

**A missiological study on African traditional
religious worldview and charm-dependency in
the Zambezi Evangelical Churches**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Patricia Linden, and my dear mother, Mary Rose Beaton, who has always prayed for me. The sincere faith that now lives in me lived first in these two remarkable women.

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ABSTRACT

Charm-dependency hinders discipleship in the Zambezi Evangelical Church in South-Central Malawi. Belief in traditional religious charms is rooted in African Traditional Religion and animated by deep-seated worldview motifs, which are shaped by the historical and contemporary religious beliefs and practices of the people in the demographic, including spurious notions about God and witchcraft related fears.

The challenge is to break this charm-dependency and related practices by transforming worldview in a way which respects the traditional religious cultural heritage, but is also faithful to Scripture, and pedagogically sound for the context. Thus, this research lays foundations for an effective missiological approach, focusing on three key areas: (1) contextual, (2) Biblical, and (3) pedagogic. The methodology is eclectic, employing literary compilative means as well as empirical, qualitative ethnographic research, in the form of interviews and focus groups.

In developing the first foundation, understanding both the receptor culture's worldview and how to transform a worldview are critical. For the former, the nature of charm-dependency in the churches is investigated and an anthology of related stories compiled. A Chewa worldview is also posited, establishing clear links between worldview motifs and practice. The latter requires a critical realist approach to epistemology which recognizes that people are not only cognitive creatures, but also affective, spiritual beings. Thus, transformation is the deep-level inward change of worldview assumptions, which is dependent on both Word and Spirit, and manifests in changes in character and conduct.

Secondly, potentially reformative Biblical texts are selected by means of a 'thick description' analysis of animating worldview motifs, especially the underlying motives and purposes for charm-usage. These texts are studied for their theological and practically applicable significance in the context, in the light of a practical missional hermeneutic which depends on the authority of Scripture. A type of customized critical contextualization process leading to transformation is envisaged, as bridges and barriers to communicating and understanding the 'new', redemptive Biblical picture of God, are identified.

Thirdly, a contextually appropriate approach to pedagogics is outlined. Grounded upon the identity-centered truth of the gospel, effective communication/reception of Biblical truth considers the need for learner participation, group-work, ongoing dialogue, and experiential reflection. Thus, a multidimensional 'problem-based learning' approach, focused on cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual development is ideal, one which is field-dependent, story-centered and case-study oriented. Foundational resources are provided in the form of: an anthology of stories of charm-usage, the articulated worldview with contemporary examples, apposite Biblical texts with developed theological and practically applicable significance, and a collection of material on ATR background and culture, relating to the Biblical texts.

These foundations stand to be built upon for the creation of a missiological approach to break charm-dependency and related ATR practices within the ZEC, but also across denominational lines throughout Malawi, and even further afield.

Key Terms: African traditional religion; traditional religious charms; Zambezi Evangelical Church; charm-dependency; worldview motifs; receptor culture; transforming worldview; missiological approach; missiological foundations

Key Words: traditional; religious; charms; witchcraft; worldview; missiological; transformation; contextual; Biblical; pedagogic

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATR	African Traditional Religions
BTC	Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa
EBCoM	Evangelical Bible College of Malawi
NIV	New International Version (1984 translation)
	Scripture quotations are in NIV unless otherwise stated)
NWU	North West University
RERC	Research Ethics Regulatory Commtitee
ZEC	Zambezi Evangelical Church

Old Testament Abbreviations:

Gen; Ex; Lev; Num; Deut; Jos; Judg; Ruth; 1 Sam; 2 Sam; 1 Kgs; 2 Kgs; 1 Chr; 2 Chr; Ezra; Neh; Est; Job; Ps (plural: Pss); Prov; Eccl; Song; Isa; Jer; Lam; Ez; Dan; Hos; Joel; Amos; Obad; Jonah; Mic; Nah; Hab; Zeph; Hag; Zech; Mal.

New Testament Abbreviations:

Mt; Mk; Lk; Jn; Acts; Rom; 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Gal; Eph; Phil; Col; 1 Th; 2 Th; 1 Tim; 2 Tim; Tit; Phm; Heb; Jas; 1 Pt; 2 Pt; 1 Jn; 2 Jn; 3 Jn; Jude; Rev.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is a missiological study on African traditional religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches (hereafter referred to as ZEC) of South-Central Malawi. It is done from the perspective of the Evangelical tradition (Bebbington 1989:2-3). The research study sets out to lay appropriate missiological foundations for the creation of a transformative, contextual approach to break charm-dependency and related traditional religious practices perpetuated by members and adherents of the ZEC. The main aim of this research is thus to identify contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in ZEC churches, by transforming worldview.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Traditional religious charms- These are understood to be objects, acts or words imbued with supernatural spiritual power, that a person may procure through traditional power specialists, or careful adherence to ancient wisdom passed down from community elders, for: protection of person and/or property from evil spirits, the aversion of evil, a guarantee of good fortune or success, the maintenance or acquisition of good health and/or positive life-force, or even the capacity to inflict harm on others. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1995:221) is helpful as it describes a charm as: “3a. an object, act or word(s) supposedly having occult or magic power; a spell; b. a thing worn to avert evil etc.; an amulet.” Note that any object deemed to be a charm will not have life or power of its own (as in the case of certain fetishes) but is only capable of fulfilling the particular purpose prescribed. It should also be acknowledged that charms, in the African context, are closely related to African medicine/s. The latter is very often a critical constituent of the former, or even at times is perceived as the charm itself.

African Traditional Religion- refers to the traditional religious beliefs and practices of African people/s which continue to profoundly shape their worldview, spirituality (Atta-Baffore 2007:12), and lifestyle (culture). Han (2013:95) helpfully defines African Traditional Religion (hereafter

ATR) as “The indigenous beliefs and practices that have permeated the whole lives of African people.”

Zambezi Evangelical Church- the ZEC is an Evangelical denomination which was founded in Malawi in 1894 as a result of the Zambesi Industrial Missions work in what was then known as the British protectorate of Nyasaland. It might be described as Presbyterian in its church polity, governed by a Synod which convenes bi-annually. For most of the first century after inception it was a rural church, but in recent years it has also established a significant presence in burgeoning cities, such as Lilongwe and Blantyre.

Worldview- The following definitions work together to provide the sense in which the concept is here understood: Kraft (1979:53) describes worldview as “the central systemization of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system... touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture.” Hiebert (1997:85) notes that “worldviews are the glasses through which people look, not what the people look at.” Wendland (2007:33) rightly asserts that, “One’s worldview will determine the manner in which one construes the same set of objective events.” O’ Donovan (1995:3) describes worldview as “the view which a person has of his world... the way he understands and interprets the things which happen to him and to other people... a person’s belief about what is real and what is not real.” Finally, Musapole (2006:13) writes that “Religion underpins this worldview as a system of spiritual relationships maintained by rituals, the power of the word and a variety of activities.” Therefore, worldview directly regulates behavior patterns in a culture where peculiar patterns or habits are exhibited (Kraft 1999:385; Dicks 2012:44).

Worldview motifs- refers to commonly held deep-level assumptions within a worldview and is a term used in reference to the stimulation or animation of particular religious practices (Kraft 1989:184; Hiebert 1997:84-85; Dicks 2012:12-13).

Transforming worldview- means challenging and subverting people’s deep-level worldview assumptions and replacing them with more Biblical notions by subjecting the former to critique and reflection, in the light of biblical evidence presented/communicated in culturally appropriate and understandable ways. The latter, hopefully, leading to changes in belief and behavior (Kraft 1999: 384-389; Ononga 2014:204-210).

Missiological- has to do with not only the study of the mission of the Christian church but also the church’s practical participation in God’s mission, being divinely sent into the world by the Trinity, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and action, the *‘missio Dei’* (Pachau 2007:233; Bosch 1991:390; 2011:9).

Missiological approach- refers to a deliberate approach to address a particular problem within the field of mission in a peculiar context, as an outworking of *missio Dei*, and in particular, practical mission theology (Jongeneel 2007:241-243). For the purposes of this research study, the term refers to carefully researched contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations for the formation of a curriculum or course- for the ZEC denomination. These foundations laid, in order to help break traditional religious charm-dependency, by transforming worldview. The approach may, however, be paradigmatic for other such approaches in both similar and different cultural contexts.

Contextual- relating to the context of the study, particularly pertaining to a knowledge of the worldview of the 'receptor' culture but also including the biblical understanding and learning preferences of the local culture (Kalilombe 2007:3-14; Ononga 2014:207; Macbean 2015:86-87).

Biblical- speaks of content arising from and remaining true to the originally intended meaning of Scripture and the wider canonical witness (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:199-200; Hiebert 1994:29-30), including the theological significance and practically applicable significance of the Biblical passages (Smith 2008:176-177).

Pedagogic/s- refers to the science of teaching, particularly to identifying effective methodologies for transmitting knowledge in the specified context (Koehler 2010:56-57; Terry 2008:99, Vella 1994:14-148; Shaw 2014:186-196,217-229).

1.3. The Context for the Study

The population of Malawi was estimated at approximately 20 000 000 in 2018 (ICT World Factbook: online, 25 June 2019), and earlier projections suggested a population of closer to 26 000 00 by 2030 (Malawi National Statistical Office: online, 17 Feb 2015). In April 2019, the figure given, based on the latest United Nations estimates, is similarly, around 19 700 000 (worldometers: online, 8 April 2019) with a projection of over 30 000 000 by 2030. Urbanites account for approximately 20% of the population, the majority depending primarily on agriculture (subsistence farming) for survival (Mandryk 2010:552). The official language is Chichewa but 24 languages are spoken and thirty three different people groups are represented; 12% of which are reputedly unreached by the Gospel (Operation World: online, 5 Aug 2014). In this milieu Groves (2010:7) explains that the church in Malawi today can be divided into two main groupings according to their origins. Firstly, we have the mainstream or missionary instituted denominations founded by the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, out of the early colonial period (circa late 19th century). These denominations were built up on the theology and

practice of their Western founders. Subsequently the African Instituted Churches emerged, also sometimes referred to as 'independent' or 'indigenous' churches. The latter sprung up as a sense of independence developed both politically, and with the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, resulting in a growing intention to grapple with the Word in context and so to 'Africanize' theology and practice.

Paas (2006: 187-210 cf. Beaton 2015:8-10) asserts that historically, there is clear evidence of Portuguese Roman Catholic Missionary activity North of the Zambezi river as early as the mid-14th century, with Protestant activity coming later, initially through David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary and explorer with the London Missionary Society, who visited Malawi in 1856. Protestant Christian mission was further developed by Bishop Charles Frederick Mackenzie with the Universities Mission for Central Africa in the establishment of the Anglican Church. James Stewart and Robert Laws of the Free Church of Scotland (c. 1870's) played key roles, the latter founding the Livingstonia Mission at Cape Maclear, in 1875. Henry Henderson of the Established Church of Scotland was instrumental in the opening of the Blantyre Mission Station in 1876, and Andrew Charles Murray of the Dutch Reformed Church, representing the Dutch Reformed Church Mission, opened a mission station at Mvera in 1889, initially under the Livingstonia Mission. Effectively, by 1890 there were Protestant Christian Mission Stations in the North (Livingstonia), South (Blantyre Mission Station), and Central (Mvera) regions of Malawi, each one having a particular interest in developing both Christian spirituality and industry in Malawi. By 1926, all three had united to found a local Church with one common Synod, the Central African Presbyterian Church. The CCAP is today the largest Protestant denomination, with the Synod of Livingstonia boasting 214 congregations, 1600 prayer houses and over 200 000 members (CCAP Synod of Livingstonia: online, 25 June 2019), and the Blantyre Synod is even larger with 800 congregations and a membership of 1.8 million (World Council of Churches: 25 June 2019). However, in the major centers (cities) such as Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu there are thousands of Protestant 'Christian' churches representing a wide diversity- literally hundreds- of denominations. Statistics at around the turn of the century indicated close on four-and-a-half million Protestants (4,316,418). Moreover, there were almost three million Catholics in Malawi (2,802,000) (Nation Master: online, 30 Aug 2016). The Pentecostal missionary instituted churches arrived a little later (circa 1950's) but have grown rapidly in size and number. In 1999 it was estimated that there were already about 150 different Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations across the country (Fiedler in Paas 2006:209). More recent figures reported that the percentage of Evangelical Christians in Malawi is around 44% of the overall population, while Roman Catholics account for another 18% (Worldatlas: online, 25 June 2019).

It is in this Evangelical community at the center of mainstream Protestantism that we find the Zambezi Evangelical Church which is the focal point of this study. The denomination was founded in 1894 out of the work of the Zambesi Industrial Mission in what was then known as the British protectorate of Nyasaland. According to the incumbent General Secretary (Interview B1: 23 Jan 2019), the ZEC now has over 200 officially established churches, and well over 500 000 members spread across Malawi. The majority of the congregations, approximately 150, are found in the Central (60) and Southern regions (94).¹ Historically, the Church has been largely rural but in the past three decades a very significant presence has been established in urban and peri-urban centers. The denomination is broadly Evangelical in liturgy and worship style but more Presbyterian when it comes to Church polity, being governed by its own Synod which convenes bi-annually (Zambesi Mission: online, 25 March 2019).

1.4 The Purpose of the Study

The researcher's particular interest in the ZEC and his passion to facilitate discipleship within this denomination can be traced back to his initial involvement as a missionary in Malawi under the banner of the Zambesi Mission (2006-2010). ZM, founded by Joseph Booth, and also a product of the Zambesi Industrial Mission, is an evangelical, non-denominational mission agency which exists to support and encourage the Zambesi Evangelical Church primarily- and other evangelical churches where possible and appropriate- in a wide range of activities (Zambesi Mission: online, 5 March 2019 cf. Zambezi Mission: online, 6 March 2019). At the heart of these activities is discipleship, where the spiritual growth of the people is considered of paramount importance. As an itinerant preacher and evangelist to the churches and a teacher at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi (EBCoM)² for more than a decade, the researcher has had the pleasure and privilege of meeting and ministering to many ZEC congregants and adherents, developing relationships with a number of pastors, and participating in the training and preparation of ministerial candidates at the College. In this way he has become immersed in the life and ministry of the denomination. He now has a ministry (Beracah Support Ministry) which exists to support Malawian Pastors in the field, not least those in ZEC churches. Through these experiences the researcher has come to recognize strengths and weaknesses in the

¹ These numbers do not include the 'Prayer houses' which are satellite congregations to the main stations. A main station may have anywhere between one and ten associated 'Prayer houses'.

² EBCoM was established by Zambesi Mission, along with other founding Mission organizations and Churches in 1964, as the Likhubula Bible College. The College serves the Evangelical (and other) Churches in Malawi by training pastors, evangelists, teachers and other Christian workers. It is accredited by ACTEA (Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa). The researcher taught at the College from 2006-2018 and served as Chaplain to the College community for three years (2008-2010).

denomination's discipleship processes. Charm-dependency has been identified as a barrier to healthy spiritual development. Finding a way to help believers to overcome this challenge, and harmful related traditional practices, would be a major breakthrough for discipleship in the context. The purpose or motivation is thus to positively contribute towards healthy, robust, Christ-centered and Holy Spirit-filled Christian living within the denomination and across the denominational spectrum.

1.5 The Traditional Roots of the Problem

It is the researcher's contention that in the ZEC and in the wider ecclesial context across a spectrum of denominations, despite the fact that the Gospel has been preached and taught for years, evidence of mature Christianity as evinced by Christ-like character and conduct remains scarce. This is the sad reality on the ground, giving credence to the popular maxim: 'Christianity in Malawi is a mile wide but only an inch deep!' Why is this? There are several reasons but syncretism stands out as a profoundly influential factor (de Kok 2004:4,12). This deleterious syncretism in the churches is the consequence of a number of unfortunate and unhelpful circumstances, including: the historical presentation of the Gospel in inaccessible Western forms and cultural guises and the adoption of 'foreign' liturgical expressions in worship (Hara 2008:159; Musapole 1996:5), the ubiquitous fear of witchcraft and spirits that exists in Malawi (Ingwe 2007:15; Msiska 1998:39; O'Donovan 1995:311), the fact that the traditional religious worldview is deep-seated and not easily replaced, especially when any suggested alternative does not appear to provide better answers to pressing everyday needs and questions, or palpably appears to fail in practice³, the lack of appropriate and effective ministry approaches to break the natural dependency on traditional religious thinking and practice (in ZEC and across denominations), widespread Biblical illiteracy (Hiebert 1999:377; Beaton 2015:23-24), a paucity of supernatural signs/wonders to demonstrate Christ's power and authority (Interview D1: August 2010) (hereafter I D1 etc.), a general acceptance of syncretism in the church which leads to spiritual apathy making for rife nominalism (Gehman 2006:97-100; Banda 2005:8-9), and the lack of a sound Biblical eschatology of hope. All of these root causes stem from the inability of the Gospel (as traditionally preached and taught) to provide answers to the 'middle level' questions, the confusing problems of everyday life faced by the people. A gap still exists between divine revelation and how the latter might impact upon people's legitimate everyday questions and problems (Hiebert et al 1999:77-79; Hiebert 1982:35-47).

³ There are many examples of new converts to Christ who forsake their religious charms to place their trust in Jesus only to find that their houses are still robbed or their fields destroyed by the elements. At such times, in the absence of a proper theology of suffering, these people often understandably turn back to their traditional practices.

These questions and problems have their roots in a people's worldview. Musapole (2006:13) rightly notes that "A worldview provides the lens through which to make sense of the cosmos ... Religion underpins this worldview as a system of spiritual relationships maintained by rituals, the power of the word and a variety of other activities." Wendland explains the dynamic clearly:

in central Africa (and perhaps Africa as a whole) the boundaries between religion and the other major institutions of culture are not clearly defined at all. In fact, a useful analogy is to compare the function of religion in traditional African society to the hub of a spoked wheel: the hub is not only at the center of things, it also directs the forward motion of the whole system. In short, religion penetrates all of life (2007:57).

The prevalent traditional religious worldview in the South-Central Malawian context may be described as animistic in the sense that is characterized by "the belief in spirits and forces, the belief in the power of supernatural control, the practice of divination, and the manipulation of spiritual agencies for good or evil" (Onongha 2014:206, Wendland and Hachibamba 2007:63-93). Many people do not even distinguish between the spiritual and physical modes of existence (Nyirongo 1997:25). This worldview creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in a capricious world believed to be inhabited by a hierarchy of spirits and spiritual forces (many of whom are malicious). It is an oppressive, highly charged spiritual climate, characterized by uncertainty and fear, one within which it is almost impossible to feel spiritually secure and confident. The recent 'witch-hunts' and subsequent deaths of those suspected of being 'blood-suckers' (vampires) empowered through magic (*matsenga*), in the Southern Region, is a case in point (Thom 2017:1-2). In this highly charged spiritual climate men perceive their salvation to reside in the guarantee of their physical wellbeing, evinced especially by personal health and strength, fertility of land and crops, and fertility of the womb (progeny). Thus, religion is anthropocentric, focused on procuring and maintaining/increasing protection, security, life-force (*moyo*), the balance of harmony in community (with both the living and the living-dead), and all that is practically needed for living and pro-creating. Salvation is considered deliverance from the evil forces all around and from "the problems, hardships, misfortunes, injustices, sicknesses, and death which people experience in this world" (Hiebert et al 1999:224-225). Hara (2008:139, 140) explains that the traditional Malawian view holds that salvation is: "The preservation of this life and solution to any problem that would lead to its loss... man's security from temporary dangers to his physical life."

Moreover, in the Malawian milieu the Supreme Being (God) is understood to be practically unapproachable, removed from day to day affairs, having left the outworking of daily life in the hands of the spirits; some created beings and others, the spirits of deceased men. Given that God is inaccessible in a direct sense, and the fact that for the most part He refrains from personal intervention (with the exception of His perceived solidarity with those in the liminal

stages of life, the disabled, and the socially inferior) (Wendland 2007:104), it is believed that mediators are required. These mediators are believed to be ancestors, spirit representatives and even spirit mediums who serve to communicate with Him in times of crisis or need, so transmitting messages between God and men. In addition, since God is not reckoned to be interested in the minutia or personal details of people's lives, other mediators, closer at hand, are also sought to facilitate the necessary procurement of 'salvation' or well-being in the 'here and now'. These are spiritual 'power experts' or practitioners (witchdoctors, sorcerers and diviners) able to manipulate latent powers for good or evil as required. Therefore, the Supreme Being (God) is understood to have left the outworking of daily life in the hands of all these spirits (Van Breugal 2001:29-41, Wendland and Hachibamba 2007:104), making these mediators indispensable to daily life (Van Breugal 2001:74-78, 233-235; Schoffeleers 1979:163-166; Ott 2000:163).

Wendland (2005:63-93) provides an accurate summary of the central worldview motifs or life principles inherent in the prevailing worldview when he identifies the following seven as key in our context: synthesis; dynamism; gradation; communalism; experientialism; humanism and circumscription.⁴ This is an overarching and yet integrated traditional religious framework around which all of life revolves, and from which it is difficult to escape. In this circumscribed cosmos, witchcraft and sorcery are prominent. Suspicions pertaining to success and prosperity or failure and misfortune, in any sphere of life, are ubiquitous. If anyone is seen to succeed it simply must be at the expense of others! Misfortune must also be traced to a mysterious source. Thus the malaise is characterized by an entrenched cause and effect paradigm (pathos) whereby every sickness, misfortune or inexplicable event (including success, the acquisition of wealth, material advancement or improved status) is presumed to have a spiritual connotation and, most often, a sinister motivation (and perpetrator) behind it. Naturally, the outcome is a potent cocktail of superstitions, witchcraft beliefs, and fear. Everyone needs to constantly watch their own back. The following recent headline highlights a case in point: 'Malawi albinos kidnapped and sacrificed by witchdoctor gangs on the hunt for election charms' (Blomfield and Mhango 2019: online, 6 April 2019).

People perceive the need to protect themselves and their families from evil, sickness and death, and their homes and crops from witchcraft, marauding thieves or the capricious natural elements. The traditional way to ensure one's wellbeing is to acquire protection by procuring traditional religious charms and medicine. These charms/medicines are commonly used to appease spirits (ancestral and created) as well as for protective and retaliatory purposes (Ferdinando 1999:107-108, 130; Dicks 2012:103). At this point the Concise Oxford Dictionary

⁴ The author modifies and elaborates these worldview motifs for the specific context in Chapter Four.

of Current English is helpful as it describes a charm as: “3a. an object, act or word(s) supposedly having occult or magic power; a spell; b. a thing worn to avert evil etc.; an amulet.” The latter (*zithumwa/mtsiliko*) are used primarily for protection but also to identify the cause of a problem or threat and then offensively, as ‘counter magic’, for retribution. There are two main methods believed to offer the required protection: firstly, one can observe all the traditions and taboos of the forefathers (*miyambo za makolo*); and secondly, one may procure anti-witchcraft or witchcraft protective charms and medicines (*zithumwa/mtsiliko*) from specialist ‘medicine men’ in various forms (Hara 2008:134-136). The main motivator is fear: of malicious spirits, ancestral spirits, man (arising from the societal expectations inherent in the passing down of religious traditions from generation to generation) and witchcraft in general. Associated motivations for charm-usage include the desire for health, success, life-enhancement and fertility (Beaton 2015:37-80).

Ironically, the spread of Western ideas and education has not led to the diminishment of superstition and witchcraft beliefs and practices. In fact, as Schofield (2003:18) points out: “Cultural change has led...to a rise in witchcraft beliefs and the enhanced role of diviners, healers and herbalists ... and ... ‘power specialists’” (2003:18). In line with this, Beaton (2015:42-43, 58-68, 138-139,148-149) discovered a growing dependence on new magic, substitute charms, and the innovation of contemporary religious practices by those residing in the burgeoning urban areas (many middle class and well educated). These ‘new’ practices, like the historical ones, all appear to be rooted in the traditional religious worldview. It is, therefore, not surprising that members and adherents of ZEC churches, across the board in rural, peri-urban and urban locations, engage in traditional religious practices such as charm-usage, as this traditional fear of spirits and witchcraft is deep-seated and extremely difficult to break (Beaton 2015: 37-80).

Clearly the church is affected. For example, a ‘believer’ might participate in a communion service at church on a Sunday morning and then return to his village and procure a charm for the protection of his house or field from ‘afiti’ (witches) and thieves. It is not uncommon for parents to bring their children forward for baptism or dedication while the child is still wearing a traditional ‘*mkuza*’ (string) with the associated ‘*chitumwa*’ (charm) around their waist or neck, for protection from the spirits (I B10; IB48; I B63; I B69). One of the primary manifestations of this syncretism, as we have already noted, is the continued use of traditional religious charms and medicines by many in the churches in times of personal need and crises (O’Donovan 1995:255; Gehman 2006a:99-100). All such practices profoundly inhibit fruitful discipleship because they depend upon traditional concepts incompatible with Scripture and encourage people to place their faith in charms rather than in God. Charm-usage by those in the ZEC churches is debilitating to individual spiritual growth, inhibits community growth toward maturity in Christ in

local church bodies, and even has a negative impact on numerical growth in the churches (Beaton 2015:46-50; 73-74). This syncretism in the churches is an abdication to culture whereby the Word of God and the reality of salvation in Christ are compromised (Schmidt 2013:33).

To complicate matters, as Newbigin (1986:4) points out, “every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are part”. Many African Christians’ live “lives of hypocrisy and uncertainty” paying lip-service to the white man’s church (mission founded) and to God while at the same time feeling that their very “Africanness has been suppressed and violated” (Nahashon 1999:264-265). As such, the gospel fails to reach the real heart of the people and their culture. To some extent, the ZEC is a case in point, having simply put on a Western, Christian ‘*chitunzi*’ (wrap around cloth traditionally worn by women), which when removed reveals no substantive change. The ZEC Church in South-Central Malawi is both too African traditional and too Western.

Many Malawian ‘Christians’ thus live confused, dualistic lives, mixing and matching Christian doctrine and practice with traditional religion, their behavioral responses determined more by context (situation) than Christian conviction. They either modify Christian doctrine and practice towards traditional religious practices (traditionalized Christianity) or simply superimpose Christianity over their traditional ideology (Christianized tradition). Some disciples may attach their own worldview assumptions to the foreign expressions of faith imported by the missionaries (a type of accommodation) (Wendland and Hachibamba 2007:29; Kraft 1999:390). There has been no change at the deep level of worldview so either ‘program’ of belief and behavior is activated according to sociological context (Wendland 2007:29). In this way, apparently devoted Christians, hold onto their traditional beliefs such as witchcraft and ancestral spirits and continue to practice traditional religion, trying all possible avenues of help in times of crisis (de Kok 2004:12). A further complication is that many who claim to be Christians are really not born again, having some form of Godliness by virtue of their adherence to church (ecclesial) rituals and liturgy but no real power as experienced through the resurrection life of Christ (Rom. 8:9-11). Gehman explains:

If people are not Christian in their hearts but only wear the clothing of Christianity (baptism, church membership and church attendance), Christ cannot meet their needs during times of sickness and death. They will quickly return to traditional solutions during those times when they have serious problems (2006:99-100).

And then there are those who attend church because they view the Christian faith as another form of magic, potentially helping them in their struggle against witchcraft (Van der Meer 2011:80-81), so merging demonology and witchcraft with ominous spiritual and practical consequences (Van der Meer 2010:166). Indeed, from a missiological perspective, substituting

folk magic with Christianity as an alternate source of magic is to provide another mechanistic formula, whereby people can still control and manipulate their destinies, as opposed to the relational framework embodied in genuine Christianity within which people actually worship and submit themselves (and their destinies) to the will of a greater being, trusting in His omniscience (Hiebert 1982:46).

On the ground, for the average Malawian (and African) person, tried and tested traditional religious practices and methods will be invoked until he/she can clearly understand and experience another reality working effectively. Banda writes:

Jesus Christ's right and authority to be regarded as Lord and Saviour in Africa is absolutely contingent on his ability to grant the African Christians and their possessions security against the evil marauding regime. Any understanding of the Lordship and salvific work of Jesus Christ that is only preoccupied with the salvation of the soul from hell is insufficient to provoke the loyalty of the African Christian... he needs to involve himself in the life and affairs of African Christians in such a way that they will depend on him for 'daily bread' and not just 'heavenly bead' (2005:8-9).

Removing traditional charms and other magic tokens is to leave Malawian people without their symbols of religious power. To do so without providing "an equally life encompassing replacement" is akin to asking them to "live in a religious vacuum" (Banda 2005:6). The traditional worldview will hold sway while a 'Christian worldview' (usually an impoverished version) will be given lip-service and paid outward homage.

Christianity may remain an attractive option for all the perceived 'benefits' (community, educational development, famine relief, medical help etc.), but it is not viewed as a potentially subversive new story which might genuinely be the true Way to follow (Jn 14:6). There is little if any genuine spiritual transformation (2 Cor 3:18), with growth towards Christian maturity which is of such obvious importance to Jesus and the Apostles (Lk 8:14; 1 Cor 2:6; Eph 4:13; Col 1:27-28, 4:12; Heb 5:14, 6:1; Jas 1:4), either severely debilitated or even stillborn. What is needed, is to shape and direct the good and helpful in the local culture while reforming the unhelpful elements, without becoming merely a replica of Western theology and Christianity, and without compromising the Gospel message (Mashau and Frederiks 2008:122 in Han 2013:273).

1.6 Towards a Way Forward: Transformation

It has been noted that many in this context remain in bondage to traditional patterns of thinking and action. Many have experienced partial conversion by way of 'personal forgiveness of sins' (justification) and reconciliation to God but appear to lack ongoing conversion of the heart,

mind, and resultant lifestyle (Carrasco 2007:393-394; McKnight 2007:71-73)⁵ (Eph 3:22-24 cf. Rom 12:1ff). At the heart of the 16th century reformation is *semper reformanda*, always reforming, a continuous process of change and transformation (Van der Walt 1983:6-7 in Zgambo 2018:20). The goal is the development of genuine, growing faith which manifests in authentic local expressions of that faith. That is, ongoing transformation or continuous conversion towards increasing Christlikeness in heart, mind, and behavior (Mateyu 2014:37).

Therefore, we must ask how we might help to facilitate the latter, so encouraging growth to spiritual maturity of those who are already born again (2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:27-29)? (Hardy 2006:154). The answer lies in the concept of worldview. Since, in Africa, religion penetrates all of life there must be a paradigm shift at the deepest levels of one's worldview to transform religious belief and behavior (Kraft 1999: 384-389; Ononga 2014:210-2014). O'Donovan (1995:3) defines worldview as: "the view which a person has of his world. It is the way he understands and interprets the things that happen to him and other people... of understanding life and the world in which he lives... a person's belief about what is real and what is not real." However, as Hiebert (1976:6) asserts, worldviews are perceptions of reality, and therefore, not always true reality. If we can understand the basic worldview assumptions of any people group then then we can attempt to change them (Kraft 1989:184; Hiebert 1997:84-85; Dicks 2012:12-13). The renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2) is affected by the transformation of one's worldview.

The practice of continued charm-dependency in our context is the case-in-point. In the ZEC churches, Beaton (2015:40-46; 58-60, 209-211 cf. de Kok 2004:56) provides evidence that traditional religious worldview assumptions animate charm-dependency because people have not embraced the Gospel as sufficient for their real life-situations. Hiebert et al (1999:26) are correct that "We need to constantly find new and better ways to provide Biblical answers to the "confusing problems of everyday life" thus bridging the gap between divine revelation and human contexts.

1.7 The Problem Statement:

Despite the notion that Malawian Christians are able to keep their ATR practices outside of the church (de Kok 2004:54-59), evidence suggests that charm-dependency negatively impacts both individual spiritual growth and numerical growth in ZEC churches, and that it is animated by deep-seated traditional religious worldview motifs (Beaton 2015:37-80).

⁵ The researcher discusses worldview and transformation in missional perspective in Malawi in more detail in Chapter Two.

The problem arising is how to effectively break this charm-dependency by transforming worldview (Hiebert 1997:84-85; Kraft 1999:384-389; Dicks 2012:12-13). Moreover, how to do so by means of an approach which is sensitive to the local culture (Kraft 1999:386; Hiebert 1999:10-11; Koehler 2010:40; Van Breugal 2001:272), faithful to Scripture (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:170-179,199-200; Hiebert 1997:85; Whelchel 2000:125-133) and pedagogically sound (Vella 1994:114-148; Shaw 2014: 182,218-220; Ononga 2014:206).

1.8 The Research Problem/ Question:

What contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations are required for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in ZEC churches by transforming worldview? This is the problem which this study will research.

1.8.1 Further questions arising from this Research Problem are:

What are the main tenets of a South-Central Malawian worldview? How has this worldview been shaped?

Which motifs in the worldview animate charm-dependency within ZEC churches? How do stories of charm-usage from the grassroots reveal these motifs?

Which Biblical passages might challenge and subvert the worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency? How?

How do local ZEC pastors understand these texts? What indigenous insights might inform our applications in context?

What are the key pedagogic factors to consider? How might Biblical truth be most effectively communicated in the context?

1.9 The Central Theoretical Argument

Therefore, the hypothesis or central theoretical argument for this research is that: *a potentially effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency by transforming worldview requires contextual, biblical, and pedagogic foundations.*

To begin to address the above stated problem/question and the five questions arising, it is necessary to focus on three particular areas:

Firstly, a contextual focus: we need to understand the local culture and the worldview behind their religious practices.⁶ Nussbaum (2014:339) explains that “The better we understand the people we are trying to bring into the Kingdom of God, the easier it becomes to make disciples of them.” Instigating change surely “...involves understanding the ideas, stories, history and assumptions of a people..., and determining how these materialize in their actions... before sharing an alternative narrative to the one that is commonly known in the society” (Dicks 2012:60-61). Thus, a potentially effective approach must consider the religious convictions of the people and respond to their deepest needs without compromising Biblical truth (Van Breugal 2001:272, Hiebert 1999:21-29). Onongha (2014: 206 cf. Shaw 2014:137), speaking of those rooted in animistic belief systems, explains that “for any enduring change to take place in the lives of its adherents, it must happen at the level of worldview. Anything short of this would only result in conformation to expected behaviours and conduct, while incongruent beliefs would merely be swept under the carpet.” By taking seriously the questions, needs and contexts of the learners we can move from ‘context to text’ by developing courses that seek to answer them through traditional texts, such as Scripture (Shaw 2014:137). From a missiological perspective, Hiebert (1987:108) explains that understanding the worldview assumptions of a people group allows us to bring them and the resultant cultural and religious practices (e.g. charm-usage) into constructive and culturally sensitive dialogue with the Bible.

Secondly, a Biblical focus: we need to consider how Scripture might address unhelpful traditional religious (cultural) thinking and practice. In every culture, and for every worldview, it is necessary to challenge and subvert spurious worldview assumptions with a Biblical worldview. Traditional beliefs lacking true Biblical salvific value must be challenged, critically analyzed and transformed (Hara 2008:170-171; Ott 2007:17). We must find appropriate ways to posit a biblical worldview which takes account of questions related to everyday life and religion, making better sense, and so enabling people to understand the holistic way in which the Gospel brings salvation. Africans need to know that Jesus is more than able to meet their concrete needs, and address their missing ‘middle level’ questions (Mbiti 1986:232; Hiebert et al 1999:77-79; Hiebert 1982:35-47). Bosch (1991:187) rightly argues for the epistemological priority of the Bible. N.T. Wright (2004:38-40), in his discussion of critical realism, suggests that knowledge is the product of worldview which forms the grid through which we view reality, and fundamental to our worldview are stories (Wright 2004:40; cf. Hiebert 1994:51). People are constantly interpreting and evaluating what we see, hear and experience which leaves room for

⁶ While the particular focus here is on understanding the worldview of a people group, the term ‘contextual’ also includes the biblical understanding and learning preferences of the local culture.

modification as our cognitive and existential dialogue progresses. Wright uses stories as the framework for our knowing things:

all knowledge of realities external to oneself takes place within the framework of a worldview, of which stories form an essential part. And it sets up as hypotheses various stories about the world in general or bits of it in particular and tests them by seeing what sort of fit they have with the stories already in place (2004:45)

Redemptive Biblical ‘stories’, component narratives relating to the Trinity and God’s interpersonal interaction with mankind, must be told. They need to be used heuristically to increase faith and change perceptions of reality (Ononga 2014:207-210). In the context of ZEC, in Malawi, these include particularly, the Biblical truths that depict God as a loving and personal Father (Lk 15:11-24; Rom 8: 12-17; 17-25, 28-39; Eph 2:4-7; 1 Pt 1:3-9), Jesus Christ as Lord of all, the only mediator between God and man, and our righteousness (Mt 28:18; Mk 1:21-34; 4:35-41; Heb 4:14-16; 1 Tim 2:5; 2 Cor 5:20-21), and the Holy Spirit as a person who indwells all believers, purifying us, strengthening us and assuring us of our rich and wonderful eternal inheritance with God (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19-20; Eph 1:12-13; Gal 5:16-26).⁷ Indeed, stories are particularly effective in communicating truth and invaluable tools in working towards moving people along the epistemological spiral towards changed thinking and therefore praxis (Wright 2004: 38-46; Malone 2014:316). Didactic passages may be used in context specific ways (Malone 2014:314-320). Those who hear the carefully selected ‘stories’, reflecting on them contextually, may begin to construct a Biblical theology based on these stories, one which accurately reflects a biblical worldview. Armstrong (2013:326-328) explains: “At the heart of everyone’s worldview is a story they tell about why the world works the way it does. When that story becomes the biblical story, there has been a sincere worldview shift”.⁸ Ongoing critical theological and ecclesiological reflection and dialogue between faith and culture in context is a very good starting point when seeking to transform thinking and practice (Gehman 1987:8-22; Ott 2000:26). Hiebert (1997:85) describes this process as “critical contextualization.”⁹ There is a caveat, as Han helpfully (2013:279) points out: the Word of God must have priority over cultural context/s which ought to be brought under, measured and reinterpreted by the Word

⁷ Ononga (2014:204-210) contends that Biblical ‘stories’ presented systematically will challenge and subvert prevailing local cultural worldview only if and when the listeners are not transported into a ‘foreign’ world through the story. He also believes that didactic texts may be used allegorically for heuristic purposes.

⁸ Armstrong and other advocates of Chronological Bible Storying, a contemporary approach to teaching the Bible to ‘oral’ cultures, embrace this philosophy. However, they opt for a chronological approach to the telling of the stories rather than the thematic approach which the present researcher suggests here.

⁹ Hiebert (1994:81-89) sets out a four step critical contextualization process which includes: 1. Studying the culture phenomenologically; 2. studying the Bible in relation to the question/s arising- discovering meaning helps to discern right from wrong; 3. Critically evaluating beliefs and practices in the light of the Biblical understanding; 4. Developing of new contextualized practice/s.

(Hiebert 1994:91; Goheen: 2000:360). Bosch (1991:427) also cautions that, "The faith tradition that is shared by all Christians should be respected and preserved."

Thirdly, a pedagogic focus: we must raise important pedagogic considerations in the context. Traditionally, from a missiological approach perspective, the teaching of Biblical truth has been in a Western, linear and propositional form, aimed at field-independent learners (Wendland and Hachibamba 2007:17-21). Shaw (2014:237-238) explains that the linear-analytical thinking of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment is globally atypical in education but that "the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the non-Western world tends towards holism and networked thinking, in contrast to the tight specificity so typical in Western academia." Weaver (2015:220-224) is correct that for the message to be truly heard and understood, leading to transformation, it must be conveyed in accessible forms. Essentially, effective communication must consider the traits and learning preferences unique to the receptor culture. The majority of folk in the ZEC churches might be described as field-dependent (Witkins et al 1977:1-64) and oral learners, belonging largely to an orality culture (Chifungu 2013:16-17). Most Malawians tend to think in patterns that are circular, interconnected, holistic, experiential and communal rather than processing information in linear, specific, analytical, theoretical and individualistic-competitive ways (Shaw 2014:237). Therefore, orality methods are key to communicating truth. The experiential nature of learning in this context means that the best methods for the communication of truth draw on traditional models such as story-telling, proverbs, and discussion, with ample room for personal testimonies and questions. The most fruitful approaches appear to be group orientated, participatory, and dialogical (MacBean 2015:86-87; Chifungu 2013:132-139; Beaton 2015:62-65,74-80). Indeed, such a model would be consistent with sound pedagogics in general, in which learner participation, group-work and ongoing dialogue are all core characteristics (Freire 1997:56,65,68-72; Vella 1997:3,140-148,18-21,149-158; Shaw 2014:182-200, 231-240).

Bearing all this in mind, what is required is a deliberate and intentional 'contextual conscious', 'Biblical specific' and 'pedagogic appropriate' missiological approach which seeks out the relationship between a people's worldview and the associated responses (why people do things), how the Bible might redress the underlying unbiblical beliefs which promote unhelpful traditional practices (particularly charm-dependency), and the best methods of communicating the Biblical truths in order to promote potentially transformative critical dialogue.

In the light of the present discussion it is necessary to bring the research objectives into sharper focus:

1.10 Research Objectives:

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Distil the major tenets of a South-Central Malawian traditional religious worldview by examining historical and contemporary practice against the backdrop of a wider South-East African worldview.
- ii. Identify specific worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches.
- iii. Select Biblical passages with the potential to challenge and subvert the worldview motifs animating charm-dependency and study them to determine the theological and practically applicable significance of the texts for the context.
- iv. Critically discuss these texts with local pastors to glean an indigenous, 'third horizon' perspective.
- v. Raise key pedagogic considerations regarding effective communication (teaching/learning) of Biblical truth in the context.

1.11 Research Design and Methodology

The research design to achieve the above objectives is eclectic including both literary-compile and empirical ethnographic methodologies.

The proposed literary-compile methodology includes a descriptive-analytical approach (Pereira 2013:13, Han 2013:9).

The proposed empirical methodology to conduct the research is a mixed-method eclectic approach (Thomas 2013:105-106,183). The design frame is multiple case-study within the field of ethnography (Thomas 2013:146-160; Robson 2002:177-185).

The following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

- In order to study South-East African worldview/s and distil the main tenets of a South-Central Malawian worldview, a descriptive synchronic analysis of the historical narrative of the worldviews will be applied by literary-compile means. A sample of the literature to be used, includes: Mbiti 1970, 1971, 1976, 1986, 1999; Schoffeleers et al 1979; Omuloku 1986; Chakanza 1987; Bediako 1995; Nyirongo 1997, 2013; Van der Walt 1997; Mugambi 1998; Ferdinando 1999; Ogunbuyo 2000; Van Breugal 2001; Amanze 2002; Okello 2003; Sanneh 2003; Banda 2005; Wendland 2005, 2007; Kalilombe 2007; Kapolyo 2007; Likupe 2011; Boucher 2012.
- In order to identify motifs in a South-Central Malawian worldview (receptor culture) which animate the use of traditional religious charms, empirical and descriptive ethnographic research of a qualitative nature will be undertaken through the collection of charm related stories by means of semi-structured interviews, including an interview

schedule with guiding open-ended questions (Thomas 2013:198, 207-209; Robson 2002: 270,278). The latter will take into account the interviewers inter-personal style, and the question design, so as to minimize the perception of coercion, 'prestige bias' and/or 'experimenter expectation' (Thomas 2013:208; Robson 2002:112). The interviews will be undertaken with a representative or 'probability' sample based on 'proportionate sampling' within a stratified random sampling model of ZEC pastors (Robson 2002:161-162, 260-263; Thomas 2013:135-137). Data will be collected by audio-taping and later transcribed with the help of translators. In order to analyze the collected stories general principles of qualitative data analysis including coding and interpretation, and a type of 'thick description' will be used (Robson 2002:492-497, Thomas 2013:109, 239-242), based on a constant comparative method and leading to a network analysis of themes and sub-themes (Thomas 2013:235-236). Methodological triangulation will then also be used (Thomas 2013:145-146) to compare and/or contrast common themes and motifs for charm-usage arising in the stories collected with previous research findings enumerated by means of a literary-compile approach based on recent empirical and descriptive field research both qualitative and quantitative in nature (cf. Beaton 2015:37-80).

- In order to select Biblical passages with the potential to challenge and subvert worldview motives animating charm-dependency for further study, a type of 'thick description' interpretation (Thomas 2013:239-242), linking themes and motives for charm-usage in the grass-roots stories of charm-usage to worldview motifs and corresponding 'reforming' biblical texts, will be used. Methodological triangulation will also be employed to note the inefficacy of particular texts as historically used by ZEC pastors (cf. Beaton 2015:37-80).
- In order to study the selected Biblical texts to uncover the theological significance and the practically applicable significance (Smith 2008:176,182) for the context, each text will be overviewed based on sound evangelical principles of historical-critical exegesis (Fee and Stewart 1993; Wolvaardt 2000), with special reference to the Malawian context. A sample of the literature to be used includes: Foulkes 1989; Bruce 1994; Stott 1994; Morris 1995; Carson 1999; Bailey 2005; Ferguson 2005; Kasali 2006.
- In order to glean an indigenous perspective on the selected Biblical passages and how they are understood in context further empirical qualitative research will be done in the form of two homogenous focus groups with ZEC pastors (Robson 2002:283-289) in which the selected texts will be read, and discussions on text and theological and practical significance for the context, will be facilitated by the researcher. Data will be collected by means of audio-taping and data reduction, and display done by means of session summary sheets (Robson 2002:475-485). Analysis will be completed and conclusions drawn by means of coding and noting consistent, patterns, themes and trends (Robson 2002:481).
- In order to raise key pedagogic considerations regarding effective communication (teaching/learning) of Biblical truth in the context, a descriptive-analysis of related aspects including: orality, story-telling, dialogue, and case-studies will be applied by literary-compile means. A sample of the literature to be used includes: Freire 1997; Vella 1997, Hardy 2006; Terry 2008; Koehler 2010; Ong 2012; Armstrong 2013;

Thornton 2013; Malone 2014; Ononga 2014; Shaw 2014; Weaver 2015; Wiles 2015; Wu 2015.

1.12 Relevance of the Study to Evangelical Missiology in Malawi and Beyond

Bearing the above in mind, while this research is done within a delimited ZEC demographic, the findings and suggestions contained in this paper move towards encouraging transformation on a broader scale. This study thus has the potential to stimulate reflection and action across the ecclesiological and missiological landscape of Malawi and beyond, contributing towards the creation of dynamic, fresh contextual ministry approaches to break a variety of inveterate traditional religious practices in the Church, so to encourage genuine discipleship and the furtherance of the Kingdom of God in this context. This is because both the worldview presuppositions which animate charm-dependency and other related traditional religious practices, and the Gospel which liberates from such bondage, transcend denominational boundaries. It demonstrates that the problem of charm-dependency is rooted in the fact that many Malawians still view life through African traditional religious lenses, but also suggests that when properly understood and fully embraced, the Gospel meets every African need since it is sufficient for every human need. Since 'in Christ', regardless of our denominational affiliation, we find security, righteousness and intimacy with the immanent, personal and living God, there is no need to fear, seek life enhancing (*moyo*) aids, or live with enervating suspicions of personal evil or malevolent neighbours, spirits or witchdoctors. This is the story that the Bible actually tells. It is a liberating message which is saturated in eschatological hope, relating God's full salvation 'in Christ' to past, present and future.

Therefore, the missiological foundations laid here, which consider contextual, Biblical and pedagogic issues in context, might be helpful building blocks for further study and reflection, stimulating critical dialogue and the formation of curriculums for different churches and denominations. The charm-dependency related stories, gleaned in the interviews from the experience of the pastors, will be a unique contribution and a particularly helpful resource for the stimulation of dialogue on the topic of charm-dependency and related traditional religious practices. The Biblical passages selected and the 'indigenous' perspectives gleaned through the focus groups will also provide new insights into how to marry cultural texts and biblical texts in critical dialogue, so moving towards transformed thinking and action. The texts, when juxtaposed to the cultural texts- that is, charm-dependency related stories from the grass-roots in ZEC churches- may also be paradigmatic for other such approaches in both similar and

different cultural contexts.¹⁰ This study might also catalyze or help similar studies related to different traditional practices in Malawi or other African contexts. Therefore, the findings of this research study will benefit Evangelical missiology.

1.13 Stating the Evangelical Presuppositions as they Impact on this Study

This research study is founded on four primary 'Evangelical' presuppositions as they relate to mission. The latter resonate with Bebbington's (1989:2-3) helpful broad-based description of Evangelical convictions and attitudes which have come to be known as 'Bebbington's Quadrilaterals'. That is, Evangelicals emphasize conversion experiences, the fact that salvation is understood to be through the work of Christ on the cross, the Bible, and an active laity engaged in witnessing and doing good works (Larsen 2007:1 in Han 2013:273). Stetzer and Henry (n.d:22) provide an eloquent summary when they write

Mission exists because God is a missionary God, and He beckons His Church to live lives of obedience to His Word (Biblicism), driven by the centrality of the cross (Crucicentricism), flowing from a right relationship (Conversionism) with God, where God's priorities and all-encompassing mission are owned by those who follow Christ and cherish Him above all else, taking Him into their everyday world and being the light and salt of the earth with simplicity, humility and boldness (Activism).

Nevertheless, some elaboration is necessary in order to emphasize certain details relevant to this study:

1.13.1 The Authority of God's Word

The focus is on the ongoing traditional use of charms and the worldview this practice in dialogue with the Biblical witness at a number of points. The Word of God must remain central to this dialogue because the Scriptures are inspired and normative for the practice of Christian faith. Bebbington's (1989:2-3) 'Quadrilaterals' begin with Biblicism or a high view of the Scriptures as inspired (Milne 1995:27; Wolvaart 2000:19). Thus the Bible is authoritative, supremely defining what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves (Erickson 1994:241). God's Word is also sufficient for us (Ps. 119:105; 1 Pt 1:3-4) in that it is through the Word, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, that God speaks to, and works to transform His people (individually and corporately) into the image of Jesus Christ. As Mateyu (2014:49) contends, "Only a community that listens and is transformed by the Word of God is able to cultivate godly character in its members."

¹⁰ The Biblical texts demonstrate or at the very least encourage reflection on how the Malawian (and African) people's perceived exigent needs: protection and deliverance from fear, sustained life-force, purification and separation from evil, and effective mediation, are all well covered 'in Christ'.

The Bible contains universal truths which transcend culture. As Schmidt (2013:29) states, “There is a truth that is above culture, but for us to appropriate it, truth must have meaning within our realm of understanding (that is the gospel is interpreted through cultural forms and structures).” Nevertheless, Mbiti (1986:41) rightly points out that “the Bible does not spare either imported forms of Christianity or the traditional African background. Christians are searching for what may best shape their Christianity in Africa, and the Bible is their light in this search.” Culture changes with time, and even methods of communicating the truth must change, but the truth contained in the Word (Jn 1:1) does not change (1 Pt 2: 23-24). Conn (quoted in Bevans and Schroeder 2006:1) describes the dynamic effectively as the story of the encounter of Eternal Word with changing worlds. Bosch (1991:187) observes that “Theology must undoubtedly always be relevant and contextual, but this may never be pursued at the expense of God’s revelation in and through the history of Israel and, supremely, the event of Jesus Christ.” He goes on to explain that the Scriptures are “a ‘point of orientation’ all Christians should share and on the basis of which the dialogue between them becomes possible.” Schmidt (2013:29) is correct that “There is a truth that is above culture, but for us to appropriate it, truth must have meaning within our realm of understanding (that is the gospel is interpreted through cultural forms and structures).” However, Bevans (2010:22) offers a salutary warning: “The fact is that a theology that takes culture seriously can easily become a ‘culture theology.’” Hence, as we seek to contextualize we do so humbly remembering that the aim is to sensitively critique culture, worldview and traditional religious practice, in the light of Biblical truth.

1.13.2 The Centrality of Christ

Any revision of worldview leading to repentance from idolatrous practices and growth to Christian maturity must be grounded in the Bible. However, the faith does not stand or fall with the canon because it rests rather on a Person. The beauty of the biblical texts is their ability to mediate knowledge of Him and meaning in His actions to us because they were all written from within a genuine encounter with God (Barton 1998b:30-34). Jesus Christ is the eternal Word (Jn 1:1-3), the incarnate Word (Jn 1:14), and He will have the final word (Rev 22:12-13). He is a mediator of a different kind, not merely one who acts as an intermediary between God and man, but the living God Himself (Kombo 2000:220). The Gospel is about encountering Christ and experiencing new life in Him.

If Evangelicalism stands for anything, it surely stands for conversion to Jesus Christ. An Evangelical is a person “who believes and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Pierard 1995:379). In the person and work of Christ, historical objective Truth is found (Jn 11:24-25, 14:6), but that truth needs to be existentially appropriated through faith, in order to bear fruit in any life or community. Bebbington’s (1989:2-3) ‘quadrilaterals’ include crucicentrism and

conversionism. The former speaks of the atoning work of Jesus; our redemption, through His death and resurrection, and the resultant forgiveness and justification for every believer. The latter speaks of the need for every individual to be converted, to appropriate and experience His work on our behalf, through faith, which is both truly believing that Jesus is who He says He is (His claims), and in His passion, which is His life, ministry, death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-5). Therefore, the specific focus must be Christocentric (Eph 3:14-20; Col. 1:27-29). The pre-existent and living Lord Jesus Christ presents a radically alternative way of life for believers. In an attempt to provide a missiological approach which is indigenous or ethno-centric, one which respects a people's culture and worldview, the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ must be kept in clear view, so as not to dilute the Gospel message (Heb 12:3; Rom 1:16; Col 1:13-23; Phil 2:10-11). As Omulokou (1986:31) explains, "Even the hallowed and cherished African Christianity that we set out to erect must conform to the central prerequisite, that it be Christocentric above all else."

1.13.3 The Indispensable Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is indispensable to the process. He is not merely a spirit in the pantheon of spirits recognized in Africa, neither is He a power or a life-force, but He is the third Person of the Trinity, God Himself (Kombo 2003:221). He convicts of sin and brings men to the place of genuine repentance and faith in Christ (Jn 3:3-8, 16:8-11; 2 Cor 5:17). A living experience of the indwelling Holy Spirit is indispensable to genuine, mature faith in God. No transformation of heart, mind and life is possible without the work of God's Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17, 21; Gal 5:22-23). This presupposes a salvation experience through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8-10), through which the individual experiences, "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5b cf. Rom 3:22-25a).

The Spirit of God will convict where there are unhelpful mindsets and practices within the Church. It is He who illuminates the Word of God for the believer, highlighting its truth (Jn 14:25-26, 16:13; 1 Cor 2:12-14). Again, it is the Spirit who sanctifies (Rom 8:1-4, 16-17; 2 Cor 3:18), and empowers for practical Godly living (Acts 4:31; Eph 5:18). He is the Spirit who dwells in the hearts of all who truly believe in Christ (Eph 1:13-14, 4:30; Rom 8:15-16, 38-39), providing assurance of salvation, and confidence in God's future (1 Cor 2:9-10; 2 Co. 5:5). The same Holy Spirit inspires prayer, thus enabling spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness (Rom 8:26; Eph 6:18). He also motivates towards morality and ethical living in community (Gal 5:16-22; 6:2, 9-10). A deeper, more Biblical understanding of the Triune God (Father, Son and

Holy Spirit), as He exists and relates to those 'in Christ', is necessary to transform worldview.¹¹ Full trust in the Holy Spirit's ability to lead both the missionaries who seek to teach and facilitate transformation, and the receptor culture, who need to be lead into truth, is required. The latter, as they continually critique their own practices in the light of the Word (Jn 16:13-15), moving towards culturally appropriate responses and expressions of faith (Kraft 1999:390).

1.13.4 Activism (Witness and Social Action)

Bebbington (1989:2-3) refers to the second of his quadrilaterals as 'activism'. Stetzer and Henry (n.d.:22) talk about 'redemption and lift'. These terms express the belief that authentic expression of the Gospel in word and deed is essential. They emphasize the positive practical or 'social' actions that follow from genuine faith, actions that work towards betterment of lives and communities. When people who are 'in Christ' respond to the Word of God, as enlightened by the Spirit of God, and transmitted through contextually appropriate means, then positive practical changes will occur in the wider community. In the power of the Holy Spirit believers become "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:17f) to the world, not only becoming witnesses through Gospel proclamation and testimony, but also demonstrating through tangible social action the love of Christ (Bebbington 1989:2-3.; Stetzer and Henry n.d.:18-22).

In the context, not only will members and adherents of Zambezi Evangelical Church grow spiritually as they are set free from charm-dependency but their example (witness) will begin to breakdown entrenched fears and challenge other unhelpful traditional beliefs in the wider communities in which the various churches are found. Moreover, as churches further explore other real-life traditional beliefs, practices and experiences in the light of Scripture, there is every possibility that they will begin to play a more active role in challenging a variety of ungodly traditional practices. For example, the practice of '*bwalo chinamwali*' or female initiation (Longwe 2006:40-71; Fiedler 2005:26-37) and many traditions related to death and burial rites (Van Breugal 2001: 97-123), as well as other culturally accepted practices related to ancestor veneration and witchcraft (Van Breugal 2001:147-151, 218-224; Wendland 2007:70-73,87-92) may all still be further critically appraised. Churches might also offer refuge and support to victims of witchcraft activities and other related social evils, and even begin to invite community members into redemptive dialogue between Bible and traditional spirituality, critically analyzing a wide variety of morally and socially questionable traditional practices. In these ways, being salt and light, and uplifting their communities.

¹¹ Here, the researcher refers to those who by faith have believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and might, therefore, be referred to as regenerated or 'born again' believers.

1.14 Chapter Summary

In this introductory Chapter the researcher describes the nature of the study and clearly articulates the main aim of the research study: an attempt to identify contextual, Biblical, and pedagogic foundations for an effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency in the ZEC churches, by transforming worldview. The key terms and concepts pertaining to the study are clarified through explanation. The context in which the research on ATR worldview and charm-dependency takes place is then discussed, revealing the loci to be within the Zambezi Evangelical Churches of South-Central Malawi. Within the stated demographic, charm-dependency, which negatively impacts discipleship within the churches, is reckoned to be stimulated by traditional religious motifs in the local worldview. The research problem and the research question/s arising all relate to how to effectively break charm-dependency, by transforming worldview, in a manner sensitive to the local culture, faithful to Scripture and pedagogically sound. The research objectives focus on three main areas of study, including: (1) identifying specific worldview motifs within the local traditional religious worldview which animate charm-dependency. The latter is dependent on a thorough investigation into the worldview of the receptor culture and an adequate understanding of the current situation in ZEC churches relating to charm-usage; (2) selecting and studying Biblical passages and themes apposite to challenge and subvert these motifs, with a special interest in the theological significance of the passages and their practical application in context; (3) highlighting key pedagogic considerations in the context in order to encourage the discovery of an effective contextual pedagogic methodology for the demographic. The proposed research design to achieve these objectives is given: a mixed-method approach, including both a literary-compile (descriptive-analytical) component and empirical-descriptive qualitative research in the field of ethnography. An explanation is also provided as to how and why the study might be beneficial to the wider Malawian Evangelical ecclesiological/missiological landscape, given that the underlying motives which animate charm-dependency are ubiquitous, transcending denominational boundaries. Finally, four guiding Evangelical presuppositions are enumerated as the study is done from the perspective of the Evangelical tradition.

In Chapter Two, the researcher will provide a critically interactive review of the primary literature which has helped to shape his thinking on the subject matter and served to provide helpful signposts for the journey of discovery.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this Chapter the researcher provides an interactive and critical review of many of the primary literary texts consulted in the formulation of this thesis. The material reviewed here provides a theoretical framework for the research. The discussion is thus presented in three categories as they clearly emerged in Chapter One from the statement of the research problem and the supporting questions, along with the hypothesis, the main aim and objectives, and the research design, namely: contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations. The materials referenced in this discussion, including books, dissertations and journal articles, helped to shape the ideas for this research by providing an overview of the topic, revealing the wide range of factors involved, and demonstrating how others have approached similar problems in other contexts. Many other texts not listed here, including books, dissertations and journal articles, as well as texts on research methodology, and newspaper articles related to African traditional practices in Malawi, were also used. The latter are referenced in the bibliography. The process of literature selection was a continuous one until the thesis was completed.

There is no extant evidence of a missiological approach intentionally aimed at breaking charm-dependency in this context. Neither are there any clearly articulated missiological foundations specifically aimed at undergirding any such approach. However, a number of scholars provide helpful signposts for the journey towards the identification of necessary foundations for the proposed creation of a potentially effective missiological approach:

2.2 Foundation One: Contextual

In this section, literature relating to African worldview/s and traditional religious practices, with particular reference to South-Central Malawi, is discussed. The latter served to provide relevant contextual background information, including some notable references to charm-usage in the context, and helped to move towards positing the main tenets of a South-Central Malawian Worldview. Moreover, materials relevant to the importance of understanding 'receptor' culture worldview, for facilitating genuine worldview transformation, are also included.

2.2.1 Charm-dependency in the Context

Firstly, a few authors discuss charm-usage (including medicines) in the Malawian context. Van Breugal (2001: 211-255) enumerates a number of practices amongst the Chewa of the Central region which is helpful. In particular, he mentions '*mankhwala*' (medicines) which are used to protect from '*ufiti*' (witchcraft), often put in the horn of an antelope or goat, or in a gourd or the tail of an antelope, by the '*sing'anga*' (witchdoctor), and then placed in the roof of a house. This is believed to protect the house from *mfiti* (a witch) or even make the house invisible to witches. The one who has such medicine is a strong man '*munthu wokhwima*' and has nothing to fear (2001:222). He also mentions three other sub-categories of *mankhwala* (medicine) which are used to create protective charms: *mtsiliko* which is also called *chambu* which is used to protect houses, gardens, grain-stores, cattle-kraals and even villages against sorcery (*mfiti* and *ziwanda*- witches and evil spirits) and theft. Then there is *mphinjiri* which believed to ward off misfortune. This is a reed or thin piece of wood into which *mankhwala* has been inserted which is fixed on a string and tied around the waist, ankles or neck. Finally, he mentions *chithumwa*, a small sachet (or pillow as it is called in contemporary parlance) made of cloth containing *mankhwala* which is sown into clothes or fixed around the neck with string. The latter is believed to enable the wearer to obtain the object of their desires (2001:247). Van Breugel also enumerates a number of examples related to the use of these medicines and charms, some of them worth noting because they are mentioned by a number of the pastors in the interviews. He talks about *mtsiliko* which takes the form of *mankhwala* which has to be rubbed into cuts in the skin (*otemera*) for the protection of the body (2001:249-250) and other *mankhwala* which protects one from lightning thrown by the enemy. He also explains that to protect gardens and maize fields from thieves, spells and wild animals, *chambu* is used in various ways: The *sing'anga* provides the *mankwala* for the owner to bury in holes at the four corners of his field. A small earthenware pot containing other *mankhwala* is placed at a chosen entrance to the field through which only the owner can enter after lifting the pot. Anyone else who attempts to enter will become lame or possibly even die. In such a case only the *sing'anga* that provided the medicine can intervene. People also plant seed dipped in *mankhwala* around their maize fields to grow a magic enclosure to protect the crop from those who would wish to diminish it for the increase of their own harvest. Others purchase a small string or 'magic snake' from the *sing'anga* which they hang in a tree to protect from thieves. Husbands also make their wives drink a *chambu* which causes anyone who commits adultery with them to contract a disease (2001:250-251). Van Breugal's (2001:252) assertions that *mphinjiri* and *chitumwa* "occupy a large place in the lives of the people" and that they "are sought for many different purposes: to prevent and cure diseases, to obtain good luck, to protect against enemies and wild animals, to prevent conception, to cause abortion, to make oneself loved...to be successful in business,

exams...etc.” still hold true for today, according to the evidence provided by the ZEC pastors. Two examples of this for small children, include the *mphinjiri njira* or *njimiko* which is a small sachet containing particular shrub matter, worn around the neck, to protect from various diseases. And to protect against headaches a child may be given a *mphinjiri yothathoka* which contains a piece of its dried-up umbilical cord. For girls and women, a *chisomo* or *mankhwala a chikondi* (love medicine) is very popular. This is a small sachet containing specific plant matter worn around the neck which is believed to make her loved. For fecundity and healthy birth of the baby a *njimiko*, sometimes called *mlimbiko* (that which makes strong) is worn around the waist. This consists of six *mphinjiri* made of a certain root tied around the waist on a string made from the fibres of another plant but there are a number of different ways of making the charm (2001:252-253). All of the above examples were mentioned by pastors as charms being used by their congregants. Van Breugal (2001:254) notes that “each *sing’anga* has his remedies and the total number is quite immense.”

Steinforth (2008:36-43), in his article ‘Enslaving the Spirit: On Magic and Mental Disorder in Southern Malawi’, demonstrates the close relationship between mental disorder and magic in Southern Malawi. In so doing he provides invaluable insights into the practice of magic and use of medicines and charms for protection and self-advancement.¹² He contends that, in general, anthropological works on magic in Malawi have divided the concept up into the valued, openly practiced and culturally acceptable *matsenga* (often translated sorcery) and the secretive, ‘evil’, feared and culturally rejected, *ufiti* (witchcraft). Although Wendland (2007:191-192) points out that the sorcerer most often acts out of an ‘evil heart’, from feelings of hostility, lust and greed, and that the *mpheranjiru* is literally: ‘one who kills out of malice or envy’. Van der Meer (2008:250) is probably correct when he argues that “There is little use in trying to distinguish between witchcraft and sorcery as some have tried as these terms are often used interchangeably.”

Nevertheless, Steinforth notes that causation of mental disorders is frequently attributed to witchcraft (*ufiti*). However, he rightly points out that the two categories of magic are not entirely distinct as *asing’anga* (traditionally witchdoctors who practice *matsenga*, providing protective medicines and charms) and *ufiti* (practiced by *mfiti* who are understood to always be malicious, causing harm), “both offer their services to perform magic charms on behalf of a paying customer” (2008:38). Thus, the lines are blurred between culturally appreciated and culturally banned forms of magic and it is very difficult to find the alleged culprit. He also makes some helpful points in understanding the use of charms. Firstly, he asserts that it “it is a

¹² There are a number of significant anthropological publications on witchcraft in Malawi, including: Van Breugal 2001; Soko 2002; Schoffeleers 2000; Chakanza 1985; Wendroff 1985; Marwick 1965,1952; Crawford 1967; and Wendland 2007 (pgs. 174-215).

common notion that individuals apply witchcraft in order to harm another person for clearly social reasons-i.e. out of jealousy, envy, hatred etc” ... and that “Within the tight social network of rural Southern Malawi, jealousy is generally one of the most frequently named motivations for the use of *ufiti* (2008:38). He then states that protective (*kutsilika*) magic is usually considered *matsenga* but shows how victims of *kutsilika* charms need not only be witches (quite often the victims of protective counter-witchcraft-magic) but might also be ordinary thieves, falling victim to defensive magic at the hands of one who wishes to protect their property and uses the expertise of a specialist (2008:39).¹³ He also discusses the category of *kukwhima*, the term used to denote a number of witchcraft related practices, including enslaving or sacrificing a relatives spirit for personal benefit, which involves following the instructions of the witchcraft specialist (*mfiti* or particularly well-informed *sing’anga*) in order to force the personality spirit (*mzimu*) of a living being (usually a relative) to leave the body, and to take control of it, so as to use it to perform tasks beneficial to the perpetrator (usually to acquire wealth).¹⁴ Two examples include, using *mizimu* (spirits) to pull the belt of a maize mill engine to ensure greater productivity, and also using these ‘captured’ spirits to attract customers for business at roadside grocery shops (2008:39-40). Other *kukhwima* procedures include fortifying oneself with protective charms to strengthen for a given purpose, but the term also denotes “a more general idea of maturity, strength and authority as related to old age” (2008:41). The latter is significant because it ties *kukwhima* charms to leadership in the Malawian context. In other words, to attain leadership at any level (traditional and modern), be that politicians, Traditional Authorities, Village Headmen, Chiefs etc., *kukwhima* charms are necessary (protective and otherwise). This fact establishes a clear link, and the associated negative perception¹⁵, between the respective person and witchcraft (2008:41-42). Indeed, this research paper exposes the fact that even pastors and church leaders make use of this category of charms.

Wendland (2007:174-215; 2005:70-73, 90-91) also mentions certain charm related practices common to the Malawian context in relation to protection and life-enhancement. Dicks (2012:103, 235-245) also briefly mentions the use of charms and traditional medicines for protection by the Yawo people of Malawi in his section on rituals and ceremonies, going on to discuss healing and power and their uses of various talisman, where the ‘Holy Word of God’, in

¹³ He states that *kuzerekeza* (mental retardation) may occur as a pre-determined punishment for the perpetrator/s, from people wishing to protect their property, if that property, protected by the *kutsilika* charms, is damaged or stolen.

¹⁴ This can result in the victim’s body being killed or their mental ability being severely impaired (*misala* or *kuzerezeke*) since they no longer have a personality spirit (*mzimu wa umunthu*). However, a mental disorder may also befall the perpetrator if they fail to follow the instructions related to the specific charm given to them by the specialist, using involving the violation of socially acceptable norms in cases where powerful charms are needed (e.g. committing incest with one’s sister or mother, mutilating body parts or even murder) (2008:40-41).

¹⁵ Steinforth (2008:42) explains that to be ‘*wokwhima*’ (a fortified person), “implies the use of secret powers for strictly selfish purposes.”

Arabic, is included as part of the talisman to “solve the following illnesses and problems: evil spirits, various body pains, madness, blindness, epilepsy, headaches, unknown sicknesses, court cases, blood pressure, lack of employment, marriage problems, bringing a loved one closer, finding a marriage partner, getting a passport or getting a job” (2012:240).¹⁶ Notably, other forms of talisman are used to protect fields from thieves, for love, court-cases and the protection of a house (2012:241-245). Indeed, in Africa, and in Malawi, traditional religious charms/medicines are commonly used, especially in times of personal need and crises (O'Donovan 1995:255; Gehman 2006:99-100; de Kok 2004:12). Fear is the driving force and so they are commonly used for protection, but they are also used for success, health, life-enhancement, and retaliatory purposes (Ferdinando 1999:107-108, 130; Dicks 2012:103; Beaton 2015:37-80). These charms/medicines (*mankwhala: zithumwa/mtsiliko/mphinjiri etc.*) are acquired by observation of traditions (*miyambo za makolo*) or consulting ‘medicine men’ (Hara 2008:134-136; Dicks 2012:103; Wendland 2007:72).

There is little research on charm-usage in relation to its impact on Christian discipleship in the ecclesiological context. de Kok (2004) has studied ATR in the CCAP (Central Church of Africa Presbyterian) in Malawi but her interests are sociological rather than missiological and her focus is not specifically on charms or finding a way to discourage ATR practice. She (2004:54-59) is incorrect when she concludes that Malawian believers are able to “literally and figuratively- keep ATR outside the church”. She clearly demonstrates how intrinsic ATR thinking and practices remain to life for believers in Malawi but her sociological interest obfuscates the deleterious impact on discipleship and church worship. Beaton (2015:2015:37-80) demonstrates that charms are being used in the ZEC churches and that these practices are harmful to discipleship within the denomination. He shows that in the ZEC churches a wide variety of charms and medicines are being used frequently and that they have a directly negative impact on both spiritual and numerical growth in the churches. The problem is that such practices compromise full salvation in Christ (Schmidt 2013:33). Some in the churches are not truly converted and so fall back into traditional practices easily (Gehman 2006:99-100), and others confuse Christianity with another form of magic (Van der Meer 2011:80-81; 2010:166; Hiebert 1982:46).¹⁷ However, even many who are true believers, also still hold onto their traditional beliefs, and thus allow their belief and behavior to be determined by sociological context (Wendland 2007:29’343; Kraft 1999:390; Hiebert 1997:84-85).

¹⁶ The most common of these are believed to be dealing with the problem of evil spirits and madness.

¹⁷ Just today, the author heard about a man who came to the Seventh day Adventist hospital at Makwasa, in a rural area of the Southern region, clutching a Bible to his side underneath his shirt. When asked what he was doing, he explained that he believed that if he held it there for long enough (another day), the pain would be relieved. On examination by the doctor he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis. So critical was the situation that the appendix was close to erupting. He was immediately operated on and the appendix removed. The doctor testified that had he not come in when he did he would have died the same day (I D2: March 2019).

Charm-dependency is the manifestation of a way of life and thinking which cannot simply be reformed without “an equally life encompassing replacement” (Banda 2005:6, 8-9). The traditional fear of spirits and witchcraft is deep-seated and extremely difficult to break (Beaton 2015: 37-80).¹⁸ However, failing to trust fully in Christ (Ps 46:1; Prov 5:3-5) and continuing to use traditional charms and other traditional religious means is idolatrous (Deut 18:9-13; Jer 27:9-10; Num 23:23; Ex 20:1-3), compromises God’s protection (Eph 6:10-19) and debilitates spiritual growth through testing times of trial and suffering (Rom 5:3-5; 8:38-39; Jas 1:3-5; Col 1:27-29).

With regards to considering how people might be discouraged from such practices from a missiological perspective there is a dearth of material. Only Beaton (2015:51-55; 62-65; 74-80, 221) attempts to broach this subject, noting the absence of appropriate and effective ministry approaches to break the natural dependency on traditional religious thinking and practice in ZEC and further afield. He explains that although a diversity of ministry approaches are being presently employed by pastors in ZEC churches to minister to the problem of charm-dependency (both formal and informal), they are limited in their scope and efficacy. He suggests that this is due to a generally haphazard, legalistic approach to dissuading charm-usage and a limited ‘canon’ for teaching which is anthropocentric, overlooking the merits of focusing on the character of God, and the believers position ‘in Christ’. However, he does not provide a solution to the problem.

2.2.2 ‘Receptor’ Culture Worldview

Secondly, there is some extant material regarding understanding the worldview of the local ‘receptor’ culture. The literature focuses on grasping the basic elements of the worldview which animate ‘religious’ behavior. For example, Van Breugal (2001:5-288) did extensive research on the culture and religious practices of the Chewa people group in the Central region of Malawi in the 1970’s. His work is seminal, but he focuses on aspects of Chewa religious beliefs and practice predominantly in the village context of some fifty years ago. Nevertheless, his work demonstrates unambiguously how Chewa beliefs are worked out in a variety of traditional religious practices, many of which are still perpetuated to one degree or another in certain areas today, including charm-usage. The author is thorough in his treatment of Chewa traditional practice, demonstrating the close correlation between worldview and practice. He exposes the importance of spirits and witchcraft to our context, seeing how the use of medicines and charms for protection is a natural outcome in such a dynamic. From Chewa traditional religion he notes the relevance of traditional concepts of God, ancestral spirits, cultic rituals, rites of passage,

¹⁸ These charms are being used across the board in rural, peri-urban and urban ZEC churches (Beaton 2015:58 ,67-68).

witches and medicine men. Every facet is woven together to form an intelligible whole, a meta-narrative needing to be understood holistically in order to grasp the significance of charm-usage. Unfortunately, while the author does acknowledge the impending impact of globalization and the movement of people on traditional religious culture he cannot comment authoritatively on the results (2001:271-272). Thus contemporary influences are not considered in any detail. Moreover, he never specifically attempts to synthesize definitive underlying worldview principals or motifs.

Schoffeleers et al (1999:147:209; first edition 1979 cf. Schoffeleers 2000:34-66) have covered rain shrine theology in Central and Southern Malawi and other forms of traditional worship (such as spirit possession rituals in the Southern region) quite thoroughly. They focus on the territorial rain cults in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The essays pertaining to the Malawian territorial mediumship, including the Chisumphi and Mbona cults are particularly enlightening (1999:147-186,187-207,215-226; 2000:66-76). They highlight the historical importance of the rain cults to African traditional religion in South-Central Malawi, taking note of key theological themes and influential cult figures and practices. The authors show how fertility for land and human progeny is sought through prayers made to and through the ancestors as intermediaries to the High God by means of special rain rituals. They also describe the role of a plethora of other intermediaries such as spirit mediums, spirit representatives, mythical figures such as the python *Thunga*, prophets and prophetesses, and even a divinized human being in the form of *Mbona*, in the traditional religion of our context. Moreover, the authors reveal the political significance of the shrines to the historical and cultural development of Malawi, discussing the crucial theological role of shrine ideology in this milieu. It is interesting to note the redolence of much that is integral to shrine ideology to contemporary life and religious practice. These accounts are useful in terms of understanding the historical roots of some contemporary religious practices and the development of worldview motifs. However, the essays pre-suppose a fairly well-developed understanding of the historical-cultural-religious background to the context and because they are synchronic the reader is left with much to do in terms of piecing together the history. They are also focused on very specific aspects of traditional religion and don't deal with charms.

Amanze (2002) gives a helpful account of the Bimbi rain cult in the Chewa religious system (2002:12-121) which shares the same characteristics as the Mbona cult among the Chewa of the Lower Shire Valley. He discusses both the theological foundations of the cult (2002:125-146) in which he usefully describes the concept of God amongst the Chewa, and its historical development in the Upper Shire valley (2002:148-167). He notes that the Chewa view God as One and Supreme, central to religion. He is generally benevolent and the giver of rain, "the life-giving water" (*Mphambe*) (2002:130). According to Amanze (2002:129-132), the Chewa view

God as an absolute moral being, a God of peace, and a God of order (any social disharmony is viewed as both anti-social and anti-*Chauta* or anti-God), One who hears the prayers of His people and is approachable, a changeless God who never grows old and dies, *Mulungu* inhabiting his abode (ku-Mulungu) in the spirit world with the ancestors, but not as remote as some scholars have portrayed him to be. These are all very helpful points of connection with the Christian gospel, but scholars disagree as to the veracity of some of these assertions, especially regarding his approachability, changelessness and transcendence (cf. Van Breugal 2001:29-41, Wendland 2007:104). Nevertheless, his discussion on the Chewa names of God (2002:133-141) provides very helpful insights into their understanding of the Supreme Being. Of particular interest is the name *Leza*. Amanze (2002:141) writes: "To the Chewa, the concept of the motherhood of God is more real than the concept of the Fatherhood of God. God (*Leza*) is the mother of humankind and they see themselves in a mother-son or mother-daughter relationship with *Leza*." This is very much in line with the matrilineal and uxorilocal cultural system of the Chewa. The idea of an ancestress being the founder of the family, clan, lineage and tribe, and nation means that God is readily perceived as the Great ancestress (*kholo lalikulu*), "the progenitor of all humankind in whom all people have their beginning and meet their end" (Amanze 2002:141).

Ott (2000; 2007:14-24, 163-183) provides helpful theological and ethnological insights into the historical religious practices of the Chewa people group who have inhabited the Central and Southern regions of Malawi since the fifteenth century. He is deliberate in his exploration of an anthropological perspective on 'historical' religion and culture in Malawi. In so doing he delves back into the past, exposing the roots of some of the key traditional religious practices, including: creation myths, rain shrine theology and rituals, and the theology and practice of the infamous *Gule wamkulu* (the great dance), including the latter's key role in overseeing the faithful observance of the ancestral customs (*miyambo ya makolo*). Ott (1998:44) also notes "the previous unity of *gule wamkulu*, rain shrine activities and High God veneration in the Chewa religion." The *gule wamkulu* is seen to be central to Chewa religion, with its close ties to the ancestors, and their intimate ties to village Chiefs, rain- shrines, initiation rites, and witchcraft and sorcery (Boucher 2012:10-49; Van Breugal 2001:125-167; Schoffeleers 1999:150-161; 1968:307-415). Again, it is Ott (1998:44) who draws attention to the relationship between the symbolism of the *gule wamkulu* masks and the seven rites of passage in the Chewa life-cycle and experience. He explains that the seven sections of *nyau* 'masks' found at Chamare Museum at Mua, show how in the rites, rituals and ceremonies, the values represented by each particular mask are taught: birth (*chikuta*), initiation rites (*chinamwali* [girls] *kumeta gule* [boys]; marriage (*ukwati*); eldership (*ufumu*); medicine man (*using'anga*); the different phases of funeral and commemoration rites (*maliro*); and finally the different rain rituals. All of this provides an

excellent overview of the intimate relationship between historical African traditional religious ideology and praxis in the stated demographic. While his focus is not on worldview as such, Ott's (2000:87-511) interest in how traditional theology is reflected in images (art and artefacts), is salutary, as Chewa religion is not academic or expressed in "coherent theological expositions", it is rather lived out and enacted by means of myths, songs, prayers, rituals, oral traditions etc. (Amanze 2002:126). Unfortunately, his discussion of traditional religious charms is very limited and does not do justice to their importance in the context.

Ott (2007:14-24) also highlights key aspects in traditional religious thinking which are subject to modification in the contemporary milieu, if and when stimulated appropriately towards indigenous theological response. Notably, he mentions: moving 'From *Deus Otiosis* to *Deus Abscondicus*', 'From God of Nature Towards God of Life'; 'From God of Taboos Towards God of Unconditional Love', 'From the Fascination of Violence and Power to the 'Powerless God of Love', and finally, 'From God of Ritual Celebration to a God of Personal Experience'. He advocates the application of a "theology of two ears", by which he means encouraging theological responses to popular concepts of God in context through listening to both the immediate and natural responses to the transcendent reality in their lives, but also "the other voice that is formed by the Bible and Christian tradition" (2007:23-24). He wants to encourage "a meaningful and contextual theology" by means of studying and dialogizing both sources (2007:24).

Other indigenous scholars, such as Likupe (2011:10-19), Musapole (1996:3-9), and particularly Kalilombe (1999a:212-235; 1999b:123-128; 2004:25-29; 2007:3-14), provide local insights into culture and religious practice. However, they all tend to be rather optimistic regarding the deleterious impact of the traditional worldview on Christian worship. Likupe's (2011:17-18) theological narration and commentary on the Kaphirintiwa myth is enlightening as he explains that "Among the various Malawian creation stories, the Kaphirintiwa account stands prominent in its explication of the conception of an immanent and transcendent God, the origin of the world, human beings, animals, plants and the presence of evil and suffering in the world." Schoffeleers (2000:9-13, 23-33) is also helpful here as his theological reflections on the myth link primordial events to contemporary religious rites and practice, especially female initiation, death and burial and the making of bush fires. Musapole wants to integrate the traditional worldview with the Biblical worldview and "create a suitable theology" for Malawi today (1996:3-6). He is right to look for principles of life in the Chewa culture which help to shed light on Biblical truth while providing dignity to the culture. But is it necessary to create a new theology? Local elements of Chewa spirituality such as bondedness, *umoyo*, *umunthu*, and community-in-communion serve as helpful connecting points, analogies and illustrations of Biblical truth, but need not be pushed further than that. He is absolutely correct that "It is the person of Jesus

Christ that is new to Malawian religiosity and spirituality, and not Western civilization, Christianity and capitalism. It is the new *umunthu* that Jesus inaugurates which constitutes the Gospel for us Malawians, and not ecclesiastical forms.” But when he adds “and belief systems” he muddies the waters (1996:7). Is it not simply the deliberate and continual contextualization of Scripture and theology that is so desperately needed here in Malawi rather than any new African theology?¹⁹ As Nyasulu (2004:82) states, “A Christianity apart from the present cannot be founded... God already brought his full revelation in Christ once and for all. Perhaps the best approach should be to reform the same Christianity.” If creating a new Malawian theology is simply reflecting on and living out (applying) the Holy Scriptures *in situ* as guided by the Holy Spirit, and aided by a commitment to conformity to traditionally accepted, catholic interpretations of the Scriptures, and core theological doctrines, then this is commendable. The latter will naturally involve a large measure of re-telling the story, as the second narrative (the one which shapes worldview) is considered at every point along its historical development in the light of the Biblical narrative, and historical interpretations and manifestations in-community, of it (1996:7-8). Musapole’s desire for theology to “enrich a people’s life for meaningful and blessed living” is admirable but the latter can never really happen if we stray from the truth. In other words, theology must not be done in a vacuum. To be fair to Musapole (1996:7), he does want a Christian Malawian theology rather than a traditional one, a theology based on the “with-us-ness of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ who became for us *munthu weniweni* (human being par excellence).” Indeed, all believers should be encouraged and enabled to grapple with “how the faith measures up to their life experience: (Kalilombe 1999:193). Nevertheless, in our quest for an indigenous theology we must be careful not to lose our Biblical (which includes the use of sound hermeneutical principles) (Nyasulu 2004:83), and traditional theological (catholic) moorings (Wendland 2005:366-373).

Kalilombe (2007:3-14) is particularly helpful, noting that the various ethnic groups in Malawi have been in constant interaction, thus legitimizing some reference to a shared Malawian culture, and therefore, spirituality. He also argues that culture is dynamic, and that culture change has been profound “since Malawi began to have intense and sustained contact with the West through Colonialism and Christian evangelization” (2007:9). He makes a good point but other historical events, such as the emergence of the Phiri state system (circa 15-17th century AD) and the resultant conflict with the proto-Chewa groups for control of the rain shrines, have also been extremely significant in shaping culture. Kalilombe (2007:4-8) also enumerates a four-part traditional Malawian worldview finding its origins in the various ‘myths of origin’,

¹⁹ Certainly Malawians need to sift out the plethora of Western cultural influences that have been passed down with the teaching of the Scriptures and theology, but they do not need to, and should not, begin again. Authentic evangelical theologizing must surely always be reflections on the Scriptures and traditional ‘orthodox’ theology, and interpretations in context, leading to specific applications of both in the present context.

particularly the '*Kapirintiwa* myth': *God* is up in the sky; the *bush* is where the rest of creation live keeping themselves separate from man; the *spirits* of the dead are invisible, near God, but also in relation to the living; and the *village* which is the abode of the living-living who must find appropriate ways to relate to the other three parts of reality. He explains that theological beliefs are formed in this matrix and challenged or provoked to modification by contact with the West. He contends that further changes to African (and Malawian) spirituality are inevitable, and recognizes the need to preserve the positive elements of traditional spirituality and develop them, suggesting that the way forward is through inculturated evangelization which begins with traditional elements of spirituality and traditional practice, and sensitively subjects them to Biblical critique. However, he is not conscious enough of the dangers of syncretism. While preserving certain elements of traditional spirituality and practice in order to establish points of connection with the Bible is useful, developing them is dangerous if they are unbiblical, as the result is all too often syncretism. Culture stands to be transformed by Scripture and 'inculturated' evangelization always runs the risk of being overly sensitive to or tolerant of pagan ideas and practices. The term needs to be further explained. As Munyenyebe (2005:38) points out, Kalilombe himself argues for the possibility of salvation in African Traditional Religion. Moreover, it is dangerous to encourage creative forms of worship in the ecclesiological context which bear the local cultural-religious stamp but deviate from the Biblical. For example, just as some herbalists with a Christian background carry out their consultations in the presence of a Bible (Schofield 2003:19), so some Christian counsellors advocate the incorporation of traditional elements into their counseling sessions and into worship in the ecclesiological context.²⁰

Wendland and Hachibamba (2007:71-253) present the world of the spirits, the question of 'who is God', and witchcraft in Central Africa, highlighting much that is commonplace in the belief systems of people in Malawi. Of particular importance for our purposes are, firstly, their explanation pertaining to the source or origin of evil in central African society: "evil, a concept, which in most south-central African languages has both, a moral as well as an amoral component, is always associated with human mental or physical activity. This may be attributed either to a single person, or less often, to a larger group of people who display harmful or reprehensible characteristics according to customary social mores" (2007:175). They go on to explain that evil has a definite religious connotation because the perpetrators are believed to be both established and upheld by God, through the mediation of the ancestral spirits, and so while there is no supernatural 'devil' concept in the local ontology of being, "there is another

²⁰ In the contemporary manifestations of some possession cults in Malawi, the mediums have healing ministries. Bible readings, hymn singing and prayer are used to induce the medium's trance and they are believed to be possessed by the spirits of saints and Biblical figures rather than local ancestors giving their ministries a 'Christian' flavor (Chakanza 2000:102-105).

personalized agency, which is designated as being the instigator of most misfortune and wickedness in the world.” The latter refers, generally speaking “to a certain malevolent, anti-social individual who has gained access to formidable powers or forces which other mortals, whether by force or by chance, do not have (2007:175). Secondly, they contend that in Chewa indigenous thought, all evil is thought to have a personal source or cause, and that there are five possible explanations for misfortune, all discoverable if the correct process of divination is employed (*kuombeza*): 1. Very rarely a death will be attributed to an act of God (*imfa ya Mulungu*), the latter usually when an old person passes away or somebody dies from a traditionally recognized disease; 2. Those suffering at the hands of unhappy or wrathful ancestral spirits- both protective (*mzimu*) and vengeful (*ziwanda*)- due to failure to honor or appease or violation of a social custom; 3. “the violation of a specific sexually related taboo (*mpingu*) pertaining to purity or pollution” (such as incest) may lead to someone in the immediate family suffering from the deadly ‘cutting disease’ (*mdulo*) as a punishment; 4. Falling victim to defensive magic such as through the powers of the protective medicines (*mankwhala*) and charms used to protect persons, houses, fields etc.; 5. The most common source is injury or death caused by malicious attack by a witch or sorcerer (*mfiti*). They sum up helpfully: “Nearly every case of misfortune, then, may be attributed to some human fault. People either provoke a just punishment by wicked behavior (i.e. impiety or impurity) or promote evil by exploiting and afflicting others (i.e. witchcraft and sorcery- *ufiti*)” (2007:177).

Additionally, in articulating the background over against which the radio dramas under consideration are presenting, Wendland (2005:63-97), skilfully assimilates Chewa practice into seven worldview categories, or ideological principles, delightfully appropriate to the South-Central Malawian context: synthesis, dynamism, gradation, communalism, experientialism, humanism and circumscription. In discussing these ‘Aspects of a Chewa Religious Worldview’ he shows how worldview animates practice at every point, emphasizing the integration of traditional religion and every aspect of life (culture). He notes just how real the spirit world is, and how all of life demands the maintenance of personal and communal harmony through various forms of mediation, in a world where the Supreme Creator God leaves daily operations in the hands of a complex hierarchy of powerful beings. The malevolent nature or tendencies of the latter leave people living in fear, and so continually seeking protection from these ubiquitous and potentially destructive forces. He understands the context and the latter is illuminating, helping us to recognize how religious worldview animates praxis. His writings also help to expose the points of conflict between local religious worldview and biblical worldview. However, they do lack contemporary examples and illustrations peculiar to our context in Malawi as he is based in Eastern Zambia.

Dicks (2012:300-396 cf. Kwast 2009:397-400) notes that an understanding of worldview is essential to understanding the culture of a people group.²¹ It also goes a long way to determining our potential to catalyze genuine transformation. The author details how the Muslim Yawo people of Southern Malawi view the world and how this animates their culture, including their traditional religious practices, such as the use of charms for protection. The latter confirms common motifs for using charms, such as the need for protection arising from an 'African' worldview characterized by a supernatural and hierarchical cosmology. The book provides a helpful overview of traditional worldview categories which leads to the analysis of Yawo traditional practice under six 'universal' categories which are useful signposts towards an overview of a Chewa worldview: Self, Allegiance, Causality, Time, Space and Classification (2012:65-75). His distillation of these significant aspects of the Yawo worldview is very useful in as much as his worldview categories, broadly speaking, bear resemblance (in explanation if not by name) to Wendland's work on the Chewa (2012:393-396). However, the Yawo are not the subject of this study and they are not as well represented in ZEC churches, particularly South of the lake, where Chewa (and other) traditions and customs appear to be more dominant.

Beaton (2015:37-80) researched charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches of South Central Malawi. He makes two significant contributions: 1. He uncovers the reality that a variety of traditional medicines and charms are being used for a diversity of reasons by members and adherents of ZEC churches in the demographic. 2. He also notes an intimate connection between charm-usage and African traditional religious worldview. He is right to identify an understanding of the worldview of the people as key for transformation. However, a more lucid and refined articulation of the Chewa worldview is required, one punctuated by real-life examples of worldview animating practice in the context. Moreover, contemporary examples, in the form of actual stories of charm-usage from the grassroots, in the ZEC churches, are needed to serve as tools for didactic use. While he does make recommendations for further research towards breaking charm-dependency, he is naïve in terms of what is required. His initial suggestions move towards a type of critical contextualization process which could easily abdicate to culture and would certainly lack focus in terms of specific and measurable didactic aims and objectives. There is an obvious need to do further research in this area.

In summary, the worldview in South-Central Malawian is animistic, acknowledging the existence of a hierarchy of spirits and spiritual forces directly involved with and influencing life (Onongha

²¹ Kwast's model of culture includes different layers of culture, clearly illustrating how values, beliefs and worldview drive behavior. The observable (i.e. what is done) only comes as a result of a culture first asking and answering three questions: What is real? What is true? What is good or best?

2014:206, Wendland 2007:63-93; Nyirongo 1997:25). Fear and lack of physical and spiritual security are commonplace (Beaton 2015:2). Wendland's (2007:63-93) summary of central worldview motifs are accurate for the context: synthesis; dynamism; gradation; communalism; experientialism; humanism and circumscription. Religion is anthropocentric and salvation is considered deliverance from "the problems, hardships, misfortunes, injustices, sicknesses, and death which people experience in this world" (Hiebert et al 1999:224-225), thus it encompasses "man's security from temporary dangers to his physical life" (Hara 2008:139, 140).

The contemporary ecclesiological milieu is characterized by syncretism (Beaton 2015:10, 21-27; de Kok 2004:4,12) and nominalism (Gehman 2006:97-100; Banda 2005:8-9). The fear of witchcraft and spirits (Ingwe 2007:15; Msiska 1998:39; O'Donovan 1995:311), the fact that the Gospel has been presented and adopted in Western forms (Newbiggin 1986:4; Hara 2008:159; Musapole 1996:5; Nahashon 1991:264-265), widespread Biblical illiteracy (Hiebert 1999:377; Beaton 2015:23-24), (notably an impoverished understanding of the loving, immanent and personal Trinity) and a limited Biblical eschatology of hope (Beaton 2015:214), are all contributing factors. In Malawi, for the Chewa people, God is generally transcendent, unapproachable and uninvolved in daily affairs (Wendland 2007:104). Therefore, a variety of mediators, in the form of ancestors, spirit representatives and human 'power specialists' (witchdoctors, sorcerers and diviners) (Hara 2008:134-136; Van Breugal 2001:29-41, Wendland 2007:104), are indispensable for everyday life and 'salvation' (Van Breugal 2001:74-78, 233-235; Schoffeleers 1999:163-166; Ott 2000:163). Medicines and charms (*zithumwa/mtsiliko/mphinjiri*) are commonly used to appease spirits (ancestral and created), for protective and retaliatory purposes (Ferdinando 1999:107-108, 130; Dicks 2012:103), especially against witchcraft and thieves. Moreover, charms are used for a plethora of other reasons, including: success in business, love, sex, job security, and leadership popularity. Westernization has ironically enhanced witchcraft beliefs and practices (Schofield 2003:18), with the rise of 'new' magic, charms and traditions, rooted in the traditional religious worldview (Beaton 2015:42-43,138-139,148-149).

As we have seen, there is sufficient extant literature to piece together an intelligible depiction of the worldview of people in South-Central Malawi (particularly the Chewa). We must now turn our attention to how to transform the existing worldview into one more closely resembling a Biblical worldview.

2.2.3 Worldview Transformation in Missional Perspective in the Malawian Context

In this section the literature reviewed focuses on identifying points of conflict between the local 'receptor' cultures worldview and a more biblical worldview (and orthodox Christian praxis),

along with helpful points of connection or theological bridges between local worldview and culture. Moreover, the literature grapples with how to encourage and facilitate transformation from an Evangelical Christian perspective.

2.2.3.1 Worldview/s and Transformation: Definitions, Problems and Pointers

Recognizing the importance of worldview as it pertains to transformation is foundational. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:204) define worldview “in terms of a person’s understandings of supernatural, nature, humanity and time.” For Redfield (1957:85-86), “It is how people see themselves in relation to all things and all things in relation to themselves.” Kwast (2009:397) notes that “One helpful method to view a culture is to visualize several successive ‘layers’, or levels of understanding, as one moves into the real heart of the culture.” He also explains that “At the very heart of any culture is its worldview...Sometimes people who share the gospel cross culturally fail to take the problem of worldview into account and are therefore disappointed by the lack of genuine change their efforts produce” (2009:400). Hiebert (1982:35-47) contends that in order to facilitate genuine worldview transformation there is a need to provide answers to the ‘middle level’ questions, the confusing problems of everyday life, faced by the local people. He draws attention to this ‘excluded middle’, that is the existence of “supernatural but this worldly beings and forces” (Hiebert 1982:43). The missing ‘middle level’ questions are, therefore, the many unanswered existential questions so fundamental to folk religions which are usually ‘answered’ by advocates of folk religion by reference to witchcraft, magic, demons, ancestors, local gods etc. These questions pertain to the meaning of life and the threat of death; the good life and the threat of calamity; guidance and the problem of the unknown; and morality and the presence of evil (Hiebert et al 1999:77-79; Hiebert 1982:43-45). There is a great divide between animistic (folk type) religions (including ATR) and the more formal religions, including Christianity. The former “are more concerned with the existential problems of everyday life and less with ultimate realities... they are interested more in issues of power and success than truth and logical consistency” (Hiebert et al 1999:77). And these ‘middle level’ questions want answers ‘here and now’. While Biblical Christianity undoubtedly addresses these questions, in truth, they have seldom been answered by those proclaiming the Gospel cross-culturally. Our historic two-tier approach represents a “dichotomous worldview in which science explains this world and religion other worlds” (Hiebert et al 1999:79 cf. Hiebert 1982:43-45). Thus, many Westerners struggle to understand the organic and relational view of many people groups who believe in the middle level, the existence of spirits, ancestors, and invisible powers of this world, and are unable to adequately answer causal questions. In this way, our Western worldview debilitates Gospel communication leaving people with a savior who does not adequately address people’s immediate needs. In

other words, the legacy of a Western dualistic worldview has obfuscated the holistic Gospel, debilitating its potential impact to radically revise worldview and thus culture (lifestyle).

Turnbull (2011:17) and Hiebert et al (1999:16-20) also point out that the radical dualism presented by many missionaries between the sacred (privatization of religious faith) and the secular (public life) has exercised a profoundly negative and confusing impact on African 'Christian' worldview and practice. Van der Poll explains that

Because the Gospel was not brought to the people as a new totally encompassing life view, which would take the place of an equally comprehensive traditional life view, the deepest core of the African culture remains untouched...The convert in Africa did not see the Gospel as sufficient for his whole life and especially for the deepest issues in life... the Gospel does not mean much in practical terms for the African (in Turnbull 2011:17).

Hence, many Christians turn back to traditional religious practices in moments of crisis. This is true in the Malawian context. He is correct that there is a need to demonstrate how divine revelation impacts upon people's legitimate everyday questions and problems (Hiebert 1982:35-47; Hiebert et al 1999:77-79).

The practice of continued charm-dependency in our context is a case-in-point. Regarding the ZEC churches, Beaton (2015:40-46; 58-60, 209-211 cf. de Kok 2004:56) provides evidence that in the ZEC churches it is the traditional religious worldview, or rather constituent motifs (worldview assumptions) thereof, that animate and perpetuate charm-usage, all but compelling people, including church-goers, to use traditional religious charms. This is because the people have not embraced a new life view and the Gospel is not perceived to be sufficient to help them to cope with their real life-situations. The deep-seated belief in the efficacy of these charms is a major obstacle to discipleship. It is, therefore, precisely at this deep level of worldview assumptions that changes need to be made to facilitate any genuine spiritual transformation (Kraft 1999: 384-389; Ononga 2014:210-2014) because it is at the level of worldview that people's beliefs and practices are shaped (Hiebert 1997:84-85; Dicks 2012:12-13; Kwast 2009:397-400). We noted earlier that these deep-level explanatory assumptions regulate culture at the shallow or visible, behavioural level, where beliefs and habits like charm-dependency are evident (Kraft 1999:385; Dicks 2011:44).

Since these questions and problems have their roots in a people's worldview, it is of vital importance to gain an understanding of a people's worldview (Nussbaum 2014:339). A worldview is the lens through which all phenomena is viewed, interpreted and understood. Hiebert (1997:85 cf. O'Donovan 1995:3) contends that "worldviews are the glasses through which people look, not what the people look at". In central Africa, worldviews are inseparable from religion (Musapole 2006:13; Wendland 2007:57). A people group's observable cultural

and religious practices can be said to be driven by their worldview. Each group has a set of basic worldview assumptions which function to naturally filter, interpret and regulate behavior. Kraft (1989:184) refers to the latter as 'explanatory assumptions', those which answer life's basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? How and Why? These explanatory assumptions together constitute a worldview which is "embedded in the consciousness of both the individual and the group..." which "...enables people to proceed through life without having to make a cognitive decision for every detail of life" (Dicks 2012:48). Kraft (1989:183) helpfully notes that worldview has at least six functions: "It enables people to explain, evaluate, validate, prioritize, interpret and adapt/integrate to the reality they perceive."

We must understand that different people perceive the same phenomena through different grids, filters or lenses so to speak. Dicks explains how different ethnic groups in Malawi can hear the same rooster crowing but describe the sound in completely diverse ways:

When I am asked to replicate the sound of a rooster crowing, I use the sound form, 'cock-a-doodle-do'. Yawo Malawians, for the same rooster crowing will replicate the sound, 'koo-koo-loo-koo'. Malawians whose mother tongue is Chichewa will replicate it, 'ko-ko-li-ko'. It is not that rooster's crow differently from one district to another or from one continent to the next; it is that our grids filter and enhance certain sounds (2012:45).

Another important observation is that worldview has more than merely a cerebral dimension. It is interesting to note that Smith (in Miller 2009:55-56) calls for a moratorium on the term 'worldview' as a reaction to what he considers the capitulation in this category to an enlightenment, rationalist conception of human beings. He champions "an anthropology that understands that it's not the cognitive processing of information that fundamentally shapes our identities, but rather what and whom we worship".²² He understands the significance of religion as it impacts on worldview and thus culture. The point is that worldview and worship are intimately connected. We might say that in the African context, to change a religious practice means first to revise a worldview. Understanding a people's religious beliefs and practices helps us to better understand their worldview and therefore, is the door to serious contemplation and action towards transformation. This needs to be our starting point. But we must ask: is it actually possible to transform a worldview, and if so, what kind of transformation are we after and how is it to be done?

²² Smith denounces what he believes to be common worldview thinking espoused by most Christian educators and institutions. He reacts against an understanding of human beings as primarily rational beings, animated by ideas, arguing that we are primarily lovers (relational), designed to love God.

2.2.3.2 Can a Worldview be Transformed?

Taking the Chewa people as an example, a Chewa person, having embraced their traditional concepts of God, will struggle to reconcile certain basic Christian doctrinal tenants with their own religio-cultural worldview. God is on the whole understood to be transcendent and powerful (Chauta- 'the Great One of the rainbow'), interfering little with the affairs of man, with the exception of his benevolence in sending rain when needed for crops, but even then intermediaries are required.²³ He is the unchanging one, above, unseen by man and unapproachable to him (although he may listen to man's prayers), who does not punish directly because he has given the responsibility of looking after the moral order to the Spirits of the dead (van Breugel 2001:29-30). Why would such a God take on human form, embrace our frailty and vulnerability, and humbly suffer for us, going to his death on a cross at the hands of those whom he created?²⁴ Concomitantly, why should we struggle against the forces of evil, suffer in so many ways, and fall victim to illness, if we serve One who is imminently approachable (Hebrews 4:14-16), personal (Matt. 28:20), and has power and dominion over all things (Mk. 1: 21-28; Col. 1:16-20). Clearly a 'Malawian' worldview and the Biblical worldview are at times oppositional. For a Malawian person to break with cultural and religious concepts, taboos and/or traditions requires a major paradigm shift. It means subverting or re-programming one's worldview, flying in the face of ancient tradition and popular wisdom, and thus risking estrangement from the community. But it is possible.

Hiebert (1976:6) asserts that worldviews are perceptions of reality, and therefore, not always true reality. Therefore, if we can identify and understand these perceptions (assumptions) then we can attempt to change them. Since religion penetrates all of life there has to be a seismic shift at the core of one's worldview for religious belief and behavior to change meaningfully. Again, Hiebert (1997:85) explains that culture is the visible behavior and beliefs that people exhibit but that worldview lies much deeper. Insightfully, Kraft (1999:384-389) explains that "People ordinarily follow the patterns of their culture, but not always. People regularly modify their old customs and create new ones. Though the habits that result in great conformity are strong, we can change our customs." He too contends that worldview constitutes the deepest level presuppositions upon which people regulate their lives (culture) but that since culture has no inherent power people can and do change customs and introduce new ones. This is good news for those of us who work cross-culturally. Despite the obvious challenges, the possibility of change at the deep-level of worldview assumptions is plausible. From an Evangelical Christian perspective, in every culture, and for every worldview, it is necessary to subvert and

²³ The Chewa have rain shrines where a priest/priestess presides and prayers are offered for rain.

²⁴ This is difficult for all men because of our spiritual blindness (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25). However, there are added barriers when certain contradictory worldview assumptions are deeply entrenched.

challenge what exists with that which more closely resembles a Biblical worldview. If it can be achieved, then both perspective and behavior, pertaining to spurious thinking and traditional religious practices deleterious to discipleship, can be reformed.

2.2.3.3 What kind of transformation?

2.2.3.3.1 Ongoing Conversion

What is the starting point for subverting and challenging existing worldview towards a more Biblical worldview? Some African scholars espouse recognizing a kind of continuity with ATR, a '*praeparatio evangelica*', whereby ATR is perceived to be a helpful preparation for the coming of Christ and faith in Him (Han 2013:281; Ferdinando 2007:131). According to Idowu (1973:104), "African Christian experience does little more than bring into sharper focus the sense of God which African Traditional Religion has had all along." Ott (2000:37) advocates the recognition of the principle of a '*theologia naturalis*', "which insists that an 'original' or pre-Christian revelation needs to be recognized as always having existed among the people." However, others, like Byang Kato, saw little or no continuity between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. For him (in De la Haye 1986:50), "In the context of African Traditional Religions, the worship is merely an indication of an honest craving for God, which can be fulfilled only in biblical revelation through the incarnate Christ who died and rose again".

Kato and Majawa are right. It is true that we are all made in the image of God and created with the potential for relationship with Him. There are also undoubtedly helpful points of connection between traditional religion and the Gospel. However, it is only encounter with the risen Christ that facilitates genuine personal conversion, which in turn leads to ongoing transformation of the crucial worldview assumptions which dictate behavioural patterns. Moreover, Christian faith most often demands the radical and ongoing revision of traditional belief and practice. Such a revision of certain elements of the local framework is necessary if the Christian faith is to be recognizable as the authentic Biblical faith. The goal must always include stimulating genuine critical reflection towards transformation. Where there appear to be concepts of God that are rooted in cultural history and then projected onto the biblical texts (Ott 2007:17), or any religious practices incongruous with Scripture, reform is necessary. Any traditional beliefs lacking true Biblical salvific value must be challenged and transformed (Hara 2008:170-171).

Missionaries are called, amongst other things, to help the local church to "nurture those who are already believers and build them up to maturity in the faith" (Grudem 2005:867). Helping them to become all they can be 'in Christ' involves facilitating spiritual transformation which lies at the heart of mission. The kind of transformation we are after begins with personal conversion (regeneration) but it does not end there. Hiebert (1997:85) explains that without

changing or converting the underlying worldview, in time, it will take captive any assumed Christian beliefs and determine behavior, the result being Christo-paganism. Growing in maturity in the faith requires ongoing transformation of that worldview.

In the Malawian ZEC context, many have been regenerated through faith in Christ, so experiencing partial salvation by way of 'personal forgiveness of sins' (justification) and reconciliation to God but they remain in bondage to traditional religious patterns of thinking and practice. To be sure, conversion is miraculous in a context where traditionally salvation has nothing to do with personal sin and reconciliation with God (Hara 2008:139), and where the culture is fundamentally shame-orientated rather than guilt-orientated (Schirrmacher 2013:12-18).²⁵ However, post-conversion many believers struggle to 'be disciples', lacking the necessary ongoing transformation of mind, heart and life (Rom 12:1-2) (Carrasco 2007:393-394; McKnight 2007:71-73). Gehman (1995:93) rightly argues that it is only by the special revelation of God that "anyone can understand his own sinful condition, repent of his sin, and turn to the Lord for forgiveness." However, true conversion and the consequent experience of the fullness of God's salvation in Christ is more than this. Sanneh (2003: 44) helpfully defines conversion as, "a refocusing of the mental life and its cultural/social underpinning and of our feelings, affections, and instincts, in the light of what God has done in Jesus." Conversion begins with the transforming work of God that brings regeneration (being born again) and justification but it is also continuous, ongoing and far reaching. Thus, what is initially required is a supernatural experience (Stetzer and Henry n.d:12), a conversion that is in the words of Olson (2004:145): "a transforming work of God that brings regeneration (being born again) and justification (forgiveness of sins and Christ's righteousness) in a special way." However, when the Holy Spirit regenerates hearts and indwells believers in this way, He precipitates the desire for, and deliberate movement towards, the renewal of one's mind (Rom 12:1-2), and a new life characterized by walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:17-23).

