>

The image of a telephonically received and imparted plea from humanity to the creator god is unique to Mbatha's biblical vocabulary and in essence the inspiration for this theme derives from Psalm 130,1-4: 'O Lord Hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of my sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness: therefore you are feared'. Besides this direct derivation from a biblical source, one should also consider the reference made earlier to the AIC context where a 'heavenly telephone' (linked from Msinga to Telezini in Zululand) from which the well-known Zionist preacher Khambule alleged he could talk to God. Both areas are proximate to places where Mbatha lived, such as Ceza and Rorke's Drift. This quaint reference to the role of technology in accessing the metaphysical is unique to the region and to separatist practice.

As noted earlier, African priests, partly because of its prophetic nature, often cite the book of Revelation. Mbatha first depicted the prophetic beast in *The Revelation of St. John* (1964) (**Figure 104**) and it continues to appear in recent works. Written at a time when Christians were subject to extreme persecution by Rome, the book of *Revelation* was intended to guide and encourage them to resist the Roman state, not through aggression but 'by preaching, witness and martyrdom'. (IKON vol 2 no.1, 1970) Christianity at the time was an underground subversive movement, the 'beast', the Roman Empire, and Babylon equated with Rome (as is clearly discernible in Revelations 18:9-24).

Besides his Biblically derived religious imagery, and the inculturation of many of these themes, Mbatha often focuses on Zulu cosmology and cultural practices, thereby acknowledging the metaphysical within belief. Significantly these were produced after he had left South Africa to live in Sweden, and must be seen as part of a series of images of cultural recovery that have occurred in his work produced in Sweden. In his autobiography (to be published in 2003) he also pursues issues of identity located in his traditionalist past at some length. Examples of this are his *The bride in the*

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<sup>226</sup> His silkscreen *Telephone call* (1970) is a similar image seen inversely.

*Village* (1980), *The dance* (1980) and *Mother and Child* (1976). In *Bride in the village* (1980) Mbatha depicts several married Zulu traditionalist women around a row of huts. The bride at right leaves her hut, while in the background of the picture birds holding shields parade. The departure of the bride from her homestead represents a major rite of passage in Zulu culture, as here she recalls her own ancestors and acknowledges those of her husband. The birds represent the ancestors who are there to give advice as well as inducting her into the ways of the clan and family. Marriage to the Zulu is not merely betrothal but is seen as a coming of age and an entry into womanhood. The bride therefore has an infant on the ground near here, as a sign of her fertility. Ultimately the work relates the presence of the spiritual and metaphysical within the realm of the physical. (Eichel 1986:21)<sup>227</sup>

Another aspect of Mbatha's imagery is indicative of his familiarity with Zionism. It has recently emerged that at least one of his brothers is a Zionist, and the young Mbatha was well aware of its premises at an early age. (Mbatha, personal communication, 2001) Mbatha's interest in Ethiopianism and Zionism is conveyed in his image of *The Ethiopian (is converted on the Road to Gaza)* (1966). **(Figure 105)** It tells of the apostle Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch who was treasurer to Queen Candice of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian had been in Jerusalem to find out more about Christ. Philip who heard of this, went in search of him, and found him in a chariot on his way back to Gaza. He was reading the book of Isaiah, which he found difficult to comprehend. Philip joined him in his chariot and expounded on his prophecies, later baptizing him. This encounter heralds the beginning of a major link between Christianity and Africa which preceded mission and colonization, the Ethiopian signifying the African intellect, experience, knowledge and enquiry that preceded western colonial expansion into Africa. Not only did Ethiopianism uphold an indigenous Christianity rooted in Africa,

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<sup>227</sup> Mbatha indicates why, despite living abroad for over thirty years, he has retained an African identity: 'The privilege for me as an artist in exile is to have the time to formulate earlier experiences. Collecting, arranging and revising thoughts and memories is a process going on at the same time as new impulses are felt. No person stands still in the course of time and changes can be discerned in the positions taken by myself in my work. But all the time an adherence to a fundamental cultural identity serves as a sounding-board. It is of the greatest importance to understand how much exile reinforced this identity in the revitalization of old truths as a parallel theme in society.' (Mbatha 1998:54) Feeling close to the 'culture of the village in which I was born' Mbatha this cultural memory helps him to solve his problems, organise his 'daily life, past experiences and future dreams'. (Mbatha 1998:54)

but opposed the European cultural manifestations of Christianity imported into South Africa by the mission churches, forging instead its own syncretic alternatives.

Loder also maintains that this theme is well understood in Africa where it reflects on slavery and colonialism:

‘Mbatha understands that the Ethiopian, although occupying a position of great temporal power, is a great man of an open and enquiring mind prepared to take the trouble of a dangerous and lengthy journey to try and find the truth. ....This encounter was the strat of the long association of Christian culture with Ethiopia which kingdom has always occupied a special position in the African consciousness. Perhaps it also demonstrates how Christianity extends beyond the confines of European culture.’ (Loder 1998:50-51)

I would therefore suggest that this image is linked both to Mbatha’s father’s discourse on the nature of Christian faith imported into the region, and the increasing local forms of syncretic religion that were practiced by the Zulu. Further the theme is one of the many when blacks were referred to in the Bible, as related by Mbatha’s father. To Mbatha the image of the Ethiopian could also read biographically as referring to one who read, found and adapted Christianity, recognizing its relevance to the African psyche.

As noted earlier, the readings of Mbatha’s works by theologians have variously emphasised political, Africanist and proselytizing aspects in his work. Theo Sundermeier (1977) and Werner Eichel (1986), both Lutheran theologians, have further deployed such images in exegesis. The former regards Mbatha’s work as a contemporary ‘passion’ of South African despair, while Eichel focuses more on the socio-political significance of his works. Theologian Gerald West has provided readings of Mbatha’s works against the framework of liberation theology. Currently, and for some decades now, there has been a tendency to focus on inculturation reading (ie reading of the cultural elements of the marginalised culture), and West notes that South Africans preferred a liberation reading and a post colonial interpretation in which issues of liberation, race, class and gender are considered. (West 1998:82)

West notes that the Comaroffs refer to creative individuals who function in post-colonial contexts as ‘experimental practitioners’: ‘They try to make universal signs speak to particular realities’ but ‘their activities are in fact a means of producing historical consciousness: they seek to shape the inchoateness, the murky ambiguity of colonial encounters into techniques of empowerment and signs of collective representation’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xxii in West 1989:84). Therefore despite the fact that the colonised is suppressed by the west and its value systems, these are often productively adapted: ‘they often seek to seize its symbols, to question their authority and integrity, and to reconstruct them in their own image’ and they therefore, like Mbatha, ‘escape the dominant order without leaving it’. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xxi)<sup>228</sup>

West regards the Joseph story as enriching and empowering as seen in Mbatha’s *Joseph* (1964-5) (Figure 110). (1998:84) Each panel has an image of a select moment of the story and he notes ‘It has also become a resource for local communities of ordinary indigenous readers in KwaZulu-Natal (and beyond) to read the *Joseph Story*’. (1998:84) West isolates the idea that power is central to a reading of this work, both as it appears within the story and for the reader, especially for those from poor and disadvantaged communities, where issues of liberation and inculturation apply. The tale takes place in Africa and West notes: ‘The characters, themes and concerns are African, with the symbols and ideas coming specifically from the Zulu tradition and culture which was largely suppressed. (1998:84 and Mbatha 1986:6)

West has raised several important facts about this work, read from a context of local communities, who noted that: (a) it is seen to portray a concern for community in that it concentrates on human oppression, and (b) it is not a story of an individual (as in mission tales) but of a community (and is linked to the concept of *ubuntu* (a person is a person because of other people), and (c) it is also a story of powerlessness and isolation. There is a threat to *ubuntu* in panels 2,4,7,and 8. The human

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<sup>228</sup> The Comaroffs note further that ‘Such forms of re-presentation and resistance are, therefore, inherently dangerous -as Adorno, Brecht, Lukas and Bloch remind us, aesthetic works that set out to contest domination often come, by means subtle and diverse, to be implemented in it’. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:xii)

being is perceived as an object: exchanged for money, a reminder of the way in which the marginalised are under the control of the centre - the powerful who exploit and manipulate them. (West 1998:85) This is allied to 'soul-eating', which is thought to have been driven by a need for power. (Mbatha 1986:7 and 9) Ultimately he sees that the text focuses on the reprehensible trade in human life, and failed aspirations. This is in fact similar to witchcraft in which 'soul eating' or bewitching in *ukuthakatha*, is seen to be driven by similar base desires such as greed for money, possessions and control, similar to those of colonialism. (West 1998:85) Mbatha also speaks of the powerful as those who 'live in this world at the expense of the weak' (Mbatha 1986:5) and that this control is exerted both by outsiders (panels 4 and 5) and from within the community (panels 1,2,3,7 and 8). (West 1998:85)

West notes that Mbatha's focus on the youngest sons of Jacob and Leah, namely Joseph and Benjamin, emphasises his notions of the ideals of community and continuity: 'When a child is born the chain of ancestors grows by another link'. (Mbatha 1986:21) Thus any threat to the two sons is a threat to continuity, and a threat to the voice of the ancestors who often speak through children. A child who is lost will not have gained sufficient credulity and communal knowledge and will not be revered as an ancestor. West also points to the fact that clothing is used as a signifier of power gained or lost: it is gained in 1,6,7 and 9, but lost in 2,4 and 5. It is gained when bestowed as a distinctive sign of favoritism by Jacob, but as a sign of the dominant power (Egypt) in the others. (West 1998:86) To West the theme ends with the community content and *ubuntu* restored. To West this is indicative that the tale is empowering in 'proclaiming as it does that forces of colonialization, conquest and capitalism will not have their final say'. (West 1998:86-87) West uses a typical deconstructive mode of reading his visual texts in which the text is seen not only in its historical context, but also in terms of its relationship with its reader. (West 1991:9) In this the reading is pertinent and subjective, but also valuable. This reception reading, results in an 'unstable reader,' who positions the text in terms of a personal reading. The unstable reader will inevitably modify her/his readings based on the prevailing pertinence of the biblical source to current realities.

The 1980s were characterised by an increasing focus by theologians on narrative in biblical studies



and theology, which was part of a wider cultural movement. He sees this interest as part of a wider reclaiming of the imagination in ‘countercultural and other movements’. (West 1989:58) In the context of ‘disenchantment with things abstract, rationalistic, cerebral, didactic, intellectualist, structured, prosaic....the appeal turned to the spontaneous, intuitive and poetic’. (West 1989:58) For theologians this saw the rise of Bible studies groups, which increasingly acknowledged the role of the layperson. It is therefore hardly surprising that from the 1980s theologians began to look to the work of indigenous artists, such as Mbatha, for use by communities both within South Africa and in Germany to ascertain how the colonised both received and interpreted the Biblical text.

