

CHAPTER 14

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Traversing the thin line between ‘*chibhoyi*’ (indigenous spirituality) and miracle working

A case study of miracle working in the Impact for Christ Ministries in Gweru

Introduction

It is almost coming to or over a decade now since the media has been awash with news about the miraculous wonders being done through the hands of some pastors beyond the Zimbabwean borders. It was thus a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe to find Bible lovers attached to their TVs watching people like Pastor Chris, Jimmy Swaggart, Prophet T. B. Joshua and others. Of late, however, things have begun to change as there are locally bred pastors who are now performing the same wonders people used to see on TV. This has seen people rushing to the City Sports Centre, for example, to listen to Prophet Makandiwa or attend Uebert Angel’s deliverance sermons. The wonders being done by these local pastors have taken the media by storm to such an extent that it has become commonplace to find names like Makandiwa on the lips of young kids, even small as those still attending kindergarten. While much has been popularized about Makandiwa and Angel, very few people know that in the small town of Gweru there are also miraculous performances being done by Prophet Khuleya of the Impact for Christ Ministries. This development in Gweru has generated interest for this chapter to explore details about this man, hidden as it were from the general public and from the outside world. In the first part of this work I shall look at the ministry being carried out by the Impact for Christ Ministries in Gweru, paying particular attention to the ministry of Prophet Khuleya and in the second part, I shall try to examine the broader ministry of deliverance and healing against the background of African traditional religion, for it is my assumption that there is an interplay between

the miracles being done during these days and *chibhoyi* or *chivanhu*, ‘traditional spiritualism.’

Impact for Christ Ministries in Gweru

Before taking a closer look at the Impact for Christ Ministries, it is perhaps worthy to make reference to Gundani (2001:136) who rightly observed that there has been, since the 1990s, a marked increase in the use of the print media by churches in Zimbabwe as a means of disseminating information to targeted audiences. In comparison, however, to what the mainline churches are doing, one finds that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have taken a lead in putting up notices either through street corner posters or electronically via the Internet. Such advertisements, as further noted by Gundani (2001:136), regularly include a photograph of the church founder and leader, the man or woman of great charism beckoning followers and possible converts to come and witness for themselves God’s mighty acts or the pastor praying over the sick. In line with the powers that the pastors of such churches claim to have, the advertisements call attention to the miracles that are performed during the services that they hold. A look at website of the Impact for Christ Ministries in Gweru incidentally authenticates the above observation made by Gundani. Below is one such advert I took from their website:

The adverts show the photograph of Prophet J. S. Khuleya and Pastor F. Khuleya who are the founder members of the Impact for Christ Ministries in Gweru.

Right in the middle of the advert and in bold letters one’s attention is drawn to what the masses are to expect when they attend their services — **miracles!**



To authenticate what is written on their adverts, Prophet J. Khuleya has taken Gweru by storm through the miracles that are ostensibly being performed through his hands. Indeed, many are said to have been amazed by the great wonders that are flowing through his hands and cannot resist except praise the Lord. The social network Facebook is awash with such praise and appreciation of what the Prophet is doing. One finds, for example, comments like: 'We give glory to God Prophet!! may the Lord take you to higher levels in JESUS' NAME!!!!', 'U're faithful Lord Jesus...', 'NdiJehova weminana –'It is God of wonders,' 'Glory be to God the same yesterday, today n forever,' 'NaJesu zvinoita – with Jesus it is possible' and so many other praise ejaculations.

One miracle, for example, which has drawn so much attention, is that of a woman who had problem with her feet and had eating and drinking problems. The prophet is said to have prayed for the woman and she recovered.



The healing of the woman is one among many of such healing and deliverance miracles that are said to be taking place in the Impact for Christ Ministries. A narration of them all is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I think it suffices here to reiterate that it is not only the Makandiwas and Angels who have stolen the limelight in Zimbabwean society, but there are also other prophets in Zimbabwe who are capable of doing the same miracles. Prophet Khuleya is one of them. The desire to bring this man to the fore, as noted earlier on, triggered the writing of this chapter. In order, however, to put Prophet Khuleya's healing ministry into its proper perspective, it is necessary to appreciate the meaning of healing in the environment in which he is operating.

