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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE *KUROVA GUVA* RITUAL IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The adoption of kurova guva *as official liturgy by the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe in 1982 can be attributed to various forces within and outside it. The radicalization of the Catholic Association, a lay Catholic organization founded in 1934, during the nascent period of nationalism in Zimbabwe, provides one explanation. This lay movement not only found impetus in the growing cultural consciousness expressed in African nationalism; it also found a willing ally in the few Black clergy, the first of whom were ordained only in 1947, who were struggling to have their voice heard by the missionary clergy and hierarchy. The Black diocesan clergy later became a force to reckon with in the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, from 1972 when they formed the National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC). This paper traces the change that took place in the church when the Catholic Association, in conjunction with the NADC and other lay members in the church steered the theological discourse which culminated in the adoption of* kurova guva. *The paper also investigates how the Vatican Council II teachings on liturgical development provided the matrix to the discourse. This paper argues that* kurova guva *represents a classic case of the dynamic interaction between the gospel and culture in Africa. It also argues that the process of change which resulted in the new liturgy was unique within 'historical churches' in the sense that it started from the bottom and not from the top.*

THE RITUAL INTEGRATION of the deceased's spirit as an ancestor to the family *(kurova guva)* is viewed as one of the biggest doctrinal problems that the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe ever faced.[1] However, the ultimate acceptance of the *kurova guva* rituals as an approved liturgical practice in the Church, has become a much bigger doctrinal and liturgical success than most other adaptations.[2]

This paper investigates the dynamics and factors that favoured or inhibited the process of change which finally resulted in the adoption of the rite of *kuchenura munhu* as an official Catholic rite in 1982.

[1] Fr. Alapont (SMI), 'Liturgy in an African', Paper on liturgy, Gen/Sec File, Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference (RCBC), 2.

[2] Many interviewees ranging from bishops, priests, and lay Catholics echo this sentiment.

Firstly, we will examine the extent to which the second Vatican Council (1962–65) provided the impetus and framework for the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), to engage in the process of indigenizing the liturgy. Three distinct 'interest groups' within the Catholic Church in Rhodesia will be crucial in the discussion: these are the White missionary clergy, the Black indigenous clergy, and the Black laity. Of particular interest will be to establish the contribution that each 'interest group' made towards the new rite.

Secondly, we will investigate the extent to which the local Zimbabwean milieu, especially the political struggle for the transfer of power from a White minority to the Black majority, influenced the theological discourse in the Roman Catholic Church of the 1960s and 1970s. However, before going into these issues, it is necessary to shed some light on the Shona peoples' beliefs surrounding death and the hereafter as well as the relationship between the living and the dead.

DEATH AND THE DEAD AMONG THE SHONA

The Shona people, like many other African peoples, view death as an evil that shatters the relationships in the family and the clan. Death is frightening and brings with it confusion and uncertainty, not only to the family but to the community at large.

Immediately after death, the spirit of the deceased is considered 'unpredictable and dangerous'.[3] Consequently, the rites that are performed by the living relatives are based on the belief that the deceased's spirit leaves the body and continues to live. This life is, however, defined primarily in terms of the influence of the deceased on the community he or she has left behind. The initial rituals that are performed immediately after death therefore 'emphasise separation of the deceased from the community'[4] and aim to ensure that 'the spirit does not find its way back to the homestead to worry the living it has left behind'.[5] People cannot associate with it until such time as a ritual has been performed to welcome it into the family as a spirit elder, and to induct it into the community of the spirit ancestors. This is the ritual called *kurova guva* or *magadziro* or *kuchenura*.[6] *Kurova guva* often takes place between six months and two years after burial.[7] Apart from the two aims referred to above, the ritual is also

[3] M. F. C. Bourdillon, 'Traditional religion in Shona society', in A. J. Dachs (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi, 1* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1973), 11.

[4] M. F. C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1991), 44.

[5] Ibid.

[6] J. Kumbirai, 'Kurova guva and Christianity', in M. F. C. Bourdillon (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi, 2* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1977), 124.

[7] Rev. Mafurutu, RCBC, *Pastoral Service Supplement* (June 1972), I, 1.

associated with the final dissolution of the deceased's estate, the inheritance of widows and the installation of the new family head who carries the name of the deceased.[8]

Because of the perceived importance of the ritual of *kurova guva*, the living descendants of the deceased do their best to facilitate the spirit's home-coming. There are many steps taken before and after the actual *kurova guva*. We will briefly refer to the significance of these steps below.

i) ***Gata***

The family of the deceased consult a diviner (the thrower of the dice, *hakata*) in order to establish the desires of the spirit.[9] Another reason for going to the *gata* at this stage is to find out whether the grave was desecrated. If such violation occurred, there is need to rectify the anomaly before performing the *kurova guva*.

ii) **Consecrating the millet**

In the presence of the members of the family, the officiant, who in most cases is the eldest partenal aunt of the deceased, mixes millet in a pot (*kubata zviyo*). She tells the deceased that the millet is for his or her beer. She also informs the deceased that he or she is about to be inducted into the family and the world of the ancestors.[10] This ritual is the first step in the brewing of beer for the *kurova guva* ceremony.

iii) **Consecration of beer and the victims**

On the eve of the *kurova guva* ceremony, few other rituals are performed. These include the formal presentation of beer and one or two animal victims. The victim is either killed at the homestead or driven to the grave to be sacrificed.[11]

iv) **Procession to the grave**

After offering the victim to the deceased, family members and close friends process to the grave. Before anybody approaches the grave, the ritual friend (*sahwira*) or nephew (*muzukuru*) sprinkles the grave with water mixed with medicine obtained from the diviner. The purpose of this ritual is to resacralize the grave which may have been desecrated by witches.[12]

[8] J. Kumbirai, 'Kurova guva', 123.

[9] Rev. Mafurutu, RCBC, *Pastoral Supplement*, 2.

[10] Ibid.

[11] E. Magava, 'African customs connected with the burial of the dead in Rhodesia', in Dachs (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi, I*, 155.

[12] Rev. Mafurutu RCBC, *Pastoral Supplement*, 2.

