

THE SHONA CONCEPT OF SPIRIT POSSESSION
(KUSVIKIRWA) AND THE PENTECOSTAL
PHENOMENON OF GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT
(KUPINDA MUMWEYA)

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The concept of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, although a neglected dimension in written African Theology and many Western mission churches, permeates the activities and functions of African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches.²⁶⁸ This paper suggests that the importance attached to the Holy Spirit in some Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe shares some tenets with the Shona concept of spiritual possession, especially the role played by the spirit world in the lives of the Shona people. This has led some critics to argue that, Pentecostal churches are spearheading the rejuvenation of the long lost African spirituality. Ivan M. Satyavrata observed that, “the genius of Pentecostalism is clearly the remarkable capacity of Pentecostal movements to incarnate themselves in various indigenous cultures, producing rich cultural and theological diversity particularly on the aspect of spirituality.”²⁶⁹ Critics would like to note that, the Zimbabwean Pentecostal operational concept of the Holy Spirit has produced a hybrid concept which to some extent is influenced by the traditional beliefs of the operation of the spirits in the lives of African traditionalist believers. The argument is further raised that the concept of the Holy Spirit, especially the value attached to glossolalia, besides having a Biblical background is more of an adopting the Shona

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²⁶⁸ Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994), p.vii.

²⁶⁹ Ivan M. Satyavrata, “Globalization of Pentecostalism” in Stanley M. Burgess (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 222.

worldview of spirits adapted to the Biblical texts. However, Christian Pentecostals have dismissed any similarities that are raised by critics on the understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit and the importance given to speaking in tongues as merely a misunderstanding of Christian pneumatology. Spirit possession as understood in ATR is taken as wholly the other or evil spirits.²⁷⁰ A sharp distinction is made between the devil, the evil one, the spirit that troubles and makes man sick, and the Holy Spirit who inspires, reveals and fills one with power and spiritual gifts.²⁷¹ The possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit or the in-filling by the Holy Spirit is quite different from possession by spirits and it is also clear that the Holy Spirit definitely excludes the others. Speaking in tongues in the Pentecostal fold features not as a continuation or replacement of traditional religious practices, but it is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance (Acts 2:3, 8:17, 19:6-7; 1 Cor.12:13; 1 John 2:20). In the Pentecostal fold, the spirit possession in the African Traditional Religion is classified under other evil spirits which are not from God but from a satanic source which does not acknowledge lordship and saviourship of Jesus. Satanic spirits are broadly taken as including other manifestations that fight against the broader church as acknowledged by Peter to Ananias in Acts 5:3.

²⁷⁰Biblical Texts are cited like 1 Corinthians 12: 10 "to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues and to still another interpretation of tongues". 1 John 4:1-2 "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of anti-christ, which you have heard is coming and even is now in the world". (NIV)

²⁷¹N. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution* (London: SPSK, 1981), p. 90; M. L. Stebbing, *Concepts of Salvation Amongst the African Independent Churches in Chipinge* (Zimbabwe, MTh dissertation, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1985), p. 106.

The Concept of the 'Spirit World', Salvation and the Community

The aspect of being in touch with the spiritual world is something linear and centrally important in the Shona worldview before one's birth, during one's life, at death and after death. The Shona interpretation of life is guided by their understanding of the spirit world and one cannot imagine a situation where one can claim to be irreligious or atheistic as proudly done by some people in the Western world. In the Shona worldview, one cannot ever think of a situation when s/he is not in contact with the spirits. Spirits are everywhere, such that they communally co-exist with the people. Life is communally lived and the guiding philosophy is 'I AM BECAUSE WE ARE or A PERSON IS A PERSON WITH OTHER PEOPLE-Unhuism,' which guides how one conducts himself/herself. It is the Shona belief that what one does can affect or benefit the community, such that they try by all means to make sure that one's conduct does not offend the spirits and bring curses on the entire community. The Shona concept of salvation is communal and not individual. In order to have peace, the 'living-living' must be in contact with the 'living-dead.' That is the same with rituals which are done on behalf of everybody living in the community, it does not matter if one is faraway. In the Shona belief, names are mentioned pleading with the spirits for the protection of all the community members. Critics point out that, the universal calling by Pentecostals for all Christians to speak in tongues finds no problems amongst the Shona, as they believe in working for the total well-being and protection of the community. Although, people can make individual decisions on some cases, the community or the extended family plays a greater role in the individual's life in relation to the communication with the spiritual world.