Undoubtedly, for those steeped in the prevalent root animistic worldview, salvation must include freedom from spiritual bondage to strongholds in the mind (2 Cor 10:4-5; Rom 12:1-2), a kind of cognitive exorcism. Without deliverance from the powers so dominant at the level of cultural worldview assumptions there can be no genuinely liberating experience of Christ as Saviour and Lord, and no ongoing spiritual transformation, characterized by life in the Spirit (Gal 5:17-23). The majority view life in terms of a spiritual power/weakness dichotomy, and therefore, conversion for the average Malawian person must be salvation from the powers and darkness of Satan who has them in the stronghold of fear and deception. Blaschke (2001:96) is correct

²⁵ The author rightly concludes that God created us for honor and righteousness and gave us a conscience with its shame-orientation and its guilt orientation, both equally important. He also helpfully demonstrates that the Biblical message is in fact both guilt-orientated and shame-orientated.

that for African people, deliverance from fear (a consequence of sin), will only become a transforming reality when “Jesus, their deliverer from Satan also becomes their saviour from sin.” However, in the Malawian context many understand and experience deliverance from sin but still live in fear of witchcraft and spirit entities. O’ Donovan (1995:255) rightly contends that many who follow Jesus do understand his forgiveness but not his Lordship over all: “They do not realize that Jesus alone is more than able to meet the greatest need or crisis they may ever face.” Therefore, He remains merely an option rather than the only Way, one possible deliverer, helping to relieve illness, poverty, and other tangible problems instead of the Deliverer, setting people free from spiritual bondage and death, and releasing people to tackle their very real challenges with new spiritual perspectives and energy. Failure to trust fully in Christ (Ps 46:1; Prov 5:3-5) and continuing to use traditional charms and other traditional religious means is idolatrous (Deut 18:9-13; Jer 27:9-10; Num 23:23; Ex 20:1-3). In doing so God’s protection is compromised (Eph 6:10-19) and people forego the blessed opportunity to see the Lord faithfully help them through testing times of trial and suffering (Rom 5:3-5; 8:38-39), so circumventing spiritual growth on the faith journey (Jas 1:3-5; Col 1:27-29) (Beaton 2015:32-33). This appears to be the case for many in ZEC churches.

Mbiti (1986:232) is right that the African person “wants to live and not just recite their faith. It is a living faith, a faith for the whole body: head, stomach, reproductive system, feet and hands; and the whole spirit, since in African view of the world, body and spirit are an entity, separable only at death.” They need to know that Jesus is more than able to meet their concrete needs, and address their missing ‘middle level’ questions (Hiebert et al 1999:77-79; 1982:35-47). However, Malawian peoples also need to be freed to see that Christ’s salvation involves the full restoration of man to his original state which cannot be achieved simply by the reduction of physical ailments or protection from bodily harm in the ‘here and now’ (Hara 2008:169).

The paradox lies in the fact that only when Malawian people become convinced that Jesus Christ is able to protect them and provide the sought-after harmony and prosperity will they be willing to surrender wholeheartedly to His Lordship (Banda 2005:8-9). And yet, it is only when Jesus is received as Lord and His power over all the forces of evil, nature and death is truly acknowledged, that they can be truly set free to live for Christ in the present despite circumstantial hardships and setbacks. Unless believers truly place their trust in Christ they cannot enjoy the wonderful privileges of being a child of God, part of His family (Jn 1:10-12; Rom 8:32) (Stott 2000:130-136). To be ‘in Christ’ means to truly have life (Jn 14:6); to live without fear (1 Tim 1:7-9), resting in Him (Matt 11:28), enjoying the fullness of His abundant life (Jn 10:10b), and being set free as one grows in the knowledge of the Truth (Jn 8:32).

Such freedom in the 'here and now' makes our eschatological hope of perfection and full restoration to our original state in the future ('not yet') especially poignant, rather than a one-sided 'spiritual' salvation (Kaliombe 2007:13). This is a balanced Biblical perspective. Full salvation is only possible after the resurrection of the body, and judgment (Hara 2008:160-161; 186) but to truly know the risen Lord Jesus Christ is to be rightly orientated to his future now. Such an outlook mitigates against the traditional anthropocentric or 'ego-centric' outworking of faith with all its associated dangers and weaknesses. True Biblical eschatological hope protects against an over-zealous embracing of material secularism, secular humanism and the prosperity gospel on the one hand, and the uncritical perpetuation of traditional practices or a shift towards the practise of new magic on the other hand. Thus, what is required is ongoing conversion of the heart, mind, and resultant lifestyle.

The transformation of communities also depends on personal conversions. As Chinkambako (2005:278-279) explains, what is needed at the communal level is 'conversion' from the outlook of the world which leads to "competition, jealousy, pulling one another down, boasting, dividing people, regionalism and groupism", to the outlook of Jesus, involving group solidarity, recognition of all as children of God, turning away from self-centeredness, and the outworking of Jesus' values in community. Such an outlook comes only when we are made new spiritual creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), having our outlook transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:1-2). As Stetzer and Henry (n.d:23) put it: "the restoration of the human soul brings with it a sense of lift; God's inner work through the Holy Spirit not only changes our fundamental worldview, but it affects our beliefs, values and behaviours."²⁶ This kind of inward change works itself out in Christian mission. The result of people being truly converted is behavioural modification or a re-orientation of one's moral and ethical compass which manifests in social action (Tit 3:4-8). As such Jesus might become the savior of the community and the wider culture too (Hara 2008:158-159).

In summary, we cannot affect the work of "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 2:5). As Hardy (2006:154) explains, "no human teacher can change the human heart or ultimately re-shape the mind. Transformation is the will of God." The wind of the Holy Spirit blows wherever He pleases (Jn 3:8). However, we can provide fertile soil for the conversion of those outside of Christ (1 Tim 2:4), and help to facilitate the growth to maturity of those who are already genuinely born again (Col 1:27-29). We can appropriately enable the process of

²⁶ In their article entitled 'The Line in the Sand: Saved by Grace- a Philippines case study' the authors argue that historically, it can be proven that Evangelicals are catalysts for societal change in such areas as bringing education to the poor and marginalized, and helping to foster civil society by bringing about much needed societal reforms. They are optimistic that the rapid growth of the PCEC (The Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches), with its vision to disciple every Filipino for the Lord Jesus Christ, will inevitably result in progress towards social justice and the transformation of the nation.

disciples learning and growing towards Christian maturity, becoming ever increasingly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18) (Hardy 2006:154). The goal is the development of genuine or sincere faith, leading to genuine local expressions and forms of the faith arising 'in situ', thus also establishing the basic principles of contextualization and inculturation as important elements of any effective transformational missiological approach. Therefore, we must ask: how do we deliberately continue to sow the seeds of the gospel to facilitate ongoing spiritual and practical transformation?

2.2.4 Facilitating Ongoing Worldview Transformation

Clearly the methods of sowing/planting and watering the gospel seeds are of paramount importance. We bridge the gap between divine revelation and human contexts when we provide Biblical answers to the "confusing problems of everyday life" (Hiebert et al 1999:26). To do so, two questions need to be answered: how can we stimulate or encourage such deep-level change leading to a more Biblical outlook and praxis in context? And how can we do so sensitively in ways that actually honor the receptor culture (Kraft 1999:386), taking seriously their traditional belief system (Hiebert et al 1999:10-11)? If we can appropriately plant gospel seeds which take root at the explanatory assumption level, then there is genuine potential for transformation.

Hiebert (1982:45-46) is convinced that in order to do so, missionaries and church leaders need to develop holistic theologies that embrace all areas of life. The Bible should be interpreted, understood and taught holistically. That is to say, we must live, teach and preach from a theological standpoint which encompasses God's personal involvement in cosmic history, human history and natural history. In our context, God must be seen in creation and redemption, having a clear purpose and destiny in mind for all things (eschatology) (Bediako 2004:92). Against this backdrop the special focus should be on God and His dealings with His creation in history (past, present and future), the epicenter being His relationship and ongoing relational interaction with human beings as the pinnacle of His creation. At the heart of all this is our standing 'in Christ', the person and work of Christ being the substance of our life and hope. From this relational perspective he is understood to guide, protect, provide and heal, sovereignly reigning over the spirits and all spiritual beings and forces. The importance of a Biblical perspective on well-being and misfortune, and the development of a Biblical theology of suffering are vital. But how do we effectively communicate this?

2.2.4.1 Towards an Appropriate Approach

Onongha (2014: 206), speaking of those rooted in animistic belief systems, explains that "for any enduring change to take place in the lives of its adherents, it must happen at the level of

worldview. Anything short of this would only result in conformation to expected behaviours and conduct, while incongruent beliefs would merely be swept under the carpet.” A better approach to instigating change surely “...involves understanding the ideas, stories, history and assumptions of a people..., and determining how these materialize in their actions... before sharing an alternative narrative to the one that is commonly known in the society” (Dicks 2012:60-61). When we talk about deep-level worldview change, both our approach (and, therefore the actual process) towards transformation should be culturally appropriate. Dicks (2012:60-61) uses an example from the world of fishing to explain the mistakes all too frequently made in our mission approaches. He asks whether it is better to give fishing rods to people or to teach them how to fish? And then shows that neither approach is, in fact, satisfactory. On the one hand, if you simply hand fishing rods to people who know nothing about fishing, you will find them abandoned, broken, or used for other purposes. On the other hand, if you teach people how to fish because you think that is what is needed, you might find that they still don't fish or won't fish, or can't fish, for cultural reasons embedded in their worldview. He suggests that we first seek to understand why they don't fish or can't fish, and what their objections might be to fishing. Then with an understanding of their worldview we may have a chance, through ongoing dialogue and the presentation of another story, to present how fishing might benefit them. This may then lead to the people making their own fishing rods.

Thus, the religious convictions of the people must be considered and we must respond to their deepest needs without compromising Biblical truth (Van Breugal 2001:272, Hiebert 1999:21-29). Looking at worldview transformation from an educational perspective, Shaw talks about 'deep learning' which leads to the formation of life-long habits. He believes it is best promoted when educators ask, “What are the major life concerns that our potential learners have?” (2014:137) and as a consequence, what life skills are needed? Then, by taking seriously the questions, needs and contexts of the learners we can move from 'context to text' by developing courses that seek to answer them through traditional texts, such as Scripture. Hiebert (1987:108), from a missiological perspective, concurs, when he explains that patronizing confrontation is not the way forward and that understanding the worldview assumptions of a people group allows us to bring them and the resultant cultural and religious practices (e.g. charm-usage) into constructive and culturally sensitive dialogue with the Bible, so avoiding “the foreignness of a gospel dressed in Western clothes” and a God who is removed, having little significance to daily life. A historical materialist approach, which seeks to bring about societal change by simply attempting to make external changes, while ignoring the need for deeper level worldview change, can bring about disequilibrium and result in disharmony within a culture (Dicks 2012:60; Kraft 1999:388).

Living out our faith is about ongoing change or spiritual growth as we critically analyze our worldviews, and thus behavior, in the light of Scripture, and correct them where appropriate. Hiebert (1997:85) believes that “The process of doing theology in a particular setting must be that of critical contextualization in which the culture is studied, then Scripture, and finally Biblical truth and morality are used to judge and correct the culture and its worldview”. He (1994:81-89) sets out a four-step critical contextualization process which includes: 1. studying the culture phenomenologically (which draws heavily on anthropology); 2. studying the Bible in relation to the question/s arising- discovering meaning helps to discern right from wrong; 3. critically evaluating beliefs and practices in the light of the Biblical understanding; 4. the development of new contextualized practices and ministries. This is a very helpful paradigm. However, there are dangers to both an overly sympathetic approach to contextualization which shies away from teaching specific biblical content to contrast spurious traditional ideas, and a contextually inappropriate pedagogy which fails to communicate biblical truth effectively, thus failing to facilitate transformation at a deep level (worldview assumptions). Contextualization must be critical in nature and the process requires guidance and input to bear real fruit. Practitioners must always bear in mind that accommodation of beliefs and behavior that are contrary to the Gospel is syncretism..

Kraft (1999:384-389) advocates an approach to contextualization whereby a Biblical seed is simply planted within the local culture and followed by observation of how it may grow and develop. He is rightly concerned with the importance of adapting ourselves and our presentation of the Gospel to the receptor culture. He wants to dispel paternalistic mission interventions as disrespectful, advocating the honouring of a people’s culture (including worldview) as proper starting points for mission which must then be respectfully subjected to Biblical critique. A salutary warning is heard: change at the deeper level of worldview may create disequilibrium through society, and changes (even good ones) at the surface level without proper attention to the deeper level, can even be destructive and demoralizing. Hence a process of contextualization is recommended whereby the Gospel is planted as a seed in the receptor culture, to be watered and nourished in their cultural soil, so producing, ‘in context’, Biblical and culturally appropriate expressions of the faith and worship. Caldwell (2000:138) points out that in contextualization it is not just a culturally appropriate final product that is important. He writes that “Deep level contextualization is equally concerned with arriving at the final product in culturally appropriate ways.” The development of contextually appropriate forms and expressions of faith worship is indeed commendable, but these must cohere with Scripture and glorify God. To be fair, Kraft (1999:384-389) does note the danger of syncretism, stating that missionaries must avoid encouraging a ‘nativistic’ type of Christianity in which foreign expressions of the faith are imported, leading to the application of the receptor culture’s

worldview assumptions to the 'Christian' rituals, without any deep level change of worldview (and culture). He believes that trust in the Holy Spirit's ability to guide people, as well as trust in the receptor cultures ability to follow His guidance, are keys to the process, arguing that God changes cultures by changing people who then make changes to the cultural structures. He is sure that this is best done on the basis of a group's understanding of the Scriptures, under the Spirit's guidance, and not by external imposition. However, while 'imposition' is not recommended, the author proposes that people can be helped to both understand the Scriptures and apply them to their everyday lives and problems. The keys are surely finding points of contact with the traditional belief system, passages of Scripture to contrast and challenge them towards reformation, and contextually appropriate pedagogic methodologies by which to do so. Surely, specific Biblical content can and must be communicated rather than a 'shotgun' approach which trusts that the Holy Spirit will lead people into discovering appropriate, applicable truths. The Holy Spirit can enable a more focused and facilitated reflection and discovery processes too.

Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:212-213) rightly argue that if peoples' non-Christian worldview is not exchanged for a Christian one, all truth and experience embraced will be interpreted from a non-Christian perspective, thus leading to syncretism. Moreover, they believe that supplanting a non-Christian worldview cannot be done by replacing false stories with pieces of true ones but that the true story must be told as it is unfolded in the Bible. They argue for the supremacy of biblical theology over systematic theology in discipling the nations. The basic premise of this argument is correct but practically there are some difficulties with this theory, especially in terms of the construction of short course catechistic material in our context:

1. They argue that the historical data upon which systematics must be based is lacking in the missionary situation, but Malawi has been catechized for a hundred and fifty years and ZEC for one hundred and twenty five;
2. The development of a systematic theology is generally based on problems posed by the West but our proposed organization of texts and information is context specific, directly related to the problems of charm-usage in South-Central Malawi.
3. The fact that systematic theology is the crowning not foundational type of theology might be true, but given limited time and opportunity it may be the most effective method. Nevertheless, their emphasis on the need to focus on Biblical stories and, indeed, the larger 'story' in Christian cross-cultural instruction is salutary, as a firm biblical foundation must be laid in order to effectively build an alternate worldview. If there must be jig-saw pieces (and there must), and some are missing (inevitable), then it is better for the existing pieces to be large, clearly visible, easily recognizable, and well positioned, so that key pieces of the puzzle are in place.

Majawa (2005:63-64) advocates a type of inculturation, involving 'planting or inserting' and not simple adaptation, imitation or accommodation. He (2005:281) contends that "We need to be

deculturated before we can inculturate truly.” He wants to see the Gospel presented as a ‘redemptive whole’ such that the responses to the experience “find expression through elements proper to the culture...” and “it becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’”. For him, something genuinely new should be created out of the marriage of Christianity to Malawian culture/s, and to specific aspects within the culture. As Shorter rightly asserts:

Christianity must become Incarnate in African cultures. Christ is present in every human situation, in every community and every human tradition... Africans must experience Christ in their own communities and within their own cultural traditions; they are not asked to react to someone else’s experience of Christ (1978:21-22).

So, we might have authentic Malawian responses to the charm-dependency problem and other traditional religious stumbling blocks in the light of the Gospel.

Majawa describes this dialogical process:

Inculturation is... the process whereby the Church incarnates all aspects of the Christian message and life in a given culture, in the cosmic philosophy and traditions of a given people. It is a dynamic, ongoing and dialectic process of the integration of Christian life in a particular context, in such a way that this experience does not only find expression through elements proper to the culture, but it becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’ (2005:63-64).

This is a noble ambition, but too idealistic. It rightly points to the need for Christ’s life, and His ‘authentic’ Church, within the ZEC Churches in the South-Central Malawian context. Ideally, we will increasingly have a search for Church life in community that is based on the Scriptures, led by the Spirit, and whose authority is derived from the Scriptures not human structures. Mbiti (1986:41) noted some years ago that, “The increasing provision of the Bible, in full or in part, in African languages, means also initiating and accelerating the transfer of authority in Church life, from the centers where it has hitherto been concentrated.” In the next decades increasing numbers of Zambezi Evangelical Church members/adherents will either own or have access to vernacular translations of the Bible (Chichewa- usually ‘*Buku Lopatulika ndi Mau a Mulungu*’- ‘The Holy Book with the Word of God’ or ‘*Buku Woyera*’- The Holy Book). With the continued growth of the church in the urban areas and increased access to education for her members this will be a very positive step forward. Ultimately, we seek the growth of a gospel-centred, Christocentric, Spirit filled, inculturated, ‘new creation’ of a Malawian, Zambezi Evangelical Church. However, such a goal will take a long time to realize, and it should be recognized that distinct church cultures already exist in Malawi, since the Gospel has been presented here in various forms for some 150 years. Therefore, starting again (deculturating) is not really an option, but certainly, church cultures, as well as culture in general, require reformation.

Therefore, presenting the Gospel as a redemptive whole may need to be substituted with the presentation of redemptive elements, carefully chosen, focusing on key areas for transformation and encouraging local responses.

Ohm (in Ott 2000:37), in suggesting a three-step methodology for inculturation, also helps to point us in the right direction. His method involves: “accommodation (preservation of the local language and style), assimilation (reception of the good, true and precious from the local tradition), and transformation (the purification, clarification and ‘elevation’ of cultures).” The aim is to purify and elevate cultures, but this is something which is only possible when the light of Christ is made known.

There are dangers in any approach to contextualization: just as a Christian Biblical/theological foundation cannot simply be laid on top of an existing worldview, neither can people simply be left to find their own way. Sanneh rightly wants to distinguish conversion from syncretism by “appealing to the process whereby the Christian message is appropriated into existing local frameworks but still remains recognizably Christian” (2003: 44). Rasmussen (2009) models a critical contextualization and education process in his thesis, *‘Illness and Death Experiences in North Western Tanzania: An investigation of Discourses, Practices, Beliefs and Social Outcomes, Especially Related to Witchcraft, used in a Critical Contextualization and Education process with Pentecostal Ministers*. In this work he shows how ministers in North West Tanzania (Sukumaland) inductively grappled with theological and pastoral issues raised through selected cases of illness and death, with particular reference to the underlying beliefs and social outcomes. He noted that Africans often perceive interpersonal causal ontologies (neo-traditional) as primary, and biochemical and other causal ontologies as secondary. Indigenous (contextual) responses were sought to illness, death and witchcraft through dialogue stimulated by ordinary cases (‘stories’) of sickness and death analysed from a Biblical perspective. The study describes a process of ‘self-theologizing’, giving credence to it as a fruitful ecclesiological adult education methodology. Such an inductive process was expected to encourage shifts in worldview, and therefore, practice (culture); also providing an authentic voice for the wider theological milieu. However, he notes that very little changed in the thinking of the members of the groups, for all the time spent in focus groups discussing biblical texts and stories of illness, death and witchcraft (2009: 302,309). He rightly suggests that presenting contrasting case studies and Scripture passages may be a more fruitful approach. ‘Self-theologizing’ does not prove to be an effective educational approach (pedagogy). This is very important as it highlights the need for a more focussed approach to dialogue in which the facilitator provides significant guidance towards pre-meditated outcomes. Rasmussen also noted that ethnographic research requires disciplined listening. Researchers must listen to the stories people have to tell, but listening must go much further, to include: listening to the voice of Scripture, to the redemptive

stories that are told, to the Spirit's voice, and to the voices of the saints past and present (2009:329-332). These are salient points, along with his reminder to missionaries of our calling to tell the redemptive Biblical stories, so helping to shape belief and practice.

In summary, helping people to discover the truth and develop local forms and expressions of faith by appropriately guiding and aiding/encouraging them is an appropriate missiological approach. We want to plant the seeds of the Word of God deep into the hearts of people in ways they might identify with and through which they might be encouraged to wrestle with, and dialogue through, how the Word relates to their real-life situations, so to discern appropriate faith responses in context. However, people can be helped to discover and do by being gently moved from the known- that is all that is familiar to the culture; like stories, challenges and problems- to the unknown, which is biblical truth. We have seen that Hiebert (1997:85 cf. Shaw 2014:220) described this as a critical contextualization process, one "in which the culture is studied, then Scripture, and finally Biblical truth and morality are used to judge and correct the culture and its worldview." A degree of inculturation is implicit in this process.

However, even in any kind of critical contextualization, there is a danger of abdicating to the local culture. Bosch (1991:427,428 quoted in Han 2013:268) argues that developing theologies which shape religious practice must not only represent the reality of a local people group (*theological localis*) but must also align with the traditions of the wider faith community (*theological orcumenica*) such that both the micro-perspective and the macro-perspective are considered. Again, it is Bosch (1991:427) who cautions that "The faith tradition that is shared by all Christians should be respected and preserved." The distinction between conversion and syncretism must be kept clear by ensuring that the Christian message remains recognizably Christian as it is appropriated into existing local frameworks (Sanneh 2003:44). As Schreiter (1985:105-106 quoted in Han 2013:272) points out, "Any contextual theology cannot stand as Christian theology if it does not hold a Christian identity that is sustained by the Christian tradition." For example, encouraging 'self-theologizing' or 'seeing' where the Spirit will lead people, as Rasmussen (2009:270-310) attempted, can be dangerous because it may result in misinterpretations and incorrect conclusions, or at the very least, a failure to change worldview (cf. Rasmusson 2009:302).²⁷ The Christian message itself must always be the yardstick against which any theology or 'Christian' practice is measured (Kuster 2005:423). All Christian theologies must be 'catholic' in this sense. What is needed, is to shape and direct the good and helpful in the local culture, while reforming the unhelpful elements, without becoming merely a

²⁷ Rasmussen (2009:309) acknowledges that "Having the students read contrasting case studies with contrasting Christian perspectives might help students see their own worldview from the outside (provided they truly consider rather than simply reject the other perspective)."

replica of Western theology and Christianity, and without compromising the Gospel message (Mashau and Frederiks 2008:122 in Han 2013:273).

What is certain is that we need to provide Biblical answers to the confusing problems and pressing questions of everyday life (Hiebert et al 1999:26), and we need to do so in a way which stimulates deep-level worldview assumption changes leading to a more Biblical outlook and praxis in context. Clearly, then the second foundation must be the provision of a sound Biblical perspective to facilitate transformative ‘dialogue’ between culture and Bible, or more specifically, between the existing worldview and a Biblical worldview. This brings us to the second necessary foundation for a potentially effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency: Biblical.

2.3 Foundation Two: Biblical

In the previous section I have repeatedly mentioned the Bible in relation to transforming worldview. In this section books and journal articles relating to the nature of knowledge, the importance of the Bible in transforming worldview, the means or methodology required to move people towards the formation of a Christian/Biblical worldview, as well as how to interpret and understand the Bible (hermeneutics), and how to do so in context, are discussed.

2.3.1 Epistemology, ‘Stories’ and Transformation

As suggested in the discussion on transformation in the previous section, to encourage a Biblical perspective on everyday problems and challenges in context, what is required is to facilitate transformative ‘dialogue’ between culture and Bible, or more specifically between the existing worldview and a Biblical worldview. This approach is rooted in a critical-realist epistemology. The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms defines epistemology as the “Study of how human knowledge is obtained, its bases, forms and criteria” (1996:91). So, we are asking: how do we know things? And from an evangelical perspective, also: how do we renew our minds into the likeness of Christ (Rom. 12:1-3)? Indeed, Bosch (1991:187) argues for the epistemological priority of the Bible. Hiebert et al (1999:384) explain that the “Bible is “the source not only for finding answers to human questions, but of defining the worldview through which they should look at reality” (1999:384). It follows that a worldview rooted in and shaped by Scripture is the ultimate goal.

There is obviously a direct link between knowledge of things and worldview which in turn determines culture (behavior or the way people live). Hiebert (1994:51) is “convinced that critical realism is a biblical approach to knowledge (1 Cor. 13:12). N.T. Wright (2004:32-46), in

his discussion of critical realism, suggests that knowledge is the product of worldview which forms the grid through which we view reality, and fundamental to our worldview are stories. In his attempt to re-interpret the Gospels with an appropriate set of tools (hermeneutical approach) Wright posits his critical realist epistemology which emphasises the spiralled and relational nature of knowledge. He proposes a theory of how people know things that is a process:

that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence 'realism') while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence 'critical') (2004:35).

He points out that we should acknowledge that we always look through lenses and that as we do so we never only look at a reflection of ourselves. Hiebert (1994:22) explains that this is because the external world is real and objective reality actually does exist. As we look out on the world we are constantly interpreting and evaluating what we see, hear and experience. This leaves room for modification as our dialogue or conversation naturally progresses. Wright uses stories as the framework for our knowing things:

The critical realist theory of knowledge and verification... acknowledges the essentially 'storied' nature of human knowing, thinking and living, within the larger model of worldviews and their component parts... all knowledge of realities external to oneself takes place within the framework of a worldview, of which stories form an essential part. And it sets up as hypotheses various stories about the world in general or bits of it in particular and tests them by seeing what sort of fit they have with the stories already in place (2004:45 cf. Hiebert 1994:51)

He contends that knowledge is the product of worldview which forms the grid through which we view reality, asserting that fundamental to our worldview are stories. Our worldviews are the product of the stories we have heard and our own interpretation of our experience in the world as dictated by the former. Therefore, stories can embody or reinforce or perhaps subvert and modify the worldviews which regulate our patterns of behavior (culture). The spiral of knowledge naturally takes its course as our lenses are continually modified:

at each stage of the process what has happened can be best expressed in terms of story: the story which prompts the question, the new stories which offer themselves in explanation, and the success of one of these stories in including all of the relevant data... within a clear and simple framework, and contributing towards a better understanding of other stories (Wright 2004:43).

The spiral of knowledge takes its course as 'new' stories introduced might subtly or otherwise bring about revision of certain presuppositions, as any story, or at least elements thereof, may actually help to answer more questions pertaining to the world inhabited by the hearer, and therefore, make better sense of the world. In other words, new stories challenge and modify existing ones, creating a spiral as each new insight is contemplated, filtered and assimilated or

rejected. Within this epistemological dynamic genuine transformation is not only plausible but probable.

It follows that stories will be an effective tool for communicating life-changing truths from the Bible. Stories have long been a part of the cultural-religious heritage of African peoples. Certainly, in Malawi we have traditionally oral cultures, rooted in the stories of the past, passed down from generation to generation. Ononga (2014:207) notes that animistic beliefs are taught from birth by means of stories related to the unseen world and the power and activities of various spiritual forces. Common African and Malawian component narratives constituting a meta-narrative include the story of creation, fall, redemption, an explanation of cosmic realities, spiritual powers and entities, and man's place in the whole milieu. Ononga (2014:207) suggests that to counter any spurious beliefs and move toward transformation 'new' narratives addressing the prominent themes, needs and fears in animistic theology (such as God's power over evil, His presence and nearness in human affairs and His ability to protect His own) need to be told and taught. He points out that literature on how to address animism has largely focused on power encounter but insufficient attention has been given to adequate presentations of biblical truth which answer extant questions. He rightly contends that employing selected biblical stories as heuristic tools might increase faith and change perceptions of reality (Ononga 2014:207-210). In order to create truly transformative ministry approaches, in addition to telling the Biblical stories at cosmic and world history level, we may also tell stories of what God has done/is doing at the biographical level (i.e. in people's lives) (Hiebert 1982:45-46).

Key Biblical texts which address and help to redirect spurious traditional religious notions (and practices) need to be selected. For example, Hara (2008:173-176) identifies three traditional religious themes: firstly, the traditional Malawian's devotion to the ancestors and communication with them (as the Great Spirit's representatives) might be helpfully channeled towards praying to Jesus Christ, the only mediator between man and God (1 Tim 2:5); secondly, the traditional belief in a guardian spirit (mzimu) could be harnessed to encourage a deep sense of security strengthened by the assurance that they are never alone but that God is always present with them to guide and protect by His Spirit (Mt 28:20; Ps 139:7-12); and thirdly, the strong traditional belief in a physical aspect to salvation can be a useful concept (notwithstanding the traditional 'anthropocentric over-emphasis referred to earlier) as this notion counteracts the Western tendency to focus solely on the spiritual aspects of salvation in evangelism and discipleship (Lk 1:71,77; Ezek 18:27-29). Moreover, when properly taught and understood the physical aspect opens avenues to the future eschatological hope of a restored cosmos (Rom 8:21-22), a resurrection body and personal restoration to the perfected state (Rom 8:23-24). Bediako (2004:92-94) also asserts that the African person's ontology actually

enables him/her to readily understand how Christ invades our world from His separate world (in the African traditional concept) to become one of us so that we might become one with Him, with no aspect of man or cosmos left out, and equilibrium maintained. God and man are thus inextricably bound up together in God's good plan for universe and humanity (Rev 21:3). The Divine destiny for humanity and cosmos lies 'at the end' but the reality of its present existence is easily grasped by the primal imagination.²⁸ Such traditional beliefs are all malleable and potentially helpful to the cause of discipleship. It is obvious from these examples that subversion of the local stories does not necessitate the disrespectful and patronizing dismissal of all traditional religious beliefs.

Among the ZEC Churches of South Central Malawi, Beaton (2015:121-122, 209-212) has already noted a number of traditional themes in understanding relating to God which debilitate spiritual growth because they are filled by traditional ideas and concepts which are unbiblical. These common motifs are often related to the myths of origin, and the wisdom passed down from generation to generation through discussions, advice giving and practical example. They include: the worship of a transcendent and somewhat capricious Supreme Being; the veneration, imitation and placation of ancestral spirits; the climate of fear, intimately related to the 'cause-effect' paradigm; the lack of faith in the power and authority of Jesus Christ over all evil spiritual forces, nature and malevolent human beings; the traditional anthropocentric understanding of salvation focused on the immediate fulfillment of perceived needs; the constant oral transmission of the traditional wisdom which warns that if people reject traditional practices they will face the wrath of the elders and antagonize their ancestral spirits, not least the *Gule wamkulu*; the traditional need for mediators in the graded and communal society, to ensure well-being, protection and communal harmony, including the living-living (usually human power specialists like witchdoctors/traditional healers or *asing'anga*) and the living-dead (ancestral spirits); the embracing of new magic and substitute charms; and finally, a profound lack of eschatological hope providing no motivation to live well in the 'here and now'.

The researcher believes that the above issues, or spurious traditional motifs, can be addressed, subverted and reformed by focusing on particular Biblical themes, which together might help to provide a more holistic understanding or meta-narrative of salvation for seekers and believers, bringing about deep-level transformation in this context. Historically, evidence within the ZEC (Beaton 2015:54-56, 75-77), shows that pastors attempting to broach the subject of charm-dependency have tended to have an anthropocentric and even legalistic approach to teaching,

²⁸ Bediako further explains that there is a vital anticipation and real experience of the Transcendent in Churches alive to the primal worldview, as they regularly experience visions, prophecy and healings. He believes that all this is surely based on faith in Christ and knowledge of the Scriptures, but it is also experiential, organic and powerful in the realm of the spiritual rather than merely cerebral in the realm of opinion (ideas).

“focusing on prohibitions on magic and witchcraft, and personal holiness and prayer to remain clean” (2015:77). Instead, passages with such themes as the character of God and His relationship to His people, the authority of Christ, ‘life in the Spirit’, and our wonderful eschatological hope as believers, should be highlighted. These critical motifs may be conveyed through a Trinitarian focus: truths relating to God’s Fatherly love and ultimate purpose for His children (Lk 15:11-24; Rom 8: 14-17; 17-25, 28-39; 1 Pet 1:3-9), the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His mediatorial role) (Mt 28:18; Mk 1:21-34; 4:35-41; Heb 4:14-16; 1 Tim 2:5), and the indwelling, purifying and assuring presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16-17, 1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 1:12-13; Gal 5:16-26). These component ‘narratives’ must be shared for believers to learn what it truly means to be ‘in Christ’, to trust God absolutely in all things, truly understanding His ultimate protection and good purposes for His people. They help towards the formation of a contextually appropriate redemptive Gospel meta-narrative by bearing witness to God’s involvement in, and authority over, both the cosmic and natural realms, and His personal interest in, and love for His people, including fundamental eschatological truths so poignant in the context. Although most of these texts are not narrative, when considering the meaning of the texts and using them heuristically (as presented appropriately in context) they serve to create new stories over against which to measure the existing stories and stimulate towards modification. Those who hear the ‘stories’, reflecting on them contextually, may begin to construct a Biblical theology based on these stories, one which accurately reflects a biblical worldview (cf. Armstrong 2013:326-328).²⁹ These are carefully selected texts which the author considers to be apposite. There are, of course, many other texts which would strengthen the position, but these serve as building blocks and examples upon which to add other texts in the future formation of curriculum/s.

In summary, an intentional, specific, ‘contextual’ and ‘Biblical’ missiological approach is required, one which focuses on how the Bible might challenge and subvert unbiblical beliefs which promote unhelpful traditional practices. The aim is to re-orientate the people towards a more Biblical worldview and praxis, by means of exposing them to apposite passages of Scripture and Biblical themes, placed in juxtaposition to grass-roots stories of charm-usage (and the associated greater backdrop of traditional ‘worldview’ stories). The dialogue stimulated with appropriate facilitation, might well lead to changes in belief at the deepest level. This kind of redemptive dialogue between culture and Bible must start with listening to the voices of the people, hearing their stories, and their real-life problems (Rasmussen 2009:329). It should then move to hermeneutics, grappling with how Scripture meets, relates to, affirms,

²⁹ Armstrong and other advocates of Chronological Bible Storying, a contemporary approach to teaching the Bible to ‘oral’ cultures, embrace this philosophy. However, they opt for a chronological approach to the telling of the stories rather than the thematic approach which the author is suggesting here.

informs, corrects and revises complex faith-life situations in context. Thus, a dialogical approach will first seek to uncover what lies behind traditional practices, then seek to discover if and how Scripture addresses them or similar practices in their own historical and cultural settings. If we move from context to text in the way described above, the wonderful possibility presents itself, “that we devise forms of communication that receptors will intuitively grasp at the deepest level” (Moreau 2012:146; Shaw 2015:137). All of this opens the possibility of change at the deep-level of worldview assumptions, leading to change at the behavioural or cultural level (Kraft 1999:386). I refer particularly to re-drawing a Biblical and redemptive picture of God and His dealings with humanity which presents a different and better story to the local people, thus helping them to better understand their own standing ‘in Christ’; and therefore, enabling them to appropriate the kind of renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2) which sets free from bondage to traditional religious thinking.

In order to facilitate the above, the Bible is the key. Therefore, we must first ask: why (and how) is the Bible authoritative for us in this process? And also, how should we study the selected Biblical texts? What exactly are we looking for?

2.3.2 The Question of Biblical Authority?

If we hope to see transformation taking place through the story of the Word of God, and particularly through the component stories (narratives) carefully selected for exegesis and discussion, we should ask why (and how) the Bible is certain and authoritative for us? Barr (1966:84) writes, “If we start at the center with the Gospel of Christ we shall have no difficulty at all discerning how indispensable the Bible is.” This gospel is a summons to men and as such its primal form is the spoken word. For Luther, “The spoken word always remains the basic form of the Gospel. Althaus (1966:72) goes as far as to say that “Scripture has its source and exists for the sole purpose of oral proclamation”. This goes too far, but in a very real sense, primary revelation lies outside the text of Scripture (Barton 1998b:60-67), both the word spoken (Gen 1:3ff), and the living Word of God (Christ) (John 1:1-2), precede, exceed and transcend it (Althaus 1966:76-78). However, to be sure, Christianity has not remained strictly an orally transmitted faith and God still speaks through that Word which He spoke in the past (Heb1:1-4), as a particular set of texts serves as a record of the faith’s origins and nature, functioning as a vehicle by which Christians explain themselves to outsiders and through which insiders are nurtured and sustained in their faith (Barton 1998b:59). Wolvaart (2000:19) explains that “God’s communication with specific people on specific occasions was recorded as a message for all people afterwards.” As Ladd (quoted in Fee and Stuart 1993:17) states, “The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of {people} in history.” Thus, His Word has both eternal relevance and historical particularity (Fee and Stewart 1993:17). Therefore, the special

revelation of God comes to us today through the Bible, which is “the material form of special divine revelation”, in which, “we learn about and meet Jesus Christ” (Milne 1995:27). Wolvaart (200:21) asserts that “We can never study and obey the Bible enough, because it contains the message of the living God to mankind.” The Scriptures are inspired by God in their original writing/recording, as well as in the process of redaction by editors at various stages along the way (Childs 1979:73). Thus, the ‘canon’, or sixty-six books, which we have today, is considered to be inspired of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). The author agrees with Erickson (1994:214-220), Grudem (2005:80-81) and Milne (1995:37-38) that God was active in a supervisory way, having a long history of providential working in the lives of each author, as well as exercising His Holy Spirit’s influence at the particular time of writing.³⁰ This resulting in what we might term ‘verbal plenary’ inspiration. The latter meaning that even the very words recorded in Scripture are inspired and that the inspiration extends to the entire Bible (although some portions are less significant than others, both in terms of the unfolding of the message of redemption, and their potential for edification and immediate applicability). Thus, the inspired canon is God’s special revelation to us, and as such, the Bible is “the basis and norm for all Christian preaching and teaching (Milne 1995:27). Most Evangelicals, the present author included, accept the Bible as authoritative for life and faith.³¹

2.3.3 Distilling an Appropriate Hermeneutic

We must also ask what is (are) the best way to interpret Scripture? Childs (1979:73-74) rightly wants to focus attention on the final form of the text, viewing the writings as historically and theologically conditioned and accorded a normative function in the life of the community of faith. No doubt, the final form of the canon was conceived because there was always a tangible concern to pass down tradition in such a way as to make it authoritative for future generations: a text with ‘canonical intentionality’ (Childs 1979:78-79). The limiting of the canon and the ordering of its subunits stabilized certain theological convictions in a more universal sense and has been described by Wall (1991:371) as, “the privileged permanent expression of an intentional, dynamic interaction between the faithful and their written rule of faith.” As such, “The Bible comes alive where authentic religious experience coincides with texts which are themselves testimony to an authentic religious experience: the past strikes a spark off the present or the present off the past, and both are illuminated” (Theissen 1979:82).

³⁰ There are certain sections where it does appear as though a type of ‘dictation’ took place, particularly in the prophetic and apocalyptic literature, where the Lord actually gives the instruction: “Write” or something similar (eg. Rev 2:1,8,12; Isa 38:4-6) (Erickson 1994:218-219; Grudem 2005:80-810).

³¹ There are other sources of authority for the Christian, including: the creeds, the historic confessions, the mind of the church, Christian experience, Christian reason, and the ‘inner voice’ of the Holy Spirit. However, while each of these recognized sources can make a contribution to our faith life, none of them is adequate (Milne 1995:16-18).

The two Testaments together reflect both historical and theological continuity whilst maintaining the integrity of each individual Testament because both have a vertical/existential dimension, bearing witness to Christ separately and in concert, in the context of the canon. The Gospels refer constantly to the Old Testament which plays a major role in their canonical shaping (Childs 1992:71-78). Since the 'canon' is one book (an organic whole) no part can be properly understood apart from the whole, so the 'full canonical context' must always be held in view in interpretation. For example, for Childs (1985b:179): "The canonical titles- the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John- emphasize both the integrity of the individual texts... and the unity of the story as preserved in these four versions." So, for example, the Gospel of Matthew can be interpreted in the light of the reality of its form as a present whole despite the fact that parts of the Gospel are re-workings of earlier texts (Childs 1985b:61). Within this dynamic texts are best interpreted in harmony with parallel passages. A case in point is Peter's confession (Matt 16:16). Watson (1994:36) explains how at this point the Synoptic accounts complement each other without simply being fused into a unity. Matthew's addition (vs. 17- 19) needs Mark's account to prevent the development of a triumphalistic theology in the church. By the same token, Mark requires Matthew to avoid defeatism and an unhealthy focus on our human frailty. Each of the four accounts has a selection, texture and witness of its own but also functions in concert with the others. Anderson (1999:122-123) also wants us to acknowledge that intra-textual voices are also seen to function harmoniously. Since Scripture interprets Scripture, where there are apparent disharmonious voices, skilled readers take into account the full canonical form of the Bible and look for the picture presented which coheres most naturally with the other canonical voices.

Childs (1992:71-72) wants to go further, arguing that Scripture as canon means that biblical text, and its theological function as authoritative norm, belong inextricably together. Therefore, it makes no sense to strip away the very elements that have contributed to the canonical shaping in order to reconstruct the historical setting. He contends that interpretation requires close examination of the fixed form and careful discernment towards a relevant contemporary application.³² He is correct that interpretation is not simply dependent on the reconstruction of diachronic relationships between the writings and their sources but where exactly is the content to the authoritative norm found? Is it strictly in the ecclesial function of the texts? Knowing how faith communities down through the ages have read and appropriated the biblical texts afresh, and how the texts have served real communities as they have grappled with real life/ faith issues is very helpful (Sanders 1984:67), but is it enough? He asserts that the canonical approach "seeks to follow the biblical text in its theological use of historical referentiality rather

³² Childs rejects the term 'canonical criticism' on the grounds that he does not want to be lumped in with other 'critical' methodologies.

than to construct a contrast between ‘Geschichte’ and ‘Historie’ (Childs 1985:16).” But does this emphasis on the theological shape of the text require the downgrading of the entire historical task (including the search for original authorial intention?)? Is it necessary to construct such a chasm? And can the ‘theological profile’ of a given passage (Childs 1979:76-77) prevent fanciful interpretations? Note that the Church Fathers and the medieval interpreters recognized a multi-valency in the scriptural text (Steinmetz 1986:270). Parsons (1991:269-271) argues that only when we are interpreting Scripture in this kind of way may we talk about the ‘*sensus plenior*’³³, since any contemporary (contextual) interpretation is grounded by the wider canonical context. But is this method adequate on its own? It’s true, as Parsons (1991:272) points out, that canonical meanings are never unhistorical, as they are intimately linked to the historical meaning(s), as discerned by the faith community of the past, in time and space. However, surely a better approach includes, both recognizing the authoritative canonical form of the inherited Biblical texts, but also embracing serious historical-critical study (not atomization) in order to further enable our understanding (interpretation), theologizing and application of the texts? Thomas (2002:408) wants to clarify the difference between historical-critical study, which approaches the Bible with skepticism rooted in an anti-supernaturalist bent arising in the Enlightenment, from grammatico-historical criticism, which is devoid of such skepticism. This serves as a rather helpful distinction. Canonical criticism is a helpful corrective to autonomous historicism (historical-critical work in the former sense) and other traditional and atomistic approaches (Parsons 1991:288), but it is surely inadequate on its own.

Watson (1994:230) is right to point out that “The texts... render faithfully the history of the relation of God and humankind, and it is in the light of this function that they must be interpreted.” That is to say, that the Bible’s primary purpose is theological, revealing God’s nature, character, and relationship to (and with) mankind and His creation. However, he (1994:43) is also correct to explain that the canon does not tell us exactly how to use the texts. So, how do we discover exactly what a text means and how to apply it to our different contexts? While Childs (1979:80-83) contends that no set meaning is passed down but that theological reflection on an authoritative text in which the authoritative norm lies, is to be encouraged, I believe that we can endeavor to discover what a text meant, and that it is important to do so.³⁴ That is to say, we should attempt to discover the original intent of the words of the Bible, or what the authors had in mind (authorial intention) (Fee and Stewart 1993:19-27). Surely this is safer ground? God can and does speak in different ways, to different people, at different times, through the same text, but this does not mean that the original author did not have a particular

³³ The ‘*sensus plenior*’ is a Latin term describing the view that there is meaning to passages of Scripture beyond what was originally intended by the authors. Such meaning is thought to be discovered through the life and experiences of the readers.

³⁴ Fee and Stewart (1993:26, 64) coined the phrase: “A text cannot mean what it never meant.”

meaning in mind for the people and context into which he was writing. On the contrary, it simply means that God is not restricted by that meaning in His relations with his people.³⁵ However, we should seek out a normative approach to interpretation, one which actually seeks to understand a passage in its context (broader historical-cultural-literary context).

Moritz (2000:195) points out that NT Wright's 'critical realism' helpfully insists that interpretation is storied and relational implying that "it is no longer possible to ask questions about meaning and significance without doing so against the backcloth of the larger stories at author, text and reader level. This third level (reader) or 'horizon' in interpretation is not to be neglected. Neither should it become the primary voice in the interpretive dynamic, or an 'anything goes' hermeneutic will soon develop. The storied, relational nature of interpretation does not (or should not) prohibit us from searching for the most responsible and normative approach to the interpretation of any Biblical text (perhaps the opposite). Barton (1998a) is right that the historical task is important and that any contemporary paradigm-shift towards text immanent criticism is a dangerous one. Wall (1995:377) also notes that the historical process mediates against an obscurantist and fundamentalistic ideological pursuit. Moreover, the historical task is vital in terms of seeking out the meaning of a text, and we can and should apply sound principles (hermeneutics), and make use of all the knowledge and tools at our disposal.

Lindbeck (1997:40) argues that if history (the historical task) interprets what a text meant and theology what it means, current readers may draw out a somewhat different meaning than intended by the original author and understood by the first readers (Wall 1995:379). Does he imply that we need to work out what a text means for us today, in the sense of how to apply the ancient texts in the 'here and now', asking: what is the contemporary relevance (cf. Fee and Stuart 1993:25-27; Osbourne 1991: 5)? Or does he mean that a text can actually have different meanings? Much depends on semantics as a definition of 'meaning' is required here. If meaning is "the truth intention of the author" (Thomas 2002:27) then it surely follows that to draw out a meaning that is different to the one originally intended by the Biblical author is surely to court error. Ramm (quoted in Thomas 2002:142) asserts that "there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study." When we understand the truth intention of the author then that is 'interpretation' according to Thomas (2002:27). However, just as there are issues with putting all our eggs in the canonical basket, so we must also

³⁵ For example, a number of Christians and missionaries (including the author) have been called to the mission field or to crucial actions for Christ through a particular verse or passage of Scripture. Often, such texts are taken entirely 'out of context' and interpreted purely at the reader level (third horizon). In other words, a thorough historical-grammatical study of the text would reveal that the meaning drawn out by the individual has little or no affinity whatsoever to what the text originally meant in its original setting. Nevertheless, the same text is found to have been profoundly influential and even 'authoritative' for an individual's life and ministry (eg. Bonhoeffer's return to Germany resulting in his imprisonment and martyrdom [cf. Metaxes 2010:339] and Brother Andrew's call to smuggle Bible's into communist Europe [cf. J. and E. Sherril 2001:88]).

acknowledge that the historical-grammatico-critical method and its 'autonomous descriptive task' is not uncomplicated. Logically, can we really know exactly what an ancient author meant to say or how the first readers understood it? Watson (1994:40) is right that the biblical texts are not simply historical artifacts whose meaning is easily determined by their historical circumstances of origin. Historical results are illuminating but do they always guarantee the 'plain' meaning of scripture? We must also ask whether the historical-critical method is adequate on its own? (Parsons 1991:266; Watson 1994:35-36)

Even when we have what we believe to be the meaning (the original intent of the biblical text) (Fee and Stuart 1993:25-27), and/or the religious functioning of a text in its original setting (Lindbeck 1997:40), we still have to work out what it means for us today, or how to apply the scriptures to our contemporary '*sitz im leben*', in the 'here and now' (Fee and Stuart 1993:25; Shealy in Thomas 2002:169). As Wall (1995:379) insists, our aim should be to engage an interpretive strategy that "seeks to relate the whole witness of the biblical canon and the whole life of the faith community in fresh and meaningful ways." I contend that the latter can only be properly done with focused historical-critical, or more properly, 'grammatico-historical' study, which seeks to discover both authorial intention (or as close as one can get!), and to relate the message at hand to the broader biblical and theological framework of the Bible (Wolfaart 2000:123-24).

In summary, in our interpretation we should be interested in the final literary form of the canon, its past and ongoing religious/ ecclesial function, and what historical study (grammatical-historical) has revealed regarding any given text. Exegesis should be done using all of the tools available to the trade but working towards a distinctive end: making the whole biblical text (not historically contextualized fragments) available in the present for interpretation by the living community. Interpretive decisions in the present can be taken in the light of what we now have, how it has been shaped, interpreted and applied in the past, and what grammatical-historical study reveals. Thus there is fluidity in interpretation (Wall 1995:371-378). The Holy Spirit is able to illuminate Truth in context, revealing 'new' facets, and highlighting different aspects much needed by peculiar groups of people at particular times. Nevertheless, He surely does so against the backcloth of the inherited 'inspired' canon, the long tradition of interpretation within the Church, and the illuminating discoveries made by those engaging in serious historical and grammatical research.

2.3.4 Towards a Missiological Hermeneutic

How do we appropriate what has been said thus far in the missiological context in Malawi? Caldwell (1987:315) states that many Westerners, and some Western-influenced missionaries

and theologians, have imported the historical critical-method into the two-thirds world and have “failed to take into account the worldview assumptions in the receptor culture affecting the successful interpretation of Scripture in that culture.” For example, Stein et al (1993:185) believe that the goal or objective of all biblical interpretation is to discover “the author-encoded historical meaning of these texts.” Caldwell (1996:25) wants to bring a corrective by asserting that “There may indeed be other valid interpretation methods available to us that will help the Bible come alive to those individuals who do not share our particular theological heritage, training or worldview.” So, he wants to search for indigenous hermeneutical methods by which biblical meaning can be understood (1999:30). The danger here, of course, is moving into a field of interpretive relativity or ‘hermeneutical relativism’. As Tappeiner (1999:226) notes, once we admit that receptor-culture hermeneutical methods might actually be legitimately employed to elucidate actual meaning we open the idea of a ‘pluralism of hermeneutical methods’. Moreover, if interpretation “is an understanding of the truth intention of the author” (Thomas 2002:27), and so much work has already been done by so many, to discover the meaning (the original authorial ‘truth’ intention) of the Biblical texts, then it would seem foolhardy to disregard all of this and attempt to re-invent the wheel.

While Caldwell himself neither wants to throw out the historical-critical methodology (1999:27) or undermine the efforts of many Evangelicals to present Scripture in culturally appropriate ways, (attempting to contextualize the message to make it receptor orientated) (1999:31), he wants to go further. He contends that God uses different hermeneutical methods that are most appropriate for each culture during each time period (1999:32-33). An obvious corollary would be the discovery of a plurality of meanings. Thus, this kind of contextualization encourages local autonomy and an infinite variety in biblical texts (Thomas 2002:410).³⁶ However, we must ask: do texts have new meanings in different contexts or only new applications (Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:175-179,201-202; Fee and Stuart 1993:45-60)? The danger lies in making the universal validity of the Gospel secondary and subservient to the needs of specific situations (often of social or political need) (Hesselgrave 1985:448 cf. West 2010:24-27). The fear that the second horizon (interpreter’s cultural conditioning and understanding) and/or the third horizon (cultural horizon of two-thirds world or in our case the receptor culture) might distort the first horizon of the biblical message, if given too much emphasis, is a legitimate one.³⁷

³⁶ The author holds that contextualization has to do with applying the texts in a particular context, which includes how we communicate the Biblical truths, rather than with hermeneutics as a purely interpretive endeavour.

³⁷ We must clearly differentiate between theology and biblical revelation. Our theologizing ‘in situ’ must always be based on biblical revelation and should cohere with the wider canonical witness and orthodox doctrine.

Carson (1984:17-18) rightly sees it as a question of authority: "To appeal to the demands of the interpreter's cultural context is legitimate, provided the intent is to facilitate the understanding and proclamation of the Bible within that context, not to transfer the authority of the Bible to conceptions and mandates not demonstrably emerging from the horizon of the biblical writers themselves." It may be that some legitimate conceptions and mandates do not demonstrably emerge from the first horizon but this should not be our starting presupposition. Most Evangelicals are comfortable acknowledging that there may be different applications to a particular text in different contexts, so long as there is one meaning for any given text. The classical position has been 'Interpretation, one; applications, many' (Tappeiner 1999:225-226). Others argue that a text may have different meanings and varied applications in different contexts, so long as both meanings and applications clearly align with the wider canonical witness. For example, Caldwell (2000:143) clearly holds to a 'many meanings-many applications' theory, and Steinmetz (in Thomas 2002:415) declares that a passage cannot be limited to one meaning and one meaning only. Moo (in Klein et al 1993:179) also argues that God could "have intended a sense related to but more than that which the human author intended." The crucial issue is whether or not such conceptions and mandates sufficiently cohere with the wider testimony of Scripture. This will always be the litmus test for any interpretation. Does it resonate with the wider canonical witness? Does it support the traditional, historic, orthodox doctrines of faith (analogy of faith)? Is Jesus Christ glorified? Are God's people edified and strengthened as a result? These are the key questions. And the Holy Spirit must be our guide. However, it would seem sensible and responsible to begin with known methods and search for one meaning.

Espiritu (2001:279) argues not for the use of other hermeneutical methods but for a more adequate Evangelical hermeneutics, fearing that the escalation of multiple interpretations in ethno-hermeneutics might delay, rather than speed up, the work of world mission. A more inclusive Evangelical hermeneutics would be desirable but we have not been left without very helpful signposts. I think that the best way forward is to allow the light of both the first horizon (first writers and readers), and varying historical interpretations of the biblical texts, to guide our interpretation in the present, regardless of the context we are in. If this is what Thistleton (1980:xix) meant when he admitted that we need to seek to move towards a 'fusion' of horizons, then I am in agreement. Tappeiner's (1999:229) concern to safeguard the importance of the text itself is invaluable. He is right that in any proper hermeneutic the text is 'king', which means that 'what it meant' is fundamental, foundational and indispensable to a proper understanding of what it means now.³⁸ We must not, however, assume that the historical critical (grammatical) method, or our own present (second horizon) understanding of

³⁸ Tappeiner (1999:225-229) champions the grammatical-historical critical method as objective and universal.

the text, or even the receptor culture's (third horizon) understanding, is absolutely authoritative. Nor is it inconceivable, as Tappeiner (1999:229) assumes, that new insights into what a text meant might arise at the second and third horizons.³⁹ However, Kaiser (1994:179) sounded a salutary warning when he noted that it is dangerous "to elevate one horizon over the others."⁴⁰ Authority lies within the canon and the Word speaks into every cultural situation, and sometimes in different ways. But we are on safer ground when we use every tool of the trade available to us for the interpretive task, including findings and insights at all three horizons, putting all of this into the interpretive cooking pot. The Holy Spirit can then shed further light where necessary and appropriate.

Hesselgrave (1985:453) sees no alternative to a position that starts in a grammatico-historical analysis of the text. This approach rightly values context, both historical and literary. He and Rommen (1989:177-178,201-202) are certain that there are limits to the possible meaning of a text determined by the author's intention (under Holy Spirit inspiration), the linguistic symbols and conventions employed by the author, and the response of the original audience. In interpretation, despite the readers own enculturation, it is possible to acquire a more or less accurate understanding of the meaning of the text because of its perspicuity and the analytical tools of exegesis, theology and history. When applying the text, the interpreter must work out the implications of his understanding of the text for the context (culture) in which he finds himself. Then he must decide whether to accept or reject the validity of the text's implications. An acceptable contextualization is rendered possible when the interpreter accepts these implications and sets about appropriating the meaning in his given socio-cultural environment. The author agrees that this is the best possible methodology at our disposal, even though remaining convinced that God is not restricted by authorial intention.

However, we must go further. Thiselton (1980:11) noted that "hermeneutics in the more recent sense of the term begins with the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided: the modern interpreter, no less the text, stands in a given historical text and tradition." This draws our attention to the need to recognize the conditioning of both interpreter as well as text. In short, we must take into account the pre-suppositions and conditioning of the reader in interpretation but need to be careful not to allow these to override the original context of the text (Hesselgrave 1985:446).⁴¹ Kraft (1978:358) wants us to note that it is more than just the

³⁹ If God has ever spoken to you through a verse or passage of Scripture without any special reference to first horizon historical particularity, it is difficult to argue with this assertion!

⁴⁰ Although Kaizer does just that by going on to assert that through God's overruling of the lives, words and attitudes of the apostles and prophets, we do have the true and living word of God as it was formulated in the first horizon. He is correct but our challenge remains the interpretation of this living word for today in our different cultural contexts.

⁴¹ The 'hermeneutical circle' acknowledges that the reader brings a set of questions to any text because of his/her life experience and presuppositions. However, through careful reading and study, the text actually interprets the reader,

influence of language and culture in the original ancient setting of a text, but also the influence of language and culture on the actual interpreter, that constitutes the wider or total cultural context (including both literary and extra-literary components). Thus, God uses the total cultural context, including the ancient setting and the modern interpreter, to communicate his message to us. However, Kraft (1978:358) also takes things further, rightly suggesting that an interpreter often has a third cultural context to consider; that of the culture into which he/she is attempting to move the Biblical message. Thus he advocates an approach with a cross-cultural perspective.

Whelchel (2000:125-133) champions contextual relevance in the missionary endeavour but is sure to point out that hermeneutics is not where contextualization should take place in our theological and missiological task. He rightly draws a clear distinction between the contextual communication of truth and any attempt to see hermeneutics as a contextually defined discipline. He also wants to be clear that cultural relevancy is always secondary to the elucidation of biblical truth. In this regard, Bonhoeffer (quoted in Metaxas 2010: 272) eloquently stated: "Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic... Do not defend God's Word but testify to it... Trust to the Word."

West (2010:21-31) suggests that there are three key elements to African interpretation: The Biblical text, the African context and the African person. Draper (in Farisani 2017:8) refers to this as a 'tripolar' approach. Firstly, there is no dialogue between text and context without the facilitation of a real 'flesh and blood' African person who moves back and forth from Biblical context to African context (a process which he refers to as appropriation) (cf. Farisani 2017:8). Secondly, he contends that the ideo-theological orientation of the reader influences both the nature of the dialogue between Biblical text and African context, as well as the focus of analysis within the text. In other words, the African reader wants to see contextual transformation and the kind of transformation depends on their particular African context (e.g. inculturation hermeneutics will focus on the religio-cultural aspects of a text and context while liberation hermeneutics will concentrate on socio-economic dimensions of text and context) (2010:23-25). Therefore, whilst African interpretation of Biblical texts seeks (as in the West) to hear the ancient biblical voice from within its own socio-historical context through the use of exegetical methodologies/tools such as the historic-critical method and literary tools (including an interest in the linguistic, literary and canonical contexts), the interest of the reader influences what exactly it is in the text that becomes the focus of the investigation. In line with this, Mijoga (2007:24-33) argues for the justification of 'foregrounding' the African cultural milieu in

adjusting those initial questions towards a better set, more functional for an understanding of the text itself (Thistleton 1977:316).

interpreting the Bible in Africa. Following Upkong (2000:11-28), he asserts that the subject of interpretation is formed by the particular African context of the reader, and that because of the largely non-literate population, visual media should also play a significant role in interpretation: "singing and dancing, storytelling, retelling, wisdom sayings (parables, proverbs, riddles), and role playing (drama/acting) (2007:25-26). But this places too much emphasis on the reader! We need to be careful to allow a text to speak for itself. Moreover, the 'media' are surely more amenable to communication of the texts than to meaningful interpretation. Thomas (2002:429) is right to point out that 'the fusion of horizons' "is more readily attainable through emphasis on the things that human beings and members of the body of Christ have in common rather than their differences." Thirdly, West (2010:23-24) notes that inculturation hermeneutics, which responds to questions arising in the African cultural and religious context, is premised on an inherent trust of the Bible as being a sacred text, 'good news' for Africa, having a potentially transformative role in a variety of socio-cultural contexts . However, at the same time, it stands in oppositional tension to any forms of biblical interpretation imposed by or inherited from missionary Christianity and Western academia. The latter needs to be overcome in order to move forward effectively, there is no point throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Caldwell (1999:32-33) asserts that while the text is divinely inspired there is no single universal hermeneutical method ordained by God to the exclusion of other methods. Taber (1978:6) noted that "If the Christian faith had originally become dominant in an Asian or African context, then the intellectual might not have been the main emphasis. The stress might well have been on the emotions and imagination." Some Malawian scholars have argued for the developing of African or Malawian 'hermeneutics' (interpretive methodologies). For example, Chifungu (2013:132-146) wants to facilitate transformation of social ills and evil cultural practices through the development of an oral hermeneutics that is enacted. In moving towards the formation of such an oral hermeneutics within the lay preaching context of the Malawian Church, the author emphasizes the interpretation of biblical texts so that, instead of performing the oral-traditional stories, the lay preachers could perform the texts of the holy book (2013:137-141). He draws attention to the fundamental evocative and emotional dimensions of gospel communication in an oral society. The oral hermeneutic he wants to develop is creative, based on the reading and re-reading of Scripture (in context and in community), and the theory of imagination and reframing as a way of understanding Scripture, so that the preaching may regard text and context, Word and world seriously. But is this interpretation or communication? He asserts that this 'hermeneutic' presupposes a deliberate effort to understand the Scriptures in their biblical context. Mijoga (1997:41-44) also appears to be arguing for a peculiar African hermeneutic when he discusses hidden ways of doing contextual Bible study in South Africa. Here, he talks about prayer, role-play/drama, and retelling of the story, including the use of visual aids (he

follows Kalilombe 1991:397-411, esp. 407-408, in his explication of how these 'devices' influence interpretation). Other influential 'devices' for interpretation included reference to local situations (eg. local politics), historical figures, local customs/beliefs, sayings taken from local wisdom, stories, and proof texts (1997:42-43). In his study on sermons preached in African Instituted Churches in Malawi (public interpretation) he also noted the use of the following methods to interpret the Biblical texts and deliver the sermons: verse-by-verse, literally, symbolically and polemically. Aids to interpretation using these methods included, "the use of themes, retelling, prayers, songs, stories, proverbs, references to local stories, prooftexts, rhetorical questions" (1997:43-44). Again, the latter seem to be used for effective communication (the delivery) rather than actual interpretation. However, the creative, imaginative and reframing elements could lead to distortions and misinterpretations of the meanings of passages of Scripture if the starting point is not attempting to understand the texts in their original historical and literary contexts (Fee and Stuart 1993:45-60; Wolvaart 2000:75:125). What limits are placed on such 'reader-centered' interpretive strategies? Undoubtedly, all these devices could be invaluable to discovering the people's perspective on the theological significance of a passage to the particular context. Moreover, they are necessary to an effective communication process, but appropriate missiological hermeneutics will need to make full use of the tools and wisdom already available to us, not losing sight of the invaluable discoveries already made, and the helpful truths revealed. It is conceivable that a 'new' indigenous hermeneutic along these lines could be developed, but only if the use of these traditional reference points and heuristic devices were somehow married to- by way of testing, comparison, guiding and verifying local interpretations- grammatico-historical interpretations and doctrinal orthodoxy. That is for another research paper. The researcher contends that any proposed 'new' or 'indigenous' or 'ethnocentric' hermeneutic (interpretive methodology) can only be proved or verified in relation to how closely the 'interpretations' resemble the exegetical findings that we already have.

The present author is convinced that, as Westerners, we need to hear African voices if we are to minister meaningfully in the African context, but we do so against the wider canonical witness and the full gamut of the history of biblical interpretation, never in a contextual or ecclesiastical vacuum. What else ought we to consider? Beeby's (2000:282-283) emphasis on a 'missionary canonical hermeneutic' is invaluable. He affirms that such a hermeneutic emerges from within Scripture and is found within a holistic reading of Scripture, but adds that in our interpretive strategies we must always hold to the 'missio Dei' as the central thrust of the canon, seeking "to be faithful to the creative and redemptive word of the missionary Trinity ..." (2000:283). Hiebert *et al* (1999:384-386) contend that a good hermeneutic will be one which is rooted in Scripture (canonical), redemptive (missiological), guided by the Holy Spirit (dynamic), and worked out

within the context of the Church community (here the emphasis should be twofold: traditional and contextual [ethnocentric], that is, involving those who are familiar with their cultural heritage). The author suggests that the consideration of three additional categories or pillars is salutary: any sound hermeneutic ought to also be: historical, that is conscious of any Biblical passage's original historical-cultural-literary context and intentionality; relational, which means the contemporary interpretation must speak directly to individuals and living communities (West 2010:21); and finally, Christocentric, meaning that any proposed interpretation is viewed in the light of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Hence, the researcher arrives at a sevenfold hermeneutic, one which is at once: historical, canonical, traditional, missiological, Christological, relational, and contextual. These considerations provide healthy parameters for interpretation.

In summary, it should be recognized that an overly accommodating 'contextual' approach to hermeneutics may invite interpretive relativization (cf. Caldwell 1996:13-35). Cultural relevancy in interpretation must remain secondary to the elucidation of biblical truth (Thomas 2002:434-441). Relevancy in the application of Scripture to culture is vital but the meaning remains the same. Thus, without an absolute standard of measurement, 'ethnohermeneutics' leads inevitably to pluralistic relativism (Whelchel 2000:125-133). Any interpretation of the Word must cohere with sound principles of hermeneutics (Fee and Stuart 1993:45-61; Wolvaart 2000:75:125; Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:170-179). Specific Scriptural material with well understood meaning is necessary to provide the biblical counter-perspective to the local people's worldview. By discussing passages of Scripture with local pastors through guiding questions, helpful indigenous insights may be gleaned without relativizing the meaning of a text. Crucially, any 'indigenous' or contextual exegetical conclusions must cohere adequately with the wider canonical witness and remain within the parameters of historical and traditional interpretations. Han (2013:279) points out that the Word of God must have priority over cultural context which ought to be brought under, measured and reinterpreted by the Word (Hiebert 1994:91; Goheen: 2000:360). Theological insights must be measured by the degree to which they actually reflect the meaning of the biblical text (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:199-200) because truth contained in Scripture is understood to be greater than our understanding of it (Hiebert 1994:29-30). Local insights will rather inform effective communication of the meaning, theological significance and practical applications of a text, in context.

All things considered, the author feels that it is important to hear the voices of the local people pertaining to key passages of Scripture. The passages may be exegeted by a missionary or 'teacher/facilitator' (who may also be a local), using all the available critical tools. The special focus should be on how the meaning of the text informs its theological significance in the context, leading to practical applications. Therefore, all is done with an eye on the cultural

presuppositions of the receptor culture in which the exegete finds him/herself. Then the passages should be subjected to wider critical appraisal/dialogue with members of the receptor culture: How do locals understand the texts? What insights do they bring as a consequence of their particular hermeneutical lenses and life experience? This approach acknowledges that the receptor culture has a legitimate voice and perspective on the Scriptures without placing the authority for interpretation in their hands. It is also premised on the understanding that we are more likely to glean helpful cultural insights, illustrations and analogies from such critique and dialogue- that may help to confirm the theological significance and the practical significance (application), and explain the meaning, of the texts- than we are to discover any new levels of meaning. Thus, key elements related to the theological significance of a passage in the particular context, as well as important facets relating to specific applications of the passage, may emerge (or at least be affirmed) through such discussions.

Bearing all of this in mind, how might we effectively marry contextual and Biblical components? For the particular purposes of this thesis: how can we bring grassroots stories of charm-usage (and the many culturally conditioned component narratives which stimulate the practices) into redemptive dialogue with Biblical texts? We need to ask: what are the most effective methods of communicating the specific Biblical truths in the context? Therefore, the third necessary foundation for an effective missiological approach is an understanding of issues relating to an appropriate pedagogic methodology; Foundation Three: Pedagogic.

2.4 Foundation Three: Pedagogic

To facilitate the communication of Biblical truth we must also ask: how do we best communicate specific Biblical truths in the context? Therefore, in this section literature related to the identification of appropriate and potentially effective pedagogic methodology/ies for the context, including books, theses and journal articles is discussed. An appropriate pedagogy is critical for a fruitful missiological approach to break charm-dependency and related ATR practices in the church. Here, foundations are laid for the more specific recommendations made in Chapter Six of this thesis pertaining to how to facilitate a potentially effective teaching/learning dynamic *in situ* in the ZEC churches. Following the study of worldview and Scripture, a focused, facilitated education process targeting the people at grass-roots level in the ZEC churches is envisaged. But what kind of pedagogy is required?

2.4.1 Principles for Education (Learning and Teaching) in Context

Gehman (1987:8-22) encourages ongoing theological/ecclesiological reflection and dialogue in context ('in situ') that seeks the voice of God, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, through the

Word of God. An ongoing and critical dialogue between faith and culture is necessary, one which allows space for the critical appraisal of both “the historical shape of the gospel and the given culture” (Ott 2000:26). (*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*). The goal is always to enable understanding of the truth of God’s Word in meaningful and relevant ways to the cultural and existential contexts of the receptor culture, impacting upon people’s everyday lives, helping them to answer the pressing ‘middle tier’ questions which they have, and to deal with the challenges which they face. Scripture must relate to life. We must theologize ‘in situ’ but our theologizing must always be in response to the truth of God’s Word and within parameters set by the meaning of the Biblical texts. Applying this to the ecclesiological context of ZEC Churches in South-Central Malawi in 2019/20, it is necessary to stimulate dialogue and critical reflection resulting in the kind of transformation discussed above arising from such dialogue.

Two studies related to teaching preaching in the Malawian ecclesiological context shed some light on how to move forward in the area of pedagogics: MacBean (2015:86-87), considering preacher training at the grass-roots level in rural Malawi, views as contextual, any grounded, coach-led learning based on a ‘field dependency’ model which values group co-operation, cultural values and verbal tasks. He rightly sees this kind of learning as empathetic and participatory, embracing pictorial language and group discussion as key elements of the process. Chifungo (2013:132-139) seeks to introduce an ‘oral’ hermeneutic for lay preachers who are predominantly oral learners, as he considers enabling effective preaching within the CCAP in Malawi. His suggested reading and re-reading of texts followed by dramatization is helpful.⁴² While these studies are preaching related the insights cohere with the testimonies of ZEC pastors relating to discovering an effective pedagogic methodology for teaching congregants. Indeed, within the ZEC the most fruitful extant approaches appear to be group orientated, participatory, and dialogical, although there is a general consensus amongst the pastors that more could and should be done (Beaton 2015:62-65; 74-80). Learning is experiential so traditional models of communication such as story-telling, proverbs, drama, testimonies, discussion (dialogue), and questions are effective. These insights cohere with sound pedagogic principles in general, in which learner participation, group-work and ongoing dialogue are all core characteristics (Freire 1997:56, 65; 68-72; Vella 1997:3, 140-148, 18-21, 149-158; Shaw 2014:182-200, 231-240). Indeed, before moving on to focus on the important subjects of orality and story-telling, it is worth examining more closely the foundational education principles encapsulated in the philosophies of Freire, Vella and Shaw.

⁴² However, he does not adequately explain how to arrive at the actual meaning of texts or how to select the necessary didactic content for communication.

Despite the obvious political overtones (humanistic and libertine), Freire (1997) has useful pedagogic insights, particularly in the light of any objective to help believers discover liberation from spiritual oppression. However, his explicit political agenda and the apparent supposition that the solution to every problem lies within the learner's potential for self-discovery and self-actualization are at variance with a discipleship agenda. For the Christian educator, it is only Christ who can bring freedom, and He is our authority, representing truth. We cannot follow a humanistic agenda but must submit to His Lordship. Moreover, Freire's depiction of a dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed is the very starting point for his educational philosophy. The Christian paradigm ought to begin with the affirmation of the equality of all persons, in submission to Christ, a dynamic in which all are seeking truth rather than power, the good of others rather than just their own good, and to serve Christ, rather than to be served by men. As such, educators should be fellow learners, but are compelled to pass on their knowledge (already acquired through study and experience), for the benefit and spiritual growth of others in Christ's church. It goes to motive. Nevertheless, methodology is important and Freire has some salient points in this regard despite the somewhat complex nature of his educational paradigm.

The main thrust to his educational philosophy is dialogical and the aim is radical transformation (1997:31, 36, 47). Based on the hope that it is possible to change life for the better, he champions co-operation, justice and a concern for the common good, believing that even illiterate adults can have their world transformed through dialogical encounter with others. His theories are premised on the understanding that fundamentally human beings require dialogue to truly perceive their reality (personal, social, political, economic etc.), and that conformity to one's culture is normative until dialogue (producing further critical dialogue) with an alternative reality is introduced. People need to be freed to become participants (subjects), capable of changing their life situations (1997:29, 38, 47). Any education praxis must involve critical reflection and action, but both presuppose dialogue, the content of which depends on the situation of the people and their perceptions of reality. Freire wants us to discover what he calls 'generative themes' (1997:78-88) which often rage silently beneath the surface leading to despair and apathy (themes such as witchcraft and charm-dependency in our context). These lead to feelings (emotion is key) of hopelessness and powerlessness. Educators must embark on a journey of discovery 'with' the people (co-intentional) in which the students also embrace a sense of responsible intentionality about uncovering their reality, critically analyzing it, and so becoming activating agents (re-creators) in their own futures (1997:60-65). In order to do this a problem posing methodology is suggested, one which encourages open dialogue, and through which teacher and students are jointly responsible for growth. Experts are not called on to simply pass on their great knowledge to students (banking). Instead, local participation is called

for and dialogue gleans the insights of all who are concerned to find solutions. And dialogue necessitates love for the other in order to listen to them, humility which demonstrates a genuine belief that you can learn from others, and faith in people's ability to discover solutions (1997:70-74). Therefore, the role of the teacher is to create a healthy environment for genuine dialogue, presenting the theme (or generative themes) to the learners, connecting with their experience and stimulating both the confidence that they have something to say on the theme, and the motivation/courage to do so. Problem posing materials are described by Freire as 'codes' which might include plays, photographs, stories etc. (1997:86, 95-98,102). The aim is for all to recognize the problem, so to link feelings to facts (related directly to their lives) and generate the energy in the group necessary for helpful dialogue. Questions may then be used to discuss the problem, creating the energy to act on it. Educators help the group to go to the root of the problem and voice potential solutions, encouraging them to search for the answers themselves and then to determine a plan of action. The author views a cycle of reflection and action (praxis) as indispensable to give groups the opportunity to take action, and then either celebrate their successes or critically analyze their failures. In this way they move forward towards transformation (1997:106-109 cf. Shaw 2014:182,220). During this stage inputs are encouraged- these may come from outside of the group and may include: lectures/teachings providing information that the group deems to be relevant (e.g. Bible passages which challenge towards a deeper response), and even guidelines for action planning. The latter are not seen as definitive but rather helpful starting points for further dialogue. Essentially, the strengths of the methodology lie in the fact that in principle, it encourages dialogue, creative thinking, critical analysis, freedom, action and responsibility on the part of the students.

Vella (1997; first edition 1994) has a somewhat similar philosophy of education but without the overtly political agenda. She makes it clear that a significant problem in adult education is the distance between teacher and student and suggests that this hinders honest dialogue (1997:3, 36, 190-191). In order to close the gap, we need to listen to hear what mature learners want and need to learn, create a 'safe', inviting learning environment in which learners feel able to express opinions, unjudged, growing in competence through appropriate sequencing, respected and affirmed (1997:4-9, 10-14). She posits twelve principles of adult learning drawn from a diversity of cultures and educational experiences. These principles take seriously the differences between people's cultural values and symbols and the need to appreciate and respect the power and potential of these in the teaching/ learning dynamic. She is particularly interested in the power of dialogue, in learning leading to action (praxis), the appropriate sequencing and re-enforcement of knowledge, skills and attitudes, holistic learning (learning with the mind, emotions and muscles- cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects), demonstrating the usefulness of the learning (immediacy), humility, teamwork, engagement of

all in the learning tasks, and in the importance of evaluation (through both immediate or short-term indicators as well as longer term indicators). Her underlying assumption is that all learners come with experience and valuable perceptions of the world and are thus to be respected (1997:3-22). Her 'seven steps of planning' (1997:23-38) prove invaluable as they relate to course design and teaching which begins by recognizing the learners as subjects of the learning process: **Who?**- who are the learners, what is their cultural perspective and what are their immediate needs? **Why?**- why is this learning or course needed? What is the problem that calls for it? **When?**- we need to find a time when the most people in any unique group can be present. We must consider just how much can be taught in the given time and set the content and achievement based objectives accordingly. **Where?**- involves many of the principles as we consider all the learners in terms of location, space, group-work potential etc., **What for?**- teachers and learners are mutually accountable to achieve the pre-set achievement based objectives which are sequential with room for reinforcement. Learners must do something to 'know that they know' (incorporates cognitive, affective and psychomotor). **What?**- here the adults' needs as discovered in the 'need assessment' (Who?) determine content- the skills, knowledge and attitudes required. And **How?**- refers to the action plan or program of sequenced learning tasks to be undertaken in groups, usually involving a case-study and associated leading questions, some decision making and a collaborative response. It is essentially 'problem-posing education' whereby the teacher facilitates by preparing the design of the course, answering questions on process or content, collating and organizing the various responses by providing commentary, linking points, showing differences, and sharing related experiences from the various groups. The key is designing a task/ tasks that pose an immediate problem and providing the groups with sufficient resources to resolve it. The learning takes place in the resolution. Finally, along with the learners, there is need to evaluate the immediate usefulness of a learning event, as well as look towards long range evaluation by designing appropriate questions relating to the originally set objectives, which are helpful in eliciting feedback.

Shaw (2014) is particularly helpful as he appears to draw together many of the principles found in the education philosophies of Freire and Vella, in his efforts to encourage greater integration and contextual significance in curricular design for theological education. In so doing, he offers theoretical foundations and practical principles which are applicable in teaching and learning anywhere but perhaps particularly on the mission field. He points out that: "Education is about learning- not teaching" (2014:129). As such it follows that the way people learn needs a significant amount of attention. Four concepts present as foundational for facilitating worldview change: 1. The significance of 'deep learning': He believes that an understanding of the nature of memory is the foundation for 'deep learning' which is learning that lasts and impacts life. The

latter only takes place when information is stored in one's long term memory (having passed through sensory memory and working memory), and is then available for retrieval by the working memory at any point, as continuous resources for life. He contends that what is especially required is the development of 'implicit' memory which "comprises habitual actions and attitudes, and includes such things as complex synthetic and evaluative thinking skills" (2014:135). In theological terms, if the theological memories are sound they help to shape people by forming habitual life decisions based on healthy reflective practice. Thus, decisions and actions are formed through retrieval of such memories. But how do we teach in such a way that the content forms implicit memories or even habitual practices? Here the author suggests that every learner asks two questions: Does this make sense? And, does this have meaning? He asserts that these questions are in fact "the keys to education that is not mere teaching but which promotes genuine life change" (2014:135). With regards to the former question, a person "is more likely to engage with new learning when it is presented either as an extension of or even an antithesis to previous learning" (2014:136). The second relates to whether or not a learner believes the material is relevant and significant for their lives. For this reason, deep learning is best promoted when educators ask "What are the major life concerns that our potential learners have?" (2014:137) And as a consequence, what life skills are needed? Then it is possible to move from what he calls 'context to text' by taking seriously the questions, needs and contexts of the learners and then developing courses that seek to answer them through texts, such as Scripture, history, theology etc.

2. Learning styles and cultural context: There are significant differences in the way that information is processed by people of different cultural backgrounds which impacts how people learn from culture to culture. Shaw writes that "the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the non-Western world tends towards holism and networked thinking, in contrast to the tight specificity so typical in Western academia" (2014:238). While in the West people are linear-analytical, theoretical and individualistic-competitive thinkers, in the East (and in Africa), people tend to think in circular, holistic, experiential and communal patterns.

3. Dialogue: The author states that "There are two keys to effective educational methodology- involvement and application" (2014:182). Learners must come to engage with material in such a way as to 'own it' for themselves and they must then be helped to apply it in specific, tangible ways. Both can be encouraged through dialogue in the learning environment. Shaw highlights a variety of methods which make the learning experience truly dialogical, including: small-group discussion, brainstorming, debate, forum or panel discussion, and interviews. He also recommends the use of images to connect the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning.

4. Case-studies: The author explains that teaching that simulates reality is participatory (involvement) and encourages the application of knowledge to practical situations, thus covering the two keys to effective methodology. Case-studies fit perfectly as human experience is narrative or story-like.

People love stories and in oral societies they are already recognized as cultural means of communicating truth. Since case studies are essentially stories related to life (sometimes actual cases) they enable us to use cultural realities as 'cultural texts' brought into dialogue with traditional texts (e.g. Scripture). They encourage reflection by comparison, challenging "students to think about contextual issues through the lenses of principles that are found in texts" (Shaw 2014:220). They are helpful points of connection enabling movement from the known to the unknown, introducing new concepts from the point of prior experience but allowing the evaluation of self and culture from a safe distance.

However, traditionally, the missiological approach to educating has been in a Western, linear and propositional form, aimed at field-independent learners (Wendland 2007:17-21). This is often in contrast to the receptor cultures more holistic and networked type of thinking (Shaw 2014:237-238), making learning, understanding and transformation very difficult (Weaver 2015:220-224). For example, Koehler (2007:56-57) refers to the difficulty experienced by those who are schooled in seminaries when attempting to communicate the message of God in rural areas. He highlights as binary opposites of the 'village' context and the 'school' context. He describes the village as "oral, participatory, relational, dialogue, concrete, holistic, random, status by age and ability to maintain old ways." The school is "print, linear, monologue, abstract, propositional, unidirectional, systematic, status by ability to learn new ways." Therefore, truth must be conveyed in accessible forms which consider the traits and learning preferences unique to the receptor culture. Most people in ZEC churches, including many church pastors/leaders, are field-dependent (Witkins et al 1977:1-64) and oral learners (Chifungu 2013:16-17; Mijoga 2000:174-185), a number, particularly in the urban areas, are even non-literate. Groves (2015:2) rightly noted that untrained pastors may not know how to use the Bible effectively for discipleship. Indeed, the majority in ZEC churches (including the urban centers) belong to the orality culture. Weaver (2015:220) explains that orality is "a term used as shorthand to describe one's way of acquiring, processing and conveying information". This has nothing to do with intelligence but speaks of a different way of thinking and learning often born in a more communal, relational and oral context. Even many who can and do read and write operate with an orality mindset (Chifungu 2013:17; Weaver 2015: 220-224). Thornton (2015:344) rightly describes oral learners as "people who either cannot read, do not understand what they read, or simply prefer to translate information orally rather than in writing." Their logic does not necessarily follow a Western linear methodology. Malawians are a case in point, most thinking in circular, interconnected, holistic, experiential and communal patterns rather than in linear, specific, analytical, theoretical and individualistic-competitive ways (Shaw 2014:237). Thornton (2015:345-348) argues that oral learners need the message both delivered and packaged (structured) in different ways such as through drama, song, the telling of stories or

attaching the message to a given proverb or folk-tale. He points to Jesus' teaching as an example of 'contextual teaching' in that Jesus used His daily encounters with people and their everyday life circumstances, knowledge and problems as subject matter (springboard) and building blocks (cf. Jn 2:11; Jn 3:5; Jn 4:14, 24; Jn 6:20) to communicate truth about Himself, life and the Kingdom. Thus 'contextual teaching' starts with the known (the experiences and challenges of life as they know it) and moves to the unknown (the principles), making it always relevant. This is a reversal of the normal Western approach whereby the starting point is usually with principles and then the elaboration on or illustration of those principles by using real life examples. The key lies in the fact that real life issues take center stage with the teaching itself always being highly interactive. Therefore, the focus is on the hearer and his or her context, teaching themes arising from real life issues and experiences. For example, in the ZEC churches, real life stories of charm-usage read and discussed, could highlight important themes underpinning the practice, paving the way for discussion of related Biblical texts which inform about the nature and character of God, and how the latter might impact traditional practice, thus stimulating thought and discussion towards transformation.

Clearly, understanding orality, and orality methods of communicating truth, is very important in our context in Malawi. Thus, in the following section we review books and journal articles discussing orality, and particularly the use of story-telling methodologies for the communication of Biblical truth.

2.4.2 Orality, Story-telling and the Communication of Biblical Truth

Ong (2012:31) speaks of "primary oral culture" by which he means "oral cultures untouched by writing" (2012:31). He distinguishes between 'primary oral cultures', 'cultures in transition' and, 'secondary orality' which is built on literary-based forms of thinking but promoted through modern communication forms (e.g. radio and TV). His main thesis that writing has changed consciousness and the way humans think is highly debatable: "without writing the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (2012:77 cf. Hartley 2012:216-218). For him, without literacy there is no logic, but many anthropological studies show that logic is common in oral societies (cf. Finnegan 2007; Street 2013:157). However, he does usefully highlight the fact that there are big differences between literate and oral societies when it comes to communication, even if his binary categories are rather extreme.⁴³

⁴³ His work promoted a clear binary divide between societies on the following levels: primitive vs civilized, simple vs advanced, pre-logical vs logical, pre-rational vs rational, pre-analytic vs analytic, mythopoeic vs logico-empirical, traditional vs modern, concrete vs scientific, oral vs visual, or pre-literate vs literate.

Weaver (2015:220-224) points out that of the seven thousand extant languages worldwide less than one percent of them have a well-developed written tradition. The vast majority rely on spoken (oral) methods of communication for the sharing of information (e.g. stories, songs, poetry and proverbs). He perspicuously asks whether today, with all the resources mobilized towards disciplining literate cultures, we are adequately equipped to to teach oral learners Biblical truths and train them to disciple others? He correctly explains that knowing the receptor culture (if oral) will reveal that literate methods will not touch their hearts but that for the message to be truly heard and understood, leading to transformation, it must be conveyed in accessible forms. Thus, effective communication must embody the traits and learning preferences unique to the people's in any given context. He suggests a number of salient missiological distinctives for reaching out to oral cultures four of which are key for our purposes: 1. Orality vs. audio- there is a difference, for example: an audio book remains a literary work whereas oral communicators need to construct the content in the learning style of the receptor culture (e.g. stories, songs, proverbs etc.). 2. Biblically faithful content that is indigenous- God's truth needs to be presented in ways that are worldview specific. Therefore, the content is produced locally and relies heavily on dialogue with the receptor culture in order to uncover foundational presuppositions in the local worldview and so to create biblically faithful content that is context specific. 3. Letting the Bible define the narrative- fidelity to the Scriptures is crucial and the integrity of the narrative of God's redemptive plan must be maintained. However, any biblical-theological content must be worldview specific, tailored to the context by means of identifying 'bridges and barriers' unique to a particular culture. 4. Promoting informed discussions among listeners- information is shared and discussed collectively with opportunity for groups to ask and answer their own questions, in the context of a guided dialogue (a trained facilitator will direct and ask basic pointed questions), in order to promote real learning and transformation.

Wiles (2015:332-336) rightly contends that orality is a significant breakthrough in the global mission movement. He points out that the fact that approximately 70% of the world could be functionally illiterate (many by preference) 'oral learners' is sobering. This has nothing to do with intelligence but speaks of a different way of learning often born in a more communal, relational and oral context. He also explains that there are startling similarities in these oral cultures to those who lived in the time of Jesus and that the way Jesus communicated truth was with simplicity, and it was reproducible in that others could repeat the stories he told. He asserts that the Gospel message was originally spread primarily through orality based methods and in order for it to be understood, reproduced and transferred to any place and any people group there is a need to 'peel back' some of the layers of non-essentials that we have added.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ He also advocates other facets of oral arts such as chants, drama, songs, dance, parables, proverbs and poetry as useful pedagogic tools, as well as the visual arts such as icons.

Moreover, he too, emphasizes the need to have a sound understanding of receptor culture and worldview. Interestingly, he advocates Contextual Bible storytelling because of its focus on a little learning, plenty of practice, immediate implementation, and the telling of the stories often. Again, for Wiles dialogue is viewed as essential, with background context to stories being shared, followed by discussion by the group of hearers relating to what they see as the main message, the lessons therein, and potential applications to life. For him, any oral group can be given a systematic narrative theology of all they need to know about how to have a relationship with Jesus, and become reproducing followers of Christ, by means of hearing and discussing as few as five stories from the Gospels. The researcher agrees with him that selection of what people need to know is crucial and the life, teaching and Spirit of Jesus, as found in Scripture, serves as a guide in this regard. Depending on the context, these stories may facilitate deeper discussions on discipleship. He is surely right that any fears of losing the accuracy of the message through orality are overcome through repetition and learning in community (collective memory) and a retrospective view on how the Bible was accurately preserved and maintained for so long in oral form.

Ononga (2014:204-210) helpfully contends that literature on how to address animism has largely focused on power encounter but insufficient attention has been given to adequate presentations of biblical truth which answer extant questions. Animistic beliefs are taught from birth by means of stories related to the unseen world and the power and activities of various spiritual forces. He suggests that to counter these beliefs and move toward transformation 'new' narratives addressing the prominent themes, needs and fears in animistic theology (such as God's power over evil, His presence and nearness in human affairs and His ability to protect His own) need to be told and taught. He suggests that employing selected biblical stories as heuristic tools might increase faith and change perceptions of reality. He then provides three examples of passages used in this way: Job 1-2; Col 2:1-3; Mt 17:24-27. It is interesting to note the use of the Colossians passage which is didactic rather than narrative but used allegorically to illustrate God's protective power. The author contends that when people begin to discover the truths in such stories, they see God's ability to meet all their needs, and His personal involvement and presence in their lives. Only then does their worldview become more biblical. He is surely correct, however, it is salutary to maintain a focus on the character of God in our selection of Biblical stories and passages, lest an anthropocentric (and traditional) idea of salvation is promoted. Reflection on what God does for us naturally arises from who He is.

Armstrong (2013:322-328) explains that because many indigenous groups have difficulty defining objects, concepts and events, and answer questions by telling stories into which are embedded their answers, we have a responsibility to proclaim the Christian message in ways which they might grasp (e.g. dramatically and picturesquely) and not merely in intellectual

ways. He champions CBS (Chronological Story Telling) as an appropriate methodology for contextualizing the Gospel message in ways both true to Scripture and sensitive to culture. As such the message is relayed to oral peoples in a culturally appropriate narrative form.

However, Malone's (2014:314-320) denunciation of chronological storying as the only helpful tool in the storyteller's toolbox is salutary. He recommends the latter as one of four kinds of storytelling for evangelism and discipleship but highly values the approach believing that it helps the listener to understand how the Bible fits together, and to see the relationships between important doctrines, especially poignant when showing how the Christ event is the fulfilment of the biblical narrative such that issues of the Old Testament find their fulfilment in Christ. However, three other types of storytelling are also recommended: Firstly, Dialogical Bible storytelling is a conversational approach in which through the verbal exchanges of everyday conversation short stories with simple plots can help people to learn in 'bits and pieces'. This means using opportunities as God gives them to be His instruments for conveying spiritual truth which fits the individual circumstances of those with whom we come into contact. This approach is clearly going to encourage more of a systematic theological development but it is certainly a legitimate pedagogic methodology. The narrative may be followed by a discussion of its possible applications to the given situation or crisis. Secondly, the Contemporary parable which follows Jesus' own teaching model. Here the author suggests resetting the biblical parables for one's target audience. By this he means starting with the careful study of the biblical parables in their original context in order to understand the essential details which cannot be lost without losing the meaning and theological significance of the parable (i.e. there are essential details which cannot be changed). Moreover, the central theological truth needs to be discovered. Then any parable might be re-caste in a contemporary setting in a way that is true to the original meaning. He also advocates the development of contemporary parables by means of using common objects and scenarios from everyday life and using them to explain biblical truth. Such stories must always call forth a response from the hearer calling them to a change of heart or action towards growth as a Christ-follower. In principle, the researcher is not against the practice of re-casting parables or even developing new ones in any contemporary setting (Malone 2014:319-320) if the integrity of the meaning and theological significance of the text are maintained. However, there seems to be little reason to do that in the Malawian context which is so similar to the Biblical setting. Finally, he recommends personal testimonies, pointing out that such stories provide powerful evidence of the work of God (His love and power) to change lives. These 'stories' will not only tell of how we became followers of Jesus but also about His work in our lives here and now. Testimonies of God's protection and provision definitely have a place in encouraging change in Malawi, and specifically in the area of breaking charm-dependency.

Wu (2015:304-309) is interested in crafting appropriate short stories in general which might challenge ethical norms and common preconceptions of the world for different cultural contexts. For him, the goal must be to evoke emotional and intellectual responses consistent with stories and situations common to the local culture. He is correct that stories will challenge and subvert prevailing local cultural worldview only if and when the listeners are not transported into a 'foreign' world through the story. Thus, of utmost importance to the shaping of stories is paying particular attention to the local worldview which shapes a people's religious thinking. Local stories must also be carefully considered in terms of what stories are commonly told and how different stories are told. Noting the use of language and the emergence of key words and concepts can help to engage values and assumptions peculiar to a given worldview, and so encourage appropriate responses such as questions, emotions and actions. The aim is to subvert the local stories in order to redeem or re-orientate people's view of the world by challenging the questionable values and priorities of the given culture. Finally, he suggests that storytellers must be conscious of the way their own cultural worldview shapes the stories they hear and tell lest the stories told (containing biblical truth) lack any meaning to the receptor culture. This approach is commendable and could prove invaluable when using didactic Biblical passages heuristically. But the use of a Biblical story, if there is one to serve the purpose, would be preferable.

Koehler (2010) engages with the wider method of biblical storytelling. He highlights the missiological origin of the current method of biblical storytelling and notes the key distinctives as: the 'chronological approach, the telling of intact biblical stories (as contrasted to exposition), and the use of worldview studies for selecting appropriate stories to interface with particular cultural and religious issues in a given people group' (2010:40). The latter represents my intended approach. He also advocates 'cooperative learning groups' as he views dialogue is essential for group learning (Koehler 2010:56-57).

Terry (2008) defines Bible Storying as 'the intentional and uninterrupted sharing of God's Word primarily as stories. These stories are usually supplemented with culturally appropriate learning exercises that are 'listener sensitive' (2008:2). 'Uninterrupted' means not stopping the story before its conclusion to comment on a point of interest. While this approach is based on Ong's binary categories of oral learners and literate learners, Terry suggests that Ong's distinctions are "general observations and should not be taken as absolute characteristics" (2008:17). He advocates that the Bible Story or a chain of Bible stories are 'ideally' used as part of a 'Bible Storying Session' which has three elements (1) a pre-story dialog (review and questions of previous stories, exploratory questions leading to the topic of the new story, link between previous stories and the new story), (2) the Bible Story/Stories, (3) post-story dialog (retelling of the story by the listeners, simple questions about the facts of the story, probing questions about

comprehension and the implications of the story, dialogue about what the listeners should think, believe or do now that they have heard the story). The latter is second in importance to the actual Bible story (Terry 2008:99). These three elements are very helpful with the emphasis on dialogue promoting listeners participation and supporting self-discovery. He offers alternative learning activities in the Post-Story Dialog, including: a variety of Open or Free Discussion, Guided Discussion and/or Question and Answer time. Dialog or discussion is understood to be a group conversation about the stories told/heard (Terry 2008:83-84). Terry believes that 'best results' are achieved with oral learners through discussion but the question is: which approach to facilitating the discussion is going to be most effective? How much does Open or Free discussion lead to indigenous interpretations and is this helpful to learning? How much guidance is required? (2008:83). The point is, there needs to be some guidance or control towards a correct interpretation. In selecting passages with a didactic intention, be that narrative or otherwise, there must be specific content with a distinct meaning to communicate. If not, we cannot specify what we want to teach (learn) to meet specific developmental or transformational needs.

In summary, while some argue that worldview transformation is best facilitated in missions through chronological story telling (Armstrong 2013:322-328; Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:214-215), the present writer agrees with Ononga (2014:204-210 cf. Malone 2014:314-320) that a systematic approach, whereby selected biblical passages are used as heuristic tools is justifiable. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:214) point out that "To attempt to supplant a worldview by removing pieces of the false stories and replacing them with pieces from the true story is to err." Thus they argue that it is difficult for hearers to piece together the parts of the Biblical meta-narrative in a logically and chronologically sensible fashion and that a chronological approach is, therefore, the ideal. This approach is fundamentally a reaction (corrective) to the compartmentalization of theology (Jagerson 2014:259-275). However, as Glissman (2016:18) points out, "It seems that Bible storying works well when the aim is an increase in Bible knowledge but it is less clear how Bible storying can be used in circumstances that are not explicitly addressed in Bible stories". Moreover, church-goers in Malawi already have some understanding of the wider Biblical meta-narrative. However, their perception of God is often flawed despite a good knowledge of the Biblical stories. Therefore, of utmost significance, is the need to teach with specific focus, arising from a careful study of the beliefs and practices of the receptor culture (Thornton 2013:342-348; Kraft 1999:384-389; Koehler 2010:40). This means it is of vital importance to focus on challenging, subverting and replacing spurious ideas of God in the local culture (Malone 2014:316; Wu 2015:304-309), with a more accurate picture of who God is and how He relates to His people, from an informed position. Biblical themes and passages should be carefully chosen and deliberately and systematically

used to teach truth relevant and significant to every-day life and so potentially subvert and renew spurious thinking. When local worldview and Biblical truth are carefully considered as indispensable foundations for a missiological approach, then genuine ongoing transformation or continuous conversion towards increasing Christlikeness in thought and action, is possible (Mateyu 2012:37; Carrasco 2007:393-394; McKnight 2007:71-73)) (Eph 3:22-24 cf. Rom 12:1ff). Any change at the level of worldview will manifest in changes in belief and behavior. In this case the rejection of traditional religious charms would be evidence of deep-level worldview change.

2.4.3 Section Summary

Recently many missiologists have championed the merits of story-telling as a useful model for communicating truths about God in oral cultures (Armstrong 2013:326; Jagerson 2014:259-275; Wiles 2015:332-336). This approach is certainly preferable to beginning with the ‘teaching’ of linear, propositional points (Thornton 2013:342-348) in a primarily orality based culture. Wiles (2015:332-336) articulates a variety of streams (methods) within the Bible storying approach, including: Chronological Bible Storying, Thematic, Topical, Relational, Panoramic, and Contextual Bible storying. Indeed, stories are particularly effective in communicating truth and invaluable tools in working towards moving people along the epistemological spiral towards changed thinking and therefore praxis (Wright 2004: 38-46; Malone 2014:316). Malone (2014:316) explains that “People love to hear stories. And biblical stories have the power to produce spiritual change in the lives of those who are ready to receive their teaching.” Thus, various new ‘stories’ about the world in general or bits of it in particular become hypotheses tested by their relationship to the stories already in place. The spiral of knowledge takes its course as ‘new’ stories introduced might subtly or otherwise bring about revision of certain presuppositions, as any story, or at least elements thereof, may actually help to answer more questions pertaining to the world inhabited by the hearer and therefore, make better sense of the world.

Therefore, new stories challenge and modify existing ones, creating a spiral as each new insight is contemplated, filtered and assimilated or rejected. Within this epistemological dynamic a shift in worldview (genuine transformation) is possible. Or as Armstrong (2015:326) puts it: “At the heart of everyone’s worldview is a story they tell about why the world works the way it does. When that story becomes the biblical story, there has been a sincere worldview shift”. Rasmussen (2009:329-335) is right to point out that missionaries (and researchers) need to listen better (cf. Vella 1997:4-6), that is to the stories the people tell and to the Biblical stories. Then it is possible to begin with local stories and build bridges to biblical stories (or passages) which are immediately pertinent and thought provoking. Stories will challenge and

subvert prevailing local cultural worldview only if and when the listeners are not transported into a 'foreign' world through the story. Thus, of utmost importance to the shaping (or selection) of stories is paying particular attention to the local worldview which shapes a people's religious thinking (Wiles 2015:332-336; Wu 2015:304-309). Passages which are didactic in nature may be used allegorically (Ononga 2014:208), or context specific stories illustrating the truths contained could be crafted (Wu 2015:304-309), when communicated/taught to groups with little or no experience of the linear/literacy paradigm, more in line with the orality paradigm. When dealing with groups of people who are more accustomed to a linear method of learning there is no reason that a more literacy based linear approach should not be employed (cf. Seng 2016:160-165) if that would aid learning and transformation. This would certainly apply to some extent to the training of pastors as facilitators.⁴⁵ Here both communication/learning paradigms could be helpfully employed as we ask what each method has to offer (Coppedge 2016:170).

However, in envisaging the planning of course lessons/modules for the ZEC churches, the basic presupposition will be that orality is the key communication/learning paradigm, and within this paradigm stories are the keys to catalyzing transformation. It is envisaged that as the stories of charm-usage and dependency emerge, the underlying motives which animate the actual practices (rooted in the stories told and in people's own life experience) will be usefully analyzed (critically) by people in the light of the 'story' of God's Word and selected 'narratives' therein (i.e. against the backdrop of the transformative redemptive story and some of its component stories). In turn, that should raise important questions and stimulate helpful discussion on issues related to foundational stories in the local people's worldview, stimulating deeper reflection and hopefully subversion and modification where necessary. Issues such as causation (especially relating to sickness, death and misfortune) (Hiebert 1999:371-372, 377)⁴⁶, the power hierarchy in the spirit world, the transcendence/immanence of God, the role of ancestors, and the putative merits of various witchcraft practices (including charm-usage) should emerge as topics for reflection and discussion.

Therefore, we might build effectively on the understanding of the 'worldview' motifs within the local South-Central Malawian traditional religious framework by developing a case-study and dialogical didactic approach dependent on biblical texts married (both narrative and didactic, the latter used heuristically) to real life stories of charm-usage, to re-envision towards a more Biblical worldview. This takes into account the Word, the receptor culture worldview, and appropriate modes of learning in context. If we move from context to text in this way, the

⁴⁵ However, it should be noted that not all ZEC pastors, even those in leadership positions within the denomination, would be Bible school trained, linear thinkers.

⁴⁶ Hiebert is correct to point out the importance of a Biblical perspective on well-being and misfortune and the value of a Biblically developed theology of suffering.

wonderful possibility presents itself, “that we devise forms of communication that receptors will intuitively grasp at the deepest level” (Moreau 2012:146; Shaw 2015:137). But there are dangers: just as a Christian Biblical/theological foundation cannot simply be laid on top of an existing worldview, neither can people simply be left to find their own way. Helping people to discover the truth and develop local forms and expressions of faith by appropriately guiding and aiding/encouraging them is surely a better approach. We want to plant the seeds of the Word of God deep into the hearts of people in ways they might identify with and through which they might be encouraged to wrestle with, and dialogue through, how the Word relates to their real-life situations, so to discern appropriate faith responses in context. People can be helped to discover and do by gently moving from the known; that is all that is familiar to the culture; like stories, challenges and problems; to the unknown, which is biblical truth. This is, of course, a type of critical contextualization in action (Hiebert 1997:85 cf. Shaw 2014:220).

Shaw (2014:182) notes that “There are two keys to effective educational methodology-involvement and application...” whereby ... the learner is drawn into and engages with the material in such a way that he or she comes to ‘own’ it for him- or herself...” and “he or she is helped to apply the content in specific, tangible ways” (cf. Freire 1997:14-16 and Vella 1994:97-113). This can be done with the help of starting with case-studies of charm-usage at the grass-roots level. The case-study approach simulates reality because human nature is essentially narrative or story-like. Students are drawn to participate through identification with the story (case) and participate by means of considering what they would think and do if confronted by the same situation (i.e. how they might apply any new-found knowledge practically). This is reflective practice. Shaw (2014:218) writes that “it is imperative that we embrace contextual realities as cultural ‘texts’ in dialogue with traditional texts. Thus, it is well worth exploring a method involving juxtaposing real-life situations (stories) with Biblical passages (stories). Regarding the latter, we must also paint a Biblical picture using paints, colors, images and styles common to our context. That is to say, the picture should adequately portray who God is, and the wonderful standing of the believer ‘in Christ’, in ways accessible to the receptor culture. Learners can be encouraged to analyze, synthesize and evaluate contextual issues through the lenses of principles found in the Biblical texts (Shaw 2014:220).

All of this may be referred to as a contextualization process if we accept Abraham’s (2014:326) definition of the contextualization of theology: “the attempt to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context.” As Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:171) explain: “Any attempt to communicate biblical content cross-culturally will involve us in an initial stage of contextualization, the process of minimizing intercultural meaning discrepancy as well as the interference occasioned by our own search for transcultural understanding.” Naturally, questions arise as to how far we should go in our attempts to be ‘contextual’ in teaching. What

is the best approach to contextualization? Key elements for reflection when it comes to communicating (teaching/learning) Biblical truth in different contexts include: the importance of fidelity to Scripture, an awareness of potential missionary bias (cultural, doctrinal and form expressive) and the danger of syncretism. An overly accommodating 'contextual' approach to the communication of truth may also prohibit, confuse, or at least obfuscate the formulation of clear objectives and measurable outcomes directly linked to subverting and renewing particular beliefs and practices within the culture. The Bible cannot be under-emphasized at the expense of culture. Terry rightly observes that "simply telling a Bible story left the interpretation of the story fairly open to the listeners", which is not the aim of a teaching event (2008:83). In other words, in any contextualization approach it is necessary to have both clear biblical content to communicate and specific outcomes to aim for. We cannot allow unbiblical or non-Christian elements to replace or dilute the essential gospel truths (Moreau quoted by Ott and Strauss 2010:275). Hardy explains that "Learning involves removing bad thinking and wrong doctrine (correction) as well as understanding what is right (teaching)" (2006:156-157). The Spirit is able to guide in the selection and formation of our content and goals (aims and objectives) as well as in the hearts of those receiving and appropriating. Having clear aims and objectives is also necessary if we are to create helpful evaluative questions and tools. How do we know when something has been learned? How do we know when genuine change has taken place? (Vella 1997:145-148; Shaw 2014:51-61). All 'Intended Learning Outcomes' should be closely aligned to what the 'learners' need to know, need to know how to do and need to be (Hardy 2006: 176). Success is measured by how well the message is received rather than how it was delivered or by how much material we have covered (Thornton 2015:347-348).

2.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, any biblical-theological content fit to serve as foundational for an effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency, and related traditional religious challenges, must be faithful to Scripture and tradition, worldview specific, and carefully tailored to the context, by means of identifying 'bridges and barriers' unique to the particular culture (Weaver 2015:220-224, Wu 2015:304-309). Moreover, the pedagogic (teaching/learning) approach should also be context specific and employ a variety of contextually appropriate methodologies, such as: a combination of storytelling (including case-study), case-study and dialogue (Koehler 2010:56-57; Terry 2008:99, Vella 1994:14-148; Shaw 2014:186-196,217-229). Based on these foundations it might be possible to create a curriculum to subvert unhelpful local worldview motifs by encouraging critical appraisal of the former in the light of theologically significant and practically applicable Biblical truth. By the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit

people will be moved along the epistemological spiral, embracing more of Christ and His truth as presented in the Scriptures as 'normative', enabling the bigger redemptive picture (story) to emerge, making better sense of reality as they experience it. The latter leading to a paradigm shift at the deepest level of worldview and catalyzing a spiritual re-formation which brings about changes in beliefs that manifest in changes in behavior (Ballard and Pritchard 1996:167), namely the practical eschewing of traditional religious charms.

Having reviewed the literature it is clear that there is no extant literature focused specifically on how to address the problem of charm-dependency in the ecclesiological context in Malawi from a missiological perspective. There is a need to provide theoretical and practical foundations in the three key areas articulated in this chapter, namely: contextual, Biblical and pedagogic, for the development of such an approach. Firstly, in terms of the contextual foundations, the extant research does highlight the main tenets of a South Central Malawian worldview to some extent. However, a better synthesis, including the historical roots of the worldview, contemporary manifestations in context (the latter including a number of 'local' examples of the worldview motifs in action), and challenges towards modification, is required. There is very little on charms and their use in the ecclesiological context in Malawi. Only Beaton's dissertation (2015) discusses charm-usage in any detail, in ZEC churches. The intimate relationship between charm-usage and traditional worldview in the ecclesiological setting should be further explored and highlighted. Moreover, the stories of charm-usage from the grassroots in ZEC churches collected in this research, as told by ZEC pastors in the Interviews, will serve as a unique contribution to the subject and will stand as invaluable pedagogic tools for the stimulation of dialogue on the subject, and related traditional practices. Secondly, there is a clear need for the selection of specific Biblical passages which might begin to encourage deeper reflection on the practice of charm-dependency, in the light of Biblical truths about God, and the standing of believers 'in Christ'. If particular stories of charm-usage can be used as case-studies, married to specifically chosen biblical passages, then potentially transformative dialogue will be stimulated. The insights gleaned from ZEC pastors and students in the Focus Groups, will provide unique contextual material (input including explanations, illustrations and analogies) for helping church members to understand the texts and develop more holistic biblical theologies, as well as for the formulation of appropriate applications in context. Finally, there is a need to draw together helpful pedagogic methodologies for the context, from both a theoretical and practical, experiential background (tried and tested).

In the next chapter the author further develops the first and third foundations for an effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency and related traditional practices - contextual and pedagogic - by analyzing the field interviews relating to charm-dependent activities in the ZEC churches and creating an anthology of stories related to charm-dependency. The analysis

makes clear which charms are being used and for what purposes, also revealing underlying motives.