At the grave, close relatives are invited to make a formal address to the spirit. This is followed by pouring beer libations on the grave. This act signifies the fellowship (*udyidzani*) between the living members of the family and the spirit being welcomed home.[13]

If a victim is to be sacrificed at the graveyard, it is then slaughtered, skinned, roasted and some of the meat offered to the spirit while the rest would be shared among those present. After this people go back home celebrating the home-coming of the spirit.

Back in the homestead, the family elder addresses the spirit and informs it that the family have done their duty to bring it home. It is then given a pot of beer which is shared with those participating. More dancing and beer-drinking follows.

Once inducted into the family, the spirit can now be honoured in the home. Beer can be brewed in honour of the spirit and whenever other family ancestors are honoured (*bira*) the name of this spirit is also invoked.[14]

v) **The inheritance ceremony (*nhaka*)**

According to Bourdillon, 'the general principle . . . is that a man's personal name and position can be inherited only by a son, but his position as head of a large family group may be inherited by a younger brother'.[15] At the ceremony attended by the deceased's brothers, aunts and nephews, the widows are expected to accept an inheritor as the husband. If the widows do not wish to be inherited by a kinsman of their late husband then the marriage is dissolved.[16]

As part of the inheritance process, the widows were often required to undergo a ritual test called *kudarika uta*. This was meant to show that they had remained faithful to their dead husband and his family.[17]

Once an inheritor was accepted by the widows he would be expected to perform the duties that were placed upon him by virtue of his new status. The first duty is to lead the distribution of the deceased's estate to the appropriate kin.[18] This ceremony concludes the *kurova guva*.

The value of the rituals

The major importance of the rituals surrounding *kurova guva* is to dramatize the common bond between the living and the dead. They underscore and reassert the Shona people's most cherished value of community. Through

[13] Interview with Mr Maturure, Mukaro, 28 Aug. 1991.
[14] M. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1987), 212.
[15] Ibid., 216.
[16] Ibid., 215.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

the rituals of *kurova guva* the deceased and the living are reunited. Bourdillon, however, makes an apt observation when he says that apart from the manifest purpose of *kurova guva*, there is a latent function, which is 'to help the living to cope with death and perhaps to overcome the conflicts of inheritance'.[19]

MISSION CHURCHES AND SHONA TRADITIONAL FUNERARY RITUALS

When the Jesuit missionaries began their work in Matabeleland in 1879 they were convinced of the liberating power of the Scriptures. They demanded 'not only a break with the traditional religious systems, but also an abandonment of the African background'.[20] After the defeat of the Shona by the British South Africa Company in the 1896–7 *Chimurenga* war, most missions began to enforce regulations on Catholics at mission farms against Shona practices. Proscribed practices included beer-drinking, polygyny, ancestral veneration and traditional dancing.[21]

With regard to *kurova guva*, the early missionaries taught that to take part in it was a grave sin. Taking part in the ceremonies was understood to be participation in 'ancestral worship' and therefore contrary to the first commandment.[22] The Chishawasha Catechism explicitly condemned the *kurova guva* ceremony.[23] However, the missionaries apparently saw no relationship between the traditional burial rituals and the *kurova guva* ceremony and there is no documentary evidence to show that the former were banned.

Although the catechism condemned *kurova guva*, many Jesuit missionaries remained hopeful that the custom would die a natural death.[24] To their dismay, the practice continued unabated. Such a lapse into the non-Christian ('pagan') habits was met with austere measures such as expulsion from sacraments, prohibition from entering the church during mass, or relegation to the back of the church when admitted.[25] The strongest disciplinary measure taken against those who did not obey the mission regulations was eviction from the Mission farm.[26] At Chishawasha,

[19] Bourdillon, *Religion and Society*, 45.

[20] N. Bhebe, 'Missionary activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga, A survey', in Dachs (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi, 1*, 45.

[21] Ibid., 46.

[22] J. Dachs and W. Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1979), 9.

[23] *Chishawasha Catechism* (Salisbury, Chishawasha Press, 1934), Question 85.

[24] Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 244.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Bhebe, 'Missionary activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga', 46.

the late Fr. Collin Zhuwawo notes, 'Fr. H. Quinn . . . took the (*kurova guva*) ban very seriously and as a result many families were evicted from Chishawasha between 1930 and 1932 for not keeping the ban'.[27]

The African Catholics' response

There was resistance to the ban on *kurova guva* from Shona Catholics.[28] Many Catholics viewed the prohibitions by missionaries as a negation of 'the very essence of their (Shona) understanding of the spiritual world'.[29] It is within the context of the violated spirituality of the Shona that we can understand the resistance that emanated from Shona Catholics regarding *kurova guva*.

The resistance often took subtle secretive forms.[30] For instance, many Catechumens and full members promised not to perform the ritual but, when death occurred in the family, they would secretly perform or participate in the *kurova guva*. Expulsion from the mission farm was painful but it did not necessarily deter the practice. Some left the mission farms and, indeed, the Church. However, the majority discovered other ways of continuing the practice without being detected by the missionary priest.[31]

Some Catholics developed compromise rituals which were held publicly, camouflaged by new rites, commonly called '*musande*', or '*bavhadheyi*' or '*bigidina*' depending on area.[32] Before the ceremonies, a priest would be invited to come and bless the grain for the beer which was to be brewed for the participants' consumption. At the ceremony the priest was also asked to conduct a service of Christian prayers, mostly extemporaneous, and hymns.[33] At this ceremony both Christian and non-Christian relatives and friends would be invited to feast in honour of the spirit of the dead. This took place at the Christian village.

Other Catholics, however, developed different ways from the one referred to above.

[27] C. Zhuwawo, 'An Investigation of the VaShawasha *Kurova Guva* Ceremony and the Catholic Teaching on Life After Death', Cf. Chishawasha Mission Archives at the Jesuit Archives, Box 1H7, File 3 (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, B.A. (Hons) dissertation, 1990), 25.

[28] Rev. Kapito, Report on *Kuchenura Munhu* Catechism, RCBC Gen/Sec. File Kg 78FMM, 2.

[29] Kumbirai, 'Kurova guva', 127.

[30] Kapito, *Kuchenura Munhu*, 2.

[31] Ibid.