Possession is one aspect that makes communication with the spiritual world possible among the Shona.²⁷² It is not surprising that possession plays a central role in ATR and the Shona people regard it as not enough for the spirit to merely exist without publicly manifesting to its audience. G. Parrinder observed that the African Traditional Religion is essentially a spiritual religion.²⁷³ The Shona people are always in touch with the spiritual world and it becomes very sensible to continue with this link even in church, in case of an attack by evil spirits. The spirits in the Shona belief system always manifest amongst the living, communing with the living. The spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living dead. The understanding is that the spirits dwell in the woods, bush, forest, rivers, and mountains or just around the villages. So failure to communicate with the living dead or *Vadzimu* is regarded as extremely dangerous and disturbing to the social and individual conscience.²⁷⁴ The spirit pervades all the aspect of life in the Shona person's world view.

The Shona spiritual world views have a tripartite cosmology in which the physical, spiritual and the dead (underworld) are in communion. Critics regard that as resonating well with the Pentecostal emphasis on demonology,²⁷⁵ an aspect which connects with the Shona traditional belief in spirits, but negatively regarded amongst

²⁷²M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1976), p. 241.

²⁷³G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Hutschison, 1954), p. 24

²⁷⁴J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), p. 83.

²⁷⁵The doctrine of demons plays a greater role in most of the African Pentecostal Churches particularly Zimbabwean ones. However, the emphasis is on the believers to be freed from such demons or evil spirits. Usually evil spirits for Pentecostals imply any "spirits" that manifest itself amongst the Shona people. The only spiritual power they recognise is that of God and Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Christians particularly Pentecostals. Demons are interpreted as occupying every place and space.²⁷⁶ The Pentecostal concept of pneumatology takes into consideration the spiritual concerns of the Shona people by negatively reversing the role of 'spirits' in the lives of Shona Christian believers, hence forming the grassroots theology that is relevant and beneficial to Pentecostal missiology. The spiritual world view of Africans is very rich and of importance in formulating the missiology of every Church which seeks to win the hearts of Africans, particularly the Shona people.

Tabona Shoko argues that, there are different types of spirits: ancestors (*vadzimu*, sing. *midzimu*), avenging spirits²⁷⁷ (*ngozi*, sing. *ngozi*) and alien spirits (*mashavi*, sing. *shavi*). These types of spirits get attention from the Shona people through illness. The illness by ancestral spirits and alien spirits is not meant to kill the victim but to alert the people on what is supposed to be done.²⁷⁸ The Shona people believe that there are some *shavi* spirits that are bad or evil like the *shavi reuroyi*-the spirit of witchcraft, which is associated with evil propensities. However for Pentecostals all the spirits in the Shona numinous

²⁷⁶*Pentecostal Experience at Pentecostal Church Camp*,

<http://www.trueghosttales.com/paranormal/demon-experience-at-pentecostal-church-camp/>, Accessed Online 23 December 2010;

²⁷⁷Ancestral spirits are the spirits of the descendants and are known to protect their members of the family after the bringing home ritual. Ngozi is the spirit of the person who was either murdered or indebted or of a mother who was not given the motherhood cow as dowry when her daughter got married. The shavi spirits comprise of good and bad ones, Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-Being* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2001), p.62

²⁷⁸Tabona Shoko, "Healing in Hear the Word Ministries Pentecostal Church Zimbabwe" in David Westerlund (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2009),p. 46.

realm are evil.²⁷⁹ It does not matter that some are regarded as good by the Shona traditional believers. In the African society sickness, illness, misfortunes, accidents and failures in life are believed to be caused by human beings using spiritual or mystical power against their relatives, neighbours, colleagues or the community in general.²⁸⁰ It is in this context that the Pentecostal message of deliverance from the various spirits is found most welcome amongst the Shona people, as it offers solutions to real life problems. It is an open response to their fears from evil spirits that bring mishaps in the community. For J. S. Ukpong, the Pentecostal churches try to attain the African way of life by making Christianity relevant and expressive of the way Africans live, think and relate with the spirits.²⁸¹ By virtue of the Pentecostal missiology, theology, ecclesiology, pneumatology and demonology touching more on spirituality, Africans find such emphasis particularly helpful, giving them the needed security of life.

