

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
IN THE COMMUNICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE
AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE VENDA BIBLE

by

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this study.

This treatise is dedicated
to my father, Ds. Jacs van Rooy,
who by his life as a minister
of the Gospel set me an
example of humble, selfless
service to Jesus Christ
our Lord.

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INTRODUCTION

When the Bible is translated for the first time into a language, it often happens that terms having strong associations from the traditional pagan world view of its speakers find their way into the translation. This leads to a breakdown in communication, with at times very undesirable effects on the life of the young Church which has to draw its spiritual nourishment from the translation. ¹⁾ The aim of this study is to indicate how this has happened in a number of instances in the Venda Bible, and how these terms can be detected and replaced by more suitable terms. ²⁾

In the course of my work as a missionary and Bible translator I have noticed how Vendas often find it difficult to grasp the meaning of the biblical truths, seemingly because certain key terms in the Venda Bible do not convey notions they are intended to communicate. As I examined some of these terms closer, I was surprised to see how radically different their meaning was from that of the biblical terms they were supposed to translate.

1) For examples from other parts of Africa, see Bühlmann, P.W. Die christliche Terminologie als missionsmethodisches Problem. Schöneck-Beckenried, 1950, pp. 66,7.

2) In this respect we subscribe to the opinion of Bühlmann, Op. cit., p. 107: "Eine gewisse Stabilität in der Religiösen Terminologie ist unbedingt zu wünschen . . . Doch sollte man wirklich nicht allzu früh die Terminologie ins unveränderliche Versteinerungsstadium übergehen lassen. Solange sich nur 10,000 Christen umgewöhnen müssen, geht es immerhin noch leichter, als wenn nachträglich das ganze Gebiet von 100,000 und mehr Seelen doch noch sprachliche Reformen über sich ergehen lassen muss, oder aber die heilige Wahrheit in unbefriedigender Form von Generation zu Generation weitergegeben wird."

To mention just three examples:-- The biblical term "God" is rendered by the Venda term Mudzimu, which means "an ancestor spirit". Now using this term for referring to "God" is looking for trouble, since the traditional Venda religion is entirely centred on ancestrolatry, and the Creator hardly plays any part in it. One could therefore expect the Venda, on first hearing the Christian message, to confuse God the Creator with an ancestor spirit, and that is what has happened in many cases.

It is a well-known and well-attested fact that the majority of church members among the Bantu, not only in the syncretistic sects, but also in the established churches, still believe and take part in magical practices and ancestrolatry. ¹⁾

-
1. Schutte A.G. 'n Gereformeerde Bantoeegemeente. Potchefstroom, 1967, in his investigations in the Bantu Townships of Johannesburg, presented the following statistics from a church in Soweto:

84% saw some connection between God and the ancestor spirits;

43% of the members said that they communicate with the ancestor spirits regularly;

77% of them do not regard it as wrong to communicate with the ancestor spirits (this practice was propagated in a church conference at which I was present by an elder of one of our churches in Johannesburg!)

91% still believe in the power of witchcraft;

67% believe that it is quite in order for a christian to consult diviners as to the cause of misfortunes;

of the 33% who did not regard it as Christian behaviour to consult diviners, about one half said that they go to the Zionist prophets to learn the causes of their misfortunes.

Also Pauw, B.A. African Christians and their ancestors. (In Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif, Vol. IV Sept. 1963) p. 202: ". . . the minimum belief that misfortune may result from disregarding the wishes of the ancestors is held by a distinct majority of Xhosa Christians of all shades of denominations."

(cont.)

It would be difficult to determine the percentage of Venda Church members who still take part in these practices. There is no reason why it should be smaller than among other people, since the terms used in the Zulu and Sotho translations of the Bible when referring to "God" "offering" etc., are not more contaminated through associations from the traditional pagan world view than those used in the Venda Bible.

Another example is the term used in the translation of the phrase "God has reconciled the world to Himself" in II Cor. 5:19, i.e. "o dipfumedzanya na shango" Other forms of this verb (u pfumelwa, u pfumedzana etc.) are well-known and are the usual terms for denoting the idea of reconciliation. In this particular form, however, it is never used among the people, and it is difficult to make sense of it. The only possible interpretation a Venda could give to it is that the guilt of the estrangement lies with God, which fits in perfectly with the traditional deistic Bantu world view.

One more example is the term used for "sin", i.e., "tshivhi", which means "an evil deed", and limits the meaning of "sin" to strongly anti-social actions, thereby fostering in the spiritual life of the Venda Church a very restricted concept of what sin is.

The terms with connotations from the traditional religion are certainly not always the most important factors involved in the process of syncretism which accompanies the

(cont.)