[32] (i) *Musande* — the feast in respect of the personal saint of the deceased Christian. (ii) *Bavhadheyi* or *bigidina* — (lit). Feast or birthday feast, characterized by lots of eating, drinking and dancing. c.f. Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 9, and Kumbirai, 'Kurova guva', 127.

[33] Kumbirai, 'Kurova guva', 128–9.

These Christians, instead of performing *kurova guva* on the (mission) estate. . . . took some soil from the grave of the deceased in the mission cemetery and went with it to the Tribal Trust Lands (communal lands). When they got there the family that wanted to perform *kurova guva* ritual killed a black goat and cut its head off and with some soil which they brought from the mission cemetery buried the goat's head in a new grave.[34]

This practice is known as '*kutora mudzimu*' (i.e taking away the spirit of the deceased). In the traditional context such a ritual was performed by families that were emigrating to far off places. The idea was to have their ancestors emigrate with them to the new place where they were going to settle. However, the ritual was a sign that the members still cherished the ancestor's protection.[35] Taking away the spirit from the mission cemetery to their original homes for a second burial enabled the Catholics on the mission farms to honour their dead without incurring the wrath of the missionary priests, which invariably led to eviction. The *kurova guva* ceremony would take place in the communal lands over the weekend and the priests at the mission were left in the dark regarding the ceremony.[36]

The priests, particularly the mission superior, had the power to evict the Catholic tenants from the farm. This meant loss of the 'new' life that the tenant had grown accustomed to. Evidently it was because of the priest's capacity to accept or expel African tenants on a Mission farm that these clandestine forms of *kurova guva* were developed.

Not much dialogue regarding policy issues or the African's spiritual concerns took place. A new situation had to develop before a new mentality emerged.

The Catholic Association and its role

From the late fifties and early sixties some more directed opposition against the ban on *kurova guva* came from the Catholic Association (CA). This was a Black lay organization that was founded in 1934.[37] The CA became nationwide in 1955 and grew by 1961 to include over 5 000 paid up members.[38] From the late fifties and early sixties, when few Black

[34] Kapito, *Kuchenura Munhu*, 2.

[35] Interview with Mr Makanyire, Nov. 26 1991; Also, Mr Manhondo of Gokomere referred to a case that he personally knew in which this was done, 29 Aug. 1990.

[36] Kapito, *Kuchenura Munhu*, 2.

[37] Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 193.

[38] Ibid., 194. See also CA Territorial Council Meetings, 1955 — Apostolate of the Laity, Diocese of Harare Archives.

indigenous priests were ordained, the CA invited some to say mass at their congresses and the annual general meetings.[39] Notable among the earliest African priests were Joseph Kumbirai and Raymond Kapito, who were also asked to give talks on the Church's relationship to culture. At these forums the question of *kurova guva* 'came up again and again'.[40] The CA members are said to have persistently expressed their discontent at the church's stance against the African ways of honouring their deceased parents and relatives. They wanted the ban on *kurova guva* lifted and the Church to give them guidance on how to practise the ritual in a Christian way.[41]

There are a number of reasons that might explain this growing anxiety for the Church to give guidance on how to practice *kurova guva* in a Christian way. Firstly, the fifties and sixties were associated with a militant nationalism that was to leave an impact on the social and religious scene in colonial Zimbabwe. After the collapse of the 1961 constitutional arrangements some mission schools and churches, including Roman Catholic churches, were attacked and burnt in civil disorders.[42] This was apparently because of the late Archbishop Francis Markall's call on Catholics to vote in the 1961 elections.[43] Markall called specifically on Catholic leaders, Robert Mugabe and Leopold Takawira to encourage Blacks to vote. However, only very few people voted.[44] The Bishop's call may have strengthened many Catholics' thinking that the Church identified with the colonial state and colonial structures. A few CA leaders led by Ambrose Majongwe resigned and joined politics on a full time basis as a result.[45] The CA took advantage of this political situation to drive home the need for reform in the church.

Secondly, at the beginning of this period of nationalistic awakening, in 1958, Pope John XXIII made an announcement on the need for reform in the Church. He also announced the convening of the Second Vatican Council and called for the whole Church to prepare for it. Since the CA was headed by Black educated Catholics, mainly teachers and trade unionists, the new wind blowing from Rome influenced them to be more forceful in their demands on the Church.

[39] Kapito, *Kuchenura Munhu*, 6.

[40] Ibid., 2.

[41] Minutes of the Bishops' Conference Meeting, 2BM, 1963, 6.

[42] A. Astrow, *Zimbabwe: A Revolution That Lost Its Way?* (London, Zed Press, 1983), 37.

[43] I. Linden, *The Catholic Church and the Struggle for Zimbabwe* (London, CIIR, 1979), 36.

[44] B. C. D. Mugabe, 'The nationalist movement of Dzimbabwe', in Daniels (ed.), *Drums of War* (New York, The Third Press, 1974), 36.

[45] Lay Apostolate, Catholic Association (File 1946–67), Box 412 of Salisbury Diocese Archives. Minutes of the Executive of the Territorial Council of the CA, 10 Jan. 1962, 1.

The ordination of indigenous priests provided great encouragement to the lay organization. Some of the indigenous priests were found to have keen interest in the culture of the Shona. More than the missionary priests, they were viewed to be approachable on, and conversant with, the question of *kurova guva*. The CA therefore approached them as potential mediators with the Bishops.[46]

The availability of indigenous priests did not necessarily bring about an easy breakthrough. On the contrary, many of them found it difficult to explain the custom intelligibly to the hierarchy, in spite of the fact that some of the missionary clergy had studied closely the Shona way of life.[47] The indigenous priests were, however, not discouraged by the apparent failure to make an impact. Rather they began to view their role in a new light; they decided to research on the *kurova guva* ceremony within its traditional context and to advise the hierarchy on aspects that the church could adapt.[48] In the early sixties the question of lifting the ban on *kurova guva* rituals became a common item on the agenda of the African priests in the Archdiocese of Salisbury.