CHAPTER THREE

The Use of Traditional Religious Charms in Zambezi Evangelical Churches: An Overview and an Anthology of Stories

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the author will discuss the nature and frequency of charm-usage in ZEC churches in South-Central Malawi, the purposes for which charms are being used, and related witchcraft beliefs and traditional practices. The aim is to identify and highlight common charm-dependency practices and reveal the underlying motives. In the first section, evidence is presented in the form of tables, diagrams, quotes and anecdotes which serve to highlight important themes and sub-themes arising from the qualitative research conducted by means of field interviews. The second section comprises a thematic anthology of stories of charm-usage from the grass-roots in ZEC churches, as gleaned from the interviews. This field research reveals both common practices and common purposes (motives), enabling the identification of underlying worldview motifs. The anthology is intended to be used as a heuristic tool, created to function as a thematic resource to promote and stimulate transformative dialogue amongst church members on the subject of charm-dependency, and related traditional practices. As such, appropriate contextual and pedagogic foundations begin to emerge for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency and related traditional religious practices.

3.2 Introduction to the Field of Analysis

The Zambesi Evangelical Church denomination has churches spread throughout Malawi's three regions (Northern, Central and Southern), in Northern Mocambique, Zimbabwe and in South Africa (a few congregations). However, the elect demographic for this study is delimited to South-Central Malawi. In 2018, for the purposes of improved oversight and administration, ZEC was divided into five Joint 'Kotales' (Quartarlies) spread across the three regions of Malawi, namely: Upper and Lower Shire Joint Kotale, Eastern Malawi Joint Kotale, Southern Lake Malawi Joint Kotale, Central Malawi Joint Kotale and Northern Malawi Joint Kotale (Interview B1: January 2019) (hereafter I B1 etc.). Each Joint Kotale is comprised of a number of district Kotales which also meet separately at different times. The first two Joint Kotales are in the Southern region. The Southern Lake Malawi Joint Kotale has churches in both the Southern region and the Central region. All the churches in the Central Malawi Joint Kotale fall

into Malawi's Central region, and all of those in the Northern Malawi Joint Kotale, may be categorized as Northern region churches. The number of 'listed' churches across the three regions comprising the five Joint Kotalas is 173 but there are also quite a few 'unlisted' churches. Most officially listed churches also have a number of associated 'prayer houses' which are dependent 'satellite' congregations varying in size. Generally, these depend on the shepherding authority of the lead pastor at the central station, who is expected to visit regularly, but each has their own elected leadership, in the form of a group of elders. Practically, this means that the number of churches is far greater than that which is listed and that most of the pastors are responsible for a number of congregations, not just the one at their main church station.

The elect demographic for this study covers three of the Joint Kotale's, and a small section of a fourth, namely: the Upper and Lower Shire Joint Kotale, the Eastern Malawi Joint Kotale (both of which are in the Southern region of Malawi) and the Central Malawi Joint Kotale, and also the most central belt of the Southern Lake Malawi Joint Kotale. The rationale for omitting the Northern Kotale and most of the Southern Lake Malawi Kotale is that there are relatively few Chewa people in the churches in these areas, except for Ntcheu and Balaka, which are more central (although Balaka is technically in the Southern region of Malawi) and are thus included.⁴⁷ Therefore, in terms of the division of churches in the elect demographic, and focusing on main stations only, there are 91 spread across the two Joint Kotalas in the Southern region, 39 in the Southern Lake Malawi Kotale (although fewer than half of those fall within the elect demographic), 30 represented in the Central region, and 13 in the Northern region (although the latter are not included in the elect demographic). According to the incumbent General Secretary the total number of members is estimated to be around the 600 000 mark. The majority of members are women with youth and children also bolstering the numbers significantly (I B1). There are over two hundred trained pastors who are actively ministering in local churches, others serving in Christian organizations, and approximately fifteen waiting to be posted to a church by the Synod leadership. Despite the fact that there are only 173 registered churches, there are, according to the incumbent General Secretary, 186 pastors ministering in local churches in the five ZEC Joint Kotalas across the three regions of Malawi. The breakdown is as follows: 79 in the Upper and Lower Shire Joint Kotale, 37 in the Southern Lake Malawi Joint Kotale, 30 in the Central region Joint Kotale, 28 in the Eastern Malawi Joint Kotale, and 12 in the Northern Malawi Joint Kotale (I D10).

⁴⁷ Originally, at the outset of the research, there were only three Joint Kotalas which comprised the ZEC denomination and these corresponded directly with Malawi's three official regions (North, Central and South).

The map of Malawi below (**Figure 1**) (Wikimedia Commons: online, 21 July 2018) provides a clear picture of Malawi's three distinct regions and allows the reader to envisage the elect demographic for the research:



3.3 Instruments, Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

3.3.1 Development of Instrument

In order to provide an overview of the state of charm-dependency in the ZEC churches in the elect demographic, identify motifs in a South-Central Malawian worldview (receptor culture)

which animate the use of traditional religious charms, and substantiate the theory, as well as compile a thematic anthology of stories, empirical and descriptive ethnographic research of a qualitative nature was undertaken. This 'field research' was done with permission from the 'Research Ethics Regulatory Committee' of North West University (NWU-RERC) (Annexure A1). This took the form of semi-structured interviews, including a simple interview schedule with guiding open-ended questions, intended to stimulate open sharing on issues related to charm-usage (Annexure A2) (Thomas 2013:198, 207-209; Robson 2002: 270,278). The latter took into account the interviewers inter-personal style, and the question design, so as to minimize the perception of coercion, 'prestige bias' and/or 'experimenter expectation' (Thomas 2013:208; Robson 2002:112). No pilot interviews were done as the researcher had previously (2014) interviewed eleven pastors on similar subject matter and had learned from that experience. The interviews were undertaken with a representative or 'probability' sample based on 'proportionate sampling' within a stratified random sampling model of ZEC pastors (Robson 2002:161-162, 260-263; Thomas 2013:135-137). This was reckoned to be achieved by means of firstly noting the number of churches and pastors in each region within the elect demographic, the particular demographic location of the churches (e.g. urban, semi-urban, rural), and the size of the congregations, and then identifying suitable forums in which to interview a representative sample of pastors. Three potential forums were identified. Firstly, the Joint Kotale meetings, to which all pastors from a particular regional Kotale are invited. The challenge was the dates for the meetings and the full meeting agendas which potentially limited time for interviews. Secondly, the local district Kotalas also presented as appropriate forums, as participants generally represent a wide cross section of churches, including different settings (rural/semi-urban/urban), as well as differing sizes of congregation and average educational standards. However, the same challenges applied as above. The third forum identified was the local pastor's fraternals, where pastors gather regularly in small organized groups for fellowship and mutual encouragement. The objective of such a random sampling of churches and pastors across the two regions was to provide an adequate and informative representation (cluster) of what is happening in the churches with regards to charm-usage. Informative interview consent forms were prepared in English and translated into Chichewa and respondents were given a choice between the two (Annexures A3/A4). The latter were submitted to scrutiny by the research assistants and necessary changes were made to the document by the researcher to ensure that the purposes and criterion were well understood by potential interviewees. The consent forms were distributed by the research assistants one month in advance of the first interviews. The research assistants explained the contents of the consent and information forms to each potential interviewee and gave them an opportunity to ask questions. Research assistants then acted as those obtaining consent on behalf of the

researcher. All of this was done with the goodwill permission of the General Secretary of the ZEC denomination (Annexure A5).

3.3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected by means of the author travelling to two Joint Kotale meetings, two district Kotale meetings, and two fraternal group meetings. This entailed close to 3000km of driving across two regions and covering four ZEC Joint Kotalas. Interviews were conducted with pastors during the course of the meetings. The fraternal groups were included in the protocol when it became apparent that there were conflicting dates for visiting more Kotale meetings, as well as insufficient time during the meetings to allow the researcher to interview an appropriate number of pastors to constitute an adequate 'proportionate' or representative sample. However, some of the pastors who were not interviewed at their respective Kotalas had a strong desire to be included, so the researcher returned to two Kotale meeting locations (one Joint and one district Kotale), on three different dates, to complete these interviews. Only ordained Zambezi Evangelical Church Pastors serving in local Zambezi Evangelical Churches within the Central and Southern regions of Malawi were eligible. Therefore, participation depended on the attendance of the pastors at the respective Kotale meetings and the additional fraternal meetings, or their desire/willingness to be interviewed subsequently (specifically from November 2018 through March 2019). As such pastors were not handpicked but constituted those who attended the meetings and were willing to be interviewed, but the number of pastors interviewed was intentionally skewed in favour of the Southern region of Malawi, as there are more ZEC churches (and pastors) in this region (cf. 3.2). Participation in the interviews was voluntary. Including the interview with the incumbent General Secretary of the denomination, 70 pastors were interviewed. Practically, 49 pastors from the Southern region of Malawi and 20 pastors from the central region were interviewed, with the General Secretary representing both. Statistically, this random sample of pastors represents 36.7% of active pastors in ZEC (69/186), and 45% of the pastors active in the elect demographic (69/153). The pastors in the South, in the elect demographic, make up 32% of the entire demographic (49/153), while pastors in the Central area of the demographic constitute 13% (20/153) of the demographic. The latter represents the fact that there are 113 active pastors in the South and only 40 in the central area, constituting 74% (113/153) and 26% (40/153) of the elect demographic respectively. In terms of each portion of the elect demographic, in the Southern region of Malawi, the 49 pastors interviewed represent approximately 43% of the active pastors (49/113), while the 20 from the Central region represent approximately 50% of active pastors in that region (20/40). As it turned out there was a good cross section of rural 49% (34), semi-urban 32% (22) and urban churches 19% (13) represented by the interviewees. This is consistent with the general trend across the ZEC denomination in which rural churches remain predominant, although the

burgeoning of townships and cities has led to the rapid growth in the number of semi-urban and urban congregations. However, these statistics do not provide an entirely accurate picture. It should be noted that if pastors were newly ensconced in their churches (first six months) and didn't feel they were able to comment helpfully on the subject matter as it pertained to their congregation, they were encouraged to speak about their previous congregation in another location, and some did. Of the 12 who chose to do so, 11 of them referred back to their previous experience in a rural church, although 3 of those also spoke of their present situation (urban or peri-urban), and 1 referred to a previous urban church that he had ministered in. However, a number of other pastors also referred to both their present church and a church where they ministered previously. Moreover, one of the pastors had recently resigned his post as the church he served decided to change allegiance to the breakaway Chiole Synod. The General Secretary also related stories covering events which took place in both of his previous rural churches. Effectively then, the pastors represented over 80 different churches, and not always, although predominantly, the church where they were *in situ* at the time of the interview. Clearly, this was not an exact science but the methodology for data collection and the actual data collected is consistent with a representative or 'probability' sample based on 'proportionate sampling' within a stratified random sampling model of ZEC pastors. Moreover, the random nature of the sampling and the voluntary nature of the interviews also mitigated against coercion and prestige bias.

It should also be noted that in order to glean different perspectives on charm-dependency and witchcraft in the churches, the researcher also interviewed four pastor's wives (digitally recorded and transcribed). Additionally, two practicing witchdoctors were interviewed for information on types of charms commonly used, the composition of the charms, who is using them and for what purposes (also digitally recorded and transcribed).

To ensure privacy and confidentiality the interviews were conducted privately at neutral locations during Joint Kotale, district Kotale and fraternal meetings when congregants were not present. The researcher was given opportunity at the beginning of each meeting to explain the process and discuss the contents of the consent and information form with the interviewees who were also given another opportunity to ask questions. In terms of the expectations of the interviewees, each pastor participated in a 15-20 minute interview conducted by the researcher, Rev. Beaton, who asked a few simple questions relating to the location of the church in which they serve, the size of the congregation, and the duration of their tenure there. The focus then shifted to the use of traditional religious charms by people attending each church. Pastors were specifically asked to tell a story or stories related to the use of any traditional religious charms by members or adherents of their local ZEC church. Interviewees were specifically asked not to mention the names of any individuals concerned during the interviews. They were interviewed

and told their story/stories in either English or Chichewa, whichever language they felt comfortable with. For those who chose to relate in Chichewa, a translator (interpreter), one of the designated research assistants, was present. The interviews were digitally recorded, and later transcribed and analyzed for common themes and useful stories by the researcher and the research assistants. The Chichewa interviews were translated and transcribed by the three research assistants, all of whom are presently serving, trained and ordained ZEC pastors, and former students of the researcher.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

Each interview was audio-taped with the use of a dicta-phone. The interviews were then loaded onto the researcher's personal computer and later distributed to research assistants to aid in the transcribing process. Every interview (76 in total) was transcribed with the help of the research assistants. In order to analyze the data collected in the interviews, including the stories collected, general principles of qualitative data analysis including coding and interpretation, and a type of 'thick description' was used (Robson 2002:492-497, Thomas 2013:109, 239-242). The latter is based on a constant comparative method and lead to a network analysis of themes and sub-themes (Thomas 2013:235-236). To aid in this process the researcher grounded his interpretation in a simple framework relating to the very essence of the interview questions, namely: 1. Are traditional charms/medicines still being used? 2. a. Which types of charms/medicines? b. Who is using them? c. For what purposes/why? 4. What themes run through the stories told? For these purposes the researcher constructed tables of themes and sub-themes which aided in the analysis and interpretation.⁴⁸ Methodological triangulation (Thomas 2013:145-146) was then undertaken with previous research conclusions, particularly the quantitative field research surveys done by the researcher in a much smaller study but on similar subject matter in 2014, to substantiate findings and/or draw attention to any inconsistencies or new findings, including common themes and motifs for charm-usage arising in the information provided and the stories collected (cf. Beaton 2015:65-80) (Annexure A6).⁴⁹

To ensure privacy and confidentiality the digital recordings are kept under password lock on the researcher's personal computer and the printed copies of the transcriptions are stored safely in a locked cabinet in his office. Research Assistants were asked to destroy all copies of digital audios or personally transcribed works immediately after submitting the copies to the researcher. All the information collected (digital and hard-copies) will be kept for no more than 18 months and then destroyed.

⁴⁸ The number of themes and sub-themes was deliberately left open-ended to enable interpretation and all three tables expanded as the interviews were analyzed.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that in 2014 only 39 pastors were surveyed and that the majority of the questions were 'closed' with tick-box options, thus potentially guiding or coercing pastors to answer in a certain way.

3.3.4 Data Presentation

The data has been presented in different forms in this thesis. Data clearly relevant to the research problem has been used in Chapters One and Two to substantiate or illustrate points made by the researcher related to the denomination, traditional practices (including witchcraft and charm-usage), and Malawian culture. In the remainder of this chapter the bulk of the data is presented by means of explanations, tables, quotes, anecdotes, detailed explanations arising from a literary-compile study of African Traditional Religious worldview and practice (with a special focus on South-Central Malawi), and an anthology of stories. In the first section, critical interview responses are integrated with the relevant interview data display tables, and the findings are triangulated with previous research findings where appropriate. Here, the researcher represents contemporary charm-usage in the ZEC churches with reference to popularity, frequency of usage, types of charms used and purposes for their use, and seeks to identify and highlight motifs in the local worldview which animate these practices. In the second section, a thematic anthology of stories of charm-usage by members/adherents of ZEC churches, as told by the pastors, is presented. In the third section, ATR charms are defined and discussed in relation to their general purposes, the perceived need for them in the light of entrenched ATR worldview motifs, and the popular belief in their efficacy. Clear links are established between the particular worldview motifs identified as animators of charm related practices and the evidence presented in the interview responses and stories. The latter providing key contextual foundations towards a transformational missiological approach.

The 'additional' interviews, including the pastor's wives and the two witchdoctors, are not included in any tables related to the use of charms/medicines, the types of charms used or the motives for their use in the first section. However, stories told by the four pastors wives and the two witchdoctors are included in the anthology on merit, based on their capacity to enhance our understanding of a certain prevalent theme, and the potential for pedagogic use. Information provided by the witchdoctors, including quotes and anecdotes, is also included where appropriate to substantiate findings. When using quotes and anecdotes any additions made for easier reading, or explanatory notes included by the author, are easily identified by the addition of *italics* and parentheses. This eclectic approach is intended to provide an adequate overview of the present situation regarding charm-dependency in the ZEC churches, as well as a thematic anthology of stories, ready-made for pedagogic use. Anonymity of participants has been respected throughout which means that names of pastors, congregants, churches, and/or specific places referred to by interviewees have been purposefully omitted. It was thus also necessary to create a customized system for referencing the interviews.

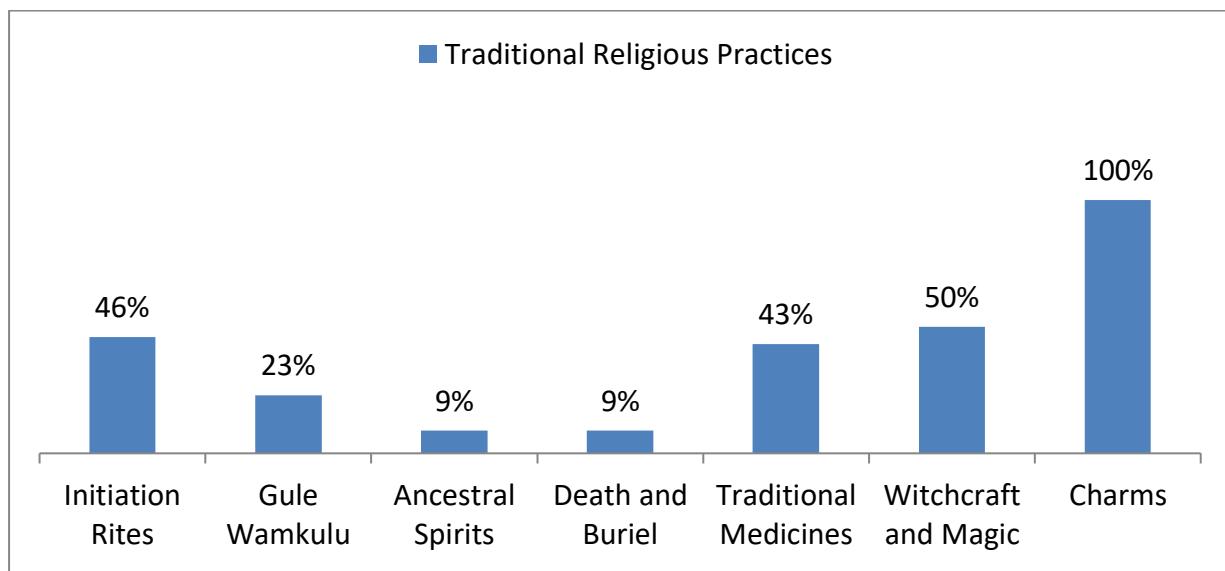
3.4 Data Display and Conclusion Drawing

3.4.1 Are traditional charms/medicines still being used?

3.4.1.1 Traditional Religious Practices

It should be noted from the outset that the pastors acknowledged the perpetuation of a variety of traditional religious practices by their members and adherents. Although the interview questions were deliberately crafted to focus on charm related activities, the integration of the latter with a number of other traditional religious practices was obvious. 31 pastors mentioned charms for infants and 1 told a story about girls' initiation (46%), 16 spoke of *gule wamkulu* (23%), 6 talked about ancestral spirits (including two stories about rain prayers/sacrifices) (9%), 6 spoke of death and funerals (9%), 30 referred to the use of traditional medicines (43%), 35 referred to witchcraft and magic (50%), and all 70 acknowledged the use of charms/fetishes.

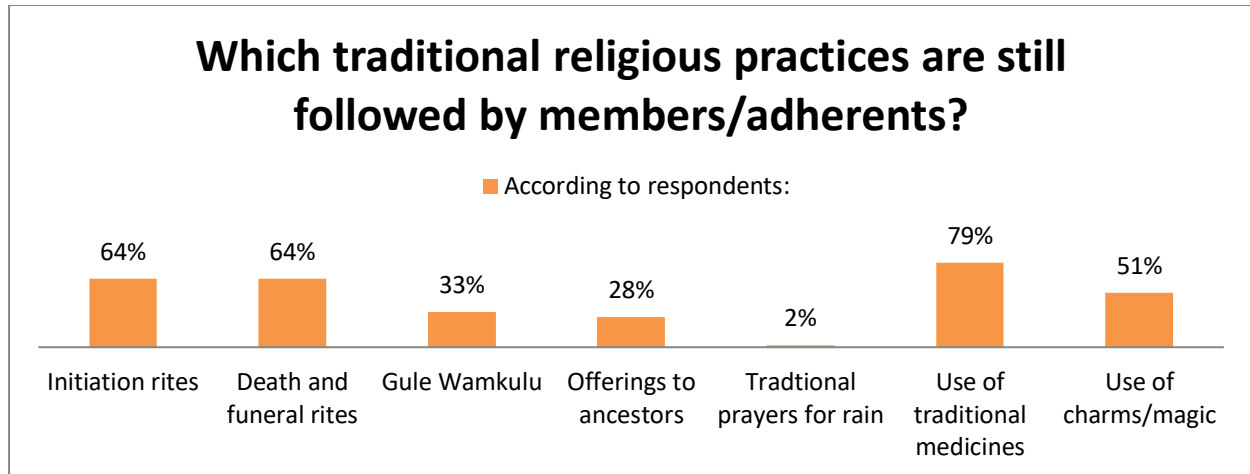
Table 1:



Despite the different emphases in the question/s asked, with interviewees offering up the information freely during the course of the recent interviews, while previous surveys provided options with blocks to be ticked, there is a noticeable correlation between Table 1 above and Table 2, below, representing the surveys taken in 2014 (Beaton 2015:66). The much higher percentage attributed to traditional medicines in Table 2 is most likely explicable by the fact that there is a clear distinction in the minds of many between herbal medicines and medicines used for charms and witchcraft related activity. As a pastor from an urban church explains, “Some believe that traditional medicines *per se* are not bad, they (*only*) become bad when one is associating them with some beliefs, for example, if one is seeking sorcery... Christians who practice those herbs defend themselves by saying, ‘we do not go to witchdoctors but we go to traditional healers’” (I B31). In summary, we note here the contemporary perpetuation of a

diversity of traditional religious practices, suggesting that the whole background to such beliefs remains redolent today.

Table 2:



3.4.1.2 The use of Traditional Charms/Medicines

The pastors were unanimous in affirming that traditional religious charms and medicines are still being used by those in ZEC churches. Each of the 70 pastors interviewed affirmed this. This is consistent with the author's research in 2014 in which 39 pastors were surveyed (2015:67). If we compare Table 3 with Table 4 on the following page, it is obvious that 100% of the pastors acknowledged charm-usage, whereas in 2014, 90% of those surveyed agreed that traditional charms/medicines were still being used. Speaking of the denomination, one pastor declared confidently that, "a lot of members in our church, almost ninety percent of the members, use charms" (I B26). Another pastor confirmed this when he passionately explained that "issues of charms, witchdoctors, witches, witchcraft, some people are saying they are not real, but let me tell you today that people are practicing it in the rural areas and even in towns..." (I B46). Indeed, a rural pastor stated that in "every village you will find them (*witchdoctors*), one or more" (I B 52), and a city center pastor pointed out that "witchdoctors these days advertise their services and wares openly in the markets" (I D11).

Table3:

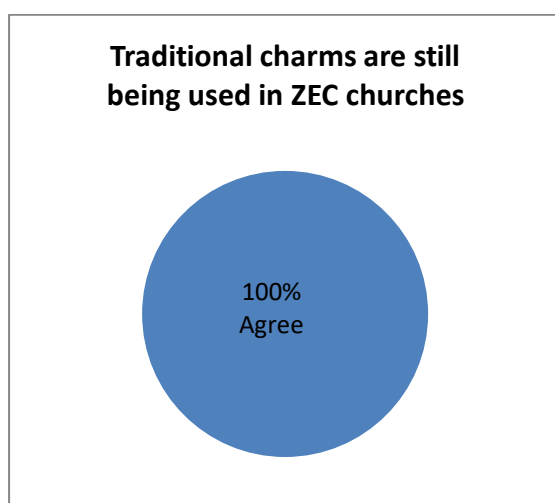
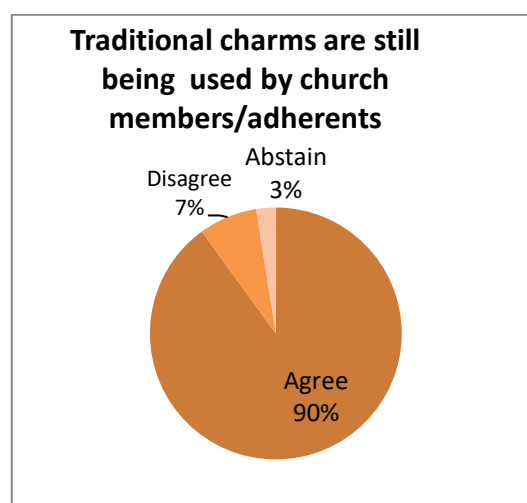


Table 4:



However, when asked whether traditional charms/medicines were being used in the particular church in which they were presently *in situ*, discounting the 11 pastors who were new to their churches and the General Secretary, 6 pastors said that they had not seen evidence in their particular setting, although one of them from a rural setting, went on to tell a story about a member and his magical gourd. Of those 6, 3 were from peri-urban settings, 2 rural and 1 urban. The pastor from the urban setting did however have a rather questionable approach to pastoral care, stating: “Maybe because of my background I don’t have an interest in checking what is happening there... because my Dad, he as against these charms” (I B68) Nevertheless, all told stories of experiencing charm related activities in their previous churches.

Different explanations were proffered by the pastors as to why traditional charms/medicines remain so popular in the churches. One pastor said, “People in churches, most of them are just church-goers, they are not deeply Christians” (I B13). This was backed up by a former denominational leader who stated that, “most of our members are nominal Christians... they are just church-goers, most of them are not born again Christians” (I B59). One noted that “the church in Malawi is syncretistic in nature” (I B17). Therefore, “It is very easy to practice these things” (I B72). The issue of tradition was also raised: “I think the reason behind this is because they have been given charms since birth” (I B40). Other pastors noted that, “people here believe much on traditional medicines and charms” (I B23) and “As a pastor I can say that people really believe in traditional charms and medicines and about witchcraft” (I B16). This was corroborated: “But what I want to emphasize is this: these people, they do these things with all their heart. They have a strong trust, a strong belief” (I B24). The same pastor went on to reveal why: “Most people believe that if you are trusting God it is not enough. You should combine” (I B24). This combination of God and charms is necessary because when it comes to witchcraft and traditional matters, “they (*the church members*) are not sure that they can rely

only on Christianity (J B19), “they think that in such aspects Christ is powerless” (I B70), and “they are not spiritually mature, so their faith (in God) is not strong enough” (I B4). Although, there are also those who would agree with the two witchdoctors, that the power to heal and protect, regardless of how it is practiced, comes from God. One witchdoctor stated outright: “Whatever I do I rely on God... God anointed me that I may heal the sick, all is done in faith” (I C2). Being a professing Christian and a ZEC church member she was also confident that God would reward her for her ministry of helps and provided a Biblical justification for her work from Acts chapter 9.⁵⁰ A second witchdoctor also explained: “when doing my job I also pray that God intervenes (*on behalf of*) the person that the medicines may work...” and he justified himself as “an eligible member of the church, not guilty anyhow because the powers I use for my work, the owner (*of them*) is God” (I C1).⁵¹ Nevertheless, most ZEC members choose to hide their charm-usage from their pastors: “The problem is that they don’t do it openly but they do it in secret...” (I B36) and when you are asking (*about charms*) as a pastor, “they will only respond in a way (*they think*) you are interested to hear... they will hide” (I B70). Undoubtedly, members know that the church (denomination) considers it to be sin. Interestingly, in previous research (surveys) one of the reasons given for charm-dependency was ignorance or Biblical illiteracy (Beaton 2015:69) but this was not mentioned by a single one of the 70 pastors interviewed this time. Moreover, many pastors have told the author in informal conversations over the years that they have often taught on the Biblical prohibitions related. The General Secretary also explained that in the ZEC church handbook certain charm related practices were clearly denounced (I B1). However, whether or not the practitioners on the ground really consider charm/medicine usage to be sinful is often debatable (cf. I B36 with I B70 and I B71). What does appear to be certain, based on the evidence, is that traditional religious charms/medicines are being used by many in the ZEC churches of South-Central Malawi. Moreover, they are being used in churches and prayer houses in urban, peri-urban and rural settings. One pastor described the malady like this: “most Christians speak (*admit*) openly that that they can’t live without charms, so much so that most of them move with them in pockets and when they forget them they go back to collect them” (I B62). A long serving pastor summed the situation in the denomination up aptly when describing one of the churches he had previously served in, when he asserted that, “within the church we had a number of people who used charms and witchcraft... people are saying that they are Christians but at the same time they are practicing witchcraft and using charms” (I B55).

⁵⁰ She also stated that she did not have a sign outside her house advertising her services because she was a church member and leader in the *chiyanjano cha amai* (fellowship of women). She felt that because she had a teaching role in the church her work as a *sing’anga* (witchdoctor) needed to be done on the quiet or church members might become confused. She was convinced that hers was a service to people rather than a business.

⁵¹ He is a practicing Roman Catholic.

3.4.2 Types of Charms/Medicines and Purposes for use

3.4.2.1 Which types of charms/medicines are being used?

The author defines ‘types’ in this section as ‘the actual physical objects and elements used’. The pastors spoke of a wide variety of types of charms used by their members and adherents (cf. Appendix A5). Some of these can be placed in their own categories while others are more properly charm constituents. However, some charm constituents for certain charms may also serve as stand-alone charms designated for other purposes. For example, parents may put a string around a child’s neck with a small pillow containing a charm concoction for protection (I B22), but a string or thread may also be tied around a woman’s waist to prevent her from losing her pregnancy (I B45). Moreover, some charm constituents, like roots, are used in a variety of charms but may also be used on their own, when crushed and rubbed on a wound, as a healing charm (I B43). Therefore, here the author attempts to highlight firstly, those objects typically used as stand-alone charms for a particular purpose and secondly, material which is primarily used as constituent/s for charms. More detailed explanations relating to purposes will follow in the next section. The aim here is to articulate the types of charms and the various constituent parts most commonly used, as revealed by the pastors.

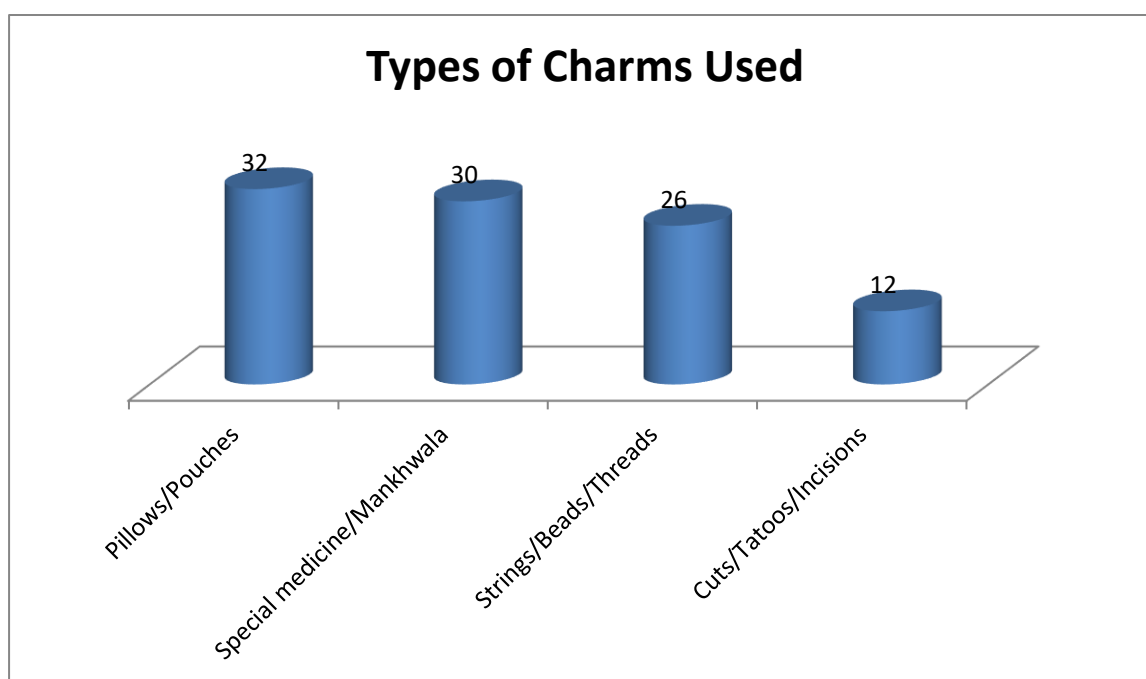
The most popular charms appear to be pillows or pouches containing various constituent elements- these were mentioned by 32 pastors. As explained, these will quite often- but not always- be attached to a string or bead necklace or band (26). Next is special medicine (*mankwhala*) (30), mysteriously mixed and comprised of a number of different elements, which may be consumed by eating and drinking. Closely linked to these medicines are the cuts/incisions/tattoos (*mphini*) (I B35) made by the witchdoctors into which the special medicine is poured or rubbed (12). Cuts are apparently made primarily in “the forehead, upper arms, knees and ankles” (I B60), although a witchdoctor was careful to mention the hands and feet too (I C1).⁵² Other items used for charms include animal horns (1), traditional gourds (*nsupa*)⁵³ (2) and axes (I B8) (3). The latter putatively placed in the fire to heat and then thrown with a particular target (person) in mind, culminating in a fatal lightning strike (I B8). Herbal medicines were mentioned 7 times, and when accompanied by certain words, or instructions to be followed, they can also be considered as charms. Animal body parts (10) are popular constituents and owls can be sent to bewitch people (I B12). Interestingly, one pastor believes that when an individual uses these types of medicines for long enough, “when he/she dies that’s when they resurrect as a hyena” (I B24). Human bodies (I B22) or human body parts (6)

⁵² His full explanation can be read in the anthology under the theme of ‘witchcraft’ and the sub-theme, ‘protection from witchcraft’ (3.5.3.2).

⁵³ This may be more strictly referred to as a fetish as the object itself takes on supernatural, animated life; for example, the ability to speak.

are also quite often used as charms or constituents. Lucrative maize mills are often associated with the latter (I B46; I B74). Roots, soil, bark, wood and plant matter are very common (16), and grave-soil also features (2). Water that has been used to wash dead bodies is used along with other material to be splashed on the floors of maize mills to attract customers (I B5) (1). Lotions and pastes are quite popular, especially for attracting love (6), and the smoke from a burning charm concoction can revivify dying or dead love when the appropriate sexual organs are exposed to it (I C2) (1).⁵⁴ Food is used for sacrifices to the ancestors (I B23) (1) to plead for rain, and cloth covered in menstrual blood is mixed with other elements for prosperity (I B30) (1). Lightening is also used to kill and seems to be especially related to *gule wamkulu* activities (I B20; I B53). Oil can be mixed with seeds and/or other elements to promote agricultural growth or protect fields (I B17; I B34). There are always exceptions, and in this case, the use of invocations may also be categorized as a particular type of charm. For example, sometimes words will be pronounced with a certain object like a hammer in the hand, as in the fatal magic hammer which strikes while someone is sleeping (I B12), or words alone may simply be used to transport somebody to the opposite bank of a fast flowing river (I B2).

Table 5 below represents the most popular types of charms:



There is obvious overlap as special medicine is often rubbed into incisions in the skin or mixed in as a charm ingredient.

⁵⁴ A female witchdoctor quite graphically demonstrated how this works to the author.

3.4.3. For what purposes/why?

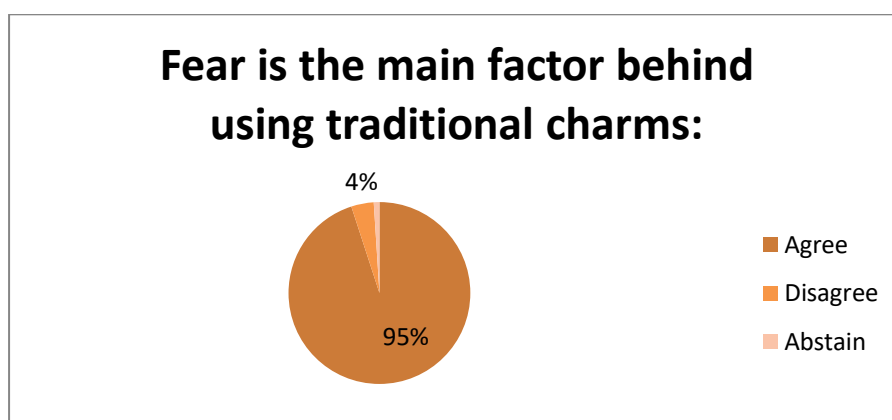
3.4.3.1 Primary Motives for Using Charms

One pastor declared that the people “need charms for everything!” (I B26). Another pastor stated that “There are many people who believe in consulting witchdoctors... because they think that they can be helped in their problems” (I B10). Why is this? What are the underlying motives and purposes? When it comes to the question of why people use charms, two main reasons are consistently cited, namely: 1. fear of witchcraft and, 2. the desire/need/expectation to follow traditional cultural wisdom (and the associated practices) handed down from generation to generation. The most prominent motivation appears to be fear of witchcraft, and in particular, being bewitched. This was explicitly mentioned or clearly implied by 40 pastors. The malaise was accurately described like this: “Witchcraft is real... you can’t get away from it because most of the problems which people/members face in their day-to-day life, are connected to witchcraft. One pastor said, “people are afraid that they might be bewitched... they see no other option but to visit traditional healers” (I B16). Another pastor described the perceived paradox well, when he paraphrased one of his congregants: “we can depend on Jesus Christ but we need these (*charms*) too because we are surrounded by these people... who can bewitch us” (I B39). The researcher was also told that many people put a charm “in the pocket, wherever they go they take that charm in the pocket for protection” (I B53). If it is left at home they fear for their lives. The underlying motifs are easily traceable to the prevailing worldview of the people, where themes such as synthesis, dynamism, gradation, humanism and circumscription, as discussed in Chapter Three, are prominent animators. In this cosmology of powers in which resources, particularly life-force (*moyo*) is limited, and religion is essentially about self, and family preservation and well-being, it is best to be wary, sensitive to the spiritual, protective of what one has, and open to help from those able to harness supernatural power. Secondly, it appears very difficult to break with traditional cultural wisdom and the charm related practices passed down from forefathers, grandparents and parents, and other family members. This issue was raised by 25 pastors. One pastor perspicuously noted that “they (*the people*) inherit them (*the beliefs*) from their parents” (I B52) when asked why church members still practice charms. Another said that his members “considered their traditions worthy as they were passed on from their forefathers” (I B20), and still another, “they believe in the beliefs of their forefathers that they are more powerful than Jesus Christ (I B19). Here it is noted that worldview motifs including, communalism, gradation, humanism, and especially experientialism, are powerful driving forces. There is a need to maintain harmony amongst the entire community (living and living-dead), not to break cultural taboos, to be seen to be respectful to elders, to know one’s place and be humble, and to learn from the past, respecting the accumulated traditional wisdom.

Behind both of these primary motivators lies fear. Perhaps the best answer to the question why charms are used was given by this pastor: “There is fear in the church and in society. This fear is the factor which forces people to engage themselves in such activities” (I B60). He believes that at the deepest level it is “the fear of death that is the root cause of all the things that are happening... the use of charms, the cutting, whatsoever” (I B60). Another pastor agreed, asserting that “many people who believe in charms and medicines are more fearful... they fear death” (I B51). But it is much more than that. As an experienced, educated pastor explains, “When you have a problem in the family, when there is an accident, sickness, almost any problem- you think about it as associated with witchcraft. And if a person is not mature enough the temptation is there to consult a *sing’anga* (witchdoctor)” (I B70).

So, fear of witchcraft, including fear of witches, evil spirits (although only 3 pastors and one witchdoctor mentioned these explicitly), and malicious people intent on causing harm (jealousy and retaliation/retribution are strong motives) drives people to use charms for protection (I B32; I B 46; I B49; I B65; B70). As a witchdoctor told the author, “yes, some people come... seeking protection, like protecting oneself from being bewitched when some evil people want to bewitch others” (I C1). People need to protect “their lives, their property, their children” (I B32). They need to be fortified, protected (*kutsilika*), this need is a powerful force. It is also a common justification for charm use as one pastor explains: “they (*my congregants*) justify it by saying, ‘I am not going there to kill anybody but to get charms for protection, my business should be protected, my family and my house should be protected” (I B 49). This emphasis on fear as a critical factor or motivator is consistent with what pastors said when surveyed in 2014, as indicated in Table 6, below (Beaton 2015:70).

Table 6:



To sum up, to this point the two primary motivating factors are clearly: 1. fear of witchcraft and the consequent need for protection, (2) fear of death, and (3) the cultural pressure/expectation to follow traditional wisdom with its built in protective practices (and the associate fears of

retribution from family members, wider community or even the ancestral spirits if cultural expectations and/or taboos are broken). We might describe these two categories as ‘defensive’ or protective magic and they include healing (by means of using charms and medicines). However, there is another very popular category: (4) life-enhancement; that is to advance oneself, to have more life-force (*moyo*), to prosper, be rich, be loved, be healthy, be fertile, and so forth. These may be described as ‘offensive’ charms and are always used at the expense of others, in the circumscribed cosmos. Included here are charms deliberately used to harm others for nefarious and malicious purposes, usually motivated by anger, jealousy and a desire for retaliation or retribution.

1.1 Figure 2, below, illustrates the existing dynamic:



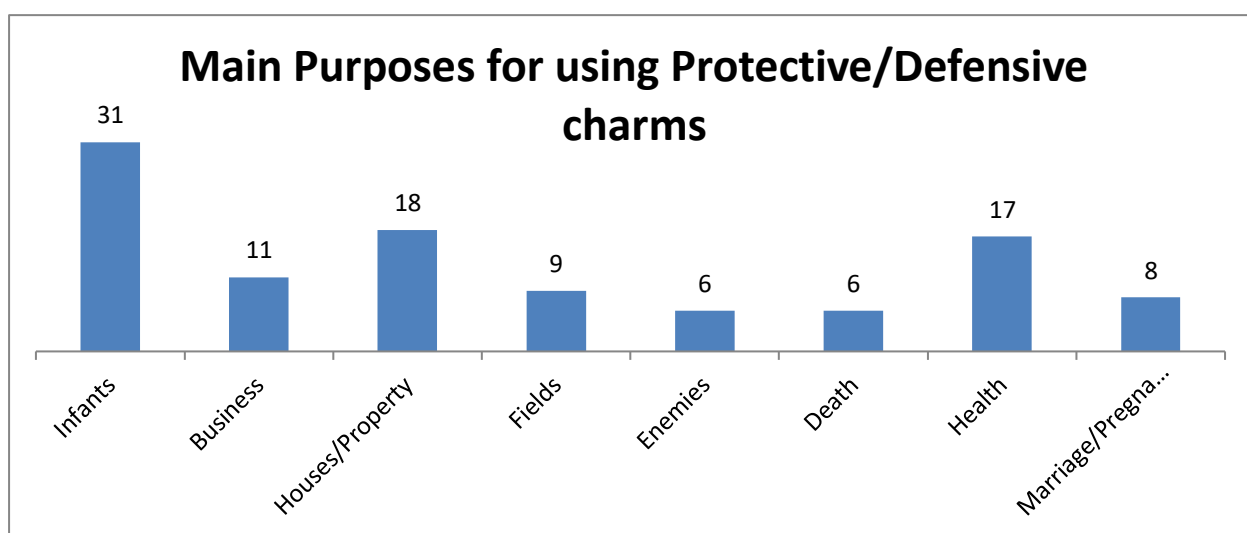
Again, it is the fear of witchcraft and its effects that serves as the primary motivator or animator for the use of both ‘defensive’ and ‘offensive’ charms/medicine. 35 pastors testified to this fact either by explicit statement or in the stories that they told. In the two sections below many of these witchcraft related fears and motivations are listed to give the reader an idea of how ubiquitous they are, negatively affecting almost every sphere of life, and leading to the need for protection or even the perceived need for aggression. Charms are still used to curse or harm others and sometimes, all too often, defense is turned into offence, when the only way to properly defend oneself/family/possessions/job etc. is understood to be through retaliation. Here it becomes evident that an unhealthy and unbroken ‘magic- counter-magic- magic’ cycle exists.

3.4.3.2 Defensive Charms used for Protection and Healing

Procuring protection is understood to be crucial. The protection of infants (and small children) is a potent theme with 31 pastors referring to these charms and 12 pastors narrating related stories. While the majority of rural members still use traditional strings and charm pillows, those in peri-urban and urban settings are now wise to the dangers of being exposed, and they give their babies a charm-concoction to drink: “For example, in villages, for a child to grow properly, they give him or her a special medication, a charm around his or her neck or waist. In town you can’t see those. They are water or liquid medication... but they are still doing it using a different type of way” (I B66). Nowadays, “they (*members*) just make the baby drink because they are now aware that as a church we cut these things” (I B64; I B69), so “the drink is a substitute for the charm” (I B69). According to one pastor, the small charm pillow can simply be placed in a cup of water (I B48). These charms protect the babies from witches and evil spirits (I B48), but they also keep the head from ‘dividing’ or growing too big, guarantee long-life for the child (I B63) and aid in the teething process (I B10), specifically to protect from “the opening of bowels” (I B43). Apparently these particular charms for infants are mostly passed on and applied by grandmothers and not witchdoctors (I B41), demonstrating the strong links to traditional wisdom.

Babies and children are also healed when suffering from any form of sickness when given a particular elixir, concocted by the witchdoctor, to drink. This is called ‘*palibe kanthu*’ or ‘there is nothing’ as the child is believed to be immediately healed having consumed the medicine (I C2). There are also certain medicines given which protect a child from being carried off at night by witches (I C2).

Table 7, on the next page, graphically illustrates the number of pastors who referred to the need for the different types of protection or ‘defensive’ charms, and for which main purposes:



Of the 26 pastors who spoke of charms for business, 11 referred to charms used for protection. That is, to protect their goods and their profits. One pastor told how he lost his profits to people stealing by means of magical snakes (I B19), and another, how he saw a charm in a pot under the table at one of his member's stores. When he inquired he was told that without it the business would be lost (I B17). 18 pastors mentioned charms/medicines used for the protection of homes and property, while 9 referred to them in relation to the protection of fields (gardens and crops). A pastor explains that people put charms "in the field, they put the medicine in the corners of the field" and that "the same thing... happens in the house except that in the house there is an additional medicine put on the roof of the house to protect their lives" (I B51). One of the stranger anecdotes told to the author involves protecting houses from heavy winds which often blow off roofs. Apparently people "are told to take the charm and tie it around their waist and then run around their house five times, then their house is protected" (I B46).

Witchdoctors concur with the need to protect houses and fields explaining that medicines must be put at the corners of the field and in the middle to protect "the crop fields from those who steal through magic" (I C2). Another witchdoctor told the author how he prepares and applies special charms/medicines to protect houses (and their occupants) from witches (I C1). A friend of the researcher has a congregant who told him that he kept charms inside of his pillowcase when sleeping to "deny witches, bad dreams and the like" (I B62). Ancestral spirits are also still occasionally called upon for protection: "The people... believe in ancestral spirits for protection so that they are protected during the night, whenever they feel like (*they might be*) being bewitched" (I B16). 6 pastors referred to the need for protection from enemies, as those who oppose can cause serious harm, threatening and cursing people (*kutemberera*), and even orchestrating death.⁵⁵ For example, one pastor told of a church member "who was paralyzed

⁵⁵ Notably, 38% of the pastors surveyed in 2014 marked the threat of being cursed as a prominent motive (Beaton 2015: 70).

and believed that the cause of his fate was that somebody had bewitched him” (I B27). There are two well-known witchcraft related sayings which strike fear into the heart of people and are spoken in hushed tones: 1. ‘*tionetsana*’ (we will see what happens) is “a very dangerous statement because it implies he or she, the one issuing the warning, will take unspecified (witchcraft) action” (I B29); 2. A well-known Chichewa proverb, ‘*Aliona potuluka, polowa salipenya*’, meaning, ‘he/she will see the sun when it rises but not when it sets’ (Chakanza 2000:22) (I B22). One pastor, speaking for himself, as much as representing his congregation explained it in this way: “They (*enemies*) just hold the charm and mention your name, and if you are not protected you can die” (I B12). Threats of death are not uncommon amongst church leaders who wish to maintain power (I B19; I B61). Indeed, the fear of death is profound, as is the fear of what might happen beyond the grave, although the need for protection for such was only mentioned directly by 6 pastors. For example one church member instructed his family to take his dead body out through the window of the house on the way to the graveyard to prevent him from turning into a zombie, or more properly an evil spirit (*ziwanda*) (I B25). Another churchgoer related how the bones of a dead chicken needed to be carried away to all the homes of relatives who were unable to attend the funeral of a family member, in order to prevent another death in the family (I B36).

Somewhat surprisingly, only 3 pastors mentioned the need for protection from evil spirits during the interviews, while when given this option in the surveys some years ago 43% of the 39 pastors involved ticked that box. Indeed the issue is poignant, one witchdoctor explained that many came to him possessed by evil spirits and he gave them certain medicines to sniff and for use to wash their faces in order to exorcize them (I C1). One pastor contended that there were some leaders in his church who communicated with evil spirits in regard to preventing younger members from becoming elders in the church (I B19). However, the limited references to evil spirits in the interviews may be explained by the fact that the phrase ‘witchcraft and witches’ is often used as a more generic description of evil which includes evil spirits. This is better understood in the light of the fact that when a witch/wizard dies, or an evil person, or one who has regularly broken ancestral taboos and customs, they are not believed to be welcomed as *mizimu* (ancestral spirits) but become *ziwanda* (evil spirits). These evil spirits are much feared and fall under the category of witchcraft.

Charms are also used to protect marriages and pregnancy (8). For example, “In the family setting, some women, they use some medicines so that they should not be divorced” (I B45). And they also use threads or strings around the waist “for attracting their husband to stay in their homes, not to find another wife” (I B 63). But even when a man “is not faithful in his marriage, some women... put such medicines in the food and when the man eats that food, the man starts loving her (I B19). Moreover, “sometimes women do use a thread (*on the waist*) so

that when she is pregnant she should not lose that pregnancy” (I B45). A pastor explains how a congregant told him that her grandmother “told her to do that in order to protect the pregnancy... so that she would not miscarry (I B48).

Maintaining good health (*moyo wauthanzi*) is another powerful incentive. Of the 25 pastors that spoke about health, 17 focused on protecting one’s good health and the health of their families. Protection from snake bites is available (I B62). Moreover, there are some diseases that the Malawian people believe can only be healed with the use of traditional medicines and not modern hospital medication. A pertinent example is the belief that a number of sexually transmitted diseases require traditional medicine for healing (I B28; I B65). A pastor explains that a certain traditional medicine known as ‘*mchape*’ is commonly found in markets and is used for “body purifications against sexually transmitted diseases” (I B28). The issue of healing is complicated by the fact that many still believe, and not without some justification, that there are still traditional healers out there that provide herbal remedies only to cure bad health. That is to say, they are not spiritual healers. A pastor explains that members of his church say that “all the trees they use to make herbs and charms are created by God so those people using them are not wrong” (I B47). Of course, the witchdoctors themselves agree, stating that “the power to heal comes from God because all the trees were created by him (I C1), and that the small cuts made (*mphini*) are simply for the application of the healing remedy (I C2). This is a thin and tenuous line to tread.

Protection is also needed when travelling (3), to make sure one’s employment is secure (2) (I B64), and in the church setting, to keep one’s leadership position (3). In relation to travelling it was noted that most people “fear accidents on the road. They believe that if they leave the charm (at home) they can die in a road accident” (I B53). Church elders are said to ensure the protection of the church buildings by digging into the foundations (during the building phase) and placing charms there, also to enable the people to pray freely in the building! (I B40). One pastor went as far as to say that his people believe that “you cannot have a church” without charms (I B26). Protection from charm-using *gule wamkulu* members is also required, especially if you are a pastor or preacher in the heart of their territory (I B18; I B58). Stories pertaining to all of the above categories of protective or defensive charms/medicine are found in the anthology which follows later in this chapter.

It is important to note the rise of charm substitutes, especially in the townships (peri-urban) and cities (urban). These are particularly for children, as we have seen, but previous research also uncovered the fact that instead of using traditional charms, people in urban locations are using holy water and anointed oil, special ‘protective’ stones received from prophets (‘men of God’), and ‘cleansing’ soaps for spiritual purification. The introduction of a ‘new’ religious tradition in Blantyre directly linked to the traditional ancestor veneration cult was also discovered (Beaton

2015:79). Lurking behind all of these ‘new’ beliefs and practices appear to be identical motifs, deeply rooted in the traditional religious worldview.

Finally, it is salutary to acknowledge that with the constant threat of witchcraft, evil spirits and malicious enemies hanging over people, it is not surprising that they consult witchdoctors (*asing’anga*) for protective charms and medicines. Some even justify their actions biblically: “If we go to the spiritual traditional healer it is quite ok because it is there in the Bible, Saul went to a witchdoctor” (I B28). Putting an end to the debilitating fear which drives this behavior is a really powerful incentive. A witchdoctor provides some insight into how the people think: “what happens is that when we apply the charms to somebody, they stop fearing witches, because whatever acts of witchcraft (they are experiencing) stops once I treat them” (I C1). Not even pastors and senior church elders are exempt from this temptation (I B26; I B73).

The photographs below show actual charms and charm constituents. The photographs were taken during an interview with a pastor (I B62) and a witchdoctor (I C2) respectively:

Figure 3:



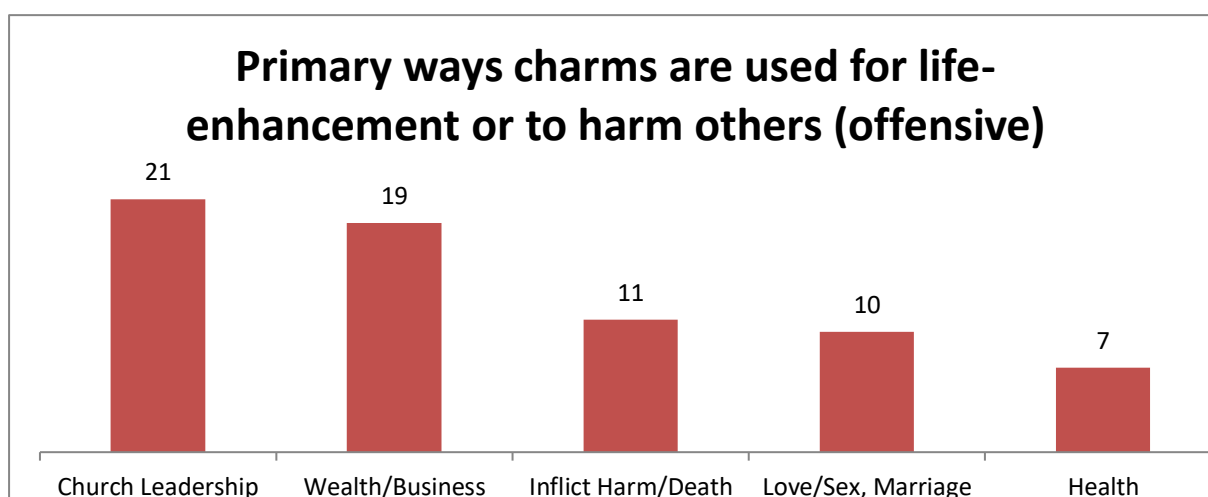
Figure 4:



3.4.3.3 Offensive Charms used for Life-enhancement and Inflicting Harm

Other charms/medicine are used to enhance one’s life through deliberately promoting general well-being, including gaining wealth, health, beauty, a good marriage, status and position in society, and ensuring success in business or whichever sphere of one’s involvement. Clearly humanism (an anthropocentric perspective on religion) and the notion of circumscription animate this need to acquire, in the sense that having all that one needs for life, and more, is believed to equate to real/actual salvation.

Table 8, on the following page, shows the primary ways in which ‘offensive’ charms are used to enhance life or harm others, indicating how many pastors voluntarily referred to each category:



We begin this section with events in church leadership. Pastors and elders are apparently using charms for a number of reasons including, popularity and power in the pulpit (preaching) (3) and gaining favour with a congregation (1). One pastor asserted that “some church elders believe that if they want to be famous in God’s ministry as they preach and teach... they are given charms... they use them in bath water when bathing” (I B25). Another testified that he was advised by a more experienced pastor to “use this (*a charm*)... Because the moment that you use this, you preach with power” (I B52). Others use charms to draw more members to increase the size of the congregation (3). For example, a pastor said that “for one to have a large following, then you need this (the charm), so that when you speak your voice alone attracts multitudes. When they see you your face shines” (I B73). A rural pastor stated in relation to his church that “The church elders there believe in using *zithumwa* (*charms*) with the aim of attracting more Christians to patronize the church... it’s called ‘*mutano*’, it is used for business but now it is also used in the church, so that more members can come” (IB 47). An interesting allegation concerned a certain pastor who “used charms to attract white men so that they could support him in his ministry” (I B26). Charms are also popular for winning local church leadership elections (7) (I B12; IB 19; I B25; I B45; I B50), and even, allegedly, to gain election to denominational leadership roles (I B26). And members use charms to harm their pastors to prevent them from preaching truth and exposing sin or even to chase them from the church (7). One pastor explains: “these people in the churches, their aim is not to protect but to harm others, so they do this to pastors to threaten (*them*) so that they will stop doing what they do” (I B38). Pastors and elders even use charms against each other. One pastor told the author that “even in the cities there are a lot of conflicts between elders and pastors, if you dig to find the source of that conflict you will find that someone is using charms” (I B26).

Acquiring wealth or ‘getting rich’ is a very powerful motivation with 19 pastors mentioning this theme, particularly related to growing their business profits. One even described this motive as “the main reason for using charms” (I B46), and it was also alleged that “pastors believe that

they cannot prosper, they cannot get money if they don't use charms" (I B26). Churchgoers apparently become frustrated that their non-churchgoing friends are getting rich, complaining that "we have been praying to God for a long time and nothing tangible is happening, but our friends are getting rich" and asking, "why can't we do this?" (I B46). However, some of these charms produce money fast but guarantee a short lifespan for the user (I B14). In fact, there are often dire consequences to trying to get rid of charms. One pastor explained that "the witchdoctor sometimes tells them (*users*) that if they burn those things, if they destroy those things, then they will go mad or something bad will happen to them" (I B23). Evidently, some members in town use a special charm called '*chitaka*' whereby "when you buy something the money should return (*to you*)... the same money but sometimes with more money" (I B45). This is similar to the charm used to catalyze the return of one's stolen property (I C2). Of course, one can simply use charms to steal the profits of a competitor, if necessary or desirable (I B3), or even kill your own child or family member to magically work in your field or shop (I B44). Another method of making money is to acquire water from the mortuary which has been used to wash dead bodies (I B5). Villagers are offered money to get this water by business people who want to put it on their shop or mill floors, believing that it will improve patronage. One can also place groundnut shells on the road and every toe that steps on a shell multiplies the harvest (I B33), or more macabre, one can murder somebody and benefit from similar numbers of customers at your store, to the hordes that mourn for the deceased (I B22). Securing employment is also possible with the use of charms such as "plantation doctor... which is applied on the body after bathing so that they (people) may easily get a job" (I C2). One may also keep a job despite being bewitched (I C2). In farming (8), it is possible to produce bumper harvests and even magically steal from the gardens/fields of others by means of rabbits and especially magic snakes (I B2; I B 65).

Charms can be used to harm others, and are ostensibly also be used to kill people (4): "People can go to a traditional doctor and say, 'I want this one to die', and they are given a charm, and told to go home and say (certain) words, and people die" (I B46). This was also mentioned in relation to the *gule wamkulu* (7) who are supposed to "use charms for harming each other whenever they disagree with each other" by means of "sending each other lightning" (I B20). One disenchanted pastor said that at his peri-urban church there were a number of elders who were members of *gule wamkule*, and as such they were usually misbehaving and rejecting correction. He connected this to their frequent use of charms (I B19). Indeed, the General Secretary testified that "planting churches in the areas where there is *Nyau* is a big challenge" (I B1). The *gule wamkulu* members also use charms to gain miraculous powers (I B19) and can even use their aura of mystery and fear to collect money. One church member, having

forsaken *gule wamkulu* ended up embracing their practices again in order to make ends meet (I B21).

Other people bury charms in order to harm their enemies who are believed to be affected simply by treading on them (I B74). Many of these kinds of 'offensive' charms which harm, maim and kill are used because people are jealous of others and do not wish to see them advance in life or prosper in any way. This is described by a mature pastor as "a big problem" (I B59). Another associated motivator is retaliation and/or retributive magic. When bad things happen people always look for the cause (cause –effect paradigm) so that they can be sure to defend themselves from further attacks but also in order to counter-attack. The motivation is to inflict harm on their adversary. It is not difficult to find a culprit. People pay sorcerers to diagnose the problem which involves identifying who is responsible. They "see the genesis of their sickness and the one responsible for the cause of their sickness, and what he/she did" (I B31). There is a fairly consistent formula: "Through their magic they conduct their tests and implicate someone related to the sick person" (I B27). Sometimes the power specialist will use a screen to show the victim the face of the one responsible for their suffering. One pastor gave a personal testimony in which he related how the witchdoctor (or sorcerer) had told him that he wanted him to see a video of the one who was bewitching him, so he sprinkled flour on a screen and suddenly the pastor saw the face of one of his Uncles appearing (I B42).

Figure 5, below, illustrates the unfortunate 'magic-counter-magic' cycle:



The contemporary rise in the popularity of Satanism in the cities was also raised more than once (I B58; I B73). A peri-urban pastor testified that "we have two people who were members of satansim" (I B 58). Speaking of Satanism, one pastor said, "we can hear and read about it in

the newspapers, (*and on the*) radio... and also it is associated with getting rich..." (I B73). Indeed, many are attracted to the so called 'prosperity gospel' for the same reasons (I D11; I A1).

Charms are also used for beauty, for women to attract men, to receive good marriage proposals, and to keep their husbands faithful (10). Girls are "given medicines to become attractive... and they mix it with oil and apply on their faces so that they should look beautiful in our churches" (I B12). It is said that unmarried women smear medicine on their faces "so that they look attractive to men and they will propose marriage to them" (I B19), and they also mix black powder and salt "and apply it to the body through cuttings" for the same purpose (I B28). Evidently, women also "sometimes use those threads and put them around the waist so that they can make their buttocks grow" (I B12). They also put these threads on their female children for the same reason (I B45). Medicines are also used to rebuild love and broken relationships and to improve a man's performance in bed when he is "failing to work in bed due to losing bed power" (I C2). Men and women can take medicines to enable the pregnancy of the women who is struggling with barrenness (I C2). Failing that, the medicine man (witchdoctor) may offer to drink medicine himself so that he can sleep with the patient in order for her to conceive (I B69).

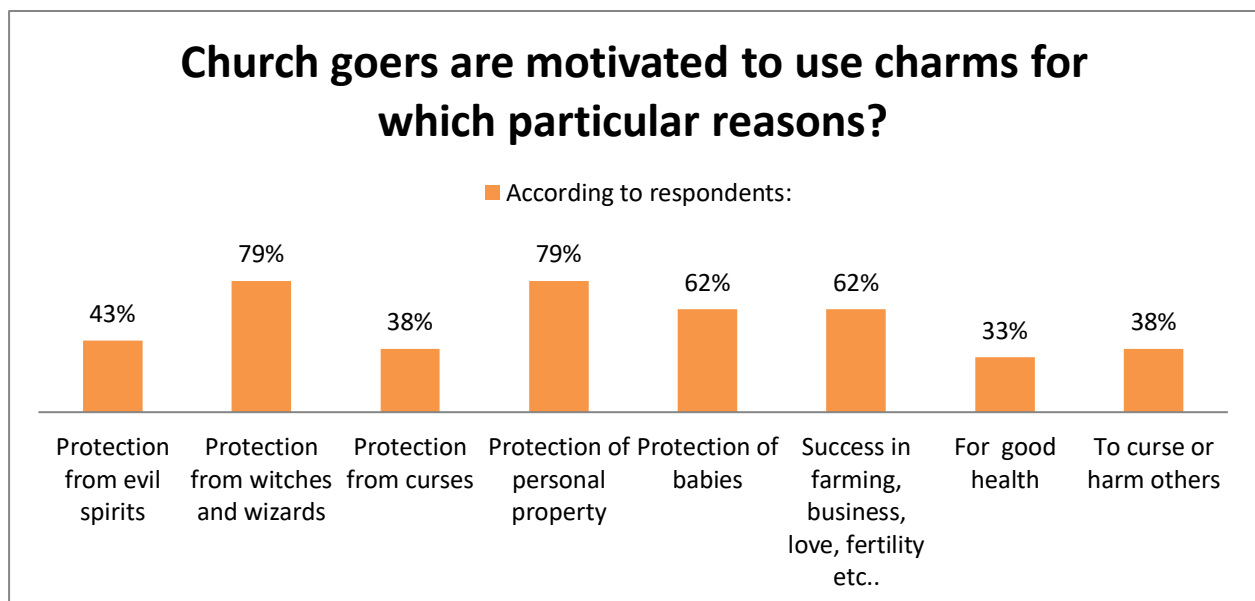
There is a certain medicine called '*chisomo*'- which unfortunately translates directly as 'grace'- that is concocted "by mixing some roots with petroleum jelly or lotions and applying it to the body" (I B28). The miraculous result is that the one covered in this lotion will be 'lucky' in every situation. There is a charm to pacify enemies which you simply put in your pocket and a charm called '*chisoni*' (sadness) which stops someone from hating you or at least placates them, comprised of a thorn which you simply attach to your clothes, or even put in your hair. Another one can see a person released from arrest (I C2). One can also receive medicine by means of cuts which will make you a hero in physical fighting because it gives great strength (I B60). There is something called the 'Chief's charm' which is used by leaders (traditionally, the village chiefs) so that their judgments are respected and nobody disputes the rulings that they make (I B62). This is not just a past relic or an outdated notion either, as one of the pastors stated that some of his members are still using charms and medicines, "more especially... chiefs, local leaders, when traditionally they are religious leaders... they are fond of using these things" (I B64). This is yet another reminder of how religion permeates all of society.

Relating to where the actual physical charms and medicines are procured, most pastors mentioned witchdoctors (*asing'anga*) with a few also referring to sorcerers and diviners (*woombeza ula*). Sometimes the witchdoctor also does the divining (Van Breugal 2001:233). This is consistent with the surveys in which 77% of the pastors indicated that witchdoctors were the traditional power specialists most often consulted when charms were required (Beaton

2015:71). Of interest is the difference in opinions of the pastors as to where the power is derived for the efficacy of their various services and charms/medicine. One pastor differentiated between witchdoctors and sorcerers, contending that sorcerers receive their information from the ancestors while witchdoctors are given information by evil spirits (I B52). Clearly there is much more here than just combining traditional herbal remedies. Another pastor explained that when the witchdoctor uses a cloth soaked in menstrual blood to concoct a charm for prosperity, “it is all about demonic powers” (I B30). When the 39 pastors were surveyed in 2014, 85% believed the power came from demonic forces (Beaton 2015:72). This would not, however, in the author’s opinion, represent the perspective of the people who would far more readily assign derivative power to ancestors, evil spirits, and a supernatural endowment from the power specialists themselves.

It should be noted that in general, the data collected during the interviews of the 70 pastors, as discussed above (see also Tables 5-8), has a very close correlation with the data collected and collated in the surveys filled out by 39 pastors in 2014, as displayed in Table 9, below (Beaton 2015:70).

Table 9:



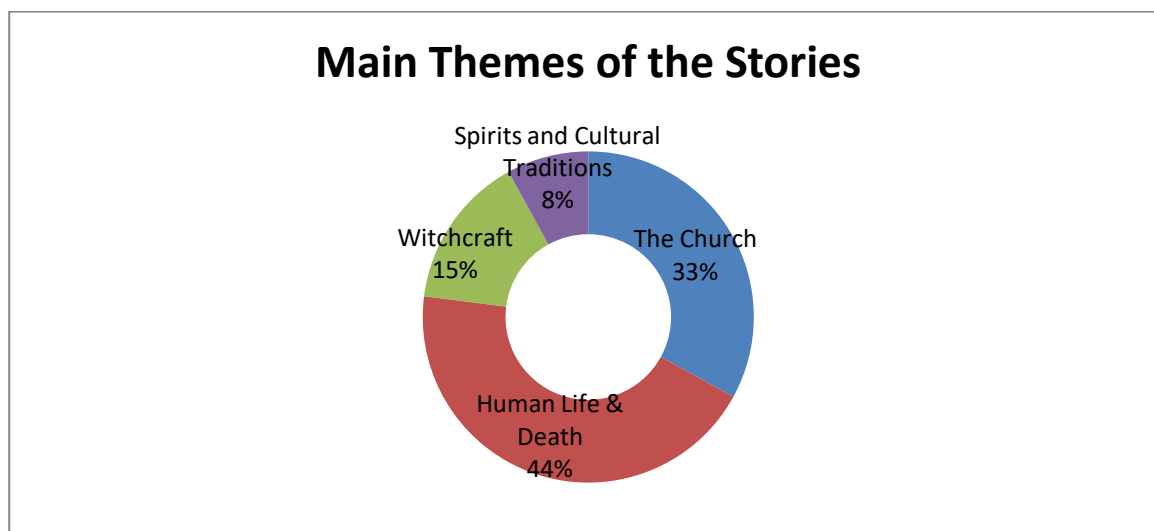
3.4.4 What themes run through the stories told?

A number of themes are identified in the stories told by the pastors. Most of these have already been included in the analysis above, helping us to recognize many of the reasons for using charms (cf. Tables 6-9 above), and to discern the underlying worldview motifs animating the behavior. In the next section a thematic anthology of stories of charm-usage is presented, further enabling identification of common themes, purposes for use, and underlying motifs.

3.5 An Anthology: Real-Life Stories of Charm-Usage from the Grass-roots in ZEC

These stories from everyday life in and around ZEC churches, which so graphically illustrate the traditional religious practice of using charms for self-protection and life-enhancement, are intended to highlight the existing deep-level assumptions about the world, human life and death, entrenched traditions, witchcraft, ancestors and evil spirits.⁵⁶ In all, the pastors told 113 stories in the interviews. Rural churches account for 64 of these stories, semi-urban churches, 33, and urban churches 16. Again, this is fairly consistent with the general demographic in the ZEC congregation. Including the pastor's wives and the two witchdoctors a total of 130 stories were told. Here the author categorizes 108 selected stories into four main categories, namely: 1. the church, 2. human life and death, 3. witchcraft, and 4. spirits and cultural traditions. Within this framework there are 19 themes, one theme is sub-divided into a further 4 parts. Some categories and themes carry more stories than others simply because they highlight the most common charm-dependent practices amongst ZEC members, as evinced by the number of stories on that particular theme, told by the pastors. Moreover, in cases where a number of seemingly similar stories are included under a particular theme, this is because each story contains a unique insight into the nature of the practice or the motives lying behind it.

Table 10, below, graphically illustrates the main themes as discerned in the stories told by the pastors.



As usual, witchcraft fears, suspicions and activities are ubiquitous, so it should be noted that in addition to the 16 stories (15%) in that particular category, witchcraft is at the heart of many, if not most, of the stories in the other three categories too.

⁵⁶ The term story as used here includes personal testimonies.

In fact, there is a great deal of overlap between the themes selected by virtue of the complexity of the practices with regards to motivations for use (often multiple), the ubiquity of witchcraft fears and consequent anti-witchcraft responses, and the dynamic, synthetic, communal, experiential and circumscribed perception of the world, in context. However, throughout the anthology run two consistent threads, these are the prominent themes relating to the primary purposes/motivations for using the various charms, including: 1. **Self-protection**- from witchcraft and witches/sorcerers, disgruntled ancestors, evil spirits, death, illness, poverty and jealous people or enemies seeking retribution, and 2. **Self-enhancement**- through the guarantee of life-force (*moyo*), fertility, health and, secure marriages, successful business ventures and employment security, fertility of ground and bumper harvests, safe travels and security of homes and property. A careful reading of the stories and testimonies exposes the fact that the above mentioned purposes or motivations encompass both a defensive and offensive use of traditional religious charms, as people seek to protect what they have, but also to gain what they think they need or want. It is very interesting to note, through the telling of the stories, comments made and personal testimonies given, that many pastors still believe in the efficacy of traditional charms and witchcraft. The themes and sub-themes relating to the church are presented first, simply to prioritize stories relating directly to the life of local churches, but there is essentially no hierarchy of importance amongst the stories. These stories are by no means comprehensive and represent only some of the charm related activities happening in the churches. Nevertheless, they at once provide insight into the nature of charm-dependency in the churches and the worldview motifs which serve to drive or animate such practices, and stand to serve as pedagogic tools, stimulating meaningful dialogue on the subject.

The author has edited some of the original stories to a degree for easier reading-without changing the content- as they were either transcribed by means of a fairly direct translation or told and transcribed in broken English. They are still intended to come across 'as told' and are thus intentionally not grammatically perfect. Additional comments and explanatory notes have been included in *italics*. In some cases the interviewer has interjected in the flow of the story with a comment or a question. Where deemed relevant, these have been included, and highlighted in **bold** text.

3.5.1 The Church

3.5.1.1 Malicious Actions against Pastors

(a) A long time since my coming they (*church members*) did some charms. Some, they had a lot, even bringing them to us, to our family... it was January last year when I got sick, seriously sick. There were some things which they (*church elders*) wanted us to do but we neglected to do that. In so doing, they had their words (*of warning*) that 'you will see the music!' Then after those words I got sick, seriously sick, until I went to hospital. I had been

admitted there and after coming there when I just sat like this it pained me and I was sometimes falling down, fainting. Then I felt powerless... Yeah, unable to move, even when I slept I dreamed some bad things. Then they said 'you will see the music' and 'you will know us, whom we are'... There is a certain woman... who controls the whole church, when she says something nobody can say no. They have to agree with her. I recovered but it took me a long time. They said nothing because their plans failed (I B8).

(b) Sometimes you just hear that that one who is a former church elder is a witch. I remember I used to pray in the late evening and one of our guards asked me, 'how do you stay here?' That was the question. 'Are you protected?' Even my church secretary once said: 'pastor I do salute you. How is it that you have stayed here for a long time and nothing has happened to you?' This is because he believed that some of our members were witches and wizards... I also remember one day when I was praying, it was something to 9 pm, I met an owl. Traditionally, people believe that others send that bird to bewitch you. And I remember a certain day I also met an owl on the ground. And I asked 'what is this doing here?' So such things happen (I B12).

(c) One time when I was ministering at [name of church] in central region, there was one of our senior members, senior elders, who used charms. One day he came to my house and stood at the door and said, "good morning pastor". He greeted me while standing at the door of the house. So I said 'I am okay'. So he said, 'no you are not okay'. He realized that I had known what he had done to me. **What did he try to do?** I don't know how to explain but I had a severe pain in my penis. So the pain that I felt was not normal, something was happening. So, in the morning that senior elder came to my house Yes, so I knew that he was responsible for that. So that day I had prayer and fasting at the mountain where God revealed to me that this man was responsible for my pain... He used charms ...charms yes, he used medicine... because you cannot do evil to anybody without using charms. You can just say 'you will see such such thing' but without using charms that cannot happen. If a person says 'you will see such such things', that one has something (a *charm*). So that member had a shop and used charms to kill neighbors ... that elder, by this time he had already killed a lot of family members. **So was he trying to chase you out of the church?** Yes, because people use charms when they see that someone is strong in prayer, they become their opponent and don't want you to be there, so he was against me because of my strong stand in prayer and fasting, so he was not happy with this... but he didn't succeed. He didn't succeed because of my goal (I B26).

(d) I was with a village headman and he was very famous but his neighboring village headmen became jealous and so he did some charms and I had a sudden sickness. Someone came to me finding me in great fever... they wanted to kill me... I went to the hospital where I was admitted. The man who did the charms was now going around the village publicizing that I was going to die. He came to the hospital in the morning with three other men and they had a conspiracy meeting aiming to deal with me right at the hospital, so that I should return home dead. They planned to send my wife home so that they could give me poisoned food. One of them came in at my bedding place and started folding a blanket down on my feet while telling my wife to go home to take care of the house. My wife refused and one lady who was praying with us was able to hear what transpired at this meeting and called my wife... telling her that if she dared going home she would lose her husband, so my wife agreed. The hospital officials came and started chasing away all visitors. The doctor came and did some testing and said that the results showed that I was in critical condition. I called my nephew who was surprised to see the condition of his uncle, then he said, 'I will pray for you and tomorrow you will be discharged'... But members of the village who heard that I was going to die started flocking to the hospital with a number of soft drinks (when people start coming to the hospital in large numbers here in Malawi it is a sign that the condition of the patient is critical). But in the morning I was discharged and returned home with many soft drinks. Upon reaching home, one of the four came and asked, 'is it true that

you have been discharged?’ She asked me the same question four times and I responded, ‘yes I am back and I am not dying’ (I B37).

(e) There [at a certain church] I met a lot of trouble in my ministry, when I reached there I found that the church leaders there were the biggest users of charms... What happened to me when I was ministering was that when I tried to preach against smoking, the leaders of the church were not happy about that, and because of that I was bewitched, I got sick. The sickness was about failing to pass out stools, in Chichewa it is called ‘*Kamatira*’, a very dangerous disease. As I went to the hospital they said that I didn’t have any problem. After staying for three days in the hospital I was discharged and went back to the church while still sick. For me to know that it was an act of witchcraft, there were three women who came to explain to me that I was given the sickness by somebody else, it wasn’t normal. They warned me that if I depended on medical assistance from the hospital I would not get well, I would die. These women advised me that I must not drink those medicines collected from the hospital but with their wisdom they sent me some charms, and I used them for two days and then I got well. Since that time I realized that in the church there are many people who use witchcraft in order to inflict pain on others... I think they did this in order just to persecute me as a preacher, to test me, to try me, but mainly I see they wanted to chase me because I was preaching against what they usually do...after me they sent another pastor there, and that pastor was also bewitched to the point that he got mad, so such types of churches have got a lot of problems in that the leaders there do inflict pain on others (I B38).

(f) One day when I was sleeping I was told by my wife that she saw me being raised up and then put down again... when I was left down I found that I was feeling pain in my knees, so I believe that only if you believe in God that’s where you can be saved from those acts and I know that if I wasn’t a believer I couldn’t have recovered after my knees were knocked... I just experienced it happening but my belief is that it just didn’t happen that way, there was a cause... I had enemies... **so they put some witchcraft to you to cause problem for you?** Yes, indeed, that’s it (I B54).

(g) The first days I arrived at [name of church] I had strange experiences. My children could not sleep at night. They were disturbed by witchcraft... When we were ready to sleep, we made sure that we had locked the doors, but when we woke up we found that the doors were open without the use of keys... Some came to me and told me that this is what normally happens here. Some were threatening me saying this is [name of church], that’s what happens... According to me, when these things happen, I trust God and pray. But when these things happened for the first time in church, I was shaken and disturbed (I B57).

(h) Another story is the one that happened to me when I was ministering at [name of church]. People used to come to my house and throw medicines. When I woke up in the morning I found charms around the house... and there was another day that I found a plate at the corner of my house and on removing the plate I discovered there was a big root there. When inquiring they said the aim was that whoever touches it should die, either myself or my children. *They did this* so that I should leave the ministry and run away, but we used to collect the charms burn them and pray, and we lived... it seems they were members because our relationship wasn’t good at that time... they were looking for the way to chase me from the church because I was rebuking some of their deeds. I have evidence because today they speak about it now that I moved from that church. When they meet me they say, ‘oh, here comes a pastor who is so strong’. The people are saying this because they failed to remove me (I B62).

(i) It was last month when I got sick, and I remember the day was the 28th of December... so for me to realize that it was acts of witchcraft, when I was sleeping on that Friday, I dreamt about my second born son, that he was seriously ill. Then in the dream I saw that the church came to see us but the executive members of the church were not present. The next morning

I explained the dream to my husband saying I had a bad dream during the night and we need to pray. On the Sunday we didn't go to church, we were just praying at home. Then around 5pm that Sunday I started feeling heat in my legs, the legs were burning... then the pastor my husband took me to the hospital but by then my legs had stopped working... *After visiting a number of hospitals and undergoing many diagnostic tests*, I heard a voice saying, 'wake up and go back home because what you are experiencing is not a normal thing, go back home and continue to pray'... when I went home I called my fellow pastor's wives around the area and we started praying... for about a week I was not really able to walk while standing up, I was crawling as a baby does until the prayers helped us and I started standing up and walking normally. Then another pastor's wife came and explained everything that the Lord showed her... there were witchcraft activities happening toward various pastor's wives and she explained everything to me, exactly what I was experiencing. That's when I believed that it was from magic... (I B7).

(j) It was in November 2017 my late husband was working on the crop in the field. While working a thorn pierced his foot, then the whole leg got swollen. When we went to the health center the medical personnel said it was not a thorn but rather a snake that has bitten him. After hearing this *my husband thought it was going to be ok* but the pain continued, that is from the foot to the hip, and it became so great that he died of the pain. With that I came to realize that people can do magic, people can do charms... **So why do you say that?** It is because of what I saw, that it was a thorn that pierced him, and it was removed, but the leg continued to swell causing a lot of pain. Even the doctor thought that it was a snake. Then people started saying that it was no longer a real thorn but a magical snake... *But* it was a normal thorn and we removed it and we saw it, but the medical personnel confirmed that the pain was from the effects of a snake bite not a thorn as we saw... the main issue was that the people there were trying to raise false stories about the pastor in order for the pastor to be removed from the church, so they tried a lot of tricks to tarnish his image, but it wasn't working. So, they decided to use charms... they resolved to do charms on him (I B9).

(j) Being a church in an urban area I was thinking that I cannot encounter those things. But there is a case that took place some months ago. We had a garden boy who is the son to one of the pastors in ZEC. I recommended him to be employed here because I knew his father, I have been working with his father, and unfortunately all the children in that family did not do well with their education, so they are just loafing around the city. Their father passed away some years ago. I took this young man in with the idea that after his working hours he should also be attending secondary school, and I managed to talk with some elders for his financial support, and that he should also be relieved in good time for his studies... Now during day hours he started showing bad behavior. Whenever I asked him about something or told him to do something he would just say, 'okay I will', but he could not do it. He was also misusing the church money whenever he was asked to buy some working materials for his job. Whenever I talked to him about this he was spitting fire on me. Now, as days passed by, I started dreaming bad dreams. One day I had a dream where I saw him and his mother. They took me to a thick forest whilst I was still alive but in a coffin. They put the coffin down but later realized that they had forgotten a hoe. The mother sent this young man back home to collect the hoe. After a long time of waiting, the mother decided to follow him. So what she did was like she had a three stranded rope and she used this rope to tie the coffin so that I could not come out during the time she was away to follow her son. I was able to see what was happening outside the coffin though I was in it. Some few minutes after she had left, I managed to kick off the coffin cover... and I managed to come out and put back the coffin cover and do some simple tying. I walked some meters away and hid and saw them coming and start digging down, a pit, (and then) in a hurry they buried the coffin and then left the place. I also left the place by taking another way. Fortunately or unfortunately, we met at a certain junction and when they saw me they were disturbed and confused. I had the same dream for two consecutive days... So, I wondering as to what was happening and the daylight hours, after these dreams, you could notice how badly the young man was behaving. Physically there was a time when his mother came to stay here

for two weeks. One day in the early hours around 2 AM, I was just having sleepless nights so I left my bedroom and sat here in the sitting room. So, normally what I do when I am suspecting some danger outside, I normally come out using the front door, not the kitchen door. Then when I come out I saw him with his mother just at the kitchen door, standing there half naked. They had something held together in their hands which up to this day I cannot explain as to what it was but I believe it was a charm or other things related to charms... When they saw me coming behind, they were shocked, so the young man pretended as if he was showing his mother the pit latrine... But that was a clear physical manifestation of charm practice by church members (I B31).

3.5.1.2 Power, Status and Position

(a) Some elders told me that... someone has been a church secretary at the church for over 40 years. So, when it's time for elections, when that guy is not elected or is the vice, he just does everything, taking charge and yet he was the vice. People were asking what this person was doing? He said that he was doing this because he had started this a long time ago, so there is no one who will bar him from doing this... I do believe that he practices charms... he does threaten others and people do fear him... everyone does fear him... He is an elder and when elections come, the people just know that this position is for that guy... people do fear to compete with him for the secretary post... they do fear that maybe he can do something magical and kill the other people. **Threat of death?** Yes, threat of death, because magic is not a thing which one can see that someone is doing it. He can even take a charm and do something at home then you feel something... Yes, sometimes you get mad... but a person is doing that at home or somewhere else... people do fear the charm (I B13).

(b) I have heard that when it comes to positions, many young people do fear, such that they don't want to be elected to be church elders because they (*fear that they*) will die while young because the elder ones do threaten that they can't be elders since they are not yet mature. They are not yet strong... so, they do believe that the elder ones... They (*the elder ones*) communicate with the evil spirits so the young ones do fear them... But when you preach the word of God they pretend they are holy and they say that such things cannot happen here. But because we don't have evidence you just keep on preaching the word of God so they can be transformed. **But how are they threatening the younger ones?** It happened that some chose a younger one to be a church elder. They met him and said that they had heard that he had been chosen to be a church elder. And they said (*told him*) that he was young and that he would die very soon: 'This is for elders like us. You will see what will happen.'... So the younger ones are fearful and they do not want to be part of the church (I B19)

(c) There are other pastors, and a lot of pastors use charms... To protect themselves and to gain favor from members... there was a pastor somewhere who used charms to attract white men so that they could support him in his ministry. Unfortunately the pastor passed away last year, he was pastoring at [name of church] in Blantyre. And there are a lot of pastors and prophets who are using charms in order to attract white men... and most of the pastors believe that they cannot prosper; they cannot get money if they don't use charms... There are also pastors who use charms if they want to be leaders, if they want to be elected... **For position in the denomination?** ...yes... There are only few pastors who believe that only God can help them to be elected... In our church there are just a few leaders who ascend into the GS leadership, chairman leadership, without using charms, a lot of pastors use charms and medicine (I B26).

(d) At our prayer house called, [*name of prayer house*], we have a church elder that is very old in age who can even openly challenge, even in session meetings, to say that 'you are all kids here, no-one can do anything to me.' Whenever you want to ask him to explain things he stands up and starts stretching himself, and after doing that he asks the question, 'do you want me to answer your question?' So, sometimes I just stop him and say, 'sit down'. That is the

other problem that we have there, it seems that he feels himself having a lot of power in himself because he knows a lot about these charms... It is about the words that come from his mouth, the way he does things, it seems he relies upon his charms (I B44).

(e) The example I can give is about position in the church. Sometimes, when a church is about to hold elections, (*for deacons or church elders*)... some church elders they do consult the herbalist so that they can get charms in order to be elected... Yes, there was a certain member who was found there at the place of the witch doctor... The other members of the church found him there... They found him coming out of the house. So, I'm very sure that he went there to collect some charms... He was re-elected... after the election the news was everywhere. It was the talk of the day... the people believed that it happened because of that charm (I B45).

(f) When I encouraged the young people this elder left the church... he came to my house to warn me, to say that 'please, you can't stop using the charms because the charms were established by our forefathers, the ancestors are in the charms, so you can't run the church dismissing the charms, no way, you can't operate- you will fail, unless you (*remain*) connected to me and others who do the charms, so that the connection of charms we put at the church premises can continue working'... for the church to prosper, to grow (I B50).

(g) Some elders, they frightened their friends because of some charms, (*in order*) to secure their positions... But when I went to rebuke those things and teach the Word of God so that they cannot really depend on those things... Some (*members*) were running away but when I preached and encouraged them, they came back... The elders, also I taught them not to depend on those charms... It was a rumour around that the church elder was using (*charms*)... because of the power of that elder, now he was frightening other boys and youth from rising up for the position of elders, so that they could be frightened (*off*). There were two incidences where someone died and they (*the church members*) said that the elder had done that (I B61).

3.5.1.3 From the Pulpit

(a) Some church elders believe that if they want to be famous in Gods ministry, as they preach, teach, and to be protected from being bewitched, they go to a witchdoctor, where they are given charms and stems... **So, some of your elders here?** Yes, some of them, they use them in bath water when bathing... they put that in the water then they bath, so there is that charm when they bath (*before*) they go to church. When they are preaching, teaching, they put it in the pocket so that when preaching their voice should touch souls... they hide it... (I B25).

(b) Going home I met my fellow pastor which was good because he had stayed in the ministry for about 30 years, that's what he told me, and he advised me that, 'ah my friend, the General Secretary is refusing to give you a church, I just want to advise you that it is good if you go to a witchdoctor so he can give you some medicine there, and the GS is going to change his mind'. So, I said 'no, I will not do that'. So, he said 'no, you see, all the pastors that are there in the church, we are using medicines'... so he encouraged me a lot and invited me to his house and the moment I went there he still advised me to use charms and he went into his house and brought some charms out and said, 'you can use this pastor because the moment that you use this you preach with power, people will be able to listen to the message that you are delivering'. So I said, 'ah, if I combine the two that means I will have two Gods, there is only one God who is in heaven, the one who has called me to the ministry'. So I denied (*refused*) to use the medicine, but he encouraged me and challenged me, and he even gave me an example... there is that pastor, all these pastors they use medicines. So I said, 'wow is it possible in the ministry that the people who are called by God to serve also to use charms to support their ministries?' (I B52).

(c) We gave him a day to preach. So when he was preaching from the pulpit he started confessing, he said: 'I do go to the asing'anga when I get sick, whenever my children or my wife

get sick, we go to the asing'anga... So, he was telling the story that he visited one of the traditional healers. And what the traditional healer did, he knew that the man who came there goes to the church and also he visits him. He also had an idea that he was also a church elder somewhere. So what the sing'anga did was to show him that he (*the sing'anga*) was more powerful than the Bible. So after their discussion it came the time when the witchdoctor wants to give some medicines to the man. He went into his house and took the Bible and picked one of the pages in the bible and removed it and used it to put some medicines in. That was done so that the church elder should take the medicines on the page of the Bible... I regretted it after the preaching. He was encouraging the church that it is good sometimes, after trying Jesus, we should also try a sing'anga... (I B73).

(d) I think this is a very good interview and I feel that charms are being practiced in the church. Not only with the members but also the church elders are doing it. But I don't know within our church, ZEC, but I understand that in other churches, even the pastors are still practicing charms. For one to have a large following then you need this so that when you speak, your voice alone attracts multitudes. When they see you, your face shines... So they (*pastors/elders*) can have it in the pocket, under the tongue, or even on the waist... and sometimes they can use their wives, to hold it. And then she is doing something with it so the people are getting attracted. So it is happening in the church as well (I B73).

(e) I had another experience in church. I put another man on the preaching programme. While he was preaching, he dropped a certain charm... Yes, down on the pulpit. So that's what happened, the service was disturbed because they (*the congregation*) saw the charm. The people started murmuring. But the owner of the charm was courageous enough to take the charm and put it back in his pocket. But at the end we advised him together with other church elders that God is not happy with these things. And again he was courageous enough to give us the charm and we prayed with him and then burnt it (I B57).

3.5.1.4 Protection of Buildings and Patronage

(a) The word 'amatsirika' means fortified... Previously, I have been hearing inside our church that churches and church elders protect the church building with charms before the church has been built. They dig inside the foundation and they do put some charms (*there*) so that the church should be protected, (*so that*) whatever should be done there the people should be able to pray (I B40).

(b) The story I can share... took place in 2013. At that time we had a project to build a church. Due to financial problems we didn't find a builder who would accept our charges. Now because of this, and just (*because*) I am builder myself, I volunteered to build the church. While building the church, we were at gilet level, the church elders came and found me. They came with something which looks like a small pillow, and they advised me that while I am building... to take that pillow of charms and put it in the building between the bricks... I said, 'what's the use of this pillow?' The answer was that it is for attracting a lot of new members to our church... that time I tried to reason with them, saying that this cannot help us but we need to dwell on prayers. But because of this answer all the church elders were not happy and they protested, except one church elder, who was my assistant in the building work. From then, those who protested broke away from the church and started their own church. After this we lost lots of members. We only remained with 20 from 54 members, and these people followed those elders who wanted to use the charms, they made one group. Up to now they have their own church and they are praying in that church... when we compare from that time to now, it is us who have so many more members than them (I B47).

(c) Yes, the older church elders said we can't allow young people to take up our positions because we have some things that we have to get (*keep*) on this church premises, so if we move away there will be no-body to take care of those things... they just say, 'we have our

'katundu', when we were building this church there were no young people, so we built it ourselves as elders, so you young ones don't know anything.' But the pastor insisted that young people takeover... but after this... the following days strange things started to appear... (I B50).

(d) There was a certain man who visited me (*and told me*) that somebody had told him that someone has applied witchcraft on his house and he was afraid, and (*that is why*) he visited me. After a prayer I destroyed the charm with fire... but the man was very much afraid that he was going to die... So this incident is giving me a picture that there are some people in the church who are still practicing charms and traditional medicines (I B67).

3.5.1.5 Charms for Infants

(a) The common ones that I am aware of and you can see often with people, even people who come to church, are especially charms that have got to do with children, young babies. As soon as babies are born you hear that there is a necklace, there is an arm band, and there is something that they will tie around the waist or on the ankle, as a charm of protection. So these are the things that parents believe that once a baby is born then they need to do these things in order to safeguard the life of the baby... when it's time for dedicating children, in ZEC, wherever you go during that dedication time, you will see that maybe the secretary will call the name of the child to be dedicated and then the mother will come forward, and then they will ask the deaconess to check that child. And then the deaconess will walk over in front of the church to check the neck, the waist and then see that there are none (*charms*). Then they send a signal to the pastor to go on... which means it's easy for someone who is dedicating a child to say, 'I am going to church this week, let me take these charms off so that once the child is dedicated I will put the charms on once more.' Because when you are going on pastor's door to door visitations, you can find a child in the kitchen with a charm and you ask yourself, 'what is that for because they know that the church teaches against them?'... *But* during house visitations we do find kids in the houses with these necklace charms and charms around their waists...(I B3).

(b) One day I was blessing children in the church and I found that they had charm necklaces on the necks... and I was explaining to the parents that we don't mix our God with charms because our God is jealous of these practices, so we need to remove these. Then when I was about to remove the necklace, there was a lot of shaking... they were shaking and the father of the child was very angry when I cut the string. I told him, 'you are not going to take this away, I am going to destroy it with fire.' He got worried very much, so that even though I was blessing the child, he was not happy, he was so disappointed and angry, and this was evidence that their faith was in the string even though they were found in the church. When he was going out after finishing everything, he looked at me, he complained to say 'can't you please give me back the string?' So when we finished, I called him, I invited him to meet at a special place and time, and I read the word of God to him... I asked him, 'what kind of assistance do you think that you can get from the necklace that you were putting on the neck of the child?' He started explaining now to say that the first small pillow was about harnessing the head, the other one was to help a child to walk quickly, the third one was about helping the child to teethe quickly... (I B10).

(c) Ok there was a day when I was dedicating a child in a church. Normally what happens is that before dedicating the child to God, the members of the women's guild are supposed to search around the waist and around the neck to see if she/ he had put a charm there. So I told the women who were doing the searching that the protection of every child is in the hands of God not on charms. After I said that I dedicated the child to God. After sometime when I was doing door to door visitations, we reached at the house of this child... We found that little child together with her little brothers and sisters. But the mother was not there... we saw that that child who was dedicated to God was wearing a charm around her neck. So I asked the sisters

and the brothers of the child the meaning of that charm. The response was that their mother took it, the charm, from the village... The reason was that the head of the child should not be divided... This gave me evidence enough that these things are being practicing amongst Christians (I B36).

(d) In ZEC we have this, I don't know whether it is our custom, when a family has a baby boy or a baby girl, we bring the baby before the man of God (*pastor*) so that the baby should be blessed. So I have observed that some parents, some families, do not want to bring their children to church, more especially when the umbilical cord is cut off. During that time we have certain program (ritual) whereby women go to that family and do (*what is*) as far as Christians are concerned, a baby shower, when the baby is just born. So after much investigation, I have seen that the people do not want Christian women (*church women*) to go there as soon as the baby is born... they know that when the Christian women come, they will not have the chance to do their practices (*traditional rituals*). So they use to take the charms (not charms as *per se* but traditional medicine) and put it in the basin and from there they take the new born baby and bathe him/her in those charms in the water... I have heard from someone, from my wife, who is *mai busa* (*pastors wife*) that those families they don't want to take part in this issue because sometimes they used to bathe their children with charms... you know pastor, a long time ago people used to tie charms on the legs or sometimes around the waist but as of now because they know that the church is against those practices, what they are doing now is that they take that small pillow (charm) and put it in a cup of water and instead of putting the charms on the leg or around the waist they are just making the child to drink that water... They do believe that once they did that system it's almost the same as putting it on the leg or around the waist. So they are concealing... And why are they doing that? There are two purposes: they need protection so that the witches should not attack their children... they do protect from witches ...magic... another reason is that they do that practice with the aim that the baby should live a long life (I B48).

(e) I notice especially during my door to door visitations... I remember that at one of the residences I found one woman had a new baby but she had put some charms around the neck of her new born baby... something... like a small pillow... She told me that it was for protection. Upon asking her 'how can this child be protected by charms?', she told us that she was told by her parents. You know what happens it is very funny because when dedicating the child you find out that the child has no charm. But now afterwards, when now the child has been taken home, they continue...The child can be bewitched so upon using that (*charm*) the child will be protected. The other thing is that they assume that the head of the child could grow bigger or divide... sometimes it is due to jealousy or hatred, the woman has a child and has an elder sister who has no children... She would search around looking for medicine to bewitch or to eliminate the child so that her sister can have no child as well. **So jealousy is a big issue?** Yes it is (I B60).

(f) Yes, they brought somethings from the villages... For example, in villages, for a child to grow properly, they give him or her special medication, a charm around his or her neck or around his or her waist. In town you can't see those. They are water or liquid medication... But because they do come from the villages they do it but quietly... Now in town, since the teaching is very common, the members do warn each other that if you want to dedicate your child to God you should remove the charm from the child's neck or waist (I B66).

(g) When a baby from a Christian family is born it is the responsibility of a pastor's wife to go and wean the child. But in that area their culture is secular and their practice about the newborn child is that the child has to be bathed in charms before the child is taken out of the house. After washing the child in charms then the child is released! (I B11).

(h) When I got married, I did that without doing such things. I received the first child without the use of charms. We just prayed to God that He was going to take care of the child. Yes. The child grew up healthy without any problem. And then we got another child, a girl. And she is

fifteen years old. And then we got another child and he is eight years old. They were all growing up without the use of charms... Yes and I can tell the difference between trusting in God alone and trusting God with other things. The difference is that the devil plays around with those who combine the two... **What do you mean?** Before my conversion when I was trusting in these things, I could feel heavy like someone has taken me up in the air and then falling down. I could hear the sound like someone has hit me. And when I woke up I could see blood oozing from my nose. And I could ask myself, 'since I have protection why are these things happening to me?' So I see that it's a lie to think that the devil can protect us. But you know that others they don't see the work of the devil in traditional practices (I B66).

3.5.2 Human Life and Death

3.5.2.1 Health

(a) In one of the prayer houses called [*name of prayer house*], I think I showed you a certain boy. The boy had a good stature but as time went on he just become crippled, he was unable to walk... he was fine but one day as he walking around his home, he just fainted and after gaining consciousness, he was not able to walk. When they went to the hospital they were told that the boy will no longer walk, so there were some exchanges of words that someone is responsible for bewitching this boy. I have heard that they have been going to various traditional healers to seek medication. So, you can see how rooted is this belief to people. As of now the boy still remains the same with a physically challenged leg but the cause is not known up to this day, though the relatives believe that somebody had bewitched the boy (I B16).

(b) There was a certain woman who got sick and tried to go to the hospital. She received some medicine there but nothing happened. She did not get healed. So she went and consulted an African witchdoctor. So when she went there, most of these witch doctors, they are mediums, spiritists, so sometimes they experience that ecstasy, and when they are doing that they are able to foretell what is happening.... Just like king Saul went to the spiritual mediums, yes that is an example... after some days this woman was escorted to her house by this spiritual medium. The spiritual medium did some rituals at her house... They also did some cutting and applied some medicine. After this woman has done all these things, she came to the church and met with me and repented (I B24).

(c) The latest issue is about our own member who has been a church elder. He was a Sunday school teacher. So this member had a son who got sick and I had been going there to pray for the child. But this other day when I went there, I found that he had been given some roots which I saw. The roots were put under his pillow... after some days it was found that the child had been transferred from the home to the witchdoctor, so he was there for almost two weeks...making tattoos on his body, up until the child died while at the witchdoctors place. And when it reached us that the child died in the hands of a witchdoctor, I as a pastor refused to take part at the funeral. This development brought misunderstandings between me and other church elders who believe in the same (*these charms and medicines*)... The cuts originated from the witchdoctor who advised the parents that if the child was to get healed he had to receive the cuts... in the end I called all the church elders and shared more light on the badness of engaging witchdoctors and I ordered the Sunday school teacher to withdraw from duties as a teacher (I B41).

(d) To me they use it when somebody has developed a swelling (*chitupa*). **Like with pus?** Yes. **So they put a thread there?** Yes **But that can be purely medical?** But I think there is a belief... they take it from the tree, but it's about herbal medicine, to protect that area not to continue to grow. So for that one to get recovered they use that thread... They go into the bush and dig the roots and then take the thread from the roots and they crush it, rub it (*amazipota*)... when I asked one of the people who was sick he was saying that the reason that they apply it is that the leg should not continue to swell and that it should be normal. **But to me it sounds like**

there is no problem? But there is a certain belief that they take that thread and the one giving that thread, he says, when tying the thread, 'you should (*do it*) behind the door... It is a matter of a belief that... the moment he enters the house the problem is left there outside the door. **So the belief is that they have the injury because of the curse?** Yes... there is magic power and to remove that magic power they use that method... I went to a certain person who was sick and I started teaching him concerning the word of God. And then he himself took it out from his leg (I B43).

(e) We had a lady who was our member and she suddenly got sick. She went to the hospital but the situation didn't get better. Now what happened was that when the parents came from the village to see her, they said, 'we have decided to take her to the village so that we can be close to her and take her to a different hospital.' ... Now here people were saying, how can you take a sick person from here where there are medical facilities to the village where there are no medicines? But they said, 'no, no we have to take her.' ... So the parents took this lady to the village, unfortunately before they arrived home the lady died... it was later when they revealed that 'no, we were planning to take her to get traditional medicine because we saw that these medical things are not working' (I B49).

(f) Another belief is that other diseases cannot be cured by modern hospitals but by traditional doctors only... We see an example from a man who always complains about body pains saying, 'something is here, it is moving up there.' ... the disease is mostly identified by some movements in the body, like something is just moving... **Ok, and this thing can only be cured by a charm?** Yes, according to the belief of other people... it's like body pains, you feel like the whole arm is in heavy pains... sometimes it only attacks the arm, sometimes it only attacks the backbone, sometimes the leg, and sometimes the person can just feel like something is just moving. So that something is moving either from downwards to upwards or from upwards to downwards, it is just like a rat moving but moving with heavy pains... Not necessarily a spiritual thing... but naturally in African context we believe that there are other (*such*) things for example, if you are bitten by a snake it is very rare to see Africans going to hospital... We normally go to witch doctors (I B65).

(g) I know of one of the church elders who suffered from *kasipa* (*kasipa* is something like a worm which enters into the body of a person in a magic way). So this member has been experiencing a great problem, trouble with that. And most of the time for him to get healed he consulted witchdoctors. But now as a pastor I did encourage him to trust in God alone. And sometimes there were conflicts between the husband and the wife. The wife did not want the husband to consult the witchdoctors but the husband did want that. So as a pastor I helped him to trust in God alone (I B67).

(h) The other story in our church is about a certain man who wanted to seek traditional healers to help other people. He is like a dealer who pretends to be a traditional healer but he himself has no knowledge of any kind of medicine. So he used to go to traditional healers and get medicines and (*provide*) access to the people so that people can come to him and get medicines... **Did you speak to him about this matter?** Yes... He said he is not a witch, he cannot bewitch a person. To him it is just a matter of helping people (I B74).

(i) I was visited by a certain lady who works in an office at Ntcheu. She had a leg problem. It was just releasing pains. She had gone to various hospitals and places looking for assistance to relieve the pain but it failed. When she came to me I made some tattoo cuts. I applied my medicine and after three days she came to witness that she is now fine. **Ok, so where did you cut?** On the back because the nerves that supply to the leg come from the back. **And what was the cause of that problem?** It was about being bewitched in the office, some colleagues (*were*) looking for her post (I C1).

3.5.2.2 Love, Sex and Marriage

(a) There was a certain man who escorted a certain lady to Mulanje to seek for traditional healers ... So they went there just to seek medicine for her marriage that was not going on well. He was a member of our church. So this was clear evidence that people within our churches are using traditional charms and medicine for (*preventing*) splitting their marriage (I B28).

(b) And also the issue of having sex through charms. There is this thing also of spiritual husbands and spiritual wives... so some people get charms to protect themselves against those things because there are people who can go out and do those things spiritually, thus a man having sex with either a woman who is a wife of someone (else), or a woman having sex with a man who is the husband of someone (else)... magically there... he or she can be physically around at the distance of about two, three or five meters away from the one whom he or she wants to have sex with or through dreams... **They can feel physically violated?** ... yes... it is often identified through dreams because it happens that when you are asleep you are able to see somebody coming to have sex with you and you feel it. Sometimes when you wake up in the morning you just feel that you have been in sexual intercourse with someone... and even when you meet with the one you have been dreaming about you can easily notice his/her behavior? **What do you mean?** For example, one can be used to chatting or laughing with somebody in a normal way but if the one who has done this is somebody whom you chat with, the nature of your conversation drastically changes after this experience and they can easily be identified as the responsible person for this... **So this is also happening to some people at your church?** Yes... I am just hearing it around... it's just a matter of protection against those things so that whenever those people want to have sex with you they should not manage (I B29).

(c) Two months ago, a certain woman engaged in preparing a charm so that her husband could not go for another woman. After she got the charm from a witchdoctor and fed it to her husband, three days later, the husband got sick and he died after two weeks. This happened just two months ago and now because of this I came to know that it is wrong to use charms. **You or these people?** No I (*me*), because I have seen the incident... the death occurred just because of the charm the woman got from the witchdoctor... I believe that this happened because she didn't follow its instructions (*the specific instructions from the witchdoctor relating to how to use the charm*)... The death occurred because there might be some poison, maybe some overdose in the charms, so it was physical not spiritual (I B35).

(d) Another issue which I have heard is to do with the time when a woman is pregnant, when the woman conceives. I have heard from my wife who told me, 'pastor, we went to such-and-such a house just for counseling' (sometimes the church women just go to a pregnant woman for counseling). So my wife told me that 'I have found a certain woman who has something like strings tied somewhere.' When she asked her why she is putting on that string, she got an answer that her grandmother told her to do that in order for her to protect the pregnancy she is carrying... She got that string from the herbalist. They went there and got the string and the herbalist told her that she should tie it on her waist so that the pregnancy should be okay. That's what I have really observed (I B48).

(e) What I see, even here in town, is that more especially women, I have seen them patronizing wherever there is a traditional healer. Somewhere a traditional doctor is there you find them going. I don't know for what purpose but I guess some of them get medicine so that they can be loved by their husbands. So that's what they do, as I have already said, here in town they try their best because they know that even if they go there their conscience tells them that this is not the right thing but because they get used to that and they just can't stop it... so they still go there but keep it as a secret. Because even if you go there to visit them they make sure that you should not see anything in relation to this (I B49).

(f) Yes, in the church where I am pastoring, I had one incident; this was a woman who has a husband. This woman believed that for her husband to love her, she needed some charms. This family has been struggling with the issue of love because of this behavior because the husband, a number of times had been catching the wife with charms.... When the man asked, 'what is the purpose of this?' the wife would answer him that 'my mum gave me this so that our family (*shouldn't*) take long time and in order to keep you away from other women... she was putting it on her waist wherever she went... until one day when the husband said, 'if you keep on refusing to stop these things then I will divorce you today and marry a born again lady.' Then the woman became scared and thought to herself that if she has been using the charm for the protection of the family, but yet the husband wants to divorce her, then the charm is useless, it is not working... She took away the charm and returned it to the mum but the family is still intact (I B53).

(g) There was a couple who were in marriage for five years but had no child. They went to seek for traditional doctors and were given the charms so that the woman should become pregnant. It happened that the woman become pregnant and in her five months period she started feeling strange pains in her stomach and then she came to church on Wednesday when we had our midweek service and narrated the story. So, I said, 'where is your husband?' When she said the husband was at home I told her that I would come there because the pregnancy issue is to do with both of them. So we went there with my wife. The woman broke the story in the presence of her husband, that they went to the witchdoctor and got charms for fertility and (*became*) pregnant... It happened that during our chat and prayers on that issue we did some deliverance to break any connection with the charms. While we were doing this the witchdoctor noticed that something had happened. **How?** I don't know how, in the spiritual realm. So the following morning the witchdoctor went directly to the family but could not find them as they had gone to the field to work. He followed them and said 'I want my things, why did you also go to another witchdoctor?' So, the couple were scared and did not understand what to do with the witchdoctor because we had already burned the charms (I B55).

(h) From what I have heard I'm told that some women do go there (*to the witchdoctor*) to take medicine so that they can conceive. I have been told that some men, they say, 'let me drink (*the medicine*) myself and sleep with the women... Not the husband but the witchdoctor... so the medicine man says, 'let me drink medicine myself and when I sleep with you, you will conceive.' **The same guy from your church?** Yes, and it was said that the guy was caught with another woman, he denied it... there is conclusive evidence from what I was told but it has not officially reached me (I B69).