While Mbatha was certainly instrumental in setting the tone for the religious imagery prevailing at Rorke’s Drift, one of his most receptive students and co-learners was John Ndevasia Muafangejo (1943-1987). Born in Angola<sup>229</sup> and thereafter resident in Namibia (then South West Africa), he was at Rorke’s Drift from 1967 to 1969. As with Mbatha, his religious propensity was initiated in his youth, and was subsequently nurtured at Rorke’s Drift. On the one hand Muafangejo’s use of biblical motifs had an obvious derivation. Born a Kwanyama, he joined his mother at Epinga, after his father, a farmer, died in 1955. Here he and his mother converted to Christianity, and they moved subsequently to mission stations in the area. Missions represented stability and survival, as traditionally the Kwanyama widow was left destitute. (Levinson 1992:10) By 1964 they had settled in Odibo at St Mary’s mission, where Fr Mallory was in charge. The mission context and the interest expected of the newly converted was doubtless the initial source of his biblical interest. This was further amplified by the attentions of the catechist Stephen Paulus who was a relative of his mother. In 1967 Paulus produced a text *Epukululo Lovawambo (Setting things straight of the Ovambos)* that was illustrated by Paulus and Muafangejo. Levinson notes: ‘The book, which is a unique mixture of Christian subject matter and traditional African lore, and contains a page devoted to Kwanyama proverbs, shows the earliest development of Muafangejo’s art’. (1992:10)

Muafangejo’s links with religion were largely positive, as he and his mother found shelter within the

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<sup>229</sup> Born at Etunda lo Nghadi, he later moved to Ombala Muandi.

church, where he was educated and assisted by Paulus and Mallory.<sup>230</sup> Given Muafangejo's artistic ability and recent exposure as an illustrator, Fr Mallory applied to have him enrolled at Rorke's Drift for further training. The school was in its infancy with Azaria Mbatha and the Gowenius couple involved in teaching. The teaching at the time was relatively informal and consisted of weaving and instruction in graphic techniques. (Levinson 1992:10) Besides setting a significant example as a linocut artist, Mbatha was mostly involved in teaching design for fabric printing and tapestry, and also taught mural painting. (Rankin, personal communication, 2003) The use of lettering in his images would have derived from Mbatha and he shared with him an interest in the analogy between indigenous oral traditions and value systems, with those derived from the Bible: 'The strong philosophical and moral content of these absorbing 'literary' games was woven into Muafangejo's way of thinking' (Levinson 1992:9) Muafangejo was also well aware of the state's suspicion of religious. While at Rorke's Drift his mentor Stephen Paulus died in Namibia and many of his Anglican friends from Namibia were deported, suspected of being involved in resistance activities.

The Anglican Church in Namibia (established in 1924) was at the forefront of a sustained campaign of opposition to both South African occupancy of the territory (it was ceded to South Africa after World War 1). It vehemently opposed the activities of the South African military in the region in suppressing cross border raids from Angola and dissidence within Namibia. By the 1960s the Anglican Church was in open conflict with the South African government, supporting the plight of the oppressed and tacitly the ideals of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO). (Katjavivi 1989:5)<sup>231</sup> In Namibia Black Theology and Liberation Theology were well known and the former was developed at the Lutheran seminary and theological college at Otjimbingwe, many of whose pastors became active in the nationalist struggle. (Katjavivi 1989:23)

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<sup>230</sup> However, when diagnosed as manic-depressive he was treated rather harshly by members of the Anglican church who chained him to his bed in the early 1970s, in order to attempt to control his manic episodes. (Levinson 1992:13)

<sup>231</sup> The Anglican Church was eventually deprived of its leader when Bishop Colin Winter was expelled from Namibia in 1972. In addition there were several other churches in Namibia, predominantly Lutheran, as well as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Herero Oruano Church (formed largely as a result of a mass exodus of former Lutherans). All were subject to victimization (of congregations, leaders and workers) by the South African government. (Katjavivi 1989:13 and 18)

It is against this backdrop of political resistance from within the church that Muafangejo entered Rorke's Drift. Mbatha recalls that Muafangejo was an avid learner and that he followed his stylistic bent closely. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) This is particularly apparent in an almost direct copy of the central part of Mbatha's *The Birth of Jesus* (1963-64) in Muafangejo's 1984 *They are dancing for Holy Mary*. He shared some central perspectives on issues of religion and its role with Mbatha, his work consistently centering on religious themes, though often related to the church in the present and the role of religious in supporting the plight of the artist and of the people of Namibia. Many of Muafangejo's earliest works, however, were of biblically derived themes. An early painting (gouache on board) *Christ in glory* (undated, my title) (c1967) is of the figure of Christ surrounded by angels. Another is an image of two angels facing each other (untitled, undated). His *Adam and Eva* (1968) (**Figure 106**) depicts the earthly paradise of Eden and the temptation, with a leering Satan in a wedge that penetrates the circle of the Edenic realm. The circle appears to simultaneously represent the earth and the garden, both functioning as archetypal signs of unity and wholeness. Mbatha's influence was evident in the appearance of several devices and themes established by the former: the replication of format and theme. <sup>232</sup>

Themes such as *Windhoek people pray for peace and love* (1977) (**Figure 107**) were clearly associated with the perception shared by both Mbatha and Muafangejo, that Christianity could ideally provide a significant parallel for interracial harmony, and ultimately change, in their respective countries. In this work a central mandala contains images of three crosses around which figures of whites and blacks embrace as a black minister reads to them at left.

Muafangejo also deployed biblical themes earlier in his career functioning as reminders of moral and ethical codes. *As the serpent leers, Eve hands* (1973) (**Figure 108**) and *Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord Jesus for R3.00* (1973) (**Figure 109**) were instances where he embraced the theme of betrayal.

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<sup>232</sup> In *The royal wedding* (1982) in which multiple figures in identical flowing robes witness an embracing couple, above; his repetition of motifs in crowd scenes in the former and in *The good shepherd* (1974); the compartmentalized narrative sequence in *Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem* and the depiction of Christ as black and white in *Crucifixion* (1984), and *Israel, Jews, Christians, Heathen our God for all people* (1981).

In the former the consequences of wrongdoing are included as Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, while in the latter Judas has hanged himself from a tree, both themes functioning as salutary reminders of the need to be trustworthy and loyal. His *Israel, Jews, Christians and Heathen, our God for all people* (1981) was equally relevant to him as a reminder of a divine presence for all peoples and cultures.

In keeping with the tenets of situational theology he focused particularly on what the church as an institution and its religious meant to him. In other works such as *Our church at Rorke's Drift* (1968) (**Figure 110**) and *Evangelical Lutheran Church Women's meeting* (1974) the church is depicted as a central feature in the community, involved in secular and religious issues, such as education. Many of his images in a church context are directly associated with friends and family, or with special occasions he has elected to focus on. (Levinson 1992:56) One such *The Bishop Rt C S Mallory* (1981) (**Figure 111**) consists simply of a profile of Mallory, who was additionally celebrated in the text accompanying the image as Muafangejo's patron and friend. *The death of the Rev Gabriel H Namueja* (1974) (**Figure 112**) depicts an individual he and his community deeply respected; similarly his image of *Cathedral church of St George, Windhoek* (1981) which depicts the enthronement of the Right Rev JH Kaulumaas as eighth Bishop of Namibia, which ceremony Muafangejo attended. In 1986 the inauguration of Bishop Desmond Tutu was depicted in *New Archbishop Desmond Tutu enthroned*. (**Figure 113**)

In the 1970s several of his works appeared on the covers of *Ikon* a quarterly publication of the Anglican Church published in Pietermaritzburg. The quarterly first appeared in 1969, its articles countering state policy, and linking the struggle to biblical injunctions, as to be seen in *Ikon* vol 2 no 2 1970 and Vol 2 no 2 1971. *Ikon* also contained articles that centered on economic, social and political empowerment, clearly spelling out Christ's politically subversive potential, as reflected in his attitude to political institutions of his day, as well as the strong political implications of his actions, leaving little doubt as to their application in an oppressive context in South Africa. (*Ikon* vol. 2 no.1, Christmas 1970)

After he left Rorke's Drift <sup>233</sup>, his former attention to Biblically derived themes persisted, but subsequently religion to him meant the reality of the mission and church as a politically challenging context with which he identified. Central to many of his works was the depiction of the rise of black clergy in the church echelons, and the church's partisan attitude to Namibia's aspirations to independence. From 1970 he taught art at St Mary's Mission school at Odibo in Ovamboland, Namibia (then South West Africa). Little is known of the extent of his influence there.

There were several other artists from Rorke's Drift who were subsequently variously responsive to biblical themes.<sup>234</sup> Mbatha's earlier influence (1962-1969) was profound, and he notes that he frequently engaged students in debate about religion. (Mbatha, personal communication, 1995) This was amplified by influences from theological students from the Mapumulo LTC, as outlined above. The recent discovery of files of some of the graphic art produced at Rorke's Drift is indicative of the extent to which students gravitated towards the use of Biblical or church related themes, but only after Mbatha had left for Sweden. It must be remembered that his murals and many of his works were still readily available at Rorke's Drift throughout the 1970s. Artists deploying biblical themes included Vuminkosi Zulu, Sidwell Velile Soha, Ndabayakhe William Zulu, Noah Dikgale, E. Zweni Pakati (Zweni wa Teyi), Patience Nelisiwe (Nelly) Dlamini, Lindiwe Mvemve, Bongwiwe Dhlomo, Patrick Mautloa, Shadrack Hlalele, Linda Chonco, Linda Nolutshungu, Eric Mbatha, Gwendolyn Vuyiswa Sondlo, Catherine Thlale, Caiphaz Nxumalo, Nomshado A Majola, Paulos E. Mchunu, Bongani Peter Shange and Thami Mnyele. While in many instances the abovementioned appear to have produced Biblically derived work predominantly while at Rorke's Drift, some students became accomplished artists and continued to produce similar themes at least for some time after they

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<sup>233</sup> It should be noted that although Muafangejo was a student from 1967/8 to 1969, he was there intermittently throughout the 1970s. (Rankin, personal communication, 2003) While his early work was substantially influenced by Mbatha, Muafangejo developed a highly individualistic style coupled with the use of text in his linocuts.

<sup>234</sup> Another artist drawn to religious themes was Eric Mbatha, a student at Rorke's Drift in 1971. Rorke's Drift also attracted a theology student (in the mid 1970s) who hailed from the Rustenburg area, doubtless contributing to student debate on matters of faith.

completed their training. Attention will be given to those whose iconography was predominantly Biblically derived.

Certain common features have also emerged from this body of work: students who focused primarily on Biblically derived themes have centered on the life and actions of Christ. Further certain themes have recurred such as the prodigal son, Jonah, John the Baptist, Moses, and Daniel. These themes are central to Lutheran emphasis as they convey a strong moralising dimension as well as fundamental aspects of dedication and belief. Significantly several students also focused on themes associated with Zulu traditional practices and separatist or Zionist practice, reflecting the emergent changes emerging in Lutheranism outlined earlier.

One such artist was Charles Nkosi who was drawn to the political impact that the passion of Christ evoked, regarding Christ as a physically engaged orator and leader, so desirable in the political idealism of the time. He was at Rorke's Drift in 1971 and again from 1974-1976, where he produced among others the *Birth of Christ* (1971), *Daniel* (n/d), *Ascension of Christ* (n/d), *John preaching in the wilderness* (1974), *The Last Supper* (1971), *Sermon on the mount* (1971), *Ten virgins* (1970), *Jesus feeding thousands of people* (1974) as well as *Graduation of izangoma* (n/d) and *Wizard (i and ii)* (1974). In a compelling *Crucifixion* series (1976) (**Figures 114 –119**) he focused on Christ's plight as comparable to the plight of '...his people being as downtrodden as the historical Christ himself was throughout his earthly life' (Xakaza 2001:28).<sup>235</sup> In this series the boundaries between the religious and political have merged: the passion has become directly applicable to the socio-political sphere during the apartheid era, especially pertinent in relation to the Soweto disturbances of 1976-7. Here, interspersed with images of Christ's passion are those of torture, people rising in support of Christ as victim and martyr, and Christ as a man of the people. After leaving Rorke's Drift, Nkosi continued to enjoy the support of church patronage and until c1980 received commissions via the Mariannhill order, where he also worked for a while.