Healing and Deliverance

Looking at Prophet Khuleya's healing and deliverance ministry and drawing from an African perspective in general, one would find that healing is not a phenomenon limited to a cure for physical ailment only; rather it embraces all aspects of suffering which affect even the moral, psychological and spiritual life of the sick person. The process of healing, therefore, involves the taking away from a sick person a stumbling block or disturbance to his/her physical or spiritual life, inhibiting him/her from human self-fulfillment. Leading to this blockage in human fulfillment is a plethora of causes ranging from ancestors to even attachment to vice, not granting forgiveness or the refusal to accept it (Mwandayi, 2011). Where the cause of illness is interpreted as cultural or spiritual, people seek deliverance from those forces that may be tormenting them. Africans, just like all peoples of the world, love life and aspire for a life free from constraints that may enslave them to any force. Healing and deliverance thus are central in living a fully human life and this accounts for the reason why some pastors are now in full force to explore this once neglected area of ministry. A flashback into the New Testament times would reveal that the healing ministry appears to have been practiced during the Apostolic Age (Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-43; 16:16-18) and that after the death of the first apostles we do not seem to find so many references to the deliverance and healing ministry.

The search for well-being among Africans answers why many are prepared to embrace whatever comes their way, as long as it assures that they are free from the unwanted worrisome problem. Before the advent

of Christianity and Western medicine, the traditional healer was held as the kingpin of the African society, for people believed that traditional healers had the capacity both to heal as well as to cast out spells of the dark forces. While Christianity, aligned with Western culture, made frantic efforts to cast a dark shadow over the traditional systems of healing and deliverance, many of the propagators of Western medicine and Christianity were annoyed due to the fact that they saw people still flocking to traditional healers, for people were convinced of the power in the traditional medicines. The traditional medical system stood the test of relegation because many of those who consulted traditional healers and even today do not do so solely on medical grounds. Many have psychological, spiritual, political, religious and social problems which they are convinced traditional healers are quite competent to handle. Some view traditional medical services as much better than the Western medical system because of its tendency to 'treat the whole man/woman.' It addresses a person's physical needs concurrently with his/her psychological needs. In affirmation to this H.E. Sigerist says,

The very unity of primitive medicine, the fact that it never addresses itself to either body or mind but always both, explains many of its results also in the somatic field. That a ceremonial in the course of which the patient comes into complete harmony with nature and the universe must have a strong psychotherapeutic value goes without saying (Sigerist cited in Chavunduka, 1998:14).

Leaving room also to the persistence of traditional medical system was sometimes the failure of modern medical science to get better or satisfactory results in certain types of illnesses like chronic dysfunctions. A. Barker, a modern medical doctor who worked in Zululand had this to admit,

Where we failed, in hopeless cancers or in chronic ailments, the spirit world again would be invoked but often only in despair, which prompted fond relatives to leave no avenue unexplored which might lead to a last minute restoration of their sufferer's health. When this happened, European know-alls were ready to point a finger: 'You see doc? They're a primitive lot at heart, and given a chance, always go back to their old ways; you'll never change them'. Yet I fancy that the return to the magician owed more to love than to fear; more to a desire to help in an extremity than to the persistence in superstition (Barker cited in Chavunduka, 1994:10).

Related to the above factor is the fact that most locals tended and even now tend to put illness into two broad categories. The first category consists of those illnesses people view as normal or natural like coughs, colds, slight headache, fevers or stomach-aches. For most of these minor complications people have no problem in consulting a modern medical doctor. The real problem begins when that which was initially viewed as normal tends to persist over a long period of time and worse when treatment with modern scientific means had been sought but no sign of improvement is in place. People would be left with no choice except to regard it as abnormal. To deal with illnesses of this second nature, people believe that consulting a traditional healer is the only way out since most modern doctors are believed unable to attack the ultimate causes of abnormal illnesses. Such causes range from witches, sorcerers, ancestor spirits and angered spirits to alien spirits. Cases of people vacillating between the traditional healer and the modern doctor are thus a common reality. As demonstrated above, an illness which was initially viewed as normal and thus referred to a modern medical doctor may be re-defined as abnormal by the patient or by members of his/her social group, requiring thus the service of a traditional healer. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the same patient or members of the social group seeking the services of a modern doctor again if, for example, their suspicions about the abnormality of the illness is not confirmed by traditional healers or when traditional healers fail also to effect a cure or even when symptoms which were initially viewed as strange just disappear.

While many indeed among Africans have embraced Christianity it does not mean that they have forsaken their traditional values and what they know brings well-being. One finds so much dependence on their indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) in almost all spheres of their lives. IKSs are forms of knowledge that have originated locally and naturally (Altieri cited in Mapara, 2009:140). These knowledge forms are known by other names, and among them are indigenous ways of knowing, traditional knowledge, indigenous technical knowledge, rural knowledge as well as ethno-science (Mapara, 2009:140). It is this count on IKSs that leads them not only to avoid going to modern practitioners but to also shun consulting some of their pastors whom they know are not able to attack the ultimate cause of illnesses linked to cultural and social issues. In mainline churches, for example, many shun the pastor for fear of being misunderstood, especially if the pastor concerned is an expatriate. Many of the expatriate pastors are known to dismiss many of the cultural

issues as mere superstition, hence calling for no serious attention. In those cases involving the local pastor who may be thought to understand the sick person's cultural background better, chances of being turned away without the much needed help offered are also there.