M. Gelfand adds that, it is an affected fact by all Shona people that a person owes his safety and protection entirely to his *Vadzimu* and if that protection is removed for any reason, one may suffer any kind of illness, tragedies and misfortunes.²⁸² Such fears are removed by the protection that is offered in the new community of believers. Besides the presence of *Vadzimu*,

²⁷⁹The position is that whenever such spirits manifest themselves in Church or anywhere on their believers, they must be cast out (Mt 8:32, 9:33, 15:28, 17:18, Mk 1:26, Acts 19:12). The casting out of such spirits is then taken as a show of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, who is there to burn out evil spirits. It is then paraded as a symbol of the type of protection that all people should expect when they become believers.

²⁸⁰J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 74.

²⁸¹J. S. Ukpong, *Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1984, Vol. 45, pp. 501-36.

²⁸²M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona: Survival Values of the African Culture*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), p. 121.

the Shona also believe that every Shona person has a *Shavi* (alien spirit) which bestows individuals with various skills (e.g. hunting, healing, fighting, witchcraft). M. L. Daneel points out:

The conveyance of knowledge or certain skills to spirit mediums through spirit-possession was replaced by all-important possession of the elect by the Holy Spirit.... Thus the Christian message and all that goes with it is introduced into African society in a truly African guise.²⁸³

Alien spirits are also known for protecting their hosts against any danger in life. Protection from danger is an important feature that is also emphasized by the Pentecostals, although the Pentecostal emphasis is based on the Trinitarian Godhead: Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Yet the spirits emphasized in ATR are departed human spirits, hence one of the clearly noted differences. All the categories of spirits (ancestors-the *midzimu*, alien spirits-*Mashavi*, *ngozji*-avenging spirits) among the Shona people are spirits of the dead, even though some *Shavi* spirits could be types of nature spirits.²⁸⁴

Tabona Shoko argues that, both the traditional Shona believers and the Pentecostals are strikingly united when it comes to the concept of power that manifests itself in ecstatic prophetic behaviour, especially in their diagnosis and healing concepts.²⁸⁵ The difference as already highlighted is that, the role of ancestral and alien spirits in the Pentecostal fold is largely shunned and ridiculed as evil spirits and the Holy Spirit takes the lead in their hierarchy of spiritual and prophetic order (Mt 3: 11, 8: 28; 9: 32; 12:22; 15:22; 17:15; John 14: 26; 20: 22; Lk 11: 13; Acts 5:16; 1 Tim. 4:1, 1 Cor. 2:4, Eph 3:16). It is common amongst the Shona that, the host of either the

²⁸³M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Morton, 1971), p. 463.

²⁸⁴M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Morton, 1971), pp. 91-140; H. O. Mönnig, *The Pedi*, (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1967), p. 52.

²⁸⁵Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*, p. 138.

ancestral spirit or *Shavi* spirit is viewed with respect and fear as they are regarded as possessing power incomparable in the face of danger. The Shona associate spiritual possession with protection, a feature that critics argue possibly influences some Shona Christian people to desire having the leading role of the Holy Spirit. In particular, having the gift of tongues as they believe that glossolalists are assured of protection from the evil spirits, sickness, diseases and pain in whatever form. A. N. Chinyemba (a senior pastor and overseer in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe) in his unpublished research claims that glossolalia has ritual value for the sick. When they pray in tongues They become a divine therapist (Eph. 6:12; 1 Cor. 14:4).²⁸⁶ J. N. Chacha adds that “if one speaks in tongues; one becomes powerful and effective witness of Jesus and gets protection from sickness (Mic 3:8, Acts 1:8, 4:31, 33, 19:11).²⁸⁷ It is important to note that Pentecostals are aware that the possession of the Holy Spirit breaks all other spirits not of God as already highlighted. Critics argue that the challenge for some Christians is when speaking in tongues is equalled with the Holy Spirit.

The Concept of Possession in the Shona Traditional Religion

The Shona people are always in touch with the spirits in different forms including: performing rituals, consulting diviners, use of music and symbols. One can tell that possession has occurred by the behaviour of the medium²⁸⁸ who begins to

²⁸⁶A. N. Chinyemba, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Unpublished Thesis), Harare: Living Waters Bible College, 1999, p. 59.

²⁸⁷J. N. Chacha, *Three Dimensions of Spiritual Warfare: A New Perspective on Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), p. 6.