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<sup>235</sup> Nkosi hailed from an urban politicised context and worked as an artist receiving commissions from Mariannhill until c1980. Thereafter he was employed as a graphic artist at the South African Broadcasting Corporation and eventually as a teacher at the African Institute of Art in Soweto.

Another artist who continued to produce sacred themes after he left Rorke's Drift was Vuminkosi Zulu (1947-199?). He was at Rorke's Drift from 1970-1972, but continued working there as resident artist and apprentice weaver until 1974. (Xakaza 2001:8) From the outset his imagery was predominantly Biblically inspired. When Mariannahill art initiatives diminished in the 1970s, Zulu was one of the few artists who was able to satisfy the ongoing, if somewhat reduced, demand for sacred art, and he continued to receive commissions and patronage via Sr Johanna Senn, resident artist at Mariannahill, who assumed this position before Pientia left in 1980.<sup>236</sup>

The subject of a recent master's dissertation by Mzuzile Mduduzi Xakaza, Zulu's influences emanated both from the specifications of his patrons and from his religious background. Zulu was a member of the Ibandla lama Nazaretha (Nazarites), the so-called Shembe church founded in 1910 (Xakaza 2001:50) by Isaiah Shembe. As has been noted, this separatist group is a vital force in KwaZulu-Natal, and provides a strong base for a syncretic belief system that draws on Biblical and Zulu traditional cultural practice and values. Like Nkosi, Zulu was concerned with commenting on the plight of his immediate community by using biblical analogies. (Xakaza 2001:2)

While in his early works he rendered themes in a western tradition as seen in his and *The Sermon on the Mount/Christ and his disciples* (1971) (**Figure 120**), and to a lesser extent in *The Birth of Christ* (1970) (**Figure 121**). By 1974 his work *John Preaching in the Wilderness* (**Figure 122**) revealed a clearer African influence: his figures are predominantly black, and he interprets John as an almost manic prophet, gesticulating as he addresses a group of potential converts. Zulu would have been familiar with the highly energetic, impassioned gestures of the Nazarite preachers, who function as prophetic healers on occasion, aspects, which have proved particularly attractive to their members.

While much has been said about the political resonance in many works by Rorke's Drift students,

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<sup>236</sup> Some of Zulu's works were produced for the Mariannahill outstations, while others were sent abroad. (Zulu, personal communication, 1993)

Zulu's contextualization is related to a more particular source. Also renowned as a sculptor, his work *The Flight into Egypt* (1994) (**Figure 123**) was one of many instances in which the theme relates directly to a parallel contemporary historical dimension. (Xakaza 2001:30) The area from which Zulu originated - the amaBomvu Tribal Authority - has for decades been racked by internecine conflict. This was particularly intense during the 1985-1987 period, which coincided with an escalation of political conflict throughout South Africa in the prelude to the first democratic elections in 1994. Here he addresses both the issue of flight/escape and that of the social impact on innocent victims in times of political conflict. (Xakaza 2001:30) He also comments on the expected function of the Zulu and Judeo-Christian cultural contexts in which the social obligations of the male as protector of women and children is paralleled. (Xakaza 2001:30) This Biblical family unit is thus symbolic of the suffering of an entire community, and refers to flight from violence and oppression both nationally and locally.

In *Jesus Feeding Thousands of People* (1974) (**Figure 124**) Christ is envisaged as the communal benefactor, who revokes despair by providing sustenance in abundance. Here the practical nature of a black Christ's actions emphasise one of the many anxieties among the rural poor - the need to provide sustenance in order to survive. This rendering recalls the centrality of Christ in Black Theology as conveyed at the LTC. Here Christ as black is one of the people and can be asked as an equal and not begged as if he were remote and white. (Xakaza 2001:34)

Xakaza also points to the autobiographical aspects conveyed through biblical themes. In *I found my goat* (c1988) (**Figure 125**) he depicts the loss of one of his goats, which was later found. (Xakaza 2001:35) This relates the parable of the lost sheep, which can also be attributed to Zulu's own sense of belonging, and his hankering for home during his stay in Sweden. (Zulu, personal communication, 1995)

Besides according importance to biblical imagery, Zulu as a Nazarite recorded a visit to the amaBomvu people by the Rev Amos Khula Shembe in April 1988, both to preach the Gospel and reinforce the position of the church in the region with the establishing of a new local site for the



faithful, called oNyazini. (Xakaza 2001:39) The work, *Rev. Shembe visited us in April 1988 to preach the gospel* (c1989) (**Figure 126**) depicts him seated amidst a large adoring crowd kneeling and standing before him and his black limousine. Shembe arrived at an auspicious time - the year after the cessation of the bloody conflict between factions in the area, and his presence can also be associated with reconciliation and the need for sustained peace in the region. Shembe's head emits rays indicative of his holiness, which Xakaza suggests might relate to his alternate title as iNyanga (the moon) a name given as a prophetic sign, as he established a new holy centre at eMatabetulu or eBuhleni. (Xakaza 2001:41) Over the years, since the inception of Ibandla lama Nazaretha, its founder, Isaiah Shembe, has increasingly been perceived to be messianic, with healing, visionary and prophetic powers, the latter also identified with some subsequent Shembe leaders. The importance of retaining these mystically derived powers and other aspects of Zulu cultural practice is significant to Shembe practitioners, rendering the church more accessible to many Zulu. A work by Caiphax Nxumalo similarly depicts *Shembe* (c 1969) (**Figure 127**) as a hieratic figure visiting his community.

However, not all artists at Rorke's Drift were swayed by the religious ethos there, but nonetheless addressed personal perspectives on matters of belief. Daniel Sefudi Rakgoathe (1937-), formerly a student at Ndaleni (1960), was at Rorke's Drift in 1967-1969 to be guided in his practical work for his Fine Arts degree at UNISA. Rakgoathe has recently indicated that his stay at Rorke's Drift was not a happy one, as he found some religious there to be intransigent and petty. As a result of several clashes and because of his demands for greater personal freedom, he left under a cloud. (Rakgoathe, personal communication, 1993) Some of these clashes were often about religion, and he believed that some religious at the mission saw him as a threat. (Rakgoathe, personal communication, 1993) Therefore while several of his images may appear to derive from Christian sources, they were not intended to convey these associations. In recent interviews Rakgoathe explains that while his images such as *The Unfolding Man* (1972) (**Figure 128**) and *Mystery of Space* (1972) (**Figure 129**) may include cruciform figures (which could easily be mistaken for the figure of Christ), they refers to a very different religious context.

Rakgoathe's ideas on religion were nurtured from two quarters: his interest in the cosmology and

belief systems of his ancestors, the BaVenda, such as myths of Fundudzi and the centrality of the Rain Queen, and on the other hand his ongoing interest in and adherence to Rosicrucianism. The former appeared as themes in works such as *The Rain Queen* (1973). **(Figure 130)**, depicting the image of the revered Rain Queen of BaVenda legend and current practice. She is regarded as one who both protects and nurtures the populace, while the latter relates the myth of the under water spirit who guards the mysteries of the community.

Rosicrucianism,<sup>237</sup> a sectarian philosophic movement, emerging in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and popularised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is often described as a religion. Central to it is the belief in a mystical hermetic wisdom that has been handed down through a secret brotherhood of initiates. Composed of various aspects of occult wisdom that appear to embrace sources from ancient Egyptian Hermeticism, Christian Gnosticism and the Jewish Kaballah, essentially Rosicrucianism reveres the metaphysical capacities in all peoples. The cruciform figure in works such as *The Unfolding Man* (1972) **(Figure 128)** relate to Rosicrucianism in that the central figure appears to resonate energy and embrace the world with its essence. Thus the Christ-like man is an acceptable form as Christian hermeticism was also embraced within Rosicrucianism. Essentially the latter recognised no single culturally developed sectarian belief system, supplanting it instead with universal mysticism and wisdom. In his adherence to this, Rakgoathe was in effect resisting the embrace of both traditionalism and Christianity.

Rakgoathe has described his images as those of the universal man. As such they epitomise his belief, emerging as it did in opposition to the particularising and individualist ethos in South Africa, which had centered on power, materialism and rationalism. His search led him beyond his religious background, and resulted in what has been described, in relation to the art of Boniface Okafor, as a more 'universalist approach to art and religion'. (Hackett 1996:203) His intentions in producing images of a universal man can also be associated with a counter response to the prevailing state-derived deprivations, as his ideals are associated with the extension of peace, harmony and integrity.

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<sup>237</sup> The name derives from Christian Rosenkreuz (1378-1484), the founder of the movement, whose journey to Damascus, Damcar in Arabia, Egypt and Fez is recounted in *Fama Fraternalitatis* (1614). On his travels he gained secret wisdom, and on his return to Germany he founded the order with three others.

(Rakgoathe, personal communication, 1993) His imagery and concepts are also indicative of the extent to which an informed intellectual like Rakgoathe exposed artists at Rorke's Drift to diverse religious debates, here.

As indicated in this chapter, Rorke's Drift and Ndaleni produced a very different and more engaged sacred art. Freed from the liturgical exigencies of the church, and repetitive images demanded by its patronage base, the students at both centres utilised religious themes as a result of their personal, contextual and social relevance. Their work was highly diverse stylistically and thematically, adapted to the relevance and association intended by artists. Such thematic emphasis set the tone for subsequent artists at Rorke's Drift who had access to the files by previous artists and were well aware of the importance of both Mbatha and Muafangejo's work, as seen also in their murals and Mbatha's various tapestry designs, one of which is in the church. Their work also functioned as a stylistic canon for future artists, identified with lino printing, etching and a rudimentary conceptualism and narrative propensity that has dominated black art in the region for decades. Further a biblically derived vocabulary provided an ongoing supply of themes that were often informally syncretised with traditionalist belief and practice, reflecting more appropriately the hybridity of such contemporary manifestations. In so doing, biblical themes simultaneously provided an implicit sanctioning of traditionalist cosmogony and cultural practice, which was increasingly reflected both within the mission church, the LTC, Black Theology and in AIC church practice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT**

In the preceding chapters I have predominantly focused on the emergence of art within the aegis of the mission churches. Not surprisingly while several artists willingly subscribed to the expectations of these initiatives, fully aware of their potential patronage base and the assurance of continued outlets for their work, other artists were drawn to secular art, equally cogniscent of its emergent importance.

In the 1960s Mbatha initiated a more challenging biblically derived art, inspired by his familial background and his encounter with theological exegesis influenced by the rise of Black Theology and nascent ideals that filtered into Black Consciousness, but also reflecting an awareness of features reflected in African Independent Churches (AICs). While Black Theology aimed to reinterpret the Bible by relating it to the plight of black experience in an oppressive society, its rootedness in western Christian theology was seen as too culturally specific and was condemned by some as having contributed to cultural isolation and even racism (Leeb-du Toit 1998:43) Ironically these ideals had in part already been raised by the AICs since the turn of the century, which resulted in revolutionary and idiosyncratic religious movements which sought to empower their followers by addressing their situation through healing, prophecy and implicit resistance, through the retention of cultural integrity and in the belief that oppression would ultimately be overcome. As will be seen, many artists who have subsequently persisted in the use of religious-derived imagery have been influenced by these more syncretic and widespread manifestations of belief. Particular characteristics intrinsic to the AICs have emerged in the iconography of these artists' works, which will be examined in this chapter.