(i) If they come and ask for charms for divorce I say no. So I exchange, instead of giving the medicine for divorce, I give medicines that will build their love again... if one comes saying either my wife or husband has divorced me, we give them this charm, the procedure is that it is put in a plate and put fire on it, and as it is burning if she is a woman, she has to stretch her legs crossing on the plate and let the smoke enter into the vagina, and if it is a man he should also do the same and let the smoke enter into the inside of the penis, and this should be done while they are naked and at their home... even this phone I am using is just a gift from somebody who I assisted... there was a certain man who came here from Limbe, his wife left him and ran away to India, and after he heard about my services he boarded a minibus from Blantyre and came here, when he arrived here I asked him if he really loves his wife and if he really wanted her back and he said yes indeed, so I did what I do (*the love medicine by smoke*), and I told him to go and wait, after three days he just saw her arriving. She arrived on a plane, telling him that she wasn't able to sleep there in India, she was only thinking and dreaming about him... We are also able to help barren couples. In a family where a man or a woman is barren, they come, we give them medicines, and they bear children. Even when a man is failing to work in bed due to losing bed power, we increase bed performance here... (I C2)

(j) For example, I know of a certain lady who gave traditional medicine called “*kondaine*” (*which is*) love medicine used by women to give to their husbands so that their husbands should love them much and not other women... When we asked her where she got the encouragement she said that one of the elders was the one who used to go to the mountains to dig up these roots and supply it to the woman. I talked to him on this but he refused (*to listen*). I left him in that state of refusal and put much focus on this lady who had confessed (I B27).

3.5.2.3 Farming

(a) One day as I was going to the church and I passed a certain house where I found the ground nuts shells put on the road ...I was very interested to know more and I discovered that people believe that when they put the shells on the road and other people step on them, then the groundnuts to be planted will produce bumper yields... It is believed each and every toe stepped on the shells multiplies the yields of the planted groundnuts. So they try to associate the equivalent of the groundnut nodes with the number of feet or toes that stepped on it... And sometimes when they are planting sweet potatoes they take the potato vine and tie it on the thigh or head with the idea that when the potatoes will start growing, they have to be as big as a thigh or a head but ever since I have known about this I have never seen a potato growing to that extent (I B33).

(b) Some of our members have got fishing dams... and I was told that no one can steal the fish from there. So I asked why... One of the church elders told me that they just rely on prayer but after talking to other members, some people surrounding /staying there told me that these people are not simple men. They rely on other things. And when someone tries to steal the fish from there he/she can face some problems. **Like what?** Maybe being bitten by snakes... **How do they protect the dam?** It can be two to three ways. Some they use words while others they use some charms and dig it inside the soil. So whenever a person moves around the dam illegally, he/she can be caught (I B40).

(c) As told by a practicing witchdoctor: **That small stick, what is that for?** It is for protecting crop fields from people who steal through magic. **Where do these sticks go?** On the corners and at the middle of the field ... it makes the people to lack appetite for the field, they just see the field as useless, so they cannot be eager to go there... this is just a sample, as we are going to secure the field there is a combination of many other charms, so in the corners we combine this one with other sticks and on the middle there is a combination of some charms with a chicken egg. **Do they put it on top of the ground?** No we dig... It's like closing the door so that no-one can enter the field since an egg is naturally closed... even a thief cannot enter, he just lacks that feeling to steal in that field (I C2).

3.5.2.4 Business and Employment

(a) I have been hearing that my church elder has got three maize mills but for him to have his business growing people say that he goes about looking for water that has been used to wash dead bodies. This is because it's a belief that when there is a funeral ceremony a lot of people gather there, so in connection with that gathering they should also do the same at his maize mill... they say it's because people come in large numbers to funerals this could be the same at his maize mills... This indeed works for him because he put his faith in it, it's just the same like when you believe that if I drink this water I will get healed, you get healed indeed... **How does he get that water?** It's easy because nowadays people are looking for money, they can even get it from the mortuary, and even in the villages also people are offered money to snatch that kind of water... It is common among those who believe in it, because when they collect that water they mix it with other charms which they know themselves... The charms could be from leaves, roots, or tree bark. They mix with that water, and when they mix that, they splash the mixture on the floors of the maize mill, so as to attract many customers (I B5).

(b) This one is my church members, he's also my young brother. One time he had attempted to kill his own child after being told by the witchdoctor that if he does that he will start getting the money he was looking for. But after sharing the matter with his wife there arose a dispute and due to this the issue reached me, so we started assisting them so that it should not happen. When we asked about the cause of the conflict, he revealed that he was given a small pillow of charms from a witchdoctor, but for the charm to work his child had to die first... Yeah has to be killed, so it showed there that he had hope that if he killed his child this would work. The witchdoctor told him that wherever he picks a note of money and puts it at a designated place and mixes it with papers the note will multiply... **what happened in the end of that story?** After being assisted he dropped the decision (I B50).

(c) I remember we had a church elder at Blantyre market. Yeah, people were speculating that he was using charms and traditional medicines. And that's why his business was growing. And his death was also associated with charms... People were saying that according to the charm he was not supposed to live more than five or 10 years... there is a limit that you can use this charm for five years, ten years, you get rich and after that period you die... Of course, his wife also died the same year (I B14).

(d) I know one member, a Christian who does business. The other day I had a chance of sitting at the counter where this member does his business...under his table there was a small pot but made of clay soil... He was putting the money he was receiving from his customers inside that pot. It was during the day but what I noticed was that inside the pot there was darkness. So he was using the torch to shine into the pot... So, I was trying to check what was inside the pot. So, I saw something like a fist. **A human hand?** Yes. It was not actually the hand but it was something solid? So I asked him about what I was seeing. So the man laughed continuously and then finally said, 'you shall know when you start a business.' ... So, I insisted by asking him to explain. It took about 3 weeks without him saying anything... One day he disclosed that what you saw in that pot, is the thing which is protecting my business. Without that thing I can be selling my product without profits... As a pastor I tried to help him, but he said that if he stopped using this thing that means he would become poor. And he asked a big question: 'if I stop using this thing or trusting this thing, are you going to take care of me?' That was the question. So, (*it was*) very difficult for me as a pastor because I had nothing to assist him (I B17).

(e) Even myself when I was in Thyolo, I was selling part time. You know, yes to top up, yes. I was buying *matemba* fish in Limbe. I was buying maybe at k10,000.00. The profit I got was k10,000.00 from selling *usipa*. The small ones, yes, and I was selling somewhere at a certain public market. I used to have many customers coming and I was convinced that indeed I am doing (*good*) business. When now I finished selling... and when I counted the money, I found that it was half the amount of the capital, not profit. I could not understand what had happened. I did it 3 times but I failed. I decided to stop. I said that maybe this is not part of my calling because I said I will be tempted and try to look for charms to protect my business... I even had a field with *chimanga* (*maize*) and I was thinking that I will harvest 50bags of maize. It was a big land and I spent on about 6 bags of fertilizers. But I harvested 14 bags only. But I was thinking that I'm going to harvest 50 bags because I spent a lot! **So what do you think happened?** I think that people had snakes and they stole my maize in a magic way-evil spirits. I thought that I would harvest much more but I harvested only 14 bags. So I stopped... I don't have appetite (*anymore*) (I B19).

(f) It is about the family, i.e. a husband using magic to increase wealth... The wife came to me and said, 'my husband is not doing well, he wanted to kill the child.'... to increase wealth, to get rich... **So he uses the life of the child to enhance his business?** Yes... He did not kill the child because the wife stopped it... But when people do that what do they do when they kill the person? Do they take body parts? According to my experience when I was chatting with her, she told me that they kill the child in a magic way not in physical way, so they take the life in a magic way... They believe that when somebody has died many people are filled with sympathy

and they do mourn, crying, so the same multitude of people will be found (*patronizing*) the business (I B22).

(g) But you know Mulanje, Chirazuru many people believe in using charms because even if we talk about selling their goods....they can't do business without using charms. They believe that its only charms that can make their business grow. If you teach them that it's only God who can protect your business not charms, they say, 'no, if you have seen a man who has bought a car or a motorbike it means he did this (*used charms*), without doing this he can't own a bike or a big business.' That's what they believe... Some people just tie charms on their clothes, some on the waist, some on their ankle, and some just inside their trousers or underwear... some people just dig and place charms deep under their selling bench... some even do some rituals... Like maybe when the woman is in her monthly period, they take those things to the traditional doctor to use in rituals for prosperity. These are serious practical issues that other Christians are revealing to us. For example, one woman said 'I have divorced my husband because he did this issue. When I am on my monthly period he wants to take the blood to use it as a means of prosperity. After meeting with the traditional doctor who gave other charms to mix with this, so this is a pity.'... It's all about demonic powers, the cloth soaked with menstrual blood is used by the traditional doctor... It's like spiritual thing (I B30).

(h) At the prayer house I encountered a certain man who relies on witchdoctors. This man wanted to get rich so he tried to go to different payer fellowships so that men of God could pray for him. Eventually he found that the men of God failed to make him rich and decided to seek for a traditional doctor for the same. He went somewhere in Mozambique where the traditional doctor told him to pay a little sum of money as a token (or as a seed for prosperity). He was also given some advice: the first one was that he should safely keep the charm that he was given and not allow any type of water to soak him while he was keeping the charm. If this happened then he would get mad. The second caution was that he should go to an anthill and kill any animal he would meet there. When he went there he found that there was a certain type of lizard. He took a stick and turned the lizard upside down. The moment he finished turning the lizard upside down he received a phone call from his wife telling him that their second born son had just collapsed. So, he turned the lizard to its normal position and the child rose up (*again*). **Is this elder from your church?** Yes, from one of my prayer houses. The time when he turned the lizard to its normal position the wife called him (*to say*) that now the boy has stood up... so he never killed the lizard and coincidentally, when he was coming from there, though it was not rainy season, from nowhere it just started raining. He tried to keep the medicine safe but to no avail. The moment the medicine got wet then the man started removing his clothes from his body and that was the genesis of his madness. He reached his home completely naked. He was eating abnormal things because of charms. But we thank God that he managed to narrate the whole story to his relatives and they tried to find where he took the charm from and there they found the traditional doctor, and the doctor said, 'no I can't reverse this and I don't (*know*) where I can get medicine to reverse this.' So they came back and started praying, meeting different men of God, up to the end when this man recovered. By the time we were meeting he was a strong ZEC member. This is the story I am remembering that took place here in [name of church] (I B46).

(i) Actually, where we live we have a neighbor, this man has a lot of money and he believes in charms. He went to the witchdoctor and the witchdoctor told him, 'from today onwards you should not put on the shoes.' He has money, he has cars, but he cannot buy shoes to wear, he just puts on slippers. He believed that because he was told that the day he would put on shoes all his money would go away. I am trying to teach the word of God to this man little by little but often, and as of now, I am yet to complete my assignment because he is still holding the belief that if he puts on the shoes his money will go away. This is a true story which is happening here in [name of church]. ... even in town he wears slippers but he has a nice car with slippers, he wears a nice suit with slippers, that's what he believes (I B53).

(j) There is one church member who I believe he believes in charms, yes, this member is doing business, selling groceries. What usually happens is that once you want to buy something from him you find that you buy something costing K100 and you pay K1000. (*Then*) you are given change of K900 but once you reach home, you find that you need to go back and buy something again... so it's like something draws you back. So you go back, you buy, you go home, you find that you still need to buy more and more until the money gets finished on the same day. So, there is a feeling of something drawing you back always, you are always suspicious of the needs, the needs that were not planned to be bought. You're forced to buy them and you realize later that this is useless, I didn't need this. **What is causing that?** It is about the invoked charms, by the words that... are used there, they are the ones that make this into a force... **But how did you know about this thing?** It's because when am buying from others that doesn't happen (I B54).

(k) So there was a certain couple in the church who had a business of Donnas (*doughnuts*). So for their business to run smoothly and that their Donnas should not be left unsold they were using charms. So, after some time it happened the woman was at the market selling the Donnas, she forgot because what they were doing is like... whenever she sold any Donnas she was to put the money under the basin where the charms were laid. Now it happened that on this day the woman just collected the money and left the charms there up until she returned home and the husband noticed in the spiritual realm that something has gone wrong. I will come open to you, this is what happened to the man because this was the confession that the couple made to me. The man said that he noticed that something had gone wrong at the market because the charms, according to him, were connected to his private parts. He was charging as a man, you know what I mean? ...He was charging, that's what was happening and it was the connection between the charms and him... the man went to the market and collected the charms and went back home where he started beating up the wife. The wife came to me and said, 'my husband has beaten me', so I called the man when I came to know what had happened (I B55).

(l) There is a certain man, in the church, when he arrived at ZEC, [name of church], was very rich. But in his history his wife was using charms. Because she was using charms, as of now, he is no longer rich. **Ok, why?** It seems as if there was a commitment with his wife in their riches, but his wife passed away... So, it was like the family agreed to something so that they could get rich. So, since his wife passed away the money is gone (I B74).

(m) As told by a practicing witchdoctor (*while showing the researcher a particular charm*): These charms are for job opportunities... it's like when you are going to look for a job, you just take and tear somewhere. For instance, where there is a button and put it inside... it may be invisible indeed, so mainly that is for security reasons. For example, somebody is going to South Africa- it's a long way- so in fear that maybe the police can grab it, it is protected in that way, so when they reach there they mix it with bath water and bath together (in it) (I B2).

3.5.2.5 Houses and Property

(a) I remember last month there was a woman who came here to the church with her problem, she was sick. Before praying with her I had a time of counseling and during that counseling she came up with something new. I told her that I would not pray with her unless she confessed anything that she did contrary to the word of God. I told her that she should tell me if at all she has any traditional medicine. So what she told me is that in her house she had buried some

charms and medicine in all the corners of the house, and at the doorsteps as part of protection. So I said, 'I cannot pray with you unless you bring that medicine', so she went and brought that medicine which was composed of charms. I asked her why she was using those things and her response was that her grandmother told her to do this for protection. So we burned those charms and prayed with her. And she was fearful because I have heard that when people take these things from the traditional doctor, the witchdoctor sometimes tells them: 'if you burn these things, if you destroy these things, you will go mad or something will go bad with you.' Yes, she told me in that way to say that 'my grandmother advised me not to burn these' (I B23).

(b) I remember there was a certain church elder, this church elder was transferring from one house to another, so he came to me on the following day telling me 'pastor I had a sleepless night but I know the reason, I didn't put some medicine around the house.' Yes, I am controlled by the medicines. So, I said 'no its not (*good*) to use the medicine you need to use God, to rely on God because God is the one who's going to protect you.' He said, 'no, what I have inherited from my parents is that the moment I transfer from one house to another, I may need to use these medicines.' ... **What was it that is protecting himself from?** From the witchcraft... He said that the witches have power that can even kill him or even bring problems to whatever he's doing, that's what he said (I B52).

(c) Secondly, women have kept charms in their homes for protection. Maybe they believe that it is for protection from witches, (*so that they may*) not to enter their house when they are sleeping. They put the charms in all the corners of their house... some use small charms but others they take a plate and take the charm and put it on and put it in the corner of the house. **Is this during door to door that you have seen these things?** No because it is done in secret, and when they hear that the pastor is coming they remove those charms and hide them... (I B63).

(d) Even myself, I am one who believed in charms. I came from a so-called Christian family. My parents are catholic. And I was catholic when I was young. But I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and saviour when I opened my heart to him. So, I turned off from my old living style to the new living style in Jesus Christ. So, when I received Christ as my Lord and my saviour I gave thought to the things I was doing, like keeping charms. So, I removed the charms in my house that were for protection... but first of all I prayed because I was warned that if I do that I will go mad... The witchdoctor, when he was giving me those charms, he said, 'if you want leave out these things you should surrender them to me.' So I got that instruction. So what happened was that I had a time of prayer. So I prayed to God for help. I have seen people who went to school, (*who*) when they got mad, they spoke things they were doing in the past. So, I said (*to God*), 'if you allow me to get mad, I will speak about you.' So I accepted to go mad. So I prayed to God and then took the charms and threw them into the pit which was close to a tree. After I threw the charms into that pit, I held the tree (for five minutes) because I thought that something was going to happen to me, but then I saw that I was normal. Then I went home rejoicing that I hadn't gone mad. So from that time I never do such things (I B66).

(e) As told by a practicing witchdoctor: someone may come to say, 'I am having sleepless nights at home, the witches are troubling me, even my children are often ill... so I organize medicines and I arrange a visit to the house. When I reach there I prepare the protection charms to protect the house... I am aware that the witches enter the house through the corners, so I prepare the charms and put them in the corners. This is done by preparing some water and putting the roots in it, then I dip a brush and spread the water on the corners, all the four corners of the house... These medicines operate like security guards so that when the witches want to force their way in they can fall down and there is evidence that witches fall down and people go to see them (I C1).

(f) For example, we had a funeral one other time. There was a lady who fell sick and her relatives were saying that the sickness was the result of (*her*) being bewitched. So we were able to conduct some Christian counseling whereby we were telling them that what is

paramount is not the issue of being bewitched. We advised them to seek medical treatment but they clung to their belief. They pretended as if they had understood what I was telling them but they secretly went to the herbalist to seek for traditional medicine for the protection of the body. They were told that the lady was being bewitched because she has built a new house. Unfortunately, the lady passed away after a short time... There was some talks here and there saying 'the deceased has been bewitched, we went somewhere (meaning to the herbalist) and they have told us this and that one are responsible for the death of our relative.' So, this created great enmity at that village... they did not do anything but they were just saying '*tionetsana*' ... they were not mentioning or pointing at a particular individual but they were just suspecting each other and just saying we will see. So, in Africa when one says '*tionetsana*' (*we will see*) this is a very dangerous statement because it implies he or she will perform an unspecified (*witchcraft*) action (I B29).

3.5.2.6 Travel

(a) What I want to share with you is that most of the church elders use charms.... yes, because I have got one church elder and one day we were going to Ntcheu for a meeting and we boarded a minibus. When we reached Ntcheu we all came out of the bus except him, and then he came out and advised us to go on with our journey without paying the bus(*fare*). I asked him, 'why are we not paying?', but he just said, 'let's just go' and even the conductor did not ask him (*or say*) 'I need the money.' So, I said, 'why not giving the money?', and so he said, 'ah pastor, I have this charm and I am using this to make people not to realize what they are doing. They just forget what they are doing.' And I said that this is cheating and stealing. But he comfortably said to me that he has been doing those things for quite a long time. So, to me it was just a shock, and I am still working with him and he is also practicing this (I B39).

3.5.2.7 Death and Burial

(a) We have a certain guy in our church (*for whom*) everything was arranged concerning burial, as he was suffering from leprosy... After the arrangement of the burial, after the whole ceremony at home, we went to the cemetery... At the cemetery a relative of the deceased said that you are supposed to put soil but you have to leave four meters (*so as*) not to cover the (*grave*) hole. So people who were helping to cover the soil did that. So, as a church we asked a question: 'What's the meaning of this?' He said, 'we want to pass away (*get rid of*) leprosy in our family.' ... We asked the question when the people were helping with the soil, we said as a church, we will not do this... I told our elders to ask a relative to the deceased and asked the chief... So, the answer was to get rid of leprosy... So after we told our friends they said, it looks like people are practicing charms (I B13).

(b) I was in [*name of town*] when I just graduated from EBCoM... we were praying in a school, so some people came with some leaves in their bags to pray... when a person dies, the thing which I saw was that the people... they do take leaves and put (*them*) in the coffin, laying them on the (*dead*) guy and covering the coffin. So, I asked, 'why do you do this and you know you are a Christian?' They said, 'everyone here, despite that she or he is a Christian or not, we do take this to avoid that (*that*) person resurrects or wakes up... they do have a certain tree (*from*) which they do take leaves and put (*them*) in the coffin (I B13).

(c) Another story that I heard from my church elders is that in the past there was one of the church elders... what happened was that as he passed away, as the pastor went there to attend the funeral, the body was lying there and beside it there was a pole from the gate of a *khola* (*kraal*) for cattle... So, people said it was he because he was practicing magic... So, these are the instructions that are given by witchdoctors as they go to get charms for protection. So, they say, 'before you die tell people that they have to do this and that at your funeral' and they warn that without (*doing*) that something (*bad*) will happen to the people... indeed, failing that (*following the witchdoctors instructions*), he (*the deceased*). would become a zombie... and

when the ladies go to fetch water he will be troubling them, and when people are going to their prospective fields the zombie (*would*) trouble them also... and the time it happened this gentleman was an elder at that time... so people believed and trusted him, but at the end, after he died, they saw a different thing (I B25).

(d) A certain family lost a grandparent at home. So, one of the church elders went there to attend the burial ceremony. But the relative to the deceased failed to go there to attend the burial ceremony because of a transport money problem and it was a long distance. So, when this man went there-normally what happens after burial the following morning, there is a ceremony or ritual called sweeping '*kusesa*'- what happened was that during the actual funeral ceremony, the family of the deceased, they killed a chicken. And the people there used that chicken as relish. But they had to spare or keep the bones of that chicken so that those who did not attend the funeral ceremony when they came they could touch the bones of that chicken. The reason behind this is to chase the spirit of death... that death should not happen again... It's like during the time of sweeping all the relatives are supposed to touch these bones. But those relatives who did not make it on the day of sweeping, those bones are supposed to be carried to where they are staying so that they can also touch the bones. After doing that they believe that no death will take place again (I B36).

(e) There was a funeral as one of our church elders died. And as per tradition the church elders had to clean the dead body. Yes. So before doing that the wife of the deceased asked the church elders if before they cleaned the dead body she could remove some things from the dead body. So, the church elders said 'no, we cannot allow you to that because this is our time. We need to clean the dead body now.' So the wife to the deceased said, 'if you cannot allow me its ok. But may I beg you one thing. If you find a charm please bring it to me.' So the church elders came to me and asked what they should do... I decided to go there with them so that I see myself. So I saw everything with my eyes... It was a charm, very dirty, it was a dirty thing. It was sewed... They were many... on the thread of the sack ... To me it was evidence enough that people are still practicing these things. So as a church we made a decision that we were not going to proceed with the funeral service (I B64).

(f) This issue happened to the family of late pastor, [*name of pastor*]. This family are our church members... we just heard a sudden message that they had lost a child who passed away suddenly, but rumors were that it was because of magic, and (*there were*) signs that it wasn't a normal death. At the time of burial the child was still bleeding in the nose, in the ears and in the eyes. Now, just after a month or a month and half, it was found that the mother of the dead child was going to a vegetable garden where the husband had grown some tomatoes, and on her way the woman heard a calling from their dead child, saying, 'mother, mother please, since I departed from you, I have never eaten something and I am feeling hungry. Hearing that, the woman started running back home, while crying, to tell her husband. The response of the husband was: 'please don't tell anyone, just keep it a secret.' ... then when the rumors hit the whole family, people gathered and resolved that now they should report the issue to the pastor to call for prayers on the incident. I went there and we prayed, from that day at least the issue stopped... **How did he die?** The child was a grown up child and he was doing standard six class. On that day he went to school but when coming back he was complaining of a headache. By sunset at night he was found bleeding in the mouth, nose, ears, and even in the eyes. Other people tried to take the child to the hospital but the father was refusing, saying, 'my child is already dead, don't take him' but the child wasn't yet dead... The actions of the father of the child were clearly showing that he was the one involved in the magic to kill the child because the same day after the burial ceremony the father went about moving, visiting other places, like he went to Balaka... As for this man, he's a tomato farmer, so he wanted to use the child to work in his field through magic (I B44).

3.5.3 Witchcraft/Magic

3.5.3.1 Practicing Witchcraft

(a) Well, one day I was chatting with a certain lady for counselling with my wife... we heard that she was involved in witchcraft. So at first, she refused (*to admit*) that she was a witch... Later on she admitted and requested for prayers... after some time she was asking my wife on how I knew that she was a witch. So my wife said that maybe it's the revelation from God, so it's a matter of confessing, and she said, 'I am ready to confess.'... **did somebody tell you that this lady was practicing witchcraft?** Yes, somebody told me, mainly the mother to this lady. The mother told me that one day her daughter was found in the graveyard early in the morning. And people were asking her 'what are you doing there?' So she said, 'I am just chatting here.' So they asked her 'why are you chatting here, this is a graveyard?' So, her mother came to me and said, 'pastor, can you assist my daughter, she was found in the graveyard last night, but I think she might be a witch.' I called her for counselling where she confessed about that. She said she had been a witch for ten years... she said, 'when we are in the graveyard, we try as much as possible to take that soil where the dead body was buried, and use that one to bewitch others' (I B39).

(b) But apart from that there is the issue of teaching the children witchcraft ...even in the city...yes, I have been meeting different parents complaining about this issue. And at the same time when I tried to interview children who were taught witchcraft they would say yes, and it is Mr. so,so,so who is also a member of the church. How do you do with that? On that one the only step I took was to make sure that those children are prayed over. I do some counseling with them and their parents because in most cases when these things are happening you find that there is a war between the parents of the child and the one who is teaching the child. So I tried to counsel the parents separately and the children separately. I used to teach children the word of God which has also helped me to create a room of meeting young children within the church. I used to meet children on Tuesdays around 2pm so that I can hear more stories from them so that when we are praying for them we should pray according to what it is affecting them (I B55).

(c) It happened that on one of our communion Sundays, we had an extended service, we were praying for people. A man came forward, and I prayed for him. Then he went to sit down. Then he started behaving awkwardly... Eventually I was told by one of the church elders that a certain man was looking for me. So he was outside... shouting with some wild stuff... So I, together with my pastor friend, went out... a few months later I was talking to one of the church elders, and I was sharing with him what happened on that particular Sunday. The church elder, said, 'ah the person is a sing'anga. He is the medicine man. Actually where he stays there is a sign post that he is asing'anga', and I was surprised. Then I connected that with the way he was behaving... (I B71).

(d) Last year a lady from Mozambique, but she is a member of ZEC, it was revealed that she was practicing witchcraft.... here at EBCoM (*Evangelical Bible College of Malawi*)... She told me that she learnt witchcraft from her father... she was the wife of one of the pastors here. **She confessed and repented?** Yes, before her husband. Her husband told me that he was wondering about her character (I B72).

(e) We used to have a night of prayers, prayer and fasting. One day... we had a child who confessed that he had been taught witchcraft. So, after revealing this, the child said, 'I am failing to stay here because my mother has taken me to this place (*but I*) am not feeling comfortable with this place. The child was feeling uncomfortable to be in the place of prayers...then we started asking questions to the child... the child said he was given food during the day by somebody else then during the night, while sleeping, he heard that person calling his name and unfortunately he found himself out of the house. he said, 'when the

witches come they just call my name and I get out through the corner, not by the door, I just find myself out of the house once they call me.' Then we intensified prayer after hearing this, praying for the child. After some days he started testifying that the witches had stopped coming to pick him (I B6).

(f) I was doing business, I used to make doughs (*donuts*). I had been making that for a very long period and the church used to say that they cannot be giving welfare offerings to this pastor because they are doing a business... the time came when ... I bake the dough by day, at noon, but by evening all of them were found rotten, they have gone bad... they last for days normally, yeah, but this time around within just hours they went rotten. Then I used to blame myself, saying, 'maybe I bought expired flour so I need to buy from a different seller', and I changed and bought the flour from another source but the same thing happened. Then I said, 'no, I don't understand, maybe this one also is from a bad source, let me get flour from my friend who also does the same business. So we exchanged; I gave her my flour...and she gave me her flour... I baked the dough using the flour I got from my friend, and she also baked using my flour that goes rotten just in hours. So to me, the same thing happened, that in the evening they were rotten, while for my friend, things were normal, they stayed for three days until she sold them all without even one going bad... then came a certain man... he revealed that such a person who bought (*from*) me on such and such a day is the one doing this... then he proceeded by advising me: 'if you can go somewhere to get charms in order to counter this, it can help you.' But I refused... (I B9).

(g) When we talk about shortage of rainfall, they (*the people*) believe that some people have powers to tie the rainfall...preventing it... making the rainfall not to come in their areas. So in this issue we have a challenge that even our members are tempted to engage in mob justice to the elderly people thinking that they are the ones responsible for withholding the rainfall... They believe that once a person has grown old then he or she is a witch... when they catch these people they just beat them to the extent of death... a traditional doctor came here and said, 'since the rain is not coming, I want to do my magic so that the rain should come'. So, he did his magic and the rain came. I said, 'no, these are demonic spirits, you don't have to believe this' (I B30).

3.5.3.2 Protection from Witchcraft (*kutsilika*)

(a) Yes, for example, I found one of my elders, the church secretary, he was cutting himself at the crossroads. And when he saw (*me*) the pastor he ran to his house because the church elder was ashamed. He was cutting himself together with his child... it was for protection, to protect themselves from witchcraft. **Why at that particular place, at the cross roads?** It's like '*zizimba*', I don't know how I can put it, but like when those witches reached there they would not be able to pass... Yes. Like a barrier (I B34).

(b) *As told by a practicing witchdoctor*: witches cannot even attempt to come to me because they know that they will get hurt if they play with me... What happens is that when we apply the charms to somebody, they stop fearing the witches because whatever act of witchcraft stops once I treat them... we cut on the forehead because the head is responsible to see everything first, so it is the one that needs to be protected since it is most of the times the targeted area... the hands are the ones that touch the evil things, for example, if you're drinking beer and somebody has put poison in the beer, the cup fall down from your hands. So the hands detect it because they are protected, and the feet are the ones that can step on the charms and hurt you, so if (they are) protected, whatever you step on, you are just safe (I C1).

3.5.3.3 Killing of Enemies and Witches

(a) There are lightnings, they use lightnings (*which*) we call '*ziphaliwal'i*' when the rain comes... they do these things through axes. They do use axes as sometimes they take axes and put

them on the fire... then they throw it. Then the sound comes as pooooohh! Even they kill others through those charms (I B8).

(b) Even when people are not on good terms, they also seek traditional doctors for protection against their enemies. This is common in rural areas.... but you know, for your understanding, these things are done privately. Maybe, at some time after one has become a born again, (*this*) is when he can reveal what he was doing before. Charms and traditional medicine are real and happen. In rural areas even the issue of lightning is common. People believe that (when) lightening hits and kills people then somebody (*e/se*) has a hand in it because they believe that this cannot always be natural (I B16).

(c) Let me just emphasize that here in Malawi people believe in witchcraft. We have seen other children revealing to us that so and so took us to go to the graveyard. So to my church elders I can say, 'no, we have to be very careful because there is a spirit of hallucination where one can just work up and say things which are not true... when somebody is just speaking things without evidence, like... 'this one is a witch' but without evidence, like a mentally disturbed person... This is what affects others and I warned the church on this, because you can burn the house of somebody alleging him or her to be a witch without concrete evidence... this can cause the destruction of properties and the life of an innocent person (I B27).

3.5.3.4 Witchcraft Related Occurrences

3.5.3.4.1 Magic Translocation

(a) What I saw at [*name of church*] ZEC, the most dangerous thing that I saw there which I can share is this one... we cross a river in order to reach [*name of church*] ZEC and one day it flooded. Now this was the time when I had ministered at the church and I was going home. So, I found the river flooded. The church members came, they said, 'the river is flooded, what are you going to do in order for yourself to reach home?' So I said, 'no I will wait for the water to pass'. When I said so somebody said 'come near', and he said, 'close your eyes'. So then he said 'close your eyes and touch me'. After a moment he said, 'do you want to go to your home?' When I said, 'yes' I found myself on the other side of the river, and the guy was on the other side again. **But was this a member of the church?** Yes... I said, 'ok bye, see you next week, go well on the other side.' **But how did you feel?** I felt fearful, I was fearing (I B2).

3.5.3.4.2 A Magic Gourd (*nsupa*)

(a) This is what I can witness that I saw (*to do*) with my church member when I was doing door to door visitation...I asked my member, saying 'what is that in the corner?' Then it was the gourd (*nsupa*) that answered my question saying, 'we are only visitors.' Then I called all the church members and I said, 'no, I am going to break this because a church elder must not keep these things.' ... so I broke it, then when I broke it the owner got sick for three weeks... then when we prayed very much about his sickness he got well and up to this day he is alive (I B2).

3.5.3.4.3 Bloodsuckers and Albino Killings

(a) **Did that issue of blood suckers come there to [*name of church*]?** Yes... Both the community and the church people were scared, but only just a few people had the courage to say, 'in Jesus name they will not succeed.' We have seen people sleeping outside...because they were saying that they can easily trace the blood suckers as to where they are coming from. When they were sleeping in the house they made sure that they put a paunch on the doors and windows or wherever they could manage to so that the blood suckers would bump into those things. So we know in that in the area a lot of things are happening, even the issue of albino killings... They are being killed and we have seen two of them with the cases in the hands of the police... They believe (*people*) that the bones can magically be used for

prosperity. And they say there is a market in Mozambique. The government tried to go there to find out if there is a business for that but they didn't find it (I B27).

3.5.3.4.4 Inexplicable Child Abduction

(a) A certain tragedy happened in the community. There was an eagle that took a child who was playing with his friends somewhere. An eagle came to pick that child away... and many people around there believed that the child was not picked by an eagle because the question that was asked there was: 'How can an eagle have picked the child because the child was bigger than the eagle?' So they (*the people*) were thinking that maybe there were some witches that did that... so they went to a certain witchdoctor to find out about the issue and who had done it, and the witchdoctor explained everything to those people, most especially to the parents of that child, that the child was taken, but magically... so some members (*of the church*) were just explaining it like this: 'I think it is not good just maybe to rely upon prayer because if you rely upon prayer only, these magic issues can touch you in one way or another (I B32).

3.5.4 Spirits and Cultural Traditions

3.5.4.1 Ancestral Spirits

(a) There is also another person, ah, that one was from the same area of Thyolo. It was during the burying of his father, he said, 'I need to use medicine to protect myself', so he tried to use charms because he said that 'if I will not use charms the spirit of my father will come and bring problems to my family.' So I said, 'no we need to trust God alone.' ... **so where does he put those charms?** Ah, they used to drink (*them*), him, the family, the children, they all drink. Some other charms are put beside the sleeping bed so that during the night those spirits should not come into the house... He said maybe the spirit can become angry and kill him... what they believe is that when the spirit joins the ancestors, there the ancestors may also report on what wrong these people have been committing. So, the spirit can come and instead of telling him the right things to do, it can just kill him. So, he was trying to protect himself... there are people there who believe in ancestors but others don't believe (I B52).

(b) People here believe much on traditional medicine and charms. They also believe in offering sacrifices. For example, there was a drought in 2008 which was accompanied by *Ntchemberezandonda* (*army worms*). So people here, more especially chiefs, met and cooked a certain type of food composed of many crops like beans, millet, rice, and maize. They mixed it all together and went in the fields and scattered it... It was part of sacrifice to God so that they can chase away the fate of drought. So when they were doing this they were singing songs like this one, '*simukuyenera kukhala kuno, chokani kuno dzipitani kwanu, chokani kuno dzipitani kwanu chokani kuno dzipitani kwanu*' ('you are not supposed to be here, leave here, go away, leave here, go away, leave here, go away'). They did that for a period of two days. So, to them they believed that they had chased the fate or evil spirits away... some of the (*church*) members here joined this because they come from those villages. So when they came to the church I asked them, 'what have you done? Is it right to do that?' So, they said, 'it's our chiefs who have forced us to do so, we couldn't do otherwise.' **So, these sacrifices....were they offered directly to God or to the ancestors?** To their ancestors and not directly to God. They believe that if the sacrifice was accepted by the ancestors then they... then God will hear the ancestors because they believe that the ancestors are the living-dead. They believe that the spirits of the ancestors are still alive (I B23).

3.5.4.2 Gule Wamkulu (Nyau)

(a) So it was a dangerous period for me because the *gule wamkulu* people rely on charms. When I taught them they become furious, especially those who did not accept Jesus as their

Lord and Savior. So they formed a mob against me so that they could kill me... They sent a lightening to kill me but it failed. We were three at my house when the lightening hit, my two friends fainted but I did not... After this plot, the Traditional Authority there was still not happy with me, more especially that I was teaching that *gule wamkulu* (great dance) is a manmade thing... because according to the Chewa they believe that *gule wamkulu* is just a wild animal and for one to have it there must be some special people who are good at fishing it. So if I say, 'no it's just a human being', then am going against their belief. So they sent four men dressed in *gule wamkulu* (animal 'masks') with dangerous weapons, clubs, bows and arrows, so that they should kill me. But the power of God was upon me, I did not fear and I started beating them one by one and they began to cry... people who were around said, 'wow these are human beings.' So then they stood up and ran away towards the grave yard... because the grave yard is their camp... when the chief heard about this, he sent seventy four *gule wamkulu*.... They stopped at a distance of almost fifty meters away from my house gazing, pointing and shouting at me saying, 'you, we will kill you.' But none of them came to attack me... They reported that I had a fearful appearance and started talking... 'If one of us dares to attack this man, he will be killed', so they retreated. After taking away their masks some of them came and reported to me that they were part of that gang sent by the chief to kill me. **Some people from the church?** ...yes, yes, yes (I B18).

(b) And I was chatting with someone who was also a member of *gule wamkulu* and he has repented from *gule wamkulu* to Christianity. He said that he lost his manhood to be powerful when he was a member of *gule wamkulu*. As I'm talking he lost one of his testicles... He was advised by witch doctors that in order for him to be more powerful he had to do that, to remove one of his testicles, like medicines. But one day he met one who was more powerful than him. In Chichewa we say '*anamuchesula*'. That is to make you lose power. That is because someone is more powerful than you, he makes you lose power. Yes as of now he has one testicle because he wanted to perform some miracles. And he can't marry now. So he has been coming to me (*asking for prayer*) (I B19).

(c) They use it (charms) for harming others, whenever they disagree with each other. And there are seasons like the one we have now, (rainy season), these things are very common... They use this rainy season to send each other lightening... they use lightening as a weapon to kill other people if they have a problem with them...yes... people are dying right now... (*people*) don't say anything because they are also scared that if we can say something we will be the next victim... They conduct the funeral ceremony quietly just as any type of death. It's like part of their tradition and it is normal to them... **so you are facing a strong challenge from the Nyau?** ... yes, yes, it is not dead it is still alive and powerful (I B20).

(d) I remember one day we went to a certain area which was a *Nyau* dominated area. We went to the chief of that area, (chiefs are the custodians of *gule wamkulu* or Chewa culture), to seek permission for the preaching of the Gospel, and he said that we are welcome. The same days that the crusade was scheduled- that was the weekend days from Friday to Sunday, we were planting a church there- surprisingly when we tried to put on the genset (*generator*), it was not responding. We were not able to go back home to hire another genset, so the chief said, 'well I am sorry the *gule wamkulu* have their function today, right now at this ground. So these things that you are experiencing are not a result of technical fault this is *gule wamkulu* people, and I know what I am talking about.' We said, 'look chief, we came to seek permission from you and you gave us a ground, now why did you also accept the *gule wamkulu* to use the same ground?' Whilst we were discussing with the chief, *gule wamkulu* was all over the ground and the chief had to go and convince the elders of the *gule wamkulu*, and say to them, 'I first gave permission to these people so please go back and yours will be next week.' So they accepted it though they were reluctant... so they went to the nearby graveyard. They just sat on the tombs but our equipment did not respond up until the chief talked to one of the elders of *gule wamkulu*... The chief called me and said, 'these people are looking for ten thousand kwacha. If I give them the money they are ready to make the equipment work. The chief wanted me to pay

that money, but I said to him that what I wanted was evangelism, the issue of money was between him and the *gule wamkulu* team. While this discussion was in progress, intercessors were in a classroom praying. So, the chief pledged to pay the money and requested them to allow us to do evangelism. That's how it went... **so what was actually preventing the equipment from working?** I think it was a charm they had as *gule wamkulu*. They had a charm...to stop it...to stop our program (I B55).

(e) There is a certain area where we went and planted a church... it is in the remote area, and at that particular area there were *gule wamkulu* and this church had a lot of members who were initiated by Nyau. So we had a problem since in their custom as *Nyau* members, at first before they joined the church, they were not attending church services because on Sunday it was their special day for the preparation of *Nyau* and whatever. So, we experienced absenteeism in church services. When I went there on Sundays I found only very little children as if I was ministering to Sunday school but the elder ones were not attending church services... they were not differentiating (*between*) Christian religion and *Nyau* culture since they were brought up in that particular set up, so whatever was taking place in the *Nyau* society they were also participating in... (I B1).

3.5.4.3 Chinamwali (Girls'Initiation)

(a) When we went there we found the church members practicing African Tradition Religion, practicing charms, especially for the young ladies; we call it *chinamwali* in Chichewa language (*initiation*)... They took them to the river... and immersed them into the water. They took some flowers- but dedicated to the evil spirits- then they threw here (on the head) of the young woman as a power to them. Then after there they took them to the field to advise them how to live. So we struggled with that behavior until we came to the point the church agreed that this is real *chikunja*, meaning outside God's word (paganism), outside behavior. **So what was that power supposed to do for the young girls?** To make them barren... from production... there are two things: the barren(ess), and when the offspring comes... she (*the baby*) will die on the same spot. She can do that for several times, six, seven times but she hasn't any child to hold onto in their hands (I B8).

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, through both the discussion on charm-usage and the anthology of stories, the continued use of traditional religious charms/medicine by members and adherents of the ZEC churches in South-Central Malawi has been highlighted. We have seen in the overview that a variety of charms and medicines are being used by many, across the board, in rural, peri-urban and urban settings, and for a number of different reasons. The main motivators are: (1) fear of witchcraft related activities, resulting in suffering and death, and (2) traditional cultural pressure to comply, and the related expectations, activities and fears, including *gule wamkulu* and malevolent spirits (*ziwanda*). Within this dynamic there are a number of purposes promoting charm-dependency, including: on the one hand, the need to self-protect. That is, to protect one's life, family, health, business and employment interests, property, fields, marriage, pregnancy and travel. The charms/medicine used for these purposes may be referred to as protective or 'defensive' charms. On the other hand, traditional charms/medicines are also commonly used for self-enhancement (or life-enhancement),

such as acquiring wealth or prospering in business, attracting a lover or a husband and keeping them faithful, falling pregnant, improving 'bed performance', gaining and keeping jobs, growing bumper crops and even living a long life. Unfortunately, any enhancement to the *moyo* or life-force of one individual is understood to be at the expense of others in the circumscribed cosmos. Moreover, in this dynamic and synthetic milieu, people believe that there is a cause behind every effect- and that cause is personal- such that most negative experiences and suffering is attributed to other individuals with malicious intent. Indeed, charms are also used for more nefarious and malicious reasons such as retribution, harming others intentionally or even killing them. Thus everyone needs to protect what they have, but also to know who is responsible for their ill-fortune. For these reasons witchdoctors and diviners/sorcerers are indispensable mediators. Many in the ZEC churches remain charm-dependent and even many elders and pastors are not immune but susceptible, immersed in contexts where life is still governed by traditional religious thinking and practice, and succumbing to the temptations.

In the next chapter the author enumerates eight foundational worldview motifs which characterize ATR beliefs and practice in the elect demographic and illustrates how these deep-seated motifs animate and perpetuate the kind of charm-dependency articulated above.

CHAPTER FOUR

ATR Worldview Motifs and Charm-Dependency

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher identifies and discusses common motifs in African worldview/s, with a specific focus on Malawi, which stimulate, animate and perpetuate charm-usage and related practices. 'Local' worldview motifs, rooted in the wider African Traditional worldview/s, are discussed with reference to their impact on charm-dependency. Underlying deep-level worldview assumptions or motifs are shown to stimulate motives for charm-dependency and so animate practice. Links between worldview and practice are established by means of referencing grass roots stories from the anthology and various charm-dependent practices as expressed in the interviews (Chapter Three), and where applicable assertions are substantiated by relevant information provided during the Focus Group sessions (Chapter Five). The author also draws from his own observations as a participant observer in the milieu.

4.2 Traditional Worldview Motifs

The significance of worldview for transformation has already been established in Chapter Two. We need to understand **why** people think and act the way they do. Kraft (1979:53) explains that, "Cultures pattern perceptions of reality into conceptualizations of what reality can or should be, what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible, and impossible." These conceptualizations are what we call 'worldview' and it is some of these conceptualizations which stimulate and animate charm-dependency, making the habit very difficult to break. Since many scholars have written widely on the subject of ATR worldview and practice (cf. Ferdinando 1999:1-133; Nyirongo 1997; Mbiti 1970, 1976; Han 2013:69-82; Rasmussen 2009:22-28, 45-61), this section represents a careful selection and synthesis of material pertinent to the direct impact of ATR worldview on the practice of charm-dependency in the stated demographic. Moreover, while there are at least five significant people groups represented in the stated demographic, including the Chewa, Lomwe, Senna, Yawo, and Tumbuka, the researcher narrows the focus to the Chewa people group.⁵⁷ The Chewa are

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive study of Chewa history consult Ntara (1973). Traditionally, the Chewa people are based primarily in the central plateau in the Central Region and in the Shire valley in the Southern Region of Malawi, as well

widespread, constituting approximately 36% of the Malawian population (WorldAtlas: online, 31 May 2019 cf. indexmundi: online, 31 May 2019). They are also very well represented in ZEC churches, and have intermarried across the various tribal lines influencing many aspects of life.⁵⁸ Therefore, what follows is not intended to be a detailed study on ATR or African worldview/s in general, or a comprehensive study on Chewa ATR or worldview '*per se*'. Other scholars have done detailed studies on particular facets of Chewa religion. Marwick (1952) discussed witchcraft and witch beliefs among the Chewa. Schoffeleers (1999:132-209) and Amanze (2003) focused on the territorial rain cults, while scholars such as Boucher (2012) and Kadyampakeni (2004:33-56) researched the Nyau. Schoffeleers' (1997) also enumerates a number of traditional beliefs and rituals in Southern and Central Malawi. Ott (2000) discusses the Chewa at length, examining the creation myths, rain shrines, Nyau and worldview but his interest is in African images and art. Van Breugal (2001) covers Chewa Traditional Religion in great detail and his work is seminal in the field. Wendland (2005:63-97), in his book, 'Sewero', outlines 'Aspects of a Traditional Chewa Religious World-View' but his work covers the Zambian context. Beaton (2015:125-149) following Wendland, focused on the Malawian context, but lacks the necessary field research findings to substantiate his assertions. In this section, the author draws from all of these resources, particularly the last two, integrating the 'local' material with a wider literary-compileative study of ATR worldview and practice, his field research findings, and his ongoing experience as a participant observer in the milieu, to demonstrate how and why the traditional belief system continues to influence contemporary religious practice, particularly charm-usage. This discussion of worldview and contextual background is apposite but not comprehensive, even for this study.⁵⁹

Through the analysis of the interviews (cf. 3.4.1-3.4.3.3), and borne out by the contents of the anthology (cf. 3.5.1.1-3.5.5.3) and the Focus Group discussions (Chapter Five), the three primary motivating factors or purposes for charm-usage (dependency) are: (1) combating witchcraft related activities which create fears related to suffering, including loss of life-force, fortune, property, health etc. and resulting ultimately in death, by acquiring specific self-protection, (2) the cultural pressure/expectation/desire to follow traditional wisdom and alleviate the associated fears of ostracism or retribution from family members, the wider community or even the ancestral spirits, if cultural expectations and/or taboos are broken and harmony disrupted, and (3) personal self-promotion or life-enhancement, almost always at the expense

as in Eastern Zambia and Western Mozambique. Chewa numbers are increasing in the South, particularly in the burgeoning cities and townships.

⁵⁸ The General Secretary of the ZEC explained that the Chewa are the most well represented people group in the ZEC churches in our elect demographic (Interview B1: January 2019).

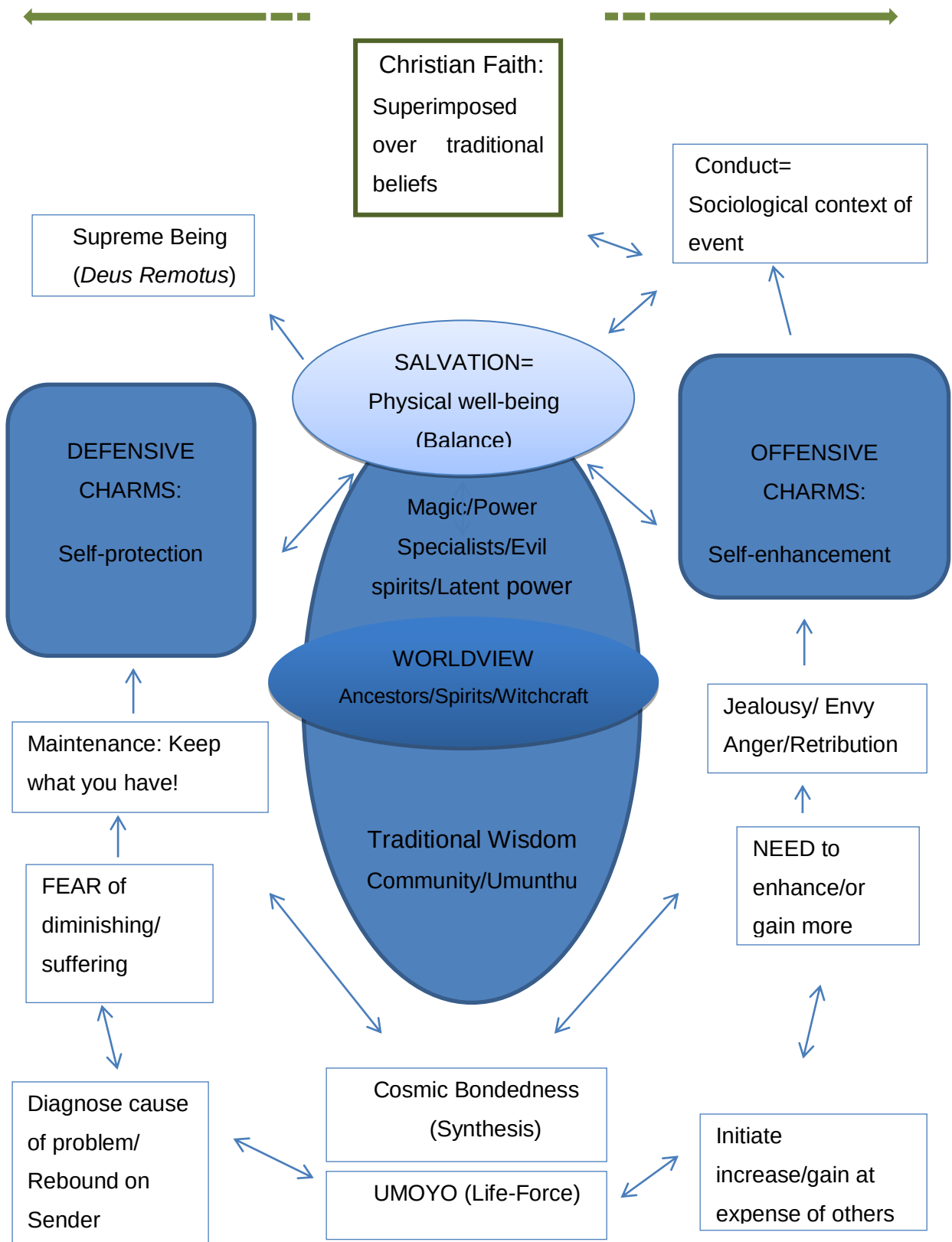
⁵⁹ Further contextual foundations are laid in Chapter Five, as arising from the content of the Focus Groups. In particular, contextual information on the hierarchical gradation/authority in the spirit world and in society, the traditional roles of ancestors (especially traditional mediation), and beliefs relating to death and the future (eschatology), is discussed.

of others and usually through witchcraft, including retaliation or retribution. At the 'heart' or center of all of this lies the perceived need to take care of the 'Self'. That is, to alleviate fear/s in a spiritual and physical milieu fraught with dangers to one's life and well-being, by means of 'self- protection' through the use of 'defensive' charms/medicine, or 'self-enhancement' by means of 'offensive' charms /medicine. Lying behind, or animating these primary purposes or motivations, is a backcloth of historical ATR beliefs and practices which influence the worldview perspectives from which people operate.

The following eight 'worldview motifs' have been identified as directly animating and perpetuating charm-dependency. Here they are discussed to establish a direct relationship between worldview motifs and practice by means of providing apposite examples, to show **how and why** particular motifs promote charm-dependency. Each worldview motif is articulated in the form of a catchphrase, and the list is meant to read like the pertinent section of an ATR, South-Central Malawian, Chewa, 'statement of faith'.⁶⁰ We believe in: (1) 'a remote and practically unapproachable Supreme Being', (2) 'cosmic holism (bondedness)', (3) 'the power of *umoyo* (life-force)', (4) 'salvation as physical wellbeing 'here and now'', (5) 'identity and purpose rooted in community', (6) 'the authority of traditional wisdom and experience', (7) 'witchcraft as integral to life', and (8) 'the indispensability of traditional religious charms'

In order to provide a graphic overview, the author attempts to display the entire dynamic in **Figure 6** on the following page, demonstrating the integral relationship between deep-seated worldview motifs and the animation/perpetuation of charm-dependency:

⁶⁰ An ordinary Malawian person would neither categorize nor label his traditional religious beliefs in this way. Nevertheless, they are there, causing him/her to perpetuate certain practices.



4.2.1 'A Remote, Practically Unapproachable Supreme Being'

4.2.1.1 The 'High God'

'High God' worship is evident in the religious history of South-Central Malawi. The traditional Chewa names for the Supreme Being demonstrate their belief in his existence and tell us much about his role: *Chauta*- 'the great one of the rainbow'; *Mulungu*- 'the great personal being who puts things together straight'; *Namalenga*- God the creator (maker) of the heavens and the world, including mankind'; *Mphambe*- 'God of the power of thunder and lightning bringing rain'; *Leza*- 'God the sustainer of man'; and *Chisumphu*- 'God the giver of rain' (Van Breugal 2001:29-33; Amanze 2003:125-141; Ott 2000:335-336). Sanneh (2003:18), points out that continuity with traditional nomenclature (names for God) has proved helpful to Christian expansion. However, we cannot simply re-create God in the image of the receptor culture for the sake of expedience. For example, in our context the common name for God, '*Mulungu*', is helpful as it is understood to be linked to the verb *kulungama* (to be straight) or the verb *kulunga* (to put together rightly). The term then refers to one who is upright (van Breugel 2001:30-31). However, another Chewa name for God, '*Chisumphu*', was used primarily in reference to rain sacrifices at the rain shrines, made to and through ancestral spirits, thus the association is misleading (PFG 6). Furthermore, the Chewa have a highly developed concept of the motherhood of God, probably "based on the close relationship that exists between the mother and the child on the principle of matrilineage in which the ancestress is thought to be the founder of the family, lineage, clan, tribe and the Chewa nation" (Amanze 2003:141) (PFG 6).⁶¹ The motherhood concept focuses on God as '*Leza*', the sustainer or cherisher of mankind. However, this does not constitute anything like the holistic Biblical picture of a Father/mother, personally concerned for and involved with his/her children in an immanent way.

Belief in the Supreme Being has two key conceptions, namely, his transcendence and immanence. In general terms, God is understood to be **transcendent** since he does not involve himself directly in daily affairs, neither is he working all things together towards a planned, predestined consummation (Hara 2008:163 cf. van Wyk 2006:706). God is remote and "rarely the immediate subject of cultic activity" (Ferdinando 1999:30). Indeed, in Malawi, the Supreme Being is understood to have created (SFG 2) and is traditionally pointed to in relation to events or circumstances beyond man's ability to solve or explain (Hara 2008:138). 'Worship' has always 'diffused', dependent on mediators, practiced by means of the veneration of ancestors and certain mystical divinized figures, and characterized by spirit mediumship, spirit representation in the rain-shrine cults and Nyau societies of Malawi (Schofeleers 1999:132-147; 200:66-96; Kadyampakeni 2004:33-40; Nkunika 2004:41-56). Thus the Supreme Being is not

⁶¹ One student-pastor suggested that Makewana might be the closest Chewa parallel to God, the Father of mankind. Earthly fathers are often perceived as harsh disciplinarians, demanding respect (SFG 6).

understood to be directly approachable in Chewa traditional religion. Moreover, the Great Spirit certainly cannot enter a human being, that is only for the smaller spirits (PFG 1; PFG 7; SFG 7), because he is dangerous and can never be possessed by man (SFG 1).

To be sure, Chewa traditional religion acknowledges a Supreme Being, a divinized human being, Mbona, representative spirits (e.g. the great pythons, Thunga and Napolo), special divining spirits (e.g. rain shrine priestesses like Makewana), ancestral spirits, and their human representatives (*Gule wamkulu*), evil spirits (*ziwanda*), human power specialists, as well as the power of traditional charms (Schoffeleers 1999, 2000; Ott 2000; Amanze 2003; Linden 1999; Vail 1999; Nkuika 2004; Kadyampakeni 2004; Hara 2008) (cf. PFG 4; PFG 5; SFG 5). Nevertheless, God, the Supreme Being is still “the exulted one ... high above all other divinities, all spirits and men”, but He, “... seems to be removed ... And He must be approached through intermediaries” (O’ Donovan 1995:41). A pastor explained that “people can’t see God in a crisis so they must go to the ancestors” (PFG 1). Practically, He is perceived to be uninvolved in daily life, being primarily, “in and beyond the past” (Mbiti 1970:12). For the Chewa people, ‘*Chauta*’, has relatively little to do with human beings.

However, God is not understood by all Africans to be absent from His world (*Deus remotus*) in a deistic sense, and even the Chewa depend on him for rain and fecundity. Moreover, Kalilombe (2007:7) rightly contends that the Chewa distinguish between “the sphere of ‘immanent causality’ where they should be able to fend for themselves, and another, the sphere of ‘transcendent causality’, for which they needed God.” While the former refers to relationships within the community (including among men, ancestors and the bush), the latter refers to extraordinary events such as droughts, epidemics and wars. Here God is “urgently real” (Idowu 1962:202), but even so, one must approach God through the appropriate mediators (I B23; I B39). At best this might be described as a ‘diffused immanence’. However, Wendland et al (2007:104) also rightly point out that even the Chewa, for whom God usually stands at a great distance, acknowledge God as **immanent** in terms of being one with his creation and sharing a form of solidarity with the helpless.

4.2.1.2 The ‘Kaphirintiwa Myth’

The literal meaning of the word ‘*kaphirintiwa*’ is ‘hill-that-leaves-traces-behind’ and as Likupe (2011:17) writes: “Among the various Malawian creation stories, the Kaphirintiwa account stands prominent in its explication of the conception of an immanent and transcendent God, the origin of the world, human beings, animals, plants and the presence of evil and suffering in the world.” While various creation myths are orally passed down from generation to generation (cf. Van Breugal 2001:34-38), it is the *kaphirintiwa* myth, and one version in particular, which has wide popular appeal, providing a more detailed explanation of events which forms the bedrock

of much of Malawi's historical Traditional Religious practice (Ott 2000:161-162; Schoffeleers 2000:22-33; Van Breugal 2001:34; Chakanza 1987:4-8). This is the oral tradition recorded by Ott (2000:159-160), as well as Schoffeleers (1997:22-23), and Likupe (2011:16-17):

In the beginning there was Chiuta (god) and the earth. Chiuta lifted the sky. Below him was the earth waterless and lifeless. One day dark clouds filled up and covered the sky. Lightning flashed and claps of thunder rent the air. The sky opened and in a great shower of rain down came Chiuta, the first man and woman, and all the animals. They landed on Kaphirintiwa, a flat topped hill in the mountains of Dzalanyama. Afterwards the ground where they landed turned to rock, and footprints and the tracks of many animals can be seen there to this day. The man's footprints are larger than the woman's and you can see also the imprints of the hoe, a winnowing basket and a mortar. Plants and trees grew on the earth, yielding abundant food and God, man and the animals lived together in happiness and peace. One day, man was playing with two sticks, a soft one and a hard one. He twirled them together and accidentally invented fire. Everyone warned him to stop but he would not listen. The grassland was set alight and there was great confusion. Among the animals the dog and the goat ran to man for protection, but the elephant, the lion and their companions ran away full of rage against him. The chameleon escaped by climbing to the top of a tree. He called to God to follow him but Chiuta answered that he was too old to climb. When the spider heard this he spun a fine thread and thus lifted God to safety. So God was driven from the earth by the wickedness of man and as he ascended he pronounced that henceforth man must die and shine forth in the heavens.

Schoffeleers (2000:31-32) suggests that it is possible to read the myth in four ways: as a factual statement about man's origins; as a cosmological account of, and reflection on, the seasons; as a theological substratum of rain rituals; and as a reflection on the main events of the human lifecycle. Whatever the case, the key motifs running through the myth reveal much about the traditional conceptions of God. Firstly, we note the initial harmony between God and his creation (animals and human beings) and his presence amongst them in the world's nascent stage (Ott 2000:160; Likupe 2011:17-18). Secondly, the Chewa names for God reveal their primordial conceptions of him as portrayed in the myth: "*Leza* (nurturer), *Namalenga* (creator), *Mphambe* (thunder), *Chiuta/Chauta* (the great rainbow), and *Chisumphi* (the great rainmaker)" (Likupe 2011:18 cf. Ott 2000:160 and Chakanza 1987:4). Thirdly, when men erred by creating fire they disrupted unity and harmony, creating division, enmity and separation between man and God, man and animals, the animals themselves, and man and the environment which he harmed. Fourthly, as a result *Chiuta* (God) physically withdrew himself from the earth, although he required help from the spider to do so. His withdrawal surely signifies his abdication from direct, personal, involvement in the affairs of the world he created. While some scholars like Likupe (2011:18) want to see *Chiuta's* flight as revelatory in a positive sense, highlighting both his immanence and transcendence (cf. Ott 2000:160), to the author's mind, such an interpretation ignores the rest of the myth. *Chiuta* is susceptible to accusations of vulnerability

and weakness, given that he was driven from the earth by man's wickedness and seemed incapable of saving himself (Kalilombe 2007:6-7). Fifthly, God pronounced a harsh judgment on man, decreeing that all men were to die. An alternate creation myth tells how God was unsure and wanted to determine whether man should die or not, so he sent a chameleon ('*birimankhwe*') to give man the message that if he died he would come back to life again. However, the chameleon took so long that God sent a lizard ('*gulo*') with another message: to tell man that if he died, he would die for good. Since the lizard arrived and delivered the message long before the chameleon did, people began to die (Van Breugal 2001:37). In another creation myth when men die they are to go on up high with God to be his slaves (Van Breugal 2001:135-136). Clearly, in these myths God's conduct might be perceived as capricious, even vengeful. It seems illogical to argue that God is understood to be entirely benevolent in the light of the myth/s. Finally, the abundant rain in the *Kaphirintiwa* myth symbolizes the paradise of the primordial creation with its unified cosmos and the fire symbolizes the source of enmity, destruction and death. Ott (2000:160) writes that, "The dual structure and movement corresponds to the actual climactic conditions of the country." There are certainly distinct seasons in Malawi (Schoffeleers 2000:26, 61). In the rainy season in Malawi the land is fertile, the bush is verdant and fields are cultivated and harvested (a veritable picture of harmony). The hot season, on the other hand, is one of disharmony, anxiety, and potential death by starvation as food supplies run low or are exhausted. During this season the smoke and the blackening of the land caused by the traditional burning of the leaves and gardens (*munda*) is reminiscent of the damage caused by the primordial fire. It is also possibly suggestive of the gathering rain clouds, readying themselves to restore order and harmony to the cosmos (Ott 2000:160-161). God is so closely identified with the rain that people in the Nsanje district in the South of Malawi use one word to describe both- '*Mulungu*' (Schoffeleers 2000:27). Even so, praying for rain is traditionally done through the ancestral spirits as mediators (Van Breugal 2001:59-63; Ott 2000:163), and as Van Breugal (2001:40) acknowledges, there are times when Chiuta withholds rain to punish man. A pastor shared his perspective: "God is generally benevolent "but when we are disobedient to him, Chauta will punish when one commits a sin" (PFG 2). And this punishment is not understood to be constructive discipline but rather it is perceived in a negative light (SFG 2).

In summary, while the Chewa do believe that the Supreme Being is a spirit (SFG 7), and he is generally benevolent, the one from whom creation (PFG 6), fecundity and rain come (Van Breugal 2001:38) (PFG 6), in the light of the *Kaphirintiwa* myth, God is clearly not above reproach or wholly consistent (PFG 6). Although the High God's names are used in rain prayers, it is the ancestors who function as the intermediaries, and God may or may not provide rain, depending on human performance (PFG 6). The Supreme Being is certainly not an

immanent, demonstrably loving and compassionate father (PFG 6). He is surely '*Deus remotus*' and it could even be argued that he is '*Deus absconditus*'.

4.2.2 'Cosmic Holism (Bondedness)'

For the African person religion is holistic, not compartmentalized, cerebral or 'other-worldly'. While in the West we "have long become numbed by a scientific explanation of the world" (Mbiti 1986:43), the African person "does not distinguish between the spiritual and physical modes of existence" (Nyirongo 1997:25 cf. Westerman 1949:83). Kapolyo (2007:26) notes that "the material world is firmly connected to the spiritual world." The relationship is almost seamless, characterized by "different dimensions of a single indivisible reality, which act and react upon one another" (Ezeanya 1969:36). Wendland (2005:66-68) refers to this reality as the 'synthesis' principal, the key characteristic of which is the perception of life's events and experiences in a holistic way, such that all things are somehow related to one another; put together into a related whole regardless of any apparent disparity. This essential 'bondedness' (Musapole 1996:3) means that links are sought between "all of the elements that occupy a given physical or conceptual space to create a community orientated system whereby everyone/thing has his/her/its designated purpose and place within the whole" (Wendland 2005:67). This is surely a helpful foundation for extending the concept of *umunthu* to encompass man's responsibility to all of creation (SFG 8).⁶² Musapole (1996:3) explains that human life and existence is "one life dimension of cosmic existence rooted in God." God, the invisible powers under him, along with the whole complex of the bush (flora and fauna), and the whole of creation itself, make up this synthetic environment (Kalilombe 1999b:128-129). Natural and supernatural form one integrated environment of mutually interacting life forces (Wendland 2005:69), or as Kalilombe (1999b:129) puts it, "The universe is conceived of primarily as a complex system of powers and forces which are in constant interaction, influencing one another for good or for ill." Thus, the boundaries are indistinct between religion and other sociocultural institutions such as the arts and crafts, trades, occupations, and politics. In fact, religion actually "permeates, promotes and propels all of life" (Wendland 2005:68).

An entire cosmology of beings belonging to the spiritual and physical domains must be considered and harmonized in a delicate balancing act demanding considerable thought and energy (Ferdinando 1999: 27-41). The 'indigenous' ideal is harmonious community in the cosmos, an essential unity maintained by protecting central beliefs and values in the face of malevolent individualistic influences (human and/or spirits) (Wendland 2005:69). This harmony "implies that the various powers in that cosmos are balanced in a way that is beneficent to

⁶² This concept is discussed in more detail in the section on community in this chapter (4.3.5) and again in Chapter 5.

humanity” (Ferdinando 1999:41). It is, therefore, not surprising that “ancestors, witches, sorcerers, malevolent spirits and the like... tend to be the primary focus of religious concern, because they are identified as the primary source of affliction” (Ferdinando 1999:130). Practically, this includes the African person always feeling vulnerable and fearful, needing to protect him/herself from threats to their well-being, and identifying a personal cause for every eventuality. This ‘cause and effect’ dynamic underpins any African’s worldview. In this cosmology, latent, neutral, impersonal, power can be used by ‘power specialists’ or those who ‘know how’ for good or evil. So a witchdoctor can send a snake or an owl to scare or kill somebody, or strike a mask with a sharp instrument to harm someone a great distance away, or he might heal someone by drinking medicine on their behalf (Westerman 1949:83-99) (PFG 7), or just speak a word to affect a healing (SFG 5). By the same token, it is possible to protect one’s grain-store from theft by placing an animal horn filled with certain *mankhwala* from the *sing’anga*, make oneself invisible by pressing the tail of a hyena firmly with your hand (Van Breugal 2001:250-253), or even strategically place the horn of a bushbuck containing harmful medicines (capable of responding to instructions, e.g. hitting specific targets or turning into a cat which eats the flesh of children) in one’s roof, or bury it at the gate of a ‘kola’ (kraal) (Soko et al 2002:72). One can protect or attack without being physically present (I B3; I B16; I B10; I B22; I B27; I B30; I B34; I B48; I B49; I B55; I B63; I B64; I B66; I B67; I B69). The author has been told that it is easy to ‘magically’ steal maize from others at harvest time, and have it delivered to one’s own house, if you go to an adequately skilled practitioner (SFG 5). Such theft can be carried out by birds (*mbalame*), rats (*makoswe*), small antelope (*gwape*) or even ghosts (*mizukwa*) (SFG 5). However, a witchdoctor spoke of the charms buried at the four corners of a *munda* (field) to protect it from theft by magic. Interestingly, in the middle of the field, a whole egg is buried with the charm which represents the closing of the field to magical intruders (I C2). People might also use magic to control the wind and the rain for their benefit, and a spiritual ‘vendor’ may even sell categories of lightning used to harm or kill others (SFG 5). A witchdoctor told the author recently that a thorn termed a ‘*chisoni*’ (direct translation-sadness) can be put in one’s hair to prevent someone else from hating one or at least venting that hatred (I C1).

4.2.3 ‘The Power of Life-force (*Umoyo*)’

Umoyo implies an inner energy or life-force. It refers to the ‘soul’ or ‘life-force’ (*moyo*- life) given by the creator God and possessed by every living being, including animals and trees (SFG 7), and even some inanimate objects in extreme cases of animistic belief. Van Breugal (2001:262) writes that “The strongest form of power is believed to reside in life itself.” As Musapole (1996:4) explains, “Life is power and where there is no power there is no life.” This ‘*moyo*’ principle acknowledges that

a divinely originated and spiritually sustained multitude of individual forces in continual flux and dynamic interaction with one another forms the hub, as it were, around which all of the other, subsidiary presuppositions about life, being, and reality revolve, like the connected spokes of a bicycle wheel (Wendland 2005:73).

Musapole (1996:4) points to God's designation as *Namalenga* which connotes a female image who births creation and all in it, providing *moyo* (life) and *umunthu* (personhood), arguing that God is thus very personal. However, this activating life-force (*moyo*) can be manipulated positively or negatively towards increase or diminishment by power specialists or individuals with the required knowledge/instructions. One's life-force might be increased by means of a natural process (such as physical growth and development) or through supernatural means such as magic. *Moyo* is enhanced as "one's quality of life improves, increasing in health, strength, and productivity. Furthermore, one's standing in terms of social status and interpersonal influence within the community grows apace" (Wendland 2005:71). Negatively, this dynamic is susceptible to the influence of witchcraft practices leaving people vulnerable and opening the door for '*asinganga*' (traditional healers/witchdoctors), '*awanyanga*' (socerers), and '*afiti*' (witches) to manipulate one's *moyo* for the nefarious purposes of paying customers. The motive is usually to enhance their personal life-force by means of mystically feeding on or magically killing the life-force of a victim. The victim's *moyo* is enervated until the soul can no longer sustain physical life and the victim dies. In certain cases the dead person may be seen magically and mysteriously working in someone else's garden or maize mill (I D9), or a dead body might be found somewhere in the maize mill (I B22 cf. I A3). In other cases a victim's soul might be enslaved to the bidding of a witch or sorcerer. There are many reported cases of children being sent on witchcraft errands in 'witchcraft planes' (baskets). Sometimes men/women are believed to carry out witchcraft while out of their own bodies. One ZEC Pastor told of a man in his congregation who, according to his wife, took on a contorted and frightening complexion one night while going completely still. He remained so until the morning. When he 'came too', his wife asked him what had happened and he said that he had been 'out' on witchcraft business, doing the bidding of a local witch (I D4). A pastor recently informed the author of an abominable, yet apparently not uncommon, practice. He said that his younger brother had told him that he planned to kill his own son as the witchdoctor had told him to do so in order to increase financial gains in his business. Thankfully, his wife was stridently opposed to the idea and they managed to dissuade him from following through (I B5 cf. I B22). The whole 'dynamic' encourages the procurement of self-protection and means of life-enhancement, even by churchgoers who fear witchcraft more than they trust Christ (Van Bruegel 2001:211).

Within this 'life force' dynamic (dynamism) there is a hierarchical structure organized or graded naturally according to one's measure of power (*mphamvu*). God the Creator is at the top, followed by the Spirits, including the Clan Spirits (such as the Bandas and Phiris), the long-since- dead and the living- dead, then man (with the paramount Chief at the top, followed by religious specialists [*asing'anga* etc.]), then Headmen and clan elders, adults, youth, children and infants (PFG 4; SFG 5), and finally we have Nature with animals and plants (also graded according to potency), locations (where nature spirits reside), and inanimate objects (Wendland 2005:74). A delicate equilibrium exists and harmony is maintained by means of observing various taboos and religious rituals (Musapole 1996:4). Upsetting the status quo through inappropriate behavior (speech or actions) is understood to evoke responses from the ever present ancestors, with potentially serious repercussions for the individual and affecting the welfare and prosperity of the whole community (Van Bregal 2001:80-83; Wendland 2005:76-77) (PFG 8; SFG 8). One's 'place' on the hierarchical ladder is determined by the amount of life-force or 'spiritual energy' derived through experience, "age, relationship to the chief, occupation, achievement, spiritual 'endowment', and magically acquired wisdom or strength" (Wendland 2005:75).

The key to a happy, healthy life is learning to balance one's life-force, ensuring the gains exceed diminishments. Clearly, there is an underlying belief that both *moyo* and resources for life are limited. Wendland (2005:90) refers to this as the 'circumscription' principle. Human power specialists can possess or harness powers (I B8; I B20) and sometimes even spirits (I C1) or animals (I B2; I B12), at a price, to enhance people's well-being. At times this involves causing misfortune, illness and even death to others (Wendland 2005:85-86). Everyone can and must protect themselves, find healing, ensure well-being, and seek prosperity (I B26; I B4; I B27; I B39; I B54). Anyone can instigate nefarious action against others if so inclined. In this awful magic-counter-magic-magic cycle charms are invaluable and suspicions and fear are rife. Unsurprisingly, those who experience misfortune commonly attribute it to the sudden or continued success of another and, therefore, use witchcraft (curses, medicine, poison or even lightning) to bring them down (I B46; I B53; I B74). A prosperous and/or successful individual may be suspected of using nefarious means to advance, their success most likely coming at the expense of others in the community (Kalilombe 2007:6). For example, in contemporary Malawi, businessmen acquire charms to guarantee success and protect their assets and interests in the market (I B3; I B5; I B14; I B27; I B47; I B55; I B64; I B69 cf. I A2.). While in the past, and putatively in some rural locations today, people might be killed and placed in the working machinations of a maize mill (*'kuika chigayo'*), or put to work magically in a garden or shop, to enhance productivity and capital gain (Van Breugal 2001:226-227 cf. I B22; I B50; I D9; I A3). This practice is rooted in the belief that the body provides powerful '*chizimba*' or

special medicine for productivity. The idea is that one benefits from the life-force (*'moyo'*) of the deceased.

Perhaps the circumscription-*moyo* dynamic also partially explains the outrageous, endemic corruption in Malawi. Malawian newspapers often carry 'corruption' stories, recently specifically covering the so-called 'cashgate' scandal through which billions (mostly international donor aid funding) went missing as government officials and their 'business' partners systematically embezzled funds. "As Khunga wrote in his article in The Nation newspaper on 5 May 2014, 'The Auditor General on Friday handed over 10 more case files to prosecuting authorities to facilitate investigations and prosecution of cases of theft of K6.1 billion from government coffers.'" Unfortunately such theft is often carried out by government officials as noted by "Mpaso and Chikoko in their article 'Kasambara, Manondo Spit Fire' in The Nation, Vol. 21, No. 23, 2014:1-2". Such corruption strikes at the soul of the nation, undermining both traditional customs and newfound Christian convictions. Even the recent democratic elections in the country have been marred by allegations of corruption. There are ongoing organized demonstrations and "Kalimira writes in The Daily Times, Friday, July 5, 2019, 1,3 that protesters are 'pushing for Malawi Electoral Commission Chairperson Justice Jane Ansah's resignation over the manner her commission handled May 21 elections.'" The ZEC, along with the CCAP (Central Church of Africa Presbyterian) and other denominations have unfortunately also endured publicized corruption and embezzlement cases in recent times, undermining the authenticity of the Gospel. Moreover, corruption has many faces. The author was told of ZEC pastors and elders (I B39) who use charms to gain power and favour (I B13; I B19; I B25; I B44; I B45; I B50; I B60), and suspicions and allegations related to the use of charms by some of those elected as office bearers in the ZEC denomination at a recent Synod meeting (I B26).

4.2.4 'Salvation as Physical Wellbeing 'here and now''

Munyemyembe (2011:10-11) explains that religion in 'pre-Christian' Malawi was practiced at three different levels: the personal level (including certain family rituals), the village or cult level (affecting the welfare of an entire village or cluster of villages), and the territorial level (different geographical areas were believed to have associated territorial spirits). The goal or aim of 'worship' at each of these overlapping levels was always to maintain harmony in the cosmos and so ensure security and well-being in day to day life at home, in the village and in one's given location. At each level worship required communication with/through the 'spirits', certain sacrifices and libations made to and through the appropriate mediator/s, and the careful adherence to traditional cultural mores by means of keeping given taboos, putatively policed by

the ancestral spirits. These requirements remain in-tact but it seems that in contemporary Malawi, witchcraft is becoming increasingly prominent.⁶³

Even though in the ecclesiological context suffering may sometimes be attributed to the consequences of sin (PFG 8), traditionally, the concept of sin is not valued (van Wyk 2006:706). Moreover, God the Supreme Being is “for many peoples relatively unimportant, since he is rarely conceived either as a cause of misfortune or as an important means of redress” (Ferdinando 1999:130). Even when he does punish, people want to say that “he is punishing for wrongdoing” (SFG 3). Therefore, He is, “exonerated from bringing disaster on humanity” (Okello 2003:67). Besides the ancestral spirits occasionally meting out punishment on his behalf, for the most part, evil spirits or witchcraft and sorcery (with their personal, independent agents), are understood to be responsible for evil and suffering. Therefore, God is not believed to be involved (SFG 3). Van Breugal (2001:230) suggests that ATR seems to want to conclude that all suffering can be attributed to witchcraft. Okello (2003:67) contends that “what is understood to be natural evil in the West is really moral evil in Africa”, meaning that all suffering and evil experienced is understood to originate with or from creatures of freewill, and not from unknown causes (cf. Chavula 2009:19). In this way, “the irrelevance of God is especially apparent in the realm of evil, where even the faith of Christianity seems to fail” (Wendland et al 2007:104). The transcendent God of Christians has been practically replaced by a number of other ‘supernatural’ forces. Ironically, the ongoing secular ‘Westernization’ of many African nations (including science, technology and secular humanism) further conspires to make God-the-Supreme-Being redundant. Thus, in most traditional African worldviews both suffering and prosperity are explained in personal terms and the aetiology is usually traced to either witchcraft/sorcery or to the spirits. Ironically, such root animistic belief systems do address existential needs, providing meaning to life by supplying an explanation for the source or origin of evil, which becomes particularly pertinent in times of pain and suffering (Onongha 2014:206).

Salvation has always been anthropocentric for Malawians, including the Chewa people. For them, the future is virtually non-existent beyond a few months and years and there is no precedent for viewing life as moving towards an eternal goal. As one pastor explained, “people don’t consider time in hours but in seasons, so seasons never end, they just come, go and come back and go. So most people think that the life time of the earth is cyclic, so there is no real traditional idea of reaching to an end” (PFG 8) (cf. van Wyk 2006:705-706). ‘Time’ is measured by events (e.g. getting up, milking cows, working in the field, eating the evening meal etc.) coming and going in their rhythmic succession (Hara 2008:160-161). For the Chewa, and

⁶³ Witchcraft is discussed in more detail later in this chapter (cf. 4.2.7)

most Malawian peoples, there is no physical resurrection (PFG 8; SFG 8) (except possibly in the form of an animal, such as a hyena, for skilled witchcraft practitioners (cf. I B24)⁶⁴, and no notion of a future spiritual/corporeal body (PFG 8). Moreover, the continuation of life after death, although axiomatic, does not necessarily inspire hope for the future (Hara 2008:161) (SFG 8). A pastor pointed out that people mostly feared the afterlife because they were not sure exactly what would happen to them as ancestors (PFG 1), and another added that people worried about who would take care of their loved ones after death (PFG 2). One student-pastor stated that people were more interested in being honored at their burial than in the life that might follow (SFG 1). Rather, their concept of salvation is humanistic, residing in security and success/well-being in the here and now (cf. I B1-74). Hara (2008:140) rightly defines the Malawian concept of salvation as “man’s security from temporary dangers to his physical life.” This has been corroborated to the author by many students, ministry colleagues and church goers over the years. One colleague who taught at a Reformed Bible College in Zomba asked his third year Bible College class why they thought people needed God. The answer is enlightening: for the provision of rain, for the fertility of the land, for the blessing of children, for health and prosperity, and of course, for protection. There was no mention of personal sin, repentance, forgiveness through Christ, or redemption (I D8). Even the pastors, who might have been expected to mention sin, and possibly a lack of genuine repentance and the experience of forgiveness, in relation to providing reasons for the use of charms by their congregants, didn’t do so. The most descriptive answers included nominalism, lack of commitment to Christ and members not being born again (I B25; I B26; I B59; I B72).

An example of this traditional understanding of salvation is found in the popularity of the prosperity Gospel, because the God preached in this environment does offer immediate physical inducements (PFG 1; SFG 1). People are attracted to the heresy that “Christ suffered so that we should not”, and there is no traditional idea about suffering benefitting spirituality in any way (SFG 8). This is why, for so many believers, “there is a problem differentiating between salvation and material benefits” (SFG 2). It is not uncommon to hear someone who dies poor being labelled as, “not a true believer” (SFG 2). One pastor even expressed the anxiety that if prosperity wasn’t preached then “no-one will come to receive Christ” (PFG 3). However, disillusionment and confusion are soon evident when those without a genuine Biblical eschatological hope still get sick, remain poor and die (PFG 1). Pentecostal pastors are also said to offer immediate healing to the sick or possessed, praying and prophesying with authority and power (PFG 5). The traditional roots of this lie with the ‘*amazimu*’, those individuals who “have the spirits” and have always been known to discern problems and their causes and offer

⁶⁴ Although the notion does exist in the North of Malawi where mourners observe a certain custom involving placing leaves at the base of the coffin before laying the deceased in it to prevent him/her from resurrecting (I B13).

solutions, as well as foretell personal events, all in consultation with the spirits. These modern day 'prophets' are able to tap into this traditional understanding, exploiting the vulnerable for their money (SFG 7). There are even those who use traditional incantations, songs, dances, flags with the names of Biblical characters (traditionally representing the spirits), and Bible readings and hymns during their exorcisms (PFG 5). This is all further complicated by the fact that the word used to translate grace (*'chisomo'*), in most Chichewa Bible translations, is traditionally the word used to describe the 'good fortune' or 'luck' one receives from a visit to the withdoctor (PFG 6). Thus, to have '*chisomo*' means one may get a job desperately needed or avoid death in a car accident etc. (PFG 6). This is a kind of saving grace. This is easily Christianized. One pastor testified that having been in a mini-bus accident, the other occupants of the taxi thanked him profusely for their luck (*'tili ndi mwai'*), believing that they were still alive because of his presence with them (PFG 6).

In summary, salvation for the Chewa is anthropocentric and humanistic. It is understood to be the acquisition and maintenance of all that is necessary for physical well-being in the 'here and now'. Since God is practically unapproachable this involves placating the ancestors and using charms/medicine to self-protect and self-enhance. This is why many believers still flock to so called Christian 'prophets' to have their physical needs met (SFG 8). Unfortunately, this embroils people in a vicious magic-counter-magic-magic cycle from which there seems to be no escape. People are in bondage through fear of losing their salvation which in practical terms means anything diminishing their life-force (*moyo*) and therefore, their physical wellbeing. Although in some cases suffering may be a punishment from God, it is usually meted out by the ancestors, or more commonly these days, traceable to witchcraft and the selfish or evil intentions and actions of personal agents. One is, therefore, responsible for one's own salvation, by means of: (1) appearing to highly value relationships and harmony in community and the wider cosmos, being humble, non-threatening, peaceable, and even obsequious in public, (2) secretly using all the resources at one's disposal to protect, maintain and acquire, balancing defense and offense to ensure physical wellbeing.

4.2.5 'Identity and Purpose Rooted in Community'

An African person is "usually understood as a complex of distinct, and to some degree, separable entities, physical and spiritual" (Ferdinando 1999:20). Each entity, derived from a different source (e.g. mother, father, ancestral group, God) defines the individual relating to kinship, personality, soul-group, spirit and destiny. Naturally, concepts differ widely in different people groups but important for all is that each person relates every aspect of his/her self to the appropriate dimension in its physical and/or spiritual environment harmoniously (Ferdinando 1999: 21-22). Kapolyo (2007:18) explains: "In Africa it is impossible to reflect on human beings

apart from their cultural surroundings and identity. The society-based existence is evident everywhere. Not for us any 'I doubt, think or buy, therefore I am'. Rather for us it is: 'We are, therefore I am'." The life of the community is central (Parrat 1995:92) with no clear distinction made between individual, social and political life (Bujo 1992:23). Communal values, the communal decision-making process and the group's influence are considered superior to individual identity and initiative. It is one of the reasons why those with education and earning potential fear death, because they know that they will be "letting down" their relatives and communities (PFG 1).

African societies are graded or hierarchical with class distinctions dependent on status and roles in society, the criterion for which are set up by the community, based on factors such as gender, age, seniority of birth, roles, rituals, wealth, position and material possessions. The higher one climbs up the ladder, the wiser and more powerful one is considered to be: "Beginning at the top, we have the ancestors ..., then the chief, father, elder brother etc" (Nyirongo 1997:149) (PFG 4; SFG 5).⁶⁵ Practically, respect must be shown to the ancestral spirits, one's elders and anyone higher up in the structure (PFG 4). Failure to do so may bring shame, a reduction in one's spiritual vitality (life-force) or even a curse (*kutemberera*) on the offender (Wendland 2005:75). One pastor spoke of the responsibility he carried because of his status, and his reluctance even to visit his home village because of the burden of expectation on him from the many in need (PFG 1). A student-pastor added that those who were perceived to have status and/or power in society also lived in fear of those who would naturally want to take it (SFG 1). This kind of hierarchical gradation also breeds the perpetual need for intermediaries. Van Breugal (2000:39) explains that traditionally, "A higher authority is never approached if the solution can be given by a lesser one." Therefore, communally recognized individuals are in mediatorial roles to "keep social relations running smoothly and appropriately according to custom" (Wendland 2005:75-76), attend to the crucial liminal stages of life and death, enable worship of the High God, placate the ancestors and 'speak' or warn on their behalf, call down rain and plead for fertility, and facilitate a host of other traditional functions (I B25; I B23; I B52; I B18; I B8). Traditionally, the village chief or Headman is prominent in this regard, being '*gogo chalo*' or 'owner of the land' (PFG 4). No activity, spiritual or otherwise takes place in the village without his/her consent. To have an audience with him one must go through the '*alagizi*' (PFG 3). Even the local witchdoctor operates under the chief's authority (PFG 4). Mediators are everywhere in society. For example, for a marriage to be recognized, Uncles on both sides (*ankhoswe* and *amalume*) are required to negotiate terms (PFG 3).

⁶⁵ Traditional and contemporary hierarchical (graded) lines of authority will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Indeed, the individual 'multiple self' described above enjoys full personhood only in community. True personhood and identity is dependent on community acceptance with traditional initiation rites playing a critical role for incorporation of the individual into the societal group. Such rites of passage perpetuate the corporate life/existence of the community and are usually associated with key stages in the life-cycle such as birth, puberty, marriage and death (Ferdinando 1999:24) (SFG 5). For example, "a newborn baby has to go through a ritual before it can be accepted by the family ... at death the deceased may not be able to attain true ancestral status unless death rituals are properly performed" (Nyirongo 1997:176) (cf. I B25; I B41; I B48; I B36). For the Chewa, like most African peoples: "Death stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible" (Bujo 1992:145; Bockie 1993:83), such that "survival after death is not a matter for argument or speculation; it is an axiom of life" (Willoughby in Gehman 1989:139). Death is viewed as a departure to the hereafter to continue life more or less as it is in its human form on earth (i.e. status, activity, sex distinction etc.) but in spirit form. On entering the world of the *mizimu* the spirit receives more life-force, becoming eternal and powerful (SFG 8). The wider human community is thus comprised of the living, the 'living-dead' and the 'long-since dead'. This is why it is considered important to bury the dead near to their relatives and homestead (SFG 8).

The 'living-dead' are clearly distinguished from the 'long-since dead' because they are the departed of up to four or five previous generations ago who are still considered to be part of their respective living families. These beings cease to be remembered by name or as a 'human being' only when the last person who knew them also dies, and they become 'long since dead' (Mbiti 1999:83), the only exceptions for the Chewa being an important person or well-known chief (Van Breugal 2001:80). The 'long-since dead' constitute the vast majority of spirits and are understood to be the "spirits of forgotten people who are no longer within the personal memory of the living" (Mbiti 1976:76). A select few may be remembered through myths and legends if they were regarded as outstanding men or women. In certain cases (and societies) where an individual is remembered with great respect for their earthly life, their spirit may be 'immortalized' through mythology and ritual ceremony (e.g. *Mbona*) (PFG 7).⁶⁶

In general, it is thought that a spirit, having left the physical body at death, may linger in the neighborhood for some time but then go to the 'spirit land' after the appropriate funeral rites (I B4; I B13; I B25; I B29; I B36; I B64) (SFG 8), later returning to its close relatives for different reasons at different times (e.g. to bring a message or a warning, or even a blessing or calamity (Mbiti 1999:82-84; Ogunboye 2000:81). The Chewa believe that while a body is decomposing the spirit is in the process of becoming a '*mizimu*' or ancestor. At this time the spirit of the

⁶⁶ He represents both a divinized human being and a divinized nature spirit in different constructs of the Southern Chewa, '*Mbona*', territorial rain cult.

deceased is particularly unpredictable in his reactions towards the living. They must carry out certain rituals such as “continuous mourning and concerted prayer”, asking the spirit to go and not return to trouble them (Van Breugal 2001:120) (cf. I B25; I B36). The dead body is referred to as ‘king’ or ‘*mfumu*’ (Chief) out of respect for the spirit becoming an ancestor, and relatives must ‘*tulutse mfumu*’ or ‘out the body’, standing in respect as it leaves the house, so smoothly facilitating the transition (SFG 8 cf. PFG 2). When the body has putrefied the spirit is thought to have reached its new home and after the ritual presentation of the decomposed body, while people are still afraid of the spirit (PFG 1), he is believed to return only to “protect, warn of impending danger, or to punish if traditional customs (*miyambo*) are not observed” (Van Breugal 2001:122) (cf. I B16; I B 23; I B39; I B52).

While the continuation of life is a certainty there is less clarity as to the location of the ‘hereafter’. It might be another world or a distant place but (hence the elaborate burial ceremonies where food and weapons are buried with the dead body for sustenance and protection on the journey to the next world). For others, the next world is separated from this one only in as much as it is unseen or invisible, as is the case for the Chewa. It is only after a commemoration ceremony on the anniversary of the death called ‘*kumeta kachiwiri*’ or ‘the second shaving’ that a spirit is thought to be received into the world of the *mizimu* (‘*kulandilidwa*’) and begin settling down to life in the ancestral spirit world. Even then, only after his former home has been pulled down are people likely to be less fearful (Van Breugal 2001:78, 80).

The Chewa have a special name for spirits who are troublesome and frequently disturb the peace of the people. They are called ‘*azimu*’ (a second, plural form of *mzimu*). A student-pastor stated that these spirits were feared (SFG 2). Moreover, the ‘*ziwanda*’ are those spirits which are not accepted into the world of *mizimu* because they are regarded as having been evil as people, such as the spirits of witches or murderers (PFG 2; SFG 5). These evil spirits are greatly feared (PFG 1; SFG 1). One student-pastor remarked that “when people pray against evil spirits, they pray in power like never before” (SFG 1). They cannot be appeased by offerings and one needs magical rites and medicines (including charms) to chase them away, such as the malodorous *bwazi* or *nafungwe* roots (Van Breugal 2001:73-83). Evil spirits are also known to possess people. The Chewa people on Likoma island have a special ritual dance called *mashawe* which is believed to be therapeutic for those who have been possessed (Amanze 2003:59). In the lower Shire valley spirit exorcism (*chikwangwali*) is practiced to ‘carry off’ the evil spirit (Schoffeleers 2000:115). Strangely, here, the spirits of deceased infants are also considered ‘*ziwanda*’ if they die before the child is taken (‘*kutenga*’). Van Breugal (2001:83-84, 93) believes that this might be because they are thought to haunt the mother before they are reborn into another baby. In such cases the dead baby was never believed to

have genuinely had life (too young), and so the spirit is legitimately finding another body to dwell in. Schoffeleers (2000:114-116, 122-126) notes that in the Lower Shire valley the Mang'anja believe certain 'private' spirits to be evil⁶⁷, and therefore, intent on causing sickness and ultimately death. These evil spirits are called '*afiti*' and can only be exorcized by means of the *chikwangwali* ritual which involves 'carrying off' the spirit, such that the beast (*chirombo*) is returned to the bush. In the exorcism ritual a diviner or '*n'ganga*' must discern the nature of the spirit (e.g. good or evil), then identity of the spirit, and then induce the spirit to enter (or possess) the patient, in order to ask its special wishes/desires. The *n'ganga* may answer for the spirit or interpret the vibrations of a speaking gourd (*nsupa*) (I B24; I B53). In fact '*nsupa*' are quite popular in the South and are believed to be controlled by spirits of unknown origin who communicate with men (SFG 4). In the North, evil spirits are exorcised through the *Vimbuza* ritual, including songs, dances and drums (SFG 5). Possession by evil spirits is still considered to be common (SFG 5; PFG 5).

Gehman (1989:140) points out that "the ancestors are closely associated with their place of burial and with their former home." It is not uncommon for the elderly (*agogo*) to request that they be buried near their traditional homes and with their kin (SFG 4). Their spirits are never far from man (in the sky, in animals, birds, the woods, bush, forest, rivers and mountains) and remain subject to the same emotions as the living members of the community (McVeigh 1974:29). However, being ontologically closer to God, they are considered bilingual: speaking both the language of men and that of God (Mbiti 1999:83 cf. Mbiti 1970:230). Being closer to God it is thought they will be more readily answered and they are thus "the go-betweenes" between man and God (SFG 3). The 'living-dead' are thus traditionally the objects of cultic ritual observance (Idowu 1973:184) because they serve a vital intermediary role between God and men (Gehman 1995:224).⁶⁸ However, one student asserted that believers turned to the intermediaries because of their lack of faith in God (SFG 1).

The ancestral spirits function as guardians of the ancestral customs ('*miyambo ya makolo*'), that is of family life and community traditions, so policing human morality (Mbiti 1999:213; Ray 1976:146), but not personal moral virtue. When the ancestors speak people must obey (PFG 1) and the living must please them in order to receive beneficence from God (PFG 2). They may inflict punishment in order to restore the social order and invite requests (i.e. for fertility and childbirth), confession, placation, and the giving of libations, particularly during times of crisis and life cycle events, on the part of the living to the 'living-dead' (Bockie 1993:18; Mbiti

⁶⁷ Private spirits are believed to be the spirits of commoners while public spirits include the Supreme Being, the spirits of deceased Chiefs and the spirit of M'bona, the guardian spirit of the Mang'anja.

⁶⁸ From an Evangelical Christian standpoint, Gehman explains that demons do have the power to appear to the human eye in any chosen form (2 Cor.11: 14), and that they can easily imitate the appearances and voices of dead relatives to deceive people into placing their trust in ancestors or other spirits instead of in Christ.

1999:82-91; Ferdinando 1999:31; Gehman 1989:136-144; Van Breugal 2001:73-75). They are thus at once wanted and yet unwanted, regarded with both fear and affection.⁶⁹ Mbiti (1999:84) helpfully captures the dynamic when he writes that: “The food and libation given to the ‘living-dead’ are paradoxically acts of hospitality and welcome, and yet of informing the living-dead to move away.” They are feared because they have the power to withhold rain and cause sickness (SFG 2). A student-pastor explained that “ancestors don’t just visit the living anyhow. Always there is a fate or a blessing and so there are suspicions as to which it is” (SFG 1). Since people usually “suspect death or punishment when the living-dead come” it is not surprising that they are regarded with some fear and ambivalence (PFG 2).

The Chewa do consider the *mizimu* to be helpful at times and will consult them when important work is undertaken or to request intercession to the Supreme Being on their behalf, so even offerings, such as *ufa* (flour) made at the rain sacrifice (*‘mfunde’*) are made to the *mizimu* who represent the people to *Chiuta* (Van Breugal 2001:77, 82) (SFG1; PFG 2). In crises such as droughts and epidemics, only the spirits of deceased senior relatives (*mizimu ya makolo*), will have the authority to help. In most societies the approach to God is regarded as a corporate act performed by the whole community (including both the living and the departed). O’Donovan (1995:142 cf. Ferdinando 1999:30) explains that as intermediaries these spirits are understood to relay information through dreams (PFG 1; SFG 1), trance, prophets and divination. However, both pastors and student-pastors agreed that this dynamic precludes individual intimacy with God (PFG 1; SFG 1). *Mizimu* in the Malawian context might also communicate by using somebody as a conduit through whom to send a message to the living by means of ravings/trances while they are in a state of spirit possession (*‘kubwebweta’*). Examples of this are found in the ceremony called *milawe* practiced by the Bimbi cult (Amanze 2003:69-78), through the Mbona’s spirit wife on Thoylo mountain (part of the Chewa, Mbona cult) (Schoffeleers 1999:169), and in the *nantongwe* spirit possession ritual practiced by the Lomwe of Southern Malawi (Nazombe 1988:15-18) (SFG 4).

Therefore, in Malawi we see the ritualized veneration of human ancestors (*mizimu/azimu*) (PFG 1), diviners, medicine men (*sing’anga*), spirit possession, sorcerers, and other malevolent spirits (*ziwanda*) (Wendland et al 2000:359).⁷⁰ This wider ‘field’ opens the door to individual religious ritual and experience. The diviner (*woombeza ula*) has an important role to play in communicating the will of the *mizimu* to the living.⁷¹ These magicians are believed to have received their powers from the spirits of the dead and are able to discern what the *mizimu* want

⁶⁹ Some related fears simply stem from the natural barrier that death automatically creates. On the other hand, demonstrations of affection and/or respect for an ancestor are also only natural given that ancestors are regarded as family members.

⁷⁰ Wendland was articulating this cosmic dynamic as it relates to the Batonga people of Zambia but his spiritual cosmology is appropriate for the Chewa and other people groups in South-Central Malawi.

⁷¹ A *sing’anga* may also be at the same time a diviner or the diviner may act in this capacity only.

to convey, effectively using lots (*ula*) to interpret the will of the spirits of the dead, usually by interpreting dreams and premonitions given to the living. Thus they can tell the people why they are being punished or warned by the *mizimu*, and how to appease them. Moreover, they can also determine if a witch (*mfiti*) has caused the problem and how to counteract the magic (Van Breugal 2001:233-234, 245). The same is said of the '*asing'anga mizimu*' (spirit witchdoctors) who perform similar functions and are thus considered mediators of a kind (PFG 7; SFG 4). As already mentioned, Christian' healing spirit mediums have risen to prominence recently claiming to be conduits of messages from God. Some "claim to heal not by being possessed by ancestral spirits, but by personalities mentioned in the Bible as well as by Christian saints, thereby giving their healing ministry a Christian flavor" (Chakanza 2000:103).⁷² They remain in communion with their churches, 'ministering' for the most part to Christians (Chakanza 2000:103; Schofield 2003:19) and employing healing techniques which incorporate Christian prayers, hymns, and Bible readings integrated with traditional songs and elements (Chakanza 2000:103-105).⁷³ They rely on dreams and possession to 'diagnose' and decide on treatment, and their special healing rooms are referred to as '*kachisi*' (like the small huts designated for offerings, libations and prayers through the spirits at the rain shrines) (Van Breugal 2001:50-51; Maleka 2004:75).

Clearly the sense of corporate community is extended beyond the grave. The community includes the living family and extends to the tribe, and even to the ancestors, although God is not generally considered part of this community (holding the highest position on the gradation scale) (Kalilombe 2007:5; Wendland 2005:79). The concept speaks of "solidarity, sharing, justice, egalitarianism, mutual participation, and cooperation (Wendland 2005:77). One finds identity, purpose and functional usefulness within community and personal ambition is secondary to the well-being of the community. Harmony, avoidance of shame, and prevention of anger or hard feelings are valued above truth telling. The good person is friendly, generous, happy and hospitable. Compromise is a virtue and antagonism is to be avoided; punishable by either the living-living or the living-dead (Wendland 2005:78). The goal is the realization of a 'community-in-communion'; a community characterized by '*umunthu*' which symbolizes all that is good and worthy in human life (Musapole 1996:4). Behind all this is the belief that the community of human beings living here on the earth is involved in a life and death struggle with the entire cosmology of forces at play. Therefore, solidarity between the living-living and the living-dead is vital (Kalilombe 1999b:129; Wendland 2007:37) (PFG 8; SFG 7, 8). The community of living (this side of death) is described by Kalilombe (2007:5) as the 'Village'. Their

⁷² In Malawi spirit possession (*kulowedwa ndi azimu*) is not uncommon across the ethnic groups and can be regarded as either an illness (*matenda*) manifested in an individual (cf. the Southern Malawi Lomwe spirit possession rituals described as Nantongwe (Nazombe 1988:15-18), or as mediumship, where there is a distinct communicative aspect.

⁷³ Interestingly, Father Chakanza is in favour of this development because he feels that the practice replaces witchcraft, helping to build a sound community under Christian influence.

well-being depends on their relationship with the Spirits (living dead- ancestors), the Bush (fauna, flora and landscape), and God (up in the sky and quite removed). Still today, there remains strong belief in the importance of placating and engaging with ancestral spirits, especially for those in rural locations (I B16; I B33; I B42; I B52).

Mutual co-operation and living together peaceably are keys to living in community in Malawi, which partly explain the deference and apparently obsequious behavior, including avoidance of confrontation and lack of willingness to take a moral stand, so often perceived in inter-personal relations. Here in the friendly 'warm heart of Africa' the face that visitors see is a happy one, welcoming, willing to please, not wanting to create division or disharmony. However, all is not as it seems, as underneath this happy veneer there is a darker side. Gossip and slander are rife, jealousy is a major problem (I B59) and seeking retribution is commonplace (I B13; I B20). While egotism, selfish ambition and unbridled selfishness are frowned-upon in public they are still nurtured and kindled in private. Thus a 'two-faced' culture is encouraged and perpetuated. People will tell you what they think you want to hear while believing and/or doing something completely different. The tenuous unity of the whole society (community) is maintained by "an elaborate system of protocols, avoidance taboos, purity preserving regulations- and conversely, strictly observed periods of license" (Kalilombe 2007:5-6; Wendland 2005:79). Anti-social behavior is punished or fined and reconciliation is outwardly sought because only healthy and functional community relationships will maintain equilibrium and guarantee the benevolence of the ancestors for the sake of community well-being. People endure social pressures to keep up appearances, adhering to protocols and traditions. As such, one must be seen to have the spirit of humanity (*umunthu*), conducting oneself properly in community by being decent, helpful and generous (PFG 7).⁷⁴ While this emphasis on community is commendable, for believers the ancient religious mindset and practices "must be decisively replaced by those principles that embody the radically changed world-view that the bible demands- in, for, and through Christ" (Wendland 2005:80).

4.2.6 'The Authority of Traditional Wisdom and Experience'

As intimated, the notions of strict adherence to traditional wisdom and fidelity to traditional responsibilities are integral to being part of the wider community and are powerful motivators. Since "people's lives are anchored in the past" (Bujo 1992:32)⁷⁵, traditional wisdom and life experience are the guiding principles. Wendland (2005:96) calls this principal 'experientialism',

⁷⁴ Pastors told the author that without *umunthu* one is considered not to have *mzimu* (a human spirit) (PFG 7).

⁷⁵ Bujo does, however, point out that many Africans do see all relationships as rooted in God and pointing towards God and, therefore, consummated in God (not dissimilar to a Judaeo-Christian eschatology).

which “sets the established wisdom tradition, the patterns of nature, and human experience as the primary criterion for deciding what constitutes knowledge and how to interpret or evaluate what goes on in the universe.” Experience of the world, derived through ancient traditional wisdom passed down through the generations, and by personal past and present sensory experience, is more valuable than propositional knowledge of it. It is championed over empirically verifiable scientific knowledge and objective reality. The traditional reference point for knowledge is thus the wisdom and experience of past generations, encapsulated in the traditional wisdom passed down (*‘miyambo za makolo’*- traditions or customs of the elders) and upheld by the ancestors and living leaders and elders (Kalilombe 2007:5-6) (PFG 4). Instruction in the ways of the ancient wisdom happens “at crucial stages of the lifecycle: conception and birth, coming of age, marriage, taking up of important community roles like chieftainship, and ultimately even at death and funerals ... in the context of initiation or rites of passage” (Kalilombe 2007:6). The latter, as well as the cycle of seasons and events organized by the community, for the community, provide life’s rhythms rather than time. The future is dealt with as it comes in the light of past and present experience (individual and communal), and that of the ancestors (Wendland 2005:80-81; Dicks 2011:371).

The traditional wisdom/church teaching dichotomy is an example of two different worldviews existing side-by-side in Malawi: “the one taught by the churches, the other imbibed with one’s mother’s milk” (Schofield 2003:21). This dualism has a profound impact on the Church. It is extremely difficult for Christians to eschew traditional wisdom that advocates the use of certain charms (I B20; I B41; I B52). Many of the younger generation continue to use traditional *‘mpinjiri’* and *‘zithumwa’*⁷⁶ (charms) to protect their children because of the pressure to do so placed on them by their parents and grandparents (I B3; I B10; I B12; I B24; B25; I B41; I B63; I B66; I B 69). One young lady shared with her pastor that she understood that using charms for protection was wrong but that her grandmother had instructed her to do so and as such it was difficult for her to disobey. She also had trouble burning the charms during counseling for the same reason (I B23). Pastors and theological students testified to their ancestral spirits speaking to them in dreams, offering good advice for healing remedies (SFG 5; PFG 5).

There are certain traditional duties and responsibilities that must be carried out. For example, a pastor told the author that a few years ago, during a period of drought, members of his church were involved with the village community, in preparing and scattering a sacrifice of beans, millet, rice and maize in the local fields. The drought had been accompanied by destructive army worms (*ntchemberezendoda*) and the sacrifice was intended to chase away any evil

⁷⁶ An *mpinjiri* is the string to which the *zithumwa* (charms) containing *mankhwala* (special medicine) and charged with protective powers are attached.

spirits causing the problem. When he confronted the church members they simply said that the village Chief had ordered them to participate (I B23). By way of another example, a student shared how an elder in his village instructed that everyone present at his burial ceremony was to make sure that they closed their eyes when his body was removed from the house if they wanted things to go well with them (SFG 2). Refusing to follow the ancient wisdom⁷⁷ is akin to turning one's back on tradition, and repercussions may include ostracism and personal and/or communal punishment from the ancestors. This creates tension for younger believers who are pressurized by their elders to follow traditional customs. This issue also affects younger pastors trying to disciple their congregations. They are expected to defer to ancient traditions, the older generation and older elders and church members. Indeed, one of the pastors explained that "there are consequences to getting rid of charms" (I B23). Pastors who challenge traditional wisdom face threats, violence, removal from pastorate and even death at the hands of disgruntled congregants (I B8; I B10; I B26; I B32; I B36; I B37; I B57; I B61).

Adherence to traditional wisdom can be both positive and negative, new challenges making its application ever more complex. The HIV Aids pandemic is a case in point. It is increasingly impacting the entire South-central African region, becoming the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa. UNAIDS statistics record that approximately 37.9 million people world-wide were living with HIV as recently as 2018, and shockingly 20.6 million of these people were in Eastern and Southern Africa (UNAIDS: online, 23 July 2019). In 2006 it was estimated that there were 17.3 million women living with aids and that in poor countries such as Malawi, only five percent of pregnant women would have access to drugs preventing them from passing the HIV virus to their unborn or newborn children (Thomas 2006:8). Effectively, without intervention, a third of HIV positive mothers will pass the virus on to their children. Chingota (2005:18) explains that in Malawi AIDS is profoundly affecting the most economically productive age, including those who are marrying and having families, so creating growing numbers of orphans and child headed families.