²⁸⁸A medium is simply the receptacle, the vessel of the spirit. S/he may be referred to in Shona as ‘*homve*’ which means pocket or little. S/he is grabbed by the ancestor and has no unspecialised powers, knowledge and qualities of his own, D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas*

twitch violently. Sometimes, he/she utters sharp cries and mourns, although he or she requires support from the attendants before entering into the state of full possession by the spirit. It is one of the fascinating aspects of the Shona spiritual worldview, where spirits reveal their presence or existence to the outside world by actively possessing particular individuals of their choice. Michael Gelfand observed that the Shona constantly try to prove the existence of the spiritual world by pointing to the medium's state of possession, with the spirit talking to him/her. The spirit constitutes irrefutable evidence of spirit possession. For example, a *n'anga* (Shona traditional practitioner), host possessed by a *shavi*²⁸⁹ (several alien spirits with various functions) or *midzimu* (ancestral spirits).²⁹⁰ Manifestation of the spirit presence is witnessed through singing and dancing. In both cases, when the climax of singing and dancing has been reached, people automatically keep quiet and that is when possession takes place. Spiritual

and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 49.

²⁸⁹The Shona people especially the Karanga people believe in many spirits which influence their day to day lives. Some of the spirits are either good or bad, for example, the *Shavi* spirits. The *Shavi* spirits are the spirits of people who died away from home and were not properly buried, for example, the bringing back rituals not being carried out. They wander around restlessly until they find the host to possess. Such spirits find hosts to possess in any family. The *Shavi* spirits can be spirits of relatives, young unmarried persons, neighbours, white people, animals (baboons) and objects (aeroplanes). The *Shavi* possess people and provide them with some skills in: hunting, healing, dancing and divination. The type of the *Shavi* spirit and its function is only known when one is possessed. Some *Shavi* spirits rarely come out but operate at a subtle level, Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-Being* (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), p. 40; M. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, With Special Reference to Their Religion* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998), pp. 242-46.

²⁹⁰M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p.132.

possession forms an integral part of the Shona's religious spirituality. However, the ease of induction of spiritual possession in the Shona Traditional Religion varies often with each type of medium.²⁹¹ The possession features are common among the Shona in cases where people have ceremonies that are linked to the bringing home ceremony (*Kurova Gwa Ceremony*), thanking their Ancestral Spirits (*Kupira Midzimu*) and identifying or celebration of the benefits that a certain *Shavi* (Alien) spirits plays in the family or community.

Speaking in tongues is undoubtedly the most distinctive doctrine of Pentecostalism and has become the cornerstone of the beliefs of Pentecostal movements.²⁹² However Pentecostals do not talk of being 'possessed' by the Holy Spirit, but they talk of 'being filled'. For critics, the vocabulary difference of being 'possessed' in the Shona spiritual world view or being 'filled or getting into the Spirit' is ambiguous and confusing even to those proclaiming the conceptual difference. Critics see no difference between the two concepts, but take them as one and the same phenomena connoting possession.²⁹³ For some

²⁹¹M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p. 134.

²⁹²David and Johanne Wyns, *A Reader on the Holy Spirit: Anointing, Equipping and Empowering for Service* (Los Angeles: International Church of the Four Square Gospel, 1993), p. 25.

²⁹³Possession as the norm in the Shona spiritual understanding implies an invading force that puts off the mind of the medium who lacks control, whereas for Pentecostals, Glossolalists have control over their minds as argued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:27-28. Possession by the 'spirit or spirits' in the Shona concept literally means 'to be seized by the spirit', M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent churches*, Vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 463. There can be cases of glossolalists who quote Acts 2 for their lack of control when speaking in tongues and some Pastors who would erroneously like to force all Christians to speak in tongues. However, for Paul (1 Cor 14:1ff), the gift of tongues is not imposed on an unsuspecting believer but they willfully pray for the gift and God gives accordingly. Yet that is not the case in most cases to do with Shona mediums, where the medium who does not wish to be possessed but made to do so as a result of illness. If one turns down

Pentecostals, speaking in tongues is the evidence and experience a Christian needs in order to have the fullness of Christian life, an irrefutable evidence for baptism or filling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2, 4, 4:8, 31, 7:55, 10:44-47, 11:24, 13:9, 13:52, 19:4-6).²⁹⁴ Pentecostals mostly cite Acts 10:44-48:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcision believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

However, for the Shona traditionalists speaking in tongues is a sign of being possessed. The understanding is that, had Cornelius not spoken in tongues, Peter would not have known that they had received the Holy Spirit. The concept of possession as understood by the Shona people is contemptuously dismissed by Pentecostals. Pentecostals find the book of Acts very useful for pneumatology, so much so that S. M. Horton has labelled it the 'the Acts of the Holy Spirit'.²⁹⁵ There are cases that have been raised by critics in relation to possession as in the following testimony by one of the Pentecostals reporting on how she received the gift of speaking in tongues:

interest of the spirit, it can result in death. According to D. Lan, it is the all-powerful ancestors who make their choice, 'grab' their mediums and take control of their lives, D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 49.