Many AICs continue to function as a significant source of authority and succour, providing a social infrastructure and support system that remains inspirational to many. As seen in the Ibandla Lama Nazaretha (ILN), many of its ideals espouse a nationalist and aspirational tone predating the later debates by theologians that addressed the role of the church in secular affairs. Not surprisingly various churches continue to be regarded as important contributors to cultural and national unity within the region.

The ILN constitutes one of the most significant and well-supported AICs in KwaZulu-Natal. Its support has increased considerably over the last few years in the wake of political conflict, the harsh economic situation and especially the Aids pandemic. Its strong traditionalist roots and its Christian and traditional ethical and moral basis provides support for a strong, coherent community. Those who live close to Ekhupakhameni are given land to occupy and proximity to moral and religious support, as long as they adhere to the rules of the church. (Cele, personal communication, 2000) The

thematic focus on nature by Shembe I, the plight of his people, the need for resistance in overcoming an identifiable enemy, the holy sites, the role of the Zulu monarchy and the activities of the ILN, have become increasingly used by artists from the region. This was seen earlier in the work of Vuminkosi Zulu and other artists from Rorke's Drift. Other than in obvious reference to Shembe and his church, the precise extent to which the ILN has influenced artists in the region, especially thematically is a little more difficult to establish.

While the ILN has to date largely manifested its belief structures in neo-traditional and syncretic dress modes that are typically modified to convey spiritual aspirations and affinities, other articles such as beadwork also express their beliefs. In addition, since the mid 1960s there has been a proliferation of predominantly commercially produced imagery which is sold to ILN followers. These include images of the main leaders, such as Isaiah, Amos and more recently MV Shembe. The images are available in miniature to be worn as necklaces, and larger scale images are used as decorative embellishments in the home, or as framed pictures. The images are blessed at the special ceremonies held on the Sabbath, bestowing on them a power that will exude from wherever the image is placed. As a result these images are highly popular, indicating that the homestead and its occupants are ILN members, blessed, and implicitly protected. (Cele, personal communication, 2000) Some of these images are also to be found in the Shembe hymnal.

In addition, T-shirts with the image of a current or past ILN leader have been sanctioned, but these do not constitute official church dress. More recently there was considerable debate in the ILN as to when and where it was appropriate to wear the t-shirt, as it was considered disrespectful to wear it in the toilet, at a disco, or in any 'problematic' context. (Cele, personal communication, 2000) As a result ILN members were again reminded that the shirts were to be worn selectively and appropriately so that the respect due to the church leaders, and implicit in these revered images, be retained. It can therefore be suggested that these are in themselves holy and implicitly powerful.

More recently a member of the ILN, Sthokoza Dominic Cele has begun to practice as an ILN affiliated artist, depicting images of the church leaders, church ceremonies, and religious sites. Like

many Zulu artists he was regarded as an able illustrator in his geography and biology classes but had no formal training Born at Ekuphakameni, to his father's second wife; Cele hails from a devout ILN family (one of four brothers born to his father's second wife), and was at an early age exposed to imagery associated with the ILN. However, when he copied an image of Isaiah Shembe which he saw in his ILN hymnal, his mother was appalled and insisted that he desist from such copyist exercises forthwith, Cele noting that her motives were probably prompted by the fact that his replication showed disrespect to church leaders. (Cele, personal communication, 2000) What his comment and her action also reveal is that the imagery of the leaders was in some way perceived to be virtually sacred and revered, as indicated in relation to the t-shirts above. This coincides with perceptions by Oosthuizen and Sundkler noted earlier, that Isaiah Shembe and many subsequent leaders are perceived to be 'holy' in the same sense that Christ or the saints are. This corroborates perceptions of at least Isaiah Shembe's messianic stature, parallel to Christ, although this is not official policy.

Cele returned to art making, having contacted the Natal Technikon art department in the early 1990s. Here painting lecturer Jeff Chandler agreed to assist him with informal lessons at his home. Cele depicted secular themes initially and eventually returned to images of Shembe leaders when Chandler suggested that he paint aspects of his own history and experience. Cele's work was seen by ILN church leader, M V Shembe, who further encouraged him. Cele also depicts scenes of the main ceremonies that occur at Ekuphakameni, the sacred hill, which is depicted bedecked with persons wearing white or in traditional attire, shown in procession, singing, representing the essential traits associated with Shembe: dignity, uniformity, communality and order. Permission to manifest his belief in essentially western media (paint on canvas) and the associated commercial aspect, was granted after ILN elders prayed for guidance prior to agreeing to allow him to pursue his venture, well aware that the market for the latter would be predominantly white, as prices for artworks are mostly in excess of that which the ordinary ILN member would be prepared to pay. (Cele, personal communication, 2000)

Further, ILN women have long been aware of the increasing tourist market in the cities for African

beadwork, for which many ILN women already produced articles. Noting the increasing presence of tourists at the central Shembe ceremonies in July and December, Cele suggested to the church elders/council that tourists should be encouraged to purchase works produced by all sectors of the ILN church.<sup>238</sup> More recently ILN elders have agreed to the request by Cele, that an organised craft outlet at Ekuphakameni should be established for such sales, as well as a venue where artworks and even a training facility for budding ILN artists be realised.

## 5.2 Laduma Madela: *inyanga* and Zionist

While some Zionist-inspired imagery has emerged in realist narratives by artists working in KwaZulu-Natal, most Zionists manifest the distinctiveness of their belief through dress, various colours and motifs, as well as items such as staffs, which are variously made of wood and metal, with or without motifs. However it may be possible to see the renowned *inyanga* and visionary Laduma Madela as part Zionist and therefore include his unique imagery as one of the first manifestations of Zionist-cum traditionalist imagery.

Laduma Michael Madela hailed from the Ceza area, where he assisted his father, an *inyanga*. Accompanying his father on extensive journey's throughout the region, visiting patients, Madela was educated in Zulu mythology by listening to stories told by grandmothers to children, including Zulu creation myths. Despite the fact that he was alleged to despise Christians, he was baptized in 1930 and belonged to the Zulu Congregational Church (an AIC church), and also later to the Zulu Ohlangeni church. He left the church, as it did not like his concern for the *idlozi* and their role in his belief. Madela's only son Mikaeli has since become a Zionist Bishop (in Umlazi, a township near Durban), indicative of the affinity Laduma had for Zionism. He had also befriended a Lutheran,

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<sup>238</sup> This is in keeping with Isaiah Shembe's ideal in which women were encouraged to work according to their cultural traditions and skills and produce work for sale to their own community, and selectively to the white market. Isaiah Shembe was particularly opposed to the idea that women should work in domestic service.

Ludwig Sibiya, who was an orator at his funeral in 1996.

At the outset of this dissertation I mentioned the significance of current anthropological practice, which here too played a role in the emergence of Madela as a significant religious figure and artist. Madela met Dr OF Raum (educator and ethnologist at the University of Fort Hare) in 1957, to whom the Swedish medical practitioner, Dr Wolfgang Bodenstein at the Swedish run Ceza hospital, introduced him. (Schlosser 1997:1) Schlosser claims that it was as a result of Raum's (and later her own) keen interest in Zulu culture and in Madela's interpretations thereof, that the latter was given the impetus to record, both in writing and in visual form, all his knowledge about Zulu cosmogony, culture and mythology. Madela was convinced that Raum had been sent to him by Mvelinqangi (the godhead) to undertake such recordings.

Being particularly concerned by the erosion of Zulu culture and its fragmented clans more especially, Madela believed that he had been called by Mveliqgangi to recapture and bring Zulu culture to life, by retaining and recording its cosmogony. He allegedly encountered Mvelinqangi personally (first in 1951, in 1955 and 1958) at a tree resembling an 'arc of heaven' on Ceza mountain, not far from where he lived. The insights gained here were amplified further by subsequent dreams and visions, and on later visits to sacred sites and places of 'mythological interest' throughout the region where he spoke to old people who shared their tales with him. (Schlosser 1997:1) Madela recognized that his people had been confused as a result of the arrival of whites and the aggressive rule of Shaka, Dingane and Zwide, which resulted in clan divisions being broken and a collective Zulu identity being fabricated. (Madela 1997:61) <sup>239</sup>

Madela planned to write a 'Bible for Blacks' known as *iBhayibheli lesintu* or *iBhayibheli labantu abantu abamnyama*, which he intended to be the 'brother of the Christian Bible'. (Schlosser 1997:2) He wanted both whites and blacks to respect both Bibles, in the hopes that this would result in '

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<sup>239</sup> Madela's recollection of cosmogony was to rectify the lineage and clan affinities that had been sundered during the *Mfecane*, resulting in widespread destruction by soldiers of the Zulu clan. (Schlosser 1997:63)



permanent peace in the country'. (Schlosser 1997:2)<sup>240</sup> Madela's Bible shared similar terminology with the Christian Bible, and also incorporated many names from Zulu cosmogony.<sup>241</sup> It relates central dimensions of Zulu cosmogony that have been recorded previously by figures such as Bryant, Tyler and others. But uniquely Madela adds and illustrates several personages and objects that have not been illustrated previously.

Madela's account of Zulu cosmology is lengthy and detailed, even confusing in areas. He relates the creation of the cosmos in which he recognises five worlds, one on top of another. (Schlosser 1997:233) Our world is the central world, where Mvelinqangi is assailed by his brother Sibi, 'the Bad One', who made Mvelinqangi's creatures die.<sup>242</sup> (Madela in Schlosser 1997:9) Perhaps as an adjunct to explaining his visions and cosmogony, Madela set about illustrating his writings. Some of his earliest imagery was of Mvelinqangi, depicting him in full regalia.<sup>243</sup> Mvelinqangi is also shown with particular attributes that reflect his character or that were used in the act of creation: He shows him with a large feather and a headdress,<sup>244</sup> in which he is said to represent 'the Very Great, the

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<sup>240</sup> He sees the present metaphorically represented as a man with a black and white leg. The black leg of Zulu cosmology has become putrefied, the white leg is the Bible/western knowledge. The two must be reconciled and co-exist, and he is said to have dreamt of a man in an *ibeshu* and a priest together, representing the two legs. (Sundkler 1976:276-277)

<sup>241</sup> For example Eden=Ekudeni; Noah=Noa; Satan=Sita; ingelosi=angel or *idlozi* (a shade of the forefathers); Jehovah or Jesus=Emajukujukwini; the wise and beautiful woman in Proverbs=Nomkubulwana /Princess of heaven; the Cross=the cardinal points. Despite his antipathy, expressed to Schlosser, Sundkler claims Madela said he loves everything in the Bible and that the two worlds belong together.

<sup>242</sup> In the creation Mvelinqangi was accompanied by his son Nowa, whose son Sita was very jealous of his brother's cattle wealth, and therefore asked Ntulo the lizard (son of Sita) to bring in death to the land. Nowa then sent Nwabu the chameleon, but Ntulo reached Mvelinqangi first and death reached humanity. Since then Sita and his son Ntulo have been abhorred. (Schlosser 1997:57) Sita was also seen to have destroyed people's morals. (Schlosser 1997:55)

<sup>243</sup> In later drawings in 1970, 1976 and again in 1985 he drew full figure images of him, but these were allegorical images, unrelated to his visions. (Schlosser 1997:13)

<sup>244</sup> In another image Mvelinqangi is shown as having only one leg. He typically is in full regalia as described above, is very hirsute, frowns, has red eyes and crosses his arms. He is flanked by two lions who breathe fire and release 'fire-wind' from their anuses. (Schlosser 1997:28) Besides his humanoid form, Mvelinqangi can also transform himself into other animals or species. He changes form according to whom he approaches eg. To the

Majesty of Various Characters' ((Madela in Schlosser 1997:32)<sup>245</sup> After his first vision of the creator-god Mvelinqangi, he was told to 'take the head of the ram' which meant he was to record traditional knowledge. (Schlosser 1997:14) He also depicted images of the godhead's great wife *OkaMjukjukwana* (she of the little very far distance) (**Figure 131**) and his children Sitha, Nowa and Nomkhubulwana.