Musapole (2006:10) contends that the ancient wisdom providing social norms for sex such as respect, fear, love and care have been eroded and that the unveiling of the mystery and associated taboos surrounding sexuality coincided with Malawi independence in 1964. The latter has certainly exacerbated the sexual moral decline and the advancement of the HIV pandemic. As Chakanza (2007:40) explains, "the post-independence era is witnessing a growing culture of increased sexual freedom and extra marital sex." This is in large part driven by economic need as men flock to the cities to find work, and there they have extra-marital sex,

⁷⁷ This includes using the correct constituent materials and following instructions carefully to ensure the efficacy of the charm.

often with multiple partners. However, Fiedler (2007: 35) points out that, wives do not, in general, have power over their sexuality and culturally they cannot exercise their human right to refuse sex to her infected husband. He adds that even in cases of pre-marital and extra-marital sex which is assumed to be consensual, submission to patriarchal rights is expected.⁷⁸ Moreover, in Malawi, existing initiation ceremonies for young Chewa girls promote HIV infections. For example, the hiring of a *fisi* (hyena) to sleep with them when they 'come of age' (at puberty) in order to 'remove dust' is diabolical. In some cases, if the family can't afford to hire a man, the father will do it instead! (Van Breugal 2001:198; Thomas 2006:9). The fact that this tradition continues today was attested to recently by a front-page story in the The Nation newspaper which was printed in response to government embarrassment at the 'outing' of this practice in the international news. "Steven Pembamoyo, Friday 29 July 2016, 1, wrote that 'The state has changed the charges from defilement to engaging in harmful practices against Eric Aniva, the Sanji man arrested on presidential order. He confessed to defiling young girls and sleeping with widows when he was HIV positive.'" He was unfortunate to become a scapegoat but there are thousands more like him operating in Malawi.

Cultural expectations related to men's sexuality in Malawi are also to blame since men must constantly test their manhood displaying their sexuality as a strong vital, energizing force:

not necessarily with a view to procreation even though that is laudable, but to have an erection, penetrate a woman and deposit the seed in her. With pride they declare that one garden is not enough for a man. The more women they go to bed with the greater their reputation (Musapole 2006:14).

This explains why many wives visit a witchdoctor for '*kondaine*', a special love potion which is believed to keep their husbands sexually attracted to them (I B27). It also points towards the common need for '*mchape*', a traditional medicine to combat sexually transmitted diseases which is openly available in most market places these days (I B28). To make matters worse, the contraction of the HIV virus is often believed to be witchcraft related. "As Dyson Mthawanji noted in his article in The Nation newspaper on April 8, 2014, 'In rural areas where many Malawians believe that witchcraft exists, when one family member gets an AIDS- related illness, some family members believe their relative has been bewitched. They point fingers at the suspected witches.'" It is also believed that one can have sexual relations (intercourse) with a woman or man of choice, at night while they sleep, through magic means. The victim will be aware of the encounter in their dreams but may wake up fully aware, and experience physical symptoms, of an actual sexual violation (I B29). Practices such as a man using his wife's

⁷⁸ Thus the HIV/AIDS virus also affects the morally virtuous through adulterous spouses, infected mothers, and even transmission by blood transfusion.

menstrual blood to mix as a constituent part for a charm intended to enhance his business, further complicate the issue (I B30).

Other cultural worldview motifs such as fatalism encourage promiscuity as people are of a mind that 'whatever will be, will be'. The same notion prevents some from taking anti-retrovirals. Those diagnosed with HIV/ AIDS face stigmatization and even discrimination in families, communities and institutional organizations or settings; "especially in workplaces, health-care services, prisons, educational institutions and social welfare settings" (Chingota 2006:28). Churches and Non-Government Organizations are working hard to educate Malawians concerning the dangers of unprotected sex and many of the traditional cultural practices but progress is slow. Anti-retrovirals are mostly obtainable these days but people tend to take them only until they begin feeling better. Even when they persevere with them their daily diets lack the required nutrients, so debilitating the impact. Moyo (1998:110) suggests that most Malawians simply lose hope when diagnosed with HIV and die quickly afterwards. Many infected Chewa persons give up the fight because they believe the virus to be witchcraft related or a punishment from the ancestors, according to the common *mdulo* beliefs and taboos (Van Breugal 2001:269). Ironically, the church also fails to hold out any real hope of healing in this world, since the majority of church members are reluctant to see sickness and death as anything other than a punishment from God. To illustrate, Ott (2007:22) conducted a survey in which 52% of Christians indicated their belief that 'AIDS is a scourge and punishment from God'. Thus, both the traditional beliefs of ATR and the new legalism foisted on people by many of the Churches are problematic. For all these reasons traditional religious protection is still sought after.

Two ancient and contemporary Chewa religious institutions, with their associated beliefs and practices, have largely shaped traditional religion, and continue to exert a profound influence on religious practice today (Annexure A7)⁷⁹, namely: the Nyau societies and the territorial rain cults:

4.2.6.1 Gule wamkulu (Nyau Societies)

Van Breugal (2001:126) believes that the Nyau are at the heart of Chewa identity and Ott (2000:178) contends that they are, next to the rain shrines, "the most important institution of the Maravi religious culture."⁸⁰ These masked societies are constituted at the village level where the Nyau has given men a much-coveted opportunity to dominate in some way in their wives' villages in the context of the Chewa matrilineal and uxorilocal society (Schoffeleers 1999:151). Their secretive nature creates an aura of mystery and fear and they pack far-reaching religious

⁷⁹ A little more detail relating to the historical, political and theological backgrounds of these institutions may be helpful to the reader.

⁸⁰ The significance of the rain shrines will be discussed in the next section.

and political clout, affecting economics, societal issues, politics, art, and most significantly, religion (Ott 2000:179). The religious symbolism is closely related to the foundational 'kaphirintiwa myth', powerfully cosmological and harkening back to the creation of the world and mankind.

Primarily, the Nyau exists to placate the *mizimu* (ancestral spirits) who are the guardians of ancestral customs (*miyambo ya makolo*). They are said to be "fished from the lake", an idiom denoting bringing the ancestors into contact with the living for the purposes of offering petitions and receiving blessings (SFG 3). Nkunica (2004:51) explains that the Nyau dance is called "*Pemphero lathu lalikulu la mizimu*" which is translated: 'our great prayer to the spirits'. Thus the Nyau act as intercessors for and protectors of the people (Van Breugal 2001:167). In fact, the *Gule wamkulu* "is a conduit to the ancestors ... They are the embodiment of the spirits themselves, the ancestors incarnate" (Morgan in Boucher 2012:10). The Nyau help to reconcile the living with the ancestors of their particular kinship line and serve a pedagogic function as moral teachers of the community, encouraging certain behaviour through imitation, and dissuading by means of satire and evoking fear (Ott 2000:183). They play an educational role in the initiation of girls through dances and songs (Kadyampakeni 2004:39). Formerly, all young boys had to go through the Nyau initiation before they could marry, or be recognized as a full member of the clan or as an adult male, and the Nyau did not hold back on meting out punishment for unacceptable behavior in order to instill the initiates with a fear of the spirits for the remainder of their lives (Van Breugal 2001:129,167; Nkunica 2004:50-51). Initiates (*wavinidwa*) are taught the secrets of the society, make covenants with the elder members and are believed to "receive something from the spirits" which causes others to fear them (SFG 5). Unfortunately, as traditional Chewa culture increasingly faces subversive challenges from both the world and the church, such dissuasion becomes problematic, as initiation practices are challenged by church and humanitarian organizations and the Nyau are losing the respect of the educated (Nkunica 2004:54-55). As a result the *Gule wamkulu* are becoming increasingly aggressive towards believers in certain areas as their traditional sphere of influence is relentlessly threatened. For example, a Pastor related how he had narrowly avoided being struck by lightning and shortly afterwards was subjected to two attacks by mobs of armed *Gule wamkulu* members (some he recognized from his congregation) who intended to violently remove him from the area or end his life (I B18 cf. I A1; I B1; I B33; I B37). Indeed, many in the ZEC churches are impacted in one way or another, whether indirectly through fear of those involved, or directly, through personal involvement, or by becoming the victims of lightning strikes or malicious and violent attacks by Nyau members (I B19; I B21).

The *Gule wamkulu* remain prominent at village level in certain regions in Malawi. The Nyau and Chewa village chiefs are closely connected since the latter is considered the spiritual head

of his people (PFG 4; SFG 4), and his responsibilities include the preservation of the sacred traditions and practices of the ancestors. Thus local chiefs are not only the 'owners of the land' but also the 'owners of the Nyau', in so much as they are able to direct and control the activities of the Nyau. However, no chief may interfere with the actual Nyau rituals because these are set in place by the ancestors (*makolo*) (Van Breugal 2001:136). The *Gule wamkulu* have close historical links to the rain shrines, formerly functioning as local representatives of the shrines, assisting in central rituals and performing subsidiary rites. Their activities (performances) remain connected to the female initiation rites (I B8), and may well have been complementary with the annual rain ceremonies, given that the final stage of the puberty rites coincided with the great rain prayers (Schoffeleers 1999:154). Their role in 'praying' for fertility is not to be overlooked as they perform an important intercessory role regarding prayers offered to the High God for fertility for humans and animals (Ott 2000:181). The dances at the girls' initiation ceremony (*chinamwali*) involve the clear invocation of the *mizimu* to intercede with Chiuta on behalf of the young women for healthy children (Ott 2000:182). They are symbolic prayers of thanksgiving to Chiuta for rain and children and of petition for ongoing fertility (in the case of a funeral ceremony), or burgeoning fertility in the case of the initiation rites.

The '*Gule wamkulu*' is literally 'the great dance' of the Chewa people which symbolically represents the spirit world and a 'mask' (costume) may represent a Malawian animal spirit from bush or fairytale, an ancestral spirit (recently deceased), or even other ethnic groups (or customs) such as Christian missionaries or colonial administrators in the case of satire (Ott 2000:180). Therefore, masks are worn as "representations of the spirits of the departed and are thus treated as highly sacred objects" (Schoffeleers 1999:150-151) (PFG 4). These 'masks', generally referred to as '*zirombo*' (animals of the forest), cover more than just the face or head, rather they constitute an entire costume designed to disguise the whole person (Ott 2000:179, Nkunika 2004:47-48). They are employed to dramatize either the traits of a deceased animal or ancestor or a specific moral behavior once recognized in a now depersonalized 'long-since dead' person which is worth recalling in community (Ott 2000:180). People believe that the Nyau dancers actually communicate with the spirits of the deceased during the dance (Hara 2008:137) (SFG 3), and that there is a link between the spirits and Chiuta (the High God) (Van Breugal 2001:166). For this reason some argue that the Nyau is itself a religion (Hara 2008:137). However, they are not mediators in the sense of carrying messages from God to man (PFG 4). Nevertheless, since the deceased spirits of ancestors (*mizimu*) are believed to be re-incarnated during the performances and if a dancer loses his mask the mystery and efficacy is destroyed. It is believed that "during the performance the dancers enter into the 'other' world, namely the sacred space of the original paradise. Each dancer, each animal figure, each mask, expresses a different aspect of the world of the spirits" (Ott 2000:181). The

dancers must “identify themselves with the *mizimu* to such an extent that they have to undergo, symbolically, a transformation, just like that of a deceased person before he can enter into the spirit world” (Van Breugal 2001:166). Dancers enter a marginal or liminal state, manifesting ‘reversals’ which might be described as the opposite of normal cultural behavior and the appropriate observance of cultural taboos and norms. Thus they demonstrate that the *mizimu* are not merely normal people but rather they represent the world of the spirits (Van Breugal 2001:148; Ott 2000:181). Such reversals might include living at the ‘*dambwe*’ near a graveyard, walking around naked and filthy, shouting obscenities, attacking and assaulting women, stealing chickens, and abusing one’s mother-in-law during dances (Van Breugal 2001:148) (SFG 2).⁸¹

Traditionally the Nyau perform on certain ritual occasions such as burials, commemorative rites for the dead, initiation ceremonies for boys and girls and healing ceremonies (Schoffeleers 1999:151; Van Breugal 2001:130; Ott 2000:179; Kadyampakeni 2004:40) (SFG 2; SFG 3). The ‘nyau’ may also be danced in honour of a particular *mzimba* (ancestral spirit) at their request through a dream (Van Breugal 2001:130). In the case of the dance being performed at or after traditional funeral ceremonies, “the ritual dances are staged to appease the angry spirits of the dead who might be angry because the burial rites were badly conducted... to avoid the disaster or death that might follow ...” (Hara 2008:137-138). Sometimes specific ancestral spirits are requested. For example, a pastor related this story: “in my home village there was a man who belonged to nyau who told his wife when he was sick that she had to make sure that a certain *gule wamkulu* called *mbalanangwe* was released, because he wanted that one to dance during his burial ceremony. But unfortunately that type of nyau was not available at that time, so the wife of the deceased was attacked by demons (*evil spirits- ziwanda*), and she cut herself with a knife... that’s when the elders realized that they did not follow what the deceased said, so they tried to find where *mbalanangwe* was, and when it danced the wife stopped (*cutting herself*)” (SFG 2). The ‘nyau’ is also performed to ensure that the deceased person’s spirit is welcomed by the *mizimu* as a true tribe member who honored the ancestral customs (Van Breugal 2001:167; Kadyampakeni 2004:40). Whereas in the past the dance was reserved for people of high standing in the community, more recently, nyau has been put on as entertainment for normal village folk during feasts and the *Gule wamkulu* is now even performed on Malawi’s national independence day (Ott 2000:179; Nkunica 2004:54). Thus a ‘cultural’ spectacle is made in public which Christians may watch or even participate in with impunity, as it is thought to have no religious import, but in reality, little has changed ideologically at the village level.⁸²

⁸¹ This is an opportunity to ‘reverse’ normal Chewa matrilineal conventions and expectations.

⁸² Some denominations such as the Central Church of Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) have historically suspended the church membership of those watching or participating in the traditional Nyau dances.

Today, they exercise a negative influence on the church in various ways. For example, a pastoral couple ministering in the Central region related how one of their members had come to Christ and forsaken his membership of *Gule wamkulu*. However, due to financial problems he had left the church and gone back. They said this was not uncommon as being part of the *Gule wamkulu* was increasingly viewed as an opportunity to boost finances (I B21). Some members use their masks, and the associated spiritual aura of mystery, to solicit (at times demand) money from fearful locals (I B20). They are still believed to have magic powers and to use charms for healing (SFG 3). It is believed that “if *nyau* can take a stone and throw it at you and make a wound... that cut can never be healed... unless you offer sacrifices and please them (*the ancestor*), you cannot get healed... it needs you to consult them so that they can search for charms” (SFG 3). Recently, the author was also told that *Gule wamkulu* members (some members of local ZEC churches) use charms to affect fatal lightning strikes on perceived enemies who disagree with their customs and practices (I B16; I B21). According to the incumbent General Secretary of ZEC, the organization remains one of the biggest challenges to discipleship in the Central region, although they also still exist and are very active in certain places in Southern Malawi, such as Mwanza (I B1 cf. I A5; I A7; I B18; I B19).

In summary, the primary purposes of the *Gule wamkulu* (Nyau) are both theological and heuristic (PFG 4), promoting reflection on cosmology, human origins and destination, and God’s relationship to mankind and His creation. The performance of the dances is also the ‘prayerful’ seeking of favour from the High God for fertility, through the territorial ancestors as intermediary spirits. This is dramatized in the form of a mime or ‘mystery play’ by means of their songs and dances, and usually at critical points in the lifecycle such as initiations and funerals (Van Breugal 2001:154;149;167). Moreover, and integral to the above dynamic, is the shepherding of the people in relation to the expected cultural norms and customs to preserve tradition. This involves instilling the fear of the ancestors in the people by means of multiple warnings at the various ceremonies, and demonstrations of aggression and intolerance towards threatening external influences. The latter explains why both the Phiri dynasties and the colonial authorities have experienced problems with the society. It is also one of the reasons why Christian Churches have struggled to see members set free from traditional cultural and religious expectations, especially at village level (I B1).

4.2.6.2 Territorial Rain Cults

The Chewa have two distinct shrine organizations, namely the Chisumphu or Makewana cult in the North, and the Mbona cult in the South (Schoffeleers 1999:147).⁸³ The former, in the North is “centered around the person of a High God, and the Southern cult predominantly around that

⁸³ The reference to the ‘North’ here includes the Central Region of Malawi.

of a divinized human being, Mbona (Schoffeleers 1999:149).⁸⁴ These rain shrines were (and are) centers of religious activity, centering around the focal point of a '*kachisi*' (a small hut designated for prayers and offerings). Here '*Chauta*' or 'the Supreme being' is said to be worshipped as people come to him through designated mediators to implore his blessing of fertility on themselves (community) and on their land. Schoffeleers (1999:1-2) explains that such "territorial cults are characterized by a network of permanent shrines, by specialized priests and by a seasonal calendar of worship ... Theologically they emphasize the creative and directive powers of God." Thus, shrines are said to be "symbols of the divine presence", functioning to foster ultimate dependence on the creator God (*Chauta*) for wellbeing on the part of the Chewa (Amanze 2003:160). The essence of this form of worship is communication with unseen beings for the purpose of invoking favour from God for the community (Amanze 2003:160). Thus, offerings such as beer, maize, flour or fish are made to the ancestors (mediators) or a divinized person or animal as spirit representative (in the case of the Mbona cult). As Ott (2000:163) notes: "The prayers are directed to the spirits of the deceased chiefs or other ancestral spirits through whom the name of the High God can be invoked." The Chewa belief that God as the master of the rain might withhold rain if offended, and their acknowledgement that God can be propitiated by sacrifice (which brings great comfort to the people), is not quite consistent with their putative belief in God (*Chiuta*) as wholly benevolent. Moreover, the constant need for intermediaries for procuring fertility of land and womb, underscores his remoteness.

4.2.6.2.1 The *Chisumphi* Cult

The name under which all the proto-Chewa rain cults in the North and Central regions of Malawi can be grouped is '*Chisumphi*' (Ott 2000:164). Schoffeleers (1999:153) explains that, during the proto-Chewa heyday, "the central cult object was conceived of as a snake, called '*tunga*', which was associated both with the shrine hut and with the sacred pool ... The snake spirit was visibly represented by the senior Mbewe official, who was himself known as '*tunga*' and who acted as the spirit wife's ritual consort." *Thunga* was understood to be a male manifestation of the High God, *Chisumphi* (Ott 2000:164), who controlled the rains (Vail 1999:216). Traditionally, his 'spirit' wife, the priestess of the shrine, Makewana (or Mangadzi Banda) who was associated with the sacred pools and brought the female counterbalance (Ott 2000:164). The spirit snake and the priestess of the shrine engaged in sexual relations as part of the fertility rites (Vail 1999:216-217), their ritual union symbolizing a balance between two worlds, or theologically, reconciliation between heaven and earth (Ott 2000:165). During

⁸⁴ While the ritual personage, 'Makewana' (one of the titles of Chisumphi's wife), is traditionally a very important mediator between God and man, she is never the central object of worship.

intercourse each remained wrapped up and neither were thought of as being like normal human beings, Kamundi being referred to as a python and as 'a snake that entered into her house' (Van Breugal 2001:56-57). It was this mythical union only that could successfully bring forth rain and so restore the lost paradise of the *kaphirintiwa* myth, even if only temporarily (Ott 2000:168; Van Breugal 2001: 35-36).

4.2.6.2.2 The Southern 'Mbona' Cult

A second territorial rain cult also developed to the South. The Mbona cult "was and is integral to the Mang'anja people" and is recognized as one of the biggest rain cults in Central and Southern Africa. At its height, towards the end of the 16th century and into the 17th century, the cult's influence extended throughout the Lower Shire valley and the adjacent areas in Malawi and into Mozambique and Zambia (Ott 2000:175). The initial cult centers on a male rain prophet by the name of Mbona who had miraculous powers and brought rain to the country. Thus, the Southern cult developed around a divinized person with rain prayers addressed directly to Mbona. Mbona served to unite people, particularly in the deep-South of Malawi, religiously and politically. However, in reality, the Mbona cult has never been a completely 'unified' territorial rain cult and was only loosely held together since there were in effect three different forms of the cult in conception and organization, all of which were to varying degrees orientated towards the historical figure Mbona.

At the Nsanje Shrine the people were of one mind regarding Mbona as "priest, prophet and martyr, and only there did myth and ritual combine into an effective mechanism of political integration" (Schoffeleers 1999:165-166). Here, Mbona represented a 'divinized' human being (PFG 2). However, at the Thyolo Shrine, North of Nsanje, a similar religious organization to the Chisumphi cult (in ideology, organization and socio-political structures) had already developed. here, they managed to continue in a recognizable form the "tradition of the creation God of Kaphirintiwa" (Ott 2000:177). As such there were "two different Mbona cults: one at Thyolo which continued the ancient Proto-Chewa organization; the other at Nsanje where a new system came into operation" (Schoffeleers 1999:163). Later, a third distinct expression of the cult was developed by the Bororo people who lived East of the Shire in the Zambezi area. They viewed 'Mbona' "less as a historical personage than as a nature spirit ... identified with the great mythical snake, known in Southern Malawi as '*napolo*'" (Schoffeleers 1999:165). This animistic understanding of the divinized python or 'river snake' appealed to a wider immigrant pool, people groups such as the Sena, Tonga, Lolo and Lomwe all embraced the cult in this area.

In summary, the territorial Chisumphu and Mbona rain cult complexes are fundamental to Chewa traditional religious understanding and practice. Today shrines are mainly scattered and 'independent' seemingly lacking centralized organization (with the exception of the Bimbi cult in the Central region) (cf. Amanze 2002: 148,174). However, the entire background remains redolent to religious practice. The various figures and practices appear to remain always rooted in people's consciousness (particularly those in rural locations). Territorial rain cult theology is far from dead. Prayers to the High God through the ancestors, mythical figures (spirit representation), divinized beings, nature spirits, spirit mediumship and possession, and prophetic figures all remain 'live' issues in this context (PFG 4, 5; SFG 4, 5). Many people still hear from and appease ancestors (convinced that fertility and fecundity lie in their hands), flock to diviners and prophets, perpetuate spirit possession cults (PFG 7; SFG 6, 7) and greatly fear the python, believing that it has mystical, spiritual powers. Both Makewana and Mbona are still well-known and remembered for their mediatory roles between man, spirits and God, and considered by some to be a 'god' (PFG 4; PFG 5). As one student-pastor pointed out, even today to replace the traditional mediators with Christ is "not such a simple thing for them (*people*) to grasp" (SFG 3). Despite little mention of these traditional religious institutions by the pastors in the interviews as related directly to charm-usage, discussions in the Focus Groups prove this historico-cultural-religious heritage to be formative and highly influential when it comes to contemporary religious practice.

4.2.7 'Witchcraft as Integral to Life'

The belief in and practice of witchcraft is very common in Africa. Indeed, it is the way by which Chewa people (and many others) can find a 'religious' cause for everything, so functioning as a central means of explanation (Ott in Van Breugal 2001:11). Ingwe (2007:15) explains that Africans have a proclivity to "accept witchcraft as a mode of explanation, of perception and interpretation of their problems, events, nature and reality even when events and common sense suggest otherwise..." In Malawi, misfortune may be accepted in a passive, even fatalistic way (PFG 8) but is likely to be attributed to witchcraft. This type of cause-effect understanding to misfortune is pervasive and functions as the '*moyo*' (life-force) of witchcraft beliefs. Isichei (2004:285) rightly notes that anthropologists and sociologists generally agree that witchcraft is one of the most enduring and pervasive elements of African Traditional Religion. Mphande (2004:65) describes witchcraft as "an essential part of the African way of life." Indeed, witchcraft beliefs and the fear of associated powers are deeply entrenched, even affecting Christians profoundly (Van Bruegel 2001:211). A student-pastor summed it up well when he stated: "In Malawi we just know that we have witchcraft" (SFG 2).

In witchcraft the material and spiritual worlds merge (synthesis), animated by the belief in the existence of a plethora of hierarchical forces and latent power in the cosmos, all of which are subject to manipulation for good or evil purposes by human agents in allegiance with them (Ferdinando 1999:29). While it is true that “Many people in Africa attribute any extraordinary, mysterious or inexplicable event, manifestation or phenomenon to witchery and wizardry ... generally in Africa, witchcraft is associated with evil, harm and destruction” (Ingwe 2007:15). The practitioners are usually identified as witches, sorcerers, wizards, and Satanists (Imasogie 1993:63) and all of these are considered ‘enemies’ in Malawi (PFG 2). However, as Steinforth (2008:38) rightly points out, “an individual with personal expertise in magic does not necessarily use it for his or her own purposes only...” rather they... “offer their services to perform magic charms on behalf of a paying customer.” A third party thus approaches the magic expert and solicits their services for personal benefit.

Idowu (1973:175-176) explains that “African concepts about witchcraft consist in the belief that the spirits of living human beings can be sent out of the body on errands of doing havoc to other persons in body, mind or estate....”, and they, “... in this way can act either invisibly or through a lower creature- an animal or a bird.” It is commonly believed in Malawi that witches can change themselves into hyenas (and other animals) or use the spirits of people to indwell animals in order to carry out malicious and nefarious witchcraft related activities (hyenas, owls, bats, flies and cockroaches are mentioned often) (Banda 2009:14; Van Breugal 2001:217) (I B2; I B12; I B32). Theft by magic is common in Malawi and may be carried out by ghosts (*mizukwa*), snakes or even rabbits (I B2; I B3I B 19; I B65; I B69; I B70) (PFG 2; SFG 5). However, if you attempt to steal by magic and come up against someone with more powerful protective magic, the consequences could be fatal (SFG 5). Magic snakes are often said to be responsible for road accidents. Such tragedies could be instigated by vengeful or envious people or caused by evil spirits bent on revenge (PFG 5). A peculiar feature in Malawian witchcraft belief is that witches are thought to not only eat their victims physically after they have died, but also to eat the bodies of their victims spiritually, while they are still alive (Van Breugal 2001:213-216).⁸⁵ This witchcraft cannibalism belief is encouraged by the fact that in both rural and semi-urban areas hyenas are quite often seen near gravesites.

Van der Meer (2008:247) notes that “While some beliefs may appear to be irrational and can be partially explained by science, not all events can be explained away scientifically and seem to indicate genuine supernatural activity of a malicious nature.” The supernatural is superimposed over the natural giving the social event/s a moral character. For example, in the natural, if someone cuts their foot on a stump it is because they kicked the stump. However, an African

⁸⁵ Tropical ulcers are cited by the Chewa as evidence of an *mfiti* (witch) eating away someone's soul.

person wants the why question to be answered: Why was the walker not carefully watching the pathway ahead at that point? Why did the wound then take so long to heal? Invariably a supernatural answer is assumed and witchcraft is suspected (Rasmussen 2008:59). The event happened just the way it did because there was a certain cause and behind that cause was a definite motive (usually malicious). Witchcraft and witches are, therefore, blamed for misfortunes of all kinds, including: bad health, death, barrenness, and even poverty. Indeed, it is often said in Malawi that the poor have been bewitched by others who use magicians to get rich (PFG 3), which is why people like “greedy politicians are considered enemies” (SFG 3).

The term ‘witchcraft’ is often used generically to describe any apparent supernatural, mysterious, inexplicable and/or nefarious happening. However, some argue for a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery (Khathide 2007:338-339; Westerlund 1985:37), even though “these terms are often used interchangeably” (Van der Meer 2008:250). Sorcery is probably slightly different because it is always intended to harm others. Ferdinando (1999:104) clarifies: “What characterises sorcery are the antisocial and illegitimate motives which inspire it, rather than the means employed.” While there is certainly power in witchcraft, and many do use it maliciously for their own benefit and to the detriment of others, it may also simply be employed for the sake of protection. Steinforth appears to first argue for a distinction to be made between hidden, secretive and feared ‘*ufiti*’ (witchcraft) and the more communally accepted ‘*matsenga*’, which is openly practiced protective magic. But in the end he acknowledges that the latter can also cause harmful effects to a supposed evil-doer, thus blurring the lines. Some, like Kombo (2003:76) and Mphande (2004:71) want to draw a distinction between ‘black magic’, which is used for offensive and malicious purposes, as opposed to ‘white magic’, which is used exclusively to defend oneself from attacks, such as curses which are very common. He explains that “In African tradition, cursing involves the use of words or actions against an individual or group. Words indicating the misfortune one will suffer for engaging in a certain action or saying certain words may be uttered ... This negative effect manifests itself in disease, poverty or even death.” For example, a pregnant woman from Mulanje allegedly gave birth to a stone as a result of a curse put on her by her sister-in-law (Kamiyala 2009:1-2). Moreover, one well known ‘witchcraft’ themed proverb in Malawi speaks of someone seeing the sunrise but not being around to see the sunset (*‘aliona poturuka, polowa salipenya’*) (Chakanza 2000:22) (I B2; I B22; I B40; I B42; I B61).

Stabell (2013:396) contends that it is also possible, despite some ambiguity, to distinguish between witches and the type of witchcraft practiced. He differentiates between public figures such as traditional healers (‘witchdoctors’) who are well known in rural and urban areas, who publicly advertise their services and receive payment for consultations, and ‘hidden witches’, who do not self-identify for fear of reprisal but secretly and maliciously manipulate the powers to

harm others. The former (witchdoctors) are believed to be ‘power specialists’ able to cure illnesses, save marriages, initiate or sustain success in business, concoct love potions, help students to pass exams or ensure the winning of football matches etc., but mostly provide protection for people and their property and possessions against witchcraft (*‘matsenga’*) (cf. I C1; I C2). The latter are greatly feared and considered responsible for many of life’s misfortunes. They are mysterious figures said to “fly vast distances at incredible speed on winnowing trays, or goatskins powered by human blood ... They are addicted to human flesh and unable to stop themselves from attacking others in an effort to quell an insatiable hunger” (Stabell 2013:397). In Malawi, it is believed that one actually becomes a witch by eating human flesh, drinking special medicine (*mankhwala*) and then receiving instruction in the arts of *‘ufiti’* (witchcraft) (Van Breugal 2001:216). Pentecostal ministers in North West Tanzania understand people to become witches in two ways: 1. They inherit it through family (relatives) as a living or dead ancestor or spirit will pressurize them into learning the relevant ways, and people say it is ‘in the blood’. Refusal leads to negative personal and communal consequences; 2. They buy the powers of witchcraft but this may involve killing people regularly in order to maintain the privilege! (Rasmussen 2008:121). Such explanations are not uncommon in Africa. Here in Malawi it is feasible for a person to approach a *mfiti* (witch) to ask for the flesh and *mankhwala* but it is usually family members, such as grandparents or others in the community, who introduce young children to *ufiti* (Van Breugal 2001:216).

Unfortunately, children are regularly targeted and become both practitioners and victims of witchcraft (Nthara 2009:6; Somanje 2009:4; Van der Meer 2013:129-144) (cf. I B16; I B32; I B55). They are apparently more vulnerable as a consequence of the cultural expectation for them to be obedient to their elders (SFG 5). A Pastor’s wife told the researcher, in a recent interview (I B6), that at a night of prayer at the church last year, she spoke with one of the children of a member of their congregation who was there with his mother, because he was looking particularly uncomfortable. The child confessed that he was involved in witchcraft activities. He said that it started when he was given food during the day by a stranger. Then during the night, while sleeping, he heard that person calling his name, and unfortunately he found himself out of the house. He explained that when the witches come they just call his name and he goes out through the corner of the house, not by the door. He just finds himself out of the house ready to do the bidding of the witch.

Witchcraft is also an opt-out clause when events and circumstances seem inexplicable and intolerable. Sadly, it can also lead to the scapegoating of individuals. Witch-hunts still take place in Malawi. Chavula (2009:4) explains that witchcraft “functions as a security valve by channeling discontent and frustration away from society and towards individuals.” Van der Meer (2013:129) adds that socio-economic factors play a role in the creation of this frustration, also

noting that “The vulnerable in society become the scapegoats upon whom all frustration is projected” Accusations of any witchcraft activity may lead to ostracism, violence, death or the need to make reparations even though the victim may only be ‘guilty’ of having a great harvest, being healthy, or simply aged, disabled, orphaned or somehow different (Van der Meer 2011:78-85; 2013:129-144) (cf. I B27; I B30). Indeed, in traditional religious perspective, abundance of any description, be that the building of a big house, the acquisition of a new car or any success is treated with suspicion (SFG 8). Often local newspaper articles cover events relating to mob violence resulting from suspicions of the practice of witchcraft, for example rituals (Kasawala 2009:3), and suspected supernatural travel in witchcraft baskets (Namangale 2009:2). Van der Meer (2013:139-140) also explains that in some cases charms found in someone’s possession are cited as evidence of a crime having been perpetrated. He rightly points out that the ‘religious’ meaning attributed to them by those who believe in their efficacy does not actually constitute a crime, stating that “Only unlawful actions, which may result from the various beliefs people hold, can and should be regulated.”

Complicating matters is the fact that deeply rooted in the Malawian psyche, is the need for cleansing or purification from evil, including personal evil which is personified in witchcraft. People need to know that they are not evil, and therefore, not actually a witch or a wizard or somehow tainted by them (SFG 2). This inherent need and the notion that medicine specialists were/are given by God (Hara 2008:138), explain the popularity of the ‘purification movements’ in Malawi in the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s. Van Breugal (2001:223 cf. Soko and Kubik 2002:16-38) relates how “A certain Chikanga presented himself 1957-1964 as being able to protect people from *ufiti* by making incisions in their skin and rubbing *mankhwala* into the cuts (*kutemera*).” Although this kind of purification ritual is now outlawed in Malawi (Van Breugal 2001:271-272), today some ‘Chikangas’-including the self-proclaimed healing ‘prophets’- still operate secretly, or openly in the case of the prophets, profiting from the people’s perceived need for purification. Today it is very common for people to receive cuts/incisions (*mpini*) on various parts of their bodies (including especially feet, hands and head) (I C1; I B60), from the *asing’anga* for protection from witchcraft (I B16; I 24; I B28; I B29; I B34; I B35; I B37; I B38; I B51; I B60; I B62; I B65).

Historically, this need also motivated many to willingly participate in the ‘*mwabvi*’ ordeal to prove that they are not witches or intrinsically evil. Suspects were given poison to drink which searched their flesh for evil. If innocent they would vomit up the poison, if not, they would die. However, the diviner, believed by many to have been appointed by God, determined life and death by means of controlling the amount of poison given to the accused. Village Chiefs would often conspire with the *sing’anga* to identify a culprit and even the innocent, in the throes of death, would confess to being a witch (Van Breugal 2001:221). Such was people’s confidence

in the *mwabvi* ordeal that they believed they may have inherited their powers, or that someone may have fed them human flesh when they were young, making them a witch. This poison ordeal has now been outlawed but innocent people may still face banishment or even death.

As we have already seen the Church is directly impacted by witchcraft (I B1; I B13; I B55; I B72). ZEC Church leaders have been known to use witchcraft to resolve disputes amongst themselves (I B26), increase membership (I B47), and to gain or consolidate power (cf. I B12; I B19; I B25; I B 26; I B40; I B50; I B61; I B73). Munza (2005:69) explains that so called 'men of God' do not hesitate to gain or hang onto power through wicked means, including: corruption, use of fetishes (charms), intimidation, persecution, false accusations, and in extreme cases, even dictatorship or assassination. Sometimes denominations become ethnic kingdoms where members from other tribes or areas are treated as enemies or second-class members. In Malawi and within the ZEC denomination in particular, events surrounding Synod elections are often tainted with allegations of corruption and/or ethnic or geographical partisanship. In 2009, the elected Office Bearers, who were both from a particular geographical location and ethnic group, were accused of paying off pastors to vote for them and of practicing witchcraft. In 2018, a senior office bearer was accused of using charms to gain popularity (I B26). The allegations were never verified in either case but the sentiments exposed the existence of profound suspicions related to their activities. Two other examples are helpful: a Pastor in the Central region related how a certain elder in one of his prayer houses had reputedly used witchcraft to kill two other members who had had conflict with him. As a result many people were fearful and failing to attend worship services. To restore order he had to dissolve the eldership at the prayer house (I B61 cf. I A4). More recently, a former student of the author told how he had been cursed by a colleague in his denomination who wanted to eliminate him from the election ballot (to the office of Bishop). This resulted in sudden fainting, temporary blindness, heart palpitations and organ dysfunction which led to a period of hospitalization (I D3). He testified to a genuine evil spiritual power at work against him through the curse.

We have already seen that church congregations and leaderships have also been known to try to get rid of their pastors by witchcraft. A ZEC Pastor's wife told the author how she had quite suddenly and inexplicably become paralyzed. After a series of tests at different hospitals which failed to diagnose the cause, she heard God telling her to go home and pray. She asked all pastor's wives in the area to pray for her as she was still unable to walk and in pain. She testified that after a few hours she saw the greatness of God as she was able to stand and then gradually regained her ability to walk. Later another Pastor's wife came to visit her and explained that God had revealed to her in a dream that it was witchcraft that had caused the problem. Remarkably, she described the exact symptoms without any prior knowledge of the situation. The pastor's wife remains convinced that the perpetrators were women in the church

(I B7). A friend of the authors, who shepherds a fellowship in the Central Region, knows that there are members of his community who oppose his ministry. He testified recently that he has had two frightful encounters with black mambas rearing up in front of him on the road, as he cycled to the church meeting place. He believes that these near escapes were not coincidental (I D7). Moreover, the evidence posited in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter demonstrated categorically that ZEC congregants use charms frequently for self-protection (e.g. I B3; I B4; I B15; I B28; I B34; I B36; I B43; I B56; I B67) and self-enhancement (e.g. I B10; I B16; I B17; I B30; I B 46; I B55; I B58; I B73), both of which may be referred to as witchcraft related activities. As such many are integrally caught up in the 'magic-counter-magic-magic' cycle.

The great fear promoting witchcraft fears and practices is death. One pastor stated that while it is true that witches cause sickness and death, the great fear amongst people is not witchcraft but death itself (PFG 1; PFG 2). Although death is generally understood to be part of the natural rhythm of life it is also believed to have external causes. Despite the fact that death leads to one's spirit moving on to another (often improved) existence, a little further along the pilgrimage towards God, people usually want to identify the causes for death and attribute blame. Mbiti (1999:155-56) enumerates the four external causes most often cited: magic, sorcery, witchcraft and God (the latter only when there is absolutely no other possible explanation). In Malawi, it is only usually the deaths of the elderly which are attributed to God (Van Breugal 2001:72). However, any inexplicable or 'suspicious' circumstances surrounding a death will mean witchcraft will be cited as the cause. Even cases which many Westerners might consider straightforward, like being struck by lightning, may be considered witchcraft related (I B8; I B18; I B 24). In Van Breugal's (2001:227) survey on the causes of 451 deaths amongst the Chewa of Central Malawi, 296 were said to be witchcraft related and 16 of those were death by lightning strike.

In summary, witchcraft beliefs, suspicions and practices are integral to the worldview of the people and therefore, ubiquitous in Malawi. Witchcraft has become the pre-eminent way to gain life force (*moyo*), procure protection, advance oneself, and/or exact retribution. Most diseases, misfortunes and deaths are attributed to the work of witches (Van Bruegel 2001:211) or wizards working in alliance with evil spirits (Van der Meer 2011:78), or malicious human beings employing power specialists for retributive or self-enhancing purposes. Even the ZEC pastors remain steeped in this kind of thinking: one pastor telling a story about people having sex with other people through magic (I B29), another relating how he was translocated across a raging river (I B2), still another testifying to the fatal powers inherent in magic hammers (I B12), and many pastors/wives also testifying that witchcraft had been used against them (I B7; I B8; I B9; I B10; I B32; I B37; I B38; I B54; I B57; I B59; I B62; I B66). The consequence of such

beliefs is an aura of suspicion, fear, anxiety and vulnerability pervading the nation. In this milieu it is only the powerful in society that are considered to have the protection (*mtsiliko*) they need, and so are (*munthu wokhwima*) or 'fortified individuals'- the rest live daily in fear and uncertainty.⁸⁶ Van der Meer (2011:78) explains that a Malawian media analyst once aptly described Malawi as a country full of 'fear of witchcraft fears' and that the country has even been labeled in a national newspaper as 'A witchcraft-infested society' (cf. Chandilanga 2010:4-5). Simply seeking to survive and succeed traps people as "there is seemingly no internal way to break the ever-present chain of causality and misfortune in life" (Wendland 2005:73 cf. Soko 2002:72-73; Van Breugal 2001:217). As such, witchcraft is not just a pseudo-religion (Van Breugal 2001:211, 271-272) but either an integral, dominant theme in traditional religion, or a superior rival, in many cases replacing or at least side-lining both the Supreme Being and many other traditional religious practices.⁸⁷

4.2.8 'The Indispensability of Traditional Religious Charms'

4.2.8.1 (Re-) Defining Charms

The synthesis or integration of the preceding seven motifs establish the necessity of this last one, which holds a prominent place in religious thought and practice, and is central to this thesis. Charm-usage is entrenched in African culture and falls into the category of ATR practice. Traditional religious charms are used both in the crisis moments of life and for more mundane or nefarious activities. They are introduced from birth (I B40; I B41) and are said to be needed "for everything" (I B26). According to Arinze (1970:21), charms are "certainly not personal spirits, nor representing them", but are "useful things charged with powers". O'Donovan (1995:239) elaborates: "Charms are physical objects carried by a person who believes that such objects will bring good luck or prevent evil..." Charms might also be classified as medicines (and vice-versa) but may or may not actually contain physical *muti*. In Africa 'medicine' is a broad term and can refer to a physical mixture (of physical substances), or to purely mystical power, or a combination of both, "where the powers of physical substances are believed to be strengthened by spiritual powers" (O' Donovan 238-239). Therefore, by way of **a definition**: anything a person procures or creates which is understood to be imbued with supernatural power through constituents, associated actions or invocations, for self-protective or self-enhancing (promotion) purposes, including inflicting harm on others, is called a charm.

⁸⁶ For example, a village chief must be fortified in order to fulfil his/her spiritual functions and protect the village from *afiti* (witches) (PFG 4).

⁸⁷ J.M. Schoffeleers declared to Van Breugal in a personal conversation as far back as 1975 that magic and witchcraft beliefs were becoming more of a centre of interest than traditional religion (Van Breugal 2001:211).

4.2.8.2 Acquiring Charms

In Malawi, people commonly obtain these charms/medicines (*zithumwa/mankhwala*) from the '*sing'anga*' (witchdoctor/medicine-man/herbalist) who is recognized as a power specialist- although certain charms may be created by following traditional wisdom- in order to protect themselves against '*ufiti*' (witchcraft), capricious or evil spirits (*ziwanda*), witches or sorcerers, curses, jealous people, and any potential harm or affliction (Van Breugal 2001:222) or to self-enhance or promote. These medicines/charms are stored and carried or hidden in sewn material 'pillows', pockets, hidden pouches in clothing, small cuts (*mpini*), strings, beads, animal horns, gourds, and even in the form of lotions, oils, liquids, water and smoke (I B 5; I B12; I B28; I B35; I B45; I B64; I B65; I B69; I C1; I C2). They are believed to be charged with supernatural powers when words (incantation) are pronounced over specially prepared matter, often by means of the repetition of a peculiar formula. The materials used in the concoction of a charm mixture might include: leaves, plant matter, tomb soil, water that has been used to bathe a dead body, or even human body parts such as hair or fingernails. The charm is worn, hidden or placed strategically according to one's purpose (I C1; I C2).

4.2.8.3 Using Charms

Interestingly, within the African context, which is palpably communal in orientation, charms are most often solicited for individual needs or purposes. Father Joseph Chakhanza (in Chavula 2009:4) explains that "the envious use the supernatural powers to harm the successful; the fearful to defend themselves from personal enemies and the overzealous to state supremacy." In Malawi, magic charms/medicines specifically prepared by the 'magician' or '*sing'anga*' (medicine man or witch-doctor) (I C1; I C2) for the purposes of protection from witchcraft/sorcery and/or theft are referred to as '*mtsiliko*' or '*chambu*'. Van Breugal (2001:246-247) informs us that "The general name for all such medicines is *mankhwala*." Others, like (Steinforth 2009:37), suggest that all 'good' magic, including protective medicines/charms, fall under a special category referred to as '*matsenga*'. Wendland (2005:72) accurately describes these medicines as "concoctions derived from selected inanimate (including human) sources which are intended to tap and consolidate the energy inherent in their respective ingredients for specific defensive and self-promotional purposes." The former is vital and purposes include specific forms of security: protecting one's life, well-being, family, marriage, spouse, pregnancies, babies, children, health, business, money, employment, possessions, property, fields, crops, and travel arrangements. The latter are self- promotional in the sense of life-enhancement, including: prosperity (Student Focus Group 2: 7 December 2018) (hereafter SFG 2 etc.), posterity, prominence in society (status), increased knowledge (wisdom), treating suffering of many kinds (Nyirongo 1997:173), including healing diseases (SFG 2), attracting a

lover or a spouse and keeping them faithful⁸⁸, falling pregnant and having children (Pastors Focus Group 2: 16 January 2019) (hereafter PFG 2 etc.), getting a job, having good crops, winning football games, passing exams, being popular amongst peers, rising socially, election to leadership, and even long-life (cf. I B1-74; I C1-2).

A good example of a traditional charm being used for protection found amongst the Chewa people of Malawi, involves procuring protection from '*ufiti*' (witchcraft) whereby the Chewa person will consult the *sing'anga* (herbalist or witchdoctor) to receive '*mankhwala*' (medicine) which is sealed in the horn or tail of an antelope or a gourd. The one in possession of such medicine is considered a strong man ('*munthu wokwhimwa*') with nothing to fear, especially when the charm is strategically placed to protect property, belongings or persons against *mfiti* (a witch) (I B10; I B22; I B42; I B24; I B37; I B45; I B62). Van Breugal (2001:222) explains that these charms are often hidden in the roof of a house, near the door to "prevent the *mfiti* from entering the house or it may perhaps warn the owner of a house that a *mfiti* is prowling around the house; sometimes it may render the house invisible to the *mfiti*" (I B3; I B16; I B35; I B49; I B61).

Charms are also used for more nefarious purposes such as harming others. Jealousy is a big issue in Malawi and people consider the envious to be dangerous enemies (SFG 3). Since in an African worldview, "Things do not happen fortuitously, they are caused by someone" (Van Breugal 2001:270)⁸⁹, all evil, suffering and disasters are believed to have a personal cause. It is considered necessary to acquire more powerful charms (magic) to counteract the effects of the offensive charms (SFG3). The power specialists (witchdoctors/diviners/sorcerers) are key to this dynamic as they are considered able to identify the perpetrators and harness the powers that be to find remedies to cure, placate, protect or counter-attack (cf. I B29; I B31; I B42). They may consult the spirits for information and receive instructions through mediums, or in dreams, visions and impressions.

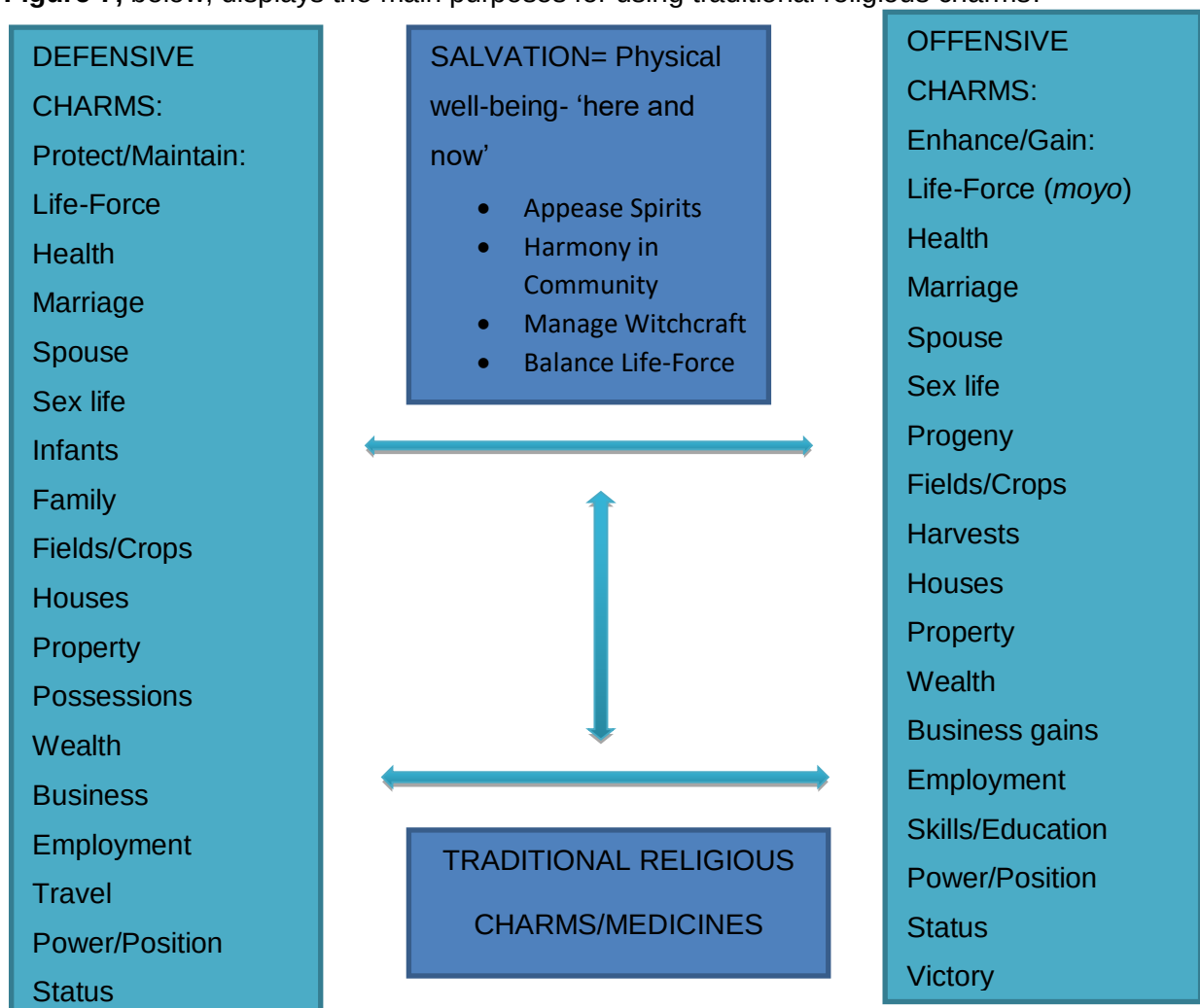
Steinforth (2009:38) contends that some powerful charms (for which '*afiti*'-witches sometimes use human body parts) can cause diseases, physical deformities, mental disorders and even death. For example, the Chewa use a magical hammer to strike an enemy with a fatal blow at night (I B12) or manipulate axes to bring about fatal lightning strikes (I B8; I B46). A number of pastors/pastor's wives told the researcher in recent interviews, how their disgruntled congregants had used charms aggressively in attempts to chase them from their churches (cf. I B9; I B37; I B62). The author has heard often that in Chiradzulu, in Southern Malawi (and other

⁸⁸ A woman or wife can apparently be 'locked' to prevent sexual intercourse or penetration, guaranteeing fidelity (Namagale 2009: 2).

⁸⁹ Here Van Breugal was speaking particularly about the Chewa people of Malawi but his perspicuous observation holds true for most African people groups.

places), victims have their breasts and/or genitals (or fingers, toes, hair, or blood) cut off/removed and sold as constituents for strong medicine (*chizimba*). Whenever such '*chizimba*' is added to the medicine, evil motives are at work. The latter (*chizimba*) may also take the form of an action such as sodomy, incest or murder (Kalilombe 2007:8; Schofield 2003:18-19). For example, an article by Kandodo in the Nation on Sunday on 5 June 2016, entitled 'Ban Traditional healers to deal with albino killings' highlights the deplorable ongoing use of human (albino) body parts for witchcraft medicine. More recently, in the Weekend Nation newspaper, on Saturday, 9 March 2019, Munthali writes that "Between November 2014 and now, the number of reported crimes against people with albinism in Malawi has risen to more than 150 cases, including at least 23 murders and 7 attempted murders." These murders are done to order and carried out by organized criminal networks on behalf of rich clients (Blomfield and Mhango 2019: online, 6 April 2019). It is even rumoured that highly ranking government officials are amongst the latter, especially as the elections approach. Chiuta (Nyasa Times online, 8 April 2019) alleging that, "the state has become a suspect in the abduction of people with albinism..."

Figure 7, below, displays the main purposes for using traditional religious charms:



4.2.8.4 Charm-usage in the Church

Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the previous Chapter, charm-usage is very common in the Church. Witchcraft fears still hold many in bondage despite belief in Christ and many remain convinced that suffering of any kind should be avoided or removed through traditional means (SFG 8). For example, new-born babies are traditionally kept in the house where they are born for a period of about a week (five to seven days) for fear of evil influences on the child. Van Breugal (2001:180) explains that “After the umbilical cord has dried off, a string with *mphinjiri* (medicine) is tied around the child’s waist to protect it from evil influences, and it is brought out of the house for the first time (*kutuluka chikuta*).” The string is called *mkuza* and is only removed when the child is 4-6 weeks old after the ritual known as *kutenga* (to take), whereby the child is made ‘warm’ by receiving strength for life from his/her father (Van Breugal (2001:181-185). It is not uncommon in ZEC churches to find infants and even children still wearing *mkuza* with *mphinjiri*. These charms are unfortunately even found on infants/children being brought forward for planned dedications (I B10; I B25; I B40). For this reason, in most ZEC churches it is customary for a senior women representative from the ‘*Chiyanjano cha amai*’ (Fellowship of Women) to visit a family before the dedication in order to remove the charms (*zithumwa*) (I B36; I B48; I B57 cf. I A5). However, the author was told recently, that many people now either bathe their infants in charms (SFG 5), or prepare a ‘charm’ drink for them to take, thus perpetuating the practice and continuing to believe in its efficacy, without needing to place a physical charm on the child, and so fear being caught out in the public eye (I B 11; I B12; I B64; I B69).

Many ordinary ‘believers’ continue to use charms for protection (I B16; I B17; I B26; I B 55; I B72). Nominal Christians (I B54), those with an immature faith (I B4; I B24), and those still very affected by their traditional culture and families (I B20; I B41), are the most susceptible. They use charms secretly (I B36; I B44; I B70). One student-pastor noted that church members change character and behavior in times of crisis (SFG 1). Another student-pastor explained that, “when a crisis comes, that’s when you know if a person is a genuine believer” (SFG 3). Believers understandably doubt Christ’s power, and ask whether Jesus Christ is truly able to protect them, especially in crisis, when for example: they are robbed at knifepoint, or their house is destroyed by floods, or they mourn the loss of a family member (I D5; I B10; I B70). A pastor explained that this lack of faith in Jesus Christ leads many Christians to say, “if I can just have this thing in my pocket, then I will feel safe” (PFG 1). A student put it this way: “human beings want to see protection with their naked eyes” (SFG 3), referring to the need to have something tangible to see or hold onto (SFG 3). Thus the faith is in the charm. Even when traditional worshipers become Christians and forsake their charms, they very often still believe in their power (Kibor 2006:156; Van Breugal 2001:255 cf. I B16; I B23). Moreover, those

attempting to eschew traditional charms often show that they are still governed by a traditional worldview by their attraction to various charm substitutes, such as the ‘mystical’ formulas taught by the prosperity gospel (I D11), ‘Christianized’ charms such as ‘holy water’, ‘cleansing soap’ and ‘protective stones’ offered by some denominations/prophets (I A1), and even Christian symbols like wooden crosses, rosary beads, statues (icons) and necklaces.⁹⁰ Other unfortunate examples involve pastors and church leaders: (1) a charm pillow placed in the pulpit by discontent elders to disrupt the pastors ministry (I A6), (2) elders and pastors ensuring election to office through charms (I B13; I B26) and gaining popularity and power in the pulpit (I B14; I B15; I B26), and (3) disgruntled members of a congregation trying to harm or get rid of their pastors (I B38; I B9). In one particular case the pastor died from an injury caused by standing on a large thorn, but both his wife and other members of the congregation believe that he was ‘charmed’, meaning in this instance, that someone caused a ‘magic’ snake to bite him (I B9).

4.2.8.5 Charm Medicine and Traditional Medicine?

Despite the increase in modern medical facilities such as hospitals and clinics, as well as the efforts of NGO’s (Non-governmental organizations) traditional medicines remain very popular. Practically, many still prefer to be treated in their own village or area as it is difficult and expensive to travel long distances to hospitals or clinics to receive treatment. Moreover, while many do use ‘Western medicine’, they very often augment treatment with traditional remedies, convinced of their appropriateness (I B31; I B48) and efficacy (I B28; I B49) (Moyo 2004:63). In Malawi, “some people are of the opinion or even the belief that there are ailments that occur as a result of our traditional environment of mystical or spiritual causation, and that these can only be cured by purely local medicine (*mankhwala achikuda*)” (Chakanza 2006:20) (cf. I B28; I B65). As a result local medicine men remain popular and indispensable to daily life in Malawi and most African cultures. Chakanza (2006:20-21) explains that in Malawi, “It is common observation that traditional medicine practitioners (*asing’anga*) are on the increase. They are found along our roads, in the market-places, in private and public houses. We can read adverts in the papers, hear about their whereabouts on the radio, or through other public media (cf. I D2; I D11).

It is often difficult to differentiate between herbal remedies and traditional charms as similar constituents may be used, and in the case of the latter, special methods, additions and invocations, as well as the underlying motives, can all be hidden yet determinative (SFG 5). This poses a further challenge for believers because although some traditional herbalists may avoid the magic/witchcraft associated with traditional religion in their preparation of medicine it

⁹⁰ It is said that one of the early missionaries to Malawi, Robert Laws (circa 1870), refused to give out Bibles because he observed that the locals were using them as charms.

is unusual.⁹¹ Many herbalists “seek the help of spirits when they prepare their traditional medicines” (O'Donovan 1995:257). Thorpe (1991:116) observes that medicines given for therapeutic purposes are often also symbolic, which moves the remedy from the sphere of religion into that of magic. It is this overlap with the manipulation of mystical powers that poses a challenge to the Christian. In cases where the medicine (*mankhwala*) is used to produce effects such as invisibility, destruction, and extreme mobility it is easy to discern witchcraft (Kalilombe 2007:8) (cf. I B27; I B20; I B46), but when the aim is purely therapeutic, it is more problematic (I B31; I B48). Both witchdoctors (*asingang'a*) interviewed by the author used traditional plants and trees to heal physical ailments but also concocted charms from the same ingredients (I C1; I C2). Surely any medicine believed to be charged with supernatural powers for efficacy must be off limits for Christians because it serves as a kind of spiritual substitute, misplacing faith (I D6).⁹²

However, for most Malawian believers it is not that simple. Hara (2008:135) rightly explains that there is the notion in Malawi today that it is God who gives medicine men and diviners to the people. Indeed, both witchdoctors interviewed by the present researcher testified to receiving their power to help people- whether for healing through the use of traditional medicines or the provision of charms and medicines for other purposes- from the Almighty God Himself (I C1; I C2).⁹³ Little wonder then that they are so popular and that a contemporary Malawian is just as likely to attribute his recovery from illness, general well-being, or success to power specialists rather than to the ancestors (Hara 2008:138), or to the Supreme Being. To make matters worse, these magic specialists encourage beliefs that sickness and misfortune are the result of witchcraft or retaliation by the spirits because it enhances their livelihood (Schofield 2003:19).

4.3 External Influences on ATR Worldview and Contemporary Religious Practice

Finally, certain global influences have impacted upon the religio-cultural milieu, challenging and modifying ATR worldview/s and practice in our context. These 'Western' influences continue to at once, erode traditional cultural mores, and promote charm-dependency and religious practices rooted in the traditional paradigm (cf. Beaton 2015:157-170).

⁹¹ There are still some '*asinganga azitsamba*' in Malawi who specialise only in preparing traditional herbal remedies for those suffering from physical ailments. However, there is a very fine line here as many people will still consider the power for their healing to have a spiritual dimension.

⁹² This conclusion was drawn during an in-class group discussion related to traditional religious practices in Malawi and how they impact discipleship at the grassroots level in local churches. This was a 'mature' group of students, many of whom were pastors and leaders in their local congregations.

⁹³ One of the witchdoctors interviewed by the researcher actually asked to close the interview with a well-known Christian hymn. The two pastors present (facilitator and translator) were extremely uncomfortable throughout the rendition.

4.3.1 Christian Mission and Colonialism

The early colonial period and so called 'hey-day' of mission (circa 1885-1918), during which Malawi became a British Protectorate (1891-1964), was characterized by an aggressive assertion of the superiority of Western civilization, coupled with a determination to hold onto leadership of the 'African Churches'⁹⁴ (Paas 2006:136-137 cf. Kalilombe 2007:9). Evangelization and discipleship often included annexation and subjugation of territories and the introduction of alluring material inducements. The Gospel was/is culturally conditioned (Newbiggin 1986:4; Sanneh 2003:22, 23-55; Shorter 1975:132) which often led/leads to the entrenchment of people's traditional beliefs and practices (whether open or clandestine)⁹⁵ (I B4; I B36; I B70). In Malawi, colonialists interfered with the traditional system of authority, introducing District Commissioners over Traditional Authorities, and at times hand-picking the latter against cultural convention (PFG 4). This system remains in place in the democratic era and tensions continue. A recent example being the 'bloodsuckers' debacle referred to earlier in the paper, during which local chiefs in the Mulanje area chased away government officials, stating that they would take care of the problem (PFG 4).

4.3.2 Globalization: Urbanization, Secularization and Pluralism

Today, urban Malawi is a melting pot of ideas and ideologies. Malawians encounter a Western, materialistic, secular and post- modern philosophy of life which profoundly influences those in urban locations but also filters back to the rural communities, since people groups are no longer static in social or geographic terms. This secular agenda is hostile to the Third World in its Christian phase (Sanneh 2003:78-79) but also challenges traditional religious thinking and practice. Kalilombe (2004:25) is correct that Malawi is now part of the 'Global village', its spirituality subject to ongoing transformations, "because of the phenomenon of 'Globalization'" (2007:4). His insightful summary of factors affecting transformation includes: "Widening the experience of community ... Shrinking of Areas of 'mystery' ... Moving beyond a culture confined to 'this world'... " (2007:13-14). Community, as a foundational aspect of ATR (Phelps 1990:333), is challenged by Western cultural patterns such as: "personal responsibility and individual freedom ... aggressive competitiveness, unhampered investigation and research, maximum productivity for profit ... meticulous planning for the future" (Kalilombe 2007:10) which are placed in juxtaposition to the traditional cultural norms. The consequences of this collision of traditional religious and modern and post-modern ideologies are often negative.

⁹⁴ Through the translation work of the missionaries many Africans heard the gospel in their own vernacular languages thus fostering a spirit of independence. The latter led to outspoken protests and even active resistance. In Malawi this culminated in the Chilembwe uprising (1915); an armed uprising against British rulers. This independent spirit was further encouraged during the first world-war (1914-1918) when many missionaries had to leave the leadership of the churches in the hands of Africans.

⁹⁵ Fiedler (1998:224) is correct that not all missionaries supported the colonialist agenda, some seeking to extend only Christ's Kingdom.

Many acquire a taste for the material things of the city, imbibing a 'materialistic' and aggressively individualistic spirit simply from seeing others living a different way.⁹⁶ This is clearly seen in attitudes to both business (I C2; I B4; I B27) and sex (I C2; I B29; I B63).

Exposure to 'new' technology such as internet, television, and dvds also creates moral challenges. For example, pornography is sold openly in streets and markets in cities like Blantyre and Lilongwe. Burgeoning cities become places of isolation, fear and loneliness for many who lose their sense identity when finding themselves cut off from their extended village or tribal communities, facing cultural changes (PFG 7). O'Donovan (1995:55) could be describing Blantyre or Lilongwe when he writes that individuals "feel cut off from everything important. Isolation, loneliness, despair, insecurity and instabilities are evidences that there has been a serious loss of things that really matter." As the experience of community widens so long-standing religious/social mores are loosened and more people become social pariahs. Sadly, it is often those on the lower tiers of the economic scale who are victimized by the exploitative structure of world economies (Kalilombe 2004:29).

Vulnerability to humanism (Wendland 2005:87) and material secularism also increases in this milieu. While ancestor veneration recedes, the spiritual vacuum is increasingly filled with man-centered beliefs and fears related to witchcraft and sorcery, further sidelining the living God.⁹⁷ Traditional specialists (like *asing'angas*) publicly flaunt their services and wares (medicines, materials and charms) in city markets, and now they increasingly offer their services in popular television and radio advertisements (ID2; I D8). Magic practices (*mtsiliko/mankhwala/zithumwa*) become the popular choices to meet deep traditional, religious and social convictions, fulfilling needs that 'new' religions tend to overlook as they ignore the deeper worldview assumptions. 'New' magic is constantly being introduced (e.g. charm drinks for infants cf. I B48; I B64; I B66; I B69), all too often also by the putative purveyors of Christian religion (e.g. 'profiteering prophets'). The prosperity gospel is popular with the 'God channel' constantly offering health, wealth and material blessings in the 'here and now' over against the realities in which people live. All of these clever opportunists exploit both the traditional worldview and the contemporary 'zeitgeist' to make money. A wide cross-section of society is embracing this utilitarian magic. Witchcraft is ironically seen as both the greatest threat to man's religious aspirations (security, health, and general well-being) as well as his potential means to the same (cf. I B3; I B4; I B5; I B12; I B16; I B17; I B22; I B24; I B26; I B27; I B30; I B40; I B46; I B47; I B53; I B54; I B55; I

⁹⁶ The author saw evidence of this every year at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi where he taught for more than a decade (2006-2018). Many students come from rural, indigent backgrounds but soon 'learn' to demand better food, lobby for improvements in their general living conditions, and even refuse to do manual chores on the campus grounds without remuneration.

⁹⁷ Although until recently traditional rites and practices were still uncritically promoted in a popular television program on TV Malawi, called *Zakwathu* ('at home').

B57; I B58; I B64; I B65; I B69; I B74).⁹⁸ Wendland (2005:88) is correct that there is “a growing emphasis upon magic as a means to attain, maintain, and augment one’s prosperity in life.” As people place more value on the trappings of material affluence there is a decline in humane spiritual values (Kalilombe 2007:13). The recent growth in popularity of satanism in urban areas is a case in point (I B58; I B73).

A related challenge is the ongoing “swing towards pluralism” (Scholfield 2003:16). This highly idealized philosophy with “no officially approved pattern of belief or conduct” (Newbiggin 1989:1) is a way of life in the West but creates challenges for traditionally communal and monotheistic (even if diffused) African societies. As a result of the globalization effect, Shorter observes that “society is no longer unitary and homogenous... possessing not only a plurality of groupings, but a plurality of cultures, of value systems and beliefs... individuals are confronted with alternatives and contradictions...” (1975:140). In Malawi there are a plethora of Christian denominations, the majority of the historic world religions (some of which are rapidly growing, e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, African Traditional Religions, Rastafarians and Bahai) (Nyasulu 2004:71) (I B69) (PFG 7), other Christian cults (Jehovah’s Witness’ and Mormons are prominent), and some rising New Age spiritual movements. This wealth of ‘consumer’ choices in the religious ‘marketplace’ (*msika*) is confusing and fragmentary. For example, in the Central region there are many mosques and Islamists offer education and dynamic social welfare programs, making the religion an attractive pragmatic option for local communities. Winning converts and making disciples in this competitive environment requires full confidence in the unique Christ and His absolute supremacy (Nyasulu 2004:71), unity in the church, and the proclamation of the truth in love (Tengatenga 1998:22-23).

4.3.3 Modern Science and Technology

New technologies, corporations, factories, durable plastic manufacturers, and dwindling timber resources move a country inexorably toward rendering its traditional culture obsolete (Obama 2007:183). Traditional subsistence communities see evidence of ‘progress’ and even power over nature in such areas as water project schemes, electro-hydro dams, farming techniques and tools, modern aircraft flight etc. The focus on education, scientific knowledge and the acquisition of greater technological skills is attractive to many and those who have succeeded and are ‘living the dream’ (having acquired education followed by wealth, status and power) are impressive and inspirational figures. However, it is met with some ambiguity by Malawians for two reasons: (1) it is impossible to separate education, commercial enterprise and scientific knowledge from Colonialism and, (2) adaptation is challenging and exacerbates rather than

⁹⁸ These references are a sample taken from the interviews pertaining to charms used for business, health, love, sex and marriage, employment and property.

alleviates spiritual ambiguities. Some 'mystery' still remains. For example, Kalilombe (2007:13) writes that for the majority "the consciousness of human limitation in the face of life and death is likely to remain dominant, even in the most modernized sectors of the population." Disillusionment soon sets in when life's 'missing middle' questions are not helpfully answered but people are also unable to go back to their traditional folk religion with any real conviction. Recently, in Great Britain, Europe and the Americas, we have seen the general resurgence of witchcraft (Schofield 2003:23).⁹⁹ In Malawi, "the tensions arising between the small-scale life of the traditional past and the macro-scale issues of the outside world... have in fact led to a rise in witchcraft beliefs and the enhanced role of ... 'power specialists'" (Schofield 2003:18) (I B26; I B71).

In the midst of all these challenges, there is no longer a clearly discernible overarching meta-narrative. Truth has become 'relative' and people are disconnecting from traditional social and spiritual mores, many becoming isolated and vulnerable.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the author established clear links between worldview and practice, demonstrating how particular deep-seated worldview motifs in the traditional religious worldview stimulate, animate and perpetuate charm-dependency. The entrenched need to use traditional religious charms for both self-protection and self-enhancement, as well as the instinct to retaliate, stem from an understanding of the world that is viewed through an interpretive grid that acknowledges that it is: (1) little affected by the Supreme Being, who has traditionally left the policing of human affairs to the ancestors but increasingly in the hands of human power specialists, (2) integrated and holistic (cosmic bondedness), (3) highly charged spiritually and requiring the preservation and increase of one's *moyo* (life-force/power) for survival and success within a circumscribed milieu where resources, both 'moyo' and materials, are limited (4) communal (including both the living and the living-dead), in which harmony is highly valued and respect for those higher up the gradation ladder is expected, and (5) dependent on traditional wisdom and experience, which must be strictly adhered to. These deeply embedded worldview motifs underpin charm-dependency and are given special impetus by (6), the prevalent humanistic or anthropocentric view of salvation which champions having all one's physical needs and wants met in the here and now, particularly: security, health, prosperity, fertility and fruitfulness of the land, and human

⁹⁹ More than a decade ago Schofield asserted that there were over half a million websites devoted to witches and their activities, as well as organized covens and academies, and a growing drive to provide witch advisors and chaplains at public institutions.

progeny. Moreover, in this cultural-religious landscape, (7) witchcraft beliefs and practices are ubiquitous, becoming increasingly dominant as the traditional religious worldview is challenged and modified by 'external' influences such as mission, science and technology, secular humanism, materialism, consumerism, and religious pluralism. The subversion of traditional mores leaves many troubled by a sense of disconnection, loneliness, disorientation, and vulnerability. This leads to uncharacteristic behavior (e.g. addictions such as alcoholism), a more profound reliance on traditionally based practices, or increasingly, where there seems to be neither a way forward or back, to the embracing of witchcraft and/or 'new' magic which still has the familiar bones of the traditional dinosaur but manifests in different forms. Local issues such as endemic corruption and the HIV/Aids pandemic exacerbate the problem. Thus, self-protection and self-promotion continues to be sought by means of observing all the traditions and taboos of the forefathers (*miyambo za makolo*), but ever increasingly through the procurement of witchcraft (*ufiti/matsenga*) and anti-witchcraft charms/medicines (*mtsiliko*) from human power specialists (Hara 2008:134-136).

In view of the reality of ubiquitous charm-dependency in the ZEC churches, and the entrenched worldview motifs which help to perpetuate it, how do we move forward, reaching the critical point where traditional charms are seen for what they really are? How do we help people to understand that charms are not needed when we are 'in Christ'? And to know and experience the freedom that at least one of the pastors has come to know, so that many might testify, along with him, that "Charms are not harmful to (*or needed by*) anybody who has repented and come to Jesus, (*they have*) no power at all" (I B61).

In the next chapter the researcher will discuss the second necessary foundation for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency, namely, Biblical. Biblical passages will be selected and discussed in view of their particular theological and practical significance in the context, so also providing further contextual and pedagogic foundations. The aim is to help to paint a more accurate picture of who God is and how He relates to His people, so beginning to transform worldview

CHAPTER FIVE

Key Biblical Texts Explored in Context: A Discourse on Theological Significance and Practically Applicable Significance

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the author discusses the second necessary foundation for an effective missiological approach to break charm-dependency and related traditional practices in ZEC churches, namely, Biblical foundations. However, in doing so, there is also much that emerges which is relevant pertaining to both the first and third foundations, namely contextual and pedagogic aspects. The discussion focuses on the theological significance and the practically applicable significance of carefully selected Biblical texts. The latter specifically chosen for: (1) the deliberate reformation of unhelpful and erroneous elements existing in the traditional worldview related to perceptions of God, (2) the content in relation to helpful points of connection with receptor culture traditional religious worldview motifs. Therefore, the main criterion is the transformative potential of the texts for the renewal of people's minds (Rom. 12:1-2), by means of stimulating the re-drawing of a more Biblically accurate 'God-picture' in the hearts and minds of congregants in our local ZEC churches. The goal is to transform worldview such that people perceive the living God in a new light, truly believing that 'in Christ' there is no need for them to depend on traditional religious charms. As such the theological and practically applicable significance of the Biblical texts- that is, the actual practical impact that understanding and applying the truths contained in the texts might have- is of paramount importance. With this in mind, each text was discussed in two homogenous Focus Groups with pastors and pastors-in-training, respectively. A very helpful outcome was the collection of contextual material directly pertinent to the effective communication/application of both which stands to serve as a very helpful pedagogic resource.

5.2 Development of Instrument

5.2.1 Selection of Biblical Texts

5.2.1.1 Texts most often used by ZEC Pastors

Most church-goers have heard Biblical prohibitions on practices such as witchcraft and the use of charms/medicines, and even Biblical 'self-help remedies', reliant on an emphasis on

Christian duty and the importance of personal striving to grow in their faith. Church members know that they are not supposed to be involved with traditional charms/medicines because the Bible says so. Indeed, Beaton's previous research (2015:74-77) demonstrated that most of the passages of Scripture that ZEC pastors have historically used to dissuade people from charm-usage have a definite legalistic bent: emphasizing restrictive prohibitions in the Old Testament (e.g. Deuteronomy 18), providing examples of witchcraft (Acts 8, 13), warning of the dangers of syncretism (Leviticus 19:3; 2 Kings 17:32-39; Mark 7:1-23 and Matthew 15:1-20) and the evil of idolatry (Exodus 20:3-4; Deuteronomy 8:9-14, 18:9-14; John 8:31-36; and Mat 15:1-20), and including strident tones of warning and caution to worship God alone (Jeremiah 17:5-16; Mark 7:1-9; John 4:24 and Acts 13:1-12), and even of the potential departure of God's glory (Ezek 8). There is also an over-emphasis (anthropocentric) on the duty of Christians (Exod 22:18; 13; Lk 9:23; 1 Cor 10:20-22), easily misinterpreted as self-help orientated (although one can hardly argue with an emphasis on prayer- Deuteronomy 18:10-11; 1 Kings 17-21; 1 Kings 18:20-46; 2 Kings 1:1-17; Psalm 103 and Matthew 18:10-28). Notably, 'life in the Spirit' was mentioned by only two pastors, 'the love of God' by one and the much-needed themes of Christian expectation (eschatological hope), and a biblical understanding of salvation, also only once each. The Pauline epistles were all but ignored with only one pastor making use of Romans chapters 6 and 8, the most encouraging being the theme of 'the inseparability of the believer from Christ' (Romans 8:37-39), an allusion to the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and 'abiding in Christ to bear fruit' (John 8:31-32; 15:7-8). Narratives in Acts describing magic and sorcery were also quite popular, emphasizing Christ's power over magic/witchcraft, along with Mark 7, which demonstrates Jesus' Lordship over traditions and cultural customs (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-22; Exodus 7:8-13; 1 Samuel 28; Jeremiah 17:5-8; Mark 5:1-20; 7 and Acts 8:9-25, 13:6-12, 19:23-30).

In summary, a number of pastors had no specific ministry approach and/or no Biblical basis for one. Most existing ministry approaches tended to rely on Biblical texts which taken in isolation might be construed as anthropocentric and legalistic, focusing on prohibitions, encouraging people to strive for personal holiness and excel in prayer. There was very little on the character of God and His work 'for us' in Christ, and how the latter impacts our lifestyles as believers. In themes related to God and Jesus Christ, the emphasis was also heavily anthropocentric, focusing on God in relation to man's needs, including: worship, trust, God as the One who answers our prayers, protection, the removal of fear, true faith and the believer's inseparability from Christ, as primary topics. Some of these themes are very helpful but there was little on the attributes and character of God and our privileged, righteous standing 'in Christ'. On the positive side, reference was made to Jesus Christ's power being superior to that of magic and

witchcraft, His ability to protect His people and remove fear, and His efficacious death on the cross.

5.2.1.2 Rationale and Methodology for Selecting Different Texts

Given the limited scope and efficacy of the above approaches with little fruit borne from the traditional use of texts with content both anthropocentric and legalistic, it seems appropriate to try an alternative approach. The author suggests a special focus on the character of God and His interaction with mankind developed over-against the contextual background articulated in previous chapters. It has already been noted that religion is profoundly anthropocentric and salvation in Malawian perspective has to do with the meeting of physical needs in the present. God is impersonal and transcendent, practically unapproachable, and indifferent to daily affairs. The latter being dependent on appropriate participation of the living in the dynamic interaction of spiritual forces ever present in the wider community, and the necessary adherence to traditional wisdom, gained experientially and carefully crafted to pass down from generation to generation, to better enable harmonious life in this milieu. As such, charm-dependency in the ZEC churches is perpetuated as a consequence of the profound fear of witchcraft and witchcraft related activities, as well as a deep-seated need for, and pressure to adhere too, traditional wisdom and associated cultural traditions and expectations. Fear is at the heart of it all.

Both spurious concepts of God that are rooted in religio-cultural history and then projected onto the biblical texts (Ott 2007:17), and traditional religious beliefs and practices incongruous with Scripture and lacking true Biblical salvific value must be challenged and transformed (Hara 2008:170-171). It is the Bible which helps to define the worldview through which people should look at reality (Hiebert et al 1999:384). Therefore, it is necessary to find appropriate ways to challenge the deleterious practices related to charm-dependency by means of positing a biblical worldview which takes into account questions related to everyday life and religion, thus enabling people to understand the holistic way in which the Gospel brings salvation.

It is obvious that very few church members/adherents (and the author suggests few pastors too) have the liberating Biblical picture of a loving, personal God, intimately involved in the lives of His people in the present, sovereign over all spiritual powers, victorious over evil and death, able to empower us for faithful daily living in every circumstance through His indwelling Spirit, and graciously keeping a glorious inheritance for us in eternity. There is, therefore, unfortunately, little understanding of the believer's ultimate security 'in Christ'. It is the author's contention that beginning to paint such a picture for people by providing 'new' redemptive stories, and in so doing challenging spurious traditional (and unhelpful church indoctrinated)

notions about God, will go a long way to helping to subvert such thinking and redrawing a truer, and thus more liberating, God- picture, one which encourages trust in Him rather than in charms. Thus, the aim is to subvert unhelpful local worldview motifs by encouraging critical appraisal of the former in the light of theologically significant and practically applicable Biblical truth (Thornton 2013:342-348; Kraft 1999:384-389; Koehler 2010:40). By the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit ZEC members/adherents might embrace more of Christ and His truth as presented in the Scriptures as 'normative', enabling the bigger redemptive picture (story) to emerge, making better sense of reality as they experience it (Malone 2014:316; Wu 2015:304-309). Hence, ongoing transformation or continuous conversion towards increasing Christlikeness in thought and action is promoted (Mateyu 2012:37; Carrasco 2007:393-394; McKnight 2007:71-73) (Eph 3:22-24 cf. Rom 12:1ff).

Therefore, the Biblical texts were all selected with the above goal in mind, using a form of 'thick description' interpretation (Thomas 2013:239-242) to link themes and motives for charm-dependency arising in the grass-roots stories of charm-usage to prevalent 'receptor culture' worldview motifs and corresponding potentially 'reforming' Biblical texts. This was done on the basis of the findings in the research, including both literary-compile and ethnographic aspects (in the form of the information given and the stories told in the field interviews), and also including methodological triangulation (Beaton 2015:74-77), as well as the researcher's own observations, conversations and experience as a participant observer in the field.

5.2.1.3 The Selected Texts and the Envisaged Outcome

The particular texts selected are as follows: **Romans 8:12-39; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Luke 15:11-32; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mathew 28:16-20; Mark 1:21-34; 2:1-12; 4:35-41; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Galatians 5:16-20; Ephesians 1:13-14.** They represent only a sample of texts that might be helpfully used to stimulate the reformation of spurious notions about God in the local receptor culture's worldview by renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2) (Thornton 2013:342-348; Kraft 1999:384-389; Koehler 2010:40). Indeed, we are to be "transformed by the renewal of our minds" (Rom. 12:2), which as Keller (2015:106-107) explains, "refers to an inner transformation rather than a mere outward conformity", such that our minds are so "inflamed with the truth about Christ" that we are moved to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, living surrendered and obedient lives, "holy and pleasing to God (v. 1). This renewal of the mind which enables believers to "test and approve what God's will is" (v.2), and then obey it, requires a combination of the Spirit and the Word of God (Stott 1994:324). All this speaks of the possibility of change at the deep-level of worldview assumptions, leading to change at the behavioural or cultural level (Kraft 1999:384-386; Onongha 2014: 206, 210-214; Dicks 2012:12-13). As the 'new' stories of who God is and how He relates to His people are presented they are tested for what

sort of fit they have with those already in place, so stimulating movement along the epistemological spiral, encouraging transformation (Wright 1992:40 cf. Hiebert 1994:51). Indeed, people's love for stories opens the door for them to produce spiritual change, especially in the lives of those who are ready to receive their teaching (Malone 2014:316). Thus, various new 'stories' about the world in general or bits of it in particular become hypotheses tested by their relationship to the stories already in place. The spiral of knowledge takes its course as 'new' stories introduced might subtly or otherwise bring about revision of certain presuppositions, as any story, or at least elements thereof, may actually help to answer more questions pertaining to the world inhabited by the hearer and therefore, make better sense of the world. These new stories challenge and modify existing ones, creating a spiral as each new insight is contemplated, filtered and assimilated or rejected. Within this epistemological dynamic a shift in worldview (genuine transformation) is possible (Armstrong 2015:326).

5.2.2 An Interpretive Framework for the Selected Biblical Texts

Specific Scriptural material with well understood meaning is necessary to provide the biblical counter-perspective to the local people's worldview. In the light of the above, the carefully chosen passages of Scripture, shedding particular light on the nature (character) and work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Beeby 2000:283), will be discussed in view of what they teach us about who God is and how that relates to the life of a genuine believer who is 'in Christ'. Truths relating to robust doctrines of God, pneumatology, Christology, and eschatology, as well as the beginnings of a Biblical theology of suffering, are found in these texts. In this Trinitarian pattern the 'inter-penetration' of the three Persons of the God-head means that any given passage seemingly related more specifically to one Person might speak directly and profoundly to the character and work of either or both of the other two Persons. Interpretive conclusions are drawn against the backdrop of the sevenfold hermeneutic as articulated in Chapter Two of this thesis, one which is at once: historical, canonical, traditional, missiological, Christological, relational and contextual. While each text is overviewed based on sound evangelical principles of historical-critical exegesis (Fee and Stewart 1993:45-245; Wolvaardt 2000:75-312; Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:170-179), of particular interest for this thesis, is the theological significance of each passage, along with the practically applicable significance, in the context (Smith 2008:176,182).

5.2.3 Gleaning an Indigenous Perspective

In order to glean an indigenous perspective on the selected Biblical passages, including how they are understood in context and how best to apply them, further empirical qualitative research was done in the form of two homogenous focus groups with ZEC pastors and pastors-

in-training (Robson 2002:283-289), in which the selected texts were read and discussions on text and theological and practically applicable significance for the context were facilitated by the researcher. The texts were thus first exegeted by the researcher but then also deliberately analysed in the light of a local receptor culture perspective, gained by means of the guided small group discussions/interaction with local pastors and pastors-in-training. It should be noted that the particular texts often came to serve as springboards to discuss culturally relevant topics apposite to, but not necessarily arising directly from, the texts. Nevertheless, there was much in the discussions which served to strengthen an understanding of the theological significance of each text for the context, as well as how they might effectively apply and be applied.

By discussing passages of Scripture with local pastors through guiding questions, helpful indigenous insights were gleaned without relativizing the meaning of any text. Exegetical contributions by participants were measured by their level of consistency and resonance with the wider group (groups) and, of course, with the wider canonical witness, and the degree to which they remained within the parameters of historical and traditional Evangelical interpretations of the passages. Theological insights were prized but always measured by the degree to which they actually reflected the meaning of the biblical text (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:199-200; Hiebert 1994:29-30). The participants sometimes shared how they understood each passage, but more importantly, their insights into how others in the context might understand them, especially raising relevant contextual and cultural issues potentially promoting misunderstanding/interpretation and ultimately needing to be redressed by the texts. Moreover, many potentially helpful points of connection between text and culture were raised by means of examples, stories, personal testimonies, explanations and statements, all of which will serve to aid the effective communication and application of the truths contained in the passages. This was about identifying 'bridges and barriers' unique to the particular culture (Weaver 2015:220-224, Wu 2015:304-309). In the final analysis, local insights gleaned did not and do not provide any new or indigenous exegetical methodology, but are properly understood to prove theological significance in context, and inform effective communication of the meaning, theological significance, and practically applicable significance of the texts.

5.2.4 Data Collection

Data was collected by means of sixteen Focus Group sessions, averaging approximately sixty minutes in duration, held at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi in Blantyre.¹⁰⁰ Goodwill permission was given for the use of a classroom at EBCoM by the incumbent Principal, Rev.

¹⁰⁰ Again, permission to collect the data was obtained from the NWU-RERC (cf. Annexure 1).

Robert Masikamu (Annexure A8). The sessions were conducted between November 2018 and March 2019. This involved twelve trips to Blantyre for the researcher and more than two thousand kilometers of travel.

The primary language for the Focus Group discussions was English. Pastors and pastors-in-training (students) respectively, were asked to give their interpretive and contextual observations, especially providing insights from a Malawian perspective which might enable the effective understanding and application of the passages in context. Prestige bias was minimized by the assurance to all participants that the researcher was not seeking to further exegete the texts with their help, but to glean a cultural (contextual) perspective, so there weren't any right or wrong insights or observations. The sessions were facilitated by the researcher, Rev. R. Beaton.

In terms of inclusion/exclusion criterion, only ordained Zambezi Evangelical Church Pastors, serving in local Zambesi Evangelical Churches within the Central and Southern regions of Malawi, were selected and recruited as participants for the Pastor's Focus Group. Inclusion was, for pragmatic reasons (minimizing transport issues), also limited to those pastors working at or ministering in reasonably close proximity to the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi (i.e. in the Blantyre area). EBCoM was identified as a suitable venue as the faculty at the College includes a number of ZEC pastors from a variety of different educational and ministry backgrounds. The second Focus Group was comprised of ZEC students studying at the College. The rationale for this was pragmatic but also aimed at gleaning perspectives from students who were not long schooled in a Western academic environment, and thus less likely to feel restricted by certain exegetical and theological parameters and expectations, so minimizing prestige bias. The original groups were comprised of no less than six people with a maximum of twelve in order to create an intimate, safe environment and maximize participation in the discussions. All of those identified as potential Focus Group participants were provided with a 'Pastor's/Student's Focus Group Information and Consent Form' (Annexure A9) months in advance of the first sessions. The contents of the form were explained by a research assistant and opportunity was given to ask questions. A second explanation was given by the researcher before the first sessions began, where potential participants were again encouraged to ask questions. Each participant willingly signed consent in the presence of a research assistant. Participation was thus voluntary.

The actual attendance at the Focus Group sessions varied in number between 6-12 people, with an average of 8 at each group session. Data was collected by means of audio-taping each session making use of a dicta-phone. Data reduction and display for the researcher's purposes was initially intended to be aided by means of session summary sheets (Robson 2002:475-

485). Practically, this entailed a hand-written summary highlighting key observations and local (receptor culture) insights, thus outlining the essence of the content of each Focus Group session. However, it soon became apparent that the volume of information and detail in each session also required that session recording was transcribed in full with the help of a research assistant, for further analysis.

Privacy and confidentiality was ensured by conducting the Focus Groups privately in a designated classroom at EBCoM in the afternoons after College classes had finished. No roll call was taken and there was no register of attendance. Although many of the insights and observations recorded are used in this thesis, nobody is mentioned by name and the names of local churches are also omitted. Research assistants involved in transcribing the recordings were asked to delete the recordings at the satisfactory completion of the transcripts. The remaining digital recordings are being kept under password lock on the researcher's personal computer, in his office, at home in Zomba. All recordings, transcripts and summary sheets will be destroyed after 18 months.

5.2.5 Data Analysis and Presentation/Display

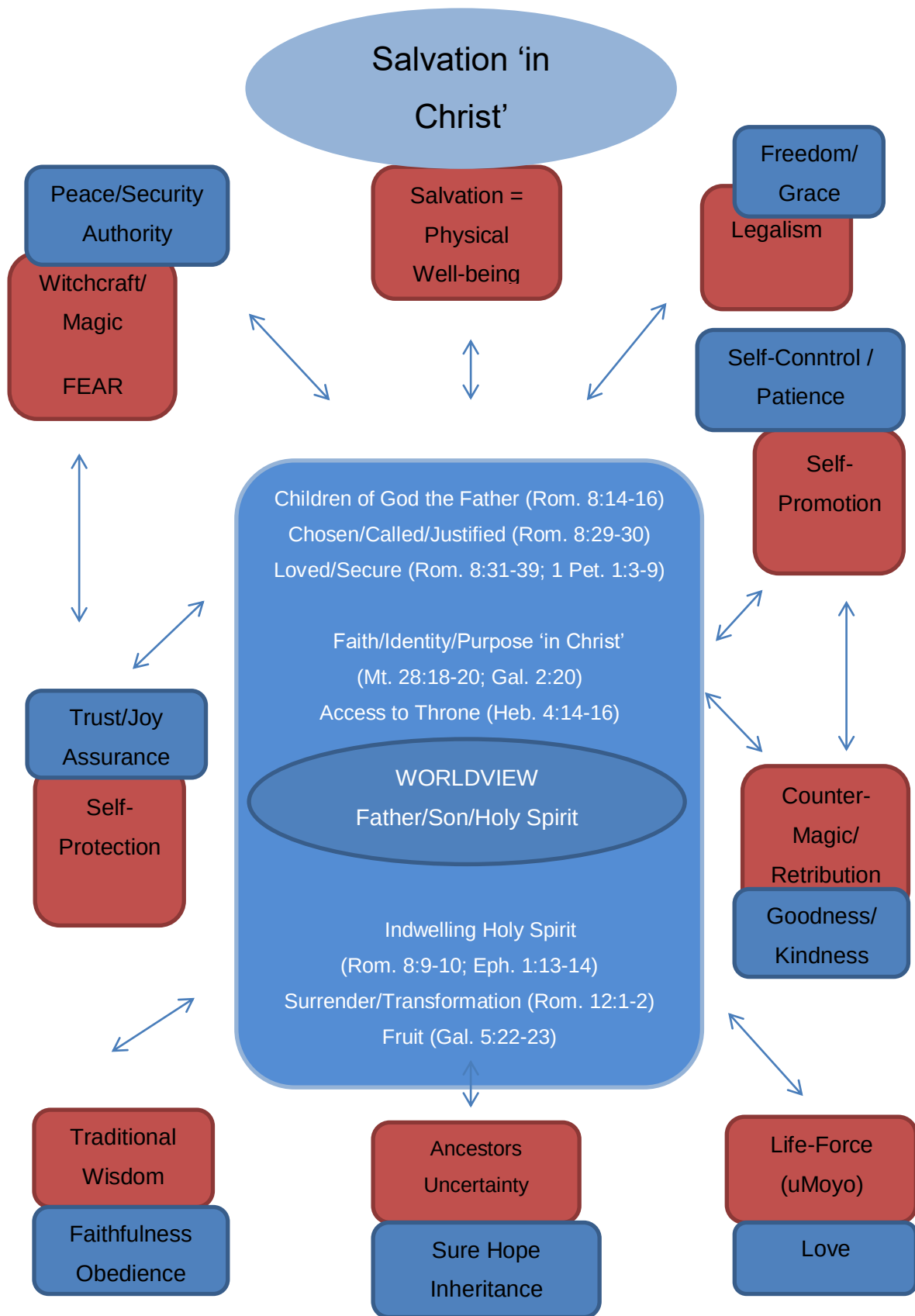
Analysis was completed and conclusions drawn by means of coding and noting consistent patterns, themes and trends in the data collected (Robson 2002:481), as related to the content of the texts. Indigenous insights on the texts and local culture, from pastors and pastors-in-training, provide windows into local cultural worldview perceptions, exposing how some of the Biblical ideas are commonly (mis)understood, or more often, considered completely foreign, by those in the receptor culture. Consistent and potentially enlightening 'indigenous' observations on the passages, as they relate to theological significance and practically applicable significance, are presented in the discussion in the following section. Firstly, each selected passage is discussed with regards to its meaning and theological significance, especially as the latter relates to the context of the elect demographic. For this purpose necessary exegetical notes are included. Secondly, points of reference and explanations about local culture and religion are used to helpfully inform practically applicable significance. That is, we see how the local receptor culture (mis)understands the particular theological truth/s as a natural consequence of their traditionally conditioned perception of the world, and therefore, why they are so important and practically significant and applicable. Finally, material considered potentially helpful in the effective communication of the practically applicable significance, moving to application, such as explanations, stories and quotes, is collected, creating a pedagogic resource for later practical use. Here, insights into the local culture, thinking and religious practice provide useful content for application. Thus, the author sets out to demonstrate how and why the theological truths in these texts are significant for the context,

how they are practically significant and applicable, and in the process also creates an actual resource to enable the communication of points for actual practical application in the context.

The author does not set out to do technical exegetical work in this chapter but brief exegetical notes on the passages are included as they are considered essential to understanding how text relates directly to context in terms of theological and practical significance. The texts are not presented in the order in which they were discussed in the Focus Groups, but rather with a Trinitarian pattern in mind, this always against the backdrop of a much-needed Biblical eschatological perspective. As such, carefully chosen passages of Scripture, shedding particular light on the nature (character) and work of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, are studied and discussed in the light of what they teach us about God, and how that relates to the life of genuine believers who are 'in Christ' (including their identity, purpose and character), particularly in the elect demographic. There is, of course, significant overlap given that God is One, existing in three Persons. The 'inter-penetration' of the three Persons of the God-head means that any given passage seemingly related more specifically to one Person might speak directly and profoundly to the character and work of either or both of the other two Persons. The author deliberately begins and ends with passages with a clear Trinitarian emphasis.

Ultimately, these texts are intended to serve as pedagogic (heuristic) tools, by means of finding contextually appropriate ways of communicating and applying the theological truths contained. Many of the texts are in the form of stories or parables, lending themselves to effective communication in the context. Reworking the didactic passages by shaping/crafting them into apposite stories or contemporary parables is optional (Wiles 2015:332-336; Wu 2014:304-309; Ononga 2014:208). The main aim is to communicate and apply the theological truths effectively to stimulate transformation. It should be noted that many of the explanations, quotes and anecdotes/stories used have been partially edited by the author for easier reading.

To begin with, **Figure 8**, on the following page (cf. Diagram 3 in Chapter Four) provides a bird's-eye view of just how a more accurate Biblical picture of God might transform worldview at the deepest level, and so herald changes in thinking and conduct:



5.3. Discussing Theological Significance, Practically Applicable Significance and Application, in Context

5.3.1 God, as Trinity

5.3.1.1 Romans 8:12-17

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

5.3.1.1.1 Theological Significance

Grasping the theological significance of this passage depends on understanding the previous section (8:1-11) in which Paul makes it clear that all Christians have the Holy Spirit (vs. 9), that to have the Holy Spirit within you is also to have the Spirit of Christ and God dwelling in you, and that the indwelling Spirit convinces us of Christ’s work on our behalf, thus freeing us from condemnation and empowering us to overcome sin and the flesh (vs. 9-11 cf. 12-14) (Carson 2008:150). The passage clearly teaches that, although difficult, “We are called to a life of saying ‘No’ to all kinds of things that our physical bodies want... A Christian life that does not involve putting to death that which drags us down into the world of the ‘flesh’ is not worthy of the name” (Wright 2004:145). Paul contrasts the former bondage of slaves (‘under the law’) with the new freedom of sons (‘under grace’) (vs.14-15 cf. Gal 3:23- 4:7) (Bruce 1994:156). There are powerful echoes of the Exodus story, “the desert land, seems to be the world in which the ‘lure’ of the ‘flesh’ remains strong, and must be resisted. Instead of the pillars of cloud and fire, Christians are given the **Spirit** as the personal presence of the living God” (Wright 2004:145). Therefore, our putting to death the acts of the flesh is not a work apart from God’s Spirit but rather in harmony with, or even because of, His presence and work in us. This is not salvation by works but a sign of being led by the Spirit, “and all those who are led by the spirit are the sons of God” (vs. 14). He is thus the Spirit of sonship, and the Greek word actually means ‘adoption’, giving assurance to believers that they are God’s children (Carson 2008:147). As such, the “Christian discovers a new identity, picking up Israel’s vocation in the

Old Testament: adoption”, and as such recognizing God as Father (Wright 2004:146). The Spirit testifies with our spirit that “we are indeed God’s children, God’s adopted sons and daughters” (Wright 2004:146-147). The Spirit of sonship gives us the ability to approach God, not in fear, but as a Father and not a boss or slavemaster: “He brings into our hearts the deepest spiritual and emotional security possible- a sense that we can approach God on a family basis, as his beloved children” (Keller 2015:34). Bruce (1994:157, 158) explains that the word ‘*abba*’ was and is used among Jews as the familiar term by which children address their father, and that to call God ‘Father’... is as sure a token of the indwelling Spirit as to call Jesus ‘Lord’ (1 Cor 12:3).” And indeed, those adopted by God will share in Christ’s inheritance in heaven but also the glorious inheritance of God himself (Stott 1994:234). Being ‘heirs of God’ is “a miracle... because the heir got the lion’s share of the parent’s wealth” (Keller 2015:33). In fact, “In Roman society adopted children enjoyed exactly the same privileges as the children of the family” (Carson 2008:148). A son was “deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate, he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature” (Bruce 1994:157). However, the only condition to our heirship is a willingness to share in His sufferings now (vs. 17) (Carson 2008:148). As Wright (2004:148) puts it, “We have to live in a particular way, a way which anticipates the ‘glory’, the rule over creation, which we will eventually share with the Messiah.” Keller (2015:33) elaborates on this theme, describing our family likeness to God in terms of suffering: “As we bear the family likeness of suffering, we become more and more like the Son, and our Father, in our characters and attitudes.” And poignantly, Carson (2008:147) contends that only a true child will cry out ‘*Abba*’, which is “neither ecstatic praise nor cozy sentimentality, but rather it is a cry of agony in the heat of battle... a cry of trust in seemingly overwhelming circumstances.”

In summary, the text is theologically significant in context for a number of reasons, including: the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of the believer, His empowering presence for overcoming the ‘flesh’, and His intimacy and personal or familial nature, are all especially contextually relevant. Moreover, the believer’s ‘sonship’ or status as ‘adopted’ children of God, and the resultant privileges of direct access to God Himself, heirship (being heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ) to an eternal inheritance (eschatological), as well as the believer’s identification with Christ through suffering are all fundamental to discipleship in the context. However, at this point it is salutary to focus on redressing spurious notions relating to God’s withdrawal from the world, His perceived impersonal character and His unapproachability, the need for ancestral spirits as mediators, an understanding of all spirits as rightfully evoking fear and uncertainty, a legalistic and individualistic ‘works orientated’ approach to overcoming sin, the notion that an apathy toward personal sin is acceptable, the general lack of eschatological expectation, and the (mis)-

belief that suffering is not part of a true salvation experience, because salvation is anthropological (humanistic), enjoyed only through physical well-being 'here and now'.

5.3.1.1.2 Practically Applicable Significance

Regarding the sinful nature or the 'flesh' (vs. 12-13) as it is rendered in some translations (e.g New King James and Holman Christian Standard Bible) there appears to be a good apprehension of what living accordingly means: "sinful nature is... somebody drunk... adultery... witchcraft... the use of charms in business and the like" (Students Focus Group 1: 30 November 2018) (hereafter SFG 1 etc.). However, in the author's experience, there is a perceived hierarchy of sin in Malawi, and the three at the top are always outward or visible: drunkenness, smoking and adultery- many others are often ignored or relativized (for example, telling lies). However, despite some understanding of what it means to "put to death the misdeeds of the body" (v. 13), there is not always an urgency to do so. While one pastor believes that "there is a perception that if I am a Christian I am not a sinner" (Pastors Focus Group 1: 30 November 2018) (hereafter PFG 1 etc.), this is not common. The lack of urgency more likely describes indifference and apathy toward, or an ignorance of, personal sin amongst Christians¹⁰¹, and demonstrates the desire to meet personal, physical needs as a part of salvation. This anthropocentric view of salvation is corroborated by many: One pastor contends that "churches are growing because they used to preach that you will get this and that" (PFG 1). Another testifies that "most people, when they become Christians, it's like they become crazy, they want to go where people are getting favor, where people are getting grace, where people are getting anointing; meaning that they don't know what real Christianity is for" (PFG 1). Even after death, "most of the people, they don't care about the coming day of judgment... or even if they will not have life after death, they don't mind, their focus is that during their burial they have to be honored with a church ceremony" (SFG 1).

Understanding the notion of having the Spirit of God indwell us (vs. 9), being "led by the Spirit of God" (v.14), and "receiving the spirit of sonship" (v.15) is problematic from the outset because of traditional beliefs about spirits. A student testified that most Malawians, when they think of spirits, "think of the spirits which are harmful to our lives", although he added that "Sometimes we also think of the spirits which are not harmful to our lives... ancestral spirits... that there is interaction between the ancestral spirits and the people, so the ancestral spirits... they are looking after the welfare of the living people... they protect them from other notorious spirits..." (SFG 1). Another student added "when someone dies he goes into the spirit world and that one gets like extra power to protect us, and that he is now near, he is not far from us"

¹⁰¹ The cultural need to be purified from any evil that may identify one as a witch may be used heuristically as analogous to a true Christian's expected antipathy to personal sin, if done very carefully and sensitively..

(SFG 1). A pastor explained that “we still believe that there is a connection between the living people and the spirits of those who died... when people are talking of spirits, whether from the scripture or culture, they... believe that spirits are given a certain authority or power over people, so in the society the spirits have a certain special value, they are highly honored” (PFG 1). With these beliefs, the Spirit of God is understood to be at work in our lives in an external capacity, through the mediation of other spirits, and not directly by means of His indwelling presence. One student stated that “God is more powerful than everything and we rely upon him but the only problem is the means to approach him... when it comes to some crisis it’s when we... can’t see him but those who are around us can be able to help us, that’s why we go to the ancestors...” (SFG 1). A pastor shed further light when he shared that “Christians somehow know that the spirit of God is having a certain influence on those spirits that we believe in. You hear someone saying, ‘I had a dream, my late father was telling me: ‘my son, you are not doing good on such and such things’, so I think that is God’... those spirits we receive from the spirit of God... when we say there is a greater spirit we still believe that there is a connection between these spirits that are given to us by the great spirit which is on high.” (PFG 1 cf. SFG 1).

From a traditional religious/cultural perspective it is not believed possible to receive the Spirit of God as an indwelling presence. A pastor clarifies that “God is actually regarded as the great Spirit that produces some small spirits that can live in us, so these spirits will be the ones that we will receive” (PFG 1). Since “God is the Great Spirit... the one who enters in us will not be the same” (PFG 1). Therefore, accepting God’s indwelling presence and His leading are not simple matters but can be highly confusing for locals with traditional beliefs. A pastor-in-training describes the challenge: “when we preach the gospel out there in the local areas... when it comes to the Spirit of God it brings a lot of questions, people can accept the word of God but when it comes to the Spirit of God, it is something that can’t be received because there is that perception that when it comes to the spiritual world, it’s something that can never be in a man... people believe that the spirit is something which is dangerous so it cannot be possessed by man” (SFG 1).

The statement: “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear” (vs.15a) evokes interesting responses. Someone acknowledged that communications with the ancestral spirits were mostly motivated by fear, “fearing that if I don’t, something else will happen” (SFG 1). And because “the spirits of the dead seem to be very powerful” (PFG 1) there is a spirit of fear that still exists (15a), at “we can have the Spirit of God living in us. There are suspicions as to the identity of the spirit and also the spirit’s real motivation for being there: “in Malawian culture, we believe that the ancestral sprits don’t just come normally, they come with a purpose, so people become suspicious, saying which is which: The spirit of God or the ancestral spirits?”

(SFG 1). This emphasis on ancestral spirits is worth noting since their influence was not a strident theme in relation to the use of charms. Evidently, that does not detract from the fact that they are very much a part of daily life and the conceptual reality of people in the elect demographic. Other fears associated with having the Spirit of God permanently residing, include: 1. anxiety about what others might think, as one student put it: “somebody may have the mentality that just because I have the Spirit testifying in me... is something that will bring fear... among my friends,” (SFG 1); 2. “the fear of notorious spirits... these are the spirits that most of the time harm people... they are another category of spirits from the ancestral spirits”, they are “evil spirits which cause death and the like” (SFG 1); 3. Success or status in society: “I think there is also a kind of fear of having some power in society, you find that... people will be following you to take your power, so people need to find some protection” (SFG 1). Clearly, many are unable to understand the experience of the indwelling presence of God, remaining in bondage to fear of the spirits. However, “the spirit of fear” is ubiquitous in Malawi, going much further than just fear of the ancestral spirits. The pastors mentioned fear of death, fear of witchcraft, fear of evil spirits and fear that causes people, even Christians, to “believe in the existence of demons everywhere” (PFG 1).

This inability to understand God’s indwelling presence, discussed above, also precludes a fulsome experience of both sonship (vs.14a, 15b), and the concomitant intimacy with God (vs. 15c-16). This means that assurance of salvation is elusive. A pastor put this into perspective when he noted that “if people are fearful... even if they want help, they cannot go to God’s face because they don’t know how to pray” (PFG 1). Since the spirits act as mediators, to and through whom the people go to communicate with God (SFG 1), “people are used to connecting to God through the intermediaries... and not going to God directly, so they cannot feel the intimacy” (PFG 1). This is evinced by where and to whom people turn in the midst of a crisis. As one young lady explained, “You find some people have been in the church for a long time but they don’t know how to pray... they don’t have even little faith, so when crisis hits they have to turn and look for what they think is a solution to their trouble” (SFG 1). Usually that involves ancestral spirits and/or very often witchdoctors and other power specialists, solicited for the necessary types of charms/medicine.

Additionally, the act of crying “Abba Father” (vs. 15c) is fraught with cultural baggage. One student explained that fathers are perceived very differently, depending on the particular culture. In some cultures the father is everything, in others, including the Chewa of the Central region, the Uncle may be respected more than the father (SFG 1). This is because the culture is matrilineal and uxorilocal. Moreover, the idea of being “adopted” (15b) (New King James) into God’s family as a fully- fledged child of God (vs.16-17a) is almost incomprehensible to most Malawians. This was made very clear in the Focus Groups: “but there is a difference

saying you are an adopted son of God, and saying you are a son of God” (SFG 1), and, “in our tradition the view of sonship or the view of adoption... is like when somebody has died and has left the children. The culture asks the relative to adopt and take care of the children, while sonship, it is when the child is of the same family and does not come from anywhere else, that is the understanding” (PFG 1). Indeed the relationship is viewed as qualitatively different: “in Malawi we feel like the adopted child does not have the same value as the biological child of the family, there is a difference in raising an adopted child as compared to the biological child” (SFG 1), and “when somebody is adopted you don’t belong to that family at all, so the perception there is that you are not being treated fairly just because you were adopted” (SFG 1). Indeed, all familial relationships are affected, “even the relationship of the children, between these biological children and the adopted children, they see someone who has just joined the family, like not part of them... they don’t see them on the same level” (SFG 1), and there may be jealousy relating to the future sharing of the inheritance (PFG 1). Adoption is often about helping a child who is hungry or lacks school fees or other essentials but not necessarily taking them in or giving them access to “the family as the real sons, so even the name, you cannot be given the same name of the sons of the house” (PFG 1). Moreover, in many cases in society adoption is related to violence: “if we see someone being adopted we think that he/she is going to be a victim of violence, so it brings that perception” (SFG 1). Often an adopted child will only be considered part of the family when well educated and potentially a major contributor to family welfare (PFG 1). An orphan in Malawi, even if adopted, is not ‘assured’ of much at all. Clearly these negative perceptions are unhelpful which is why one pastor-in-training was very deliberate in telling the researcher that the term ‘sonship’ (NIV) was a more appropriate term for Malawi (SFG 1).

These negative impressions also ‘muddy the waters’ when it comes to understanding what it means to be “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (vs. 17b). A pastor explains: “I don’t think that when you adopt somebody, even if you don’t have children, I don’t think that your things will become for him or her. Normally your possessions go to your biological children, unless if the adopted one was your close relative, like a son of your sister or brother” (PFG 1). So, inheriting is far from guaranteed for those adopted in this context. Moreover, in the matrilineal, uxorilocal Chewa culture, a child may not receive anything from his father, as one student-pastor clarifies: “but as for our culture the things that my father possesses belong to my mother’s side, so as he dies, the Uncle’s will come and get them” (SFG 1). Thus “the understanding of being an inheritor is not clear” (SFG 1). Therefore, any mention of adoption and/or inheritance needs to be very carefully and thoroughly explained from a biblical perspective with the whole cultural backdrop above in mind.