Oosthuizen, G.C. The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit in the independent movements in Africa. (In van den Berg, J. a.o. Christusprediking in de volkerenwereld. Kampen, Kok, 1965) p. 183:

"An African Presbyterian minister maintains 'we worship the spirits of our ancestors . . . we feel and see their existence . . . Everything you do is governed completely by the will of the spirits, which behave according to the laws of the community'!"

communication of the Gospel to Africans, in this case the Venda. One has to take into account the natural inclination towards reinterpreting information received in terms of the existing world view of the receptor¹⁾, and the superficial penetration of Christianity into Africa²⁾. But it is a pity that terms having associations from the traditional African religion have been introduced into the Venda Bible. These terms contribute towards the process of syncretism, whereas more suitable terms should have exercised a preventative function.

African languages are not inferior in their power of expressing the truths of the Bible. With the correct translation procedures it is possible to find close natural equivalents for almost any Biblical expression or term.³⁾

This is a missiological treatise. The scope of the subject demands some attention to linguistics, particularly semantics, the study of meaning. It also demands that we take cognisance of the findings of anthropological research into the ideological aspects of the culture of the Venda people and their neighbours. To understand the meaning of Biblical terms one has to study the historical background and context of the terms in question, and delineate their meaning in different contexts. But the main interest and emphasis is on how they influence the communication of the Gospel to the Venda people. This explains why terms which are not very important from a Biblical or doctrinal viewpoint, such as muloi, a sorcerer, are dealt with, because of their significant influence on the communication of the Gospel.

1) See Bühlmann, Op. cit., p. 67

2) See Mbiti, J.S. African religions and philosophy. New York, Praeger, 1969, p. 15.

3) See Bühlmann, Op. cit., p. 76: " . . . dieser Einwand (ie. dasz die Eingebornensprachen die vielen Begriffe der christlichen Religion und der Kultur und Technik nie wiedergeben können) bezeuge, dasz man sich nicht die Mühe gegeben hätte, die Sprachen zu studieren und sich in sie zu vertiefen, in ihre Seele und ihren Geist einzudringen."

In the first chapter the linguistic aspects of our subject are treated briefly, so as to provide a background for the use of linguistic techniques in the later chapters.

The second chapter gives a short history of the Venda Bible and an appreciation of it.

The third chapter deals with the spiritual background of the terms discussed in chapter four, and tries to explain why and how the use of these terms leads to a breakdown in communication. This amounts to a short sketch of some of the main features in the traditional Venda world view.

In the fourth chapter eleven terms from the Venda Bible are discussed one by one, using the following scheme:

1. The Venda term itself;
2. the Biblical term(s) translated by it;
3. a comparative analysis of the Venda and Biblical terms;
4. the results in the life of the Church from using the particular Venda term;
5. more suitable terms suggested.

Effective communication of the Gospel does not depend on merely using the correct individual terms to convey biblical ideas. The receptor may still reinterpret those terms to fit into the overall context of his pagan world view. The last chapter deals with the problem of providing a new, biblical context in which the individual terms may be correctly interpreted.

In concluding the introduction the writer should state that he believes the Bible to be the infallible Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and revealing the mighty acts, commandments and promises of the LORD. This means that, though the human character of Scripture is acknowledged, and grateful use is made of the results of research of all Biblical scholars, including those representing the "Higher Criticism" school of thought, he rejects the idea that the Bible is the result of the evolution of the religion of the Hebrews, without any supernatural intervention or revelation. It

follows that he believes in the unity and harmony of Scripture within the framework of a rich diversity and of a progressive revelation in the History of Redemption. ¹⁾

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- 1 As a point of interest the following illuminating remark of a critical scholar is quoted (Snaith, N.H. The distinctive ideas of the Old Testament. London, Epworth Press, 3rd imp. 1947, p. 89) :

"The literary criticism (Higher Criticism) of the Old Testament has often forgotten that those who pieced the Old Testament together, pieced it together as we have it now. They chose the order we have. The analysis of the sources is but the first step in literary criticism. The editors had the final say and they used all the material from its varied sources in order to teach their particular message. This message, that of Scripture as a whole, can never be found so long as we think of the Bible only with respect to its literary sources. This is why the fundamentalists, with all their errors, are sometimes nearer to the truth than the literary critics."

CHAPTER ONE

SOME LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

It has pleased God to reveal Himself to man through the medium of human language. Christianity is a religion in which the word is of primary importance. Since the Christian faith is communicated primarily through the medium of language, "language gives form as well as content to it" ¹⁾. For this reason alone it is important for theologians to make at least an elementary study of linguistics ²⁾.

So far this has not happened. In theological colleges hardly any attention has been paid to the study of linguistics; not even semantics, the science of meaning, has received much attention. The result is that, even though during the last forty years there has been a steady stream of theological literature on the meaning of Biblical terms, the greater part of this literature is, according to Erhardt Güttgemanns ³⁾, lacking in skill as far as semantic methodology is concerned. In many cases it is even distasteful to linguists !