Madela's images were produced over a period of several years, in drawings, murals and some carvings. The drawings, often illustrating the written text, appear in his bible and others were collected by Schlosser and used in some of numerous publications on him. He depicts Mvelinqangi's creation of ten humans from the *izinhlanga* (source of life) the *uhlange* in the west where the sun sets, (Schlosser 1997:69) and also five greater chiefs which he depicts as trees with doors out of which creatures appear. In the process of creation the creator god hit the sea and commanded that animals, birds and beings come forth, and the peoples were divided and named. Always an elephant was the first to emerge, then other animals (Madela in Schlosser 1997:53), which appears in several of Madela's images. Mvelinqangi is also seen flanked by a lion with a headring, which relates to the appearance of Mvelinqangi with animals when he appeared from a rock below 'the below in the world of Msukawamazwe'.<sup>246</sup> (Schlosser 1997:28)

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snake he appears as a snake. (Madela in Schlosser 1997:31)

<sup>245</sup> In another version Madela drew Mvelinqangi's right arm holding his metal knobkerrie, used in the act of creation. He also drew a picture of Mvelinqangi's blanket, an *ingubo*, made from elephant hide and decorated with a magical coil, the *inkatha*, from copper and brass, and a loin cloth *idlaka*, with an ornamental side tail, an *injobo*. This dress code derives from Madela's recounting of tales told by 'our grandparents' and also from Madela's seeing Mvelinqangi's shadow. (Schlosser 1993:16-17) He also wore a magical necklace an *iziqu*, which represents five hearts one for each of the five worlds, each also constituting part of his heart. He also wears *omabani*, the ornament worn across his breast which consists of various rectangular metal pieces. The most powerful amulet is the sun disk which is hot and repels all who approach him. He also has a dagga horn (*igudu*), which he used when he rested during the act of creation. (Schlosser 1997:17) The third vision of Mvelinqangi was accompanied by a description of him: 'I met the third head of Mvelinqangi, The chief of chiefs Mvelinqangi was wearing a feather. He has a headring and whiskers and a long beard and a sun on his chest. The body has long hair even in the ears, and wrinkles in the face.' (Schlosser 1997:16)

<sup>246</sup> Msukawamazwe was one of five chiefs on earth. Sibi, Mvelinqangi's brother and opponent represents envy and jealousy, and the lion too represents destructive power.

An image of *Creation* (c1962) (**Figure 132**) and the encounter between Madela and Mvelinqangi was depicted by Madela's assistant Muziwezixhwala Tabete. Tabete was trained in the linocut process at Rorke's Drift and is well remembered by teachers there, such as Ola Granath who recalls working with him in the late 1960s. (Granath, personal communication, 2003) In this image the godhead is shown twice, as a chieftain, surrounded by animals and people, and the act of creation is depicted as occurring within a circular mass.<sup>247</sup>

In explaining the culturally based interpretations of God/Mvelinqangi, which contribute somewhat to the debate on God/Christ's relevance cross-culturally, Madela noted that Mvelinqangi appeared to whites as a white in countries where they predominated, and without pierced earlobes,<sup>248</sup> while to blacks he will appear brown and with pierced earlobes. The concept of a white and a black creator god had emerged earlier in Mbatha's work where Christ became the two-tone figure who appeared to the peoples of Africa, both white and black. Yet if he shows himself to both white and black it will be as a white with pierced earlobes, or a black without pierced lobes. Madela's account acknowledges the traditionalist practice of piercing in which wisdom is said to be attained in so doing, and he notes that by piercing, one also prevents escape from the creator god 'because we are all his'. (Schlosser 1997:26)

A symbol of Mvelinqangi's omnipotence is the many-headed *Mnengi snake* (*undated*), which reproduces itself but also gives birth to men, women and animals, especially horses, cattle and rams. Other snakes are considered powerful symbols of immortality: a snake 'dies' prior to shedding its skin, and being 'reborn', and its liminality is also associated with the *idlozi* (ancestors). In this image a cow bellows, announcing the snake's presence, while the rooster below fulfils a similar function. In other instances Madela recalls the evil of snakes that are emitted by the humans created by Sibi, but

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<sup>247</sup> In Madela's cosmogony, the heavens contain incorporeal birds and Mvelinqangi often joins them as a beautiful bird. There is also a girl and other 'people who are in the wind' as well as cattle and often zebras, which are also to be found in the sea. (Schlosser 1997:150)

<sup>248</sup> To the Zulu traditionalist the piercing of the earlobe implies that one has accessed wisdom and divine reason.

also speaks of snakes that talk and act like humans and who are especially drawn to children whom they devour. (Schlosser 1997:212-213)

The significance of Madela's work requires further research. Its relevance in this dissertation lies in the fact that he presented a counterpoint to the spate of Biblically and especially Christian-derived images that explained an alternate belief system to the Zulu. In so doing he reinstated Zulu cosmogony and its relevance in cultural practice, highlighting its hierarchies and elaborating the significance of diverse figures and images that are central to its mythography. He also provides an elaborate account of the moralizing vested in his images and writings, leaving little doubt as to the validity of an equitable vernacular vocabulary of cosmogony and mythology contained in his Zulu Bible.

### **5.3 Contemporary sacred images**

Contemporary communities in KwaZulu-Natal continue to be dominated by various religious practices located in the AICs, traditionalism and diverse neo-Christian sources. AICs and Pentecostal groups multiply in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the latter half, and American inspired fundamentalist religions and the socially progressive liberation theologies, have both contributed substantially to the centrality of religion in many spheres in South Africa.

While the role of religious education, particularly a Christian dominated one, has been downplayed by the state and local education departments in South Africa, especially since the early 1990s, it has been replaced by an all embracing policy of tolerance, in acknowledgment of the diverse ethnic and religious orientations of pupils in the region's schools. Yet there are several other forums for the continued presence of Christian religious influence - in weekly practice, the media,<sup>249</sup> and church-

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<sup>249</sup> West points to the fact that *the New Nation*, a popular weekly newspaper with a predominantly black readership, includes a biblical tract in each addition. (West 1989:202) while another weekly newspaper, the relaunched *Umafrika*, a Catholic sponsored paper published by the Mariannhill Press, recently reappeared after an absence of almost a decade. The latter, known for its frank perspectives on current affairs, issues pertaining to belief

based poverty relief and Aids centres.

While mission and church based patronage is rare, a few examples of the continued interest in such activity remains. In the early 1990s a CPS nun (from the Mariannahill based order), Sr Magda Mncwabe, was trained in the Fine Arts Department at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, to prepare her for an art teaching career. Not surprisingly much of her work is dominated by biblically derived themes. But mostly as the missions soon withdrew from formalised art training ventures, artists were left to their own devices in drawing inspiration from alternate sources and locating other patronage bases. Yet the 1980s in KwaZulu-Natal saw the emergence of a number of artists whose work was dominated by intriguing images related to religion.

Many recent motivations for the appearance of art related to religious belief, emerged in South Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, as a result of crises prevalent throughout the country in the 1980s and 1990s related to the struggle for democracy. Initially the struggle was primarily that of the oppressed, poor and marginalised desirous of liberation from restrictive segregationist and oppressive policies associated with apartheid, and the regaining of lost identities, rights and dignity. Such resistance was not merely against apartheid and the state, but against an entrenched series of colonial impositions, which had gradually eroded every sense of identity, and self esteem among black peoples. However in the prelude to the 1994 democratic elections, new conflicts and tensions emerged that impacted on earlier 'struggle' aspirations.

In KwaZulu-Natal a dramatic increase in internecine conflicts was exacerbated by the political affiliations of various groups, with Inkhatha centered in the rural areas and the ANC emerging as a dominant force in the urban townships. It was in response to both a national, regional, local and communal series of dramatic and devastating incidents related to these divisions that artists in KwaZulu-Natal responded. As the country moved towards a state of anarchy in the late 1980s and

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and the Zulu speaking community, was launched by the OMM in 1929. It was preceded by the paper *Izindaba Zabantu* which was first published in 1911. The Mariannahill mission was well known for its plays, music and exhibitions.

the confrontation between state and opposition forces escalated, artists translated their fears and anxieties in a number of impassioned images that implored citizens to both fight for justice but equally to restore order and encourage a new humanism. They reflected on current conditions by presenting alternate perspectives on ways in which conflicts, both personal and collective, could be resolved. In this they positioned themselves as purveyors of a syncretically derived morality shaped by personal experiences, and neo-Christian, AIC or traditionalist derived mores and values.

Poignant images testify to the devastating effects related to the context of violence that shattered many families in the prelude to the 1994 elections. Israel Mathenjwa (1967-), a Natal Technikon trained graphic artist, responded to the internecine politicized context in KwaZulu-Natal, often including inferences that expressed the need for intervention from a divine source.<sup>250</sup> A member of an AIC, he combined biblically robed prophetic figures with contemporary black personages, variously responding to the tragedies that resulted from the abovementioned conflict. Often his images were controversial, depicting incidents where suspected perpetrators were politically affiliated. These images were a shocking reflection of the brutality at the time, when scores of innocent victims lost their lives as warlords encouraged politically motivated revenge attacks. His image *God Bless South Africa* (1994) (**Figure 133**), depicts a prophetic figure, hands outstretched, imploring divine intervention, while to his left a minibus taxi lies upturned with its victims scattered around him. This image relates to the horrific ambush and slaughter of taxi occupants, including women and children, which occurred a few months earlier, prior to the first democratic elections. In this the work echoed the pleas by many clergy, such as Archbishop Tutu, to an end to what was termed 'black on black violence'. So too Smart Gumede (1943-), an art teacher, depicted the need for reconciliation in the work *Peace perfect peace* (c1994), in which two soldiers confront each other in an open landscape, while hovering above them is an image of Christ.

Several artists, persuaded by a re-emerging Africanism, have tended to reflect on traditional religious

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<sup>250</sup> At present an art teacher in northern KwaZulu-Natal, Mathenjwa completed his studies at the Natal Technikon Fine Arts Department in the mid 1990s.

practice and ideals in the hopes of restoring their cultural identity and dignity, while also implicitly challenging the centrality of predominantly western belief in the lives of contemporary Africans in KwaZulu-Natal. Trevor Makhoba, hailed from a background where traditionalist cultural practice was balanced by an assimilation of western ideals in education and lifestyle, together with fundamentalist Christianity (derived from an AIC context)<sup>251</sup>. In his images he broaches tradition within the context of current realities in response to crises, both personal and national, upholding communal ideals, a return to the values of the past and the mores of Christianity as a counter to such problems. His self-prescribed task as social commentator has derived from numerous additional sources, including his own vacillating religious affiliation (inspired by his wife - a fundamentalist Christian), as well as his interest in music, more particularly *maskanda*, *iscathimiya* and *mbaqanga*. The lyrics of these popular musical traditions variously challenge prevailing social practice and direct the community towards improved behaviour. (Makhoba, personal communication, 1999) To Makhoba such ethical concerns are constantly reconsidered in the light of social fragmentation and the erosion of traditional and Christian values within the strained contexts of urban township life.