Finally, and profoundly, neither necessary suffering nor an expectation of future glory, are part of a traditional Malawian religious worldview. In fact, when suffering is experienced, an immediate solution is usually sought. If faith is not 'working' to produce healing, one simply turns back to traditional means, consulting the witchdoctor (SFG 1). There is no adequate theology of suffering (Phil 3:10-11) in the church either, no desire to "share in His sufferings" (vs. 17c). For example, speaking of church members, one student said that "when crises arise they seem to change their character because of fear" (SFG 1). Another stated that "You find someone coming to church with some cuts and when you ask where they got them, they say they had a headache so they went somewhere. You wonder because you expect someone who has been coming to church for over ten years to have a strong stand, but you find that it's something different" (SFG 1). On future hope, that hope of sharing in His future "glory" (vs.17c), a pastor-in-training asserted that in "the minds of people today, they think that in the Kingdom of God, receiving Christ means they will become rich...", they believe in a "prosperity gospel, yes, a healing gospel... they become frustrated, whilst in the church they become sick, whilst in the church they die, whilst they are in the church they become poor, so there are many questions..." (SFG 1). The focus is on fulfilment 'here and now'. This lack of an adequate eschatology is a serious challenge. An experienced pastor stated: "we don't have a proper biblical hope because when people try to teach these things they get confused... sometimes you think that you will impart fear on the people if you teach eschatology" (PFG 1). Traditional Malawian eschatology extends to life as an ancestor, and there is still fear associated as one is not sure "what you will have after death" (PFG 1). Although one student said, "most of these people they don't mind about the coming day of judgment, what they consider most is that during the day of their death they just want to go with a religious ceremony" (SFG 1). In the author's experience, most teaching on the subject focuses on obscure viewpoints related to various millennial views, rather than on Jesus Christ as the believer's hope of glory (Col 1:27) (cf. PFG 1).

In summary, the text has a great deal to say to Malawian people and has critical practical significance. However, there are a number of challenges to conceptually grasping, and experientially living out the theological truths, all of which are rooted in the traditional worldview. The existing fear and uncertainty around the feasibility of any spirit indwelling a human being makes it difficult for locals to see the need for, willingly receive, and acknowledge the indwelling presence of the living God. Moreover, the belief that the Great Spirit is transcendent and could never indwell men precludes intimacy, and promotes a legalistic or 'external' understanding of salvation. Therefore, many remain nominal 'Christians', believing in Jesus but unable to, (and in many cases unmotivated to), put to death the deeds of the flesh with the help of the Spirit. They lack assurance of their faith and the security of truly knowing that they are sons and

daughters of the living God, in the absence of the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (*'testimonium spiritus sancti internum'*) (Bruce 1994:158). The plethora of negative ideas pertaining to adoption in the context, including, inequality with biological children, ineligibility for inheritance, being a burden to one's adopted parents, and vulnerability to violence, hinder acceptance of the truth, meaning that careful and deliberate explication is required in this area. Moreover, there is little, if any, hope of a glorious future and the necessary willingness to identify with Christ through suffering in the present. In short, the following characteristics of the children of God or evidences by which the Holy Spirit witnesses to believers that they are, indeed, God's children, are all too often missing: "radical holiness, fearless freedom, filial prayerfulness and the hope of glory" (Stott 1994:230). Practically, unless these theological truths are grasped and experienced, true living faith in God is stillborn.

5.3.1.1.3 Specific Content for Application

- Two stories were told by the pastors that are very helpful in explaining the 'spirit of fear' that pervades all of society which arises from the 'religious' or 'spiritual' local worldview. This affects perceptions of everyday events, which might ordinarily be taken at face value, turning them into fear-inducing, 'spiritual' experiences: (1) "This other day we were home. It was around eleven. Then we heard some footsteps on the roof. So I said it might be some *mphaka*, (cat). Then my boy went outside and saw that it was a cat, but from where we are coming from, there might be some people thinking is it someone who was there....*asking* is it a natural cat or something else?" (PFG 1)¹⁰² (2) "A friend of mine, when we had to go and take exams, on the day of the exam, as he was coming out of his room, the key broke. He couldn't come out, so he felt like it was the devil. It's like the bondage to fear seems to see spirits everywhere" (PFG 1).
- A student also told a story demonstrating how quickly believers can turn back to traditional means without an adequate theology of suffering, and when still holding conceptually to the traditional notion of salvation as physical well-being 'here and now': "Born again people... when crises arise, they seem to change their character because of fear. For example, we went to see a church member at Chilomoni (*township*), a well devoted member who had been sick for few weeks. And when he went to the hospital he was told that he had a liver problem. He said, 'pastor, I think I should just go for a witchdoctor because I don't see anything (*results*) from my faith.' You see, that man was a powerful member of the church but now that something had happened, he had forgotten where he's coming from" (SFG 1).

5.3.1.2 Romans 18:18-27

¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of*

¹⁰² Cats are often believed to be portents of imminent death.

the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

5.3.1.2.1 Theological Significance

Wright (2004:148) believes that these verses (18-25) provide a viewpoint from which we can see “with astonishing clarity, the whole plan of salvation for all of God’s creation.” Picking up on the theme of sharing in Christ’s “sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (vs. 17), Paul makes the point that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (vs.18 cf. 2 Cor 4:17). Keller (2015:35) helpfully paraphrases it in this way: “If you know where you are heading in the future, you won’t even entertain the idea that your current problems and pain aren’t worth it.” It’s all about perspective; understanding that sharing in Christ’s inheritance means experiencing the fulfilment of all God’s promises (Isa 11:6-9; 65:17-25 cf. Rev 21:1-5), including “a perfectly restored relationship with Him and a new creation in which there is no suffering” (Carson 2008:154-156). This makes both our ordinary suffering as human beings and our Christian suffering tolerable. More than that, as Bruce (1994:159) contends, the everlasting glory to which Paul refers, is not merely “a compensation for the suffering; it grows out of the suffering. There is an organic relation between the two for the believer as surely as there was for the Lord.” Stott (1994:237) concurs, stating that “the sufferings and the glory are married; they cannot be divorced... since suffering is the way to glory.”

It will be clear for all to see who the true children of God are when we are glorified, that is, when His glory is revealed in us (vs. 18) (Carson 2008:156), which will surely coincide with the revelation of the Son of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:7) (Bruce 1994:163). And this revealing of the true sons of God (vs. 19b), when we are raised (Rev 20:1-21:1), is eagerly anticipated by all of creation (vs. 19a). As Wright (2004:151) explains, “The point of ‘glory’ is that it means glorious, sovereign rule, sharing the Messiah’s saving rule over the world. And that is what the whole

creation is waiting for. It is waiting for us... for all God's children to be revealed. Then, at last, creation will see its true rulers, and will know that the time has come for it to be rescued from corruption" (Wright 2004:151). Keller (2015:35) speaks of this coming public revelation of our sonship when we will finally be fully "conformed to the likeness of his Son" (vs. 29a), and at which time we will bring all of nature with us "into a renewed, restored, redeemed reality."

Presently nature or creation is alienated from God and from us, humans, who were meant to "tend it and care for it" (Gen 2:15), living in harmony with, and acting as benevolent directors and stewards of and for, the earth. But through the fall (Gen 3) "the creation was subjected to frustration" (vs. 20a), but like us, because of God's covenant faithfulness, and in His great redemptive plan, creation also has the hope of liberation, as God puts "the world back to rights according to His original plan" (Wright 2008:152 cf. Keller 2015:36). Therefore, while for now the creation is in "bondage to decay" (vs. 21a), "caught in a continuous cycle of death and decomposition... a realm of pain and suffering" (Keller 2015:36), it will not always be so. The whole of creation has the hope that it will be "liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (vs. 21). That is, "The creation is not waiting to *share* the freedom of God's children... It is waiting to benefit wonderfully when God's children are glorified...for...that wise rule and stewardship, which was always intended for those who bear God's glorious image" (Wright 2008:152). Therefore, the "transformation of the universe depends on the completion of man's transformation by the working of God's grace" (Bruce 1994:161). However, as the whole creation waits, it suffers, "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (vs. 22). Keller (2015:36-37) commends the appropriateness of the metaphor on the grounds that frustration will be replaced with fulfilment, decay with strength and newness, and pain with joy.

What does this mean for God's children in the light of this future? What Paul is effectively saying is that even the creation urges us to agree that our glorious future makes our present sufferings worth bearing (Keller 2015:37). Paul's description of birth-pangs is one of the most vivid biblical images of hope (Wright 2008:153). As such, "we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (vs. 23). This inward groaning, as in the case of creation, is the result of the tension between present pain (suffering) and future glory, as we wait for our full and final redemption when we receive our resurrection bodies. Now, "In this world, we groan with creation as we live out our lives in mortal unregenerate bodies" (Carson 2008:156). Even though the Spirit is currently at work within us, giving us life, leading, assurance, intimacy, fellowship and hope (cf. 8:1-17), these are only the first-fruits of our full renewal, "just a taste of the complete, total freedom from the effects of sin and death in our bodies and spirits that the Spirit will one day give us (Keller 2015:37). As Carson (2008:157) explains, "This expectation

is another of the convictions that the Holy Spirit, dwelling within, gives us.” So, as we groan inwardly, we wait eagerly in anticipation of our full “adoption as sons” (vs 23b). We are legally adopted in the present and fully fledged members of God’s family but the time is yet coming when “our membership of God’s family will be fully revealed” (Carson 2008:157). Moreover, as believers we will be receiving the full manifestation of our inheritance (Bruce 1994:165), as we inhabit the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21), and “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Thus, at this future final celebration of status, we will, indeed, be like him (vs. 29 cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:4). As Lewis (1969:174-175) puts it: “God will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess...a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) his own boundless power and delight and goodness.” Hence, for now, we wait patiently, even in the midst of our suffering, knowing that salvation is already ours (vs.24- “in this hope we were saved”), but still hoping “for what we do not yet have”, but which is still certain (vs. 25), the full enjoyment of that salvation.

And as we wait “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (v.26a), even helping us, who in the midst of our suffering, don’t know how to pray or what to pray for (Kasali 2006:1365). The Spirit joins with the world and the Church, or rather we join with Him, as He has come to dwell ‘with us’ and ‘in us’ in the very midst of the suffering (vs. 17-25), and He “intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (v. 26b). Wright (2004:155-156) suggests that through this kind of prayer we share in Christ’s sufferings, and are conformed into His likeness as we take on the responsibility of ruling or reigning over the larger world in anticipation of the full revelation of our reigning ‘with Him’, that is yet to come (cf. v.18). Moreover, the fact that, “the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (v.27b) also means that we join with Him in praying for God’s people (Keller 2015:42), “participating in a divine conversation” (Edwards 2011:216-217), which will ultimately bring about God’s will. There is a beautiful Trinitarian pattern to our prayer as we “have access to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit” (Stott 1994:244).

In summary, the passage has much to say in the Malawian context. It gives our suffering in the present purpose, shows how we are united to Christ through it, and how it provides real hope for a glorious and blessed future. This fundamental eschatological hope is lacking in traditional religion, along with the expectation of the corporeal redemption of our bodies. Yet, understanding these truths means knowing the goodness of God our Father, the gracious work of Jesus Christ ‘for us’, and the Spirits work in and through us. Such understanding instills true Biblical eschatological hope and provides the foundation for a robust theology of suffering. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is seen to be personally involved, giving us His first fruits, so helping us to groan with and hope ‘in Christ’, helping us in our weakness, and praying through and with us for the saints. God’s Spirit in us, absolutely necessary and fundamental to our lives ‘in Christ’, is a concept reiterated here. Finally, the emphasis on creation redemption being tied-

up inextricably with our glorification as true sons and daughters of the living God, is a salutary pointer towards our ecological responsibilities as the Church in the present context.

5.3.1.2.2 Practically Applicable Significance

The group discussions focused on three main issues: (1) suffering, (2) eschatological hope—especially the idea of resurrection, (3) the redemption/renewal of the earth and the Christian’s ecological/environmental responsibilities.

It was made clear that the concept of suffering for or with Christ is completely culturally foreign. Again, this is because traditionally, “to have everything... children... good health, that is salvation” (PFG 8). A pastor was careful to emphasize that “Traditionally those who are spiritual, those who are upright... they wouldn’t want to face suffering” (PFG 8). The traditional consensus is that, “nobody wants to suffer... it means suffering is completely evil and the human malady needs to be remedied” (PFG 8). Indeed, “those who are in good relationship with God... are not supposed to suffer” (SFG 8). For example, “people will judge that one is poor because his relationship with God is not good” (SFG 8). Not surprisingly, it was asserted that “we do expect that if something evil befalls you then you might have sinned” (PFG 8). Moreover, a student stated that “traditionally, when suffering, when situations arise, we always believe that something not good has happened, and we run to do ABCD, whatsoever we can do in a traditional manner that the sufferings must go... we don’t believe that it comes in good accord you know, we usually say it is something bad, maybe we have done something bad to the ancestors, or God our supreme being is not happy with something. So, let’s do something that this plague or disease or whatsoever must go... (SFG 8). There is certainly no traditional religious understanding of the necessity for suffering while “waiting for something greater than what we have in the suffering” (SFG 8). Even Christians remain trapped in this deception: “people think when they receive Christ, when they become Christians, everything will be okay, they don’t expect sufferings, what, what, but this is contrary to what the word of God is saying... that’s why we were saying about prophets out there, people they go there not to seek salvation but to seek their physical needs. It clearly shows that many people they don’t know what Christianity is” (SFG 8).

On the subject of eschatology and looking forward to the good things after physical death, specifically sharing in our Lord’s glory, it was stated that: “this concept is to a greater extent foreign to our cultural philosophy.” However, “the concept of longing for something is there”, as contended by a pastor who explained that integral to the notion of *umunthu*, is the idea that death is understood to be a release to a better place, a better life. He spoke of his grandfather who was actually looking forward to death, so he could go and be with his father who was

waiting for him (PFG 8). There also exists the concept of *akupuma* (he/she is resting), being free from the old troubles, as one pastor asserted: “if you are *munthu* (human being) you are intrinsically human, certainly people would look at death as a release to a better place” (PFG 8). The author has heard more than a few ministry colleagues expressing some longing to be set free from the burden of their many pressing responsibilities to family and community. However, this is all a far cry from the glory referred to in Scripture. As one student put it, “Because traditionally all we know is that when we depart from this physical realm we join the spiritual realm, we become spirits... I think it's only hope that we will be living-dead, which means that there is not something better that we expect traditionally, we just expect to become an ancestral spirit” (SFG 8). Another student-pastor explained that “we believe that there is a spiritual world but because we don't know what's really happening in the spiritual world we fear it” (SFG 8). In the final analysis, a student was correct to astutely point out that, “the hope of a Christian is known while the hope of this one (*the African traditional religionist*) is not known because he is not even familiar with the lifestyle of the spiritual world” (SFG 8). There remains much uncertainty pertaining to the future.

On receiving a resurrection body a pastor emphatically stated, “that is completely foreign in our cultures” (PFG 8). More than that, another pastor pointed out that a traditional cultural person, when encountering the idea of resurrection, would most likely think immediately of “*mzuka* (ghost), because they manifest physically, that will be the first impression. Then (*they will*) think about *ufiti* (witchcraft)... because witches move around in bodies” (PFG 8). A student took pains to explain that “In African traditional perspective, I think they are just familiar with the changing of a person from a physical to the spiritual realm when he dies, but concerning the dead body, we don't have a tangible description of what is happening to the dead body, but we just know that when a person is departed from the physical realm, he goes to the spiritual realm... I think our beliefs is that we will be like other spirits who have no body, we don't see them, we don't have a right mindset about our body being resurrected and becoming a physical body (SFG 8). There is no continuity between the dead person's body and their spirit in the ancestral world but there is understood to be continuity between the relations between the *mzimu* and his/her family and community. A student-pastor explained it like this: “I think they (*traditional religious Malawians*) think that the dead body has now become a spiritual being that maintains a good relationship with the people there (*near to their home*), so the body should not be far away because that ancestral spirit will be near the people, to the family... still having interaction with those who died” (SFG 8). Thus, there is continuity, interaction and a good relationship with the relatives who are still alive (SFG 8). It was also suggested that teaching on resurrection in the churches was often confusing, and that much of this could be avoided by using Paul's analogies in 1 Corinthians 15 (PFG 8).

In terms of the renewal of the earth and looking after the environment, the following was said: “People don’t care at all about this, we just know that we are living on creation but even the concept that it will be renewed isn’t there” (PFG 8). Indeed, where the author lives on the side of a mountain, trees are disappearing fast! In fact, throughout Malawi there is a crisis- in 20 years it is predicted that there will be no trees. Even in places where they are being protected, it is not because of a conviction to take care of the environment, but rather, “where you find that there are many trees it means there is a mysterious belief there... it might be there are spirits in those trees, so people fear to be attacked by the spirits” (PFG 8). One student stated that “there is not any element of renewing in the tradition” (SFG 8). Another elaborated: “they (*traditional Malawians*) know that the world will come to an end, *dziko lidzatha, dziko lidzatha...(but)* they don’t have the knowledge of what will follow... we don’t know what is to come after the end of the world, we just know that there will be the end of the world but no renewing... the end can be uncertain” (SFG 8). Strangely, in a country where life is so closely linked to the fertility of the land, there seems to be little understanding or acknowledgement that certain behaviours are destructive to the environment and, therefore unacceptable, both before God, and in terms of the well-understood idea of *umunthu*. A helpful point of connection is the fact the vast majority of Malawians agree, from a traditional religious perspective, that God created “everything that exists on earth” (SFG 2). One pastor helpfully suggested that “if we can have the concept of a full definition of *umunthu*, from (*including*) the creation, then we would not destroy the environment, because we will consider the responsibility of being human (*as it relates to*) the creation, so the concept of *umunthu* is very important” (PFG 8).

In summary, the passage teaches that our suffering in the present has purpose as we identify with Christ and infuses it with hope for a glorious and blessed future. This rebuffs both the popular idea that when people suffer they have done something wrong, as well as the misconception that our future in the next world is uncertain, dependent more on how closely we adhere to traditional expectations than on God’s sovereign, benevolent will and ways. It also demythologizes the idea that physical blessing in the present represents true salvation, so also debunking a major doctrine of the ever-popular prosperity gospel. The eschatological hope provided which is kindled by the realization that God has a wonderful plan to ultimately glorify us, making us like Him and revealing us as His sons and daughters, along with the expectation of the corporeal redemption of our bodies, are foreign concepts in traditional religion. However, they are fundamental to understanding the goodness of God our Father, instilling true Biblical eschatological hope, and continuing to lay the foundation for a robust theology of suffering. The latter is not a stumbling block to faith when we have right expectations for life in the present. Moreover, the emphasis on creation’s redemption being tied-up inextricably with ours, is a salutary pointer towards our ecological responsibilities as the Church in the present context

within which little, if any thought, let alone effort, is given or expended towards living in harmony with the rest of creation and exercising our God-given duty and responsibility to “to work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). The land is not simply to be used for our benefit and ‘salvation’ but also to be cared for and nurtured, respected and enjoyed, as we mutually await our full redemption. It is God’s land, he created it and he will redeem it. Creation’s future liberation also means an ongoing relationship between men and the land, a clear intimation that there is so much more to come, not so much our necessary escape from the world, as our glorious redemption ‘with it’.

5.3.1.2.3 Specific Content for Application

- Regarding the lack of care for the environment in Malawi, one pastor told this story: “I have an example, one of my dogs died and my boy had to dig (*to bury it*). So people were coming to say, ‘why are you troubled digging there? Can’t you just throw it away?’ I was like, ‘no we have to take care of the environment’. So people just have a certain concept that they don’t worry about anything to do with the creation.” (PFG 8)
- In terms of both jealousy and the traditional mindset when it comes to success or achievement: “in those days I remember my cousin constructed a house. He’s just two years older than me. His mother said, ‘somebody is going to die in this family.’ We said, ‘why?’ She said ‘because, why is it that you have constructed a good house like this one, yet I your mother, I don’t have it?’” (SFG 8)
- In relation to the ancestors being near to and involved with the lives of their living relatives one student provided this anecdote: “My grand-mom, a mom to my father, she is old now about seventies to eighties. She is still telling us, ‘give me transport, I want to go home to Chikwawa before I die... provide me with transport I want to go where my sons are.’” (SFG 8).
- Concerning the dead, great respect is shown to dead bodies because of the belief that the spirit is passing into the ancestral world, literally becoming an ancestor (*mzimu*), entering the realm of the living-dead, thus becoming greater than a mere human: “they treat it with respect because in Malawi we say the dead body is the king, the chief... ‘*titulutse mfumu*’ (let us ‘out the dead body’), it’s when you are getting the dead body out of the house, we all stand up giving respect to the dead body. Even if you can carry the dead body and the dead body falls down people begin to shout (SFG 8).

5.3.1.3 Romans 8:28-39

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?³³ Who will bring any charge

against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No- one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5.3.1.3.1 Theological Significance

This passage has variously been described as teaching ‘assurance of salvation’ or the necessary doctrinal corollary which is, of course, the ‘final perseverance of the saints’. This is a very encouraging passage for believers who are ‘in Christ’. Carson (2008:166) provides a helpful orientation by breaking the structure of the passage down into two sections: verses 28-30 which he entitles “God’s plan to glorify us and Jesus is unstoppable”, and verses 31-39, headed, “Our confidence in God: no-one can oppose Him.” As Stott (1994:246) explains, in these verses “the burden of Paul’s climax is the eternal security of God’s people, on account of the eternal unchangeability of God’s purpose, which is itself due to the eternal steadfastness of God’s love.” As such these verses correspond closely to 5:1-11, and bring to a close the section, chapters 5-11 (Carson 2008:165). The eternal security of believers is assured because from beginning to end we are in God’s hands.

The immediate literary context sets the scene for Paul’s climactic statements on present suffering and future glory. The first thirty verses of chapter eight deal explicitly with assurance of eternal life in the Spirit (Moo 1991:499). There is a clear link between this chapter and the preceding argument, especially 7:6b-25. The truths in the latter are as Moo describes them, “subordinate connections taken within Paul’s theme of Christian assurance and eschatological victory” (1991:502). Under the law the struggle with the sinful nature was an impossible battle to win (cf. 7:14-25). Yet now, those controlled by the Spirit, “do the will of God from the heart” (Bruce 1994:149). Those who are “in Christ Jesus” (8:1) have access to His resources of life and power and are therefore “more than conquerors” (8:37). There is no condemnation for the Christian (8:1) who is ‘in Christ’, nor is there any separation from God for the believer (8:39). The Christian has been set free from the burden of the law and there is newness of Spirit (cf. 8:1 with 7:6). In fact, verses 1-17 of chapter eight pertain explicitly to life in the Spirit (cf. 8:4 with Gal 5:16-17). The fact that this is through “him who loved us” (8:37b) provides some

insight into the flow of Paul's argument. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who is referred to nineteen times in the chapter, is for the believer a guarantee of future glory (Eph 1:13-14), "the assurance that life immortal has already begun in them" (Bruce 1963:158). This speaks of both our present sanctification and the benefits of our redemption that we will enjoy in our resurrected bodies at the final consummation, and for all of eternity (cf. 8:11-13). The Spirit of God and the Christian spirit bear witness to their adoption as his children (cf. 8:14 with Gal 4:4-7), and through identification with Christ in His suffering believers can look forward to the fellowship of His glory. This glory far outweighs the affliction suffered in the present dispensation (8:18-30). Such hope (8:24-26) is decisive for Christian living for the trials of the present can be endured when God's people are sure of their eschatological hope. When God purposes anything He always carries it through. Thus in the flow of Paul's argument to this point he has posited three major tenets of salvation assurance: faith in Christ, the witness of the Spirit and the fruit of the spirit-controlled life. Romans 8:28-39 proceeds to clarify the nature of this assurance so as to leave the believer in no doubt as to his salvation and its permanent efficacy. And such security promotes new 'heart-felt' obedience.

Verses 28-30

In these verses Paul articulates unambiguously the doctrine of assurance of salvation and its corollary, the perseverance of the saints or 'of God with the saints' as above. Referring to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints Lloyd-Jones writes that the argument of verses 28-30 "is really quite sufficient in and of itself to establish the doctrine, even if we had no other Scriptures (1975:334). This is the assurance of salvation: that believers might be quite certain that their salvation ('in Christ') cannot simply be lost or snatched away at any moment. "And we know" (28a) expresses a knowledge of faith, something generally recognized as true (Bruce 1994:165; Cranfield 1975:424). It is so because as Keller (2015:43) points out, "The universe is not just a mechanism run by blind chance; it is run by a person- and not just any person, but our Father." Thus "God works all things", meaning all the sufferings of the present age, "for the good" (28a cf. 8:18) of those who love him teaches us to view even life's troubles as part of God's loving purpose for us. Indeed, as Kasali (2006:1364) puts it "Our sufferings, our groaning, our hope and our joy - all are designed for our ultimate good. God is in control and nothing is beyond his ultimate power." Those, "who love him" (28a), are those whose love for God (v. 28a), is a whole-hearted response to the prior love of God (Cranfield 1975:425). They are also those "who have been called according to his purpose" (28a-b). Here the sense of effectual calling is intended rather than the sense of an invitation given as in the synoptic gospels (Bruce 1963:176). Thus, Paul refers to all those who have been called by God, and as such, have been enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to perceive their own sin and to embrace Christ. And God is so great that He can even use our past sins and failures "to humble

us and teach us a right view of ourselves and a greater appreciation of Christ (Keller 2015:44). Moreover, they “have been called according to his purpose” (28b) refers back to Paul’s entire discussion on Christian assurance, grounding the verse contextually. Linked to verse 29 it is clear, as Moo (1991:568) points out, that “it is the unfolding of the plan of God in the lives of individual believers that is the ultimate foundation for the hope of glory.” It’s not that things are always good or even work out well, or that sin should be called good either, but that God is at work in all things - even the horrible ones - to accomplish His purpose. Edwards (2011:218) explains that “This verse testifies to God’s sovereignty, not to the beneficent outworking of circumstances.”

The next two verses (8:29-30) are linked together in what has been referred to as the ‘salvation chain’ in which every link of the chain represents divine action (Hendriksen 1980:281), revealing God’s purpose mentioned in verse 28-29, according to which He has called us and is working out for our good in all the circumstances of life (Keller 2015:48; Stott 1994:248). There is a careful parallelism here established by a chain of verbs whereby, in each case, God is the subject and believers are the object of the action. At every point the divine initiative is established and highlighted in the outworking of God’s purpose. For this reason we may have hope in our salvation and future, not because we love God, but because He has chosen us and sets this golden chain into action, one which begins with God’s foreknowledge of us and ends with our glorification (30e). As Hendriksen (1980:281) puts it, “Christians are the subject of God’s active delight.” The first verb in the chain, God “foreknew” (29a) believers, connotes a sense of entering “into relationship before” or “to choose, or determine, before” (Moo 1991:569 cf. Keller 2015:50-51). The latter makes sense when we understand that in biblical parlance ‘to know’ is to love denoting a personal relationship of love, care and affection (Murray 1968:317-318 cf. Carson 2008:167). Thus “The only source of divine election and predestination is divine love” and the entire message here emphasizes God’s free initiative of grace (Stott 1994:249). The second verb focuses attention on the purpose of God’s electing grace and thus adds meaning to the first. More than an intellectual knowledge, God’s electing grace, “predestined” (29a) or ‘foreordained’ believers, thus determining before the foundation of the world that they would “be conformed to the likeness of His Son” (29a) (Kasali 2006:1364). This is the wonderful destination to which man is moving by God’s initiative and grace! Our Father has a master design or form, His Son, and now He is using all things to conform us into His likeness (Keller 2015:49). It is thus “God’s purpose to imprint on all those who belong to Christ the image of the second Adam” (Moo 1991:571). This is God’s work of transformation (sanctification) which is effected in the present (cf. 8:17) as well as at our final glorification. Christ is “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (29b), giving Him pre-eminence, but also linking Him directly to “the first fruits” of those who will be raised from the dead (1 Cor

15:20 cf. 12-19). The emphasis is on God's gracious, sovereign choice of us before time as we know it began (Stott 1994:249-250) but we also see from the context that His choice was made with a particular purpose in mind, a purpose which is made ever clearer as we proceed. Forming the next link in the chain is the phrase, "he also called" (30a), the verb again denoting God's effectual summoning into relationship with Him (cf. 28b) (Keller 2015:44). Stott (1994:252) explains that "The call of God is the historical application of his eternal predestination... the divine summons which raises the spiritually dead to life". It is "those he predestined" whom "he also called" (30a), and the latter He is also said to justify and glorify (30b). Here the links in the 'salvation chain' are clearly established as it is clear that the called ones are precisely those whom He predestined for conformity to the image of His Son (thus sanctification), justification, and ultimately glorification. As Keller (2015:50) explains, "The key to understanding this verse is to use the 'controlling insight' that each verb refers to the same set of people."

The fourth link, "he also justified" (30b), pertains to "that divine gift of a status of righteousness before God with which so much of the epistle is concerned (Cranfield 1975:433). We note that a divine purpose and activity lies behind faith itself: even though it is the believer who is justified, God justifies. This means that "God has declared all those who believe in the gospel to be in the right, and no-one will be able to overturn God's verdict" (Wright 2004:160). We are 'in Christ' justified by virtue of our new life in Him who became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (cf. 1 Cor 5:21). Stott (1994:253) explains that 'justification is more than forgiveness or acquittal or even acceptance; it is a declaration that we sinners are now righteous in God's sight, because of his conferment upon us of a righteous status, which is indeed the righteousness of Christ himself.' It is not an isolated incident but part of God's whole sweeping redemptive plan, "beginning in eternity, coming into time/history, and ending again in eternity" (Keller 2015:51). When we properly understand our justification we gain not justification itself (already conferred by God) but assurance (Wright 2004:169).

Finally, believers will certainly share in Christ's glory if we are united with Him and so share in His sufferings (cf. 8:17), the divine decision has already been made and those who are justified have the assurance that they will also be glorified (Carson 2008:167; Moo 1991:573). In fact Paul actually speaks of our future glorification in the past tense, "he also glorified" (v.30), so emphasizing its certainty (Keller 2015:52 cf. Carson 2008:167). However, chronologically, our sanctification already begins after justification and has its consummation in glorification. It is already implicit in the statement: "conformed to the likeness of his Son" (29a). Stott (1994:252) explains that "the transformation process begins here and now in our character and conduct through the work of the Holy Spirit, but will be brought to completion only when Christ comes and we see him." Ultimately, the glory of God which we sinners fall short of (cf. Rom 3:23) is recovered and shared with us: "Our destiny is to be given new bodies in a new world, both of

which will be transfigured with the glory of God” (Stott 1994:253). The salvation chain is unbreakable because our sovereign God has put it in place. As Wright (2004:160) asserts, “The God who has called us in the gospel has declared that we are members of his family, and he will not let us go.”

In summary, Christians cannot and will not lose their salvation on account of the sufferings of this world (Carson 2008:167). Regardless of life’s circumstances, troubles, tribulations or trials, we can be sure that God, our Father, is in control of our destinies and we are secure in Him. Come what may in this world, His purposes for us in eternity will be accomplished.

Verses 31-39

These verses conclude the whole of the foregoing argument of the epistle (cf. 5:1-11). They have been described by Bruce as “the triumph of faith” (1994:188) and by Moo as “the believer’s security celebrated” (1991:580). Keller (2015:52) states that they represent the attitude of the Christian who knows the preceding truths (v. 26-30). Building on the firm foundation laid in verses 28-30 Paul now makes it crystal clear that the believer is guaranteed ultimate vindication but his/her assurance is also ‘this worldly’ because victory over all the forces of this world is promised. Stott (1994:254) points out that Paul answers his own question “What then shall we say in response to this?” (31a) by asking five more unanswerable questions, in bold defiance, challenging: “anybody and everybody, in heaven, earth, or hell, to answer them and to deny the truth which they contain. But there is no answer. For no-one and nothing can harm the people whom God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified.” Kasali (2006:1364) agrees that “Paul concludes by stating his firm conviction that the believer’s eternal salvation is secured.” Certainly, Paul uses “what, then, shall we say” (31a cf. 3:1; 4:1; 9:30) quite often to advance his preceding argument and in this case to conclude it (Cranfield 1975:435). The fact that the words do not stand alone but are part of a substantive question: “in response to these things” (31a) embraces the surety of God our Father’s good purposes for us, the salvation chain, and all the blessings ascribed to Christians (v28-30 cf. 5:1-21). And then “If God is for us” (31b), i.e. ‘on our side’ then what ultimate harm can come to us? Indeed, “who can be against us?” (31b). The ‘if’ here does not introduce a condition that may or may not be fulfilled. On the contrary, Paul’s rhetorical question alludes to the fact that despite facing enemies and adversity the Christian can be secure in his God. Why be afraid of any opposition at all if the God who has purposed our glory is all-powerful? (Keller 2015:52). Despite facing real enemies including: sin, suffering, evil, death, demonic forces and the devil himself, believers can be confident that none of these will prevail against us because God is for us (Kasali 2006:1364). Verse 32 demonstrates that God’s being ‘for us’ is most emphatically illustrated in His giving of His Son (cf. Gen 22: 12, 14). Paul emphatically points us to the cross

(Stott 1994:255). He (God, the Father) gave His “own” Son; the adjective emphasizing “the cost to the father of delivering up His dearest and most precious” (Cranfield 1975:436). Jesus is thus clearly distinguished from all believers as God’s own Son while all believers are adopted members of his family (cf. 8:14-16) (Moo 1991:582). God “did not spare his own Son” (cf. Gen 22:1-19) but “gave him up for us all” (32a) (cf. 4:25; Isa 53:12), that is, for all those who have been called. To these all things will be graciously given (32b). To be sure, the Christian hope is grounded in the purpose of God who gave up his Son ‘for us’, that all those whom he effectually called might receive the full blessings of our eschatological salvation (cf. 28-30 with Matt 6:33). The cross guarantees it! As Kasali (2006:1364) puts it: “If God was prepared to go to the length of giving up his only Son to save us, he will certainly give us everything else we need to achieve his ultimate goal: our sanctification and glorification.” Indeed, Paul surely has our glorification (v. 30) and inheritance (v. 17) in mind here rather than any worldly desires (Carson 2008:168), but his rhetorical question surely also embraces our daily needs (cf. Matt 6:11, 23-34). It is also plausible that implicit in all that we are given, “along with him” (32b) (who is Christ) is our share of His sovereignty over creation (cf. Ps 8:6 and 110:1 with 1 Cor 15:25-28) (Moo 1991:583).

Verses 33-34 are linked together by the judicial language which Paul employs as he asks, “Who will bring any charge” (33a) and then follows that up with, “Who then is the one who condemns?” (34a). The future tense in 34a denotes the last judgement where the ‘accusers’ accusations will be exposed as ineffective against God’s elect, “those whom God has chosen” (33a). For who can bring a charge against those who are assured of God’s glory? The fact that “It is God who justifies” (33b) is a further basis for understanding the ultimate failure of Satan’s accusations against Christians. Stott (1994:255) explains that God our judge has already justified us. Therefore, no one can condemn us. On the final judgement day, “God will reaffirm the verdict already issued on the basis of faith” (Wright 2004:160). The latter especially in the light of the fact that Christ has already died ‘for us’ and been raised from the dead to sit at the right hand of God, where he intercedes ‘for us’. All accusations are null and void because God has chosen us and justified us. Regardless of what our consciences or the devil or our human enemies may tell us, “God has passed his verdict, and that verdict is that we are justified. Once the judge has spoken, the case is closed” (Kasali 2006:1364). At the time of conversion God took the irrevocable decision in justifying the convert, a “verdict that must, therefore, render impotent any accusations against us at the judgement (cf. 5:9-10 and the allusion to Isa 50:7-9). And it is Jesus Christ who saves us from condemnation. The judge of the world (Jn 5:22) would not condemn the ones for whom he died. Kasali (2006:1364) explains that “the judge is also the advocate for those who believe in him.” Jesus secured our justification through his death (“It is Christ Jesus who died”) (34b) by condemning the very sin in

us for which we might deservedly have been condemned. But by Christ taking upon himself (in his humanity) our sin (cf. 8:3), he redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us (Gal 3:13), thus setting us free (Stott 1994:256). “More than that” (34b), it was also Christ whom the Father “raised to life” (34b cf. 8:11), his resurrection from the dead standing as an unambiguous indication that his substitutionary sacrifice has been accepted by the Father (cf. Rom 4:25). Christ’s work of atonement is complete. Our sins have been blotted out and Christ’s resurrection established this fact beyond the possibility of successful contradiction. Grace is, indeed, the vindication of God’s chosen (Edwards 2011:224). Christ now occupies the highest position in God’s economy (cf. Ps 110:1), “at the right hand of God” (34c), suggests “the place of supreme honor” (Stott 1994:257). Thus, Christ’s mediatory work on earth is finished but His heavenly ministry continues in the present day: “and is also interceding for us” (34c) referring to his high-priestly ministry of intercession on behalf of his own (cf. Heb 7:25). How encouraging to know that believers have “an intercessor or ‘advocate’ with the Father (cf 1 Jn. 2:1) as well as an intercessor here” (Bruce 1994:170). The latter refers to the Holy Spirit, “who intercedes for the saints according to God’s will” (27b). And there can be no doubt that God will answer his son’s prayers (cf. Jn 11:42a with Isa 53:10). No wonder Paul was able to state so confidently that “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (cf. 8:1).

The question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (35a) is the last question because all the other questions are really just versions of this one, since the only thing believers would ever have to fear is separation from Christ (Keller 2015:53). Thus it sets the tone for the next five verses. Again it is rhetorical in meaning, that no-one will ever be able to separate us from the love that Christ has for us. Moo rightly notes that there is a slight shift here to a more personal and relational emphasis of the love of God in Christ for us (1991:568). Kasali explains that “The answer to this question is the climax of Paul’s argument concerning the security of the believer” (2006:1364). The latter part of the verse must be read as a supplement to the first question, and all of the difficulties mentioned, bar the last one (“the sword”), are trials which threaten the Christian enumerated by one who had already experienced them (2 Cor 11:26-28, 12:10). The argument here is not one for theodicy but a much more practical acknowledgement that adversity and suffering are the lot of those who dedicate themselves to God (Edwards 2011:225). The first three (trouble, hardship and persecution) relate to the hostile world in which we live and come to all Christians at some point; the next two (famine and nakedness) strike at the heart of things God has promised to provide His children (Mt 6:25-34), and the last two (danger and the sword) speak of the risk of death and the actual experience of it faced by many of God’s people throughout the ages (Stott 1994:257 cf. Keller 2015:53). “As it is written” (36a) undoubtedly introduces an Old Testament quotation. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22, “which depicts the persecution of Israel by the nations.

They were not suffering because they had forgotten Yahweh or turned to a foreign god. Instead, they were suffering for Yahweh's sake because of their very loyalty to him" (Stott 1994:257 cf. Wright 2004:161). Clearly his intention is to point out that it is not uncommon for believers to face persecution and death, even though they have a sure hope (cf. Mt 5:10-12). Suffering does not estrange us from God; His love is certain and our suffering brings us closer to Him. Moreover, as Stott explains, "A willingness for martyrdom is certainly the final test of Christian faith and faithfulness" (1994:257). Significantly, Paul was later put to death by the sword.

Verse 37 is linked to verse 35, providing the answer to the original question: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us". "No", nothing can separate us from Christ's love for us because it is in fact this very love that carries us through or "in all these things" such that we are "more than conquerors" as we endure these challenges. According to Moo the Greek verb can actually be translated as 'super- conquerors' (1991:587). And significantly, we are 'super conquerors' "through him who loved us". Christians "triumph through and over the worst that life brings" (Keller 2015:53). Stott points out that the aorist tense ("who loved") marks the ground for our confidence as it indicates an allusion to the cross. That is to say that Christ has already proved His love by suffering on the cross for us, making our sufferings (v.35-37 cf. v.17) evidence of our union with him rather than any cause for doubting the surety of His love (1994:258). We are, indeed, victorious in every situation because of the fullness of our eschatological hope; we live in the power of the Holy Spirit, our faith grounded in the historical reality of Christ's 'finished work'. The victory in reality is not ours for the battle belongs to the Lord. And God will never lose any of those He foreknew, those who love Him for whom He is working all things out for their good, as he exercises His sovereign control over every aspect of human history (Keller 2015:53).

The beginning of verse 38 is both personal and emphatic: "For I am convinced..." Paul is absolutely convinced that nothing can separate him (us) "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (38c). He mentions death first, probably intentionally lining this reference back to the quote in verse 36, but also expressing his conviction that to die is to be with Christ (cf. Phil 1:21). Death is coupled with life ("neither death nor life") (38a) to make the point that whether we live or die we are equally the Lord's (2 Cor 14:8). We cannot be separated from God's love by anything at all: the crisis of death, the calamities of life; spiritual powers of any kind; time; space; or any other kind of "powers" (possibly a reference to the astrological powers in which many in the Hellenistic world believed); "nor anything else in all creation" (39b) which makes it clear that there is absolutely nothing left out and all things are actually under God's control (Stott 1994:259). Some translations have 'nor heavenly rulers/principalities' instead of 'nor demons'. In this context it is very important to understand that the reference here includes

all the forces of evil in the universe (cf. Eph 6:12) (Bruce 1994:171) because spirits and witchcraft are so greatly feared. In other words, “Having looked at everything in life Paul knows that nothing whatsoever can separate us from the love of Christ” (Kasali 2006:1364). Indeed, the list found in verses 38-39 deals with cosmic spiritual forces, this worldly influences and even our eschatological security. What a powerful statement Paul makes, “as the dangers heighten, so does the apostles confidence in God’s love” (Edwards 2011). Bruce sums it up beautifully when he writes: “Nothing in the expanses of space or in the course of time, nothing in the whole universe of God can sever the children of God from their Father’s love, secured to them in Christ” (1994:171). And this, when understood in the light of the constant, steadfast, faithful, enduring, “love of God” (39c) is the thrust of Paul’s message. Why is this so? Keller (2015:54) answers the question: “Because God loves us simply because of His choice, not because of anything in us (which may change), nor anything around us (which may change). He loves us because he loves us.” As Kasali (2006:1364) explains, “God has provided for our victory. We can rest assured that his love will never let us down. All we need to do is trust God and be convinced that he can keep his promises no matter how unlikely that may sometimes appear in our circumstances.”

In summary, the Christian hope (cf. 1 Tim 1:1) is certain because it is grounded in the sure purposes of Almighty God. Salvation is never temporary. Those whom our Father God calls are justified by Him and as such believers stand to inherit the fullness of His eschatological blessing. Being more than conquerors in the present we will most certainly be glorified with Christ in the future, enjoying our rich inheritance ‘with Him’ when Christ is revealed (1 Pet 1:3-7). Our ultimate glorification depends on God, and because He is constant and faithful, our salvation is assured. Our confidence lies, not in our own ability to stand firm, but in the love of God for us. The saints of God ‘in Christ’, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will persevere until the very end. Thus the doctrine of perseverance is also the doctrine of preservation: we will persevere because God Almighty preserves us. Or as Stott puts it: “The doctrine of ‘the perseverance of the saints’ needs to be renamed. It is the doctrine of the perseverance of God with the saints” (1994:259-260).

5.3.1.3.2 Practically Applicable Significance for the Malawian Context

Regarding God, the Father, a pastor contends that “from our traditional religious background, usually God is seen as benevolent: *Mphambe*, *Chauta*, (Chewa names of God), he that gives when we pray; he gives to his children, but then when something goes wrong he gets angry and punishes” (PFG 2). But this is not understood as discipline: “the punishment, it’s negative, basically negative” (PFG 2). However, a student-pastor asserted that it is not God who punishes because “it is the mediators who are responsible for sending the messages to him”

(SFG 2). The students wanted to make it clear that the benevolence of God was very much linked to the quality of the interaction with one's ancestors: "that's why most of the time we offer sacrifices to the intermediaries, so that the intermediaries should send good messages or good information about us to the Supreme being" (PFG 2). In other words, "we do so that things will be well on our side" (SFG2). This dynamic is very much performance based: "all good things come from the supreme God, but if something bad happens they (*people*) start to ask questions and find out the root cause of that problem... that's why people go to offer sacrifices to their mediators, believing that there is something wrong they did. So, they go to confess so that the supreme God should do them favor" (SFG 2). Indeed, pastors felt that from a traditional perspective they were closer to the ancestors than God, and mediators were needed. God as father is an alien concept. One pastor asserted that even for believers, "it is more Christ and the Holy Spirit, less the father." He testified personally that, "He looks a bit removed. In my case to address God as Father is a struggle. He is God. He is perceived as somehow removed" (PFG 2). On the positive side, when very bad things do happen, like drought, severe illness or death etc. the perception of God's goodness remains intact, because the blame is usually attributed to ancestors (as we have seen) or evil spirits (SFG 2). It is possible to build on this foundation.

Acknowledging Jesus as a brother is also fraught with issues. Firstly, if one says he is God then he cannot be a brother because there "is a gap between God and man" (PFG 2; SFG 2). So, to say Jesus is Lord (*Ambuye*) but also a brother is not culturally accepted. It is discrediting God to suggest we might be on the same level (SFG 2). Secondly, if he is God and God is a spirit, then it is impossible from a traditional cultural perspective, "for a spirit cannot be my brother or your brother" (PFG 2). Thirdly, there is always some resistance to the coming of an ancestral spirit, we don't just say, "ah, my brother you have come, you are welcome" (PFG 2). This is not surprising as the coming of a spirit may signal imminent death (PFG 2). Fourthly, it brings confusion pertaining to the deity of Christ because if the father is God and so is Jesus, but you say Jesus is also a brother, "then Jesus is not God to the same level with the Father" (PFG 2). On the positive side, if kept strictly on the level of Jesus' humanity, then people may be able to acknowledge brotherhood with him, but even then it might be problematic, since brotherhood is usually restricted to the clan (PFG 2), and is verified by blood relations (SFG 2). One pastor remarked that a Chewa person could never believe that a '*mzungu*' (white man), born in a Jewish tribe, could be his brother (PFG 2). The fact that Africans like to establish the existence and veracity of familial relationships could be used positively here, but there is much cultural baggage to shed (PFG 2). One student persceptively pointed out that it would perhaps be better, in the context, to focus on 'being conformed to the likeness of his Son' (v.29a), rather than on adoption or brotherhood (SFG 2). He stated that, "this scripture is now telling us (*that we are*) the same as Jesus, that we will be like Jesus; so this likeness tells us who we are in

Jesus Christ" (SFG 2). This is a crucial observation as it speaks to our identity in Christ which directly impacts the way we live in the world, as the pastor was careful to explain (SFG 2). Another student-pastor, wanted to emphasize the importance of understanding that "this is to do with our relationship with Jesus", and that people will not understand these truths unless they "know something about him (*Jesus*), that's how and why did he come...", thus rightly suggesting that a good foundation needed to be laid before teaching on brotherhood with Jesus, conformity to his likeness and so on.

On another helpful note, the idea that there may be a great degree of patience with a family member, and the promise of unmerited forgiveness, even for transgressors, is not foreign to the culture. A pastor explained that "there is a cultural saying (in the Chewa language) that says, '*chitsiru chili ndi mwini*' (literally: 'even a fool has an owner/a mother/a parent'). The background (or meaning) of this is that no matter how bad a person is there is still somebody who cares for him." He goes on, "for instance, when I was a little, I was very naughty, my mother could be cross with me but... she was still siding with me, still tender to me without counting what I did yesterday" (PFG 2). This opens a vista for understanding God's long-suffering with His children and possibly also provides a starting point for understanding justification. People are constantly being 'set free' from their guilt by the Chief through payments (reparation) made to and through the traditional village courts, usually by an Uncle in the Chewa culture (see illustration below). A student explained it like this: "in terms of culture in both rural and urban areas talking of justice... it is more than just being judged, it gives that picture of someone passing judgment, saying despite all the accusations, despite all that the accusers have said, you have been declared free so go. So that understanding, I think is out there because even as am talking now someone somewhere is passing out judgment... the chief is in charge" (SFG 2). This notion may be helpful since the Chief's declaration of one's innocence may be analogous to being declared justified by God, being made righteous through the atoning work of Christ. Indeed, 'who will bring a charge against, or condemn anyone whom the Chief has declared free?'

Again, related to death and eschatology, one pastor stated that, "when a person dies people always say, '*wayamba moyo wina*' (he has started another life)" (PFG 2). This traditional idea definitely includes a relief from physical suffering, and the burdens and responsibilities of the present life, but hardly begins to delineate the 'glorification' of the saints of God. Moreover, again, at grassroots level there is a fear of death, and a fear of how those left behind will cope (PFG 2). This is exacerbated by the older generations dispensing traditional wisdom which encourages certain rituals around the dead and so promotes fears (SFG 2) (see example below). A student testified that the church is also not helping: "most of the messages that we

preach are only there to teach about judgment, they don't teach about the glory that we will have, as a result we impart fear in those people" (SFG 2).

When considering the Biblical questions: "who can be against us?" (v. 31b), and "Who shall separate us?" (v.33a), there are a number of 'enemies' in the context, potentially capable of doing so. Firstly, a pastor stated that "naturally, enemy number one is witches and wizards" (PFG 2). This is because "these are the ones who bring about death, they can also cause misfortunes like barrenness, they can bewitch you" (PFG 2; PFG 3). Indeed, diseases and death are profound enemies (SFG 3). Secondly, the students cited witchcraft, and the people involved, which has a wider application, including all those harboring jealousy (SFG 3), and all those with malicious intent (SFG 2; PFG 2). Thirdly, "traditionally, the other thing that people fear is witchdoctors because they can do evil to you" (PFG 2). Fourthly, charms were cited by a student who asserted that, "if they exist, they are existing against you" (SFG 2). Fifthly, thieves, who might come as ghosts (*azukwa*) and steal" (PFG 2). Sixthly, evil spirits, who are "people who were not good when they were alive" and now come to "hurt those who were not good to them when they were living" (PFG 2; SFG 2; SFG 3). Seventhly, people who oppress others and greedy people, like political leaders, who "take possessions or things from the poor" (SFG 3). Finally, the students mentioned the devil (SFG 3), demons (SFG 2) and Islam (SFG 2; SFG 3), although the latter is considered an 'enemy' more from a Christian perspective than a traditional religious one.¹⁰³ All of these are considered to be enemies causing fear and leaving people without peace of mind.

In terms of which practical issues cause anxiety to Malawians in the light of Paul's question: "how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things" (v.32b), the answers were straight forward: "food, clothes, children, wife, and husband as well (PFG 2; SFG 3). Also, food: "what am I going to eat?", and protection from anything that may cause death (PFG 2; SFG 3). For example, one pastor said, "I have a car so when I am traveling I am anxious that am I going to reach my destination" (PFG 2). Poverty and unemployment cause much anxiety in the context (SFG 3). A related problem is the projection of the traditional belief that if you lack anything God is not happy with you, onto Christian faith. This results in the misconception that if "you die poor while you are a Christian, people condemn you, (*saying*) that, 'this one was not a real Christian'" (SFG 2). Thus being poor makes one 'unrighteous' in the eyes of others but being rich may create suspicions of witchcraft activity (SFG 2). The same is true of suffering from terminal or "long-illnesses" such as HIV. Naturally, people question why it is happening (SFG 3).

¹⁰³ One student-pastor, speaking from a ministerial perspective cited the leaders of secular organizations as enemies because they introduce immoral behaviours, such as homosexuality, which debilitate the spreading of the true gospel (SFG 3).

The discussion around Jesus Christ's intercessory role on our behalf was an interesting one (cf. v. 34). One student was convinced that "the concept can be understood easily because we are all aware that we have intermediaries amongst us, so it's a matter of just knowing that there is someone who is greater amongst all those. So we need to just polish up there, (*explaining*) that it's only Jesus who speaks to God not these others" (SFG 3). However, others felt that replacing the traditional intermediaries with Christ conceptually and practically was very challenging: "introducing Jesus sometimes can be... a difficult thing, because they (*the people*) have something that they were born into. So, when they go to the *khulubvi* (shrine) they have their own now (*intermediaries*), who are interceding for specific issues. For example, the one who brings the rain. So, to remove this and bring in Christ... cannot be such a simple thing for them to grasp" (SFG 3).

Discussing Paul's question, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ" (v. 35) and the examples he listed, evoked a helpful response. It was noted that people (Christians) fall back on traditional means when crises arise because they cannot see God at work (SFG 3). One student-pastor noted that "people are stirred with messages which are not at all vital in their spiritual lives, ah prosperity, healings, so these messages are destroying people because they don't know the reality of Christianity... people think having Christ, it means there is no poverty, there is no suffering" (SFG 3). It is commonly understood that "Jesus is not meant to cause harm to his people" (PFG 3). Additionally, Christians "wonder why when we are serving God we are having a lot more troubles than those who don't believe... people expect some favour as they are working for God" (PFG 3). It was stated that the traditional root to all this kind of thinking lies with the idea that "if we are facing problems it means there is something wrong that we have done, that makes the ancestors to bring harm on us, that's why when we face problems we believe that maybe we are not in line with God" (SFG 3). Another student added, "maybe we have not appeased the ancestors, that's why we are facing this (*trouble/crisis*), so most of the people and even Christians, we believe that when we face problems it means maybe we face them because our relationship with God is not good. That makes us to lose our hope in God" (SFG 3). Indeed, suffering is "a thing that comes to evil people" (PFG 3), and those "who are not obedient to God (PFG 3), while "those who are doing well in terms of their relationship with God, will be able to live a happy life", along with "those who are doing good things" (PFG 3). Thus, if someone is suffering, God is punishing them or perhaps evil people are harming them, in which case God cannot be blamed (PFG 3). However, this issue becomes particularly poignant when people can't see God at work and it appears he is letting them down: "We feel like we are not being protected, when where we trusted to get our protection did not give us the protection to the level that we required" (SFG 3). It is traditionally expected that if one charm fails it is necessary to go to a witchdoctor who is more powerful. So, if God is

perceived to be unable to protect from physical suffering, it is natural to go to a higher power (SFG 3).

There are three clear difficulties with traditional religious thinking on suffering as it impacts those in the church: (1) the power of Christ is called into question, (2) people feel that they have done something wrong and so God has lifted His hand of protection off them (SFG 3), and (3) the misconception that God will never allow Christians to suffer (PFG 3; SFG 3). One student-pastor rightly concluded that, “this passage, if it can be presented to people properly, it’s a good passage that can help to bring faith in God only” (SFG 3), and a pastor added that “passages like these, if taught properly, they can bring an impact to our churches” (PFG 3). Another student testified that “the passage can be helpful because it’s how I came to realize how God responded to my situation and this is what helped me to stay ‘in Christ’” (SFG 3). He was referring to a time when his young child was very sick. There was general agreement that much teaching was needed in this area so that people could understand that they were going to face all these sorts of things as believers (cf. vs.35), but that none of them could “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord...” (v.35a, 39). However, it was also acknowledged that the challenge is profound: “because people are used to hearing that in God there is prosperity, when you are trying to teach this in the church you confuse the people, you even weaken the hope of some people. It’s like you are bringing a foreign teaching in their minds, so it raises a lot of questions” (PFG 3). Moreover, “if you are preaching ‘come to Jesus and you will get rich’ you find that a lot of people are receiving Christ, but if you say ‘come to Christ and you will suffer with him’, you find that no one says that they are ready” (PFG 3). And “even those who were already Christians, they will be telling you, ‘abusa (*pastor*), I think I will not survive’” (PFG 3). The pastors wisely concluded that what is needed in teaching in the churches is a balanced approach, one pastor saying that “in our preaching we have to reflect that the bible speaks of God blessing his people and also his people suffering” (PFG 3). Another pastor added: “as pastors we need to teach more on the hope of a new life, rather than teaching people only how they will benefit on this earth as Christians... (*also teaching*) on the hope of our inheritance in heaven” (PFG 3).

In summation a number of points can be made. The theme of assurance of salvation in this passage obviously has much to say to the Malawian worldview. The passage, rightly understood, has the potential to set people free from their inherent fears, allowing them to rest securely in the heavenly Father’s hands regardless of the vicissitudes of life’s circumstances and the influences of (often misdirected) traditional cultural wisdom. This hope speaks to both the present and the future as it arises out of what God has already done for believers ‘in Christ’. Firstly, the notion of a distant, impersonal God is dispelled as our Father God is rightly portrayed as having been intimately involved with us from before the beginning of time as we

know it, foreknowing us and purposely predestining us to be called, justified and glorified, wonderfully “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (v. 29). Moreover, to achieve this wonderful plan for us, He lovingly gave up His own Son for our salvation, continuing to love us, by justifying us and listening to the intercession of His Son on our behalf in the present, but also ensuring that, ‘in Christ’, nothing in all creation can separate us from His love, so guaranteeing us a glorious, blessed future. Clearly, our heavenly Father has not left us to our own devices or at the mercy of the capricious ancestral spirits (good or evil), or other spiritual forces and the people who manipulate them. Secondly, Jesus Christ, who was willingly incarnated and lived and died in the flesh, is rightly seen to be the mediator of this assurance of salvation, thus providing a very helpful point of connection with the traditional need/understanding of the mediatory role and de-emphasizing the need for any other ‘this worldly’ spiritual mediators such as ancestral spirits and/or the local ‘*asing’ganga*’ or witchdoctors. Believers have direct access to the Father God, through His Son, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Thirdly, it encourages hope in the midst of suffering, promoting the much needed foundations for a biblical theology of suffering and refuting the traditional religious understanding of salvation as explicitly physical well-being in the present, a temporal state of well-being’ evinced by good health, fertility of ground and womb, sufficient life force and success. At the same time, rebutting false prosperity gospel teachings with their emphasis on health and wealth as the true evidences of God’s blessing. Our ‘*moyo*’ (life) is seen to be given by God ‘in Christ’ and it is vital and permanent, regardless of external circumstances and appearances to the contrary. Fourthly, it also provides security in the face of present challenges and change such as the sustained eroding of traditional cultural mores and the significant challenge to traditional wisdom brought about through increasing exposure to the effects of globalization, secularization, technological progress and pluralism. Even church schisms, in-fighting, and the ever increasing exposure of leaders and so-called ‘prophets’ as charlatans, cannot separate believers from a God who is “for us”. Fifthly, the implicit eschatological hope trumps ‘this worldly’ fears and threats, including: death, illness, hunger, natural disasters, suffering of many kinds, and the traditional fear of ancestral spirits, malevolent created spirits, witches, wizards, sorcery, curses and witchcraft in general. If, nothing “can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39), and “God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us” (v.32), then surely we are “more than conquerors” (v.37), no matter the adversary, the challenge, the situation. Sixthly, it also guarantees a blessed eternity (‘*moyo wosatha*’- eternal life), so removing anxiety related to the vagaries of the afterlife such as rejection of one’s spirit into the world of the *mizimu* (spirits), and provides true eschatological perspective which subverts the traditional notion of a circumscribed cosmos, thus impelling believers to live well in the ‘here and now’ instead of seeking to gain and protect all that is needed for life at any cost. Seventhly, and very importantly, the truth of a believer’s spiritual renewal (justification) in Christ and their

concomitant righteousness (or purity) dispels the traditional fear of evil residing within and the resultant need for traditional purification. It also mitigates against a traditional legalism stemming from the need to strictly adhere to traditional wisdom but still profoundly affecting many in the church who continue to feel compelled to meet self-imposed 'traditional' standards and judge others by the same. Surely there can be no need to earn our salvation, or buy it, if it is God who justifies us. Finally, this subverted and revised understanding of salvation and eschatological security, which includes the knowledge that none of it depends on human decision, merit, action or competence, but rather on divine sovereignty, grace and love, undermines elements in the traditional anthropocentric understanding of salvation which promote the need for libations, sacrifices, prayers to and through the ancestors etc. Effectively, this means that all the deleterious traditional religious means of seeking to ensure equilibrium in the cosmos might be abandoned. Here the author refers particularly to the appeasement of other humans (particularly the elders), ancestral spirits and the created spirits, the need to consult traditional power specialists, as well as to the expected strict adherence to a complex system of traditions and taboos. Therefore, the deep-felt and traditionally rooted and nurtured need for traditional religious charms (or 'new' substitute charms and magic) is exposed as spurious, subverted by an understanding of biblical truth which leads to freedom.

In summary, understanding the Father God's sovereignty, the unbreakable salvation chain which He has lovingly and graciously put in place, and therefore the privileged position of security 'in Christ' which all believers enjoy, is surely a 'game-changer' in the context. Such knowledge challenges and potentially subverts many unhelpful spurious traditional notions about God, and provides the much needed confidence to place full trust in Him.

5.3.1.3.3 Specific Content for Practical Application

- Three helpful quotes on the role of mediators in relation to the putative benevolence of God: (1) "we believe that the mediators send the information for us to God, so if we are pleasing them we expect that they are going to send the message which is beneficial to us" (SFG 2), (2) "everyone knows that rain comes from God but when there is no rain we go to the ancestral spirits and plead to them so that they may bring rain" (SFG 2), (3) "you can hear someone saying that he had a dream in which his late relative was saying that if we don't do such and such a thing, we will fall sick" (SFG 2).
- On why ancestral mediators are needed: "I think it's because they are dead and we expect that they are close to God, and because they are close God, what they ask will be answered" (SFG 3).
- Other mediators include witchdoctors: "people can go to the traditional doctors to seek protection from these powers. I remember this Christmas break I was home and my father got sick, so he called someone who knows how to play with these things, so he wanted to have some cuts because he was afraid that someone was playing around with his life" (SFG 3).

- Sometimes a more powerful witchdoctor is required: “For example, maybe in the villages most of the people use charms to protect their houses. They go and get from somebody else, so if the witches come and trouble them, they think that the magic man did not provide them with enough charms. So they may choose to go to somebody who is believed to be more powerful (DFG 3).
- A student provided a very useful quote for opening a discussion on ‘sonship’, ‘adoption’ and being ‘brothers’ of Christ: “people can wonder because we Malawians, we believe that if someone is your brother then it means that you belong to the same mother, the same father, so in this way we can say that we are some-one’s children” (SFG 2).
- Discussing how we might understand Jesus to be a brother to all believers, a mature pastor said this: “I was looking at the way that Jesus Christ did it (Matt. 12:46-50), whereby, Jesus was preaching and teaching and his mother and brothers came, so someone said, ‘your mother and brothers want to speak to you.’ So he said, ‘look, these are my brothers and my mother, not the blood relations but those who do the will of my Father in heaven are my brothers and mother.’ So, we can have a big family, not connected by blood relations” (PFG 2).
- Considering the idea of justification from a traditional perspective, a pastor gave this example of how one is legally exonerated for a crime committed at the traditional village level: “when you’re guilty of a certain crime you have to pay something and you are then set free. Let’s say you were in conflict with somebody and you are judged guilty (*by the village Chief*), you or your uncle is told to pay either goats or sometimes chickens to the chief so that you can be set free. So, that is justification traditionally... you are guilt free and what normally happens is that the chickens are shared, the other one goes to the one you have wronged and the other one goes to the chief, and then it is declared that you are now free” (PFG 2).
- One of the reasons given for doubting God’s sovereign protection of the believer’s intimacy with Jesus Christ, and therefore, promoting the need to procure traditional protection, was fear of thieves: “thieves are greatly feared because they can come in human form or as animals, spirits or ghosts (*mizukwa*). One pastor stated that “mostly they come during the night and they can do anything they want” (PFG 2).
- In explaining the aura of fear surrounding death in the village a student told this story: “I remember there was this old man in my village and when he was about to die he called his relatives to say, ‘please when I die, when you are taking my body out of this house, make sure that everybody closes his eyes... if you do that things will be good for you but if you don’t follow this (*instruction*) things will not be good anymore” (SFG 2). A second story involves the *Nyau*: “in my home village there was a man who belonged to *Nyau*. He told his wife when he was sick: ‘you have to make sure that you release a certain *gule wamkulu* called *mbalanangwe*, I want that one to dance during my ceremony. But unfortunately that type of *Nyau* was not available at the time of his burial so the wife of the deceased was attacked by demons and she cut herself with a knife... when the (*village*) elders realized that they did not follow what the deceased had said, they tried to find where *mbalanangwe* was, and when it danced the wife stopped (*cutting herself*)” (SFG 2).
- Dealing with why believers suffer, and what an appropriate Christian response might be, one student testified: “It was in 2009 that my first kid got sick and fainted. It was in the afternoon and I cried, ‘why is it that God has allowed this to happen to me? Is it because I have sinned? Is it because of the devil? Why is it that God is allowing this?’ But now

the passage (*Romans 8:28-39*) is trying to address something... you might be faithful to God, but some (*bad*) situations can still come" (SFG 3).

- On evil people who cause suffering, two examples were given: (1) "Others may use magicians, it's like if you are wealthy, they make you sick so that you sell your harvests and spend the money in hospitals, so that you become poor... God is not blamed because when people go to the magicians to seek who is causing the problem, that's when the issue of magic comes in" (PFG 3). (2) "There is a belief that if you suffer, even if you see those people who are mad in our societies, it's because there was somebody who bewitched them so that he might get rich" (PFG 3).
- A Biblical example of how traditional religious thinking affects contemporary church thinking on the subject of suffering is found in Job: "you find that as Job was suffering, his friends were saying that he had sinned against God, so this is the perception today in the church" (PFG 3).
- The traditional notion of salvation includes prosperity rather than salvation and this is reflected in the church today: "there is an example from one of my church members who goes to a certain fellowship. So, two weeks ago there, the pastor asked who would preach the next week. A lady said she would. Then the pastor asked the lady if she had a car and when the lady said she didn't have one, the pastor said she could not preach because if one doesn't have a car, and you are telling people that God is good, it will not make sense" (PFG 3).

5.3.2. God, the Father

5.3.2.1 1 Peter 1:4-12

³*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴*and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,* ⁵*who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.* ⁶*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.* ⁷*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* ⁸*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,* ⁹*for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

5.3.2.1.1 Theological Significance

This passage further explores many of the themes discussed in the Romans text above. It focuses on three particular theological truths pertaining to God the Father which are profoundly important for the context: (1) the mercy of the Father, as demonstrated by what He has done, and continues to do, for believers in giving them new spiritual life, (2) His gracious promises

and purposes regarding an inheritance and eternal blessings, and (3) fellowship with Him and thus joy in the midst of present trials (Fleming 2014:575). “God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.3a) is to be praised because “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope” (v. 3b). It is “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (v.3c) that all of God’s people, scattered as we may be, strangers now to the world, and suffering all kinds of human trials, some persecuted, like Peter’s readers in the first century AD¹⁰⁴, find this great hope. It is much needed here in Malawi where believers are facing the full gamut of African challenges which Muriithi (2006:1518) describes: “religious pluralism, schism in churches, cultural oppression, poverty, ethnic conflicts, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, gender issues and human animosity, which often translates into violence.” And this wonderful hope given by God through Christ is not without substance. There is “an inheritance which can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven” (v. 4) for us. This means that despite the various hardships of life, “we can be full of enthusiastic hope that our inheritance will be waiting for us in our heavenly home” (Muriithi 2006:1518). Those who have received the “new birth” (v. 1) from the Father have this “living hope” (v. 1) which grows increasingly stronger as we walk with the Lord in the knowledge that He who has given us a spiritual rebirth is keeping, or literally has ‘kept’ (Grudem 1995:57), our inheritance for us, one which can “never perish spoil or fade” (v. 4a). While Peter certainly has in mind the Old Testament idea of the promised land (Nu 32:19; Dt 2:12; 12:9; Ps 105:11; Josh 13:14, 23, 28), the inheritance of the New Covenant Christian is far superior to that of Israel’s possession of the land of Canaan (Grudem 1995:56-58; Barclay 1965). Their inheritance was not kept for them, but “*taken from them* in the exile and later by Roman occupation”, it’s holiness before God also repeatedly spoiled or defiled by sin (cf. Nu. 35:34; Jer. 2:7; 3:2) (Grudem 1995:58). Instead, believers will experience salvation in its fullness when Christ returns, that is when our salvation “is ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). Moreover, we are enjoying some of the benefits in the present (cf. vv. 8-9) (Muriithi 2006:1518), as Peter states: “you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (v. 9). God Himself is our inheritance (Barclay 1960:204-205), and our fellowship with Him in the present brings increasing joy, always expanding our love for him (vs.6, 8-9). Moreover, our faith is tested as we “suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (v.6) but for good reason: we are developing perseverance and endurance, proving our faith to be genuine and resulting in “praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ returns” (v.7). Suffering grief here includes all kinds of trials that Christians experience (cf. Jas 1:3) in this fallen world, not only persecution (Grudem 1995:62-63). Life has many challenges but as Barclay contends, “In this world trial and affliction are not meant to take the strength out of us, but to put the strength into us.” Fleming (2014:575) summarizes the present dynamic experience of believers well when he writes: “As faith grows

¹⁰⁴ Under Emperor Nero’s rule (AD 54-68) many Christians were burned alive or thrown into the arena to be eaten by lions and other wild animals.

stronger and joy increases, so their love for Christ is enriched. They experience in advance the greater fellowship that they will have with Christ when their salvation reaches its fulfilment at his return (8-9).” This is all possible because believers, “through faith are shielded by God’s power” (v.5a) in the present milieu. Both Barclay (1960:206) and Grudem (1995:58-59) note that the Greek word used for ‘protect’ (*phrourein*) is a military word, meaning that, “our life is garrisoned by God, that God stands sentinel over us all of our days” (Barclay 1960:206). Grudem (1995:58) suggests that two types of guarding are meant here: “God is preventing believers from escaping out of his kingdom, and he is protecting them from external attacks.” It is God’s power that guards or shields us but He does not work apart from the personal faith of those whom he shields, it is “through faith” (v. 5a). Grudem (1995:59) points out that this “seems to imply that God’s power in fact energizes and continually sustains individual, personal faith.” Therefore, since believers are guarded by God for a particular purpose, that is for Him to reveal His full salvation to them at the right time (cf. v. 5b), it is safe to assume that our receiving final and full salvation is not dependent on ourselves, but on God’s power! Integral to the whole salvation experience is the deepening of our love for God, the strengthening of our faith, including a personal relationship of trust (“you believe in him” v.8b) and a wonderful, “inexpressible and glorious joy” (vs8-.9b). Grudem (1995:66) contends that this joy, unlike the rejoicing referred to in verse 6, which is as a result of our future hope, is a product of being in the presence of God Himself, through personal, daily fellowship with Him, the experience of which makes us partakers “of the joy of heaven before heaven.”

In summary, there is much in this text which is especially theologically significant for our context. In particular, the grace and mercy of God the Father as demonstrated to believers in His gift of new spiritual birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (cf. Eph. 1:5-9), the future eschatological hope of an inheritance which God is faithfully keeping for us, the present experience of joy in the midst of suffering, and the profound joy of personal fellowship with God our Father in every circumstance.

5.3.2.1.2 Practically Applicable Significance

To truly believe that there is a glorious inheritance awaiting, one pastor felt it essential that “we know if there is any linkage to the gentiles on this issue because that could help for references when it comes to teaching our people... as Peter was making this presentation how did he connect it to the gentiles” (PFG 8). Behind this comment, of course, is the concern to show how Malawian people are part of the broader plan of God, and included as heirs to this inheritance. Here John 1:10-18 could be very helpful. Nevertheless, the author was encouraged by this because it strengthened his conviction that it is of vital importance to labour the point of our inclusion into the family of God by virtue of His sovereign mercy, His decision

for our justification and righteousness through the work of Jesus Christ, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us, that we are indeed His children, all in the previous passage (Rom. 8:11-39).¹⁰⁵

It was again confirmed that most people were looking for the manifestation of the imperishable 'inheritance' whilst still here on earth: "people are looking for a better life, a life free from diseases, a life free from struggles, yeah, so these are the things that people want in this physical life" (PFG 8). Although this traditional religious motif of salvation as physical well-being 'here and now' is spurious, there is a distinct bridge, because it is malleable. People can be helped to see that this is exactly what will happen when our faithful God renews the heavens and the earth- their hope will be fulfilled at that time because the Father is faithful to His promises, both in keeping the inheritance and shielding their faith until that time. One pastor explained it in these terms: "we see that believers are complaining of troubles... you only see that what this person is going through is because he's a Christian but he is even asking God to remove the troubles, unlike what Peter is saying here because Peter is talking about the release of the problems, not now but in the afterlife" (PFG 8).

The dearth of stories, examples and quotes in the Focus Group sessions on the subject was evidence enough to the author of an impoverished traditional religious eschatology. Interestingly, some students felt that ATR in Malawi does hold out some eschatological hope, albeit inferior to the true Christian hope. When asked if an inheritance was expected one student felt that "there is nothing that you gain" (SFG 8). However, it was also stated that "it can be taken as acquiring additional powers or respect because when you change into the spiritual world that's when you get some respect... we respect more the dead. We regard them as greater than ourselves so there must be an element of inheritance, they are inheriting some additional power which is great" (SFG 8). Another student put it this way: "Changing from the physical life to the spiritual world, it can mean to Africans, to Malawians, that this is the one that acquires additional force" (SFG 8). Even when forgotten by the last living person the ancestors don't just disappear because they are eternal, and they gain power the older they get because they are believed to get closer to God (SFG 8). The traditional beliefs in the eternal nature of the spirit and that one gets closer to God after death may be useful bridges if used properly. But when asked if this gave hope, it was clear that it wasn't enough: "Hope of becoming an ancestor? Yeah, that hope is there but it's not something that you can cheer" (SFG 8). The aforementioned fear of death is still a big factor (PFG 1; SFG 8). So, from a traditional perspective, eternal hope is characterized by becoming a 'good' ancestor (*mzimu*) by being a

¹⁰⁵ This was also slightly disconcerting given that he had participated in at least one of the previous Focus Groups discussing Romans 8.

'good' person in the present, and so acquiring the respect from the living and a place a little closer to God. Whereas, a student, commenting on grasping the certainty of our inheritance from God said, "It's a good thing and so encouraging, our response is to remain faithful to God, in Christ, so that we may receive that inheritance, which God has kept for us" (SFG 8). This is of course exactly the response and understanding that is desired across the church. To flesh out what this inheritance might look like, we can go back to Romans 8:19-22 and forward to revelation 21:1-8.

A student-pastor also expressed the fact that from a traditional perspective, "Joy is there but not to do with suffering, somebody rejoicing in times of suffering, that is not there" (SFG 8). Another student clarified that joy is only present "when things are working out" (SFG 8), and that joy in times of trouble "is only a Christian understanding" (SFG 8). That's why the pastor who asserted that helping people to understand that we will face pain and suffering as followers of Christ, but that God has an inheritance planned for us, was "building the foundation of Christianity" (PFG 8), is correct. This is a critical point because the notion of prosperity in the present as evidence of salvation (PFG 1; PFG 8) needs to be replaced with a true, biblical, eschatological hope rooted in the sovereign, merciful and gracious plan of our heavenly Father. Regarding the latter and on experiencing joy in the midst of present sufferings (cf. v.6), it was agreed that it was possible "because of the expectation that one day we will be more than happy" (PFG 8). However, not even the pastors acknowledged the "inexpressible and glorious joy" (v.9) which is the product of intimate fellowship with God in and through every circumstance of life. This relational dimension is missing and needs to be encouraged. Only when His joy becomes ours, are we truly sustained.

In summary, our heavenly Father is seen to be merciful, generous and personally involved with believers. The suffering of believers is shown to have purpose, specifically in the testing and proving of our faith (graciously given by God, Eph 2: 8-9), which God shields (protects) for us. As such, in the midst of the grief which life's challenges so regularly bring we might "greatly rejoice" (v. 6a), knowing full well that a blessed and glorious inheritance awaits us. Moreover, the very joy of heaven can be known to us as we fellowship continually with our God, confident that His sovereign purposes for believers will come to pass. This includes trusting that He will protect our faith, despite the harsh realities of life in Malawi, and all the enemies of faith, spiritual and temporal. The vagaries of the afterlife are replaced with the certainty of a promised inheritance. Presently, there is enough of His love and joy and fellowship for all who trust Him; His gracious beneficence is not limited. God our Father is near, not only transcendent but also imminent, personally interested in the events of our lives and more than able to provide for our needs and preserve us through trouble. Thus there is no need to compete with one-another, no need to strive or clamber, and no need to robustly protect the

little that we think we have by any means possible. God means well for us in the 'here and now' and into eternity. Believers need to grasp this truth and live in its light. Since it is the Father God's power that shields believers, we simply need to continue to trust Him through thick and thin. The message is clear: "God keeps our final inheritance secure for us- and he keeps us for the inheritance" (Ferguson 2005:17).

5.3.2.1.3 Content for Application

- In discussing the difference between a traditional religious understanding of eschatology and the Biblical teaching on the same, these are two very useful questions to ask: (a) What do people hope for after death? (b) What is there to look forward to? (SFG 8)
- On whether people really do 'hope' to become ancestors: "if it were like that there would be no element of fearing death because Africans fear death, it's a (*big*) thing to die... if you can tell someone, 'my friend, soon you will die', eeeh..." (SFG 8).

5.3.2.2 Luke 15:11-32

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

5.3.2.2.1 Theological Significance

This parable teaches us much about the character of God our Father, particularly regarding how that is demonstrated in his relating to His children. ‘The Parable of the Prodigal Son’ or ‘the Parable of the Lost Son’ (NIV) is very popular but the significance of the role of the Father is all too often overlooked, as teaching on the parable has traditionally tended to focus on the son’s lost-ness and his subsequent repentance. The story does highlight repentance, but its special emphasis is on “the amazing graciousness of God in receiving back those who have wandered far from Him” (Eaton 2000:52). While some scholars find both incarnation and atonement in the parable (cf. Bailey 2005), others disagree (cf. Morris 1995). However, there is general consensus that it is indeed about the wonderful love and forgiving grace of God who is ready to welcome back his wayward, unworthy son. Based on the remarkable character and actions of the Father in the story, Wright (2004:187) suggests naming it ‘The Parable of the Running Father’ which has no little merit. The hero of the story is certainly the Father (Eaton 2000:54), who throughout is seen to demonstrate costly love (Wright 2004:188-189). While Bock (1996:412) suggests the name ‘The Forgiving father’ with the addendum, ‘and the Begrudging Brother’, perhaps a better title for it would be, as Bailey (2005:40) suggests: ‘The Parable of the Compassionate Father and the Two Lost Sons’.

This parable builds on the first two parables in the trilogy (cf. 15:1-10) which point towards God’s attitude to the lost, how he actively seeks them out and how much joy it brings to God when a lost sinner is found (cf. v.7,10, 24, 32) (Morris 1995:260). Jesus shared the three parables with the “tax collectors and ‘sinners’” (v.1), to whom the message would have come as very good news. However, he also had in his audience “the Pharisees and the teachers of the

law" (v.2) who were grumbling about him welcoming sinners and eating with them (cf. v.2b), a clear indication that they thought themselves superior and more righteous than both the former and the teacher. How could he welcome such outcasts into full fellowship with himself by eating with them, a sacramental act in Middle-Eastern culture? (Bailey 2005:29). He also shared these stories in response to this attitude. The joy in all three stories when that which is lost (sheep, coin and son) is found is in sharp contrast to their attitude (Evans 2011:231). Jesus has them in mind when he refers to the "ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (v.7), since there really is no such group of people (Bailey 2005:33).

When the younger son asks his father for his share of the estate (v.12), he is effectively saying, 'I wish you were dead' (Wright 2004:167 cf. Bailey 2005:41), as the division of a father's wealth would naturally come only at the very end of his life. If he chose to divide his property before death an heir would be given the legal right of possession but not of disposition, but here the younger son demands the right of both (Bailey 2005:41). Effectively this meant that the father had to split his land into two so that the younger son could sell off his share and turn it into cash. All of this brought great shame on the father in the cultural milieu, but he appears to have borne it without recrimination (Wright 2004:187). Such requests are virtually unheard of in Middle-Eastern societies and would almost surely have resulted in the son being rejected or at the very least severely beaten for his disrespectful contempt. Nevertheless, what was broken was relationship not law. As Bailey (2005:42) explains, according to Deuteronomy 21:17 the younger son's portion is one-third but the text doesn't preclude him from having it before his father's death! He does not even ask for his 'inheritance' because that would imply some leadership responsibility in the family clan - he selfishly wants out, in the process deliberately turning his back on his father, his family, his clan and his village (the heart of one's identity and security in the culture) (Bailey 2005:42-44). He goes away and events show his degradation to be complete (v. 13-16). Having experienced hunger and the indifference of others to his plight he decided to return home (17-18a). He plans to go back to his father and offer a confession in the hope that he will at least be fed! However, while most scholars see his planned confession speech (v. 18-19) as a sign of genuine contrition and repentance (cf. Evans 2011:233; Morris 1995:265), Bailey (2005:59-60) explains that at this stage in the story he probably only regretted having lost all the money and his resultant hunger and mis-treatment. His well-rehearsed and humble repentance speech was much more likely to have been part of a much shrewder plan to manipulate his father into endorsing him for training as "one of your hired men" (v.19), an apprentice craftsmen (i.e skilled and well-paid) (*misthios*) rather than offering himself as a slave (*doulos*). He knew that if he went back he had to face the *kezazah*

ceremony¹⁰⁶ and that there was no possibility of being restored to the family without paying back all the money. His planned speech begins with “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (v.18), echoing the unrepentant words of Pharaoh to Moses (Exod. 10:16).

Something remarkable then happened: while he was still a long way off, his father saw him” (v. 20). His Father was looking out for his son and saw him coming long before he was near to the house (Eaton 2000:51). The text states that, “he had compassion for him; he ran to his son.” Firstly, usually a father would wait to be addressed by his son, receiving an indication of respect before responding (Bock 1996:413). Secondly, as Morris (1995:265) points out, running anywhere was striking in an elderly Oriental, given that Middle-Eastern men of his age and position commonly walk everywhere slowly and in a dignified manner (Bailey 2005:67). In fact, to run would mean lifting one’s robes and showing one’s legs “in a humiliating posture” (Bailey 2005:67). Here the word used for ‘ran’, *dramon*, (a technical term for footraces in the stadium) could actually be translated, ‘raced’, demonstrating the father’s eagerness to meet his son. He races out not only because he is happy to see his son returning and has missed him greatly but also because “he had compassion for him” (v.20), and as such wanted to spare him the indignity, shame and trauma of facing the ridicule of the villagers, and the expected *kezazah* ceremony. He willingly, through his counter-cultural actions, takes the shame and humiliation for his wayward son. And this while his son has not truly realized how he has broken relationship with his father and how deeply he has hurt him. Neither is he yet ready to throw himself on his father’s mercy. He still has ambitions to redeem himself by acquiring a skilled job and paying back what he has squandered (Bailey 2005:60-61). When he reached his son the father, “threw his arms around him and kissed him” (v.20b), publicly demonstrating his affection and acceptance. The conversation which followed must have been in full view and hearing of many of the villagers, both those who were already on the street and others who would have come out to see the spectacle. Bailey (2005:68) describes the scene (vs. 20-24) as “a drama of reconciliation that can restore the boy to his home and to his community” because “after this scene, no one in the village can reject or despise him.”

Traditionally, most Western scholars (cf. Morris 1995:266) have thought that when the son began his rehearsed confession (v.21), he was not allowed to finish as the father interrupted him, sending his servants scurrying (vs. 21-23). While his response is indeed to receive his son back with joy on the basis of grace alone, there is more to the story than meets the eye. It is more than plausible, that the son chose not to finish his speech because the demonstration of costly love by his father meant that for the first time he actually saw how much he was loved.

¹⁰⁶ Bailey (2005:52-53) explains that if a Jewish boy lost his inheritance among the Gentiles and dared to return home he would face this public ceremony which involved the breaking of a pot in front of him and the declaration that he was cut off from his people.

No longer was manipulation necessary. His father had paved the way for reconciliation by shaming himself, his “suffering provides the foundation for the possibility of the son’s return” (Bailey 2005:47). While, as Wright (2004:188) points out there was no question that there was anything in the son to commend him to his father, the son knew only in that moment that he didn’t need to pay back his debt, and more profoundly still, that he didn’t want to. His confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (v.21) is sincere and heartfelt. As Bailey (2005:70) notes, he is overwhelmed by the unexpected outpouring of costly love... In a flash of awareness he no knows that there is nothing he can do to make up for what he has done... he changes his mind and accepts being found.” From the father’s perspective, no speech was necessary, he joyfully welcomed back his son, not as a slave or in servitude but as a fully-fledged son with all the prestige and privileges that entailed. Morris (1995:267) explains that “the *best robe* was a sign of position and the *ring* also, especially if, as many hold, a signet ring is meant (cf. Gn. 41:2; Est. 3:10;8:2); such a ring conveyed authority.” Being given shoes to wear meant to all in the culture that he was not a slave, as they went barefoot (Morris 1995:266). The “fatted calf” was kept for a very special occasion and this was to be a great celebration because as the father declares, “This son of mine was dead but is alive again, he was lost and is found” (v. 24). As Morris (1995:266) states, “there is no question that Jesus is teaching that the heavenly father welcomes returning sinners”, but there is more. This statement must have galled the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who would have rightly thought that Jesus was talking about the hope of Israel delivering them presently from their ‘exile’ under the pagans. Moreover, the reference to dead and alive harkened back to Ezekiel 37, from which the well-known picture of resurrection became, “picture language for the true return from exile” (Wright 2004:188). There is no question that the son was restored to full sonship, and that this was done by the father alone, through grace alone. The son simply came to accept, in humility, his restoration, acknowledging that everything he had been given was from His father’s hand (Bailey 2005:72). This was in stark contrast to the self-righteous piety of the religious elite of the day who championed their own merit and legalism. On the contrary, to be found means to be grateful and serve willingly even though a privileged son. Jesus’ point was clear, there was/is reason to celebrate when a sinner is restored through reconciliation with God (vs. 22-24).

Jesus continues to challenge the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the later part of the parable (vs. 25-32). The elder son surely represents them and their antipathy towards Gentile converts in his anger and refusal to go into the celebration (v. 28), his misrepresentation/understanding of his relationship with his father;; “All these years I have been slaving for you” (Morris 1995:267), and his Pharisaic boast that he has never disobeyed any of his father’s orders (v. 29). (Evans 2011:233; Eaton 2000:53). He rudely lectures his father in

front of his guests and distances himself from his brother: “This son of yours...” (v.30), showing through his bad-temper and self-centeredness that he is just as lost as the ‘prodigal’ younger son ever was and how little respect he actually has for his father. The elder son was clearly offended by the fact that his young wastrel of a brother was now reconciled with his father, and moreover, what was due to come to him (any profits from the estate) was now being spent on a celebration for the squanderer (Bailey 2005:81). His refusal to go in (v.28) is a powerful insult to his father as well as to his guests, as it was expected cultural practice at the time for the elder son to shake hands with the guests at a banquet, and even sometimes to be stationed to serve them on behalf of his father (Bailey 2005:82). This is a serious situation as the elder brother publicly insults his father for all to see and hear, by his rebellious behavior (vs. 28-30).¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the father responds generously and tenderly to his angry, resentful son, He “went out and pleaded with him” (v.28b), showing that he loves both sons equally, so demonstrating that there is enough of God’s love for both those Gentiles coming into the Kingdom and the ‘faithful’ long serving religious leaders- but they too need to open their hearts, recognize their need, and receive His love and compassion. At the time, it was shocking and shameful for a father to leave his guests at the feast in order to go out and plead with his son for reconciliation. But this is exactly what he did, again humiliating himself before all, for the sake of having a son rather than a servant. Overlooking his disrespectful behavior, arrogance, bitterness and distortion of fact, the father addresses him, as , “My son” (31a), using ‘*teknon*’, a special word for son, denoting love and affection, demonstrating that he is not rejecting his son but seeking reconciliation (Bailey 2005:86). He reminds him that everything that he has actually belongs to him, the elder son (v.31), implicit is the fact that he already has access to it according to Jewish law (Bock 1996:414). However, he does make it clear that celebrating the return of his ‘prodigal’ younger son was necessary and right (v.32), driving home the point that the repentant return of any ‘lost’ or ‘dead’ sinner was an event worthy of celebration. Moreover, he will not allow the elder brother to overlook his relationship with his younger brother, gently correcting him: “this brother of yours” (v.32). God’s redemptive plan will move forward despite grumblers and opposition. Ironically, the self-righteous never see themselves as “dead” or “lost” (v.32), and are therefore never genuinely repentant, leaving many religious leaders outside of the Kingdom, while sinners enter it (vs. 31-32) (Fleming 2014:435).

In summary, we know the Father by what he does (Bailey 2005:47). Isaak (2006:1236) notes that “the image people are left with is an image of the waiting, running, embracing, kissing and partying One, who has *compassion* for the lost who are still a *long way off*.” Our heavenly Father is seen to be good, gracious, full of mercy and abundant in love and compassion for His

¹⁰⁷ He does not even address his father respectfully, as was the custom (‘O Father’), but goes directly into his accusatory speech (Bailey 2005:84).

children. In this parable we have “as vivid a picture as anywhere in Jesus’ teaching of what God’s love is like” (Wright 2004:189). Or in the words of Bailey (2005:88), “The image of God as a compassionate father is here given its finest definition in all of Scripture.”

5.3.2.2.2 Practically Applicable Significance

In most cultures in Malawi it is the men who divide the inheritance, whether that be fathers or uncles, but “it’s very rare to see a father sharing the inheritance to sons... when he is alive” (SFG 6). This refers specifically to possessions. These days in the urban areas it is becoming more common for people to write a will but traditionally, “they share according to who was the first born and who was born last”, and relatives of the man stand to inherit (SFG 6).¹⁰⁸ All too often the deceased’s brothers will grab land and possessions leaving his children and wife stranded (PFG 6; I D12). In the Chewa culture, “the property is left for the kids” which is reasonable because they are understood to belong to the wife anyway (SFG 6). In all matrilineal cultures the inheritance should be passed down to the girls (PFG 6), and “the inheritance in our context is looked at as land, so as a girl is growing up, whenever this girl from a family gets married, then the family sets aside a portion for that girl. So, it depends at what point is a person responsible enough to be given a piece of land” (PFG 6). An Uncle (brother to mother) will be the trustee and he will hand over the land at the time the girl/woman is considered responsible enough.¹⁰⁹ If the wife dies the husband may even be chased away in some cases (PFG 6). Even in patrilineal cultures, the Uncle dispenses the land, even when the parents may still be alive. But, the common thread is that a child will not ask for their inheritance (land). It will be given to them when the family decides that it is time (PFG 6, SFG 6). Some other examples of breaking cultural taboos to do with inheritances in Malawi would be: (a) for a son to ask for land in a matrilineal culture, or (b) for the woman to receive the land and then sell that family land off for her own benefit (PFG 6). These issues can be contentious (hot) and the growth of urban settlements has complicated the matter for nearby villages, with people more regularly selling family land and leaving (PFG 6). It was pointed out that for the more educated, “the responsibility now is shifted from the uncle to the father” with regards to taking responsibility for their own children. As such, wherever resources are available, private property is bought which belongs to the children of that particular family unit and not the clan, but still as one pastor explained, “if I marry my wife and we are staying at my wife’s home then my wife has been given her portion there, so that one belongs to the family there, and the uncles have authority over the land” (PFG 6). Nevertheless, just as in the culture of the Ancient

¹⁰⁸ Still today, it is common for men (brothers, Uncles cousins) to remove the deceased wife from her late husband’s house and/or property and lay claim to it and any remaining possessions (I D13).

¹⁰⁹ One pastor wanted to point out that even in matrilineal cultures things were beginning to change with parents considering all their children regardless of sex (PFG 6).

Near East at the time Jesus told the parable, in Malawi, if a son went to his father to ask for his inheritance, it would be “like you want the father to die soon, so that you can take the property, it’s like grabbing... it’s like he wants his father to die so that he may inherit the property, that is what comes to the mind of Africans” (SFG 6). A father may decide, in rare cases, to divide up his property or possessions before his death but for “a son to go to his father... to say, ‘I want my share’ is an abomination... a serious issue” (SFG 6). The closest analogy to the biblical story was said to be those with liquid assets like businesses or shops who would be expected to pass those assets onto their children. This question was asked by a pastor, who related a scenario in which a son comes to ask his father to hand over his business while the father is still alive and running the business: “How do you think the father is going to feel?” (PFG 6) Clearly, Malawians will easily grasp the seriousness and insulting nature of the son’s actions which is a very helpful bridge.

The students felt that traditionally the father-son relationship, especially between a father and his unmarried son, could be a close one (SFG 6). This of course, notwithstanding the fact that many fathers, particularly in matrilineal cultures, are mostly absent, and thus uninvolved. Nevertheless, sons are said to be highly valued as they continue the family name and lineage. For example, for the Chewa, a boy is his father’s son by clan name (*mfunda*) and so he shall always be: “for example if I am Ngozo, that means my child will be Ngozo and the son to my child will be Ngozo” (SFG 6). Traditionally it is the father’s role to teach his sons moral standards and mete out discipline whenever necessary. So, there are clear functional ties but there may also be close emotional ties (SFG 6). Under normal circumstances “we expect a father will be waiting for a son who has gone far away” (SFG 6). However, it is highly unlikely that a father would publicly show such affection for his son because this would undermine the expected respect because “the children should know that he is older” (SFG 6). So, such displays would not be culturally appropriate. The pastors felt that it was mothers who were traditionally the compassionate ones and fathers were “hard on their children most of the time” (PFG 6), the perception of them often as being the “tough, difficult” ones (PFG 6). Mothers would be more likely to display emotional tenderness but not fathers (SFG 6). From a traditional cultural perspective, the return of the wayward son would likely be met with suspicion, “maybe he is just wanting some other things” (SFG 6). Although a father in a patrilineal culture might have some mercy or compassion on his prodigal son (PFG 6), to display that publicly would almost certainly be perceived as a weakness (PFG 6). It was even suggested that the right traditional response would be to take a stick and whip the boy (PFG 6) because what was required was discipline for his misdemeanors (PFG 6). There is terminology for children like this in the culture: ‘*ana oleredwa pa chilolo*’ (meaning, ‘children not properly raised’) which means that they have been treated with ‘kid gloves’ (PFG 6). This reflects very

badly on the father. One student-pastor explained that “this father is different to fathers we expect here in Malawi because if we can see a father like what Jesus is explaining in this parable, we can call him ‘*bambo osalera bwino ana*’ (an irresponsible father). He’s raising his children without responsibility. We believe that to love your child is not tolerating bad things, we should discipline our children” (SFG 6). So, understanding the Father God as portrayed in the parable is not a simple matter. However, just as Jesus was challenging the Pharisaic understanding of God’s fatherhood, so He “is challenging our values” (PFG 6), moving us from cultural perspectives to Biblical ones.

Even the concept of fatherhood as seen in the Bible is somewhat problematic from a traditional religious perspective. *Mulungu* (God) as the creator (*Namalenga*) is not viewed as male (PFG 6). Moreover, any idea of fatherhood is “projected onto God through the ancestors” (PFG 6). The pastor was trying to say that the ancestors are still regarded in familial terms whereas God is spirit and not of the same substance or family. This is clearly a barrier. Moreover, “the supreme being is viewed as somebody who is compassionate, just as you have said, but now when we the people misbehave, we are doing something against him, then that’s when the things change. So generally from what I know is that God when we are okay, obeying him is good, he gives us rain, that’s why we say he is a rain giver, that’s why we call him...*Chisumphu* (God)...but when you have done something wrong...” (PFG 6). The notion of God as a consistently gracious, merciful, compassionate Father is clearly absent.

A student put the response of the elder brother to his brother’s welcome into traditional cultural perspective: “traditionally people do rejoice when somebody is always doing good, so I think the complaint of this elder brother was a bit genuine because culturally someone who is doing good, would be crazy (*angry*), and he worked indeed...but nothing was given, maybe even just a goat, but now this one who went away and squandered materials, has just come and a calf was given. The father is a bit unfair” (SFG 6). The treatment would be viewed as unfair because of all that the elder brother did and also, significantly, because he had not asked for his inheritance and squandered it, so adhering to traditional cultural expectations. Most student-pastors agreed that he should be recognized and ‘appreciated’ for that and that he was therefore treated badly (SFG 6). It is obvious that when using this parable the error of the elder son’s ways would need to be carefully pointed out, especially all the ways in which he broke cultural conventions/taboo.

The fact that the father went out to speak to his disrespectful elder son is also not viewed as culturally appropriate in Malawi. Usually, under similar circumstances, “the father could ask other people to talk to the son... this father may ask maybe an uncle, ‘you go and talk to him, go and talk to your nephew’” (SFG 6). Moreover, even organizing the party for the prodigal

without the elder son's help would be considered inappropriate behavior: "in our culture, the father cannot organize a party without involving the elder son. So the elder son was supposed to be the organizer on behalf of the father... the father was supposed to apologize to the son" (SFG 6). The point is that just as the father pictured in the parable broke all sorts of cultural taboos in showing compassion and love to his sons, so too is the father pictured through traditional cultural lenses in Malawi. The challenging task is to show that he did/does so out of love for his sons, a powerful love and compassion which transcends even traditional cultural expectations and taboos, a love that causes a father to willingly shame himself publicly in different ways to save his sons.

A helpful bridge lies in the traditional cultural social more, whereby, "when a son is not doing good things to the father, it doesn't mean that, that son is not (*no longer*) a son of that father, but only that the son is doing (*things which are*) contrary to what the father wants" (SFG 6). There are times when a father will plead for his son or even humble himself to undo his wrongdoing. For example, a pastor told this story: "I remember sometime back there were problems in our family in terms of water. So the other side was saying, 'no, don't come and draw water from our well'... so these two families were not on good terms because of the well. My brother was very furious with that so he went and threw some bad stuff in the well. So when that happened my father had to go into the well and remove the things. So you could see that he was trying to cover for his son" (PFG 6). A helpful parallel was drawn with the very best of fathers in Malawi when one student said that "The true love of a father, we realize it when there is a crisis, which is very complimentary to this passage because of the crisis which happened to the prodigal son, that's when the love of his father manifested... For example, when we are in prison, that's when we see our father coming" (SFG 6). But even this falls short of describing God's compassion because there was no real crisis for the elder son, just a rebellious heart and disposition, but the father still went out to him. Indeed, in most Malawian cultures, both sons deserved to be punished by the father (SFG 6; PFG 6), and to extrapolate, if people have "done something against the Supreme Being then they have to suffer" (PFG 6). Moreover, concerning God, "there is no grace unless you do something" (PFG 6). Therefore, the actions of the father are counter-cultural and counter-traditional religious, in that he breaks down all barriers when demonstrating his unmerited love and compassion.

As one student-pastor noted, "the love of the father in this story is unlimited, unfailing love, with which the father is able to tolerate (*forgive/restore?*) the one who sinned and turned back, and the father is also able to tolerate (*forgive and seek to restore?*) the elder son who is not showing respect to him" (SFG 6). Another concluded that "it's very difficult to find a father like

that but this is the type of fatherhood which is supposed to be” (SFG 6).¹¹⁰ This is in stark contrast to the Supreme Being “whose love in our context is limited because it depends on how we respond, how we behave towards him” (PFG 6).¹¹¹ Perhaps an apt summary is found in this observation: “So, that kind of fatherhood is very rare... I’m in love with that kind of fatherhood” (SFG 6). Moreover, the traditional religious concept of grace (*‘chisomo’*) is a far cry from the way the grace of God the Father is portrayed in this story, as he opens wide His arms to receive back and restore His wayward and undeserving son. Traditionally, one would visit the *sing’anga* to receive grace (*‘chisomo’*), meaning fortune or good luck (PFG 6).

In summary, In the Malawian context, and especially within the Chewa culture which is matrilineal and uxori-local, fathers can be perceived to be removed or distant (as is the case with God himself in the *Kaphirintiwa* myth), somewhat austere, ready to punish at a whim (PFG 1; SFG 1). In fact, the concept of fatherhood is “unclear” and even “distorted” (PFG 6) with regards to the Biblical picture, in many cultures. Thus it is not easy for many to picture God as loving, forgiving and compassionate, let alone willing to be humiliated in order to lay a foundation for reconciliation with individual human beings, be they obvious sinners or self-righteous religious types. That a father would take the initiative to go out and speak to both of his sons directly, in person, despite their waywardness and disrespectful behavior and the associated humiliation, is radical. He does not send mediators as would be expected but does it himself. He accepts his prodigal son back and restores him to his position and status despite how he has hurt him and brought shame to him. And he wants to do the same for his elder son who cannot see his ‘lostness’. This is an image of the Heavenly Father with the potential to alter how people perceive God entirely. Surely this picture is enough to promote rejection of the traditional notions of an angry God, who removed himself from the world, capricious in his dealings with men and likely to punish. Not only is He imminent and approachable, but he loves us, watches for us, has compassion on us, personally approaches us, humbles himself for us, graciously forgives us, desires reconciliation with us, and so holds out open arms towards us. Indeed, He is a Father who lavishes love on His children (cf. 1 John 3:1). The parable also shows that those who are self-righteous, believing themselves pious due to their legalistic obedience to the law are just as lost, if not more so, than the flagrant sinner. This is a common theme in Malawian ecclesiological circles. Nevertheless, God loves them just as much and wants to welcome them home into His Kingdom. In Him there is hope for the repentant, ‘sinful’ and ‘self-righteous’ alike. All who acknowledge their ‘lostness’ can be found and will be received by our Father, God, who is searching for us with joy. As Bock (1996:415) asserts,

¹¹⁰ He went on to explain that many of the social problems in Malawi can be traced back to the rejection of children by their fathers.

¹¹¹ This comment was actually made specifically in relation to Ephesians 2:5-9 but in the context of the wider discussion on the Fatherhood of God.

“Those who come to him with contrite hearts can know that God runs to greet us and wrap his arms around us to welcome us home.” Moreover, He also takes the initiative, as evinced by the father’s interaction with the elder son. Indeed, “God is always previous” (von Hugel in Tozer 1984: 12).

5.3.2.2.3 Content for Application

- A story illustrating taboos concerning inheriting in a matrilineal culture (e.g. Chewa): “It happened... in my village, when my elder brother from the sister to my mother, I am told that he went to the village and asked his mother to give a piece of land to him to sell because he wanted to run his family.... everybody said ‘no, you are a man, the land does not belong to you’” (PFG 6).
- This story illustrates the contentious nature of dealing with an inheritance because of land and possession grabbing: “It reminds me of my uncle, my father’s elder brother. He was sick and he asked his brothers, not my father but other brothers from home: ‘so if you want anything from me, ask whilst I am alive so that I can give you. What I have belongs to my children’. Maybe he was afraid that after he has passed on these brothers from home should be saying, ‘that vehicle, that land, we are taking it’... putting my children in trouble” (PFG 6).
- A pastor provided a true to life contemporary Malawian illustration which has some resonance with the son’s request in the parable: “I have a sister who is married to a businessman, he’s a well-to-do, he has sons. He had children before he married my sister and the expectation of his children over the years has been that my in-law will share some of the wealth with them before he dies, and I thought he was taking note to do that because everyone knows that if he dies today these men (*his other sons*) will come and they will take almost everything from the mother because he had other marriages before he married my sister. Now my sister has her last born who is grown up. Now his attitude is that... ‘you are too old, you can’t run these businesses. Let me run my businesses!’... How do you think the father would feel? (PFG 6)
- Describing the different love of fathers and mothers in Malawi: “the love of the father and the love of a mother culturally is different... because that kissing and other things of love, it’s very simple to the mother to perform that kind of love, but the father, in our tradition sometimes we regard the father as someone who is sometimes harsh” (SFG 6).
- Two examples of local father’s demonstrating love and compassion for their sons were given by the students: (1) “in our culture, it can also happen, a father can also show love to his son in the sense that when he sees the son whose clothes are not well, they are worn out, sometimes we see the father taking his shirt or his trousers over to the son, ‘take this’. That’s part of showing love and we have been experiencing this from our fathers” (SFG 6). (2) “their son has been arrested, maybe (*they are*) in a *Chichiri* prison. You see them, they are busy hunting money so that they can go and bring him out. So that’s the love, so that they can bail him out, even though they (*the son*) have done wrong, it doesn’t mean that they are fatherless” (SFG 6).
- The pastors also provided more examples of the practical demonstration of a father’s love: (1) “There is also a situation in a community where a son has done something wrong and then the chief is furious, something like that. We have seen in those cases that a father goes to a chief to plead on behalf of the son. Yes, whatever penalty is

supposed to be paid the father pays on (*his*) behalf” (PFG 6). (2) “yesterday I was doing some door to door across *Michiru* (*name of a mountain*) mountain and there was this other guy who went to the forest to cut trees and he was caught... it was illegal. So, before they took him to the police the father had to plead before these officials so that he could give them money to let him (*his son*) free” (PFG 6).

- Two examples were provided by the students relating to emblems signifying sonship, like the robe in the story: (1) “In Ntcheu, sons of chiefs, if you are a son from a chieftaincy house, the real chief has something that they put on...a bangle. They put there (*on the wrist*) a bangle, and the son who shall be inheriting the position, he also has a small bangle here... so when the Chief dies he takes off the small one and puts on his father’s bangle and the small one, if he has a son, he also takes it to the son who is going to inherit from him” (SFG 6). (2) “in Chewa culture, I heard that it happens mainly when the chief has died, they have a stick, not a mere stick, culturally we believe that the stick has got certain spirits. So, during the funeral ceremony the one who is going to be the chief handles that stick, from the beginning of the funeral ceremony up to the end, and people see that stick... (*then*) people already know that the one to inherit is that one” (SFG 6).
- Commenting on the dire consequences of children being rejected by their fathers, one student noted: “rejecting is not solving a problem; then it cannot be corrected. We have been seeing many children who have been rejected because of being disobedient to their parents, they go (*away*) for good and wherever they go, they become robbers because they have been rejected. So, they think, ‘I am nothing to the world, let me do anything that I can do, I don’t have any parents’, because they feel that rejection” (SFG 6).

5.3.3 God the Son, Jesus Christ

5.3.3.1 Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

5.3.3.1.1 Theological Significance

The text is significant because the author discusses a theme of great importance, Jesus Christ’s present mediatory, intercessory ministry. The writer shows that Jesus’ priesthood is superior to that of Aaron, Moses’ brother. He needed to do this as the Hebrew believers were in danger of denying their Christian faith and going back to Judaism (Fleming 2014:563). It was all too easy for the Hebrew believers to return to their old religious system with the visible Temple in Jerusalem and a clear set of laws to follow, upheld by the priesthood (Kassa 2006:1496). As such, the High priestly office of Jesus is presented as an incentive to

perseverance (Bruce 1962:1011), and not only that, but also to fearless witness (Brown 2000:95). The “faith we profess” (v.14), to which the writer urged his readers to “hold firmly”, is literally the confession of faith in Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection and all that that accomplished ‘for us’ (cf. 3:1; 10:23) (Hagner 2011:78). Moreover, as Brown (2000:93) contends, the triumphantly victorious work of Jesus Christ which has already been clearly portrayed in the letter (cf. 2:9, 14-18), is here “compressed into a rich Christian confession” (cf. v.14): “we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.”

Jesus is the only one referred to as a “great” high priest (v14). The designation suggests his uniqueness in the office (Hagner 2011:78; Brown 2000:94). He is the pre-eminent priest because of the particular ministry that he has and he can have this ministry only because “he is simultaneously the Son of God and the Son of Man” (Kassa (2006:1496 cf. Guthrie1994:121). In ancient Israel priests had a dual role, both ceremonial and pastoral. They offered various sacrifices on behalf of the people, for the atonement of their sins, but because they were not sinless, they also needed to offer sacrifices in relation to their own sins. Pastorally, they were to get alongside the Israelite people, standing with them, looking after them and sympathizing with them, so representing God to them and them to God. Indeed, as Wright (2004:44) explains, “Jesus has fulfilled the ancient promise of God that he would eventually send his people a great high priest who would do in perpetuity, and perfectly, what the regular priesthood symbolized but could only do in part, and imperfectly.”

However, His humanity is also brought into sharp focus because a mediator needs to be representative (cf. 1 Tim 2:5) (Guthrie 1994:82). Despite His superior status Jesus, being a man, and having participated in the normal experiences of earthly life, can sympathize with us in our weaknesses because he “has been tempted in every way, just as we are” (v.15). However, he never yielded to temptation and so is “without sin”. This does not mean that he faced every specific manifestation of human temptation but rather that he experienced the basic trials or tests across the wide range of human experience, but to a much higher degree of intensity, since he never yielded (Hagner 2011:79; Brown 2000:95). Bruce (1962:1011) rightly points out that his ability to sympathize with us does not depend on the experience of sin but rather on the strength of the temptation to sin, which was surely greater not less, than ordinary men. Therefore, “His understanding of our situation means that he can carry out his duties with great sympathy, mercy and faithfulness” (Kassa 2006:1496) (cf. 2:17-18). The assurance that ‘Jesus knows’ is itself a comfort to us in our trials and temptations (Brown 2000:96). Moreover, being God, he is able to give His people super-human help (Fleming 2014:563). The absence of “our weaknesses” (v.15) in the great high priest, Jesus, despite the fact that he has ‘suffered along with us’ (*sympatheo*), means not only that he understands but also that he is best

qualified to help (Guthrie 1994:122). The One who has won through victoriously is best able to help others.

Ordinary people could never have approached a high priest for help but they can approach Jesus directly. And if, as believers, we are to “hold firm to the faith we profess”, we must surely avail ourselves of the help that comes from being in the very presence of God (Hagner 2011:79). This help is available to us because Jesus’ saving work on earth is finished, having been completed, “once for all” (cf. 9:26) (Brown 2000:94). Now, since Jesus has “gone through the heavens” (v.14), into the very presence of God the Father, he needs no tabernacle or Temple but, “believers may also enter this presence, and ask God’s help during their temptations” (Fleming 2014:563), or at any time and for any reason, for that matter. This is because as Wright (2004:45) explains, having died and been raised from the dead, when Jesus was exalted, in the ascension, he “went right to his father’s inner courtroom, in order that by representing us there, by interceding for us with the father, he might continue to implement the work he accomplished on earth” (cf. Rom. 8:34).