DEVELOPING LOCAL LITURGIES WITH VATICAN II IN PERSPECTIVE

In article 40 of the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, the Second Vatican Council addresses the relationship between the gospel and local cultures pleading for a multi-cultural and plural Church. The Council recommended that in some missionary lands, where circumstances demanded, a radical adaptation of the liturgy was necessary. Under these circumstances, the Council requested the competent territorial ecclesiastic authority to 'carefully and prudently consider which elements from traditions and cultures of individual peoples might appropriately be admitted into divine worship'.[49]

In a post-conciliar document, *Ecclesia Sanctae*, produced a year after the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI provided a framework of norms to expedite the council's recommendations regarding the liturgy. The norms requested episcopal conferences to set up study groups, the tasks of which were

> to examine the thought of the people on the universe, on man and on his attitude to God, and undertake theological reflection on what is good and true in their culture.[50]

[46] ZCBC File, *Kurova Guva*, 3.

[47] Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 225.

[48] RCBC Minutes, 1963, 2BM, 6.

[49] Vatican II, 'Constitution on sacred liturgy, article 40', in Abbott, W. (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New Jersey, New Century Publishers, 1966), 151–2.

[50] *Ecclesia Sanctae*, 6 Aug., 1966. See Flannery, A. (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York, Costello Publishing Company, 1987), 857.

Pope Paul VI also called for the appointment of commissions on an *ad hoc* basis to investigate cultural questions such as marriage and rites of passage.[51]

In the teachings referred to above, we see a gradual conceptual development in the Roman Catholic Church, regarding the relationship between the Gospel and culture. While this theoretical framework was meant to yield more pastoral benefits in each local church, it would make the whole Church more dynamic and truly Catholic as the diversity of cultures became reflected in it. However, this dynamism in some ways became a burden on some hierarchies since it laid on them the primary responsibility of studying and understanding the dynamics of the local situation. Liturgical models would come from the local churches and be sent to Rome for approval or disapproval rather than uniform liturgical models coming from Rome to local churches. We now move on to the experiments carried out with the blessing of the Bishops' Conference in Zimbabwe, and then assess their value within the context of the local church.

Towards a Shona-based liturgy

Caught up in the web of political, social and pastoral changes operating in colonial Rhodesia as well as from Rome, the Catholic Church in Rhodesia embarked on a programme of liturgical transformation. During the 1963 recess of the Second Vatican Council, the Rhodesian Catholic bishops discussed African customs *vis-à-vis* the Church. Since the bishops had neither the time, (because they would soon go back to the Council in Rome) nor the resources adequate to exhaust such a wide-ranging subject, they agreed to delegate the Inter-diocesan Liturgical Commission to investigate the degree to which African customs, which had a religious nature, could be incorporated in Catholic worship.[52]

Some local priests from both Salisbury and Gwelo dioceses began studying the Shona customs of *kurova guva*. Not a small number insisted that the *kurova guva* practice could be Christianized.[53] Of note was Rev. Joseph Kumbirai who pleaded with the bishops that the whole liturgy needed a total overhaul in order that it should meet the spiritual needs of the African worshippers.[54]

Gwelo diocese played a significant role in exerting pressure on the hierarchy's thinking towards *kurova guva*. Priests in Chilimanzi were in

[51] Ibid.

[52] RCBC, Minutes 2BM, 1963, 6.

[53] Fr J. Kumbirai was in the forefront of the *kurova guva* campaign. RCBC Minutes, IBM, 1967.

[54] Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 225.

the forefront in investigating the practice with a view to proposing a solution that would enable Catholics to take part in *kurova guva* with a good conscience.

Bishop Haene of Gwelo diocese had observed that Catholics often performed the rites despite the Church's prohibition. He was also convinced that the custom was going to be practised for a period much longer than anticipated by the early Jesuit missionaries to Zimbabwe. He felt that it was important to Christianize *kurova guva* since the pressure on Christians remained very strong.[55]

The enthusiasm to reform the Church seems to have become uncontrollable as bishops lost track of developments in their dioceses. In both Salisbury and Gwelo dioceses, African priests led 'uncontrolled experimentation . . . in regard to African customs'.[56]

In 1968, the Archbishop of Salisbury heard from some diocesan priests that Fr. J. Kumbirai had devised a *kurova guva* ceremony which attempted 'to accommodate the pagan rite to Christian beliefs'. The priests who told the Bishop thought that Kumbirai's position was too radical.[57] In the Salisbury diocese, there was also Fr. Mavudzi who had drawn up an alternative rite of *kurova guva* which was yet to be discussed.[58] Meanwhile in Gwelo diocese, some missions had continued the ceremony of *kuita musande* (celebrating a saint's day) and had adapted most of the elements from the traditional *kurova guva* ritual.[59]

Although the diocesan priests were not agreed on what sort of ritual the church was to produce, many agreed that *kurova guva* had to be Christianized. They therefore stopped suppressing the experiments by other priests.

In Umtali diocese, Bishop Lamont set up a commission to investigate whether or not *kurova guva* was to be Christianized.[60] A survey carried out by the commission revealed that while Catholics in the diocese were generally interested in *kurova guva*, their interest had been awakened by the politicians for their own purposes. Many Catholics therefore advocated a cautious adaptation of elements in *kurova guva* like belief in the power of ancestors on the living, consulting diviners, making libations of beer on the grave and the inheritance ceremony. The commission also found that the Church's explicit condemnation of the *kurova guva* was unacceptable.[61]

[55] RCBC Minutes, IBM, 1967, 225.
[56] RCBC Meeting, IBM, 1968, 3.
[57] RCBC Meeting 2BM, 1968, 9.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] RCBC Minutes, IBM, 1968, 11.
[61] RCBC Minutes, 2BM 1968, 9.