The position of the male in traditionalist society as the purveyor of traditionally expected behaviour, has often been challenged, the result of emergent feminism and increasing societal and economic pressure. Inevitably in a patriarchal Zulu society, itself a reflection of a cosmogony headed by a male creator god, such erosions are seen as a challenge to the divinely bestowed authority of the adult male. Makhoba has increasingly positioned himself in the role of the male observer, at times victim, in a society in which male authority, implicit power and dignity are being eroded both within the family context and in terms of state intervention. His *Ubayacinda* (1992) (**Figure 134**) depicts a family in their township home, huddled around a primus stove, over which medicine (provided by a sangoma) is heated and partaken of by each family member, usually from a pot shard. This activity relates to a Zulu tradition based in religious practice, in which the unity of the family will be

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<sup>251</sup> Makhoba has recently returned to Christianity, largely as a result of the fact that his wife is a staunch member of the Durban Central Gospel Church, and his daughter and son are members of the choir, his son an accomplished musician in the church band. Makhoba's Christian religious affiliation has been interrupted on several occasions, as he is torn between its premises, traditionalist belief and his own failings. (Makhoba, personal communication, 2001)

restored, drawing on belief in the appeasement of the ancestors and the extension of unity from the realm of the creator god, into that of the home and community.

In his images that relate to the ongoing debate on abortion (controversially legalized in South Africa in the 1990s), Makhoba manifests both his oppositional traditionalist stance, and alludes to Biblical injunctions and the role of satanic forces in such action. In his work *Satan's victim* (c1990) (**Figure 135**) he depicts Satan grasping a foetus that has been ripped from of a bleeding woman, while at his left a Bible is auspiciously opened where the injunction against murder is prominent, Here the distinction between right and wrong in traditionalist and Biblical injunction coincides, and Makhoba's indictment is obvious: the woman is a murderer and the child the victim of so-called liberal legislation. Makhoba often critique the newly independent African woman and emergent feminist idealism in which he adopts both a Biblically derived and Zulu traditionalist patriarchal stance, regretting the demise of male dominance and what he regards as associative reason and order.

The belief in prayer and intercession from the realm of the metaphysical is foremost in *Agony* (1991) (**Figure 136**) in which Makhoba depicts a woman, her back to the viewer, in front of her deceased husband's framed portrait, her two children at either side, and at her left a Bible and a candle. She invokes her husband's presence in an atmosphere of reverence and despair, a Bible situated in the left foreground. Here Makhoba assimilates two belief structures: the Christian one implicit in the Bible which seems to suggest that it continues to provide spiritual support, while on the other hand the traditionalist context of mourning and respectful veneration, in which the wife bewails her fate as a widow and her family's plight in the absence of a breadwinner. Seen against the backdrop of the aforementioned violence in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1990s, religion functions as a natural recourse *in extremis*.

In another image, *Mr A. C.* (1999) (**Figure 137**), Makhoba has responded to what he perceives as the arrival in the community's midst of the anti-Christ, depicted as a skeletal priest. The anti-Christ astride a large brown steed parades in amongst a startled crowd consisting mainly of women dressed in the distinctive denominational regalia of various AICs and mission church women's groups,



representing the cream of the community, who are appalled to recognise that a clergyman, and all that he upholds, is in fact the anti-Christ. Thus besides symbolically announcing the arrival of the anti-Christ, Makhoba specifically indicts the mission church cleric. The anti-Christ represents authority, greed, power, and ostensible blessing, which he bestows on the flock. The work is one of many images by black artists, in which the symbols of colonial power are inverted, subverting their erstwhile significance. Not only is the mission church flawed, but the AIC women (usually perceived to be more representative of the true church), may also be misinformed. He also alerts the viewer (and perhaps chides those who engage in excessive devotional endeavour) by pointing out that not all Christians are to be trusted and that the anti-Christ may well in fact arise from their midst.

Many artists are currently influenced by the symbolism and motifs peculiar to the AICs, and most of those I consider in this section are members of such groups. Sibusiso Mapumulo a self taught sculptor who began carving in the 1980s, predominantly angels. Initially unadorned, they are now mostly carved of wood blackened by a flame, resulting in effective contrasting of pale and burnt wood areas which readily lend themselves to decoration. The texture of the angels' clothing has been increasingly elaborated by decorative elements and the addition of texts, including floral motifs, landscapes and sometimes additional animal figures (**Figure 138**) In some instances the angels are depicted in traditional attire (**Figure 139**), the playing of soccer (**Figure 140**), as a Nomkhubulwana (or Mami-wata) (**Figure 141**), or carrying a guitar or some other musical instrument. A devout member of an AIC, Mapumulo claims his angels are ancestor figures, thereby reinforcing this interpretation by many AICs.<sup>252</sup> While he does not pretend that any of these are votive, rather protective, they represent the presence of the metaphysical and a traditionalist belief, paralleled in Christianity, that ancestors, and in fact all humans, are potentially immortal. (Mapumulo, personal communication, 1993) While his works are sold at commercial outlets such as the BAT Centre and the African Arts Centre, predominantly intended for consumption by the art and tourist market, he

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<sup>252</sup> Mapumulo's interpretation of angels as ancestor figures constitutes one of the first of its kind since Gerard Bhengu's similar claim in the early 1940s (where the angels depicted in his mural for the Wesleyan Methodist recreational hall in Grey street Durban represented ancestors). Interestingly the appearance of angel figures was prevalent throughout Southern Africa at the close of the millenium, and he would certainly also have been influenced by these.

has also produced large angels for the church where he worships, thereby providing an important AIC liturgical context for his work. Many other artists also began to depict angels in the late 1980s (such as Jackson Gumede), probably as a result of their widespread popularity at the turn of the century as well as their AIC and ancestral associations.

Other artists have interpreted the fervour and cross-culturalism of the AICs as seen in Sithembiso Sibisi's *Umpolofiti/Umbolofithi (the Prophet)* (1999). **(Figure 143)** Sibisi has emphasized the fervour of the priest and congregants who are physically transformed as they receive the force of a spiritual encounter of some kind, and clearly draws on first hand experience, foregrounding the centrality of the AICs in popular religious practice.

Many artists have continued in the depiction of more conventional biblically derived imagery as seen in the work of Bafana Mkhize, also a member of an AIC, and as a result many of his images of Christ and of Christ the Shepherd are purchased for liturgical contexts. Unconstrained by preconceived interpretations, his work reflects an expressive naivety enlivens many an identifiable theme. His image of *Jonah* (1992) **(Figure 144)** depicts him holding a Bible emerging from the alleged fish/whale's gaping mouth. Simply carved images translate the figure of Christ as stoic and calm, especially notable in his many images of *Christ crucified*. Another artist whose work often reflects his experience of formalised religion is Shadrack Mpongose, a self-taught artist from the Greytown district whose images are often characterised by a slightly humorous approach as seen in *Preacher* (c1994) **(Figure 145)** who wears a crown as he pontificates to an unseen congregation.

Many religious motifs have also been co-opted to counter the Aids pandemic that is widespread in KwaZulu-Natal, which to date has one of the world's highest incidences of the disease. In 1988 the Valley of a Thousand Hills bead maker, Sizakhele Mchunu, created a beaded cloth constructed *Christ on the Cross* **(Figure 146)**, a unique interpretation of Christ. A recent project initiated by the BAT centre and an Aids awareness campaign was launched in c1998, employing bead makers from the region to produce not only the well-known Aids ribbon 'letters', in red and white, but other works associated with the motif and the Aids pandemic. This resulted in numerous sculptures and

beaded messages, one in particular resembling Mchunu's figure of *Christ on the cross*, whose apron contains an Aids motif. Here Christ becomes the source of intervention for a people plagued by the disease.

Besides an AIC influenced inspirational source, several local artists have become involved with other religions, as already noted at Rorke's Drift where Rosicrucianism influenced Rakgoathe. Among the many proto African influences that came to this country in the late 1960s, Rastafarianism has attracted a considerable following, sanctioning the rule of the Emperor Haille Selassie (Ras Tafari) of Ethiopia as the true God given monarch of Africa and prototypical liberation figure. Rastafarianism has added another dimension to this religio-cultural system, such as the belief in peace, Afrocentrism, an Afrocentric brotherhood and self-induced (through the smoking of marihuana). Several artists from Natal have included allusions to Rastafarianism in their work.

Sacred imagery persists in the work of individuals who are co-opted into art workshops in the region. In the widely celebrated Ardmore ceramic studio, originating near Winterton in the Natal Midlands, religion inspired art - both indigenous and Biblically derived - has developed as a result of distinctive responses to belief and visual sources from art publications to which its artists are exposed.<sup>253</sup> Its founder, Fee Halsted-Berning, a Fine Arts graduate from Natal University, when requiring assistance with her own ceramics, employed the polio crippled Bonie Ntshalintshali. Showing a particular aptitude for drawing and clay modeling she was soon encouraged to produce her own work.

While Halsted-Berning initially controlled the shapes and motifs of works, through interventions and suggestions, her protégée soon developed her own distinctive iconography, based largely on local and exotic fauna and flora. She also showed a particular interest in depicting religious themes, which themes her mentor had also briefly explored. (Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali, personal communication (a), 1996) Aware of the predilections of the art and tourist market, Halsted-Berning tried to persuade her to depict themes related to traditional practice and dress as well. Although born

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<sup>253</sup> A second studio has been formed at Springvale, when Halsted-Berning moved onto a farm there in the 1990s. Both studios continue to produce similar work.

and raised a traditionalist, Ntshalintshali was influenced by Catholicism at school, and became a practicing Catholic in the late 1980s. At the time the church increasingly functioned as a haven for communities fearful of the uncertainties of change and the heightening of internecine conflict. In addition the Catholic Church in particular was set on actively seeking ways to assimilate aspects of traditionalism in their liturgy (Hurley, personal communication, 1993), and several consultations and symposia were held to debate issues of incarnation and acculturation.

Typical of many Zulu in her community, and widespread in the AIC context, Ntshalintshali saw no problem in the conflation of the two belief systems in her works as in daily practice. Despite being Catholic she also consulted traditional healers and fundamentally also regarded herself as traditionalist. Her biblically derived motifs originated from a variety of sources accessible in the studio, such as the book *Gothic Art* by Andrew Martindale, interior decorating magazines and even illustrated tracts and books from the Jehovah's Witness sect. One of her earliest large totemic sculptures was of *Adam and Eve* (1990) (**Figure 147**), in the stacked building method she perfected, in which joined cylindrical forms constitute the base for her figures. While the predominant focus is on Adam and Eve, the works also relate some aspects of the idyll into which these creations of God were placed: thus in the register below Eve consists of a palmate tree with the snake and an array of animals, including zebra, local felines and exotic tigers. On Adam's plinth are fig leaves, the tree of knowledge with a serpent emerging (the configuration of evil). Deploying what seems to echo an ancient Egyptian convention, Adam is depicted as dark skinned while Eve is relatively light skinned. This interpretation may also have been influenced by local preferences for lighter skinned women, which she would also have been aware of. Adam and Eve conventionally represent the original heterosexual pair, who introduced both knowledge and sin into the world.