Hagner (2011:79) suggests that the “throne of grace” (v.16) is probably analogous to the mercy-seat in the holy of holies (cf.9:5), where only the high priest could be found. It is the place of help for all believers. The fact that we may “approach the throne of grace with confidence” (v. 16a cf. 10:19), tells us at least two very important truths: (1) We are coming to the very throne of God, and (2) we must think of God as the God of grace and, therefore, come confidently (Wright 2004:45). Naturally there is a sense of awe in God’s presence but fear is to be replaced by confidence (boldness) because Jesus Christ’s presence at the right hand of the throne (cf. 8:1; 12:2), is “the guarantee that it is a place of grace” (Guthrie 1994:124). Therefore, “All of us in Africa who believe in Christ can run to this great high priest at any time, in any circumstances to find the help we need. We will find mercy and grace to help us face the challenges of our traditions and of the world” (Kassa 2006:1496). Brown (2000:96) puts it well when he states that it is here at the “throne of grace”, that “we receive mercy to cover the sins of yesterday, and it is also here that we find grace to meet the needs of today.”

In summary, because of the finished work of Jesus, and on that basis, he is able to intercede for us before the Father. He is our mediator, standing in the gap, so that we are able to enter the very presence of God to find the help that we need to ‘keep on keeping on’, holding firm to our confession of faith. Instead of separation from God we are now brought close through Jesus, able to confidently go to the throne of a gracious God at any time, to find the mercy and grace which we need for the life of faith. Indeed, his mercy sets us free from the sin and folly which would sink us and his grace strengthens us for our lives of service and witness (Wright

2004:45). More than that, as Tozer (1984:48) puts it, “to push in sensitive living experience into the holy Presence, is a privilege open to every child of God.”

5.3.3.1.2 Practically Applicable Significance

With regards to Jesus’ high priestly role the Chewa have distinct priests and priestesses, such as the rain shrine priestess, ‘*Makewana*’, a human princess who mediates by standing in the gap between the living and the dead, and ultimately between God and man (PFG 4). As one pastor said, “there was no way people could consult spirits, even the chiefs would not consult the spirits, without going through Makewana” (PFG 4). Although it was suggested that in other cultures the issue was not so clearly defined it was commonly agreed that the offering of sacrifices for rain on behalf of the people was considered a priestly role, and that most contemporary Malawians would have an idea about the traditional role of a priest, ‘*wansembe*’, without being clear about the details (PFG 4).¹¹² This sacrificial aspect is a useful bridge.

In the spiritual realm, it has already been noted that the living-dead are always near to man and nearer to God than man is (PFG 1; SFG 1). It has also been established that they have a certain authority over the living and gain more power when they enter the spirit world (SFG 1; PFG 1). Here, it is noted that the ancestors are “the go betweens” between God and man (SFG 3). Since they are closer to God it is believed that their requests will be heard and answered (SFG 3). It was noted that both the ‘living-dead’ and the ‘long-since dead’ performed mediatory roles (PFG 3). However, when discussing the traditional roles of mediators it was stated that “In most cases, it’s not the mediators who do something but the human beings who have to do something. Maybe in cases of crisis like drought or what, it is the people who are supposed to offer the sacrifice and the mediator takes it to the Supreme Being” (SFG 4 cf. PFG 4). The mediator “is never seen with the naked eye” (SFG 4). When people offer the sacrifices, “they just leave the materials there without knowing what will happen” (SFG 3), believing that the mediators are there “to speak to God, maybe by interceding on behalf of the rest of the people” (SFG 4). For family matters sacrifices may simply be offered at home but in crises the community will go to a place such as a mountain (SFG 4). In rain shrine complexes a further intermediary is required, that is the priest who will take the sacrifices and offer them before the ancestors (SFG 3). Still, people do the work of offering the sacrifices, unlike Jesus who offered himself as a sacrifice on behalf of people (Heb v. 14 cf. 9:11-15). Nevertheless, traditionally the ancestral mediators do also bring messages from God to man in the form of dreams or spirit possession (SFG 4; PFG 3) which are interpreted by the community elders. Traditionally, Chiefs also exercise a special mediatory role between the ancestors and their people,

¹¹² It was suggested that the Catholics had a much better idea of the priestly functions (PFG 4).

characterized by their intimate links with the *gule wamkulu*, the rain shrines and the human power specialists (*asing'anga*, *woombeza ula*). The pastors also wanted to clarify that the *gule wamkulu* did not play a mediatory role. They are rather understood to be representations, incarnations or manifestations of different spirits, their primary purpose being teaching (pedagogic) (PFG 4).

Witchdoctors/diviners are also considered to be mediators- but not *wansembe*, even though they perform some of the traditionally understood functions (PFG 4)- in at least three important ways: (1) because they are connected to, or can connect with, the spirits, they are believed to give Chiefs certain powers to enable them and help him “to sustain” their positions, carrying out all their roles effectively; (2) they are asked to diagnose the cause of people’s problems and consult the spirits to do so, often also foretelling the future as a result; (3) apparently, each family has an “elder person who mediates between the witchdoctors and the family” (PFG 3).

A simple but helpful bridge is the fact that just as ancestors are traditionally approached for help in times of need, so now Jesus can be approached to “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (v.16). He is the high priest who takes us not only to and through the ancestors, as traditional priests do, but directly into the presence of God. One student explained the new dynamic this way: “basically it seems like before we had no chance to go straight to God. We deserved to use the mediators because of sin but Jesus when he came... everyone (*now*) has potential to go straight to request Jesus or God to do things for us. That means the works of the mediators and other intermediaries are over” (SFG 4). Indeed, “Jesus is now our mediator to God” (SFG 4).

Mediators are ubiquitous, even in earthly affairs. A pastor put things in perspective when he asserted that “we have a lot of mediators, for almost everything that we are doing we have mediators, we talk of villages we have our mediators, in marriages we have the mediators” (PFG 3). In Chewa culture and most other cultures “marriages... are initiated by the *ankhoswe*, who is your uncle, and the wife also has an uncle (*amalume*). So for the marriage to take place an uncle and an uncle have to meet” (PFG 3) because “when you see a girl and you have an interest to propose you had to go to your uncle and he had to propose for you through her uncle as well” (PFG 3). Marriage conflict must also be mediated by the relevant uncle (PFG 3). One pastor contended that the role of the Uncle to reconcile the marriage partners when a husband was in the wrong was an intercessory one (PFG 4). If the correct procedures are not followed and the mediator is not involved the community will not recognize the marriage and may refuse to help in times of trouble or conflict (PFG 3).

Another pastor explained that “in the villages we have those who connect the chiefs and the public, and even when you are moving from the village chiefs to the senior chief, you have the village chief as a mediator who connects the senior chief and his villagers” (PFG 3). To approach a chief “you don’t just go on your own, you have to take your uncle and there are what we call *alangizi*, the chief’s advisors, so you approach them so that they can approach the chief, so the process is full of mediators” (PFG 3). Even in cases tried in the village courts, “when you are guilty you don’t apologize yourself, no, but there must be somebody who has to apologize (*on your behalf*) and then the apology is accepted” (PFG 3). This, of course, is a useful parallel with the role of Jesus Christ as our mediator, who goes much further than making an apology on our behalf, taking upon himself our transgressions and punishment. Helpful analogies exist where uncles, parents or family members ‘pay the price’ of chickens or a goat etc. on behalf of someone found guilty (and unable to pay themselves) in the village courts (PFG 8; SFG 8).

Regarding the intercessory role one pastor said, “intercession is pleading, it’s more like it carries the connotation of pleading, to change the mind” (PFG 4). The pastors contended that it was traditionally well understood that the intercessory role was very much a part of being a mediator. Uncles intercede/interceded on behalf of husbands, friends on behalf of friends, parents on behalf of their children, and mothers on behalf of their children when a father is furious (PFG 4). Elderly people, especially grandparents (*agogo*) are greatly respected and if they intervene between two parties in a family the matter (even if it is a grudge or debt) will usually be dropped immediately (PFG 4). Traditionally, sacrifices were/are also most often accompanied by prayers or pleading utterances to and through the ancestors too, making that role intercessory (PFG 4).

Some pastors were skeptical about using any illustrations pertaining to traditional mediatory roles to illustrate Christ’s role because they felt that “they were considered as sins and we cannot use sin to relate to Christ” (PFG 3), also because they preach against such things (PFG 3). Presumably they were referring specifically to the spirits and the witchdoctors and not the avuncular and other familial or communal roles which don’t appear to pose any threats.

In summary, this passage has obvious practically applicable significance for the Malawian context. The mediatory role is well understood in this context and thus provides a very helpful point of connection. The need for numerous mediators in Chewa religion and culture (and many other cultures), even though often mis-representing the biblical idea, serves a useful purpose in providing illustrations to explain differences and similarities with the mediatory role of Christ. The most significant difference being that Jesus, being both a man and God allows us to approach personally, unencumbered by fear, to freely express ourselves to the Father.

We need no other priest, no other intermediary, whether human or spiritual, familial or supernatural. There is no place for ancestors to step in and no role for power-specialists, rituals or rites. Believers can go directly to God, entering His presence boldly, and express themselves freely because of the work Christ has done 'once for all' and His continued intercessory role on our behalf. In this way we may have intimacy with God Himself, receiving grace, mercy and strength from Him for daily living. As Paul makes clear in first Timothy 2:5: "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..." Moreover, there is no need for repeated sacrifices because Christ, as the mediator of a "new covenant" (cf. 9:15) between God and man, offered himself as a "once for all" (cf. 9:25-27) sacrifice, making atonement for the sins of all (cf. 2:17). This also means that legalism and good works are shown to be deficient for salvation, for our righteousness lies in the work of Christ 'for us' (2 Cor. 5:21), by Him alone are we justified (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). To be justified by faith, a faith that God gives us (cf. Eph. 2:8-9), is truly "a blessed relief from sterile legalism and unavailing self-effort" (Tozer 1984: 12). In addition, our great high priest, Jesus Christ sympathizes with our human condition and constantly intercedes before the Father on our behalf constantly (cf. 7:25). The final word is His.

5.3.3.1.3 Content for Application

- Describing the mediatory role in a marriage in a paternal/patriarchal culture: "You can propose to the girl on your own and she accepts but for people to know you have to go to your uncle and has to take something, we call it *lobola* to the uncle of the girl, and the uncle has to say, 'okay go back and I will tell the girl to come later for a response'. So the difference between this area and other cultures is that where you don't pay *lobola* the children are considered to belong to their mother, not to you, while where you have paid *lobola* the children belong to you, the father" (PFG 3).
- On the limited efficacy of the ancestors, one student commented: "There is no power because their sacrifice is not enough because... according to the bible, it says Jesus offered the sacrifice 'once and for all' but to the ancestors, once a disaster comes on people they (*the people*) went and sacrificed again and again. After another crisis they went again" (SFG 3).
- A helpful statement on the worthiness of Jesus to be our one and only mediator: "There is another difference between Jesus and the intermediaries: the Bible says we all sin, which means even the ancestors they sinned, while Jesus is sinless so that's the difference. So, that means our worthy mediator is Jesus Christ because is sinless and God is pleased with a man who is sinless" (SFG 3).
- Describing a message sent from God to man through the ancestral mediators: "especially in times of crisis, people can be crying out through the ancestors and the Supreme Being can respond through the spirits by telling someone (or a parent in the family) that you have done wrong to me. There we come to know that if we don't correct this something will come. So people will come and clean their ways because of the ancestor" (SFG 4).

- One student gave a testimony as to how his grandmother used to help to heal people through her spirit possession: “She used to help people with herbs, healing their diseases. Someone may come to say ‘I have such a problem’, so she said, ‘no as of now I can’t help you or give you treatment, come tomorrow’. So the patients would go back. As long as she said ‘come tomorrow morning’ she was aware that that evening she would get possessed and she would send someone to say, ‘buy me ABCD’... so upon her having that she had a *nsupa* (a gourd), and she poured some honey in. So during midnight, 11, 12 or 1 am, she was possessed and she shouted and most times I could just hear talking but I couldn’t understand. Only the first born could interpret, so in the morning at 3 or 4, the spirits would leave and at 4 or 5 the patients would come, and she would say, ‘last night the spirits came and told me you must get ABC’” (SFG 4).
- Describing the intercessory role a pastor explained this family dynamic: “the same thing also comes out clearly in parenting, parents also take on role to intercede in the sense that when my child is wrong, I will also be supposed to go and sort that out even in the absence of my son. I will meet the aggrieved parties and talk to them and then I will ask for forgiveness even in the absence of the guilty person. They will still take my plea as genuine. And again the wife can also play the role of an intercessor in the sense that when the child has done wrong the husband is very angry and furious and it’s sometimes the woman who says, ‘why don’t you forgive this child of ours?, more especially when she is female, maybe she gets pregnant, so the wife will plead for her” (PFG 4).
- The role of the grandparent or elder in the house is said to be intercessory: “because if the *agogo* is there you say, ‘ah if I do this what will *agogo* do?’ So their presence is playing the role of interceding for the whole family and when something went wrong and *agogo* intervenes, everyone is like: ‘how can we argue with this *agogo*? Why can’t we just drop it?’” (PFG 4)

5.3.3.2 Mark 1:21-28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

5.3.3.2.1 Theological Significance

The theme of spiritual authority is of great significance in the dynamic, highly spiritually charged context of Malawi. Hurtado (2011:26) makes the point that in Marks Gospel both teaching and exorcisms are emphasized, so this passage in chapter 1 shows a representative scene. In this particular story Jesus demonstrates his authority both in his teaching and in the way he deals with the 'impure' or evil spirit. The latter is very important in a context where spirits are most often feared- at the very least regarded with suspicion and ambiguity- especially those regarded as 'evil' (*ziwanda*).

In the synagogue Jesus taught with unparalleled authority, so much so that "people were amazed" (v.21-22 cf. 27) by it. In this case, as Fleming (2014:413) suggests, it appears that Jesus' teaching was opposed by an evil or 'impure' spirit that had taken control of a man in the audience (vs. 23-24). This was not uncommon in Jesus' earthly ministry but evil spirits were never victorious over him, for as in this instance, he always demonstrated his authority over them. Hurtado (2011:27) helpfully explains that the theme of Jesus' expulsion of evil spirits (or demons) is a major one in mark's story as he wants to show that the "kingdom of God" (cf. v.15) which had drawn near in the person of Jesus, "is God's power (authority) in action." As Wright (2004:12) puts it, Jesus had come to join in the struggle against the forces of darkness and destruction, but he had come "to be the human bridge across which people could climb to safety."

This spiritual confrontation was initiated by the spirit who spoke through the person, interrupting Jesus, by crying out, "What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth?" (v.24a). He also recognized that Jesus' activities, presumably including his authoritative teaching, were destructive to the cause of all evil spirits (Cole 2006:1175): "Have you come to destroy us?" (v.24b). Moreover, the spirit recognized him: "I know who you are- the Holy One of God" (v. 24c). This acclamation of Jesus by the demon possessed was not uncommon and we are told that other evil spirits knew who he was (cf. v.34; 3:12). Indeed, they recognized Him, understood His divine authority, and knew that he had come to defeat them, robbing them for good of their authority at Calvary (Wright 2004:12-130 (cf. Col. 1:15). Jesus ordered silence: "Be quiet" (v. 25 cf. 34, 3:12) or 'be muzzled', a strong and blunt phrase like 'shut up' in colloquial English (Cole 1993:114). He then commanded the evil spirit to "come out of him" (v.25), at once demonstrating His authority and setting the man free from his torment.¹¹³ The spirit left shrieking (v.26), leaving the people who had witnessed the teaching and the exorcism amazed at Jesus' authority (vs.27-28).

¹¹³ The fact that Jesus commanded silence when acclaimed by evil spirits (demons) also proved to his opponents that he was no sorcerer manipulating demons to bring glory to Himself (Hurtado 2011:27-28).

In summary, the text leaves us in no doubt about Jesus' authority. This is clearly seen both through His teaching, and profoundly, in His exercising power over the evil spirit. These actions also point towards His Deity and the work he came to do on the cross. Since this story is not an isolated incident but Mark's Gospel (as well as other Gospel accounts) is punctuated by such demonstrations of authority, it is safe to conclude that Jesus had authority over the forces of evil and exercised it decisively and effectively. The evil spirits (demons) knew who he was and what He had come to do, and they were in fear of Him, submissive, and obedient to His commands.

5.3.3.2.2 Practically Applicable Significance

Evil spirits are common in Malawi. Their origins are somewhat ambiguous (PFG 5) although they are believed to be linked to death and can "can come into somebody and make his head not to work well" (SFG 5). They are not considered to be ancestors, at least not the living-dead but possibly the long-since-dead, forgotten by living relatives but still around and causing problems, and sometimes found in particular locations, like certain mountains (PFG 5). These long-since dead spirits can sometimes be malicious (PFG 5). However, on the whole, evil spirits are rather considered to be the spirits of people who were evil during their lives on earth (SFG 5; PFG 5), thus failing to become *mizumu*.¹¹⁴ Often such spirits would have been witches or sorcerers in their previous lives. These spirits do not qualify as ancestral spirits but may roam, possess people, or take the form of ghosts (*mizukwa*) (SFG 5). These spirits (ghosts) may "just linger around the family scaring people" (SFG 5). Or they might inhabit a certain location to exact revenge and create havoc. There are certain areas where many car accidents take place such as Machinga and Liwonde (near the author's home) and it is believed that evil spirits are responsible for the road carnage (PFG 5). Often the explanation will be that the driver saw a snake, "but the physical snake was not there" (PFG 5). In the Biblical story, the 'impure spirit' would automatically be understood by most Malawians to be just such a spirit (*azimu/mzukwa*), one who possesses someone, going into them and using him/her to do whatever they want (SFG 5; PFG 5). For most Malawians the term 'demon' would be considered synonymous with 'evil spirit', but pastors felt that more consideration needed to be given to the matter to differentiate between the traditional and Biblical ideas, especially as to the origin of the former (PFG 5).

The special name *majini* is given to those who suffer from the sickness of possession by evil spirits (PFG 5). Regarding exactly whom has the power over these evil spirits in the traditional religious milieu, somebody "in touch with the spiritual realm" (PFG 5) is required. A student

¹¹⁴ This does not preclude disgruntled ancestors, especially the long-since dead, from creating problems for the living.

mentioned the *vimbuza* exorcism ritual fairly common in the North where an expert performs dances and music to chase away the evil spirit (SFG 5; PFG 5). Certain specialists like witches, witchdoctors (*asing'anga*) or particularly '*asinganga amizimu*' also have the power to remove spirits (PFG 5; SFG 5). It is believed that they also use "songs and dance" to exorcise, and sometimes even the Bible (SFG 5). Flags (*mbendera*) representing different spirits are used, and it appears that sometimes the specialists use different spirits with biblical names to cast out the evil spirits (PFG 5). And since the Bible is used and exorcists have names like Jesus and Ruth, Christian people are encouraged to go to these traditional specialists when they or their kin are believed to be possessed (PFG 5). Moreover, this was also cited as a reason for the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Malawi, because these groups are meeting felt traditional religious needs, in this case, the common need to be set free from spirit possession (PFG 5). And those who practice are even more popular when they follow traditional methodology such as praying vociferously and passionately to chase the spirits away (PFG 5). Interestingly, some ZEC pastors testified that in their experience evil spirits had spoken to them, identified themselves by name, and even recognized the power of Christ in them (PFG 5).¹¹⁵

People may also display the symptoms of possession such as aimless wandering and committing random evil, violent and destructive acts, without actually being possessed. Two examples, include those whose vital life-force (*moyo*) has been stolen by others and used for their own benefit to get rich (SFG 5). Then there are those with *misala* (madness) because they have been told secrets or given charms by witchdoctors to get rich but they have failed to keep the instructions or lost the charms. The punishment for these transgressions is madness (SFG 5).

In summary, it is vital for people to understand the absolute power and authority of Jesus Christ over evil spirits in this milieu. They create an unhealthy and debilitating fear and sense of victimization. Spirit possession is not uncommon in Malawi and spiritual 'doctors' are understood to be able to communicate with the evil spirits. It was rightly expressed that people would understand this story well and it would have impact because: (a) "in Malawi we believe that we can be possessed by the evil spirits" (PFG 5), and (b) Jesus shows himself to be greater than those who need magic or rituals etc. to demonstrate authority over the evil spirits (SFG 5). Jesus did not need to shout, use flags, call on other spirits, sing songs, dance or hold an official exorcism. He simply commanded (sternly) the spirit to leave (v.25), and the impure/evil spirit had no choice but to obey. Later the Apostles and many disciples

¹¹⁵ It was also asserted that even witches, when they come up against a true man or woman of prayer, cannot carry out their evil plans, recognizing that they have some protection from above (PFG 5).

demonstrated the extent of Christ's authority and power over evil spirits and illnesses. For Paul, even cloth that he had touched, when carried to the suffering, affected exorcisms and healing (cf. Acts 19:11-12). From the author's perspective as a participant observer, the problem comes in when such displays of spiritual authority in the name of Jesus are not being witnessed on the ground. Nevertheless, this does not change the reality (cf. Col. 2:15).

5.3.3.2.3 Content for Application

- Regarding the perceived existence of ghosts (*mizukwa*): "This issue is always happening in our village in Ntcheu, during times like this time when maize grows out, people are telling children that there is ghost in the field, so don't go there" (SFG 5).
- On certain ghosts that can steal crops from others: "depending on what kind of magic you have, for example we have '*mizukwa tindondocha*', (ghosts) those small like people... they go into the fields....other people, they cannot see them but the owner, you see them and you feed them, you take good care of them..." (SFG 5).
- On evil spirits/ghosts causing accidents: "where I come from Msipe (area)... accidents happen now and then, but despite the fact that it is very steep people still believe... when I was talking to somebody who is aged he said this land in the past, there was what we call a graveyard, now maybe the spirits are happy because they are going inside the grave yard" (PFG 5).
- Regarding the methods of evil spirits when causing accidents a pastor related this story: "on the issue of snakes, it reminds me of what one church elder told me: when he was driving, someone was following him. So in the mirror he wanted not to look at the mirror, so he was just looking straight on and then ahead of him after three kilometers from the trading (*center*) he saw a big snake on the road. So he said, 'at this speed if I happen to apply brakes the car is going to turn'. So he just waited so that the snake should cross first. He found that when the snake disappeared the car was nowhere to be seen. So this issue of these other spirits is true" (PFG 5).
- Regarding the methods of so-called Pentecostal prophets/exorcists, this was said: "For them to appear effective... when they pray, a prayer shouldn't be a calm one. It should be a vocal prayer because if they go to a witchdoctor there is some kind of incantation. So, if a person comes to you and you pray in a small manner, they feel like, no, they haven't been assisted, but when they go to a person with charisma and he prays with charisma then he feels, yes!" (PFG 5)
- One pastor testified that an evil spirit had spoken to him: "I remember some years back there was a lady, she was possessed and we prayed for her, and she started saying that 'my name is Zimbabwe'. But Zimbabwe was not her real name. I think it was the evil spirit... We prayed for her, and after an hour she became normal and up to now she is normal" (PFG 5).
- Another testimony was given relating to an exorcism: "we were doing some counselling...the child was possessed... So he confessed that 'I am possessed'... After some counselling we prayed from him. He started to manifest, we continued to pray for him and he was freed from that possession, and when he became normal... I saw some changes and even his behavior changed" (PFG 5).

5.3.3.3 Mark 1:29-34

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

5.3.3.3.1 Theological Significance

Here again we see the presence and the power of the kingdom at work in Jesus as he heals many suffering from a variety of diseases and casts out many demons. The simplicity of the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (vs.30-31), whereby Jesus merely "took her hand and helped her up" and the "fever left her" is surely "another indication of Jesus' power and authority-this time in the face of illness" (Hurtado 2011:28-31). His response as soon as "the fever left her" was to "wait on them" (v.31), and indeed, as Cole (1993:115) suggests, her grateful, humble service is the mode; for every disciple of Jesus. Word spread quickly about these miracles and people soon brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed" (v.32). Mark shows that the exorcism and healing were by no means isolated incidents when he records that "Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..." (v.34). Indeed, the gospels are replete with stories of Jesus' healing ministry. It is important to recognize that Jesus has authority/power over all kinds of diseases, especially in a context where serious, even life-threatening diseases, such as malaria, cholera, typhoid, bilharzia and HIV/AIDS are commonplace. The reason this knowledge is comforting is not that believers should expect or demand instantaneous healing or even healing in this world (although God can and does still perform such miracles)¹¹⁶, but that they may know that Jesus does have power over whichever disease they or their loved ones are suffering from. Their suffering is not out of His control, and as with the evil spirits, diseases of all kinds will not trouble God's people in eternity (Rev. 21:4-7). This has been made certain by the cross and resurrection.

5.3.3.3.2 Practically Applicable Significance

People in Malawi suffer from diseases of many kinds - malaria, bilharzia, HIV Aids and cholera to name but a few - and good medical care is not readily available for the majority.

¹¹⁶ Nor should they neglect to seek legitimate medical attention.

Traditionally, “one gets well of a sickness when he goes to a herbalist, at least you get the herbs there, or sometimes, you don’t even go to the herbalist but the elders might tell you” (SFG 5). Grandparents (*agogo*) provide information and instructions as to which “tree can heal you from such type of disease” and failing these two options one is told to go to the witchdoctor proper (SFG 5). On the one hand, the latter being differentiated from the former, since herbalists, *asing’anga a zitsamba* (herbal doctor/herbalist) (PFG 5), and/or herbal medicine *per se*, are “not associated with the spirits” (SFG 5). On the other hand, witchdoctors may give *mankwhala* (medicine), charms or even just speak words which could heal the one suffering, even by proxy (SFG 5). It is said that one can just go to get herbs from the *asing’anga a zitsamba*, while the *asing’anga weni weni* (real/genuine one) are “those who have got those spiritual connotations, they do have some criteria in using the medicine... they don’t just cut the tree anyhow, they are supposed maybe to cut while undressed, while they are naked” (PFG 5). Going to a herbal doctor was compared to going to a contemporary hospital to receive the appropriate medicine with its associated instructions to be followed (PFG 5). However, the lines are blurred by the fact that the knowledge and instructions pertaining to the ‘herbal’ remedies don’t only come from the living parents or grandparents, but also, quite often, from the living-dead, the ancestors, through dreams or visions (SFG 5; PFG 5). Thus there is clearly a connection with the spirits in such a case. For example, one student-pastor testified to seeing his grandfather in a dream and another saw his father in a vision, and was healed by following the instructions given (SFG 5). Moreover, some diseases are thought to be given as punishments from the ancestral spirits, sometimes simply unfortunate suffering brought on by capricious spirits, and madness (various forms of mental instability) is often considered the consequence of greedy people ‘magically’ stealing the vital life-force of an innocent victim. It should also be noted that both of the witchdoctors that the author interviewed used both herbal remedies and charm concoctions, and stated that they received their power to heal from God (I C1; I C 2).

Even the pastors seemed ambivalent as to the merits of visiting *asing’anga a zitsamba*, expressing the fact that this was very much common practice, even for believers. The village-chiefs encouraged it in many cases and it wasn’t easy to prevent people (PFG 5). But there was a note of caution due to the fact that one didn’t actually know for sure whether the herbalist consulted spirits or not (PFG 5). Complicating matters is the fact that many share testimonies of receiving instructions from their ancestors in dreams, following them, and being healed. These spirits are thus perceived as good and to shift people’s faith onto Christ is then a very difficult thing (PFG 5). Moreover, if people believe that their sickness is the result of being bewitched they have no option but to visit the *sing’anga*, because Western medicine or herbal medicine will not suffice (PFG 5). It was generally agreed that this was not good practice but

acknowledged that many do try hospitals and herbalists first only to find these remedies fail (PFG 5). Many are even advised at the hospitals to consult witchdoctors when they struggle to diagnose or heal them because “any harm that has been sent from evil source cannot be traced in a laboratory, it’s only witchdoctors who can diagnose” (PFG 5).

Again the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches were mentioned at this point. Apparently some Pentecostal pastors are now so well known in the urban centers that hospitals sometimes refer patients to them for exorcisms and healings rather than referring them to the witchdoctors (PFG 5). The Pentecostals preach that Jesus has the authority over diseases and are willing to pray publicly with volume, power and passion for people (PFG 5). People with these kinds of spiritually induced problems, from bewitchment, curses and the like are said “to know that this one (*problem*) requires equal powers” to counteract it (PFG 5). And Evangelicals and their Jesus are seen to be powerless in this regard (PFG 5). As is the case with seeking a more powerful *sing’anga* to counteract magic, so now many go from pastor to pastor to prophet, always seeking the one with enough power to overcome their particular ailment and its root cause (PFG 5).¹¹⁷ People, including believers, are after vociferous prayers and instantaneous healing, not quiet, assured prayers of faith and the willingness to leave things in God’s hands and wait (PFG 5). Pastors unable to demonstrate the required powers to affect immediate healings soon gain reputations for being men/women of weak faith (PFG 5). The example of barrenness was given to suggest that a Pentecostal pastor would not hesitate to pray powerfully for a woman’s womb to be opened, and quite possibly see that miracle happen, whereas Evangelicals would be silent on the matter (PFG 5). One pastor testified that “when you pray and that one doesn’t get healed instantly it means something is wrong with you, you don’t have power” (PFG 5). This was given as a definite reason why Christians (Evangelical ZEC members) would consult witchdoctors or visit Pentecostal pastors, and it was also suggested that the silence exposed a weakness or deficiency in our teaching (and presumably in faith in action too) (PFG 5). However, it was also acknowledged that Pentecostal pastors sometimes go to visit the *sing’anga* themselves, and even collaborate with Satanists, in order to guarantee the power to effect immediate healings! (PFG 5)

Thus, most often diseases, sicknesses and suffering is considered to have a spiritual component. As such, for people to know that Jesus Christ has ultimate authority over diseases and maladies of all kinds, both physical and spiritual, including kinds where the two converge, is truly liberating, in the context. This, against the background assurance of our future inheritance and glorification, and the knowledge that suffering illness/disability may well be part of the

¹¹⁷ One pastor felt that the contemporary practice at hospitals of referring patients from one doctor and one facility to the next exacerbated the problem by perpetuating this kind of thinking (PFG 5).

Christian's faith walk, and not a foreign experience or a sign of sin or weak faith on the part of believers, in this world (SFG 3; PFG 3). Even though there is no guarantee of healing in the present, this knowledge is surely enough to combat both common flaws, that is, the 'fatalistic acceptance' (victim mentality) of illness and death as from the spirits or evil sources (PFG 8), and the kind of 'prosperity gospel insistence' on immediate healing. Interestingly, a few students agreed that knowing that Jesus had the power to just speak a word for healing to take place, would have a powerful impact on Malawians (SFG 5).¹¹⁸ This means that the story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 5:5-9) would also be very useful in the context.

5.3.3.3 Content for Application

- On those practicing herbal medicine only: "Yeah, now-a-days they are many, these people who are doing herbals there are many now in towns. Just behind Queen Elizabeth Hospital there is a guy here he's a herbalist. He's not associated with spirits, he's a raster man. So that man, I was talking to him one day. He said he spent about 15 years practicing how trees work, in mixing and fixing of the trees" (SFG 5).
- An example given to explaining the traditional difference between herbal medicines and more 'spiritual' medicine: If someone tells you, "I give you this medicine, you put it in the corners of your house", then it has gone beyond, it's not purely herbal, so what they tell you is what matters" (SFG 5).
- A contemporary take on the same theme which really just proves the point that the lines are indistinct: "it is now these years we are coming to understand that there is a difference between a herbalist and those people who use charms, but in the past someone who went to take something from a *sing'anga* was even from the church expelled! Maybe he goes there and dies there, the church will not conduct the funeral ceremony because he has died *kwa sing'anga*, (at a witchdoctor's place) (SFG 5).
- A testimony of how contact with an ancestral spirit lead to healing: "Once I had a problem..... I tried to go the hospital but was still not well. Many came with their medicines. I took them but there was no change. I was in my room sleeping, I saw my father coming in a vision. He said can you turn back so I turned, 'do you see that shrub there?' I said yes, 'go and take it, take its roots and dissolve them in water, and after a few minutes drink them', I said yes again. Then I got it and it worked... I followed the instructions... as soon as I took those things my body received healing, but from that time up to now I can't remember the shrub I used" (SFG 5).
- Regarding certain undiagnosed illnesses: "people, when they go to the hospital, they are tested. They say, 'you don't have any problem you are okay'. So the doctors advise them that you go and find some witchdoctors. I have come across these instances, that they (*medical doctors*) have tried and they have failed, and they are doing this like a reserve to go the witch doctor... they believe that a misery from a witchdoctor cannot be tested in a laboratory" (PFG 5).

¹¹⁸ This is probably related to the ability of certain power specialists to heal people from afar through incantations or by *proxy*, sometimes taking the *mankhwa* (medicine) on someone's behalf.

5.3.3.4 Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."* ³⁶ *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.* ³⁷ *A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.* ³⁸ *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

³⁹ *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

⁴⁰ *He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

⁴¹ *They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

5.3.3.4.1 Theological Significance

Not only does Jesus have authority in the spiritual realm, over diseases, and to forgive sin, but he also demonstrated his authority over the forces of nature - as is the case in this story - and over the physical world in general (cf. 6:41; 8:6; 11:20). It is not insignificant that the story is placed between a parable about faith (4:30-34) and then an account about Jesus healing a boy with an evil spirit (5:1-20), followed by His healing of a sick woman (5:21-34), and the raising of a dead girl to life (v. 35-43). In all of these stories it is clear that the authority of Jesus is being proven. As Hurtado (2011:82) notes, "In these miracle stories, Jesus successively deals with the powers of nature (4:35-41), the demoniac (5:1-20), illness (5:21-34), and death (5:35-43). In this particular story his authority over the forces of nature (the wind and waves) is on display (cf. 6:45-52). Moreover, Mark uses language to describe Jesus' words and actions which alludes to Old Testament descriptions of God's demonstration of power over the sea (cf. Pss. 65:7; 89:9; 106:9; 107:23-32), indicating that Jesus acts in divine power and authority (Hurtado 2011:81; Wright 2004:52). Wright (2004:52) explains that for the Jews the sea symbolized the dark power of evil, "threatening to destroy God's good creation, God's people, God's purposes...So when Jesus rescues the **disciples** from a storm, we are witnessing something which says, in concrete terms, what the **parables** earlier in the chapter were saying in word pictures. God's sovereign power is being unleashed: that is, God's **kingdom** is at hand." The point is that this power of God is now living in Jesus and acting through Him.

It is well-known that fierce storms can blow up quickly on the lake of Galilee. When the, "furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat" (v.37), the disciples were fearful. In Luke's account, they woke Jesus up saying, "Master, Master, we are going to drown!" (cf. Lk.

8:24). The fact that Jesus, who had suggested crossing the lake in the first place (v.35), was still “sleeping on a cushion” (v. 38) in the stern of the boat while the boat was nearly swamped, also made them angry. Cole (1993:154) notes more than a hint of reproach in their tone when they wake Jesus and ask Him: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” They felt aggrieved. Why was this happening when they had followed Him in faith and obedience? For Jesus, on the other hand, as well as being tired from a busy day, he was asleep because He knew that He was doing exactly what the living God wanted Him to do, and so had full confidence (faith) in God’s presence and power, despite the storm (Wright 2004:52).

Nevertheless, he first rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ (v.39). He spoke to the storm as if it was a person (personification), and the result was immediate obedience to His command (Cole 2006:1181). The disciples couldn’t help but recognize His authority and “were terrified”, but they still did not recognize Him as the Son of God: “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (v.41). Fear and faith are mutual exclusives, which is why the command, “Do not fear” (cf. Exod. 14:13; 20:20) is reiterated in the Bible more often than any other (Cole 1993:155). This is exactly what Jesus rebukes them for when he asked them: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (v.40). In Matthews gospel it comes across more stridently as a rebuke: “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” (cf. 8:26). The storm and their possible death as a result had scared them, and now the uncertainty as to the identity of the man in the boat with them, terrified them. Their mixture of wonder and fear did not produce faith (Fleming 2014:422). Clearly, they still “had no faith” and that is why they were “afraid” (v.40). As Cole (1993:155) asserts, “a friendly, familiar, human Jesus they wanted, but not a supernatural Son of God.” Even though the sovereign Lord of creation was among them, they did not apprehend fully the divine power of Jesus (Fleming 2014:422).

In summary, as Cole (1993:154) asserts, “only the one who had initially created the wind and sea in the first place would dare to rebuke them so (verse 39): their instant obedience shows his full Deity as Creator as well as Redeemer.” Implicit is obviously His authority over what He has created. Surely, an appropriate response is faith rather than fear, full confidence in Jesus regardless of external circumstances, rather than doubt, confusion, disappointment and anger. As Cole (2006:1180) writes, “fear hinders faith; though dangers are real, when Jesus is with us, we can have perfect tranquility amidst the storms.”

5.3.3.4.2 Practically Applicable Significance

For those whose very livelihood is dependent on the natural order, knowledge that God is in full control and Jesus has all authority in this sphere, over the natural order, is radical. Traditionally, there are people who can exercise some kind of power over the elements, such

as the rain, wind or lightening, but this is commonly known to be magic power or witchcraft (SFG 5). For example, women who have their maize drying may need to turn the wind away in another direction before it destroys their entire harvest so they may point a finger at the wind. Or someone may magically command lightening to strike down and kill an enemy (SFG 5). However, for the most part, the commonly sanctioned traditional recourse during natural disasters such as droughts and floods has been to approach the ancestors for help. The common belief that God gives the rain is a helpful bridge or starting point for showing Him to be sovereign over all of nature.

In summary, what is required is faith in the power and authority of Jesus Christ over the elements, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. This is no simple matter when the majority of people in the country are subsistence farmers. It has already been noted that creation, like us, is groaning in anticipation of its redemption (Rom. 8:17-25). Natural disasters will occur until the earth is renewed. As such, the country has more than its share of floods and droughts. Even in the absence of the latter there are constant challenges. For example, every year, people refer to the 'hungry season', describing a few months during the rainy season (December-February) when the maize from last year's harvest is running out or actually runs out. Nevertheless, even in these hard times, Jesus is with us, in control, and desiring a response of faith and dependence on Him through every crisis. Believers need to eschew charms and magic means to protect or improve their crops. To truly trust Him in and through all circumstances (cf. Phil. 4:11-13) dispels fear and grows faith.

5.3.3.4.3 Content for Teaching/Application

- The students provided two personal testimonies/stories which demonstrate the use of magic powers to control the natural elements: (1) "there is something I experienced some years back. There was a time when we were having a wedding ceremony on an open ground and rain was coming strongly from that other area. So one of the elders, he just went to the kitchen. He asked for the things he wanted, he did his magic and immediately the rain stopped... it's something magic, but what we experienced was that the rain was coming (down) on the other side, and definitely it could have disturbed the whole wedding ceremony" (SFG 5), (2) "I didn't understand that it was a magician who did that, imagine there is wind coming, parents will advise you to say, 'you point your finger there where the direction of the wind is coming from and you twist your finger, immediately the wind will wheel (around) and not come to where you are, it will go to the direction where you finger will point'. I didn't understand how the connection is, but it worked... they didn't give me charms or whatever but they just said, 'if you see wind coming, to avoid your things being destroyed, just point your finger to another direction.'"

5.3.3.5 Mark 2:1-12

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

5.3.3.5.1 Theological Significance

Jesus acknowledged the faith of the paralytic's friends for going to such great lengths to bring him before Jesus for healing (vs.1-4). As Fleming notes (2014:413), Jesus went "straight to the root of all suffering in a fallen world, sin, and on the basis of the faith that had been displayed, he announced forgiveness of the man's sins" (v.5). The teachers of the law who were present thought his words blasphemous, for "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v.7 cf. 14:62-64). Only God could forgive and only the priests could declare forgiveness in God's name (Wright 2004:17). Either this man was God or a blasphemer. However, Jesus "knew in his spirit what they were thinking in their hearts" (v.8), so he challenged them on it, and proceeded to demonstrate his authority to forgive sins (vs.10-12) by healing the paralytic. To say that someone's sins are forgiven cannot be proven by external evidence whereas to say that someone is in fact, physically healed (especially a paralytic), most certainly can. As Cole (1993:121) suggests, "in this physical sphere it could most readily be seen whether the assumption of authority by Jesus was justified or unjustified." If his claim to heal was proven true then surely his claim to forgive sins would also be proven true. Thus Jesus healed the man to show that, "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v.10). But the healing also provides an illustration of forgiveness, since the "man imprisoned by his paralysis,

confined to his bed, is a fitting picture of the bondage of sins; and his release from the paralysis is a vivid picture of release from sins and guilt (Hurtado 2011:37). Isaak (2006:1176) contends that Jesus referred to Himself as the 'Son of Man', a title that "implies that he is the Messiah - the prophetic figure in Daniel 7:13 who is able to exercise the divine prerogative to forgive sins." However, also implicit in the title is his humanity. Nevertheless, the point is that not any human can exercise such authority but only this particular one (Jesus Christ) because He is also the Son of God (1:1; 15:39) (Hurtado 2011:38). Moreover, in Daniel the Son of Man is actually pictured with the authority to dispense judgment, but here he has the authority to dispense forgiveness (Wright 2004:17). To prove the point, Jesus simply said to the paralytic: "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (v. 11), and he did so "in full view" (12a) of the large crowd (cf. v.2). As Cole (1993:122) states, "Once again the word of Jesus proved to be effectual, a word of power and authority." The people were amazed and praised God, acknowledging that they had never seen anything like it before (v. 12b).

In summary, Jesus Christ had/has the authority to forgive sins. The "teachers of the law" (v. 6) were quite correct that only God has that authority. The point is surely that Jesus is the God-man, both God and man, the Messiah, with the authority on earth to forgive sins. This is not just trivial wrongdoing that He forgives but the restoration of the soul, a cleansing from innate unrighteousness. The story points to the cross and represents the gospel of Mark in a microcosm. Again, The Deity of Jesus is revealed in this story (cf. v.62). There were/are others with the power to perform healings but there is no-one else with the authority to forgive sin.

5.3.3.5.2 Practically Applicable Significance

This passage was not discussed in the Focus groups but is, nevertheless, of crucial importance in the context. In Malawi, where power specialists are believed to perform healings, exorcisms and wonders, and people are in fearful awe of what witches and sorcerers can do, it is important for people to understand that Jesus could, can and does do so much more than that. And that He is so much more! The story is apposite because just as in Malawi people would think first of a physical healing or manifestation, so too did the paralytic's friends bring him to Jesus to be physically healed. Moreover, in this context there is little, if any, acknowledgement or understanding of personal sin. But it is not enough to simply be *munthu wabwino* (a good man), with *umunthu* as one's guiding principle. Jesus' bold and unexpected proclamation of the forgiveness of the man's sins draws attention to the fact that all men need forgiveness, and that Jesus Christ has the authority to offer it. If Jesus has not to this point been recognized as God, it is no longer deniable. True Biblical salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12), and it must include spiritual cleansing and reconciliation to God through the cross-

the sacrificial and atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Gal. 3:13; Rom.3:23-26; Heb. 8:12; Rom 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:21), and His supernatural resurrection from the dead in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20-24).

In summary, the anthropocentric traditional religious view of salvation which is so prevalent, must give way to a more Biblical perspective, which includes the forgiveness of sins as a primary aspect (cf. Eph. 1:7-8). The emphasis needs to shift from saving self through appeasement of ancestors and adherence to communal mores, as well as recourse to charms and witchcraft, to recognizing the need to be saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10). There is no forgiveness for those putatively found to be witches/wizards through the *mwabvi* ordeal. If one is found to be evil, it is unforgivable and the penalty is death. The traditional need to be seen as free from any indwelling evil may be a helpful bridge at this point. There are power-specialists in Malawi who can perform healings and exorcisms (PFG 7; SFG 7) but only Jesus Christ can forgive sin.

5.3.3.6 Mathew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

5.3.3.6.1 Theological Significance

The text includes a number of themes theologically significant in the context, most profoundly, the absolute authority of Jesus Christ (v.18). In this way this passage draws together all the previous texts referring to Jesus Christ's authority. Other themes worth exploring include: (1) the doubt experienced by some of Jesus' followers (17), (2) the task or commission given by Jesus to all disciples and how that provides an appropriate orientation for His disciples (v.19), (3) the Trinitarian 'formula' or name into which men are to be baptized (v.19), and (4) the assurance that Jesus will always be with His disciples (v.20b).

It is interesting that Jesus told his disciples to go to a mountain to wait for him (v.16) as mountains play a significant role in traditional religious worship and contemporary ecclesiological practice here in Malawi. They are traditionally a place where spirits dwell and, therefore, popular places for the offering of sacrifices and libations. In contemporary church culture, they are places of communal and individual prayer, being an escape from the busyness

of daily life, but also places considered to be of religious or biblical significance (e.g. the ten-commandments, the temptations, the sermon on the mount, the transfiguration, the crucifixion, a solitary place for Jesus to pray, and now the 'great commission').

Of the eleven disciples (representing all of God's people) who met Jesus that day, it is not clear from the text why "some doubted" (v.17) or 'hesitated', as other translations have it. Was it because they weren't sure that it was actually Jesus? Or perhaps they doubted because they weren't sure, as Wright (2004:206) suggests, "whether they, as good Jewish monotheists, believing in **YHWH** as the one true God, should actually *worship* Jesus?" Their answer surely came when he declared Himself to be "with you always" (v. 20), revealing Himself to be Emmanuel (cf. 1:23). The fact that there were some who doubted, however, provides encouragement to many who are not sure whether to pledge whole-hearted allegiance to Jesus Christ, or hold onto some of their traditional beliefs and practices (like the disciples on that day). But also like them, Matthew wants his readers today to know that worship of Jesus is the appropriate response. The Trinitarian name into which disciples are to be baptized is another clear indication of Jesus' Deity (v.19). This name, is as Wright (2004:208) explains, "the 'new' name of the living God - the father, the son, and the holy spirit" which all Jesus' followers are to share. Baptism into this name is thus a sign of allegiance to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As France (1985:414) states: "Jesus thus takes his place along with the Father and the Spirit as the object of worship and of the disciples' commitment. The experience of God in these three persons is the essential basis of discipleship."

However, the most significant theological truth for our context arises from Jesus statement in verse 18: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." This statement of reassurance based on Daniel 7:13-14, was quoted by Jesus as a future event in 26:64, but here refers to something that has already happened. The Son of man, Jesus Christ, has already been enthroned as ruler of the world (France 1985:413). He has received "authority, glory and sovereign power" (Dan 7:13-14 cf. Phil 2:6-11). Of course, Jesus demonstrated that before his resurrection, he already had authority on the earth (cf. 7:29; 9:6,8;11:27; 21:23ff.), but now he has all authority "in heaven and on earth" (v. 18). This word authority (*exousia*) in this context refers to "absolute power and jurisdiction. There is nothing outside the sovereign control of the risen Christ" (Mounce 2011:268). Jesus is now already ruling the world having defeated the forces of evil (Col 2:15), and death itself (1. Cor 15:54-55) through suffering and obedience, which culminated in the cross and His resurrection. As Wright (2004:207) explains, the world is not already as Jesus intends it to be but he is working to take it "from where it was - under the rule not only of death but of corruption, greed and every kind of wickedness - and to bring it, by slow means and quick, under the rule of his life-giving love." His method is to do so

through all those who believe in Him. We are the ones “given the responsibility to go make real in the world the authority he already has” (Wright 2004:207).

France (1985:413) describes it well when he writes that, “Jesus’ universal Lordship now demands a universal mission.” The range of the mission which had to date been focused on Israel (cf. Mt 10:5-6; 15:24; Rom 15:8) is to be extended to include all nations: “make disciples of all nations” (v.19). This still includes Israel but widens to include anyone, as membership is now based not on race but on relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the mission for individual believers and the church corporate. Indeed God’s purpose was/is to establish His church (Matt 16:18) (Fleming 2014:456). What Jesus was saying is that “His power would be in his disciples, preserving them through dangers and enabling them to perform remarkable works” (Fleming 2014:456). Essentially, the task of bringing Jesus’ sovereign authority to bear on the earth is threefold: make disciples, baptize them and teach them obedience to what Christ taught (vs. 19-20a). Integral to all of this is the fact that as the disciples carry out this work in Jesus’ authority, He expands his attack upon demonic power (Hurtado 2011:26) (cf. Mk 16:15-18) through them. This involves: (1) proclaiming the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, so calling men and women to follow Him and learn of Him, training them to understand His message and His way, (2) baptizing them into One name, thus unifying them and including them in God’s divine love and purpose (Wright 2004:208), and (3) teaching them “to obey” (v.20a) all that Jesus commanded, providing a strong ethical impetus (France 1985:415 cf. Mounce 2011:268). As Kapolyo (2006:1170) explains, “Discipleship demands a total surrender of one’s identity, security and being to the Lordship of Christ.” This is so much more than outward conformity to a religion but must affect one’s innermost being, transforming the deepest elements of self, culture, and religious tradition towards conformity to Christ and His will. It is about going ‘all-in’.

Moreover, the relevance of the task and the command to “go and make disciples” (v.19) cannot be underestimated for our context. Firstly, the church is not just about fellowship and/or comfort, neither is it simply survival in a world filled with threats and dangers to one’s faith. The very authority of Christ has been given to her so that she might rise up and fulfil her commission. Moreover, we are to “go” to the nations and make disciples. Kapolyo (2006:1170) could be describing many ZEC churches when he rightly contends that, “This is a message that the African church needs to hear loudly and clearly. For too long we have been recipients of the benefits of the gospel... we do not see it as our duty to go and spread the good news... we must repent of this sin and take up his call to make disciples of all nations.” This sense of identity and purpose is vital to the life and growth of the church and embracing the mission helps to put into perspective many of the perceived obstacles to faith, relativizing some of them in the light of Christ’s conferred authority and mission.

Jesus then promises to be present with the disciples, “always, to the very end of the age” (v.20b). He will be exactly what was promised, “God with us (cf. 1:23), ‘Emmanuel’, until His bodily physical return in glory at the end of human history, when the eternal state begins (Mounce 2011:268). It is very encouraging to know that as we operate in His authority He is also always present ‘with us’. Just as the promise of God’s presence often accompanied His call to service in the Old testament (e.g. Ex 3:12; Jos 1:5), so it does here, “a necessary equipment for mission” (France 1985:416). But more than that, it is a great personal promise which helps to sustain us as we carry out our task, this great commission, appropriating His authority and bringing His Kingdom to earth (cf. Mt. 6:10).

In summary, Jesus has given his disciples everything that is needed for a life of faith and witness. Essentially, He is enough! We have seen His Deity and so rightly worship the risen Christ. We have received His authority and so have nothing to fear, not even evil, demonic spirits and powers (cf. Mk 16:15-18). We have been commissioned with His ministry (*‘misseo Dei’*), to make disciples of all nations. We are unified under One name, sharing the divine love and purpose. And we are assured of His personal presence always, working ‘with us’, empowering and enabling us to carry out our God-given mission. Such clarity regarding identity and purpose sets believers free to live lives of purpose, without fear or uncertainty, worshipping the One true God alone (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Kapolyo (2006:1170) sums up appropriately when he writes that, “The Great Commission is given by the highest authority in the universe and it is binding on all disciples for all time.” What a privilege.

5.3.3.6.2 Practically Applicable Significance

Referring to the importance of mountains in the spiritual climate of Malawi, pastors and students gave both a Christian and a traditional perspective. Regarding the former, a pastor said that “those who are Christians, they like to go to the mountain. I think mostly it is a mimic of what they read from the bible” (PFG 4). A student added that “maybe we just adopted that from him (*Moses*)” (SFG 4). People often go to particular mountains “to pray and fast” (PFG 4). Another pastor asserted that “It is very easy to conduct spiritual warfare because most of the prayers that we make at the mountains are spiritual warfare prayers” (PFG 4).

Traditionally, mountains have been used for sacrifices to the Supreme Being and are thought to be mysterious, fearful places where the spirits dwell (PFG 4; SFG 4). Even though Christianity has replaced the ancestors with Jesus, the idea of going there to pray still has the mediatory role in mind (SFG 4). In the absence of mountains, rivers and forests are also sometimes considered sacred places. Three examples of such places were provided: (1) Mulanje mountain, in the South of Malawi, (2) Chigwaja, which was used for sacrifices (*nsembe*) and

where the older generation in that area still believe the rain comes from, and (3) the Zomba plateau, where the author lives, has a deep hole called *Chingwes*, which evokes fears and is thought to be inhabited by spirits (PFG 4).

The issue of great importance here is, however, authority. Lines of authority are well understood in the Malawian context. As one pastor explained, this is foundational to society: “at household level there is authority, children are expected to respect parents and beyond parents, children have an expectation to respect elders” (PFG 4), although in some instances this is being eroded. But mostly still, an elderly person “has a certain measure of authority in the society and their authority comes from the wisdom attached to age” (PFG 4). There are hierarchies in both earthly affairs because of the communal and graded nature of society, but also in the spiritual realm, since there are mediators between God and man. Moreover, earthly leaders such as chiefs have authority which extends into the spiritual realm, consistent with the common understanding of cosmic holism or synthesis. The chief is regarded as “a spiritual father”, having authority over deaths and funerals, initiation rites (hence certain functions of the *gule wamkulu*), and certain key roles in the rain shrine cultus, as well as being the one who consults the witchdoctor on behalf of the people in times of trouble. Even the witchdoctor cannot operate “in the realm of the chief” without the chief’s say-so. In fact, “there is belief in the village that every chief must be a wizard or a witch, *okhwima* (a person fortified magically), and it’s mandatory, you have to, because all the witches, they must be under you. So you need to be *okhwima* if you are to guard the village. Then for the *afiti* (witches) to operate it can’t be possible, if you don’t do that you will die” (PFG 4).¹¹⁹ Chiefs are known as, “*gogo chalo*, (owners of the land)”, and as such, the “authority of the chief is connected to the land... you cannot open a graveyard without a chief. So the chief has to let you do that, so anything to do with the grave or the dead the chief has to give consent. So in one way or another, chiefs are more taken as gate keepers in the spirit world. You can’t bypass them if you want to do spiritual things” (PFG 4 cf. SFG 4). They serve as protectors of their people. However, linking families in the village to the chiefs are the ‘owners of the family’ or grand elders, who also have links to the ancestral spirits (SFG 5). Nevertheless, “the chiefs are those in authority and then from the chiefs it goes to the ancestors who are related to you and then from there it goes to the gods” (PFG 5). Again, the chief will be a link to the ancestors in times of crises, like droughts, since they have “a higher probability of getting in touch with the spirits” (SFG 4). He also has certain religious functions vis-a-vis the *gule wamkulu*, who represent the ancestral spirits at key moments such as initiations and burials (SFG 5). Somewhere in-between are the long-since dead who may be capricious. There is some ambiguity in the understanding here because there are ‘out-and-out’ evil spirits, the spirits of dead evil people (witches/wizards etc.)

¹¹⁹ For this reason some Christians refuse to become chiefs even if it is their right by blood-line.

who still want to create havoc. Then there are also other unknown spirits, like those used by witchdoctors for their *nsupa*. But there are also those who were people, not influential negatively or positively, but they are still around in spirit form long after death (SFG 4). There is also ambiguity as to the origins of the gods but they are generally thought to be minor divinities, created beings associated with the mountains and rivers (PFG 5). One pastor made the point that *Mbona*, the divinized being associated with the Southern territorial rain shrine cult of the same name, is an ancestor of human origin (PFG 5). He is taken as a small god in the sense of being a link to the Supreme Being, just as *Makewana*, the priestess, is human but taken as a god by many because of her mediatory role (PFG 5). At the top of the pyramid we have the Supreme Being: "Traditionally, for Malawians or Africans, the authority is with the Supreme Being who is God... The main authority lies with him, that's why when something happens, maybe sudden deaths are just occurring, droughts, barrenness... any issue, the African mindset is that the Supreme Being is not happy about something, and the only ones who can communicate (*with him*) to deliver a message of apology, a message to appease this Supreme Being, are the ancestral spirits" (SFG 4).

From an 'earthly' perspective, the authority dynamic looks something like this: The elderly in a village, then the 'owner' of the family' (the senior family elder) (SFG 5), then: "There is the village headman who is called *nyakwawa*, and then above the village headman is the group village headman, so the 'group' is responsible for several village headmen, and then above the 'group' there is a Traditional Authority, the T/As, and sub-T/As, because of politics we have come to introduce sub-T/As, this sub-T/A is between the group and the T/A, but in the traditional past there was the group all the way to the T/A and the T/A was almost paramount king" (PFG 4 cf. SFG 4). The village headman is the chief, the 'group' is the 'group village headman' who is over a number of villages (SFG 4). Then above the 'group' is the T/A which is also an inherited position (SFG 4). At the top of the traditional tree we find the paramount chief, who is "the head of the tribe, like Ngonis; the Ngoni from Ntcheu they have their own whole district now, (he is) *inkosi ya makosi* (the big chief/king)" (SFG 4). And once the paramount chief dies, "his son will automatically take over", or the daughter if she is first born, regardless of age (SFG 4). These authorities are generally honored and obeyed, as are those with spiritual authority like herbalists and witchdoctors (SFG 5). This cultural understanding of authority and the need for obedience is particularly helpful foundation for teaching people to honor and obey Jesus Christ in all things.

However, there is a fair amount of tension as a result of this traditional system of authority being modified during colonial rule and beyond into the independent era (circa 1964). While "at all these levels the chieftancy is passed in the blood" (PFG 4) or hereditary, the colonial masters introduced new positions, including their own District Commissioners, who would have

to sanction the election of chiefs. The poor standard of education common to many chiefs has not helped (PFG 4). Moreover, Malawi's new constitution made way for the perpetuation of these practices, thus undermining the traditional authority held by chiefs. Today, "Politicians are elected and then they become more powerful than the chiefs" (PFG 4). Having a democratic constitution, money and power, they are able to tinker with the traditional hierarchy. In some cases, these political leaders even promote certain 'hand-picked' individuals to senior chieftancies, in order to further their own interests (PFG 4). This kind of meddling in the passing of authority by blood is vehemently opposed while some other traditional cultural practices are being helpfully sensitized and reformed by the democratic era (SFG 4). For example, the Ngoni paramount chief no longer takes a new wife at the festival in Ntcheu every year (SFG 4).

Traditionally, in the villages a chief used to judge cases between villagers and rule accordingly. They pronounce punishments, for example, "they say bring two or three goats" (SFG 4). Dissatisfied parties could then appeal to the group village headman (PFG 4). This has now been extended to provide leeway to appeal 'above' these authorities to the T/A, and even to the civil courts (SFG 4; PFG 4). There is still an appropriate protocol, however, which involves "going to the group village headman, and all the way to the T/A if you are not satisfied. Then the T/A will give you the leeway to go to the civil courts" (PFG 4). Missing out any of the steps on the hierarchical ladder leaves the occupant of that position undermined and thus jeopardizes relationship. Apparently there are certain offences, like unwanted pregnancies, that must always go before the chief first. If the families then cannot sort out the matter under his direction, then he writes a letter for them to take the matter to the courts (SFG 4). For cases such as murder the matter will go straight to the courts (SFG 4).

In summary, Malawians live within a cosmic dynamic in which authority is well understood and necessary in all spheres of life. Their spiritual cosmology includes a hierarchy of powers, with the Supreme Being recognized as the highest power. There is great fear and respect for those higher on the ladder and a definite need to live within/by the prescribed parameters, the spiritual and communal merging or synthesizing in the context of cosmic holism (bondedness). As such, there are barriers and bridges to understanding and rightly appropriating the absolute authority of Christ. On the positive side, there is a willingness to submit to recognized authority which is not found in the Western world. Moreover, Christ's authority over evil and mysterious capricious spirits will be readily welcomed, as will the knowledge that He (Jesus) commissions believers with that same authority. Negatively, His authority over the forces of evil is not given as a means for personal 'fortification' but rather with a distinct purpose in mind, that being the carrying out of His commission in all the earth. Many will doubt His Deity, His constant presence, and His authority (especially in the absence of tangible evidence) (SFG 7).

However, to walk as free men and women, without fear and confident of Christ's presence, power and authority, believers need to be fully surrendered to Him, placing their full faith in Him, and committing themselves to fulfilling His good purposes in the world. This means lifting our eyes off all that we think we need for a life of peace and prosperity, and trusting ourselves wholeheartedly to God's sovereign plan. Within this construct, believers may always appeal to and through the ever present Christ for the protection and strength needed to overcome the very real forces of evil against which they struggle (Eph. 6:10-12; Heb. 4:14-16). Then we find that He is more than sufficient to sustain us through every circumstance and challenge, giving us the victory, for His glory and the sake of His wonderful name.

5.3.3.6.3 Content for Application

- Describing a particular peak on the popular Mulanje massif, one student said: "yes, you can't go to that place because we have this story saying, if you go there, you go missing. So it's difficult to approach. The reason is there are spirits there... one white man (*mzungu*) went missing there" (SFG 4).
- This testimony was given about a Christian chief in an area near to the Bible College where the author taught, who refused to be 'fortified': "you know Chief Anderson of Sigerege village in Blantyre district in Malawi? She was asked to do that (to fortify her body). But now because she was a Christian during the time when Pastor Mphamba was pastoring Mitsidi church, she refused and she trusted God. We joined her and prayed and prayed. For the first time when she was elected to be a chief she suffered for a period of time but after that she was just excellent, and if you are seriously connected to Christ you have to face these things" (PFG 4).
- Traditional chiefs and group village headman etc. inherit their positions by blood (kinship): "we say if one is a chief he was born a chief, (he is) not one who is made, he's born Chief" (SFG 4).
- The spiritual significance of a chief's initiation: "when they have chosen someone to be like a chief, there is an initiation... it's what they tell or what they do to this one who is becoming a chief, it is something connected to the spirits...it's not mere instruction, they may keep him in a separate house maybe for three weeks. After that what they do with him in that house is something to connect him with spirits... so that after that he may have authority over sickness... yeah, and when this one is coming out, he is not the type of a person he was before the house, because he has those scars what and what..." (SFG 5).
- Regarding the authority/power of chiefs on the ground: "this reminds me of what Chief Ngongoliwa said last time he spoke to the public in Chiradzulu when they were dealing with the issue of *kupopa magari* (blood sucking), you remember?... now he said: 'no, you policemen you can do nothing leave it to us the chiefs' (PFG 4).
- Pastors gave these two examples of a village chief's authority/responsibilities *viz-a-viz* funerals: (1) "when we are looking at the authority of the chief, they are observable whenever you have funeral one cannot just go the grave without the chief... after we have buried our beloved one, one cannot just go, moving out from the grave. You have to follow (*instructions/protocol*), you go out by the gate you entered through. For one to go using any other direction we fear the chief, the chief says this is the way to go out

and enter the graveyard, so this is how the authority of the chief is seen now” (PFG 5).

(2) “This reminds me of what happens from where I come from. I am Ngoni (tribe), the chief, when they want to escort the young ones *adzukulu* (who dig the gravel pit) for the one who has passed on, before entering the grave yard, the chief has to take a stone and throw it in. That is a knock to say we are coming, and they knock. So a chief plays a very big role when it comes to religious things” (PFG 4).

- Regarding the traditional view of obedience to authority: “In our cultures those who are in authority are usually given honour, they are obeyed, whatever they say, its viable to be followed, like kings, chiefs, the one we say *mkulu wa limana* (the head of a clan)- those people have their word which is (*considered*) very much important” (SFG 5).
- An unfortunate abuse of children’s obedience: “it seems when witches want to teach somebody to be witches they will always use young people because they know that these young people, they know how to obey” (SFG 5).
- Discussing certain ‘evil’ spirits who were people but are not ancestors: “there are other people, maybe they were herbalists, witchdoctors, before they died; they will tell you something to do, ‘when I die please do ABCD’. Once you miss (*doing that*) you are going to face chaos in this village, so that is influential” (SFG 4).
- On spirits of ambiguous origins found in the mountains: “if you go to the mountains, sometimes you just find cooked *nsima* (Malawian staple meal made from maize flour), but we don’t know who has cooked the food. Something surprising, very popular in Malawi; but if you go to Mulanje (mountain/district) you cannot trace which spirits have done this” (PFG 5).
- A testimony about a healing that took place either through the ancestors or the powers of a witchdoctor: “When somebody is suffering from... you have got many types of headaches, ‘*Mutu wa Nantongwe*’ (severe headache). After the one who is suffering from the particular severe headache hears the drums there, people are singing and dancing to the sound of the drums, she or he rises from there and is now (to be) healed. She or he comes where the occasion is taking place, from there they are led by the leader of this particular dance toward the river... dropped himself into the river... and he said that after three days he is going to bring, in Chewa (tribe) we say something *nsupa* (a charm), after three days he came back with those things. That is where from that day he got healed” (PFG 5).
- To give an idea of the changing face of traditional villages and their authorities: “nowadays, as the population of Malawi is growing, so big villages are now being divided into two or three according to the number of people in the villages. So the one who was a village head can be promoted to a group headman” (SFG 4).
- Explaining how local chiefs have been losing their traditional authority over the years as a result of colonialism and democracy: “What the government did is, when the *azungu* were coming, the first colonial government, they found these authorities intact, so now it was not easy for them to govern the chiefs, to govern the villages. So what they did was to usurp the authority of the chiefs. They usurped the authority of the chiefs by enticing them with material things, and these chiefs started bowing down before politicians. With that process that trend continued and then (*came*) the law, the constitution of our country became supreme over the chiefs... the *azungu* came up with laws and the chiefs had no authority over the colonial masters, so they could tell (them) what to do, and this continued and now we have the political establishment. And now you cannot be recognized as a chief if the DC doesn’t do that, so the DC has to come! Now as I am talking, the DC is the big boss of all the chiefs” (PFG 4).

- On this contemporary state of affairs, one pastor had this to say, “It is a patronizing approach, the government’s approach, without which politicians cannot have any authority in the traditional system. Politicians are elected, chiefs are not elected they are born, so these politicians are elected and then they become powerful above the chiefs” (PFG 4).
- An example of direct government interference in traditional lines of authority was given: “in Blantyre, T/A Kuntaja, before he was promoted as a senior chief, government wanted to promote Kunthembwe who is a lesser chief from Kuntaja... Kunthembwe is down there and even population wise, Kuntaja has over 80,000 while Kunthembwe is around 30. So politics - because Kuntaja is not in favor with the current political establishment, they wanted to promote Kunthembwe as a senior chief which meant that Kuntaja was supposed to report to him, and then Kuntaja stood out to say that cannot happen. He is my junior it can’t happen, so they elevated Kuntaja as a senior chief and then some years down they elevated him (Kunthembwe)” (PFG 4).
- On the other hand, shrewd politicians have manipulated the traditional system to their advantage as demonstrated in these two examples: (1) “The Chilembwe uprising was possible because he had influence over some chiefs, all the way to Ntcheu. He had backing because he was educated. We understand the situation was deep, the chiefs trusted him to lead the uprising, so that tells that chiefs have authority and if it is left unchecked, they can easily steer the masses against government, the civil authorities. So what the *azungu* did was to assure that the powers of the chiefs were trimmed to size so that they didn’t have too much authority to mobilize the masses” (PFG 4), (2) “when Kamuzu came (to power) he used the traditional system to rule Malawi. He had the traditional courts; if you were sent to a traditional court you could be tried and be sentenced to be hanged. So he used that system because he knew that the chiefs had that authority, and then he also ruled that one could appeal against the rulings of the chiefs. So he used that (traditional) system to suppress Malawi” (PFG 4).
- On the recent collaboration between government and traditional authorities: “the police have recommended community policing in which they work hand in hand with the police, so when something happens in the village there are guys who are chosen, maybe ten guys, they work as police men... assisting the police unit, when something bad in the village happens, they are supposed to go to a particular place where the person stays, and they take the one who committed the crime to the chief... and maybe if it is a big issue they can go to police” (SFG 4).

5.3.4 God, the Holy Spirit: (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 5:16-20; Ephesians 1:11-14)

5.3.4.1 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

¹⁶ *Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?* ¹⁷ *If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

5.3.4.1.1 Theological Significance

In the wider section (1:10-4:21) Paul is focusing on the problem of divisions in the church. Here in chapter three (vs.9-23) he likens the church in Corinth to a building, reaching something of a climax when he refers to the corporate body of believers as the Temple of God, in these particular verses (vs. 16-17). “Don’t you know” (v.16) is a mild rebuke and a device Paul uses a number of times in this letter to introduce a matter which ought to be common knowledge (Morris 1995:67). Since the church (the group of believers as a whole), is the Temple of God, it must be holy. It is considered to be the Temple of God because it is the place where the Spirit of God resides: “God’s Spirit lives in you” (v. 16). The use of God’s Spirit” is not common and highlights “the connection of the Spirit with the Father and underlines the Deity of the Spirit” (Morris 1995:67). Paul is reminding the believers that they “collectively constitute a holy place like the holy of holies, where God was present in a special way (3:16)” (Datiri 2006:1381). The word used for temple (*naos*) does denote the “shrine proper, the sanctuary”, pointing to the very presence of God (Morris 1995:67; Soards 2011:74). To create division in the church is to “destroy the Temple” (v. 17), and it is a very serious matter which will arouse God’s anger, because the Temple is sacred. To be sacred means to be set apart for God and the church is God’s possession. Therefore, destroying God’s Temple would be an act of sacrilege (Wright 2004:37). When Paul writes, “you yourselves are God’s temple” (v.16) the emphasis is on the Corinthian believers and their consequent responsibility. Wright (2004:37) explains that danger was not just that they would build with the wrong materials (vs. 12-15) but that they would actually pull the building down altogether (v.17). The introduction of dissention and strife into the fellowship of the church hampers the operation of the church and can result in splitting the church (Barclay 1956:38). The sad fact was that the church in Corinth was in danger of being destroyed by ‘in-fighting’ manifesting in dissention, quarrels and divisions. Soards (2011:75) also points out that, “At issue is the reality of God’s Spirit among them that means that as a church they are the special locus of God’s presence and power at work in Corinth.” They are thus reminded of their special identity as the ‘spirit-filled’, corporate people of God and their missional identity to live out the Spirit’s presence and power in their context. This, of course, the outworking of the great commission in Jesus Christ’s authority (cf. Mt 28:18-20) and the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1-11ff.)

Evidently, the divisions in the church at Corinth were caused by those who considered themselves wise to follow certain teachers over others (vs. 1-10 cf. v.18-22). Barclay (1956:38) describes the root cause of the problem as the worship of intellectual, worldly wisdom. Paul is careful to point out that their behavior is, in fact, foolish (18-20 cf. Job 5:13; Ps 94:11). By trying to subordinate themselves to ‘party leaders’ they are in fact acting as those who are “worldly - mere infants in Christ” (v.1). Their “jealousy and quarrelling” (v.3) is destructive and unspiritual.

Paul reminds them that he and Apollos are both merely servants, carrying out their God-given tasks (vs.5-9) as “God’s fellow workers” (v.9), but that it is “only God who makes things grow” (v.7). Moreover, the local body of Christ of which they are a part, is “God’s building” (v.9). He goes on to make it clear that there is only one foundation for the church, “which is Jesus Christ” (v. 11). There is no place for a ‘party spirit’ in the church, and therefore, no place for competition. The Spirit of God brings unity not division (cf. Eph 4:3-6). The believers are to take responsibility for erecting the finished building, founded on Christ, and built upon by Paul during his eighteen month stay in Corinth (v.10-11). Even though there is still much work to be done in this regard the Spirit is still present in the temple (Bailey 2011:135). Paul reminds them that they each have a role to play, an invaluable contribution to make to the church, to make it one which will survive the test to come on the day of judgment (v.11-14) (Datiri 2006:1381). Since that day is coming, there is also no need for them to pass judgment on the efforts of others towards building the church (Bailey 2011:135). The three teachers to whom the Corinthians wanted to belong (v.22), in actual fact belonged to them: “are all yours” (v22b). So, by choosing to align with or back one over the others, they were impoverishing themselves from the blessing of benefitting from what the others could contribute (Morris 1995:71).

The main point of theological significance is the fact that God is not removed, distant or disinterested in His people. On the contrary, He has chosen to reside in their very midst in the form of His Spirit. This means that God’s own presence (His *Shekinah* or ‘tabernacled presence’) dwells within the Christian community (Wright 2004:37). As such the believers are to build the church by serving faithfully and allowing others to do the same with the gifts and according to the different tasks/roles God has assigned to them, and be the church, by demonstrating the Spirit’s presence and power through their lives in their given location.

5.3.4.1.2 Practically Applicable Significance

Firstly, a very helpful bridge is that traditionally God (the Supreme Being) is believed to exist and is considered to be a spirit (SFG 7). That is why ancestors are needed to communicate with him and also a reason given for the fact that he cannot be seen “with the naked eye” (SFG 7). Another point of connection is the belief in good spirits, that is, most of the ancestors, who offer help to the living (SFG 7). However, when considering whether God, the Spirit might indwell a human being there are a number of barriers. The spirit within a man only really becomes a spirit being after death and entry into the world of the *mizimu* (SFG 7). While spirits entering men is not an uncommon concept, as evinced by the spirit possession beliefs and exorcism ritual such as *vimbuza* and *nantongwe*, as well as utterances and visitations from ancestral spirits, for the Spirit of God to do so, is inconceivable to the traditional mindset (SFG 7; PFG 7). There was lively discussion among the students as to whether the spirit of *umunthu*

represented God's presence within a human being, but it was concluded that this is not the case, but that it rather symbolized a common humanity (SFG 7). To have the spirit of *umunthu* means one is human, distinct from the animals, and thus lives by certain communal norms and expectations, behaving like a human being, and helping others (SFG 7; PFG 7). One pastor described it like this: "whenever we talk about *umunthu* we talk about goodness, the positive characteristics of a human being... human nature in itself it talks about the positive, the ideal man, the ideal human being" (PFG 7). And this supposed innate goodness has a distinct communal dimension making people predisposed to helping others, or at the very least, expected to do so (PFG 7). However, the spirit of *umunthu* is for believers and unbelievers alike but it is to be distinguished from *umoyo* which is "life" and so, "even an animal has *umoyo*" (SFG 7). Moreover, if the Spirit of God is understood to be involved in/with the community, he "can come through the ancestral spirits" or otherwise will visit only for a very short time (SFG 7). People are in the village, while spirits, including the Supreme Being, are not found in the community but on mountains and near rivers and forests, in the "sacred places", so this presence of God in a Temple comprised of humans is a strange concept (SFG 7). However, the connection with the traditional understanding of God's presence as found in sacred places is useful, in that it may help to make sense of His presence in His newly designated sacred place, the community of believers.

Bringing this very close to home, in the ZEC there is and has historically been, much division. In the local church context this often results in factions forming to remove the pastor (or other leaders/elders) and his family and usually leads to witchcraft action, very often culminating in charms/medicine being used in the attempt to oust him (as seen in a number of stories in the anthology in chapter three). From a denominational perspective, this has mostly been the result of church members pledging allegiance or siding with a particular denominational leader or potential leader. The result has been destructive and severely debilitating to discipleship. Not only have local churches been split but there was even a 'breakaway' group who formed an alternative or opposition Synod some years ago. There are still factions within the traditional Synod and elected leaders find themselves facing stern opposition which debilitates the work of establishing kingdom and church in a variety of ways. As articulated in chapter three, there are constant accusations relating to the use of charms by those seeking to hold onto or attain leadership positions in the denomination.

In summary, the Spirit of God residing within the corporate body of believers is practically inconceivable from a traditional religious perspective. The Supreme Being is transcendent and communication with Him is always through intermediaries. Whereas worship in the traditional paradigm always finds its impetus in external motivation, Paul is saying that we live out our identity as the collective people of God in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, by living out of that very

identity. In other words, when we recognize our identity as being ‘in Christ’, ‘of Christ’, and having the Holy Spirit in our midst, there is no need to strive, compete, earn our way, or belong to a certain faction or group to provide identity. Indeed, we can build together on the foundation of Christ already laid for us, thus building that which will last, as we have a Godly impact on the world around us (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Since the Spirit lives in the church and the believers collectively make up God’s Temple, it does not belong to any individual/s or a particular group. All are “of Christ” (v.22), all have a role to play in serving, and so creating division by aligning with one of God’s servants or another, is divisive and destructive. As Soards (2011:75) explains, “Paul tells the Corinthians who they are, calls them to appropriate patterns of life in relationship to God and to one another, and promises that God cares for and guards his people.”

5.3.4.2 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

5.3.4.2.1 Theological Significance

In this text we see clearly that the individual believer is also God’s temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells but that each individual believer is a part of the body of Christ. Here there is an ethical or moral incentive to live holy lives in the area of sexuality because the Spirit of God is “in you” (v.19), that is, in each individual believer. These verses conclude what Bailey (2011:195) describes as “Paul’s foundation for Christian sexual ethics.” Paul uses the rhetorical question, “Do you not know?” (v.19a) again, as he has done several times in the immediate context (cf. 6:2, 3, 9, 16), to call the attention of the Corinthian believers to something that they should already know. In verse 15 he asks: ‘Do you not know that our bodies are members of Christ himself?’ In verse 19: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you received from God?” Clearly, as Bailey (2011:188) asserts, “My individual body is related to *our body*, the church.” Paul is interested in the personal/bodily health and destiny of the individual but also in that of the whole body of Christ (cf. 3.16-17). The Trinity is also clearly perceived here as “The believer is *in Christ* and at the same time is a sanctuary of the *Holy Spirit* from God” (Bailey 2011:189). This has ethical and eschatological implications. The body is not separate from the soul as in Epicurean and

Stoic thought, neither is it simply evil, as in Gnosticism.¹²⁰ Rather it is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, and each individual body is a member of Christ, and His wider body. The body is sacred because it is the temple (*naos*- the sacred shrine) of the Holy Spirit and it has permanent values as shown in the resurrection (Morris 1995:99). Wright (2004:73) explains that what Paul is saying is that God wants to “know us and work through us as fully physical human beings, both here and hereafter...”, that “there will be some sort of continuity between the present body and the future one” and “What you do in and with the present body will have consequences...” in eternity. Therefore, sexual conduct in the body is a very important matter (cf. 6:9; 13-16). Bailey (2011:191) explains that “The *past* is important because in the *past* “God raised the Lord” and in the past, believers were “bought with a price.” So the believer *is* already united with the body of the risen Lord *in the present* even though “inheritance of the kingdom” and “the resurrection” are *in the future*” (cf. 14; 20; 9-11).

Given all of this, Paul exhorts believers to “Flee from sexual immorality” (19). Based on the immediate context (vs.13-17), his basic point is that “fornicating or sexual involvement with a prostitute is not appropriate for the believer, who is united with Christ in spirit and so defiles the body (perhaps the body of Christ) with such sinful behavior (Soards 2011:132). Being one in spirit with the Lord (v.17) is a spiritual union which means being united to him in such a way that independent action or asserting one’s own will is precluded. To become united with a prostitute is to become “one with her in body” (cf. Gen. 2:24) and damage or at the very least threaten our union of the spirit with God (Wright 2004:74). Moreover, such behavior is like making Christ commit immoral acts (v.15). Wright (2004:74) is correct that what “there is no such thing as a casual sexual encounter. What you do sexually you do with your whole self”, just as “what you are and do as a Christian you are and do as your whole self, not just with the ‘spiritual’ part of you.” As members of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (v.13; 19), we thus defile our own bodies and the body of Christ plural, as well as undermining our union with God, so dishonoring Him (v.20). The sexual appetite arises from within and is incompatible with the believer’s solidarity with Christ (Morris 1995:99), except, of course, within the God-ordained relationship of marriage (cf. 7:1-40) (Wright 2004:73-74). We are not to be mastered by our appetites, desires and instincts (cf. v.12) but are to be their master (Datiri 2006:1384). Since each individual’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit who lives in us is received from God (v.19), there is a moral imperative to honor Him. As Fleming 2014:507) contends, the body is “the means by which people serve God, and by which God functions in people (13).” All behavior which is not appropriate to the temple of God is ruled out (Morris 1995:99-100).

¹²⁰ Datiri (2006:1384) notes that one of the Greek proverbs stated, “‘the body is a tomb’ and the Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, ‘I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse’.”

More than that, the Spirit's presence in believers is also the very provision of empowerment to live lives which will honor and glorify God.

Given that believers are bound into intimate relationship with God through the presence of His Holy Spirit, who is divine and a gift from God (v.19a), Paul is able to say, "You are not your own" (v.19b). Soards (2011:133) quite rightly asserts that, "the Corinthians are neither autonomous individuals nor an autonomous community of human beings. God founded, forms, and holds a claim on the lives of these and all other believers." Again, the issue of identity and purpose for individuals and the church is implicit here. We are God's, members of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, commissioned with a task and empowered to live righteous God-honoring lives in community and in the world. The life manifested by individual believers and thus the Christian community as a whole, in both moral and mission related dimensions of existence, should bring praise and honor to God (Soards 2011:134). "You were bought with a price" (v.20a) is market-place language referring to the buying and selling of slaves who would come under the absolute authority of their owner. Believers have been "bought" out of the slavery of sin at the cost of Christ's life (Fleming 2014:507). Paul simply reiterates that it was God who paid a price, He "bought" or redeemed by paying with the life of our Saviour at Calvary, and so "God owns or has a claim on the lives of the believers" (Soards 2011:134). And so the prime motive in the service of the Christian is to glorify God (Morris 1995:101).

In summary, Paul has already stated that the whole church is God's Temple (1 Cor. 3:16), now he is saying that the individual Christian is as well. God lives permanently in every believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. We can grieve the Holy Spirit by our thoughts and actions (Eph. 4:30), but we cannot simply leave Him to pursue our own agendas. Every Christian is united in spirit to God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, 'bought' (body and soul) at the tremendous cost of Jesus' life, and must therefore, be reminded of "what special people they are, and learn to behave accordingly" (Wright 2004:75). As God's possession, we are 'free not to sin', pleasing Christ and overcoming our fleshly desires and instincts (Datiri 2006:1384 cf. Barclay 1956:64). We are to serve God with our bodies, using them to bring Him glory and honor.

5.3.4.2.2 Practically Applicable Significance

Naturally the same traditional barriers and bridges exist when it comes to understanding and accepting the indwelling presence of God, the Holy Spirit in each believer. Other barriers to genuinely believing that God's Spirit lives in people are formed by the traditional misunderstanding of salvation, the lack of an adequate theology of suffering, and an under-developed or non-existent Biblical eschatology (all addressed earlier in the chapter). In short, "many Christians doubt that God lives in them... due to the challenges they are facing. If

somebody is sick for so long, they can start doubting, ‘if God is in me, why am I sick?’ (SFG 7) Again, “even if you are struggling under poverty you are like, ‘why is God allowing me to be in absolute poverty, yet he is in me? That means he’s suffering with me, so why would a powerful God be suffering with me?’” (SFG 7) These barriers can only be overcome by addressing the misunderstandings articulated above before attempting to explain the reality of the indwelling Spirit. The fact that traditionally it is usually only evil spirits which are associated with possessing people, means that the thought of an indwelling spirit has negative connotations (PFG 7). The ‘*asing’anga wa mizimu*’ or ‘*amizimu*’ (spiritists) may consult ancestral spirits for diagnostics and remedies (SFG 7; PFG 7), but when people start talking about them ‘having spirits’ or being indwelt by spirits, the idea is usually (but not always) that of possession, and mostly conjures up fear (PFG 7). The fact that people recognize that spirits can indwell someone is helpful but the fear aspect is pejorative.

One pastor suggested using the events involved in the *vimbuza* dance as a type of analogy to explain the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He contended that the coming of a spirit into the person, even though the individual still has his/her own spirit, and the subsequent healing or exorcism during the dance, might helpfully demonstrate the possibility of being indwelt by a spirit (PFG 7). The author saw where he was going with this but like most of the other pastors, feels that there are dangers there, because of the traditional understanding. As someone suggested, “people might start to think that maybe *abusa* (pastor) consults witchdoctors” (PFG 7). It may have been a poor choice of analogy but his subsequent point was excellent: we need to find many more contextually (religio-cultural) appropriate analogies and illustrations to explain Biblical concepts/truth effectively.¹²¹

Considering the latter, a traditional concept, now carrying ‘Christian’ significance, may be helpful at this point. The concept of *uzimu*, apparently distinguishes one from simply having the common *umunthu*. Here it is important to differentiate between *uzimu* and *mzimu*. The latter refers to the human spirit, so one might be, ‘*ali ndi mzimu*’ (he has a spirit) which means much the same as ‘*ali ndi umunthu*’, that is to say, one with a human spirit, or the spirit of humanity. However, *uzimu* has a genuine spiritual connotation. So, if one is ‘*wauzimu*’, it goes beyond *umunthu* to spiritual things, meaning “to be connected to Godly things” (PFG 7). Therefore, to have *uzimu* goes above and beyond living according to the traditional expectations of human conduct (SFG 7; PFG 7). Traditionally, the concept referred to anything spiritual or supernatural, but now in ecclesiological circles, it has come to connote something godly (i.e. ‘*munthu wa uzimu*’ or ‘a godly man’). According to the Chichewa-Chinyanja English dictionary,

¹²¹ Some salutary points were made regarding the need for indigenous contextualization. The author refers to this in the evaluation in chapter Six.

the ideas of something sacred and mystical are, and always have been, implicit in the term too (Pass 2004:462). One pastor described the meaning of the term *wauzimu* like this: “the reference point is that one is a serious believer and lives out his life in accordance with the values of the faith” (PFG 7). This is very helpful in developing an understanding of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in a believer, and explaining the difference between ‘good works’ or appropriate behavior, and the fruit of the Spirit. Everybody has a human spirit, even if they fail to live up to social/bahavioural expectations and break traditional taboos and are referred to as (*‘ulibe munthu’* or *‘ulibe mzimu’*- they do not have humanness or a human spirit), they actually do still have a spirit (*mzimu*). As one pastor explained, “when one dies you don’t say that *‘munthuyo ndi amene wachoka’* (the human has departed), it’s the spirit” (PFG 7). But not everybody has the Holy Spirit. All of this speaks to the Holy Spirit finding His sacred place within the human individual, who then becomes *‘munthu wa uzimu’*, conducting themselves in holiness and doing good to others, as a result of their relationship with Christ and the concomitant mystical relationship with the indwelling Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). This truth brings a helpful corrective to the idea that striving for solidarity and social well-being is sufficient: *‘kali kokha mkanyama, tili tiwiri n’tianthu’* (‘what is by itself is a little animal, those who are two are human beings’) (Chakanza 2000:99) (PFG 7). Although there is much to commend in the communal and relational emphasis in Malawi, the point is that it may be merely humanistic in motivation and implementation. Moreover, it also subverts the traditional notion that *umunthu* constitutes an innate goodness in all humans which is worked out in community, a belief seemingly redolent with salvific import. Although the latter may be helpful, but only if used to explain natural moral law and employed as a ‘stepping stone’ to discovering our true salvation and identity in Christ, and our true personhood and freedom as we are led by the Spirit (vs 16,18, 22-25). Finally, the true/real presence of the divine Spirit within challenges morally dubious traditionally accepted behavioural norms related to sexual practice. For example, the need to prove one’s manhood through multiple sexual ‘conquests’, and also some traditional initiation rites, such as *‘kusesa fumbi’* (‘to sweep out the dust’), whereby pubescent girls have to sleep with a male *‘fisi’*- (hyena) in order to prepare themselves for all future sexual relationships. The Spirit exposes the sinful nature of such practices.

In summary, the concept of *wauzimu* is a very helpful bridge to positing a Biblical understanding of the indwelling presence and work of the Holy Spirit in every true believer. In Malawi, there is a desperate need for those who profess to follow Christ to acknowledge and embrace the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and so renounce both ownership and management of the ‘self’, which includes our physical bodies. Indeed, the Spirit reminds us that we “belong to somebody” (SFG 7). Human beings are not innately good even though the divine seed or spark (*Imago Dei*) remains within us. Neither do we possess the wherewithal to be, or to be to

others, all that we can and should be in this world, in our own strength. Only as we, believers, surrender to the Holy Spirit of God's presence and work in and through us, do our motives, our thoughts, our words, and our conduct, all begin to conform to the "good and pleasing will of God" (Rom 12:2) for us. We become increasingly Christ-like (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 2:20), honoring Him with our bodies (and our lives), as we fulfil His purposes in the world.

5.3.4.3 Galatians 5:16-26

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever^[a] you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

5.3.4.3.1 Theological and Practically Applicable Significance

In the previous passage it was shown that each individual believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and that as such, we are to honour him with our bodies by abstaining from sexual immorality. A wider application warrants using the human body to serve Him, and as a vessel through which God, the Holy Spirit, may function to fulfil His missional agenda to establish His church and reach out to the world. Therefore, Christian freedom is not about indulging our fleshly appetites but rather about serving God. As Ngewa (2006:1423) contends, our Christian freedom means that having been set free from slavery to the law, "we are called to serve the Spirit and one another." In this particular passage the emphasis shifts to how to serve God by serving "one another in love" (cf. vs.13-15). This passage sheds light on what it actually means to live as God's Spirit-filled people, teaching us what behaving according to our identity 'in Christ' looks like practically, and how to do so in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although the law commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves (v.14 cf. Lev 9:18), this high goal is "not reached by trying to keep the law, but by acting with true Christian liberty (vs. 13-15) (Fleming

2014:527). The love which enables us to love even our enemies (Mt 5:44) flows from within. Christ-like conduct is demonstrated only when Christians, “walk by the Spirit” (v.16), are “led by the Spirit” (v.18), “keep in step with the Spirit” (v.25), and “live by the Spirit” (v.25). Cole (1994:211) notes that, “All of these are varied metaphors for what is essentially one and the same thing, a life completely and continuously under the control and the direction of the Holy Spirit.” The motivation for growth in Christian character is thus not legalistic or fear-based, rather it is love (Keller 2013:145).

Christians are to “live by the spirit” (v. 16) so as not to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (or flesh- *sarx*). The Greek word translated “live” is ‘*peripateiete*’ which is literally “walk” which suggests “continuance, progress and daily attention” (Jervis 2011:142). Keller (2013:145) defines the *sarx* as “the sin-desiring aspect of our whole being.” The two, Spirit and *sarx*, have conflicting desires (v.17), and the way to victory is not through obedience to the law but being “led by the Spirit” (v.18). The law is incapable of preventing believers from defeating fleshly desires and behavior. These desires (*epithumia*) are not just sexual but are more properly, ‘over-desires’ in any area, which become all-consuming and cause us to drift away from God (Keller 2013:146-147). Only the Spirit of God, “who entered our hearts supernaturally when we first became Christians, and has begun a renewal that is now our ‘new nature’” (Keller 2013:146), can direct us appropriately. The “acts of the sinful nature” (vs. 19-21) are contrary to the desires of the Spirit and people who indulge in them “will not enter the kingdom of God” (v.21). This refers to the habitual practices of those who continually indulge their flesh, as Keller (2013:149-150) notes, and not “infrequent, repented-of lapses.” Paul may well have been drawing on a pagan philosophers ‘stock-list’ of vices here, but he views them as natural and inevitable results of unchecked human nature, rather than as being contrary to humanities true nature, as was the case with the philosophers (Cole 1994:211). This is where the idea of *umunthu* may be confusing because it also suggests that good conduct is part of what makes one human. It is rather the potential that lies within each individual (the ‘*imago Dei*’) to be so related to God, that our conduct is righteous, that marks believers out as different. Different cultures within Malawi have different standards of morality. For example, for the Ngoni, drunkenness is not seen as bad conduct, it may even be expected (SFG 7). Many cultures espouse polygamy (SFG 7). The point is, even *umunthu* is not enough. It may be true that living by the Spirit will strengthen our *umunthu*, as one student claimed (SFG 7), but they are certainly not the same thing. It is also true that some may appear to be believers because of their good conduct, so obfuscating their true identity. Indeed, a student pointed out that some who are not churchgoers behave better than regular attendees (SFG 7). On the other hand, people often don’t behave as traditionally expected. A well-known Chichewa proverb expresses it best: “*Munthu ndi galu, galu ndi munthu*” (Chakanza 2000:218-219). When directly

translated this states that, 'a person is a dog, a dog is a person'. It speaks of human degradation and irresponsibility. However, a true Christian conscience is one continually sharpened by the indwelling Holy Spirit, not guided by external rules or motivations, not even a communal 'spirit'. That's why the *umunthu* analogy is so limited because, as one pastor rightly stated, it fails when "you get to the point of the fallen human nature" (PFG 7). This is a critical point when considering true salvation as one pastor explained: "we have the *umunthu* philosophy (in which) human beings are good, and because human beings are good, that is why from a cultural perspective, if you take salvation - we don't need salvation, what we need is to be *umunthu*. So, it's in a way, from a scriptural point, it's salvation by works. If you manage to live like *munthu* (human), then you are okay, no need for salvation" (PFG 7).

Certainly, Paul exposes both attitudes and actions motivated by the 'sax-heart' which are destructive in the areas of sexual conduct, religion and relationships in general (Keller 2013:148-149). Such an understanding also brings a much needed correction to the legalistic, man-made hierarchy of sins which exists in many churches in Malawi. The pairing of "idolatry and witchcraft" (v.20) is significant for our context as, according to Keller (2013:149), Paul refers here to "very specific occult and pagan religious practices" which provide an inadequate substitute for God or fake the work of the Spirit. He contrasts all of this selfish, sinful behaviour (vs.19-21) with "the fruit of the Spirit" (v.22-23a). The solution to combating the *sax*-desires is not found in asceticism or 'a rule of life', but rather, "Paul advocates human will (v.16) in cooperation with the transforming work of the Spirit" (Jervis 2011:144). Fleming (2014:527) elaborates when he rightly explains that, if "Christians allow God's Spirit to control them, their lives become full of the most pleasing virtues - the opposite of those things the law forbids." Or as Cole (1994:219) puts it, "The use of *karpos*, *fruit*... suggests that all these spiritual qualities, and many more, are the spontaneous product of the presence of the Spirit of Christ within the heart of the Christian." Thus such fruit as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness and self-control" (vs.22-23a) is evidence of the presence of the Spirit in believers (cf. Matt. 7:16), and evidence of advanced growth of the fruit proves Christian maturity.¹²² None of it is hidden and each aspect pertains to how we relate to others. However, the fruit is evident because of the inner life, and the deep change which the Spirit brings about in those who live by Him and are led by Him. Keller (2013:151-153) makes three other notable points about the fruit: (1) its growth is gradual, it doesn't happen overnight, (2) but it is inevitable, the fruit will grow in a saved person, (3) growth is symmetrical, meaning all the fruit grows up together, so for example, a person will not have love without kindness, gentleness, faithfulness etc. All of these will, of course, strengthen our sense of *umunthu*, but it needs to be

¹²² This is not to be confused with either the 'gifts of the Spirit', which people may have received and demonstrate powerfully whilst still immature in the faith, or our strengths due to natural temperament.

made clear that the fruit is not native to the unregenerate heart, and it cannot truly grow or be cultivated by human effort in the absence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Jn. 7:37-38). One pastor claimed that *umunthu* is intrinsic to all human beings, something “every human being is born with” (PFG 7). What is for certain is that every born again person has the Holy Spirit and therefore, will have the fruit of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5-7 cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

“Against such things there is no law” (23b) because those who behave habitually in this way are keeping or fulfilling the law, so how could there be a law against them? As Jervis states, “Life in Christ will result in character that fulfills the law apart from the law (cf. 5:14).” Perhaps, as Cole (1994:221) suggests, the phrase could read, ‘The law was never meant for people like this.’ Either way, the Christian is no longer driven by the desires of the ‘*sarx*-heart’, which remains under the law because it seeks to save itself and/or indulge itself independently of God (Keller 2013:148). The Christian is free from the law because they “belong to Christ Jesus” and have “crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (v.24). The use of the word “crucified” is used to strengthen the direct link between the change of attitude and conduct with the death of Christ (Cole 1994:221) (cf. Gal. 2:20). Real crucifixion of the *sarx*, involves, as Keller (2013:155) contends, “strangling sin at the motivational level, rather than simply setting ourselves against sin at the behavioural level.” Therefore, the passionate longings of the flesh which so profoundly govern the habits of the man without the Spirit have been crucified with Christ. But it is an ongoing process, as we have to continue to put to death the *sarx*-heart, with its over-desires that wish to become substitutes for God. Keller (2013:157) suggests that the way to do this is to “worship Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, adoring Him until our hearts find Him more beautiful than the object we felt we had to have.”

Believers are under new ownership, and led or directed not by the desires of the flesh but rather by the yearnings of the Holy Spirit (cf. 16:14). Since they “live by the Spirit”, Paul exhorts them to “keep in step with the Spirit” (v.25). As we focus on Christ, loving and adoring Him, we make room for the growth of the fruit, and become more like Christ. Then Christians’ lives will, as Fleming (2014:527) asserts they should, “demonstrate the truth that their sinful nature has been crucified with Christ and has no further power over them. They are now controlled by God’s Spirit.” Perhaps, as Jervis (2011:150) suggests, the NEB translation is best here: “If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct our course.” Indeed, then one is truly *wauzimu*, in the way that the author would like to see the term develop. This is not just *munthu*, neither simply someone spoken of as a person of faith because they do right and go to church, but rather one who is led by the Spirit of God in every sphere of life!

Finally, Paul makes it plain that there is no room in the relationships of those who are keeping in step with the Spirit for conceit, boastful arrogance, provocation of others, ambitious rivalry

and envy within the church (v.26). This mitigates against superiority, jealousy, competition and power struggles. None of that is from the Spirit, in fact, it is completely at odds with what the Spirit desires. Moreover, such conduct breaks down rather than builds up God's church. This is quite the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit and is destructive to the community and detrimental to the Spirit-led life (cf. v15).

In summary, as Keller (2013:147) contends, "The re-born person has both sinful desires and godly desires but 'we' most truly want what our Spirit-renewed heart wants." Christian character is formed from the inside out and not the other way around. The conduct of believers is determined by the inward impulse or leading of the Spirit and not by legalistic adherence to laws, a rule of life, or traditional expectations. The 'Good' Spirit comes to indwell those who by faith in Jesus Christ invite Him in, and He begins a work of transformation. The fruit of the Spirit grows and will be seen in action in the life of every true believer in whom the Spirit of God dwells. However, this Spirit led life does involve the will of a believer, the "continual turning away from that which is opposed to the Spirit" (Jervis 2011:143). Willing submission and participation 'with Him' is required for genuine growth towards Christian maturity. When Christians live by the Spirit in this way, they live from their Spirit-renewed natures, becoming the people God desires for them to be. Their character is shaped by their new nature and the fruit of that is evidenced in their conduct. Ngewa (2006:1423) sums it up accurately when he writes that, "Their behavior will demonstrate that the Spirit is within them and is bearing fruit in their actions and attitudes (5:22-23). These virtues go far beyond what any mere law could possibly prescribe."

5.3.4.4 Ephesians 1:12-13

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

5.3.4.4.1 Theological and Practically Applicable Significance

Here, in this text, there are two fundamental aspects relating the Spirit's work in the lives of believers which are profoundly significant theologically in our context that Paul, who had established the Church in Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:31), wants to highlight, namely: 'marking' or 'sealing' and 'guaranteeing'. Turaki (2006:1428) writes: "Not only does the Holy Spirit mark us

as God's possession, but he also guarantees that we will indeed receive the full inheritance that God has graciously promised us (1:13b)." All those who "heard the message of truth" (v.13a), the gospel, and responded in faith ("When you believed" (v. 14a), "where included in Christ" (v.13a), and sealed with the Holy Spirit as a mark of identity or possession (vs.13b-14). To be sure, "The New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from the Spirit (Jn 3:5; Acts 11:17; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 3:2; 1 Ths1:5f; Tit 3:5; Heb 6:4; 1 Pt 1:2; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13) (Marshall 1994:305). It is already established that traditionally there is no concept of the Spirit of God living in people, but it is commonly believed that spirits do possess people (PFG 7; SFG 7). This barrier needs to be overcome.

Having been "marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (v.13b), means that the Spirit is both the guarantee that they (believers) are God's people now and that they will one day receive the full inheritance that God has promised them as heirs (Fleming 2014:530). The seal in the ancient world was the personal sign of the owner or sender of important documents, and also the guarantee that it hadn't been opened. This it provided a confirmation of authenticity and ownership, as well as security (Ferguson 2005:19). Foulkes (1985:64) suggests that the experience of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is "the final proof to them, and indeed a demonstration to others, of the genuineness of what they have believed, and provides the inward assurance that they belong to God as children (cf. Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6)."

The Holy Spirit who is Himself God's seal also carries the promise of good things to come. In fact, "the promised Holy Spirit" (v.13b) is literally the 'holy Spirit of promise' which implies that His presence heralds a bright future (Foulkes 1989:65). Indeed, Paul talks about the Holy Spirit being a "deposit" or 'down payment', "guaranteeing our inheritance (v.14). Ferguson (2005:20) explains that "His presence in our life is itself God's assurance that every spiritual blessing will be ours. More than that, this 'down payment' is a first instalment of the final consummation of the blessings we will experience in the resurrection." That is, at "the redemption of those who are God's possession" (v.14). Paul uses the illustration of a business transaction between two parties that would have been well understood by his readers, one in which an '*arrabon*' or 'part-payment' was made as a guarantee or assurance that full payment would be made (Foulkes 1989:65). The concepts of a seal and being marked out as belonging to a particular group is understood in Malawi. A student-pastor shared that "traditionally, there are vows which are made out there, they may be the kings, magicians, those who practice witchcraft, we hear that they have vows which they make and obviously those vows make a seal that this one is part of us... by words or by blood sometimes" (SFG 7). It was recognized that this is a seal in the spiritual realm and that those belonging to the same groups are able to recognize each other by sight (SFG 7). Perhaps a more user-friendly analogy is found in everyday 'physical' life, whereby cattle and goats may be branded with an owner's stamp, marking them out as his

possession. The best local analogy is found in marriage preparation. In Malawi, to guarantee a suitor's intentions, the would-be husband gives a piece of cloth to the girl he wants to marry (SFG 7): "I think a seal in cultural terms is '*chikole*' (a deposit)... *Chikole* is an upfront deposit that one makes. Way back in our respective cultures we, when you plan to marry somebody, you give that family or that girl something, *kutomera* (depositing or booking). You buy *chitenje* (cloth) and you give (*it to*) them or you buy something else, and that family knows that this girl... has a suitor somewhere... and when the time fully comes the marriage is consummated" (PFG 7). However, before the consummation all parties understand that they are fully committed, they are already considered to be married, there is no backing out once the '*chitomero*' deposit has been given (PFG 7).

Paul has already explained that having been adopted into God's family (cf. v.5), we are younger brothers/sisters of the heir to all things, Jesus Christ (cf. Heb1:2), and so all things are ours in Him (cf. 1 Cor 3:21-22) (Ferguson 2005:17). But what will believers 'in Christ' inherit? No doubt, the Spirit of God is part of the inheritance because, as Wright (2004:13) points out, the spirit is God's own presence, which in the new world will be fully and personally with us forever." Just as the Israelites were promised, longed for, and eventually reached their inheritance, the promised land of Canaan, so God has a new promised land for those 'in Christ', and he will make sure that they get there. This inheritance includes the whole world, "when it's been renewed by a fresh act of God's power and love", such that God floods "the whole cosmos, heaven and earth together, with his presence and grace, and when that happens the new world that results, in which Jesus himself will be the central figure, is to be the 'inheritance'" (Wright 2004:12) (cf. v.10). All that God has planned for humanity will be fully possessed because He is sovereign and more than able to accomplish it, and the outworking of His plan is "to the praise of his glory" (v.14 cf. v. 6. v.12).

In the Old Testament Israel were God's chosen people but now all believers in Christ may also consider themselves "chosen" and "predestined" (v.11), having Christ as their inheritance (v.13b). The Jews were "the first to believe" and this was "for the praise of his glory" (v.12)¹²³, but now many Gentiles have heard and believed "the word of truth, the gospel..." (v.13), and experienced salvation. Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to apply the benefits of redemption in the lives of all believers - Jews and Gentiles alike - "to fulfil the promises made by the Father and the Son" (Turaki 2006:1428). The point is, 'In Christ, Jewish believers and Gentile believers share the same privileges' (Ferguson 2005:18). Appropriately, as this theological discussion of texts is drawn to a close, Ferguson (2005:20) insightfully explains that the three similar refrains underline the Trinitarian nature of the blessings Paul has been describing, outlining the activity

¹²³ The Jews had, of course, hoped in and longed for 'the Christ' long before he came (cf. Acts 28:20).

of all three persons of the Trinity in redemption: (1) the blessings have their origin in the Father's plan (v.3), (2) they are accomplished through the work of the Son (v.7), and (3) their application is affected by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, the Holy Spirit of God is given to all who respond in faith to the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the sovereign plan and purposes of God the Father. He is real, personal, sometimes tangible (cf. Rom. 8:14-16), God-in-us, facilitating our participation in the Divine both now and in the future. The Spirit is for believers a seal, marking them as God's possession, and a deposit, guaranteeing that they will receive the full inheritance which He has planned for them when Christ returns. This includes blessed, perpetual fellowship with the Spirit in a perfect new world in which Christ is central and forever worshipped, and the presence and grace of God the Father, ubiquitous. For now the presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer is their security and assurance of salvation, the evidence to others of the reality of their experience, and the guarantee of a wonderful future. Additionally, the blessed fellowship now enjoyed with Him and the 'inexpressible and glorious joy' experienced, is a foretaste of what is to come. And all of this is certain because it is in the plan and will of an absolutely sovereign God (vs. 1-11).

5.3.5 Content for Teaching/ Application

- Describing the 'spirit' of *umunthu*, the students said: (a) "*umunthu* is something that distinguishes between us and animals, so because of that *umunthu* it's when we behave as a person, without that *umunthu*, you can just behave like any other creatures" (SFG 7). (b) "For example, a mad person, he behaves unhuman, not as a person, which means the spirit which is *umunthu* departed from him, so that's why now his behavior is not human it is like an animal...he can do whatever" (SFG 7). (c) "*Umunthu* can be described as something which makes somebody to be organized as a normal person, one knows that I cannot go out naked, why? *Umunthu* is telling you, that is an African perspective. We think that a man has got *umunthu* because he has put his shirt on, he has combed his hair, whatsoever, he is looking smart, *umunthu*. Without *umunthu* you can go out naked, you do whatsoever you wish" (SFG 7).
- The pastors gave these examples of *umunthu*: (1) "for example if somebody comes to my house and I don't know that person, where he comes from, my *umunthu* will force me to receive that person at my house and to stay with him, so that we do regard as *umunthu*" (PFG 7). (2) "So many people who are seeking some assistance will come to the pastors house to seek what they are looking for. So, they have their stories, so when you have heard his or her story you say, 'let me help the person.' So, no matter that he or she is lying but the *umunthu* will force you to assist him or her in one way or the other. I remember one time someone came (to my) home with her stories: 'I am from Lilongwe, and I am seeking transport to go to Lilongwe. I don't have anything.' So I took some money to give that lady. Three days later I met her in town! So I say, I have done my part, whether she was lying or she (was not)...so long as I have given her that money, so that is *umunthu*" (PFG 7).
- One who does not behave according to expectations is described as: '*ulibe umunthu*' or '*awatu alibe umunthu*' ('this one doesn't have humanness') (PFG 7).

- Traditionally, to have *umunthu* is to be human and to have *mzimu* is to have a human spirit (PFG 7). The two go hand-in-hand.
- In the contemporary milieu, to have *uzimu* and to be '*wauzimu*' is to be one who is spiritual, Godly; one who professes and appears to believe in God (PFG 7).
- Describing the difference between *umunthu* and *umoyo*, a student rightly contended: "So we can have life, animals have life but the animals cannot have humanity which is *umunthu*. *Umunthu* is for human beings while *umoyo* is for every living creature, even *mtengo* (a tree) has got *umoyo*" (SFG 7).
- Explaining how good spirits may offer help through witchdoctors: "*asing'anga a mizimu* (spiritual witchdoctors)... they use spirits to diagnose a problem and even to prescribe into and make the prescriptions, so from them we have good spirits who help them to know... any problem that has come to a particular person, so they know that this particular problem is caused because of A,B,C,D, so it's the spirit helping them" (PFG 7; SFG 7).
- But the same witchdoctors may also consult evil spirits and one is not always sure of the origin or nature of the 'helping' spirit (PFG 7; SFG 7).
- A student explained that: "There are people we call them *amizimu*... they have spirits... you can go there, maybe you want them to prophesy to you or to tell you something about your future or to tell you about anything, or maybe you are sick... there are those people, *amizimu*, they tell you your problem before you tell them, or (*that*) you are coming from Zomba, you have two children, your wife's name is so-and-so" (SFG 7).
- A testimony about the spirit possession of witchdoctors: "I have participated in these traditional functions where a person has been trained to be *sing'anga wa mizimu*, (spiritist), and then upon graduation there were a lot of rituals that happen so that a person is completely indwelled by the spirits" (PFG 7).
- On why people doubt the indwelling presence of God's Spirit: "I remember that a week or two weeks ago, that Malawi had been affected by floods. People asked two questions: one of them is that the believers are suffering, why? God is within them, living in them, why are they suffering like that? There can be such kind of doubt, even to the disaster of people with albinism. They are facing some abductions and some of them are Christians. They can start thinking that God is abandoning me, yet he's in me!?" (SFG 7)
- A helpful description of someone filled with the Holy Spirit: "so everywhere, even if you can mix with the pagans, you can be identified because of what you produce among that society. Even if you can find (*him in*) the village, you can hear that Norman is a good man, such-and- such is a good man, because he is someone who is special because of what is in him. He has an identity because of who is in him and the fruits of that... humble... not a drunkard... very kind and gentle" (SFG 7).
- A testimony was shared relating to how like recognizes like in the spiritual realm: "I remember at school we had a certain girl and we had a certain meeting. So we were visited by children of another school, they came. So when they came this lady was practicing witchcraft. So another two children from that school also, they were in the same practices, so they knew each other just by seeing, just when they faced each other they knew each other... that gave me a sign that there is a seal in the spiritual realm. They know each other, that we belong to the very same" (SFG 7).
- A local example of a seal and deposit related to marriage: "you give something and then that family knows that this girl has a suitor somewhere. It can be even your shirt and trouser. She can be keeping it, and when the time fully comes the marriage is

consummated. So, that is the idea that I think am getting from there that the holy Spirit has been given as a seal and as a deposit” (PFG 7).