After completing the survey, the Umtali Diocesan Committee made important recommendations to the Bishop. They argued that since *kurova guva* was only one aspect of a much larger problem facing the faithful, the whole tradition of Shona culture had to be studied and consultation with the elders and other churches be undertaken.[62]

The Bishops' Conference found the recommendations made by the Umtali Diocesan Commission worth adopting. The bishops agreed to set up an Inter-diocesan Committee to investigate the matter in all its aspects, 'to consult other churches, to call in anthropologists and priests engaged in pastoral work . . . and not only local priests'.[63] The crucial issues to be tackled by the Committee were

> whether the honour paid to the *midzimu* (i.e. ancestors) and the manner of expressing it by offering rapoko was a sacrifice in the strict sense, and whether the power attributed to the *midzimu* derogates the power of the Almighty.[64]

In March 1969 when the Bishops' Conference met, it was reported that the Inter-diocesan Committee set up the previous year was in the process of preparing a final working draft on *kurova guva*. The report, submitted three months later was not unanimous but carried one minority report from Fr. Mavudzi of Salisbury. The report by the majority, however, argued that *kurova guva* and similar ancestral rites were to be understood in the context of the fourth Commandment ('Honour thy father and thy mother') rather than the first (against honouring false gods). Hence such practices were not idolatrous nor against Catholic faith. The committee therefore recommended the lifting of the ban on *kurova guva*, for pastoral reasons.[65]

The committee's report, however, stressed the Church's duty to inform the faithful's consciences. They argued that it was imperative to produce an adult Catechism that would form the basis of an inculturated liturgy on *kurova guva*. Without this, the lifting of the ban would result

> in the great revival of *mudzimu* cult, *mashave* and *mhondoro* (i.e. the cult of ancestors and other territorial and foreign spirits) . . . and could lead the faithful to go back to the pagan rites without any change of disposition.[66]

The proposed Catechism was meant to bear a clear christocentric character.

The committee's stance on *kurova guva* was based on recent pastoral developments within the universal Church. Its members took into consideration the fact that cremation, a practice formerly condemned by

[62] Ibid.

[63] RCBC Minutes, 2BB, 1968, 9.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Dachs and Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, 225.

[66] RCBC, Minutes of the Pastoral Committee, 18th July 1973, 2.

the Church for doctrinal reasons, had now been allowed. Secondly, they viewed the acceptance by Rome of the second mortuary ceremony of 'washing of the grave' in the Chinese rites as a classic case of inculturation worth emulating.

Thirdly, the report argued, it was 'an accepted missiological principle that Christianity must become a leaven in society and be present in all the important events and happenings in the way of life of the people'.[67] On these bases, the committee argued that to impose a ban while doing nothing effectively to influence or direct the evolution of this traditional practice was not a good pastoral practice. It would only be counter-productive.

Fourthly, the report stressed the principle that Christianity should preserve what was good and purge the erroneous elements of the traditional practices and beliefs. They noted that the veneration of Saints in Europe evolved in such a way. A similar evolution had to be expected in the case of *kurova guva* and other traditional practices. The committee stressed the role of the Black indigenous clergy and laity, as against an imposition by the hierarchy and missionary priests in the evolution to be undertaken. However, the role of the hierarchy remained important as advisory.[68]

The report produced by the inter-diocesan Committee was extensive and sounded progressive. However, a minority report referred to above rejected the *kurova guva* and ancestor veneration in general. It called upon Catholic members and their relatives to engage in a simple ceremony of comforting the bereaved — *nyaradzo*.[69]

The conflicting recommendations and claims made in the two reports, and led by two prominent indigenous priests (Kumbirai and Mavhudzi), created some concern within the Bishop's Conference. The bishops decided that there was need for more intimate knowledge of local attitudes and practices regarding *kurova guva* before any practical moves were made towards developing it into a liturgical service. They also argued that although the Shona comprised closely related ethnic groups (i.e. Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Ndau, Korekore, etc.) there existed ethnic differences that could not be ignored.

The bishops placed the onus of identifying these fine differences and of pressing them into a liturgical service of *kurova guva* on the Black indigenous clergy. This, however, was deemed practical only after the indigenous clergy were organized into a national association.

The bishops further noted that since the dioceses were going through a general restructuring following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, it was important that as and when the process was concluded,

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

the indigenous clergy, in consultation with lay associations and councils, carry the burden of inculturation. But before such time came, the bishops stressed the need for the laity to receive the required formation, theological or otherwise. Both missionary and indigenous clergy were therefore called upon to make concerted effort in the formation of the laity regarding inculturation.

No significant developments took place regarding *kurova guva* until the founding of the National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) in January 1973.[70] The purpose of the association was, among others,

> to implement the Spirit of co-responsibility and dialogue recommended by Vatican II; to foster the unity of mind and action among the clergy themselves and their hierarchy which has its source in the priesthood they share for the service of the people of God; to provide its members with an official channel of communication and support, among themselves and with other pastoral bodies within and outside Rhodesia.[71]

At their meeting in December, 1973 the indigenous diocesan clergy supported the recommendation of the majority report by the Inter-diocesan Committee to lift the ban on *kurova guva*.[72]

At a meeting in June 1974 the Bishops accepted the recommendations by both the Inter-diocesan Committee and the NADC to lift the ban on *kurova guva*.[73] It was at this meeting that the Bishop of Wankie proposed that a pastoral guide be prepared which would preserve and stress all cultural values that were not clearly against the faith in order that they too could be accepted in the church. He also proposed that the inculturation of *kurova guva* ceremony be undertaken without delay. Both proposals were accepted by the Bishops' Council which in turn asked the Pastoral Centre to prepare a pastoral guide. The Pastoral Centre was asked to work in collaboration with African priests.[74]

Later in 1974, members of the Pastoral Committee met at Chishawasha, and formally dissolved the existing Inter-diocesan Committee on *kurova guva*. In its stead, a theological commission was set up to work out the arguments put forward in the draft report presented to the RCBC by the Inter-diocesan Committee and the NADC. The commission's mandate was

[70] R. Randolph, *Report to Rome* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1978), 32.

[71] Ibid.

[72] National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) Meeting, 17 Dec. 1973, in NADC file, Gokomere Training Centre, Minutes, 4.

[73] RCBC Minutes, 7BM, 1973, 6.