²⁹⁴J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 201.

²⁹⁵S. M. Horton, *What the Bible says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), p. 136.

When the pastor laid his hands on my head, I suddenly felt my body shaking violently as a result a sort of electric shock which I experienced on my whole body. I started jumping, falling on the ground, beating the ground with my fists, running around and shouting with a loud voice. I could not stop it and I knew that God was at work with me. I felt every part of my body responding to the force that I was facing and an extraordinary power started streaming through me. I was no longer my usual self.²⁹⁶

It is possible to find same kind of behaviour that was also observable with the Hebrew prophets that made the onlookers easily able to identify them as possessed by the spirit of YHWH (Isaiah 11:2; Ezek 1: 12, 2:2, 3:12, 8:3, 20-21, 11:5, 37:1 and 43:5). For example, the case of King Saul in 1 Samuel 19:23-24. People judged his behaviour as that of somebody possessed and said:

So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

In this sense, possession is generally associated with a change in behaviour (Ezek 3:1ff; Jer.13:1ff) that causes the onlookers to easily recognize that one is under the possession of a spiritual force. It might be true as raised by critics that there is confusion on what actually is possession and getting into the spirit in relation to peoples' behaviour. Whether there is a difference or not is something up for further debate for theologians, religious researchers and African biblical scholars.

The Concept Music and Dance in Preparation for Possession

²⁹⁶Mrs Shamiso Ndlovu, interviewed on 26 January 2010.

Music and dance play an important role among the Shona people in their communication with the spiritual world. It is rare among the Shona people to get possessed without music being played. The Shona People dance the whole night and when the tempo of the music is at its peak, it becomes easy for one to get possessed. Music is always an inducer to spirit possession in the Zimbabwean traditional worship. Critics have pointed to the role that music plays, thereby becoming one of the pillars in the Zimbabwean Pentecostal worship and its role in 'getting into the spirit' (*Kupinda Mumweya*). M. Gelfand²⁹⁷, M. F. C. Bourdillon²⁹⁸, J. S. Mbiti²⁹⁹ take music as playing a central role to allow full possession to take place. As the music increases in tempo, the individuals enter into full possession; become very hyperkinetic, excited and start to grunt, yawn, and emit strange staccato-like noises. Intense preparation through music and dance are highly expected in the Shona traditional worship, if possession is to take place. The Shona dances like: *Mbande*, *Mbakumba*, *Muchongowoyo* and *Chidzimba* propel the 'svikiro-host' to possession. People sing and dance until somebody gets possessed. Most dances and songs are linked to spiritual possession.³⁰⁰ Even though the same features can be observable in the Pentecostal concept of 'getting into the spirit' where music and dancing play a central role; these are coincidental parallels which do not imply more than that, since God gives the gift of glossolalia as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11). Glossolalists can still get into spirit even without the help of music and dance (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 13:52).

G. C. Oosthuizen argues that, spirit possession, the general feature in African Traditional Religion, has found a new

²⁹⁷M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p. 133.

²⁹⁸M. F. C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society*, p. 237.

²⁹⁹J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 82.

³⁰⁰Jesca Mushoperi Machingura, *The Influence of Modernity on Zimbabwean Traditional Dances, with Specific Reference to Mbande Dance* (Harare: University Of Zimbabwe (Unpublished Thesis), 2002), pp. 9-11.

emphasis which finds congenial soil in the Pentecostal approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.³⁰¹ The missionary churches that operated in Zimbabwe were out of touch with the spiritual world view of Africans as their pneumatology concept was dressed in Western philosophical garb. The African worship since time immemorial had this direct link and experience with the spirit world. In the Pentecostal churches, using Daneel's words, "there is the conveyance of knowledge or certain skills to spirit mediums though spirit possession was replaced by all-important possession of the elect by the Holy Spirit....Thus the Christian message and all that goes with it is introduced into African society in a truly African guise."³⁰² The mission is accomplished by making the Bible and its teachings relevant to African Christians. This has made the Pentecostal message attractive to Africans, as the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them, making a relationship between the spiritual world and humanity thus possible. Allan Anderson argues that:

Since the Pentecostal movement was generated in a black church in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, where the emphasis on the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' with the 'initial evidence' of speaking in tongues was propagated by a preacher named William Seymour, an African American preacher. Many of the Early Manifestations of Pentecostalism were found in the religious expressions of the slaves who were themselves products of the slavery and were themselves a reflection of the African religious culture from which they had been abducted.³⁰³

I. MacRobert notes that the Pentecostals holistic view of the Holy Spirit possession or 'getting into the spirit' is inspired by such manifestations such as motor behaviour that are not European but African. The rhythmic hand clapping, the

³⁰¹G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa*, London: C Hurst, 1968, p. 134.