1. See Heeroma, K. Nader tot een taaltheologie. The Hague, Bakker/Daamen, 1967, p. 39.

2. Heeroma, Op. cit., p. 44. On p. 71 he remarks,

"Het heeft God liefd menselijke taal te worden en dat maakt onze religie tot een taalreligie, ons geloof tot een taalgeloof, ons bestaan tot een taalbestaan. Ook als wij van nature, door ons psychologisch type, helemaal niet zoveel aanleg hebben om in taal te bestaan, ook als wij van onszelf uit liever in muziek of in dans of in lijn en kleur of (dat voeg ik er nu maar even aan toe) in mathematische formules zouden bestaan, dwingt de bijbel ons de taal serieus te nemen in haar alleralgemeenste, allerwezenlijkste functie, die van de mens tot mens te maken in alle eeuwigheid."

3. See his article, Sprache des Glaubens - Sprache der Menschen (In Verkündigung und Forschung, 14, 2/1969).

In his article on this subject ¹⁾ Güttgemanns comes to the conclusion that the pastor, through lack of linguistic training, is confronted with the 21st century as a "helpless culture romanticist". This may be exaggerated, being the conclusion of a person who over-estimates the role of linguistics in theology, but it should not be ignored by theologians. The following pages will show adequately how unacceptable are some conclusions which theologians reach when they venture unprepared into areas of theology where a thorough knowledge of linguistics is necessary.

I. Semantics and world view

In this study our main interest is in semantics, because we are primarily interested in language as the conveyor of the faith and world view of a people. Often when a term is used it calls to the fore a host of associations from the world view in which it is embedded. ²⁾

For instance, when a Venda calls a person muvhi, "an evil one", the whole conceptual scheme of Venda society is implied with its scale of values and moral code, its concept of socially desirable and undesirable qualities, its concept of instrumentality (muvh*i* is probably a witch

1) Güttgemanns, Op. cit., p. 90.

2) See Barr, J. The semantics of Biblical language. Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 2: " . . . much that is prima facie sociological or anthropological is in fact of great importance in the cultural and therefore mental shape of Israel and of the Church. In other words, the sacred tradition of the apostolic church is never purely 'religious language', and still less so is the Old Testament as the sacred tradition of Israel."

or wizard), emphasis on social integration (muvhi is an anti-social person), etc. To be able to define the meaning of this word one has to understand this whole background. The world view provides the very basis for the problems which have been detected.

This is especially true of words with magico-religious, ethical and/or social connotations, such as "god", "spirit", "prayer", "holiness", "blessing", "sin". Therefore we devote the first section to a description of some dominant themes from the traditional Venda world view. ¹⁾

- 1). Linguists such as John A. Hutchison have indicated how language symbols from the terminology of each religion are peculiar to that religion, and how concepts such as height, depth, light and darkness, duration of time, fertility, and the lord-servant relationship have their own peculiar value in different religions.
(In Language and faith, Philadelphia, undated, pp. 284 ff.)
Also Bavinck, J.H. The impact of Christianity on the non-Christian world. Grand Rapids, 1949, p. 47:

"A language is a storehouse of spiritual and cultural forces . . . The words of that language all have a specific meaning which can be understood only by him who is acquainted with the hidden trends of thought living in the souls of that people."

By the same author also: Christus en de mystiek van het Oosten. Kampen, Kok, undated, p. 108:

"Het Oosten spreekt ook van God, ook van de overgave aan God (bhakti); ook van geloof, ook van de genade Gods, ook van zijn liefde, ook van menselijke zonde en kleinheid, ook van verlossing en zaligheid, maar geen van deze begrippen dekt of is gelijk aan datgene, wat het Christendom onder deze woorden verstaat."

The reader should take note of the fact that in the second quotation Bavinck commits the error of not distinguishing between "woord" and "begrip" ("word" and "concept").

The communication of religious concepts between
languages representing different world views

Missionaries on mission fields right round the world have been confronted with the vexing problem of what indigenous terms to use for translating biblical and theological terms into the languages on the mission fields. Even the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans, an Indo-European language, which was born, so to speak, as a christianized language, brought with it a multitude of problems, causing the well-known Afrikaans poet and theologian, Totius, to sigh, "Job wil nie Afrikaans praat nie"! (Job refuses to speak Afrikaans!). How much more formidable obstacles can one expect to encounter when translating the Bible into an African language, the conveyor of a non-Christian, animistic world view?

The problems besetting the Bible translator are pointed out in their complexity by James Barr ¹⁾ in the following terms: "We have to consider therefore a linguistic gap between a Semitic language, an Indo-European (Greek), and our own modern language (which might be Chinese or a Bantu language); and the correspondent cultural gaps between the Ancient Near East, the Roman Empire and the modern world. It is doubtful whether any other sphere of life than the theological has common people without special training so continually attempting a semantic transference across such gaps." ²⁾

1) Barr, Op. cit., p. 4.

2) Many missionaries, especially Roman Catholics, have avoided or tried to avoid the problems attached to communication between languages representing different world views by using Latin terms in transcription. For a wealth of illustrative material about this, see Bühlmann, Op. cit., pp. 19-52.

It is clear that the issue is even more complicated by the necessity for more than one transfer of meaning, viz. from the source language into the translator's language, which is usually the intermediary stage of translating the Bible, and from there into the receptor language. 1)

Dr. Nida 2) explains the possibility of communication from the wide common range of cultural experience which exists between people from different cultural backgrounds, despite the great and many differences. But then, of course, it is important to take these differences into account when trying to communicate between these different worlds.