[74] Ibid.

to make a theological argument and not to examine the evidence nor to pass judgement on the work produced by the former committee.[75] It was also required to consider Fr. Mavudzi's minority report and the *Pastoral Service Supplement* on *kurova guva*, which had just been published by the Pastoral Centre.[76]

After the theological commission had analysed these documents, all members except one co-opted indigenous priest were in favour of recommending the *kurova guva* for liturgical purposes. The local priest who abstained, Fr. Bernard Ndhlovu, argued that time was not ripe for a final decision.[77]

Fr. Ndhlovu argued that after a careful study of Shona, Ndebele and Kalanga practices of reinstatement of the dead, he had arrived at the conclusion that what they did was at best a form of religious sacrificial act. This sacrifice, he argued, was directed to the spirit of the deceased and not to God. He went further to argue that the whole ceremony was in violation of the first commandment. Secondly, Fr. Ndhlovu wondered whether the church was going on to baptize the diviner too. He stressed that it would be doing injustice to view *kurova guva* in isolation from the cultural practices such as divination and others.[78]

Another point that he raised was that people performed the ceremony out of fear based on the assumption that the spirit of the deceased had the power over the living if they did not perform the rite. If the overall motive then was to pacify the spirit, Fr. Ndhlovu argued, then the practice was not only evil, but incongruous with the Christian faith. Finally, Fr. Ndhlovu took exception to the idea of reinstatement of the spirit of the deceased into the family. He argued that the whole practice was against the Church's teaching regarding the disembodied spirit after death.[79]

The majority of the commission's members felt that Fr. Ndhlovu's understanding of sacrifice was not theological in the Roman Catholic Church's view. The theological definition that this commission and previous committees on the *kurova guva* used viewed sacrifice as 'a special act of external worship by which something which can be perceived by the senses, is legitimately offered to God . . . the action of offering involving a certain change in the thing being offered — to show recognition of His supreme majesty'.[80] The majority in the commission insisted that the

[75] Ibid.

[76] Rev. Mafurutu, 'Reinstatement of a deceased person', *RCBC Pastoral Service Supplement* (June 1973), II.

[77] RCBC Minutes, 7BM, 1973, 4.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid. Fr. Ndhlovu viewed the concept of disembodied spirit as contrary to that of bodily resurrection taught by the church. (1 Cor. 15: 35–30).

[80] Rev. Kapito, 'Kuchenura Munhu', 29.

beast (*n'ombe yenhevedzo*) and the goat (*mbudzi yeshungu*) should not be viewed as sacrifice in the theological sense but as food for the invited guests and all participants and that it symbolized the honour and respect paid to the deceased. The *kurova guva* ceremony was therefore primarily doing one's duty to the departed spirit and fulfilling one's family obligation. While the majority agreed with Fr. Ndhlovu that *kurova guva* should not be viewed in isolation from ancestral veneration, they felt that this could not stand in the way of the rite being baptized as Christian.

Kurova guva ceremony and other practices concerning *midzimu* were viewed by these members as not intrinsically incompatible with the Christian faith and morals.[81] The Theological Commission endorsed the Inter-diocesan Committee's position that *kurova guva* and the overall Shona belief in communing with and depending on ancestors provided fertile soil for the church's teaching and belief in the communion of Saints. The Church teaches that Saints have communion with the living and intercede on behalf of the living to God. The majority members therefore viewed the status of the ancestors as comparable to that of Saints since the spirit brought back home to protect the family is also expected to intercede to the senior family ancestors (*madzitateguru*).

On Fr. Ndhlovu's reservations regarding the fate of the spirit of the dead, the Theological Commission also adopted the position based on the Catholic teaching on the doctrine of purgatory. According to this teaching, those in a state of grace, but still retaining after-effects of repented sins as well as those retaining unrepented venial sins, need to undergo purification before they can receive the beatific vision. They also need the prayers and especially the Masses of the faithful who can help them in their state of purification. The commission argued that since, according to the Shona, purification (*kuchenura*) was necessary because death was believed to inflict a 'black spell' on the spirit of the deceased, *kurova guva* was not incongrous with the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Integral in the beliefs and practice of purification was the duty and responsibility of the living to the dead performed in the hope that the spirit would be given a place in the other world.[82]

Apart from the theological justification that the majority members provided, it was also argued that pastorally one could not totally abolish a custom that was so ingrained in the culture of the people.[83] A verdict passed by the majority of the commission's members was that there was sufficient evidence in the history of the church to allow accommodation of

[81] RCBC Minutes, 7BM, 1973, 4.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

the *kurova guva* rites in the Church. The members envisaged that accommodation would happen gradually and that perhaps both the Christianized and traditional rites might exist side by side for some time although eventually the erroneous elements would fade out while the Christian rite would prevail.[84]

The theological commission recommended not only the lifting of the ban on *kurova guva*, but that it be Christianized for liturgical purposes. They passed on however, the formulation of the pastoral procedures on the new rites to the responsibility of the bishops with advice from African priests and the faithful.[85]

The role of local priests in the Christianization of *kurova guva*

As soon as the Theological Commission completed its assignment and reported to the Bishop's Conference, the bishops handed over the responsibility of consulting Black clergy to Bishop Chakaipa, the newly appointed and only African Bishop in the country. In turn Bishop Chakaipa requested the National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) to present their recommendations.[86]

In 1977, the NADC set up diocese-based commissions, whose findings were finally tabled at a special *kurova guva* workshop that they held later in the year. The priests who headed the diocesan commissions were required to invite at least one lay person well versed in the *kurova guva* ceremony. This was viewed as an effective way of ensuring that there was consultation at the grassroots levels.[87]

At the workshop, which was held at Driefontein towards the end of 1977, the objective was to receive reports from the Shona-speaking dioceses, upon which to formulate the final guidelines for *kurova guva*. Only three diocesan representatives turned up at the workshop. These were from Salisbury, Gwelo and Umtali. Of these, Gwelo diocese produced a well researched and comprehensive guideline that was later adopted by the participants, with few amendments.

In the three proposed guidelines presented at the workshop, there were some views shared in common by the diocesan committees. These were that *kurova guva* had to be Christianized as a matter of urgency; the role of the diviner (*gata*) was rejected; offerings of grain, an animal victim and beer was acceptable. Salisbury diocese's report, however, raised one

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] NADC/B15, Letter to Fr. Makusha, Chairman of NADC, from RCBC Secretary, August 1974.