Certain illnesses, as we saw, require the deliverance of the sufferer from the forces of the dark-world. This indeed is a challenging area and the dread in many pastors when it comes to dealing with such evil forces need not be overstated. Many pastors know that exorcism is not a mere repetition of a given formula but rather demands purity of life and a determined effort towards sanctity on the part of the exorcist. Aware of their failures here and there, many would not dare enter into that field. In comparison to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, however, one would find that there is less emphasis on exorcism in mainline churches and when a pastor in the latter churches tries by his/her own initiative to get involved in healing and the exorcism of traditional evil spirits, he/she is likely to get trouble with authorities (Bourdillon:1993). Among the popular figures of our modern times, one needs to think of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo in the Catholic Church and Fr Nerwande in the Anglican Communion for a confirmation of this. Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors, Prophet Khuleya being among them, have utilized this loophole in mainline churches to lure more followers to themselves for they claim to have that authority and prowess to deal with problems of any spiritual nature.

Seeing the need in people to retain both their traditional culture as well as their imported religion - Christianity, some healers have gone out to provide both services to their clients. There are some who let their clients choose the best way they want to be helped, either using Christian means or traditional ones. What it means then is that it would be up to the client to prioritize what he/she may see as most fitting given the situation and his/her background. The healer on his/her own part is versatile in such a way that he/she is able to handle whatever option the client would have chosen. If it demands of the healer to enter the world of the ancestors and mediate on their behalf with the client then that would be so and if it demands him/her to invoke the 'Holy Spirit' to come and heal/deliver his/her client then that would be done also without any challenge. As noted by Gundani (2001:140),

With these two faces of Janus, they appeal both to adherents of Shona or Ndebele traditional religions and to those Christians who are not yet pre-

pared to make the huge leap towards Christ and thus become transformed into new creatures.

Charismatic Pastors and the Role of Traditional Healers

An interesting development, and which is now a phenomenon seen also in Gweru with the Impact for Christ Ministries, is the new crop of charismatic pastors who are almost taking over the roles which have long been associated with that of traditional healers. As a mark possibly of being distinct from other ordinary pastors, these pastors are now generally referred to as prophets; hence the new title 'prophet' in the case of pastor Khuleya also. As seen from their live shows on TV, such prophets now have the power, for example, to identify people in the congregation by their national identity numbers; tell the address of the home where someone grew up; others name a few relatives by the first name. Others have the power to tell the color and design of furniture pieces in people's houses or how someone may have visited the doctor for a pregnancy test five days previously. Others even expose marital affairs and call the culprits forward to confess, lest they die. In moments of political crisis even, some have claimed to be messengers of hope to the people. As the results of 2013 harmonized elections were beginning to trickle in and people were beginning to become agitated at the possibility of another Zanu Pf landslide victory and a possible repeat of the unforgettable 2007/8 crisis, prophet Khuleya on the 29th of July 2013 delivered what he claimed was God's message to Zimbabweans:

Though we are in Zimbabwe we are in the hand of the Lord, Daniel was in the hand of the Lord in the Lion's den and the lions did not feast on him, Shadrek, Mishek and Abednigo were in the Lord's hand in the fire and the fire did not burn them, I say to you Zimbabweans, don't be afraid [...] (Khuleya, 2013).

It is the accuracy of these prophecies, as observed by one writer, that mesmerizes their congregations and people attend church for long hours with their friends and family, hoping that the "man of God" will single them out of the crowd and tell them what has happened and perhaps point a way into the future (False Prophets in Zimbabwe, 2013). The essence of what is done looks essentially the same with what is done by traditional healers, and what appears only to have changed is that one service is provided by a man/woman in the regalia of traditional spiritualism whilst the other is provided by a man/woman of the cloth.