Many other poignant images that are biblically and personally sourced, relate to the birth of her own child, in *Nativity* (c 1996) (**Figure 148**) and *Mother and Child* (c1999). (**Figure 149**) Like Mbatha, Xulu and Mkhize she also depicted (as a silkscreen print and a clay sculpture) images of *Jonah* (c1993) conveying the message of the sinner against God lost and later redeemed. Most of her works are indicative of a sound understanding and knowledge of the biblically derived source, but with

visual translations that embrace more popular interpretations such as reading the large fish that devoured Jonah as a whale. Often too, additional vernacularizing occurs, such as the inclusion of local fauna and flora, the depiction of biblical figures as African, and the contextualising in terms of Zulu convention.

In her ceramic sculpture *God and the animals* (c1997) (**Figure 150**), she has elected to situate her theme within a Zulu traditionalist context in which God is represented as a mature *isicoco* wearing Godhead at the apex of a pile of dead animals. The dead animals are used metaphorically - Ntshalintshali indicating that the theme represented the evil of humankind, which destroyed animals (and implicitly humans), thereby angering God. This work was produced at the height of the internecine conflict in South Africa in the early 1990s that affected the inhabitants of the nearby Loskop township. (Ntshalintshali, personal communication, 1997) God, the aged *induna*, menacingly holds out his hand in admonition, facing the viewer and implicitly indicting him/her for destroying His creations. Implicating the viewer as perpetrator is particularly telling, as it suggests that all who view the work need to question their actions and share in the guilt for destructive acts in South Africa. Buckenham highlights the fact that as one of the few black female artists in South Africa, she reflected a gendered insight into the themes she elected, often choosing (as in her *Adam and Eve*) to convey ideas of equilibrium and the need for redemption in a world that had inverted such values or had at least temporarily neglected to uphold divinely derived s injunctions and/or mores. (2001)

At Ardmore other artists have also been drawn to religious imagery but of a very different nature. On the one hand there is the Sotho-speaking Josephine Ghesa who produced large articulate images of imaginary animals. These in part derived from her familiarity with Sotho totemic animals, associated with clan identity, the fired clay forms modified by the application of paint, polish and other materials to enhance their robust monumentality. Ghesa claims that some of her animals emerged from dreams that she continues to associate with a calling to become a healer. The metaphysically derived forms are not, therefore, always positive or unthreatening, and it is this ambiguity that she ably conveys as seen in *Mythical animal* (c2000) (**Figure 151**). Also from the Ardmore studio, Wonderboy Nxumalo, has established himself as a narrator, producing platters and vessels that

variously relate stories about his own life, Zulu history and local intrigues. Given the context he works in he also depicts religious scenes from time to time.

Many artists who have worked in a religious context have drawn from its thematic vocabularies in secular work, while still producing liturgical work on commission. Hailing from the Bulwer district in KwaZulu-Natal, self-taught sculptor Zamokwakhe Gumede, was taught additional carving skills in the mission context at Mariannhill, as seen in his *Crucifixion* (c1992) (**Figure 152**) which loosely continues a tradition originated by Bernard Gcwensa and Reuben Xulu. He also depicts local myths and popular accounts associated with communal life and indigenous belief. More recently he has produced caricature-like angels, *Singing angels* (c2000) (**Figure 153**), mostly for the secular market, fully aware of the marketability of this popular motif in the late 1990s. Unlike many of his counterparts who belong to AICs, Gumede has no religious affiliation, noting that religious have ‘failed’ to convert him. (Gumede, personal communication, 1992)

Not surprisingly many artists were increasingly drawn to imagery related to mystical aspects of indigenous belief, at a time when indigenous African practices became increasingly attractive in emergent African democracies. Images related to the spiritual presence of deceased ancestors are not uncommon in work by both traditionalists and members of AICs. Scotch Mathebula, who worked in the Empangeni region, produced intriguing images in oil paint on glass.<sup>254</sup> In his work titled *Gonondo*<sup>255</sup> (c 1980) (**Figure 154**) he depicts what initially appear to be representations of traditional rural Zulu settlements on a steep hillside. However, as one moves away from the image several male faces appear imbedded in the matrix of the landscape, the features determined by the careful positioning of the homes and foliage. Mathebula claimed that the homeowner was always at home, even when away. In this sense the figures allude to either the ancestors, those who watch and protect the home and tradition, invisible at first glance, or to the notion of *isithunzi* (the soul presence). The

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<sup>254</sup> He worked in Johannesburg for most of his life and ‘learnt more about art’ there (Mathebula, personal communication, 1994)

<sup>255</sup> *Gonondo* is the term used for a positive healing force (Khoza and Sibisi, personal communication, 2002)

work can also be said to poignantly refer to his physical absence, yet an aspired for respect and acknowledged or desired presence. Ancestral acknowledgment is also central to Elphas Khela Ngobese's work *Umsebenzi - burning imphepho for the ancestral spirits* (1990) (**Figure 155**) in which ancestral forces are invoked by the brewing of *utshwala* in an *ukhamba* in the foreground. The ensuing fumes surround the image, and the picture is flanked by a decorative pattern in red, yellow, green and black. The association of these colours with the ANC further reinforces the sourcing of ancestral protection in the highly politicized context of the 1990s.

In the abovementioned examples of contemporary belief-inspired art, several pertinent aspects have recurred. There is no longer an anticipated consistency or purism in church inspired religious imagery, given the virtual absence of liturgical prescriptiveness. The themes selected are inevitably closely related to ideas of salvation and healing (in a physical and metaphysical sense), prompted by highly personalized motives and a direct reflection of the diversity of its practitioners and interpreters. Reflecting the profound changes that have occurred in religious practice and historical events in the region, much recent imagery has assumed a quasi-secular position as a visual equivalence to moralizing oral traditions. Such art reflects the emergence of a new culture of value and belief, which has shaped the consciousness, identity and values of communities throughout the region.

Often, as in the work of Makhoba and others, these visual records prefigured written texts and verbal debates that centered on the social and personal ills that prevail in communities, where taboos and decorum prevented such issues from being raised in public or personal forums. These works acted as salutary reminders to individuals and the state of neglected priorities in individual and collective contexts, and functioned as a conscientising source for many observers. In this these religious based works in effect fulfill a central neo-religious function, albeit in a secular context.

## 5.4 Conclusions

Artists reflect the ethos and culture in which they live, and echo the changes that are effected in their society. In Africa new art forms reflect cross-cultural dynamics that result from changing social conditions and perspectives as well as the interaction between culture and religion, religion and politics and religious reinterpretation. The ongoing changes in religion in Africa probably constitute one of the most profound impacts, as they touch on the very centre of cultural integrity. (Hillman 1993:69)

In essence the art that emerged from KwaZulu-Natal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflects the changing purposes of art and creativity, from a traditionalist context where art was functional and associated with religious ritual, with symbol bearing embellishment and an identifiable encoding, to an art that developed at the behest of a white patronage base, initially predominantly a religious one. Contemporary art in KwaZulu-Natal was preceded by traditional art forms that were collectively intended and communally approved, the result of practical, ritual or aesthetic significance or for embellishment. Such creativity was admired because of its aesthetic merits, its usefulness and importance, or a combination of these. The imagery that appeared in such art reflected the symbolic values of the culture, always oriented positively towards ‘man’s search for a secure and relatively ordered existence. Artists worked within a framework of need and approbation and often worked collectively, but this practice was eliminated or became adapted as colonized cultures increasingly absorbed European/western notions of individualism, and variously displayed cross-cultural affinities in other art forms such as oral traditions and music.

The interrelationship between diverse cultures under colonialism, however, resulted in an initial relationship between the colonial power and its periphery in an association best described as one of acculturation. Here imbalances in power and cultural prioritization were reflected in either a rejection of, or a borrowing from and emulation of the colonial centre, a process further dictated by aspirations to westernization. However such borrowing was to both reinforce and weaken the dominance of the centre, as vernacular absorption and interpretation became increasingly affected by individualistic translation and practice.



In this dissertation I have examined several factors associated with the way in which religion from a different and dominant culture has been imposed on, explored and assimilated by a formerly marginalised culture, the predominantly Zulu inhabitants of KwaZulu-Natal. Artists have responded to changing perceptions of the relevance of Biblical and/or Christian injunctions and authority, which change was effected as subject peoples came to explore the central dimensions of such belief system independently, absorbing selectively and variously aspects of its structure, mythography and practice. Further, such investigation has been located within the complex systems of cultural exchange and control that have permeated South African religio-cultural, educational and political spheres.

In the colonial and later modernist period, cultural identity became a weapon to bolster western hegemonic control and identity and by so doing undermine and reduce the significance of the colonized or other cultures. This resulted in two strategies among the colonized: a deliberate imitation of western standards, followed thereafter, in a wave of resistance in which these values and identity are usurped, an attempt is made to replace them with African cultural values that had been suppressed under colonialism. (McEvelley 1993:11) While this results in an end to colonialism, thereafter, unburdened by colonial inequalities and power, the African artist reverses the colonial imbalance, and with characteristic independence, draws freely on sources including those of his erstwhile oppressors. In this process such images become attached to local or universal dimensions that are no longer implicated in a colonialist past. Consequently artists are more certain of their own sense of identity, which is a legitimate blend of African and European influences and they increasingly become part of a universal body of art makers. Some even go so far as to disdain the issue of identity and to consider any debate around it as extraneous to their work<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> An interesting reading of the reinterpretation of meaning in a context of imbalance of power relations, typical of any post colonial context is suggested by Bhaba. He recognises that the absorption and interpretation of the religious system or language of the colonial centre is invariably tempered by the indigene in its subsequent manifestation and translation. The result is a 'fracturing of the colonialist text by re-articulating it' which 'perverts the meaning and message' of the original which functioned as the 'insignia of colonial authority and signifier of colonial desire and discipline' (in this instance the white western Christian church), (Bhabha 1985a:89) and therefore makes an absolute exercise of power impossible. (Parry 1985 in Ashcroft:42)

The mimicry that occurred - especially in art and religion - did not suggest that there was no opposition or contestation; but mimicry is implicit in the production of dominance, and tends to confirm 'the very thing it displaces'. (Ashcroft 1995: 9) The African artist looked to the west for a mode to emulate, much as Picasso looked at African art, largely from a formal perspective. Whatever style or medium used is automatically regarded as valuable and themes deployed variously relate to the external world: seldom is art for art's sake. Despite such borrowing artists are still able to retain their difference 'without destroying the individualities of the various cultures within it'. (Ashcroft 1995:9) This is fully in keeping with a postcolonial and postmodern realization that human identity is composite and complex, a realization that only emerged after the modernist emphasis on nationalism. (Mc Evilly1993: 15)

This has particular relevance to those artists who utilised biblically sourced imagery (predominantly Christian, Biblically or AIC derived) in KwaZulu-Natal, and suggests why the use of such imagery has undergone significant changes. The African artist drawn to such imagery, albeit remote culturally and implicitly a sign or remnant of colonial domination, is able to extract the essential relevance that resides in it, thereby enriching both her/his and the colonial power's culture, in which such belief systems and imagery developed. (McEvilly1993: 21)

In view of the prominence of biblically derived imagery in the work of artists from KwaZulu-Natal, I explored the motivations for church patronage and training, theoretical and other agencies that contributed to its perpetuation, and ultimately current motivations for the persistence of such thematic focus, albeit modified and absorbed into new cross-cultural contexts of relevance. I have examined how the church of the colonial centre was instrumental in partly transforming cultural and religious practice, absorbing extant creative capacities of artists for liturgical needs and practice. However, like all impositions, this was to change as the authority of interpretation, motivation for production and religio-cultural absorption devolved onto the African Independent Churches and was consequently controlled by the Zulu themselves. As they assumed this central interpretative role, outside of preconceived hierarchies, diverse styles and iconographies have emerged, with the result that such art gradually came to express an internal subversion of its erstwhile centrality. Such

diversity also reflects the fact that there is no single corpus of Christian identity that pertains in the region, an inevitable reflection too of the fact that colonial Natal was subject to one of the most diverse missionising in any region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As has been shown, early western art training in KwaZulu-Natal in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was largely conducted under the auspices of missionary and ethnographic enterprise, both of which intrinsically marked contemporary African art in the region stylistically, pictorially and thematically. The absorption of a biblically derived vocabulary is a sign of two distinctive actions: on the one hand the imposition of western cultural paradigms by missionaries, and on the other the integration and absorption of a system of mythography that was only absorbed insofar as it is valued or proximate to mores, ideals and aspirations of those individuals who embraced it.