[87] NADC, Dec., 1976.

issue not given much attention by other diocesan committees. The report took exception to the singing of war (*ngondo*) songs by some Shona groups, at the time when the spirit is symbolically being welcomed to the homestead from the graveyard.[88]

As the workshop went into discussion panels, much disagreement surfaced from the participants on whether the diviner had to be totally excluded from the *kurova guva* ceremony. While some rejected the diviner's role and methods of divining as 'pagan', others argued that the diviner could assist the family by offering advice on procedural matters regarding the performance of the ritual. After more expostulation, the members unanimously adopted a position that the diviner's role was unacceptable at any stage of the *kurova guva* ritual.[89]

On concluding the workshop, the NADC had arrived at a majority decision that *kurova guva* be Christianized as a matter of urgency. The secretary of the Association was therefore tasked to send to the Bishop's Conference an amended version of the pastoral guidelines reflecting the NADC workshop's deliberations.[90] At the NADC executive meeting held at Gwelo on 6 March 1978, a final version of the rite of *kurova guva* was produced. Three days later, the NADC secretary sent the document to the RCBC. In a covering letter the secretary, on behalf of the NADC executive, requested the bishops to approve the proposed rite *ad experimentum* for three years.[91]

In its final version the NADC presented the purpose of the *kurova guva* rite as

a) calling back the ancestor (*kudana mudzimu*);
b) purification of the ancestor (*kuchenura mudzimu*);
c) reinstatement of the ancestor to his/her home (*kudzora mudzimu mumusha*); and
d) giving the name and inheritance (*kupa zita nekugadza nhaka*).[92]

They argued that any other rite of the *kurova guva* which did not meet such requirements and aspirations had no value for the Shona people.[93] They also argued that what made the rite Christian was not the removal of

[88] NADC, Dec., 1977.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Rev. Marimazhira, 'Kurova guva rite', 1975, 4.
[91] NADC, March, 1978, 4.
[92] NADC, 'The Christian rite of *kurova guva*', 3.
[93] Ibid.

questionable acts such as going to the diviner nor was it the presence and participation of the priest. Rather

what should essentially make the *kurova guva* a Christian rite is the Christian orientation of the proceedings . . . What really counts is precisely the desire and intention of the rite in and through Christ as the only one who can effectively bring about the real homecoming of the deceased. It is therefore the recognition in practice, namely that only Jesus Christ, the saviour, has the will and power to reconcile our beloved dead with God and with their fellow men and protect and bless those whom they have left behind, which can and will make the rite a truly Christian ceremony.[94]

The document sent to the Bishops by the NADC executive presented the rites in seven stages. According to the document the climax of the rite is the Mass held as people arrive at the homestead with the deceased being reinstated into the home and family.[95]

When the Bishops' Conference got the proposed rite from NADC they in turn referred it to the two indigenous bishops for comments. The two Bishops, Chakaipa and Chiginya, after careful examination, recommended the Bishops' Council to instruct the Commission for Christian Formation and Worship to redraft the proposed rite for liturgical purposes.

From *kurova guva* to *kuchenura munhu*

At an administrative meeting of the Bishops' Council in June 1978, the bishops produced a memorandum to the NADC expressing their desire that there should be a Catechism on the new rite of *kurova guva*. The bishops argued that the new rite be referred to as *kuchenura munhu*. This title was given as a result of their express wish to make the main aim of the rite 'to achieve a purification of the departed spirit, in harmony with that purification which we believe purgatory to effect'.[96]

The bishops went on to denounce the role of the diviner in the rites.

We do not believe in the role of the *n'anga*. We believe, with the certainty of faith, in God's providence over the deceased. We believe that this providence protects the dead person from all evil.[97]

In the same vein the bishops unequivocally rejected the anxiety of the living members regarding the desecration of the grave arguing that,

[94] Ibid., 1.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Memo to NADC, 7 June 1978.
[97] Ibid.

Since, in his graciousness, God allows people to share in His saving action, we can surely trust that the blessed ancestors, by their intercession with God, are able to play a part in protecting the recently dead person from harm.[98]

After making their position clear the Bishops' Council asked Archbishop Chakaipa to consult the NADC on the redrafting of the *kuchenura munhu* rite.

At their meeting in December 1978, NADC endorsed the RCBC's views on the rite. On the point regarding the title of the rite, the NADC argued that whether the rite was called *kurova guva* or *kuchenura munhu* was really immaterial. The concepts express one reality.[99] They also endorsed the appointed members who were to rework the rite and to subsequently work on the catechism on the rite.

According to Archbishop Chakaipa the committee had an unenviable task of looking into

the honour and respect that the Shona pay to their ancestors and then write a Catechism whose aim was to give a chance to the faithful to overcome fear and come to worship expressing ties of kinship and love beyond the grave.[100]

For a viable catechism to be evolved, Chakaipa observed, a prototype catechism had to be tested in a training programme of the faithful throughout the country. It was imperative therefore for the committee to undertake training courses with leaders of communities, teachers of faith and others who were expected to bring out some pastoral recommendations that would elevate and purify the traditional ceremony of *kuchenura munhu*.[101]

A fully-fledged committee on the *kurova guva* catechism could not meet. The major problem was that the members were full-time pastors, catechists and lay workers. And since the committee was broad-based having members from Gwelo and Salisbury dioceses and Sinoia Prefecture, it proved impossible to find suitable times and places to convene and produce a catechism and subsequently test it throughout the country. About half of the appointed members managed to meet to gather material and to make pastoral recommendations for the catechism. However, this committee finally submitted a catechism on *kuchenura munhu* which was written in Shona and did not consider Ndebele elements. The committee sent it to the Commission for Christian Formation and Worship for criticism and revision.[102] The latter sent it to the Bishops' Conference for adoption. This was at the beginning of 1980. The bishops in turn, sent it on to Rome.

[98] Ibid.
[99] NADC, December 1978, 5.
[100] Rev. Kapito, 'Kuchenura Munhu', 3.
[101] Ibid.
[102] ZCBC file, K/9 78, 2.

Finally on 9 April 1981, after having received Rome's approval, the ZCBC approved the catechism on *kurova guva ad experimentum* for three years. From then on the Christianized *kuchenura munhu* rite was accepted as official liturgy.[103] It was published in October 1982 by Mambo Press for use by all members of the Church.