What is mind boggling, however, about the whole issue is the source of power used by these charismatic prophets. This an area which has fascinated many researchers, especially considering the ability of these prophets to perform mysterious actions which are similar and which may even surpass what people are used to seeing their traditional healers perform. While such actions have helped lift the flag of some churches, in some cases it has dragged them into the mud of controversies. Making reference to the St Elijah Church of Mberengwa, Tabona Shoko notes that the close alliance with African traditional religious beliefs and methods of healing gives the faith community a somewhat schizophrenic stance and this has resulted in divisions and accusations of witchcraft (Shoko, 2006). Due to all this, doubting Thomases have been quick to dismiss charismatic prophets as fake while others are convinced in the powers of these prophets which they would like to believe is of divine origin as claimed by the very prophets engaged in this ministry. A look at the literature which has been proffered so far shows the mixed feeling among researchers and the general public who are trying to come to terms with this phenomenon. One writer noted that apologists for the new crop of prophets often quote texts like 1 Chronicles 16 verse 22 which says: "Touch not my anointed ones and do my prophets no harm!" or Matthew 7:1 which says: "Do not judge and you shall not be judged" (False Prophets in Zimbabwe, 2013). Such texts are at most interpreted literally, a typical style of how the Bible is used in the public discourse in Zimbabwe.

Some believe that the prophets offer excellent and affordable service for the poor majority in Zimbabwe. Due to abject poverty, many cannot afford medical insurance and therefore cannot get quality medical service from either public or private health systems. As pointed out by Gundani, the government of Zimbabwe in 1991 removed free medical service from its public health institutions, a development that left the poor with no cushion. Such a move earned the government sharp criticism and many began to see "professional prophets," as a viable alternative to a society that had become grossly irresponsible. As the apologists for charismatic prophets would argue, prophets are servants of God and are some of the few people who offer affordable and culture-friendly health service (Gundani, 2001:141). Still others argue that it is unfair to criticize them on the basis of hearsay and rumour. "The taste of the pudding is in the eating," so they would argue. Others go on to argue that a true prophet is known by his or her works. A mark of genuine-

ness, as they would argue, is seen, for example, when a prophet refers a patient to another prophet following a realization that he/she cannot prescribe the right medicines to the client.

While some approve and believe in the powers of prophets as of divine origin, the testimonies given by some who appear well versed on the ongoing in the spiritual realm tend to show that there appears to be something fishy about the whole exercise. In an article titled: "Prophets, Sangomas use the same power. We turn people into prophets: Chipinge Sangoma," published in *My Zimbabwe*, the writer reports of a traditional healer known as Sekuru Chigadzira Panganai Chirimambowa of Musikavanhu village in Chipinge who claimed that nothing was impossible to him and that he sells powers to any willing buyer who wants to become a prophet or a traditional healer. Sekuru Panganai is alleged to have further confirmed that some prophets use a vulture's head to predict what the future carries or make prophecies. Basing on his vast experience, Sekuru Panganai is said to have revealed: "A vulture's head is so powerful and I also use it. You will never miss in prediction. A vulture can foretell when an animal will die. That's why you see some prophets now predict anyone's National ID number" (Sekuru Pangani cited *Prophets, Sangomas use the same power*, 2013).

What is more revealing possibly is a testimony given by the renowned Ghanaian sangoma Nana Kwaku Bonsam who claims that he has been helping not only his countrymen but also people from other countries to get supernatural powers. In an interview, Nana Kwaku Bonsam is said to have acknowledged:

I'm a fetish priest; a powerful one of course, and I use my powers to heal the sick, help people who want to travel abroad, help traders get better sales, protect people from fraudsters, dis-empower witches and wizards or help people who have one problem or the other. I am well-known for the wonders I perform in this country so I receive people from all parts of the country and even people from other countries (Nana Kwaku Bonsam cited in *Ghana sangoma who gave 1700 prophets powers*, 2013).

Probed further to ascertain his powers, Nana Kwaku Bonsam is said to have openly and publicly dared any of his critics to challenge him in a battle of supernatural powers. He went on to boast of his capabilities when he claimed:

I produced money, a gold watch, handkerchief and other things there and that was so wonderful before the chief of Techiman. At the palace, I was able to plant cocoa seeds and they germinated on that same day; I

planted a mango seed and it germinated the same day and I killed a house-fly, resurrected it and made it fly round for all to see (Nana Kwaku Bonsam cited in *Ghana sangoma who gave 1700 prophets powers*, 2013).

A stunner to many was the testimony he gave that his god 'Kofi-Kofi' provides him with supernatural powers that are desperately needed by different pastors from all walks of life to start prominent churches and perform miracles. On being questioned whether pastors were really seeking his services, Bonsam is said to have answered:

Yes it is true. I give powers to perform miracles to a lot of pastors. Currently I have over one thousand seven hundred and something pastors; I might need to look into my register for the figure. When they come to me I give golden rings to some of them after taking them through a ritual bath. I give them the ring and a Bible and the power I want them to get is what I put in the ring. I give some the power to heal, others to see into the future and or the past, or do anything I want them to do. It helps their churches get more members who always want to see signs and wonders (Nana Kwaku Bonsam cited in *Ghana sangoma who gave 1700 prophets powers*, 2013).