³⁰²M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 463.

³⁰³Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context*, p. 26.

antiphonal participation of the congregation in the sermon, the immediacy of God in the services and baptism by immersion, all are survivals of Africanisms.³⁰⁴ Critics think that it is during the singing, clapping hands and dancing that there is this spiritual preparation for possession. For example, the increase in the tone of singing usually leads to possession in the sense of speaking in tongues as understood by Pentecostals. The more people increase the pitch of their voices, the more the possibility of getting possessed. This fits well with the claim by some Pentecostals that, they started speaking in tongues when they began by making noises with their mouths, clapping of hands loudly as well as the loud use of musical instruments like drums, tambourines, guitars and keyboards.³⁰⁵ In view of this, critics still insist that the Zimbabwean Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit, glossolalia and spiritual power is more of an influence from the African Traditional Religious understanding of spiritual possession than the Biblical portrayal of the Holy Spirit. The Shona concept of spirit possession is taken as resembling the Pentecostal concept of 'getting into the Spirit' but they differ in substance particularly the concept of pneumatology, which holistically does not end with speaking in tongues, but points to the operation of the Holy Spirit as understood by Christians. The difference is that the Holy Spirit is one of the Godhead, who cannot be associated with any other spirits. M. L. Daneel explains that the Spirit is believed to be given by the divine God and not as a human initiative, but as an act of faith which stands in direct relation to the recipient's spiritual life.³⁰⁶ The Holy Spirit and the giving of gifts are completely independent of human control and inducement as in the case of the Shona. The Holy Spirit, as well as the gifts, is

³⁰⁴I. MacRobert, *The Black roots and White racism of early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 29, 77.

³⁰⁵M. West, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), p. 93.

³⁰⁶M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1, (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 349.

not an impersonal manipulable force. The gift of the Holy Spirit's predilection is to make believers develop the character of Christ, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23, Rom 5:5, 2 Pet 1:5-7). There are cases of certain Pentecostal pastors who falsely claim to give gifts of the Holy Spirit, an issue that cannot be covered in this paper.

Critics believe that Zimbabwean Pentecostals relate to the Bible using their social, political, religious and economical circles. The Bible has passed the test of historical development and adaptation in respect to various cultures and the Shona people are not an exception from that. J. S. Ukpong argues that, "the main goal of African theology is to make Christianity attain African expression...to become a way of life for Africans; Christianity must be relevant to and expressive of the way they live and think."³⁰⁷ This makes the Holy Spirit reveal himself to Africans, especially Shona Christians in a specific way understandable to them. Desmond M. Tutu adds that, "for Christianity to be truly African, it must be incarnated in Africa.....Christianity must be seen as fulfilling the highest and best in the spiritual and religious aspirations of the black, and yet stand in judgement on all that diminishes him and makes him less than what God intended him to be."³⁰⁸ One can basically argue that, the Zimbabwe Pentecostal aspect of 'getting into the Spirit,' besides having managed to win many followers, is a missiological adaptive approach and contextual pneumatology suiting their own context.

Conclusion

This article has shown the dynamics and ambiguities that one witnesses when discussing the concept of 'spiritual possession'

³⁰⁷J. S. Ukpong, "Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies" in *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol.45, 1984, pp.501-36.

³⁰⁸D. M. Tutu, "Black Theology and African Theology-Soul Mates or Antagonists?" in Parratt (ed.), *Reader in African Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 46-55.

as understood by the Shona people and the Pentecostals' understanding of 'getting into the spirit'. However this paper sought to show that, the manifestations of Spirit-power should not be interpreted as one-sidedly in terms of mere extension of African spiritual world-view, as done by some critics, but as the good news of God's operational power of the Holy Spirit to the African quest for spiritual power in their worldview. There can be possible similarities here and there in terms of how people view spirituality, but the underlying factor is that Pentecostal pneumatology is confrontational and revolutionary in relation to other spirits branded as evil deserving no honour save God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:12).