III The analysis of meaning for the purpose of comparing equivalent terms in languages representing different world views

For evaluating, comparing and selecting the most suitable terms in Venda by which to translate the biblical terms in question, we made use of the semantic technique of comparative analysis. Although this technique is still in its infancy, it seems to be the most relevant and effective technique for comparing the meanings of words from two different languages (or within a single language). Moreover, it provides a basis for evaluating the meanings of semantically related terms, since it enables one to specify the particular features which provide the meanings, and therefore puts one in a good position to select the most suitable terms.

1) See also Nida, E.A. Towards a science of translating. Leiden, Brill, 1964, pp. 145-150.

2) Op. cit., p. 55.

The advantage of this technique is that it clearly points out the common, contrastive (diagnostic) and supplementary components which render the terms under consideration either suitable or unsuitable for translating biblical terms.

This method was first employed by anthropologists for analysing kinship systems, and was taken over by linguists for isolating the different kinds of components of meaning of related terms in various other fields, such as religious terms with related meanings in different languages. 1)

Nida suggests five basic steps when analysing the components of a word or group of words, viz. 2)

"1. listing all features of meaning which seem important for each term in a related set or series;

1) For further background study, see:

Lounsbury, F.G. The structural analysis of kinship semantics, and

A formal account of the Crow- and Omaha-type kinship terminologies. (Both in Tyler, S.A. Cognitive anthropology. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

Goodenough, W.H. Componential analysis and the study of meaning. (In Language, Vol. 32, Jan. — March, 1956).

Nida, E.A. The componential analysis of meaning with special application to certain key Biblical terms. New York, American Bible Society, 1968.

Nida, E.A. and Taber, C.R. Semantic structures. New York, 1968.

Nida and Taber. Introduction to semantic structures. New York, 1969.

Tyler, S.A. Cognitive anthropology. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

2) Reyburn, W.D. Cultural equivalences and nonequivalences in translation. (In The Bible Translator, Vol, 21 No. 1, Jan. 1970).

Nida. The componential analysis of meaning, p. 85.
But see also Towards a science of translating, p. 83.

2. separating out the universal features of the set,
3. separating out the supplementary components, which may be significant for a particular expression, but which are not diagnostic in distinguishing between the members of the set,
4. comparing the diagnostic features, and
5. determining the structural relationships between the various lexical units of any set."

Since in this study usually only two terms are compared at one stage, the procedure is rather simpler than when a large number of terms has to be analysed at the same time. This is an important feature in favour of using the technique of componential analysis in this study.

Now this method has its obvious limitations, linguistically speaking, eg. that it is applicable only when comparing terms with certain shared and contrastive features, and that it lacks completeness.¹⁾

The first limitation is no problem in this study, since this is precisely the kind of terms we are interested in. As to the second problem, we are only interested in those components of meaning which are relevant to the purpose of our enquiry,²⁾ and therefore we do not need an exhaustive analysis.

1) See Nida. Toward a science of translating, p. 87;
Nida & Taber. Semantic structures, p. 18;
Nida. Componential analysis, p. 9.

2) Nida. Componential analysis, p. 9:

" . . . from a theoretical standpoint we would never be able to analyse completely any set of terms without including all the terms in the language, for all words are combined in one way or another with all the other terms". When only two terms at a time are compared in this way, the analysis can be made as exhaustive as necessary for the purpose of bringing out their diagnostic and supplementary components.

Hierarchies and redundancy of components

Many of the components of a given term exist in an hierarchical order to one another. For instance in the term "to believe" ("faith") the components of accepting a message implies mental activity of the believer. But this component is redundant for the purpose of comparative analysis, since it is implied, and is therefore not mentioned in the analysis.¹⁾

IV

The importance of context

Since the same word may have radically different meanings in different contexts, it is important, when analysing the various terms, to state the context explicitly in order to define the area of meaning which is relevant in each particular case. David Hill in his criticism of some of the articles in Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, which do not sufficiently take into consideration the contexts of the terms which are studied, observed,

"The underlying cause of these errors in vocabulary studies is the failure to interpret words in their contexts. The semantics of words in their actual usages is not investigated; their interpretation is taken directly from the dictionary and not from the texts in which they appear, and the question of what the writer meant when he used a particular word is not raised . . . " ²⁾, and he goes on to say that " . . . the contextual analysis of meaning is possibly the most influential single fact in the growth of 20th century semantics . . . " ³⁾.

1) See Pike, K.L. Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behaviour. The Hague, Mouton, 1967, pp. 626 ff.

2) Hill, D. Greek words and Hebrew meanings. Cambridge, 1967, p. 4.

3) Op. cit., p. 6.

Quite a number of scholars have made significant contributions toward emphasising the importance of semantic context in analysing the meaning of a term.