Missionary activity in KwaZulu-Natal accelerated in the 1880s, at a time when doubt in the centrality of Christianity escalated in Europe, and when African and other cultures were increasingly upheld for their art and desirable 'simplicity'. As noted earlier, however, missionary intransigence vis a vis African cultures was not always the norm, and was later countered in derivative art practice in the west, and locally, in anthropological research on African culture, some of which was conducted by missionaries.

The historical context of missionization in the region is intrinsically linked to a series of intersecting factors that include the development of contemporary art elsewhere in Africa, the incidence of Christian influence in education and the concomitant rise of ethnography and anthropology as new fields of study that contributed to the sanctioning of African creative and conceptual capacities. This established the background for a more specific examination of the development of several mission-based training ventures and patronage, which represented some of the earliest forms of recognition of contemporary African art form. Such training set the tone for a co-opted cultural manifestation - mainly representational art (as in the work of Gerard Bhengu)- which the church intended to deploy within the ambit of its liturgical and evangelizing context.

By the 1950s this had given way to a more modernist conceptualism in the mission art-training

context. Soon the art student or apprentice was subject to a prescriptive iconography and stylistic conventions, dependent on the degree to which their mentors were aware of current developments in liturgical art, emergent Modernism or in contemporary African art. However well intentioned the modernist centered training of Mariannhill, Ndaleni and Rorkes's Drift, there was a perceived stylistic coercion of modernist-primitivist syncretism, which has persisted as a schematic formula designated as 'black South African' by local institutions and the art world. This restricted context introduced artists to a white patronage base (Sack 1988:9), new ways of art making and a new modernist conceptualizing expressiveness that in itself had been developed in the west under, amongst others, African influence.

Mission derived or liturgical art was relatively marginalised for decades, perceived as a coerced remnant of colonial intervention destructive of the original cultural base. Criticism was leveled at the church for co-opting budding African artists into its employ, which at times resulted in repetitive art for practical use by missionaries and local churches. The marginalization of missionary, or 'ecumenical art' as it has been described, resulted in such art often being exhibited separately, and its artists being subject to selective isolation, regarded as merely 'sacred artists' and implicitly limited in their innovative and artistic capacities. Until recently, too, such art was largely the focus of texts by theologians, missionaries and others associated with various denominations, whose writings on such art was associated with acclamatory texts on missionary endeavour or attempts to extrapolate the spirituality, and hence relevance, in such images. Such art too, was partly limited, in that it failed to reflect the actual syncretic practices in belief that soon emerged in the wake of missionization.

However, as mission based initiatives were short-lived, many so-called liturgical artists, once trained in western media, were drawn to secular themes and workplaces, allowing them greater access to urban and eventually even international markets. This change was also prompted by economic need, as church patronage was sporadic and it was unable to provide commissions indefinitely. Many of these artists reflected aspects of the changed cultural realities and influences they experienced, and new syncretic religious practices in religion were some of many such manifestations reflected in their work, yet now intended for a secular (still predominantly white) audience.

More recently, other religions have become inspirational due to an uncoerced assimilation by various groups, and such imagery is subject to less prescriptiveness. It was therefore hardly surprising that when artists elected to undergo art training at centres that were church linked but had no intention of eliciting religious art, such as Ndaleni and Rorke's Drift, many students initially drew on an inculcated and accessible Biblically derived vocabulary in their art. Such themes functioned as new mythographies that were pertinent to their lives and their increasingly cross-cultural spiritualities.

These vocabularies were distinctive in that they were partly indigenised, and personally and regionally contextualized. Unlike the intentions of those who subscribed to the many emergent theological debates on acculturation and enculturation, this art increasingly reflected local contexts, particularly syncretic religious practices, reflecting the changes felt in the church, and more especially those manifest in the independent churches. I have indicated how hybridity, applicability and even politicization of Biblical themes was largely derived from such interpretations and discourse, later to be further ratified by black and liberal theological debate.

Such changes must in part be seen to have arisen as a result of the widespread development of the AICs, which emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of which sanctioned aspects of indigenous Zulu belief systems in their practice. Art reflected this syncretic amalgam of belief and practice largely different from that previously described as Biblically influenced or liturgical art. It became more narrative, inspirational and didactic and even secularised, in that it functioned historically as a reflection of the vicissitudes of daily life and the hybridity of belief. In effect it reflected more accurately the central and traditional function of religion in the region, which is largely anthropocentrically based, in which healing, direction, and support are central to the function of religion to those who sought its intervention in their lives.

In KwaZulu-Natal, as elsewhere in South Africa, religion still remains one of the central dimensions among the majority of its peoples that shapes cultural identity and practice, reflecting their aims, aspirations, fears and worldviews. Religion is always there 'in the wings' to challenge individuals

and the state based on a consensual code of ethics. (Haynes 1993:18). By the 1980s it would correct to aver that the AICs and Christianity were the prevailing hegemonic religions in South Africa. The emergence of Liberation theology, expressed in a vernacular Black Theology, enabled people to act together to attempt to change and confront existing social realities and illegitimate rule. Within a developing context of Contextual Theology, artists in effect preempted theological debate in their images that testify to the relevant reading and interpretation of biblical narratives, as a counter to the despair associated with oppression. In this the artists in effect functioned as theologians, reflecting the central tenets of Contextual Theology that were only developed more fully in the late 1970s and 1980s. (Speckman and Kaufmann 2001)

At the same time other religious groups, both AIC and mission church based, which dealt with the trauma of oppression and socio-political change. The latter were variously determined to influence the need for change in a country suffering under intransigent legislation. In this way religion became one of the most influential forces to challenge current hegemony, and not the 'secularized ideologies of the political centre (e.g. communism, socialism and in some contexts centralized state-Nationalism)' (Haynes 1993:39). Religion rather enabled people who were politically powerless to organize resistance, rather than resort to apathy and despair. There can be little doubt that the close allegiances between new theologies and the struggle that emerged in the late 1970-1980s contributed further to the sanctioning of biblically derived motifs in art.

However, ironically both the government and many central opposition forces heralded the support of the church, Christianity or other belief systems as the basis for their respective nationalist or liberationist ideologies: the defensive Calvinist state religion and perspective that entrenched apartheid, or the inspired dissident beliefs, including those of indigenous religions, independent churches and those inspired by Liberation Theology. While the white state saw religion as a buffer to Communism and black nationalism, black dissidents saw religion as a bolster for their socio-politically progressive ideals.

Another dimension which attached itself to religion inspired art, is the reading made by theologians.

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We have seen above how work such as that produced at Mariannahill was regarded as a significant barometer of the reception of Christianity among indigenes by various authors, and how Fr Kinch was to draw from Liturgical Arts and advertise the work of his students in this context. Delegates to the 1972 Mapumulo Consultation also referred frequently to the possible use of art as a way of visually communicating new theological ideals, especially those of situational and contextual theology.

The church has long realized that western cultural domination is in decline and that in order for it to survive, Euro-American cultural domination will give way. (Hillman 1993:3). Further the church has been aware for some time that western cultures too have been undergoing serious changes, particularly since World War 2 and that its authoritarian and paternalistic as well as gendered values are no longer acceptable (Hillman 1993:5) Yet within the mission church there are few examples of true inculturation. As seen earlier however the seminary system and training often alienates the young priest from his community. What Hillman notes is that this had the effect of ‘inhibiting’, if not totally precluding, any likelihood of authentically African cultural systems of humanism and social order (ethics, law, religion, art etc) meeting the new needs of African peoples (Hillman 1993:45) The results of this deprivation of religious and ethical systems is an amorality and religious indifference among African elites, and even a disregard for their own cultural origins.

While the responses to Christianity have been varied in KwaZulu-Natal, the art that emerged from the missionary endeavour, and that which emerged more autonomously in the 1970s and 1980s has been surpassed in the last decade of the twentieth century by a wave of religious imagery, diverse in creative expression and in function. While artists were earlier subject to viable imagery and the teaching methods of the mission teachers, others reflected a more idiosyncratic approach, reflecting the increasing religious pluralism in the contexts from which several of the artists hail. The notion that there is distinctiveness between *kholwa* and *amabhinca* no longer fully applies in the region as religious beliefs and associated cultural and ‘foreign’ belief systems are often conflated.

Contemporary religious imagery is rarely produced for a specific church or sacred context, rather

such iconography is an integral and sanctioned part of contemporary art production. In this such imagery reflects a new wave of post Contextual Theology, in which the energies that emerged in the 1970s to the mid 1980 in resistance practices, has now been revised and channeled into new strategies that address basic human rights, needs, mores and values. (Speckman and Kaufmann2001: 6)

Hackett also points to a growing body of artists who would not describe themselves as being affiliated to any religious practice but who are more eclectic and who seek a 'synthesis of different religious paths' (Hackett 1996:203), with influences that range from Eastern belief systems to other more esoteric ones. While the same could be said to apply in the context in KwaZulu-Natal, the predominance of traditionalist or quasi-Christian mission church based or independent church variants predominates.

The art that emerged from the many contexts considered in this dissertation, conveys the processes in which religion has been absorbed, assimilated, evaluated and transformed. There remains a need to further explore the personalized theologies that have emerged in the work of individual artists, and especially to consider the cultural manifestations associated with the many AICs that function in the region.

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320 x 800 (Source: field photograph, Ardmore studio, Winterton)

148. *Nativity (and detail)*, c1995, by Bonie Ntshalintshali, painted ceramic ware, approximately 280 x 750 (Source: field photograph, Ardmore studio, Winterton)

149. *Mother and child*, c1999, by Bonie Ntshalintshali, painted ceramic ware, approximately 270 x 530 (Source: field photograph, Ardmore studio, Winterton)

150. *God and the animals (and detail)*, c1997, by Bonie Ntshantshali, painted ceramic ware, approximately 320 x 850 (Source: field photograph, Ardmore studio, Winterton)

151. *Mythical animals*, c200, by Josephine Ghesa, bisque fired clay, painted, dimensions unknown (Source: photograph by Fee Halsted)

152. *Crucifixion*, c 1992, by Zamokwakhe Gumede, wood, 1715 x 1300 x 311 (Source: Spiritual Art of Natal catalogue)

153. *Angels*, c2001, by Zamokwakhe Gumede, wood, each approximately 320 x 250 (Source: greetings card issued by the African Art Centre)

154. *Gonondo*, c1980, by Scotch Mathebula, mixed media on corrugated board, 452 x 290 (Source: Spiritual Art of Natal catalogue)

155. *Umsebenzi - burning impepho for the ancestral spirits*, 1990, by Elphas Khela Ngobese, mixed media on paper, 402 x 577 (Source: Spiritual Art of Natal catalogue)