While the claims by Nana Kwaku Bonsam could be taken as somehow apologetic so as for him to be feared and revered, one cannot dismiss them as total falsehood. As most Nigerian films even try to portray also, there are some in Africa who possess 'bombs' more mysterious and powerful than the atomic bomb itself. Further providing evidence that there could be something fishy in what the charismatic prophets are doing is the testimony from the Apostolic groups of Zimbabwe. As revealed by the news crew of My Zimbabwe, one member of the Vapostori (Apostolic) sect who spoke on condition of anonymity alleged that some senior prophets in his sect, annoyed by the exodus of their followers to follow the emerging prophets, had consulted with Higher Powers to find out whether these Christian prophets were really what they claimed to be, that is, sent of God and they were shown by divine insight that these new prophets were using devious ways to gain power and be able to see into the future (False Prophets in Zimbabwe, 2013).

Such testimonies from people like Sekuru Chigadzira Panganai Chirimambowa, Nana Kwaku Bonsam and others are not only an eye opener to the mysteries that are the order of the day in the supernatural world but also cast a shadow over today's prophetic world. What the testimonies show confirm my earlier assumption that there is some sort of interplay between the miracles being done during these days and *chibhoi*

or *chivanhu* ‘traditional spiritualism.’ If we take a transect walk through *chivanhu* we would surely realize that all seems possible to those who are into it. From the testimonies I grew hearing, it is not a surprise, for example, for one to turn into a hyena, ride of a hyena at night, fly to distant places seated on a *tsero* (winnowing utensil), enter a grave with the intent to feed on the flesh of a dead person as well as come out unnoticed, sniff out chicken bones from either the forehead or part of the body of a person and so many other mysterious acts. If such acts were done in a church context surely one would be tempted to call them miracles too and indeed they are if one is to go by the simple definition of a miracle as an amazing event that breaks the laws of nature, especially something that happens unexpectedly (South African Student’s Dictionary, 1996). All these acts generally classified under the term *chibhoyi* or *chivanhu* can hardly be said to be different from the alleged amazing wonders we hear now of charismatic prophets who are said to have caused a baby to be born after a ‘three-day gestation period, making the crippled walk and promising people that bald heads will grow hair while others without teeth would develop new teeth (Staff Reporter, 2013).

One, however, can neither claim with certainty that today’s charismatic prophets are deriving their powers from somewhere else other than God nor can one argue with absolute certainty that God is behind all their miraculous performances. Buttressing, however, the testimonies given by Sekuru Chadzira Panganai Chirimambowa, Nana Kwaku Bonsam and others which reflect that there could be something fishy about the moves of our contemporary charismatic prophets is the reported case of the once renowned prophet Muponda who became famous for making barren wives beget children. Muponda is known to have later confessed that he was a true traditional healer in religious gab. As attested in a newspaper article titled: Muponda— part prophet part traditional healer, the healer resurfaced and revealed that he was now leading an apostolic faith sect while at the same time practising as a traditional healer in Uzumba, Mashonaland East. Speaking to the news crew he said:

I am still a prophet and I go to ‘Kutenda Kuna Mwari’ Apostolic Faith Church which is a new church. People from the church that I founded (Kutungamirira Apostolic Church) wanted to make me an archbishop of the church but I refused. I pray for people from as early as 5am in the morning to noon and thereafter I put on my traditional garments and

consult the spirits. (Muponda cited in Muponda – part prophet part traditional healer, 2010).

The same is almost true for the Matthias and Mildred Ministries which once took Zimbabwe by storm around 2000. Later developments in their ministry showed that all was not well in their house and this saw their ministry nosedive to such an extent that one can hardly hear of them anymore.

Conclusion

Since no one can possibly claim to know or have an undisputed insight into the mystery behind the miraculous performances being done by today's charismatic prophets, perhaps the best position then one could take is the Gamaliel one (Acts 5:33-42). Faced with the mighty works which were being done under the hands of the apostles, Gamaliel is said to have advised his Sanhedrin colleagues: "[...] keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" (38-39). Surely if Prophet Khuleya's work and that of fellow pastors who are in the same fold is from God, nobody will have the capacity to destroy it no matter what critic levelled against it, but if it is from the other world it will suffer the same fate as the movements led by Theudas and Judas the Galilean.

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