Nida drew our attention to the fact that "languages exhibit in use surprisingly little genuine ambiguity, despite the fact that they use somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 lexical units to describe literally millions of different objects, experiences, and features of such objects and experiences" ¹⁾.

The reasons for this are manifold, but the most important one is the semantic value of context ²⁾.

In his discussion of the subject, Hill ³⁾ goes so far as to say that " . . . the influence of context and situation as determinative factors is such as to make all other aspects of meaning of a word vanish completely. Only those are called up, are 'activated', which are at that moment intended by the speaker or writer. The other aspects of meaning simply do not occur to us, neither to the speaker nor to the hearer."

During the past decade a lively discussion has developed in theological circles about the semantics of biblical language, to which especially James Barr, David Hill and Gerhard Friedrich, the present editor of Kittel's "Wörterbuch", have made important contributions ⁴⁾.

1) In Semantic structures, pp. 4,5.

2) See also Nida, Semantic structures, pp. 6,7; and Toward a science of translating, pp. 38, 40, 100ff.

3) Op. cit., p. 9. See also Ullmann, S. Semantic universals (In Greenberg, J.H. a. o. Universals of language. Massachusetts, M.I.T. Press, 1963, p. 183); and Pike, K.L., Op. cit., pp. 599ff.

4) See Barr, Op. cit., and Hill, Op. cit. Also Gerhard Friedrich. Zum Problem der semantik (In Kerugma und Dogma, 1970) and by the same author, Semasiologie und Lexikologie (In Theologische Literaturzeitung, Nov. 1969, col. 801ff).

Barr's most valuable contribution towards theological thought was his emphasis on the importance of the immediate context as a constitutive element of the theological meaning of a word. " . . . the distinctiveness of biblical thought and language had to be settled at sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with" ¹⁾ (Italics are mine).

One cannot help feeling with Hill ²⁾ that Barr has here somewhat overstated his case. Words do have their meaning, which in some cases may be a more important constitutive element in determining the meaning of what is written than the immediate context. The terms discussed in this treatise are so many examples of this phenomenon. This is the reason why words with pagan connotations in the Venda Bible did not take on a new meaning in the Biblical context, but on the contrary in some cases changed the meaning of the whole context into something conveying pagan conceptions.

Yet this does not detract from the fact that the specific meaning of a term is determined by the context in which it is found, and no analysis can be made of it without reference to the context. This is the reason why, in each case where a comparative analysis of the Venda and Biblical terms is made in this treatise, the context is explicitly stated.

1) Barr, Op. cit., p. 270 (but see the whole discussion from p. 263 onward). Also important is his statement on p. 250: " . . . I suggest that the impress of the Jewish tradition in the Pauline letters and speeches was born mainly by the things that he said, his sentences, his complex word-combinations, his themes and subject-matter . . ."

2) Op. cit., p. 7:
"Barr's affirmation implies that words are not the bearers of meaning and are therefore not a proper object of semantic analysis. It is obvious that the contextual theory of meaning constitutes a direct threat to the relative independence of the word as a unit of meaning."

One of the positive developments in modern Bible translation techniques is that the importance of context is taken into account ¹⁾. One can mention many instances in most Bible translations in African languages, including Venda, where communication has been spoiled by insisting on translating a Greek or Hebrew term by the same Venda term in all contexts.

To take but one example: The Greek term sarx has been translated by seven different terms in seven different places by the New English Bible as well as by Today's English Version. In these seven places it has consistently been rendered by the Venda term nama, "meat", with the result that the meaning is obscure in the Venda Bible. In a place such as Luke 24 : 39 it gives the correct meaning, "tshirunzi a tshi na dzinama na marambo". But in places such as II Cor. 7:5, "nama yashu a yo ngo vhuya ya vha na u awela"; Rom. 11:14, "vha re nama nthihi na nne"; Acts 2:17, "ndi do shulula Muya wanga kha nama yotho"; Rom. 8:3, "tshe mulayo wa kundwa u ita nge wa shaiswa nungo nga nama"; II Cor. 10:3, "ngauri naho ri tshi tshimbila namani, a ri lwi lwa nama"; and I Cor. 1:26 "a hu na vhatali vhanzhi kha lwa nama kha inwi", it sounds, to persons not acquainted with New Testament Greek, either ridiculous or it simply makes no sense ²⁾.

This discussion of the importance of context shows the shortcomings in the approach of most older Bible translations, but also of some later translations such as "The Amplified Bible" ³⁾, which sometimes creates the impression that a term is always the conveyor of all its possible meanings in all possible contexts.

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- 1) Nida, E.A. The theory and practice of translating. Bible Society of S. Africa, 1967, pp. 10ff provides a clear treatment of this subject.
 - 2) These examples have, as far as the English translations are concerned, been taken from Nida, Idem, p. 12.
 - 3) Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1965.