SOME IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL POINTS TO NOTE IN THE CATECHISM

The catechism on *kuchenura munhu* instructs the faithful on the relationship between God and the ancestors. Because of the linguistic problem surrounding the Shona word *kupira*, the catechism interpreted the word in the context of presenting something to somebody. For instance '*kupira nyaya kunashe*' (presenting a case to the chief), or presenting a pot of beer to a visiting grandfather (*kupira hari yehwahwa kuna vasekuru vashanya*). Hence the stress is placed on honour bequeathed on somebody. The catechism therefore teaches that offering of libations to the ancestors or pouring libations of beer on the grave or the ground is not worshipping the deceased. Such actions are acceptable in the rite because they are 'purely symbolic gestures without sacrificial connotations in the theological sense'.[104] Such honour is equated to that given to the living, notwithstanding the element of fear of the dead by the living.

The catechism also discusses the *kuchenura munhu* rite in the light of the Catholic views of death, purgatory and the resurrection of the saints. It stresses the christocentric nature of the ceremony and this makes the rite different from the traditional ritual.[105]

The rite for use in the church consists of guided prayers and scripture teachings suited to,

a) blessing and presentation of rapoko grain for the *kurova guva*,
b) presentation and immolation of a goat victim for the purposes of purification and reconciliation between the family and the spirit of the deceased and the rest of the ancestors.

This is followed by the presentation and immolation of the beast (cow/ox, goat etc) to the deceased and to the rest of the ancestors. Finally comes the symbolic induction or reinstatement of the spirit into the family

[103] Rev. Kapito, 'Kuchenura Munhu', 3.
[104] *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1982), 3.
[105] Ibid.

and into the ancestor world and to heaven. These steps are followed by the celebration of mass with communal eating and drinking between the living and the departed elders.[106]

The impact of the rite and catechism

The publication of *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* in 1982 made public the Zimbabwean Catholic Church's acceptance of *kurova guva* as a liturgical celebration. In spite of the publication, however, it has not received much publicity among the faithful because it was not included in the hymn book (*munamato*) which, since 1967, has become the handbook on Faith for the ordinary Catholic. The popularity of *kuchenura munhu* as approved by the ZCBC has depended more on the role of the parish priest and informed Catechists.[107]

While the formerly controverted question regarding offering rapoko, the beast and libations to the ancestors and the deceased was specifically tackled in the rite and catechism, that regarding the consultation of diviners was not. The published rite and catechism is silent on this issue. The silence regarding this question was apparently necessitated by the diversity of opinion among both clergy and laity on the specific purpose of *gata* (consulting a diviner).

The position of many lay members interviewed regarding the role of the diviner in the *kuchenura munhu* rite is summarized by a leading layman. He argues that consulting a diviner is very important in order for him/her to shed light on the deceased's desires. 'This is part of the honour and request given to the dead. The family has to find out his/her mind before performing the rite.'[108] He goes on to argue that it is not all families that know the procedure regarding the ceremony.

Some know, some do not, depending on the interest of the elders. But because they now have to do it, it is important that they find out about the procedure. They may go to an elder in the village but most likely to a respectable diviner in the neighbourhood.[109]

The informant goes on to say that the rapoko porridge (*nhopi yezviyo*) eaten, using tree bark, by the immediate family members is mixed with medicines derived from a diviner. It is accompanied by the meat from a goat victim (*mbudzi yeshungu*) — indispensable in the ceremony in his area. The meal, he argues,

[106] Ibid.

[107] Interview with Fr. Jakata, Director of the Lay Apostolate, Gweru Diocese, 5 Aug. 1991.

[108] Interview with Mr Matururе, a seasoned Catholic leader of Mukaro Mission, 19 Oct. 1990.

[109] Ibid.

serves the purpose of preparing the members of the family for the ultimate reconcillation that occurs when the deceased is welcomed back home.[110]

It has already been pointed out that some Shona priests accepted the consultation of a diviner for procedural reasons. What they resented, however, was to consult the diviner for purposes of finding the culprit behind the death of the family member. Such consultation would lead to revenge, they argue.[111] Other Shona priests argue that while the process of consulting a diviner is not always necessary, it is invaluable especially for clarification on some areas of concern or ambiguity about what to do. These priests regard consultation of a diviner as a mere formality performed by people who generally know the procedure. This group of priests conclude that since consulting a diviner is not imperative but circumstantial for the *kurova guva*, banning it is not necessary.[112]

While these arguments show the diversity of opinion in the Zimbabwean Catholic clergy, the same diversity appears among its laity. Many people continue to consult diviners while others have moved away from the practice. Some follow the letter and spirit of the Shona ritual *kuchenura munhu* while others, oblivious of the new developments in the church, behave as though *kurova guva* is still banned. They still talk of having a *musande* when they perform the ceremony.[113]

While the *kuchenura munhu* rite has been received with a sense of relief and triumph, the contest between some lay persons and clergy and between some Shona clergy and the hierarchy have generated anxiety in the Bishops' Conference. As Bishop Karlen of Hwange diocese observed, the hierarchy has realized that old habits 'take some considerable time to alter. We live by Christian hope.'[114] Perhaps that is the right attitude to take; that remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the Second Vatican Council provided a major impetus for the Shona Catholics' desire to adjust ritual and liturgy to closer conformity

[110] Ibid.

[111] Supra.

[112] Interview with Rev. T. Jakata on 5 August 1991 at Gokomere Training Centre. He argues that a number of culture conscious and theologically sound priests in Gweru diocese and other dioceses think the same on this issue.

[113] Interview with Mr Manhondo at Gokomere Mission. He made an announcement of a Musande service the researcher attended on 29 August 1991. I had an interview with him later.

[114] Speech at the Roman Catholic Council of the Lay Apostolate Meeting on 5 October 1983 See *Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference Newsletter* (Oct. 1983), 4.

with African religious custom. The political situation in the country also became a factor to reckon with as the vigorous expression of nationalism in the 1960s charged the churches with complicity in colonialism and the neglect of African values. A radicalized lay movement, the Catholic Association and some culture-conscious indigenous clergy responded positively and started to fan the demands for change in the Church. These factors had a direct bearing on the liturgical developments that occurred in the Church in Zimbabwe. The acceptance of *kuchenura munhu/kurova guva* in the liturgy stands out as a classic case of inculturation of the gospel in Zimbabwe. That the missionary clergy took note of the call for change, and together with indigenous clergy and the laity found a way around the non-Christian rites was impressive. What they have come up with is a superbly innovative case of the 'taking flesh' of the gospel and the church in a particular cultural milieu.