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, specifically chosen Biblical texts relating to the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have been discussed with a view to establishing their theological significance and their practically applicable significance in the Malawian context. Theologically, truths such as the sovereignty of God and His good plan for His children and all of creation, the extravagant, love and compassion of the Father, the mediatory role of Jesus Christ which enables access and intimacy with God, and His authority over spirits, sicknesses and the natural elements, and the assuring, strengthening and transforming work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, have been shown to be profoundly significant for the context. All of these truths speak to misconceptions about God deeply rooted in the traditional religious worldview, their practically applicable significance lying in their potential to challenge, subvert and transform thinking and practice. A new picture of God emerges as we meditate on and discuss these passages, one which provides assurance, hope and encouragement. Those whom the Father has chosen to redeem, through faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, He will conform to the image of His Son, transforming their character from the inside-out, through the work of His indwelling Spirit. God the Father is seen to be immanent not removed, demonstrably loving and compassionate rather than indifferent and capricious, always beneficent and gracious, wonderfully working all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes, sovereign over all, and the architect of an amazing plan of salvation and an immutable inheritance plan, involving the certain glorification of believers and the renewal of the earth, for them. He is a good and gracious Father. Jesus Christ, the Son, guarantees believers perpetual access to the very throne of God through His high priestly work ‘for us’, and his present intercession assures us of God’s continued grace and mercy to meet our needs. No need for ancestors, witchdoctors or other spiritual mediators. His absolute authority in both the spiritual and physical realms is reassuring in the highly charged spiritual cosmos, where there is no higher power and no other name by which men can be saved (including forgiveness of sin). Moreover, He has commissioned us and given us His authority to carry out His mission in the world. The guarantee of His constant presence ‘with us’, is cause for peace and contentment despite hardships, persecution and trials of many kinds in the present. Even the great threat of death which creates so much fear is alleviated. There is no need for recourse to charms and witchcraft because His “grace is sufficient for us” (2 Cor 12:9). Our sufferings in the present identify us as co-heirs with Christ and cannot compare with the glory which is to come. Jesus is our Lord and Savior, and the Way. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence ‘in us’, assuring us of our

salvation and sealing our status as fully fledged children of God, so guaranteeing the rich inheritance God has prepared. He develops Godly character (fruit) in all who are willing to participate with Him, leading us in paths of righteousness, giving joy in the midst of suffering, and 'joy inexpressible' through fellowship with the living God in the 'here and now'. The great and good Spirit has made His home with us, in Christ's church, but also choosing to reside in each one of us, and enabling us to be '*munthu wouzimu weniweni*' ('a person genuinely filled with the Holy Spirit')¹²⁴, loving and serving one another and the world. Therefore, believers are children of God and co-heirs with Christ to a glorious inheritance, carrying out His missional purposes in the world, in His power and authority. Our true identity is found 'in Christ'. To truly know the Almighty God is to have a sure and certain hope, enjoy heavenly blessed fellowship with Him now, and be completely secure in Him.

In the final chapter the author will provide a summary overview of the research, enumerate challenges experienced, point out notable findings and draw conclusions where appropriate, as well as highlight areas requiring further research and make recommendations,.

¹²⁴ This is the author's own 'designation' and translation. It implies more than just a genuinely spiritual person or '*wauzimu weniweni*'. To describe a person of genuine faith who is filled with the Holy Spirit one would usually say, '*wokhulupilira a weni weni odzadzidwa ndi Mzimu Woyera*'.

CHAPTER SIX

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the researcher will provide a summary of findings directly related to the research problem, the research question and the sub-questions formulated, in the light of the stated aim and objectives. The methodology and research process will then be evaluated regarding viability and efficacy. Notable findings are highlighted, including the postulation that witchcraft may well be a (the) *bona fide* religion in South-Central Malawi. The researcher also provides some personal reflections on his experience apposite to the topic. Recommendations are made for further study relating to the three key foundations: contextual, Biblical and pedagogic, and it is suggested that findings should be triangulated with psychological studies. The importance of the study for the ZEC and further afield is also noted. Finally, a brief conclusion is given.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This missiological study was done from the perspective of the Evangelical tradition in the context of mission in South-central Malawi. The research was necessary because charm-dependency, animated by deep-seated traditional religious worldview motifs, negatively impacts both individual spiritual growth and numerical growth in ZEC churches. The problem arising is how to effectively break this charm-dependency by transforming worldview by means of an approach which is sensitive to the local culture, faithful to Scripture, and pedagogically sound for the context. The central theoretical argument is that contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations are needed to solve this particular problem. The research question was, therefore: What contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations are required for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in ZEC churches by transforming worldview? The main aim of this research was thus to identify (1) contextual, (2) Biblical and (3) pedagogic foundations, for such an approach.

The questions arising from this problem and the research question, along with the stated aim and objectives, guided the researcher. Summary answers to these secondary questions provide a helpful synopsis of findings to this point:

6.2.1 (a) What are the main tenets (motifs) of a South-Central Malawian worldview?

This question was considered in some detail and given particular attention in Chapter Four. The corresponding objective was to ‘distil the major tenets of a South-Central Malawian traditional religious worldview by examining historical and contemporary practice against the backdrop of a wider South-East African worldview’. The researcher contended that there are eight main tenets or motifs which when synthesized, form the bedrock of a South-Central Malawian, especially Chewa, worldview. These are not new but the unique contribution lies in the clarity of the enumeration, and particularly in the frequent references to contemporary practice, drawn from the Interviews and Focus Groups, which punctuate and illustrate the explanations. These were posited as belief in: (1) a remote and unapproachable Supreme Being, (2) cosmic holism (bondedness), (3) the need for life-force (*umoyo*), (4) salvation as physical well-being ‘here and now’, (5) identity rooted in community, (6) the authority of traditional experience, (7) witchcraft as integral to life, and (8) the indispensability of traditional religious charms/medicine. The latter arises from the dynamic synthesis of the first seven and while it is not included by other authors as a stand-alone motif, the present author is convinced that it now warrants its place as a worldview motif in the contemporary milieu.

(b) How has this worldview been shaped?

The rationale behind this question was the fact that to instigate change surely “...involves understanding the ideas, stories, history and assumptions of a people..., and determining how these materialize in their actions... before sharing an alternative narrative to the one that is commonly known in the society” (Dicks 2012:60-61). Here, it must be noted that the worldview articulated in summary form above, has been shaped by traditional religious thinking and practice and cultural influences (internal and external), ancient and contemporary. Foundational to this shaping is the ‘*kaphirintiwa*’ creation myth, and the concepts of God, creation, humanity, and the rest of creation (including fauna and flora) arising. Central to worldview at every point in the African context is religion and so traditional practices and institutions are primary. For the Chewa, these include the *Gule wamkulu* and the territorial rain cults (*Chisumphu* and *Mbona*), both closely tied to the living-dead (ancestors). Traditional wisdom pertaining to the spirits, healing and expected social norms in community is also germane. Witchcraft is increasingly and profoundly influential. Since worldview is dynamic, shaping is ongoing, as the traditional ideas and practices wrestle against and interact with new ideas and global influences.

6.2.2 (a) Which motifs in the worldview animate charm-dependency within ZEC churches?

The objective was to ‘identify specific worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency in the Zambesi Evangelical Churches’. The difficulty in singling out particular motifs reveals how a holistic perspective on the cosmos means that all eight motifs comprising the worldview are synthesized to form the grid or lens from which people perceive life and act on those perceptions. The Interview responses, particularly the stories in the anthology provide a unique insight into charm-dependency in ZEC churches, and the wider ecclesiological milieu in Malawi. These insights were regularly substantiated in the Focus Group discussions. The evidence collected points to the primary motives, including: (1) fear of witchcraft related activities carried out by witches/sorcerers, witchdoctors, evil spirits (*ziwanda*), jealous or greedy people, and/or enemies seeking retribution, resulting in suffering and ultimately death, (2) cultural pressure to comply to traditional wisdom and the related expectations and activities, which stimulates fears relating to ostracism or retribution from family members, and even punishment from the ancestral spirits if cultural expectations and/or taboos are broken and communal harmony disrupted, and (3) personal self-promotion or life-enhancement through witchcraft. Within this dynamic there are a number of purposes promoting charm-dependency, all of which can be subsumed under the umbrella of two primary needs: (a) **self-protection**, and (b) **self-enhancement**. However, behind all this lies the larger backdrop of worldview motifs, including particularly: (1) the notion that God is remote and disinterested in people’s personal affairs, which promotes taking matters into one’s own hands, (2) the idea that salvation is found in temporary physical well-being in the present, (3) the belief in a hierarchy of spiritual powers and the need to maintain harmony in this wider community, (4) the need to enhance or protect one’s *umoyo* or life-force in this highly spiritually charged environment, in what’s understood to be a circumscribed cosmos, (5) the deep-rooted belief that there is a personal cause behind every effect in the bonded cosmos, meaning that suffering is usually attributed to other individuals/spirits with malicious intent.

(b) How do stories of charm-usage from the grassroots reveal these motifs?

The majority of the 130 stories collected and the 108 stories chosen for the anthology were collected because they relate to charm-usage (dependency) in the ZEC churches. Other stories were included because they helpfully illustrate worldview motifs impacting religious practice. This anthology stands as a unique contribution to the field displaying real-life charm-dependency at the grassroots level in ZEC churches. It corroborates the impact of the above motifs. The researcher established links between motifs and practice in Chapter Four, by referencing stories from the anthology and examples from the Interviews, as well as stories and

contextual information provided in the Focus Groups. The content of the stories demonstrates clearly the use of defensive and offensive charms for: 1. **Self-protection**, and 2. **Self-enhancement** (as above), the animation for which can be traced back to the worldview motifs articulated above. The links are easily established when examining the presenting motives/purposes for charm-usage, including: (1) protection of infants, health security, security of homes, property, jobs, status and positions, protection of wealth and businesses, protection of fields and crops, protection of marriages and from spouses having adulterous liaisons, protection from STDs, safe travel, protection from evil spirits and sometimes even capricious ancestors, and (2) the guarantee or increase of life-force (*umoyo*), fertility of the womb, fertility of ground and bumper harvests, good health (*moyo wauthanzi*) and healing, marriage and sex partners, successful business ventures and employment, the acquisition of status, position, popularity and power, magic theft and retaliation/retribution. Thus the stories clearly demonstrate that these charm-dependent actions are animated by the dynamic synthesis of the seven worldview motifs described above.

6.2.3 (a) Which Biblical passages might challenge and subvert the worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency?

The first part of the objective here was to ‘select Biblical passages with the potential to challenge and subvert the worldview motifs animating charm-dependency...’ but the second part is also critical: ‘and study them to determine the theological and practically applicable significance of the texts for the context’. Thus, the second foundation for a missiological approach was considered in order to provide a sound Biblical perspective to facilitate transformative ‘dialogue’ between culture and Bible, or more specifically, between the existing worldview and a Biblical worldview. The particular texts selected, studied and discussed are as follows: Romans 8:12-39; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Luke 15:11-32; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mathew 28:16-20; Mark 1:21-34; 2:1-12; 4:35-41; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Galatians 5:16-20; Ephesians 1:13-14. These texts represent only a sample of texts that might be helpful but they represent a very good starting point (foundation) for building a more Biblical worldview, especially in the particular context of the elect demographic. One text was added (Mark 2:1-12) to the list after the Focus Group discussions because of its perceived importance in the light of the research.

(b) How might they affect this change?

The main aim of the research was to break charm-dependency in ZEC churches by transforming worldview. The selected Biblical texts, properly interpreted and understood with regards to their theological significance and practically applicable significance in the context, are the means by which to stimulate the reformation of spurious notions about God in the local

receptor culture's worldview by renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2) The researcher contends that people can be helped to discover and do by being gently moved from the known - that is all that is familiar to the culture; like stories, challenges and problems - to the unknown, which is biblical truth. To facilitate this journey it is important to build bridges and identify barriers, sensitively and seriously studying culture, and then subjecting it to critical appraisal by the Scriptures (a type of critical contextualization process). A 'critical realist' approach understands knowledge to be the product of worldview which forms the grid through which we view reality, and fundamental to our worldview are stories. Thus, 'new' narratives addressing the prominent themes, needs and fears by employing selected biblical stories as heuristic tools might increase faith and change perceptions of reality, promoting transformation. In this case the 'new' stories about God (Trinity), the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, challenge and modify existing traditional concepts of god, the world, the spiritual realm (authority), salvation, community, identity, purpose and conduct. Contextual discussion and reflection on the new 'stories' may lead to the construction of a more Biblical theology, one which better reflects a biblical worldview. In this way a spiral is created as each new insight is contemplated, filtered and assimilated or rejected, stimulating movement along the epistemological spiral, encouraging a shift in worldview and conduct, and facilitating transformation. This speaks of change at the deep-level of worldview assumptions which will lead to change at the behavioural or cultural level.

Therefore, determining the theological and practically applicable significance of the texts for the context was critical because the texts, effectively communicated and understood, lead to a better apprehension of the nature and character of the living God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), resulting in surrendered and obedient lives manifesting in changes in thinking and conduct as related to charm-dependency. The list of significances is far too long to enumerate here (cf. Chapter Five) but critical themes include: (1) from 'above' - God the Father's immanence, His love and compassion for His children, His sovereignty, His plan of salvation and the security of the believer's inheritance, as well as their assurance of Sonship; Jesus Christ's mediatory and intercessory roles, His authority in the spiritual and temporal realms, His authority to forgive sin and cleanse from evil, and His provision of identity, authority and purpose for believers; and the Holy Spirit's personal indwelling presence, His defining and unifying presence in the church, and His inward transformation of believers, manifesting in the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit and increasing conformity to the image of Christ in spirit and conduct. (2) From 'below' - the believer's identity and purpose are rooted 'in Christ', thus they are assured that they are children of the living God (chosen, justified, forgiven), heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, guaranteed to spend eternity with Him; having open access to the Father to receive grace and mercy, fully confident of Christ's authority and potentially fearless as they carry out His will in the world; Spirit-filled people, sealed and marked by the Spirit as belonging to God, united in

Him as a new-covenant community, presently 'keeping in step with the Spirit', bearing His fruit in attitudes and conduct. The author contends that these themes, as effectively communicated in the power of the Holy Spirit, are foundational for transformation. As Malawians look upward to a Divine transcendent point, that is to the God revealed in and through Jesus Christ, rather than outward or inward, a true Biblical identity begins to take shape (Keller 2016:133). The developmental psychologist, James Fowler (1981:18), explains that faith becomes 'identity-trust', as God's worth is recognized and His worth confers special value on those who recognize it. Thus, we might build effectively on the understanding of the 'worldview' motifs within the local South-Central Malawian traditional religious framework by developing a case-study and dialogical didactic approach dependent on biblical texts presented in juxtaposition to real life stories of charm-usage, which re-envision towards a more Biblical worldview, one which truly apprehends God's glory and finds true identity in Him. This takes into account the Word, the receptor culture worldview, and appropriate modes of learning in context.

6.2.4 (a) How do local ZEC pastors understand these texts?

The guiding objective here was to 'critically discuss these texts with local pastors to glean an indigenous, 'third horizon' perspective.' With hindsight this was not the right question to ask. This would have been the case even if an exegetical exercise was envisioned, because most of the pastors and student-pastors have at least some 'Western' academic background, giving them the basic tools to exegete and interpret the texts. Moreover, many would have heard the texts preached and taught or done the same themselves in the course of carrying out their ministerial duties. However, this was not an exegetical exercise '*per se*', but became ever increasingly about hearing how local people at grassroots might interpret and understand the texts as a consequence of their cultural and traditional religious heritage. That is, how the meaning of the text informs its theological significance and practically applicable significance in the context, leading to practical applications. A better question to ask, and the question that the researcher did end up asking repeatedly in practice, is: 'How do you think local people understand this passage from a traditional perspective? And then, 'why?' or 'what cultural or traditional religious ideas and/or practices contribute to shaping their thinking/understanding in this way?'

(b) What indigenous insights might inform our applications in context?

Following to the previous question, the 'indigenous, 'third horizon' perspective' was, although helpful in distilling theological significance, most profoundly beneficial in the area of unpacking practically applicable significance, and providing contextual material for practical application/teaching. The insights are too numerous to be enumerated here. The majority of

this material is captured in Chapter Five. During the sixteen Focus Group sessions, pastors and student-pastors offered theological insights, contextual background relevant to culture and historical and contemporary traditional religious practice, stories, testimonies, anecdotes and quotes. The material was used to corroborate or illuminate theological significance, and to further establish and develop practically applicable significance (Chapter Five), as well as enhance understanding of worldview motifs and link these to motives for charm-dependency (Chapter Four). Other material was specifically collected for the purpose of its use in teaching and/or application of the texts and stands as a unique pedagogic resource (Chapter Five).

6.2.5 (a) What are the key pedagogic factors to consider?

The final objective was to 'raise key pedagogic considerations regarding effective communication (teaching/learning) of Biblical truth in the context.' The author concluded (cf. Chapter Two) that there are a number of factors to consider in order to convey truth in accessible forms which consider the traits and learning preferences unique to the receptor culture: (1) the fact that most learners are field-dependent and oral learners, many of them illiterate, (2) the receptor culture's orality mindset makes their thinking networked and holistic, their logic does not necessarily follow a Western linear methodology, (3) this in turn means that their learning preferences are more communal, relational, oral, participatory, dialogical, and experiential, (4) therefore, oral learners need the message both packaged and delivered in different ways such as drama, song, story-telling, proverbs, parables or folk-tales, (5) real life issues must take center stage with the focus on the hearer and their particular context, (6) This kind of 'contextual teaching' starts with the known (the experiences and challenges of life as experienced constituting the teaching themes), and moves to the unknown (the Biblical truth), (7) This means that a case-study type approach, where stories of charm-dependency (usage) are discussed and then Biblical stories introduced, is potentially effective, (8) the importance of including the consideration of children in the planning for any teaching on the subject was noted: "If we teach the young ones it means we will have a powerful church and the gospel will go forward" (I B53).

(b) How might Biblical truth be most effectively communicated in the context?

The author contends that orality is the key communication/learning paradigm, and within this paradigm stories are the keys to catalyzing transformation. Stories are invaluable tools in moving people along the epistemological spiral towards changed thinking and therefore praxis. While chronological Bible storying may well be the best approach if time and resources permit, a thematic or topical approach is best suited to our circumstances, given the specific aim to break charm-dependency. The selection and/or shaping of the Biblical stories is critical. Passages which are didactic in nature may be used allegorically or preferably, context specific

stories illustrating the truths contained, can be crafted if particular attention has been paid to the local worldview. Beginning with local stories of charm-usage and building bridges to biblical stories (or passages) which are pertinent is recommended.

6.3 Evaluation of Research Methodology: Viability and Efficacy

6.3.1 Research Design

The research design was eclectic including both literary-compile and empirical ethnographic methodologies. The proposed literary-compile methodology included a descriptive-analytical approach (Pereira 2013:13; Han 2013:9). The proposed empirical methodology was a mixed-method eclectic approach (Thomas 2013:105-106,183). The design frame was multiple case-study within the field of ethnography (Thomas 2013:146-160; Robson 2002:177-185). The eclectic design was necessary as a theoretical foundation needed to be established first and many scholars have written on: (1) worldview in the context, (2) the Bible and understanding/applying it in different contexts, and (3) contextual pedagogics. A framework was posited before moving onto the field research (Chapter Two). Building on from this literary-compile foundation, the Interview findings and Focus Group discussions make unique contributions to the field of study.

The following methods were used to answer the various research questions:

6.3.2 Main motifs in a South-Central Malawian worldview

In order to study South-East African worldview/s and distil the main tenets of a South-Central Malawian worldview, a descriptive synchronic analysis of the historical narrative of the worldviews was applied by literary-compile means. The author articulated eight worldview motifs for the peculiar context rooted in the wider South-East African worldview/s, with a specific view to enumerating those which animate charm-dependency, and the objective of substantiating any assertions through field research findings. While this may appear to be putting 'the cart before the horse' so to speak, it was plausible and worked out well for two reasons: (1) the researcher had some background understanding to charm-usage in the context as a long-standing participant observer and through conducting previous research on the topic, and (2) the worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency also animate other traditional religious practices in the wider context, many of which have been written about in much more detail. Therefore, the researcher was able to draw from a number of sources to posit a worldview and then directly link constituent motifs and charm related practices. This is a unique and helpful contribution.

6.3.2.1 Worldview motifs which animate the use of traditional religious charms

In order to identify motifs in a South-Central Malawian worldview (receptor culture) which animate the use of traditional religious charms, empirical and descriptive ethnographic research of a qualitative nature was undertaken through the collection of charm related stories and reflections by means of semi-structured Interviews. The Interviews were undertaken with a representative or 'probability' sample based on 'proportionate sampling' within a stratified random sampling model of ZEC pastors. Identifying three different forums where pastors from diverse locations (e.g. rural, peri-urban and urban), congregational constitutions (e.g. educational and economic differences) and sizes, could be interviewed enabled the process: Joint Kotalas, Kotalas and Farternals. Data was collected by audio-taping and later transcribed with the help of translators. In order to analyze the collected stories and information, general principles of qualitative data analysis including coding and interpretation, and a type of 'thick description' were used, based on a constant comparative method and leading to a network analysis of themes and sub-themes related to types of charms used, motives for usage (e.g. defensive/offensive) and specific purposes for their use. Methodological triangulation was used to compare/contrast/substantiate the findings. Thus the researcher was able to collect charm related stories from the grassroots in ZEC churches but also gleaned helpful information also relating directly to the types of charms used and the overarching motivations and specific purposes for their use (Chapter Three). Additionally, pastors and student-pastors also provided substantiating evidence throughout the sixteen Focus Group sessions (Chapter Five). All of this enabled the researcher to trace specific examples of charm-dependency to particular animating worldview motifs, but more significantly, to see how the synthesis of worldview motifs create the 'need' for charm-dependency.

6.3.2.2 Challenges Experienced

The main challenges for the researcher included the mileage involved, proposed group meeting dates (pastor's Fraternals, Kotale and Joint Kotale meetings) being changed frequently, and poor attendance at one or two meetings. The researcher also experienced a technical hitch with one out of the 76 recordings and lost the data. The majority of the contents of the 'lost' Interview were salvaged by handwriting from memory as soon as the problem was identified. Transcription proved challenging initially but was expedited by the introduction of a customized coding system for the transcribers/translators. However, overall the methodology was effective and the analysis of the data has led to a very helpful overview of the situation in ZEC churches as it pertains to ongoing charm-dependency, and a 'ready to use' anthology of stories which is a veritable store-house of practical examples of charm-usage.

6.3.2.3 Notable Findings

Some unexpected but interesting and useful insights were revealed through the stories and reflections: (1) The prevalent worldview creates a 'need' for charm-dependency making traditional religious charms indispensable to life for most Malawian people, (2) A pastor summed up the ubiquity of charms, even within the ecclesiological milieu, when he stated: "you need to use charms for everything you have" (I B26). (3) It was noted that the fear of death lies behind all witchcraft fears: (a) "There is fear in the church and in society. This fear is the factor which forces people to engage themselves in such activities...the fear of death, that is the root cause of all the things that are happening... the use of charms, the cutting, whatsoever" (I B60). (b) "many people who believe in charms and medicines are more fearful... they fear death" (I B51). (4) While charms are mostly used covertly by individuals, the number of stories told by pastors and pastor's wives pertaining to congregations or groups within their congregations or communities trying to harm them or remove them from pastorate, demonstrates that charms are sometimes used for communal purposes, and sanctioned by groups of people. (5) Another interesting discovery is that, although traditional cultural pressure (traditional wisdom) arising from the wider community (including the living and the living-dead) does play a role, for the most part, the majority of charm-dependency appears to be more closely tied to witchcraft related fears (including evil spirits) than to the ancestors. The latter, notwithstanding the use of charms by the *Gule wamkulu*, and certain 'herbal' or traditional medicines sometimes said to be suggested by ancestral spirits, through dreams or possession. Even those charms/medicines concocted 'at home' by means of following traditional instructions (wisdom) are mostly to protect from evil spirits and witchcraft rather than ancestors, who would normally be placated through libations, reparations made in community or changes in conduct.

6.3.3 Selection of Biblical Passages

Here the researcher already had a very good idea of what Biblical themes and stories might be necessary and useful in bringing a helpful corrective to spurious receptor culture concepts of God. However, the stories and information provided in the Interviews did provide a very helpful confirmation and in some cases corrective, to the researcher's hypotheses, as 'thick description' was applied in addition to methodological triangulation, the latter highlighting the inefficacy of particular texts as historically used by ZEC pastors (cf. Beaton 2015:37-80). Therefore, the stated methodology was applied: 'Biblical passages with the potential to challenge and subvert worldview motifs animating charm-dependency will be selected for further study by a type of 'thick description' interpretation, linking themes and motives for charm-usage in the grass-roots stories of charm-usage to worldview motifs and corresponding 'reforming' biblical texts.' For example, at least six of the twelve texts initially proposed in the introductory chapter were either

changed or added during the course of the research. The researcher suggests that this is an ongoing process and even as this paper is concluding there are still texts springing to mind which would be directly appropriate and powerfully transformational in the context (cf. 6.6.2 'Recommendations').

6.3.3.1 Theological significance and practically applicable significance of the texts

In order to study the selected Biblical texts to uncover the theological significance and the practically applicable significance for the context, 'each text was overviewed based on sound evangelical principles of historical-critical exegesis', but also, in view of the sevenfold 'missional hermeneutic' articulated by the author in Chapter Two. This search for theological significance involved some exegetical work but was not an explicitly exegetical exercise. What was not stated in the methodology was the need to bring an understanding of the local worldview, and particularly the motivations/purposes for charm-dependency to the table, in order to discern particular aspects of the theological significance for the context. This became increasingly evident to the researcher as the field research findings further illuminated the situation on the ground. Thus, a type of 'thick description' was again used to identify aspects within the broader theological significance of each passage which carry particular significance in the context.

In large measure the explication of the practically applicable significance was determined by the responses of Focus Group participants who provided invaluable contextual information when discussing the Biblical texts, which helped the researcher to identify or substantiate significance. In many cases the background information provided on ATR and culture, not only helps the reader to understand why the Biblical texts and themes are significant, but also to perceive obvious bridges and barriers to communication and the embracing/understanding of the truths contained (see below).

6.3.3.2 Gleaning an indigenous perspective on the selected Biblical passages

It was stated that 'In order to glean an indigenous perspective on the selected Biblical passages and how they are understood in context, further empirical qualitative research will be done in the form of two homogenous focus groups with ZEC pastors (Robson 2002:283-289) in which the selected texts will be read and discussions on text and theological and practical significance for the context will be facilitated by the researcher.' Indeed, the texts were discussed with pastors and student-pastors in sixteen Focus Group sessions. Having the two groups was practically beneficial because the students were more at ease sharing their personal experiences which was very helpful. Data was collected as proposed by means of audio-taping, but data reduction and display by means of session summary sheets was deemed insufficient. The author felt that a brief summary of each discussion was inadequate for the purposes and so changed the

goalposts, preferring to work from full transcripts. Analyzing the contents of the discussions was time consuming but helpful as 'indigenous' insights were noted by coding according to relevance to particular passages of Scripture, and noting consistent themes as they related to worldview motifs. The participants provided a wealth of information to substantiate the theological significance of the Biblical texts and, more profoundly, to illuminate practically applicable significance for the context (Chapter Five). A very useful and unexpected outcome was the collection of pertinent contextual material, including traditional religious theological insights, stories, testimonies, anecdotes and quotes as a 'ready-made' teaching/application resource.

6.3.3.3 Challenges Experienced

Regarding the discussion on theological significance, the researcher faced a major setback when losing the entire completed section due to computer malfunction precipitated by a power cut. Not even specific recovery software helped. This meant reworking the entire section which was time consuming and disheartening, although from another perspective, the added time spent in the Word was productive for preaching and teaching purposes.¹²⁵ Again, as with the Interviews, the researcher travelled thousands of kilometers to complete the Focus Group sessions. It was also challenging to create a timetable for the group sessions which fit in with the Bible College (EBCoM) semester programs. Moreover, College leadership changed documented plans on a whim on more than one occasion, inadvertently disturbing the Focus Group timetable. Therefore, flexibility was required from beginning to end. Pastors found it difficult to attend all of the sessions due to their own pastoral duties and the vicissitudes of the calling, so there was some inconsistency in attendance. However, there was thankfully a core who faithfully attended 90% of the sessions. Initially some of the pastors seemed somewhat reticent to share freely; perhaps afraid of appearing to know too much or to be theologically 'incorrect'. However, the dynamic did change when a core group was established. One of the sessions had to be repeated because the Dictaphone failed to record the discussion (researcher oversight!). The biggest challenge was the transcribing of the sessions. As mentioned, this had not been initially envisioned, but was deemed necessary because of the volume of pertinent information coming from the discussions. It took many months for the researcher to have all the transcripts completed (over sixteen hours of audio data), and even then, those completed by an assistant were at points unintelligible, requiring correcting which involved returning frequently to the audios. The process was, however, worth it in the end, as

¹²⁵ During the re-working phase the author created a number of sermon/teaching outlines pertinent for the context as arising from the Biblical passages.

having the full transcripts enabled a more detailed analysis and the capturing of more useful material for teaching and application.

6.3.3.4 Notable Findings

(1) The popularity of the prosperity gospel is only likely to grow since its basic tenets enjoy such a great affinity with traditional religious thinking. That is to say, beginning with immediate solutions to extant physical problems, moving through the acquisition of health, wealth and possessions as the tell-tale signs of 'blessing', to powerful demonstrations of spiritual authority, the salvation message is at heart very similar.

(2) One of the most encouraging outcomes for the researcher was the recognition on the part of the pastors that much more contextual work needs to be done, and that it needs to be done by them. This relates particularly to finding ways to effectively communicate and understand Biblical passages. One young 'up-and-coming' leader in the church said: "we don't have a localized theology, we are still doing theology using Western forms of thinking and their theological framework and that is what has caused the church... I mean, discipleship has become a problem. Spiritually, people are not growing effectively... because the Christian faith has not being localized as 'our faith' using cultural models or analogies for understanding" (PFG 7).¹²⁶ A prominent educator added: "I think every lecturer can take it as an opportunity to give local examples when teaching. A better understanding should be grounded in your own local perspective rather than giving Western examples" (PFG 7). This is exactly the kind of outcome the researcher was hoping for, to encourage others to take the baton and move forward.

(3) Here again the 'fear of death' was cited as significant and so warrants further explication. The fear of death was described as the single most influential factor pertaining to animating witchcraft fears. As one pastor explained, the greatest fear of Malawian people is death: "those fearing witchcraft, it's not witchcraft itself but death, because those things will cause death...so what is being feared mostly is the things that will cause death" (PFG 1). Thus, this particular fear necessitates the use of, and dependency on, traditional religious charms. All manner of witchcraft fears can be traced back to the fear of death. The fear of being bewitched is all-encompassing because it might lead to diminishing *umoyo* (life-force), terminal sickness, or loss of well-being in any way, resulting ultimately in death. The traditional belief that those who have lived good lives on the earth will be accepted into the world of the ancestors (*mizimu*) does not appear to obviate the underlying uncertainties and fear. Another pastor stating that even for believers, "when death is approaching we tend to be afraid" (PFG 7). Since the possibility of

¹²⁶ The researcher was very happy to be called "a different *mzungu* (white man)" in the context of this discussion (PFG 7).

death is ever present and that reality produces crippling fear, everything that Malawian people do is driven by this awareness. Charm-dependency is a way of coping with the ever present threat (repressing it) without allowing it to overcome and completely debilitate and cripple people. Society in South–Central Malawi has created this mechanism for keeping the fear of death at bay, which is why the author is convinced that the ‘indispensability of traditional religious charms’ owns its place as a constituent motif in the cultural worldview. All this is consistent with what the esteemed anthropologist, Ernest Becker (1973:17), noted many years ago: “the fear of death must be present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self- preservation. But the fear of death cannot be present constantly in one’s mental functioning, or else the organism could not function.”

(4) Traditional herbal doctors remain popular, and so they should, but the lines are blurred between them and those who deal in charms. Sometimes these herbalists are simply referred to as ‘*asing’anga*’ which is unhelpful because the term is closely associated with those who practice charms and magic medicine. Another designation is ‘*asing’anga azitsamba*’ (I B31) which is an improvement because it specifies the use of plants, leaves, bark etc. However, the researcher suggests that a term already occasionally in use, ‘*adokotala azitsamba*’, is best suited, as the pejorative term ‘*asing’anga*’ is omitted. This could become the designated name for those who practice traditional herbal medicine only. If adopted by all in ecclesiological circles, it would help to make a clearer distinction between the two practitioners, for Christians.

6.3.4 Raising key pedagogic considerations

In order to raise key pedagogic considerations regarding effective communication (teaching/learning) of Biblical truth in the context, a descriptive-analysis of related aspects including: orality, story-telling, dialogue, and case-studies was applied by literary-compile means. The conclusions have already been enumerated above (cf. 6.2.5). It should also be noted at this point, however, that from discussions with a number of pastors, the researcher has ascertained that they perceive the need for a deliberate and focused teaching ministry, but that those who have attempted it have failed to gain ground. The researcher contends that this is because of: (1) an overly legalistic and anthropocentric approach governing the choice of Biblical material, and (2) a lack of the necessary resources to effectively communicate critical Biblical truths. The wider eclectic research design enabled the provision of a series of helpful resources to overcome both of these obstacles. Actual pedagogic resources have been provided for a dialogical, story-based, case-study type approach to the teaching/learning dynamic by means of: (1) the positing of the worldview motifs, (2) the unique anthology of stories ready made for use in promoting dialogue on the topic, (3) the articulated discussion on the theological significance of each selected passage, (4) the many examples and helpful ATR

and cultural insights provided by the pastors pertaining to practically applicable significance, and (5) the collection of stories, testimonies, anecdotes and contextually relevant material captured as 'content for teaching/application'.

Negatively, because of the broad scope of the research, the author did not manage to: (1) demonstrate how stories of charm-dependency from the anthology could be practically 'married' to Biblical passages (stories) to stimulate transformative dialogue, (2) craft or shape some of the didactic passages into contextually appropriate stories for didactic use.

6.4. Final thoughts on Witchcraft

Is it a *bona fide* religion? Is witchcraft the contemporary religion of South-Central Malawi? The author contends that the evidence collected in this thesis and his observations as a participant observer in the milieu, point to the reality that witchcraft in Malawi is quite possibly more than a pseudo-religion, or simply an ATR worldview motif. Rather, it could be **the** religion of most people in the demographic. Well known Jewish anthropologist, Emile Durkheim (1915:47) defined a religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim: 1915:47). This functional definition points to the impact of a religion on social life, which is to unite a society around a meaningful identity, thus giving them power. In this context witchcraft 'beliefs and practices' are ubiquitous, uniting all people across ethnic, economic and educational lines. The author is yet to meet a Malawian person, including pastors, who doesn't believe in the reality and efficacy of witchcraft and traditional charms. Witchcraft is axiomatic and everyone is a participant. Charms, medicine, and curses are the sacred things, set apart and forbidden, but the very means by which to prevent or orchestrate death, the great fear animating all practice. The cause-effect dynamic within which people believe that all evil and suffering have a personal etiology is ubiquitous. Moreover, so is the understanding that one's life-force (*moyo*) must be protected and/or enhanced at all costs. Thus, salvation, which is the tangible evidence of physical well-being 'here and now', is found in keeping up the appearance of being *umunthu* in community, maintaining harmony by following social norms and adhering to cultural and traditional religious taboos in the wider community of living and living-dead, but always, at the same time, covertly ensuring that one has the necessary means of self-protection and self-enhancement in order to balance one's life-force adequately, or increase it judiciously, without attracting critical attention. This is the means by which society enables individuals to deny and repress the fear of death, and the many associated fears, enabling it to function.

Many do still subscribe to the historical/cultural ATR beliefs and practices, including acknowledging a Supreme Being, upholding traditional religious institutions such as the *Gule wamkulu* and the territorial rain cults, as well as following traditional wisdom passed down from generation to generation relating to conduct, physical well-being, health etc. Even for those who have moved on, most still have a good appreciation of the beliefs and practices and so the entire 'spiritually charged' background remains relevant. However, witchcraft beliefs and practice is growing apace, becoming the 'central governor' or what unifies society, as the impact of globalization is felt, and traditional religious beliefs and practices come under increasing scrutiny and criticism, and formerly coherent ATR meta-narratives are eroding and breaking down. The sense of disconnection with traditional values and social mores is seen most profoundly in the urban and peri-urban locations, but even in the villages (where witchcraft has always existed), there appears to be a growing openness to magic practices, old and new.¹²⁷ Everyone wants their perceived needs met and so all 'adhere' because the way to do that is by means of witchcraft practices. Whether one is a practitioner of ATR, a Christian or a Muslim, the knowledge and practice of witchcraft appears to be the single uniting factor, that which provides identity. Even if covert and unspoken, it is that one thing which unites society (the wider community) into a 'single moral community', or a 'Church', as Durkheim put it. It may be defined as a moral community because whilst people might deny it publicly, charm-usage, curses and all manner of witchcraft practices, have really become "accepted rules and standards of human behavior" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1995:883) in the context. Publicly one must appear shocked but privately it is commonly accepted that everyone is practicing. Witchcraft is thus that aspect of worldview, or the deeper more primitive motivations, which everyone appears to hold onto 'by faith', believing fervently in its veracity and efficacy, recognizing its impact in every sphere of their lives and acknowledging their need to participate, whether they want to or not. The researcher contends that it is thus a religion.

6.5 Personal Reflections on Experiences during the Study Period

The researcher has faced a great number of challenges during the period of study, especially in the past year, while attempting to write-up the research. These challenges have manifested in spiritual, emotional, psychological, relational, and physical ways. Besides the loss of a significant portion of work and other technical hitches, the author has faced considerable spiritual attack which is difficult to quantify, relational and emotional trauma within the family, an inordinate number of illnesses besetting his children, the frequent breakdown of his vehicle, a

¹²⁷ Here, under the banner of witchcraft, the author includes not only charms but also certain 'Christianized' practices (often but not always Pentecostal), Satanism, and other newly developed utilitarian magic practices.

series of issues with house and property (e.g. leaking roof, termite damage, collapsed fence etc.), technical problems with or the collapse of almost every household appliance, a debilitating loss of vital energy, a decline in motivation, and at times uncharacteristic feelings of depression and self-loathing. There was also the 'ants' incident. When the researcher interviewed one of the witchdoctors he was covered by a colony of ants - said to live in the rudimentary sofa - during the interview. Having been shown to another chair, the same thing happened again, with no explanation forthcoming as to where the second colony came from or resided. There were four other people in the room, unaffected, including the interpreter, the pastor who arranged the interview, the witchdoctor and her assistant. It is a fact that all through these challenges God has been faithful and gracious. Nevertheless, these questions must be asked: (1) what/who caused all these issues? (2) was the timing merely coincidental? (3) was the researcher psychologically affected by continued contemplation of the subject? Or (4) were they the result of personal nefarious action instigated against him? As one of the pastors asserted, "Nothing happens for nothing in Africa" (PFG 1).

6.6 Recommendations for Further Study

The study focused on developing foundations in three particular areas for an effective missiological approach, namely: contextual, Biblical and pedagogic. While considerable material has been provided in each of these three critical areas, researchers can and should do more to build on these foundations:

6.6.1 Contextual Foundations

Firstly, further study/research should focus on 'contextual' exploration of a variety of Biblical passages pertinent to eradicating deleterious syncretism through the transformation of worldview, starting with those mentioned below, in the following areas: (1) theological significance for the context, (2) practically applicable significance for the context, (3) producing contextually appropriate material for the communication and application of the passages, including: helpful background information on culture and related ATR practice, personal testimonies, stories, anecdotes, analogies, illustrations, quotes, proverbs, songs, and drama. The work done in this thesis and the methodology employed serve as helpful signposts, but it is important for Malawian theologians, educators, pastors and church leaders to take up the challenge. Secondly, the impact of increasing religious pluralism in the context on culture, ATR thinking and practice, and in particular charm-dependency, should be studied in more detail. Thirdly, further research on charm-dependency and other ATR practices, such as spirit veneration, spirit possession, initiation rites, and particular institutions (e.g. *Gule wamakulu* and

territorial rain cults for the Chewa) within other denominations would helpfully paint a clearer picture of the challenge at hand, stimulating leaders to initiate contextually appropriate responses. Fourthly, the impact of witchcraft on discipleship within the ecclesiological context presents as a critical matter and needs to be a focus for researchers throughout Malawi. The aim of this study is again a helpful marker, as transformation in this area is a prerequisite for spiritual growth for most people in the demographic. Key area for research include: (1) the impact on witchcraft on children, (2) the phenomenon of scapegoating and how to deal with it, (3) identifying witchcraft practices perpetuated in the church (other than charm-dependency), (4) investigating how witchcraft beliefs and practices have changed over the years, (5) searching for the underlying psychological motivations, and (6) proposing approaches for transformation.

6.6.2 Biblical Foundations

1. The researcher recommends further study of the following Biblical texts and themes and that they are discussed in Focus Groups similar to those documented in this thesis: (1) only when the remote and unapproachable God is truly pictured as the loving, compassionate Father who watches for His children and runs out with open arms to welcome back the repentant, can people begin to grasp the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In this thesis the author has started with Christ's mediatory and intercessory roles and painted a clearer picture of His authority, in order to meet the receptor culture where they are, so to speak, building bridges with concepts already well understood in the culture and within the local ATR paradigm. But there is so much more. People must know that God humbled Himself and took on human form, this is the next step. This is suggestive of the need to study texts related to Christ's coming amongst us, His incarnation, and what that accomplished and means for believers. The following texts are recommended: (a) the story of Jesus' birth as fulfilment of prophecy in Luke 2:1-52, (b) Isaiah 53:1-12, (c) John 1:1-18, (d) Philippians 2:1-11. (2) Building on the former and emerging directly from the research, is the need for more attention to be paid to the efficacy of Christ's death and His triumph over the grave. Death was said to be the great fear amongst the people, that deep-rooted fear which lies behind or animates all types of fear, including bewitchment. Therefore the following texts are suggested- (a) the story of Lazarus' death and resurrection in John 11:1-16, (b) Hebrews 2:14-15 is surely a key text here, as through His death Jesus Christ is shown to "destroy the one holding the power of death - the Devil - and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death", (c) Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection morning in 24:1-12, and (d) Paul's teaching on the inevitability of the believer's resurrection because of Christ's victory over death in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. (3) Finally, although some work was done on this theme, the need for a fully developed 'Biblical identity' is of utmost importance. The believer's new birth "in Christ" (Rom. 5:12-19) must function to inaugurate a

new 'supra-identity' or 'master-identity', that of being God's child (Hayes 2019:173 cf. Light 2012:220-230). Other texts include; (a) 2 Corinthians 5:13-21, (b) Galatians 2:20; 3:26-29, (c) Colossians 3:1- 3, and (d) John 1:10-11. Incarnation, Christ's victory over death, and the identity of believers as God's children, 'in Christ' are Biblical truths with profound theological and practically applicable significance for the context.

2. There are, of course, other challenges and problems posed by syncretistic ATR practices within ZEC and across the wider ecclesiological landscape that should be addressed through the study of Biblical passages. Both problems and apposite reformative passages need to be identified and contextualization needs to be done by local church leaders, theologians and Bible teachers, to enable communication of the truth and transformation.

6.6.3 Pedagogic Foundations

Further study and research should focus on the following: (1) to enable further communication in the context selected passages (cf. Chapter Five and 6.4.2 above) which are didactic in nature can be shaped/crafted into apposite stories or contemporary parables. (2) the researcher recommends the use of particular stories of charm-usage as case-studies, married to specifically chosen biblical passages to stimulate potentially transformative dialogue. Careful consideration needs to be given to the marrying of stories to texts (or stories to stories as suggested above). (3) encompassing both of the above, the researcher also recommends the development of a short course for ZEC. Grounded upon the identity-centered truth of the gospel (Chandler 2015:318)¹²⁸, what is envisaged is a series of lessons on the topic of overcoming charm-dependency. The preparation must consider the need for learner participation, group-work and ongoing dialogue, promoting experiential reflection (Vella 1997:3, 140-148, 18-21, 149-158; Shaw 2014:68-70, 182-200, 231-240). The final product should reflect a 'problem-based learning' approach (Smith 2014:102-110) which is multidimensional, focusing on cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual development (Johnson & Johnson 2017:1-2). In order to move forward on this, further research is required on: (a) Zull's (2002:17) circular process of: (i) concrete experience, (ii) reflective observation, (iii) abstract hypothesis, and (iv) active testing, (b) Shaffer's model of education for the African context, modified by Rowland (2001:166-167), and now called LePSAS: (1) L = learner-centered, (2) P = problem-posing, (3) S = self-discovery, (4) A = action-oriented, and (5) S = Spirit-guided (Rowland 2001:166-167).

¹²⁸ In this case it means asking what it means to live as children of God who are being formed into the image of Christ *vis-a-vis* charm-dependency.

6.6.4 The Importance of Psychology

Studies in the field of psychology could provide a very helpful fourth foundation. The researcher recommends an inter-disciplinary approach for a better understanding of what actually lies behind the conscious beliefs explicitly discussed and taught which constitute what we call worldview. This thesis has shown that deep-seated worldview assumptions animate practice and attempted to articulate some of these motifs and show how they promote the perpetuation of charm-dependency. Transformation has been envisaged primarily as a spiritual-affective-cognitive-behavioural journey towards conformity to Christ, recognizing that people are much more than “brains on a stick” (Smith 2009:41), complex relational, emotional beings, created to worship God, but with deep-rooted patterns of motivation which can’t simply be “changed through cognitive education processes” (Hayes 2019:90). Triangulating the findings from this research with psychological studies would surely prove beneficial. What things deeper set in the human heart and mind drive us? Hayes (2019:90-91), following Feinstein et al (2005:7), states that “psychological studies are revealing that humanity’s first worldview lenses are the deep (usually) unconsciously held beliefs which shape every aspect of life.” Charm-dependency appears to be animated by deep-seated motivations, broadly categorized as worldview motifs, but rooted even deeper than the communal (traditional wisdom) and cultural (witchcraft) manifestations. For example, psychological studies might help to further clarify how and why the fear of death is so profound.¹²⁹ Where does anxiety come from and how does the ego function to defend against it? (cf. Becker cited in Anton 2010:8 and Liechty 1995:35-36) The researcher has contended that witchcraft beliefs and fears appear to consciously and/or unconsciously affect and shape every aspect of life in this context. Why is this so, even for pastors, Bible teachers and those who have heard and received the Gospel? Is culture and religious expression simply a means to deny or repress fear/anxiety? Moreover, what can be learned from the field of psychology about the impact of identity consciousness on worldview, culture and religious practice? (Becker 1973, 1975; Liechty 1995; Anton 2010) How can a Biblical identity become someone’s ‘master-identity’? And what transformative impact might that have? (Fowler 1981; Light 2012; Ukwuegbo 2008) Answers to all these questions would increase knowledge and understanding, providing invaluable insights to enhance the missiological aim to facilitate transformation.

¹²⁹ Terror Management Theory would be an interesting starting point in this regard (Webb 1998:78-79 cf. Becker 1973).

6.7 Summary Comments

6.7.1 Research Summary

The central-theoretical argument of this study is that 'a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in ZEC churches by transforming worldview requires contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations'. This research has demonstrated how and why specific contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations are needed. That is not to say that there is not more to be done in each area, particularly pertaining to pedagogic foundations, but the building blocks have been provided. In terms of foundations, the following have been laid **(1) Contextual foundations:** (a) a theoretical framework for 'why' an understanding of context is so critical for the facilitation of worldview transformation is provided in Chapter Two, (b) the situation 'on the ground' in ZEC churches with regards to charm-dependency, particularly the nature of and purposes for charm-dependency has been investigated and discussed in Chapter Three, (c) eight motifs constituting a South-Central Malawian, Chewa worldview, have been articulated in Chapter Four, (d) a wealth of 'background', cultural and traditional religious information, emerged from the Focus Group discussions on Biblical texts in Chapter Five, (e) direct links between worldview motifs (manifesting in the motivations/purposes for usage) and charm-dependency have been identified and demonstrated in Chapters Three, Four (particularly) and Five. **(2) Biblical foundations:** (a) a theoretical framework for how and why the Bible is indispensable and authoritative for transforming worldview, and the guidelines for an effective 'missional' hermeneutic are provided in Chapter Two, (b) twelve specific texts (sub-divided into fourteen) have been selected for their potential to (i) break down barriers preventing people in the context from perceiving God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in a true Biblical light, (ii) build bridges which encourage connections between helpful traditional religious and cultural concepts of God with the Biblical picture, (c) each text has been studied, discussed and summarized with a view to its theological significance in the context in Chapter Five, (d) each text has been discussed and analyzed with a view to its practically applicable significance in the context, also in Chapter Five (e) other passages apposite to further developing a truer Biblical picture of God, emerging from 'thick interpretation' of the research, have been suggested for further study in this Chapter. **(3) Pedagogic Foundations:** (a) a theoretical basis for communicating truth effectively in an orality based culture where learners are field dependent, through contextually appropriate methods such as story-telling, dialogue and case-studies, is proposed in Chapter Two, (b) the theoretical rationale for using stories as the main methodology for communicating Biblical truth is also found in Chapter Two (including the need to craft context specific stories or parables illustrating the truths contained in didactic passages), (c) an anthology of stories of charm-usage in the ZEC churches has been compiled, and stands as a ready-to-use heuristic tool to stimulate dialogue on the subject, and identify worldview motifs, motivations and

purposes for dependency, in Chapter Three, (d) the articulation of worldview motifs in Chapter Four, with the clearly established links to stories and examples of charm-usage, also serves as a heuristic tool to promote self-understanding and critical appraisal of practice, (e) the Biblical texts, including the study of theological significance and practically applicable significance in Chapter Five, forms the basis or foundational resource for communicating/teaching/shaping a Biblical worldview in the context, (f) the contextual material collected from the discussions on the selected passages in Chapter Five serves as a helpful resource for application when teaching on the passages.

6.7.2 Importance of this Study

Firstly, the study has obvious importance for the ZEC since it: (1) promotes self-awareness, highlighting the importance of knowing and critically appraising ATR practices within the denomination, (2) provides an overview of the situation on the ground within the denomination regarding charm-dependency in South-Central Malawi, (3) uncovers purposes and underlying motives for the use of charms, showing how many in the church still view the world through traditional religious lenses, (4) encourages the consideration of how other ATR practices, also animated by the core motifs, may be/are impacting discipleship in the church through the articulation of such a worldview, (5) has the potential to stimulate a prayerful and deliberate move on the part of the denomination's leadership and pastors to root out charm-dependency and all unhelpful syncretistic practices, (6) provides resources, contextual, Biblical and pedagogic, which serve to enable pastors to more effectively broach the topic with their congregations, for example, the anthology is well-suited to stimulate dialogue on the subject, (7) has already begun to stimulate work on contextualization on the part of some pastors, who are now contemplating the importance of contextually appropriate applications in their preaching and teaching, (8) could potentially provide the foundations for a specific course for the denomination, helping to facilitate transformation in this area and broach other related challenges (the researcher, God willing, would like to create and oversee the implementation of such a program).

Secondly, the findings and suggestions contained in this paper encourage transformation on a broader scale. This is because (1) despite a "diversity in details" (Kaililombe 1999:214), as Ferdinando (1999:9-11) points out, ATR worldviews tend to have much in common¹³⁰, (2) points 1-7, above, with the exception of the specific details (e.g. point 2), apply to denominations throughout Malawi and further afield because charm-dependency is not unique to the ZEC. Rather, the author suggests that it is endemic in Malawi across the ecclesiological

¹³⁰ For example, it is not uncommon to hear South African politicians and clergymen referring to witchcraft and magic in their rhetoric (Johnson 2016:143-144).

spectrum, and that also affects churches and societies all over Africa, (3) the worldview motifs which animate charm-dependency also stimulate other related traditional religious practices. Charm-dependency, critical as it is, is symptomatic of the wider problem of ubiquitous syncretism in the church. Therefore, this study could be a model to catalyze or help similar 'contextual' studies related to different traditional practices in Malawi or in other African contexts, helping to break not only charm-dependency but a variety of inveterate traditional religious practices in the Church.

Thirdly, the research, particularly the depiction of the reality and nature of charm-dependency in the church, and the articulation of worldview motifs, will also be helpful to all missionaries currently serving, or planning to serve in Malawi. The stories of charm-usage, the contextual background information, and the Biblical response provided, will enable a wider appreciation of ATR in Malawi, and the nature of the challenges which we as missionaries are facing within the church.

Finally, Christian educators, especially those teaching ATR, can use much of this material in their classrooms, and should be encouraged through the research to contextualize regardless of the subject matter, giving "local examples when teaching" (PFG 7).

6.8 Conclusion

Charm-dependency hinders discipleship within the ZEC and the wider Church in Malawi and Africa. The problem arising is how to effectively break this charm-dependency and related practices by transforming worldview by means of an approach which is sensitive to the local culture, faithful to Scripture, and pedagogically sound. This research provides contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations for the practical implementation of a missiological approach to do just that. Transformation must be inward, enabled by the Word of God and His Holy Spirit. It depends on the renewal of the mind- which Biblically includes the heart where one's deepest affections and convictions lie- and involves the subversion and rejection of deep-seated ATR worldview motifs which animate the practice, and the "affective predispositions" (Kraft 1996:58) which underpin them, through the inauguration and growth of new Biblical beliefs/convictions about God. These beliefs, shaped, nurtured and matured by Word and Spirit, constituting a more Biblical worldview which makes much better sense of the world which we inhabit and each individual's unique place within it, as God's children, 'in Christ'.

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- A1, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, written notes]. 27 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A2, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 30 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A3, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 29 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A4, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 30 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A5, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 29 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A6, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 29 August 2014, Mitsidi.
- A7, 2014. 'Charm-dependency' in the ZEC churches [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 30 August 2014, Mitsidi.

Semi-Structured Interviews (ZEC Pastors):

- Interview B1, 2019. 'Facts pertaining to the Zambezi Evangelical Church today' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 23 January 2019, Mitsidi.
- Interview B2, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.
- Interview B3, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.
- Interview B4, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.
- Interview B5, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 13 November 2018, Ntcheu.
- Interview B6. 'Witchcraft and charms from the perspective of a pastor's wife' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.
- Interview B7. 'Witchcraft and charms from the perspective of a pastor's wife' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B8. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B9, 2019. 'Witchcraft and charms from the perspective of a pastor's wife' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B10, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 13 November 2018, Ntcheu.

Interview B11, 2019. 'Witchcraft and charms from the perspective of a pastor's wife' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 13 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B12, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

Interview B13, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B14, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 7 January 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B15, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B16, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B17, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B18, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

Interview B19, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 7 January 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B20 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

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Interview B22, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

Interview B23, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B24, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

Interview B25, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 13 November 2018, Ntcheu.

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Interview B29, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

Interview B30, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B31, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

Interview B32, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B33, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B34, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

Interview B35, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 November 2018, Ntcheu.

Interview B36, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B37, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

Interview B38, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B39, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B40, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B41, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 13 November 2018, Ntcheu.

Interview B42, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

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Interview B45, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B46, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Senzani.

Interview B47, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B48, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 26 January 2019, Lingadzi.

Interview B49, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

Interview B50, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B51, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 December 2018, Zomba.

Interview B52, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B53, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 15 December 2018, Lingadzi.

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Interview B61, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B62, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 14 January 2019, Senzani.

Interview B63, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B64, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 5 December 2018, Mitsidi.

Interview B65, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 26 January 2019, Lingadzi.

Interview B66, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 7 January 2019, Mitsidi.

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Interview B68, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2018, Limbe.

Interview B69, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 16 January 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B70, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 16 January 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B71, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 30 January 2019, Limbe.

Interview B72, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 16 January 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B73, 2019. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 11 March 2019, Mitsidi.

Interview B74, 2018. 'Charm-usage and stories related in the ZEC churches' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 4 December 2019, Limbe.

Unstructured Interviews (Practicing Witchdoctors):

Witchdoctor C1, 2019. 'Traditional Medicines and Charms' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 22 June 2019, Manjawira.

Witchdoctor C2, 2019. 'Traditional Medicines and Charms' [personal interview, digitally recorded]. 27 June 2019, Manjawira.

Informal Interviews/Discussions (Pastors and Christian Students/Workers):

Interview D1. 2010. 'Signs, Wonders and Witchcraft' [personal interview with Ps. A Skene]. August 13, 2010, Limbe Sports Club, Limbe.

Interview D2, 2019. 'The availability of traditional charms and medicines'. [personal interview]. 12 May 2019

Interview D3, 2016. 'Experiencing witchcraft and charms in ministry' [personal interview]. 17 November 2018, Zomba.

Interview D4, 2014. 'Experiencing witchcraft and charms in ministry' [personal interview]. 7 September 2014, Zomba.

Interview D5, 2009. 'The power of charms or the power of Jesus?' [personal discussion with Discipleship Group]. 15 July 2009, Blantyre Sports Club, Blantyre.

Interview D6, 2014. 'Can Christians use traditional medicines?' [class discussion with Diploma class]. 9, April 2014, Evangelical Bible College of Malawi, Blantyre.

Interview D7, 2016. 'Experiencing witchcraft and charms in ministry' [personal interview]. 15 December 2016, Ntcheu.

Interview D8, 2015. 'Salvation in Malawian perspective' [personal discussion]. 16 July 2015, Zomba.

Interview D9, 2019. 'Can you really steal someone's moyo?' [personal interview]. 11 January 2019, Manjawira.

Interview D10, 2019. 'Number of ZEC Churches and pastors in the different regions and kotalas' [personal telephonic interview]. 10 August 2019, Zomba/Lilongwe.

Interview D11, 2019. 'Witchdoctors and charms in the cities' [personal discussion]. 16 January 2019, Blantyre.

Interview D12, 'Land grabbing in Malawi as a serious gender issue' [personal discussion]. 21 November 2019.

Focus Groups:

Pastors Focus Group 1, 2018. 'Romans 8:17-25' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 30 November 2018, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 1, 2018. 'Romans 8:17-25' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 30 November 2018, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 2, 2018. 'Romans 8:28-39' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 7 December, 2018, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 3, 2019. 'Romans 8:31-39'; '2 Timothy 2:5'; 'Hebrews 4:14-16' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 11 January 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 2, 2019. 'Romans 8:28-35' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 16 January 2019, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 4, 2019. 'Hebrews 4:14-16'; 'Matthew 28:18-20' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 18 January 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 3, 2019. 'Romans 8:35-39'; '2 Timothy 2:5'; 'Hebrews 4:14-16' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 29 January 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 4, 2019. 'Hebrews 4:14-16'; 'Matthew 28:16-20' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 30 January 2019, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 5, 2019. 'Matthew 28:16-20'; 'Mark 1:21-28'; 'Mark 4:35-41' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 31 January 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 5, 2019. 'Matthew 28:16-20'; 'Mark 1:21-28'; 'Mark 4:35-41' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 7 February 2019, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 6, 2019. 'Luke 15:11-31' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 7 February 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 6, 2019. 'Luke 15:11-31' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 13 February 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 7, 2019. '1 Corinthians 3:16-17'; '1 Corinthians 6:19-20'; 'Galatians 5:16-26'; 'Ephesians 1:11-14' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 13 February 2019, Blantyre.

Pastors Focus Group 8, 2019. 'Romans 8:17-25'; '1 Peter 1:3-12' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 13 February 2019, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 7, 2019. '1 Corinthians 3:16-17'; '1 Corinthians 6:19-20'; 'Galatians 5:16-26'; 'Ephesians 1:11-14' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 15 March 2019, Blantyre.

Students Focus Group 8, 2019. 'Romans 8:17-27'; '1 Peter 1:3-12' [Facilitated Group Discussion]. 15 March 2019, Blantyre.

Online Statistics and Facts:

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2019.

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A1: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER FOR STUDY



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom,
South Africa, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900

Faks: (018) 299-4910

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Research Ethics Regulatory Committee

Tel: +27 18 299 4849

Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by **Research Ethics Committee of Theology (TREC)** on **08/10/2018**, the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) hereby **approves** your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-RERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: A missiological study of the African traditional religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches.																															
Project Leader/Supervisor: Dr DHenry																															
Student: R.B. Beaton																															
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>7</td><td>3</td><td>9</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>6</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td></td><td colspan="5">Project Number</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Status</td></tr></table> Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	N	W	U	-	0	0	7	3	9	-	1	8	-	A	6	Institution				Project Number						Year			Status	
N	W	U	-	0	0	7	3	9	-	1	8	-	A	6																	
Institution				Project Number						Year			Status																		
Application Type: Full Single Application																															
Commencement date: 2018-10-01	Expiry date: 2019-09-3101																														
Risk:	Minimal																														

Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):

General conditions: While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply: • The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the TREC: - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project; - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project; - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit. • The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the TREC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited. • The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-RERC via TREC and new approval received before or on the expiry date. • In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-RERC and TREC reserves the right to: - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project; - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process; - withdraw or postpone approval if: · any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected; · it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the TREC or that information has been false or misrepresented; · the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately; and/ or · new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary. • TREC can be contacted for further assistance via Rudi.Denton@nwu.ac.za.

The TREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-RERC or TREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof Rudy Denton
Chair NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXURE A2: PASTOR'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (NOVEMBER 2018)

1. About your church

- 1.1 What is the name of your church?
- 1.2 Where is it situated?
- 1.3 How many members are there in the church?
- 1.4 How many prayer houses do you have?

2. About you

- 2.1 How long have you been the pastor of this church?
- 2.2 How many years have you been in pastoral ministry?

3. About Traditional Religious Charms

- 3.1 Are you aware of any of your church members/adherents using traditional religious charms/medicines?
- 3.2 Which traditional charms/medicines are commonly used?
- 3.2 Why do people use these charms/medicines?
- 3.4 Can you tell me a 'real life' story about a time when someone or some people in your church used traditional charms/medicines?

ANNEXURE A3: ZEC PASTOR'S INTERVIEW INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

ZEC Pastor's Interview Information and Consent Form

Institution: North West University

Project Head/Supervisor: Dr. Desmond Henry, Registrar/Lecturer- Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa; Associate Lecturer- North West University | +27722399363 | des@btc.co.za

Researcher: Rev. Robert B. Beaton, Missionary, AVAIL Mission
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Assistant: Rev. Molten Kalima, Pastor, Zambezi Evangelical Church
(+265) 999 226 201 | moltendemister@gmail.com

Your consent to participating:

Title of Study: A missiological study on African traditional religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches.

Purpose of Study: I am seeking to provide foundations for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in Zambezi Evangelical Churches. I am investigating contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations as the basis for a curriculum for the denomination. To support this I want to ask you and other practicing pastors in ZEC about the use of traditional religious charms by members/adherents of your church. I would like to hear any stories of charm-usage that you may have to tell me. The ultimate purpose of the research study is to improve the quality of discipleship within the denomination (ZEC), thus strengthening local Zambezi Evangelical Church congregations, by proposing a teaching curriculum aimed at helping to reduce charm-dependency in the Zambesi Evangelical Churches.

Permission: Goodwill permission has been granted for the collection of the data (stories) by the General Secretary of the ZEC, Rev. Luckwell Mtima.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criterion: Only ordained Zambezi Evangelical Church Pastors serving in local Zambezi Evangelical Churches within the Central and Southern regions of Malawi will be selected and recruited as participants for the interviews. Participation also depends on your attendance at your local fraternal in the months during which the interviews will be conducted (specifically November 2018 to February 2019).

Expectations of Interviewees: You will participate in a 15-20 minute interview in November and December 2018 or January and February 2019, conducted by Rev. Beaton. You will be asked a few basic questions relating to the church where you serve. The focus will be on the use of traditional religious charms by people attending the church. You will be specifically asked to tell a story or stories related to the use of any traditional religious charms by members or adherents of your local Zambezi Evangelical Church.

Languages: You may tell your story/stories in either English or Chichewa, whichever language you are comfortable with. If you choose to relate in Chichewa a translator will be present.

Information Collection, Storage and Analysis: The stories will be digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed for consistent themes and patterns by Rev. Beaton. The translators/transcribers of Chichewa interviews will be Rev. M. Kalima and Rev. G. Mbendera. The stories (or parts thereof) may be used in the thesis. All collected information will be destroyed after 18 months.

Privacy/Confidentiality: The digital recordings will be kept under password lock on Rev. Beaton's personal computer. The transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in his office. The interviews will be conducted privately at neutral locations during Pastor's fraternal when congregants are not present. You will not be asked to mention anybody by name. Although the stories may be used in the thesis no names will be mentioned and the information you give will not be attributed to you personally, and you will not be identified in subsequent analysis or in the actual thesis. The information you give will be retained for no more than 18 months and then destroyed.

Benefits: I will benefit from this study because it will form part of my thesis for a Philosophy Doctorate in Theology, in Missiology. You will benefit indirectly because the results will help ZEC to consider following a deliberate missiological approach to break charm-dependency in the churches. Any direct benefit for pastors will be long-term and in the area of ministry, whereby the creation of a suitable curriculum to help church members and attendees to break charm-dependency may enhance your ministry, and strengthen discipleship within your congregation.

Cost/Remuneration: There will be no cost involved for you and no remuneration, financial benefits or incentives for either you or me.

Honesty: There are no right or wrong stories relating to the topic we are discussing. Please be as honest as possible so ZEC can benefit as much as possible from the results of the study.

Harm: I do not foresee any significant risk of harm to you from this study.

Communication of the findings: Participants will not be personally or directly informed with regards to the findings of the research but a copy of the completed thesis detailing the analysis of the data and relevant conclusions will be stored at the denominational headquarters (ZEC) and made available for perusal by any participant on request.

Questions: If you have any questions relating to the interview and anything outlined above please speak to your Pastors Fraternal leader or feel free to contact the principal investigator (relevant details are above).

Contact: If at any time you have any questions concerning this study or wish to cancel your agreement to me using your stories then please contact me using the contact details above. If you remove your consent then I will immediately delete all material and take all practical steps to remove your information from my analysis and report. You will not be punished for this in any way.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study titled:

A missiological study on African Traditional Religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.

- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of researcher

.....
Signature of witness

ANNEXURE A4: ZEC PASTOR'S INTERVIEW INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (CHICHEWA)

ZEC Pastor's Interview Information and Consent Form (Chichewa)

DZINA LA SUKULU YA UKACHENJEDE: North West University

AMENE AKUYANG'ANIRA KAFUKUFUKUYU Dr. Desmond Henry, Registrar/Lecturer- Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa; Associate Lecturer- North West University | +27722399363 | des@btc.co.za

OCHITA KAFUKUFUKUYU: Rev. Robert B. Beaton, Missionary, AVAIL Mission
PO Box 216, Blantyre | 0991749129 | thebeatons28@yahoo.com

OTHANDIZIRA: Rev. Geoffrey Mbendera, Pastor, Zambezi Evangelical Church
+265 995 600 790, +265 886 832 850 | gmbemdera@gmail.com, ggmbendera002@gmail.com

OTHANDIZIRA: Rev. Molten Kalima, Pastor, Zambezi Evangelical Church
(+265) 999 226 201 | moltendemister@gmail.com

Uboni wanu wosonyeza kuti mwatengapo gawo pa kafukufukuyu:

Mutu wa phunziro: Phunziro lokhudza ziphunzitso za chipembedzo cha makolo aku Africa komanso kudalira zithumwa mu Mpingo wa ZAMBEZI EVANGELICAL CHURCH Molingana ndi utumiki wa mau a Mulungu.

Cholinga cha phunziro: Ndikulakalaka kuyala maziko a njira yabwino yothetsera kudalira zithumwa mu Mpingo ya Zambezi Evangelical Church. Ndikufufuza maziko abwino olingana ndi mmene kudalako ku lili ndi chikhalidwe chake koma mosatsutsana ndi mmene baibulo limaphunzitsira kuti likhale tsinde la ndondomeko ya maphunziro mu Chipembedzo. Pofuna kuthandiza kafukufukuyu, Ndikukufusani inuyo pamodzi ndi azibusa ena amene ali mu utumiki kale mu mpingo wa ZEC, kuti kodi akhristu a mpingo wanu ngati amagwiritsa ntchito zithumwa. Ndikhala oyembekezera kuva nkhani ya mmene ena mwa akhristu anu amagwiritsira ntchito zinthumwa zimene inuyo munaziva kwa ena mwa akhristu anu. Cholinga chachikulu chachikulu cha kafukufukuyu ndi chakuti, tipititse patsogolo utumiki wakupanga ophunzira a yesu mu mpingo wa Zambezi Evangelical Church. Uku ndikulimbikitsa mpingo wapa malo wa Zambezi Evangelical church, pakupereka ndondomeko yabwino yamaphunziro ndicholinga chochepetsa ntchitidwe odalira kugwiritsa ntchito zithumwa Mpingo ya zambezi Evangelical.

CHILOREZO: Chilolezo chinaperekedwa ndi amene anali Mlembe wamkulu wa sinodi wa mpingo wa Zambezi Abusa a Lackwell Mtima choti nditolele nkhani zokhudza zimenezi zoterezi.

AMENE AKUYENERA KUTENGA MBALI PAKAFUKUFUKUYU: Azibusa okha amene ndi odzodzedwa ndipo akutumikira pa mpingo wa Zambezi Evangelical Church maboma a pakati komanso ku mwera kwa dziko la Malawi ndi amene adzafusidwe kutengapo mbali pakafukufuku ameneyu. Kutengapo mbali kudzatengeranso kupezeka kwanu pa nkomano wa abusa m'dera lanu pa miyezi imene yasankhidwa kuti mudzafusidwe mafunso okhudzana ndi kafukufukuyu (kuyambira November 2018 kufikira February 2019).

Zimene ofusidwa angaziyembekezere pa nthawi yofusidwa: Mudzayembekezedwa kufusidwa kwa mphindi zosachepera khumi ndi zisanu, komanso zosapyolera makumi awiri ndi abusa a Beaton pa miyezi ya November ndi December 2018, komanso January ndi February 2019. Mudzafusidwa mafunso apadera okhudza mpingo umene inuyo mukuutumikira. Mafunso adzakhazikika pakagwiritsidwe ka zithumwa kwa anthu amene mumawatumikira mu mpingo wanu. Mwapadera mudzafusidwa kuti

muneneko nkhani yochitika yokhudzana ndi kugwiritsa ntchito zithumwa yokhudza membala wanu pa mpingo umene inuyo mukuutumikira.

Chilankhulo: Muli oloedwa kunena nkhani yanu mchiyankhulo cha chichewa kapena chizungu. Mchiyakhulo chimene inuyo mungamasuke nacho mwa ziwirizi. Ngati mungasannkhe kuti munene nkhani yanu mchichewa, omasulira adzapezeka.

KASUNGIDWE KOMANSO KUUNIKIRA KWA NKHANI ZOMWE ZIDZATENGEDWE: Nkhani yanuyo idzajambulidwa, kumasulilidwa ndi kuunikiridwa molingana ndi mitu komanso ndondomeko yake ndi Mbusa Beaton. Omasulira chichewa kupita mchizungu adzakhala abusa a M.D kalima ndi abusa a G. Mbendera. Nkhani yanuyo kapena mbali ina ya nkhani yanu idzagwiritsidwa ntchito mu kafukufukuyu. Zonse zimene zidzatoleredwe pa kafukufukuyu zidzaonongedwa pakadzapita chaka chimodzi ndi theka.

Chisisi: Zojambulidwa zija zidasungidwa mwachisisi mu komputa ya abusa a Beaton zitatsekedwa ndi nambala yachisisi (Password). Ma pepala amene anagwiritsidwa ntchito pakafukufuyu adzatsekeredwa mu kabathi ya abusa a Beaton. Kufusidwaku kudzachitika malo apadera nthawi ya nkumano wa azibusa palibe munthu wina aliyense. Simudzaloledwa kutchula dzina la munthu aliyense pa nthawi ya yakufusidwaku. Ngakhale kuti nkhaniyo izagwiritsidwa ntchito mkafukufukuyu, maina sadzatchulidwa. Ndiponso zimene mwanenazo sizidzatengedwa ngati za inuyo. Inuyonso simudzatchulidwa mukafukufuku weniweniyo. Zimene mwanenazo zidasungidwa kwa chaka chimodzi ndi theka kenaka zidzaonongedwa.

Ubwino: Ineyo ndidzapindula pa phunziro limeneli, chifukwa kafukufukuyu adzakhala mbali imodzi ya degree yanga ya dokotoleti ya maphunziro a Mulungu mbali ya utumiki. Inuyo mudzapindula mwanjira ina chifukwa choti zotsatira za kafukufukuyu zithandiza mpingo wa zambezi Evangelical Church kuti utsatire zolembedwazo ngati njira imodzi wothetsera mchitidwe odalira zithumwa mipingo. Azibusa adzapindulanso patsogolo pake, mbali ya utumiki pamene ndondomeko yamaphunziro yoyenera idzapangidwa kuti ithandize mamembala a mpingo ndi onse amene amapezeka nawo tchalitchi ya mmene angathetsere tchitidwe odalira zithumwa, zimenenso zikhoza kuthandiza utumiki wanu ndikulimbikitsa kupanga ophunzira.

Mtengo wake: Palibe phindu la ndalama kapena cholimbikitsa chilichonse kwa inuyo komanso kwa ineyo pachifukwa chakuti tatenga nawo mbali pakafukufukuyu.

Kuona mtima: Palibe kuti nkhaniyi ndiolakwika kapena kuti nkhani iyi ndiyabwino molingana ndi mutu umene ukukambidwawu. Chonde khalani **oona mtima ndithu** ndicholinga chonena kuti mpingo wa zambezi evangelical Church upindule kwambiri ndi zotsatira za kafukufukuyu.

Chiopsezo: Sindikuona kuthekera kwa chiopsezo chilichonse pa inuyo pakutenga nawo mbali pakafukufukuyu.

Kulumikizana pa zotsatira: Amene atenge nawo mbali pakafukufukuyu sadzandiwitsidwa mwapadera pa zotsatira zakafukufukuyu. Bukhu la zotsatira zakafukufukuyu lounikila zonse ndi mathero ake lidzasungidwa ku likulu la mpingo wa Zambezi Evangelical Church. Ndipo wina aliyense amene anatenga nawo mbali pakafukufukuyu adzaloledwa kuwerenga bukhuli ngati atapempha kutero.

Mafunso: Ngati muli ndi mafunso ena alionse okhudza mafunso olo chilichonse chimene chakambidwa pamwambapa, chonde fusani tsogoleri wa nkumano wa abusa, kapena mukhoza kufunsa kwa mwini wake wakafukufukuyu pogwiritsa ntchito ma address amene ali mwambawo.

Kufikira: Nthawi iliyonse ngati muli ndi funso lokhudza phunziroli, kapena kuti mukufuna kuthetsa gwirizano wanu ndi ine pa nkhanu zimene mwandipatsa kuti ndisadzigwiritse ntchito, Chonde ndifikireni pakundilemba kapena kundiimbira pogwiritsa ntchito ma address ali pa mwambawo. Zikatero, ineyo ndidzafufuta zonse zimene munandipatsa kuti zisagwire ntchito pakafukufuyu. Simudzalandira chimbalo chilichonse chifukwa chachimenechi.

Kulengeza kwa amene atenge nawo mbali

Pakusainira musimu Ndikugwirizana nazo kuti nditenga nawo mbali pakafukufuyu pa mutu oti

Phunziro lokhudza ziphunzitso za chipembedzo cha makolo aku Africa komanso kudalira zithumwa mu Mpingo wa ZAMBEZI EVANGELICAL CHURCH Molingana ndi utumiki wa mau a Mulungu

Ndikulengeza kuti

- Ndawerenga zonse zimene zalembedwazi magawo onse. Zalembedwa mu chiyankhulo chimene ndimatha kuyankhula mosavuta komanso komanso ndi chiyankhulo chimene ndimamasuka nacho.
- Ndinali ndi mwayi ofunsa mafunso kwa munthu wapatsidwa pepala limene lalembedwa zonsezi, ndi mwini wake amene akupanga kafukufukuyu, ndipo mafunso anga onse anayankhidwa bwino.
- Ndavetsetsa kuti kutengapo mbali pakafukufukuyu ndikodzipereka ndipo sindinakakamizidwe kutero.
- Ndikhoza kusankha kusiyira panjira pakutengapo mbali pakafukufukuyu nthawi ina iliyonse ndipo sindingalandile chimbalo chilichonse pa chifukwa chimenechi.
- Ndikhoza kufunsidwa ndi amene akuchita kafukufukuyu kuti ndisapitilize kutengapo mbali pakafukufukuyo pa zifukwa zimene opanga kafukufukuyu akuzidziwa komanso ngati ndisakutsatira ndongosolo limene ineyo ndi amene akupanga afukufukuyu tinagwirizana.

Malo amene ndasainila..... Tsiku.....Chaka cha 20....

.....
saini ya otenga nawo mbali

.....
saini ya mboni

Kulengeza kwa munthu amene watenga pepala la zimene zalembedwazi

Ine (dzina).....Ndikulengeza kuti

- Ndinafotokozera zonse zimene zalembedwa papepalali kwa
- Ndinamulimbikitsa munthuyu kuti afunse mafunso ndipo ndinatenga nthawi yakumufotokozera moyenera.
- Ndakhutira kuti munthuyu wavetsetsa mokwanira mbali iliyonse ya kafukufukuyu monga mmene zalembedwera mwambamu.
- Ndagwiritsa ntchito omasulira/ sindinagwiritse ntchito womasulira.

Malo amene ndinasainira.....Tsiku.....20.....

.....
Saini ya amene watenga pepala lembedwa zimenezi Saini ya munthu ochitira umboni.

Kulengeza kwa munthu amene akuchita kafukufukuyu

Ine (dzina).....Ndikulengeza kuti

- Ndinafotokozera zonse zimene zalembedwa papepalali kwa
- Ndinamulimbikitsa munthuyu kuti afunse mafunso ndipo ndinatenga nthawi yakumufotokozera moyenera.
- Ndakhutira kuti munthuyu wavetsetsa mokwanira mbali iliyonse ya kafukufukuyu monga mmene zalembedwera mwambamu.

Malo amene ndinasainira.....Tsiku..... Chaka cha 20.....

.....
Saini ya amene akuchita kafukufukuyu.

.....
Saini ya munthu ochitira umboni.

ANNEXURE A5: LETTER OF GOODWILL FROM THE ZAMBEZI EVANGELICAL CHURCH



Zambezi Evangelical Church

Discipling Nations for Christ

7th December 2017,

Dear Rev. Robert Beaton,

RE: PhD Research within the Zambesi Evangelical Churches

I write to confirm that I, in my capacity as the General Secretary of the Zambesi Evangelical Church, along with the leadership of the denomination, grant you permission to carry out your empirical field research within the denomination, during the year of 2018. I understand that this will include interviews with pastors in various locations, as well as Focus Groups with pastors, and pastors in training, at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi.

I pray for the success of the research and trust that as a denomination we will ultimately benefit from your work with regards to our discipleship processes. May the Lord bless your research and use it to strengthen His Church and enhance the Kingdom.

Thank you too for your continued ministry of preaching, teaching and evangelism within the denomination. May this research also enhance your ministry amongst us, for Christ's sake.

Yours in the Faith,

Rev. Luckwell Mtima
General Secretary

ZAMBEZI EVANGELICAL CHURCH
MITSIDI SYNOD
P.O. BOX 490
BLANTYRE — MALAWI

All correspondence to
The General Secretary, Mitsidi Synod Office, PO Box 490, Blantyre
Email: zecmitsidisynod@yahoo.com | Cell: 0999950948
Matthew 28:19-20

**ANNEXURE A6: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO USE PREVIOUS RESEARCH FROM BTC
(BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA)**

The Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa

260 Oak Avenue, Randburg 2194

E-mail: info@btc.co.za

Tel: (011) 886-0421

Facebook: btcsa

Registration No: 2003/019542/08

P.O. Box 50710, Randburg 2125

Website: <http://www.btc.co.za>

Fax: (011) 886-0453

Twitter: @BTC_SA



Attention: Rev. Robert Beaton

28 November 2017

Permission to Use the Empirical Data Gathered for your MTh Work.

Dear Sir,

Following your e-mail request of 24 November 2017, we hereby grant you permission to use the empirical data you have collected for your MTh project with BTC. Our permission is granted for only using data as it pertained to that project and as it was reflected in your dissertation dated July 2015. Attached is the original Appendix D (Human Participation Consent Form).

Wishing you well in your continued research.

Regards,

Prof Dr "Piff" G.C. Pereira

Dean of Studies



ANNEXURE A7: CHEWA TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

This is a supplement to the 'worldview motifs' discussed in Chapter Four. The material provides the reader with a wider historical, political and theological background understanding of the Chewa religious institutions, namely: *Gule wamkulu* and the territorial rain cults, *Chisumphu* and *Mbona*. Numbering remains consistent with the relevant Chapter in the thesis (Chapter Four):

4.2.6.1 *Gule wamkulu* (Nyau Societies)

Ott (2000:178) states that '*Gule wamkulu*' is actually the correct designation or term for the Nyau societies as this is what the members call themselves, and the term 'nyau' or nyau has a perjorative character for the initiates. They probably originate from the Akafula/Batwa tradition since Nyau may actually have been the traditional religion of the hunter-gatherer Batwa (Amanze 2003:149; Morgan in Boucher 2012:5-6) and some of the characters represented in the dances make a possible allusion to the Akafula/Batwa people (Boucher 2012:49).¹³¹ Schoffeleers (1999:150) agrees that the *Gule wamkulu* is almost definitely a pre-Phiri development (although from the Banda tribe), noting that there is and has always been strident 'Nyau' activity in the North.¹³² Therefore, '*Gule wamkulu*' is a Chewa (and Mang'anja) tradition, although other groups like the Yawo and Ngoni have been incorporated over the years as a result of contact with the Nyau organizations (Ott 2000:179).

The religious symbolism is powerfully cosmological and harkening back to the creation of the world and mankind. It is understood that there is a close link between the origins of the Nyau, '*kaphirintiwa* myth', and the theme of creation (Ott 2000:180-181; Schoffeleers 1999:150-151; 1973:47-60).¹³³ Certainly the *Gule wamkulu* dancers are re-enacting primordial events, functioning to remind people of the original harmony of the creation existing between men, God and the animals and expressing the desire of the people to enjoy such a harmonious and fruitful life again (Ott 2000:182). Indeed, Schoffeleers (2000:32) describes the performance of the Nyau societies as being "in terms of the Chewa magico-religious system, the institutionalized dramatization of the Kaphiri-Ntiwa myth." As the *Gule wamkulu* gather in the forest (*dambwe*), adhering to taboos harking back to the rain cults and symbolizing entrance into the fertile rain forest at the beginning of time, don the masks representing the spirits of men

¹³¹ Morgan also suggests that the *Gule* might have arrived with the Banda migrations (circa 800 A.D.).

¹³² The North here refers to all territory North of the Southerly Lower Shire valley.

¹³³ One tradition assigns their origin to the hand of God when he created the earth and human beings to people it, while another tradition assigns their origin to the hand of Makewana, the rain-shrine princess at Msinja.

and of the wild animals from the bush (*Zirombo*)¹³⁴ and enter the village to meet with the people, the separation of God, men and the animals through fire is temporarily forgotten. Villagers gather round with their symbols of reconciliation (calabashes of beer) waiting to experience the first or primordial rains from the creation myth again (Ott 2000:182-183 cf. Schoffeleers 1968:307-415). The temporary reconciliation is all too soon over when the dancers disappear back into the bush to burn masks and hide their costumes from the living people which speaks of both their literal transformation into the ancestral spirits and reminds us of the fire that destroyed the original harmony (Ott 2000:182; Schoffeleers 2000:32).¹³⁵ The forest and their actions symbolize that much longed for hidden place of primordial harmony. Thus according to Schoffeleers (1968:307-415 in Ott 2000:183), the performance of the *Gule wamkulu* is a re-enactment of the history of the world from the very beginning. The performance of the *Gule wamkulu* at various stages of life and death “lifts basic human experiences such as birth, death and rebirth, onto a higher plane and imbues them with existential meaning” (Schoffeleers 2000:13).

Politically, they have been a powerful force for cultural resistance, often at the forefront of power struggles with immigrating Bantu people groups, British imperialists, and evangelizing Christian Churches (Ott 2000:179). They have enjoyed a measure of legal impunity, freeing them to actively resist infringement and encroachment on their rights. Schoffeleers (1999:151) explains that they are jurally “independent of the public courts with regard to all matters pertaining to their organization”. However, primarily, the Nyau exists to intercede for and protect the people (Van Breugal 2001:167), placate the *mizimu* (ancestral spirits) who are the guardians of ancestral customs (*miyambo ya makolo*).

Historically, as the rain shrines became more dependent on the Phiri dynasties they gradually lost their cultic links with the Nyau societies organizationally and thus the role of the latter in linking shrine to people and people to shrine diminished. However, the Banda fought to retain control of the *Gule wamkulu* (Boucher 2012:49),¹³⁶ and given their intimate connection to village chiefs they established closer links to the village structures, becoming defenders of their autonomy and religious interests against the centralizing and transformative policies of the Phiri (Schoffeleers 1999:160). Theologically, this marked a division between “the spirits of the aristocracy and those of the commonality” (Schoffeleers 1999:177). The *Gule wamkulu* were

¹³⁴ The Chewa word ‘*zirombo*’ literally means animals of the forest but when used to describe the masks of the *Gule wamkulu* it takes in all the deceased spirits, including those of the ancestors in addition to the animals.

¹³⁵ Sometimes masks are actually burnt in an obvious allusion to the destructive primordial fire.

¹³⁶ More historical background is provided in the next section on territorial rain cults.

pushed out to the villages where they represented the spirits of the common people and therefore the wider community of all ancestors (Ott 2000:181).

4.2.6.2 Territorial Rain Cults

The fact that the High Creator God is understood to be in some way involved in blessing people with rain and fertility is clear, as Ott (2000:163) notes: “the prayer for rain is the most obvious way that the human being expresses both creatureliness and dependence on ‘higher powers’”. Messages may be conveyed in turn from God to man via the resident spirit medium or representative. The territorial mediums are ostensibly competent to pronounce authoritatively in the areas of moral censorship, cognitive guidance and political mediation (Schoffeleers 2000: 68, 75).

4.2.6.2.1 The *Chisumphi* Cult

In this cult the phallic symbolic ritual act between *Thunga* (the central cult object represented by an Mbewe official) and *Makewana* (the resident ‘spirit wife’) pointed not only to the fertility of the land but also more specifically to Makewana’s chiefly initiation responsibility towards young girls. Her ritual intercourse with Kamundi (*Thunga*) completed the ‘opening’ of their wombs but forfeited the fertility of her own womb. If she did fall pregnant she would have to die (Ott 2000:167). Makewana, and thus all local shrine priestesses, had to remain otherwise celibate and unmarried.¹³⁷ Even in cases where localized shrines had no male ritual official married to the spirit wife, their relationship with *Thunga* was still “conceived of as explicitly sexual” (Vail 1999:217). As Linden (1999:201) states, “Chisumphi theology, with its phallic messenger who visits wives of the High God at shrines throughout Central Malawi, provides a model of Chewa polygynous, uxori-local society.” Chisumphi, as father and husband was seen as an “impermanent and mainly sexual presence at rain-shrines, there to fertilize and depart, just as the role of the Chewa man was to impregnate his wife, whose task was procreation on behalf of her own matrilineage” (Linden 1999:202). Theologically, Linden explains that

Such male spirit-representation provided an adequate relationship with an inarticulate deity whose only communication with man was a seasonal provision of fertility ... as rain or semen, in rain cult or initiation rites, for the land or for women (1999:199-200).

Over time, as a result of Phiri expansion, especially the developing cult of the Phiri royal ancestors, and the growing role of shrine prophetesses (Vail 1999:225-226), Thunga’s representative role and even his symbolism of cosmic male force to the proto-Chewa, reduced

¹³⁷ One pastor referred to Makewana as a ‘god’ because of her venerated position in Chewa traditional religion (PFG 2).

significantly. Christian influence further eroded *Thunga* worship and the High God cult as it had been known at Msinja. Quite recently, a 'Makewana' stated that the Chewa High God was still known as *Chisumphu* but that he (the now male *makewana*) was possessed by the '*mizumu woyera*' (Holy Spirit), who had taken Thunga's place as messenger-intermediary (Linden 1999:201). Vail (1999:220) writes of Thunga that, "under the impact of changes by the twentieth century, he is fading from memory in many areas, although he still survives as a mime figure in the *nyau* dances danced at the deaths of chiefs." However, there remains evidence of shrine practices clearly linked with Thunga. For example, Van Breugal (2001:56-57) noted that in the 1970's at Bunda Hill all shrine dignitaries were forbidden from having sexual intercourse with their wives during the entire rainy season (December-April) for fear of destroying the efficacy of the rituals ('*kudula miyambo*').¹³⁸ He rightly traces this back to the sexual rituals at the mother shrine, Msinja, described above. He (2001:67) also discovered that people in the villages still considered certain snakes like the python (*thunga*, *nsato*, *napolo*, *chilele*) to be favored by Chiuta (God). These snakes were called 'masters of the rain', and if one was killed, a special ceremony in which the chief wrapped the remains of the snake in black cloth and threw it in the river, accompanied by a set prayer, was required. If the python killer was unidentified a more solemn sacrifice would have to be made or rain might be withheld.

In later years, a leading Phiri official took on the role of Makewana's husband and python, and was thus linked directly with God and viewed as superior to the spirit wife (Amanze 2003:151-157); blood sacrifices were introduced along with the installation of sacrifices of Phiri descent (Schoffeleers 1979:159; Van Breugal (2001:47). Most significantly from a theological perspective, a gradual process had begun of integrating the chief's ancestors into the cult which resulted ultimately in the latter becoming the primary mediators between the High God and people (Ott 2000:165). In fact, veneration of the High God receded and 'worship' of the royal ancestors became the norm (Ott 2000:165). Schoffeleers (1999:160) explains that the spirits of the royal Phiri (deceased chiefs and notable kinsmen), "came to be known as territorial spirits with functions analogous with those of Chisumphu."

¹³⁸ Schoffeleers (2000:29-33) perspicuously notes that the burning of the bush in Malawi still has "magico-religious significance." Today, at the onset of every hot season, many fires, intentionally lit, can be seen all over Malawi. These bush fires are interpreted as symbols of the earth's puberty and death. In this conception, the seasonal cycle of the earth and the human lifecycle, represented primarily by the coming of age (sexually) of girls and the passing on into the spirit world of all men, are linked. Theological reflection on the kaphirintwa myth encourages recognition that the earth produces life and then new life after the bush fires, symbolizing the earth's fertility, sex, human fertility, and the new life of spirits of the dead. Interestingly, Schoffeleers notes that the name Malawi actually means 'fire flames' and that "it was originally used as a name for the ancestral spirits, the people under their tutelage, and the places at which they were worshipped" (Schoffeleers 2000:32-33).

Significantly, these new developments brought about a division: “on the conceptual level, a division between royal spirits and those of commoners, concomitant with this on the organizational level, a division between the territorial shrines and the nyau” (Schoffeleers 1999:161). An institutional spirit-mediumship cult developed (Linden 1999:196), an inspirational one as opposed to hereditary (Ott 2000:166-167)¹³⁹, opening the door for a proliferation of prophetesses and prophets outside of the localized Msinja shrine (Linden 1999:160). Autonomous spirit-possession cults relegated Thunga to the state of a spirit (not the High God) (Linden 1999:200-201).

Between 1835 and 1870 Msinja was almost completely destroyed through raids, first by the Portuguese traders and then by the Ngoni. A number of unsuccessful attempts were made to revive the original shrine at Kaphirintiwa (Schoffeleers 1999: 170-171, 174-175) but the original Chisumphi shrine organization had fragmented and never recovered her former glories. The early 20th century saw the decline of Chisumphi prophetism and the disappearance of spirit wives with men assuming their titles. The earlier decentralization of the cult gave rise to the adoption of village chiefs or headman to the ritual role (of Makewana) formerly played by the female rain makers (Van Breugal 2001:47). The ritualistic roles of the rainmaker/caller were then closely associated with secular leadership, and the latter was once again tied into linear succession. Today, in the words of Schoffeleers, the Chisumphi cult:

still exists, be it in a rudimentary and highly fragmented form. It is left with the sacred drum, a handful of shrines... a number of titles, some of which have been converted into secular offices, and a sporadic re-enactment of rituals ... Prophetism and ecstasy have completely vanished ... for which foreign possession cults now substitute (1999:174-175).

A number of local village rain shrines do still exist and are inevitably linked back to Kaphirintiwa and the Chisumphi cult by means of their connection to the Banda clan, the Makewana tradition, or a cult name that reveals a relationship to the original Chisumphi cult (Ott 2000:172-173).

Historically, two main sub-shrines were established from Msinja, namely Mankhambwe and Ulongwe (Ott 2000:169-172). At Mankhambwe, “the spirits of the deceased chiefs gradually came to be seen as the primary mediators between God and humankind. In the rain prayer they superseded the original spirit mediums direct link to the sacred” (Ott 2000:170). The Bimbi sanctuary near Ulongwe in the Mangochi district had a special religious cult leader designated ‘*Bimbi*’ or ‘rainmaker’ (Amanze 2003: 157-158) who operated under the protection of the paramount chief in the area at that time. Thus the Bimbi cult developed an organization not

¹³⁹ She could not cut her hair or fingernails because to do so would ‘cut the rain’.

based on families or lineage but on the basis of the unity of a number of villages in a certain geographical location near to a shrine, which served as an 'inter-local' religious worship center. A complex territorial cult (religious organization) developed all over the Upper Shire valley characterized by numerous 'junior' cult leaders all given power to own shrines and invoke the much needed spiritual powers for help.¹⁴⁰ Ngoni attacks (1865-1870) led the Chewa in the Upper Shire valley to seek the political and military protection of the Yawo. They had to recognize the political authority of Liwonde in secular matters, while Liwonde bowed to Bimbi in religious matters. The Bimbi cult thus became a kind of state religion with the central shrine at Ulongwe for both Chewa and Yao (Amanze 2003:168). Subsequently a number of other Yawo chiefs followed Liwonde's example making Bimbi their spiritual leader. He in turn gave them the right to maintain their own smaller shrines. This arrangement was reinforced during the colonial period when the British officials affirmed Yawo paramount chiefs in political matters (Amanze 2003:169). Today the Yawo still occupy the chieftaincies whereas the Chewa are represented in village headmanships (Amanze 2003:167). Most people in the rural areas still believe that agricultural productivity is dependent on the ritual role of the Chewa village headmen which means that Yawo chiefs still comply with Bimbi cult directives, relying on the appropriately appointed Chewa representatives to consult their dead ancestors and following their directives to ensure good crops and a harmonious environment (Amanze 2003:170).

4.2.6.2.2 The Southern 'Mbona' Cult

A second territorial rain cult also developed to the South. The Mbona cult "was and is integral to the Mang'anja people" and is recognized as one of the biggest rain cults in Central and Southern Africa. At its height, towards the end of the 16th century and into the 17th century, the cult's influence extended throughout the Lower Shire valley and the adjacent areas in Malawi and into Mozambique and Zambia (Ott 2000:175). The initial cult centers on a male rain prophet by the name of Mbona who had miraculous powers and brought rain to the country.

In the Lower Shire the Lundu kings built a separate 'Maravi' state.¹⁴¹ In order to centralize the state, they attempted to bring the existing Nsanje shrine under state control and make it the cultic center of the kingdom. They were opposed by the Nyau and Mbewe, (ruling proto-Chewa chiefs), who killed Kaphwiti's installed a male medium (Mbona) (Schofelleers 1999:163).¹⁴² This junior-kinsmen of the Lundus, was viewed as a martyr and became the focus of the reformed cult, venerated as 'priest, prophet and martyr'. The central spirit was now Phiri, not

¹⁴⁰ Leaders could invoke help in times of crisis such as droughts, wars and the outbreaks of epidemics.

¹⁴¹ North of this it was the royal Karongas and Undis that established dynasties respectively.

¹⁴² Kaphwiti was originally one of Undi's subjects but broke away to establish his authority over large tracts of land in the Southern region before the last quarter of the 16th century when Lundu appropriated most of the territory.

Banda, which established their ownership of the cult. Before his death he had requested that a shrine be erected in his honour, telling the people that as long as he was remembered, the rains would continue to fall (Ott 2000:175). The center of the cult was located at Khulubvi in Nsanje to the South, where huts were built for Mbona and his wife, Salima. Not far from their huts was the sacred pool called 'Ndione'. The pool's reddish brown waters are reputed to symbolize Mbona's life-blood (Ott 2000:176). After Mbona's martyrdom, a spirit medium was periodically 'possessed' by the re-incarnation of Mbona which took the form of a python (Ott 2000:176). This ecstatic possession would mark the start of the rainmaking ritual during which the spirit-mediums authority would be accepted by the local chiefs (Ott 2000:176-177). Thus the Southern cult developed around a divinized person with rain prayers addressed directly to Mbona.

However, in reality, the Mbona cult has never been a completely 'unified' territorial rain cult and was only loosely held together by the Lundus since there were in effect three different forms of the cult in conception and organization, all of which were to varying degrees orientated towards the historical figure Mbona. At the Nsanje Shrine with a Phiri 'Mbona' installed, the spirit wife no longer had any secular or mediumistic powers. In fact, Lundu provided the spirit wife, and did so in grand procession, symbolizing the unity brought by the cult to Lundu territory (Schoffeleers 1999:161-165). Thus the Lundus had full political control of the cult in the Lower Shire (Nsanje) where the people were of one mind regarding Mbona as "priest, prophet and martyr, and only there did myth and ritual combine into an effective mechanism of political integration" (Schoffeleers 1999:165-166). Here, Mbona represented a 'divinized' human being (PFG 2). Nevertheless, senior chiefs still maintained lesser and dependent shrines in their areas.¹⁴³ However, at the Thyolo Shrine, North of Nsanje, a similar religious organization to the Chisumphi cult (in ideology, organization and socio-political structures) had already developed. The Thyolo organization pre-dated developments at Nsanje but did not remain unaffected by them (Schoffeleers 1999:161-162; Ott 2000:177). Whereas the Phiris introduced royal historical personages as integral to rain prayers to the North, and the divinized Mbona to the South, the local spirit wife at Thyolo was from the Banda clan, even though she was referred to as Mbona, which can be translated as 'Seer' from the Chewa word '*wona*' (to see) (Schoffeleers 1999:162). The spirit wife still held significant religious and political clout, even in the mid to late 19th century under the Mankhokwe dynasty (Schoffeleers 1999:169,172-173) and "the Mbewe priests and chiefs succeeded in running the shrine activities in spite of the

¹⁴³ In the South, in the second half of the 19th century, severe drought and the escalation of slaving forays saw the destruction of the Nsanje shrine (1863).

attempts of the Lundu chiefs to control them” (Ott 2000:177).¹⁴⁴ Therefore, they managed to continue in a recognizable form the “tradition of the creation God of Kaphirintiwa” (Ott 2000:177). As such there were “two different Mbona cults: one at Thyolo which continued the ancient Proto-Chewa organization; the other at Nsanje where a new system came into operation” (Schoffeleers 1999:163).¹⁴⁵ Later, a third distinct expression of the cult was developed by the Bororo people who lived East of the Shire in the Zambezi area. They viewed ‘Mbona’ “less as a historical personage than as a nature spirit ... identified with the great mythical snake, known in Southern Malawi as ‘*napolo*’” (Schoffeleers 1999:165). This animistic understanding of the divinized python or ‘river snake’ appealed to a wider immigrant pool, people groups such as the Sena, Tonga, Lolo and Lomwe all embraced the cult in this area. They still depended on the Mbona shrine at Nsanje to some extent for political expedience and it was understood that the Lundus had kinship ties with the central spirit. However, in Bororo territory the cult took root, and lasted, in this quite different form (Schoffeleers 1999:164-165).

Ultimately, Mbona served to unite people, particularly in the deep South of Malawi, religiously and politically. Schoffeleers (1999:175-176) explains that “To the Mang’anja the cult is a means of preserving their prerogatives as ‘owners of the land’” while “On a wider plane, the cult ... has often defended the rights of the population or of oppressed sections among the population” (cf. Amanze (2003:174).¹⁴⁶ Therefore, later settlers in the Shire valley (e.g. Senna and Lomwe) followed the cult in large numbers. The fact that in the Mbona cult spirit wives did not hold secular offices precluded a proliferation of ‘independence’ movements and restricted prophets and prophetism to kinsmen of the chiefs, meaning that charlatans and the power hungry could not gain a foothold (Amanze 2003:174; Schoffeleers 1999:174-176). Moreover, with Christian proclamation in the early 20th century the assimilation of some biblical elements

¹⁴⁴ After the decline of the Lundu state, Mankhokwe developed a type of theocracy extending from Chikwawa in the South, taking in some of the Bororo territory to the East, and into the Shire highlands to the North but he was not the supreme authority as he submitted to the spirit at Thyolo, seeking Mbona’s advice through the resident spirit wife.

¹⁴⁵ In the late 19th century the shrine at Thyolo was wrecked by the Kololo, who murdered both Lundu and Kaphwiti. They set themselves up as rulers and embraced the Nyau but rejected the rain shrines entirely, in so doing cleverly preventing any political interference by the religious establishment and gaining the favour of the common people in the villages (Schoffeleers 1999:172-173). While there is evidence of a revival of the Thyolo cult towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, still maintaining a titular spirit wife and occasionally holding ceremonies, the cult was never fully revived to its original form.

¹⁴⁶ The Mbona often rallied against chiefs criticizing them for abuse of their political powers so defending the general population and particularly the oppressed. During the agricultural reforms of 1922 and 1949 the people in Nsanje refused to comply with government ‘farming’ advice on cotton growing and producing good crops in general, specifically regarding the practice of having to ‘ridge’ (*kugalauza*) their gardens. They were confident that Mbona was all they needed for rain, fertility and successful crops. They were also strongly opposed to the imposition of the confederation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1959, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of the outspoken medium of Mbona at the time.

into the Mbona myth made it attractive to a broader spectrum of people with Mbona as a kind of redemptive figure, like Christ.

ANNEXURE A8: LETTER OF GOODWILL FROM EBCOM (EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF MALAWI)



Evangelical Bible College of Malawi

P. O. Box 243, Blantyre, Malawi
Tel : +265 111 949 793 (Office)
+265 880432669 (Principal)

Email: info@ebcom-malawi.org
Website: www.ebcom-malawi.org

5th December 2017

Dear Mr. Robert Beaton

RE: LETTER OF GOOD WILL TO USE COLLEGE CLASSROOM FOR FGDs

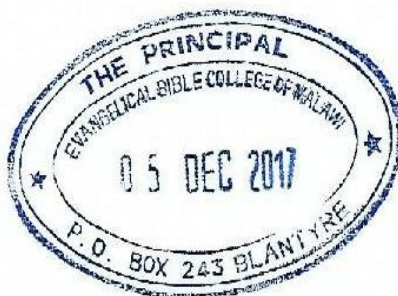
Following your request sent through email dated 30th November 2017 asking to use the college classroom for your Focus Group Discussions, On behalf of the management team, I am glad to give you permission to do so as planned. The college wishes you all the best as you work on your PhD and your success will be our benefit as well since you have been volunteering to teach for us.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours!

Yours in Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Masikamu', written over a horizontal line.

Rev. Robert Masikamu
(College Principal)



ANNEXURE A9: ZEC PASTOR'S/STUDENT'S FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

ZEC Pastor's Focus Group Information and Consent Form

Institution: North West University

Project Head/Supervisor: Dr. Desmond Henry, Registrar/Lecturer- Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa; Associate Lecturer- North West University | +27722399363 | des@btc.co.za

Researcher: Rev. Robert B. Beaton, Missionary, AVAIL Mission
PO Box 216, Blantyre | 0991749129 | thebeatons28@yahoo.com

Assistant: Rev. Geoffrey Mbendera, Pastor, Zambesi Evangelical Church
+265 995 600 790, +265 886 832 850 | gmbemdera@gmail.com

Assistant: Rev. Molten Kalima, Pastor, Zambesi Evangelical Church (+265) 999 226 201 | moltendemister@gmail

Your consent to participating:

Title of Study: A missiological study on African traditional religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches.

Purpose of Study: I am seeking to provide foundations for a missiological approach to break charm-dependency in Zambezi Evangelical Churches. I am investigating contextual, Biblical and pedagogic foundations as the basis for a curriculum for the denomination. The ultimate purpose of the research study is to improve the quality of discipleship within the denomination (ZEC), thus strengthening local Zambezi Evangelical Church congregations, by proposing a teaching curriculum aimed at helping to reduce charm-dependency in the Zambezi Evangelical Churches.

Permission: Goodwill permission has been granted for the collection of the data (stories) by the General Secretary of the ZEC, Rev. Luckwell Mtima. Additionally, goodwill permission has been given for the use of a classroom at EBCoM by the Principal, Rev. Robert Masikamu.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criterion: Only ordained Zambezi Evangelical Church Pastors serving in local Zambesi Evangelical Churches within the Central and Southern regions of Malawi/ ZEC students will be selected and recruited as participants for the interviews. Inclusion is also limited to those pastors working at or ministering in close proximity to the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi. This is expedient because the Focus Groups will meet at the College thus minimizing transport issues. Moreover, the faculty at EBCoM includes a number of ZEC pastors/students from a variety of different educational and ministry backgrounds. Competency in English language is essential. However, if any pastor/student who does not meet the inclusion criterion wishes to be included, they will not automatically be excluded. Both transport to and from the sessions and an interpreter (if necessary) may be arranged in this case.

Expectations of members of the Focus Group: You will participate in weekly two hour discussion groups on Wednesday or Thursday afternoons throughout the months of November and December (2018), and January, February and March (2019). These groups will be facilitated by Rev. Beaton. Passages of Scripture will be read and you will be asked to give your interpretive observations in the context of a group discussion.

Languages: The primary language for the Focus group discussions will be English.

Information Collection, Storage and Analysis: The discussions will be digitally recorded and later analyzed for consistent themes and patterns by Rev. Beaton. The digital recordings will be kept under password lock on Rev. Beaton's personal computer, in his office, at home in Zomba. All recordings will be destroyed after 18 months. However, any consistent or potentially enlightening 'indigenous' interpretive observations on the passages will be noted and articulated in the thesis.

Privacy/Confidentiality: The Focus Groups will be conducted privately in a designated classroom in the afternoons after College classes have finished. Although the insights and observations recorded may be used in the thesis no names will be mentioned and the information you give will not be attributed to you personally. You will not be personally identified in subsequent analysis or in the actual thesis. The information you give will be retained for no more than 18 months and then destroyed.

Benefits: I will benefit from this study because it will form part of my thesis for a Philosophy Doctorate in Theology, in Missiology. You will benefit indirectly because the results will help ZEC to consider following a deliberate missiological approach to break charm-dependency in the churches. Any direct benefit for pastors will be long-term and in the area of ministry whereby the creation of a suitable curriculum to help church members and attendees to break charm-dependency may enhance your ministry and strengthen discipleship within your congregation.

Cost/Remuneration/Benefits: There will be no cost involved for you and no remuneration or financial benefits or incentives for either you or me.

Honesty: There are no right or wrong insights/observations to the topic we are discussing, although all contributions will be measured by their level of consistency and resonance with traditional, historical Evangelical interpretations of the passages. Please contribute as honestly and naturally as possible so ZEC can benefit as much as possible from the results of the study.

Risk/Harm: I do not foresee any significant risk of harm to you from this study.

Communication of the findings: Participants will not be personally or directly informed with regards to the findings of the research but a copy of the completed thesis detailing the analysis of the data and relevant conclusions will be stored at the denominational headquarters (ZEC) and made available for perusal by any participant on request.

Questions: If you have any questions relating to the interview and anything outlined above please contact the principal investigator or one of the assistants (relevant details are above).

Contact: If at any time you have any questions concerning this study or wish to cancel your agreement to me using your stories then please contact me using the contact details above. If you remove your consent then I will immediately disregard all material from you and take all practical steps to remove your information from my analysis and report. You will not be punished for this in any way.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study titled:

A missiological study on African Traditional Religious worldview and charm-dependency in the Zambesi Evangelical Churches

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.

- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of researcher

.....
Signature of witness