The disregard for the linguistic importance of context is also one of James Barr's main points of criticism against Kittel's "Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament". Barr asks, "Is the 'concept' fully present each time the word appears?" ¹⁾ and calls this kind of approach an "illegitimate totality transfer".²⁾

Friedrich himself, in his polemic with Barr, concedes that this tendency is found in Kittel ³⁾. He attributes it to the influence of Leo Weisgerber, whose most important work on semantics were published during the years 1927 to 1931, at the time when G. Kittel was planning the publication of his dictionary.

But then, in another article⁴⁾, Friedrich draws our attention to the fact that Barr's criticism is aimed mainly at the first four parts of the "Wörterbuch", which were all published more than a quarter of a century ago, and he claims that the later volumes differ from the earlier ones in this respect.

In accepting the challenge, Friedrich accuses Barr of being biased by a positivistic approach to linguistics, and of offering his own philosophical approach as the only valid and scientific one, although there are many linguists with other views on the matter.⁵⁾

1) The semantics of Biblical language, p. 209.

2) Idem, p. 218.

3) Zum Problem der Semantik, p. 47.

4) Semasiologie und Lexikologie, col. 802.

5) Zum Problem der Semantik, p. 57: "Aber er vertritt mit seinen Anschauungen, das es nicht auf das Wort, sondern auf den Satz ankomme, das es nicht darum gehe zu fragen, was der Sprecher denkt und ob mit dem Wort die Sache getroffen sei, das die Sprache ein willkürlich gesetztes System semantischer Zeichen sei, die Thesen einer anderen Philosophie, nämlich die des Positivismus. Er ersetzt in seiner Semantik eine philosophisch geprägte Sprachlehre durch eine andere. Aber ist sie wirklich die bessere und sachgemäzere? Diese Antwort ist mit seinem Buch nicht gegeben."

Friedrich appeals to A. Ammer ¹⁾, who advises not to disregard the contribution of an individual word to the meaning of the context as if the word has not a clearly defined meaning in itself and is entirely dependent on the meaning of the sentence. Instead, Ammer would claim a measure of independence for the meaning of the word, even if it is of a limited nature.

In Barr's answer to Hill's book, "Greek words and Hebrew meanings", which dealt extensively with the views of Barr, he admits the importance of the contribution of the individual word to the meaning of the context ²⁾. "Hill argues that words are not dependent solely on context but have a core or kernel of meaning which appears in all contexts", Barr writes, and he continues, "I expressly admit the presumable existence of a psychological reality corresponding to words like 'truth'."

And with regards to Kittel's "Wörterbuch", he states his position as follows:

" . . . the main part of the Kittel dictionary, despite contrary statements by the original planner, did in fact what I wanted it to do and remained perfectly usable for anyone taking up my own position. This argument has been growing stronger with the years, because later volumes have often overcome the faults of the earlier, sometimes ignoring the ideas of the original planning altogether" ³⁾ The reader should not be surprised to notice that Kittel's Wörterbuch has been gratefully used for the purpose of our treatise.

In conclusion we must state that the word and the context in which it is used both make important contributions towards the meaning of the whole. Sometimes one predominates, sometimes the other. Sometimes a different word

1) Einführung in die Sprachwissenschaft, quoted in Friedrich, Semasiologie und Lexikologie, col. 812,3.

2) Common sense and Biblical language. (In Biblica, Vol. 49, 1968, p. 381).

3) Idem, p. 386.

may change the meaning of the context into its opposite, e.g. "I hate you", "I love you".

In other cases the context may change the meaning of the individual word into something quite different from its original or previous meaning, especially if repeatedly used in a new context and against the background of a new overall context, such as has happened with the Venda term mudzimu, which for instructed Christians in Vendaland has come to mean "God", while previously it used to mean "an ancestor spirit". Even today this is its meaning for non-Christians in most contexts.

The solution of a part of our translation problems is to be found in the fact that in the long run words may acquire new or additional meanings in a Biblical context.

We are also confronted with the problem of how to create such a new context as soon as possible. This matter is dealt with in the last chapter.

V

The importance of current usage

In the past very strong emphasis has been laid on etymology for determining the areas of meaning of terms in current use. The argument was that if the original meaning of a word could be established, we would know what the root meaning, or basic meaning, of that word was, in other words, what we should mean by it when using it. It has, however, become clear that the value of etymology for determining the meaning of a word as it is used at present is rather limited. "Etymology is not, and does not profess to be, a guide to the semantic value of words in their current usage, and such value has to be determined from the current usage and not from derivation" 1).

1) Barr, Op. cit., p. 107.

The etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history ¹⁾, whereas our concern is not with the history of a word, but with its meaning in a given context. In any case we hardly ever know the original meaning of a word; all we know is its oldest meaning to be found in print. Barr points out that arguments from the etymology of a word mean a disregard for the social nature of language as a means of communication ²⁾, and points out a number of absurd conclusions which follow from placing too much emphasis on etymology.³⁾

This is another complaint of Barr against the Kittel dictionary. Referring to Schlier's article on amén ⁴⁾ he says,⁵⁾

"This latter article is heavily etymologizing in parts; to call a supposed original sense an 'inner' sense is to show a basic misunderstanding of semantic change."

One has, therefore, to be on the lookout for this kind of etymologizing theology when using Kittel.

But here, again, however necessary Barr's warnings may be, there is another side to the issue. J.F.A. Sawyer wrote an interesting article, "Root-meanings in Hebrew", ⁶⁾ in which he advances several arguments against Barr. He observes that in a Semitic language it is considerably easier to discern the root of a word than in its Indo-European equivalent. He points out that the root of three consonants which recur in several words carries a definite meaning within itself. As an illustration he uses the two verbs in the last part of Is. 7:9. We have here two "semantic fields", he says.

1) Barr, Op. cit., p. 109.

2) Idem, p. 113.

3) Idem pp. 111 - 160.

4) T W N T, Vol. I, p. 341.

5) Barr, Op. cit., p. 168.

6) In Journal of Semitic studies, Vol. 12, 1967, pp. 37 - 50.

The one is formed by words which can be translated with the terms "true, faith, faithful"; those of the other can be translated by "firmness, established, fixed". Now Sawyer points out that four different roots function on both these semantic fields, ie. 'mn, qwm, jtsb or ntsb and kwn.

Something of the kind can also be said of the Syrian, Accadian and Arabic languages. This, according to Sawyer, indicates that for the Semites the cluster of words referring to "truth" must have contained certain elements which they regarded as akin to the concept of "firmness", which favours the idea that words which have an etymological link must also have a common semantic element, such as the root 'mn which is a common "sensebearing" element in the two verbs in Is. 7:9.

This view is shared by Nic. H. Ridderbos ¹⁾ when he calls Barr's attitude towards a theology based on etymology rather onesided.

Taking Sawyer's comment into account, Barr's warning should nevertheless be heeded when dealing with Venda terms since there are many possibilities of forming new words from common roots in the Bantu languages, and consequently there are usually many words that have been formed from the same roots. Although these words are etymologically linked, they may have acquired different meanings in the course of history.

VI

Culture and grammar

In our dealing with language and thought, we are not concerned with the relationship between grammatical categories in language and their cultural reflection in peoples' thought processes, but since a number of scholars

1) Enkele beschouwingen naar aanleiding van ta'aminu in Jes. 7:9 (In Schrift en uitleg. Feestschrift Gispén. Kampen, Kok, 1970).

argue that there is a natural relation between the world view of a people and the grammar of its language, it might be profitable to discuss it briefly ¹⁾.

The name of Benjamin Lee Whorf will always be associated with this idea of linguistic relativity, which he formulated as follows:

" . . . every language is a vast pattern-system different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analysis nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness" 2).

This theory is sometimes called the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, and is referred to in the following terms by Jane and William Bright 3) in their article in Tyler's "Cognitive anthropology":

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. . . . The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached."

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- 1) The first important representative of this school of thought was W. von Humboldt, in his Sprachphilosophische Werke, Steintal, 1884.
Others are

Weisgerber, L. Das Gesetz der Sprache, Heidelberg, 1951, and Vom Weltbild der deutschen Sprache, I & II, Düsseldorf, 1953.

Dammann, E. Introduction to Placied Tempels, Bantu-Philosophie, Heidelberg, 1956.

See also, for a sympathetic yet sober evaluation, Miller, R.L. The linguistic relativity principle and Humboldtian ethnolinguistics.
The Hague, Mouton, 1968, pp. 88-102.

- 2) In Language, thought and reality. Massachusetts, M I T Press, 1967, p. 252.
- 3) Semantic structures in Northwestern California and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, p. 67.

Another scholar of this school with fairly wide influence in theological circles, is Thorleif Boman who in his book "Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen" 1), tried to prove with linguistic arguments that Hebrew thought is dynamic whereas Greek thought is static.

In this book 2) Boman claims that

"Dem Verfasser war es aber besonders daran gelegen, dem Vorwurf der Spekulation zu entgehen. Er führte daher überall eine solide und vielleicht gelegentlich - vor allem zu Anfang - zu umfassende empirische Grundlage seiner Anschauungen aus der hebräischen (alttestamentlichen) und griechischen Sprache und Literatur an . . ." although he confesses that he has had not taken the pains of checking his findings with other languages:

"Den Parallelen bei andern Völkern jedesmal nachzugehen, wäre aber kaum möglich, wenn sich die Untersuchung nicht ins Uferlose verlieren sollte, und ist für das Ziel unserer Untersuchung auch nicht notwendig." 3)

Boman starts his argument by listing a number of verbs expressing motion which in some cases refer to a position resulting from motion. "Man verfolgt die Bewegung bis zum Stillstand, oder seht umgekehrt das Stehen als das Ergebnis des Auferstehens resp. des Hinstellens an." 4) This implies that this is something specifically Hebrew and does not occur in Greek (the perfectum) or in any European language!

The book teems with sweeping statements which show little regard for the occurrence of phenomena in almost any other language which Boman holds to be expressions of the "dynamic" Hebrew thought pattern.

The kind of argument that is used is illustrated by the following 5): In I Kings 10:19ff, "wird von dem Throne Salomos erzählt: neben dem Lehnen standen ('amad pt) zwei Löwen . . . Das 'amad ist hier kein bloßes Sein, sondern gibt die Haltung der Löwen an; sie hätten ja auch z.B. sitzen oder liegen können." !!!!

1) Göttingen, 4e Auflage, 1965.

2) p. 16.

3) Ibidem.

4) Idem, pp. 19,20.

5) Ibidem.

Note the kind of logic displayed in the following statement 1): "Die überaus vielen stativen Verben im Hebräischen (resp. in anderen semitischen Sprachen), sind ein erneuter Beweis dafür, dass der hebräische (resp. semitische) Geist auf das Dynamische und Tätige gerichtet ist."

It is interesting that E. Benveniste 2) comes across the same phenomena in Indo-European languages, including Greek, that Boman claims to be characteristic of Hebrew !

A number of scholars have treated this question of a supposed correspondence between grammar and thought-forms from a biblical and theological angle.

James Barr 3) states that "the field of ethno-psychology in its connection with linguistic phenomena is widely recognized to be a difficult and slippery area, even when entered by linguists and psychologists, of which most biblical theologians are neither".

He goes on to say that " . . . in this view (ie. that there is a correspondence between grammar and thought-forms) there are very great difficulties, and though it may be possible to maintain it in some greatly modified sense, the way in which it is at present used in theology may well be regarded as wholly outmoded and a survival from the time before the scientific study of language began". 4) When considering the way in which Boman treats this subject, one is inclined to agree with Barr.

Barr quotes a linguist, C. Serrus, who in a survey of this supposed parallellism between language and thought-forms came to the conclusion that " . . . to expect a correspondence between grammar and thought-forms is, since the development of scientific methodology, an illusion . . .". 5) He concludes his examination by pleading for a scientific linguistic approach to this subject instead of assuming on meagre evidence that language contains an implicit metaphysics. 6)

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- 1) Boman, Op. cit., p. 24.
 - 2) La phrase nominale, (In Problèmes de linguistique générale. Paris, 1966, pp. 151-168).
 - 3) Op. cit., p. 24.
 - 4) Idem, p. 33.
 - 5) Le parallélisme logico-grammatical. Paris, 1933.
 - 6) Barr, Op. cit., pp. 294,5.
See also Crystal, D. Linguistics, language and religion. London, Burns and Oates, 1965. p. 144.

Unfortunately Boman in his reaction to Barr's book reveals the same naive self-assurance one finds in his book discussed above:

"Die moderne Sprachphilosophie . . . ist darüber völlig klar, dass die Sprachen Ausdrücke des eigenartigen Denkens der Völker, auch der primitivsten Naturvölker, sind".1)

Other scholars have treated this question rather from a linguistic and anthropological angle. Prof. Berthe Siertsema of Amsterdam has published a very interesting article 2) on "Language and World view (Semantics for theologians)", in which she exposed a lot of unfounded theorizing about the idea that language contains an inherent metaphysics, a petrified philosophy, indicating inter alia the arbitrary nature of the word form and of syntactic rules.

Linguists and anthropologists have tried to test the plausability of the theory of linguistic relativity in the field. The following quotation from R.L. Miller might give a good indication of the methods and results of these tests: "It is now generally agreed that the following two steps are necessary if we are to make advances in this area. First, the general proposition itself must be stated in explicit, researchable terms and each of the latter carefully defined; Secondly, evidence of an experimental sort must be put forth. That is, to show that the speakers of a given language 'think' differently from the speakers of other languages, it is necessary to appeal ultimately to nonlinguistic facts. Brown, for example, in summarizing the investigations of American ethnolinguists in this area, has suggested that 'language' be defined so as to include semantics, and 'thought' be defined 'in terms of some nonlinguistic behaviour'. The theses would be that 'some nonlinguistic evidence corresponds with some linguistic evidence'. Without some such approach as this, it is difficult to see how questions of linguistic relativity can be regarded as conclusively settled" 3).

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- 1) Quoted by Güttgemanns, E. Sprache des Glaubens - Sprache der Menschen, p. 94.
 - 2) In The Bible translator, Vol. 20 No. 1, Jan. 1969. See also her article "De Taal" in Chr. Encyclopedie: "Het taalteken is dus 'n willekeurige klankgroep, waarbij in stilzwijgende afspraak, bij conventie, een bepaalde betekenis is vasgelegd voor het gebruik in de communicatie".
 - 3) In The linguistic relativity principle, p. 119.

Miller points out that " . . . at least one large-scale research project, the Southwestern Project in Comparative Psycholinguistics, is at present engaged in exploring the Whorfian hypotheses. But so far its findings have been inconclusive. Concerning this and other projects, John Carroll recently writes: "To sum things up, the linguistic-relativity hypothesis has thus far received very little convincing support. Our best guess at present is that the effects of language structure will be found to be limited and localized." 1)

J.B. Casagrande²⁾ informs us that in a recent survey of people from Japan, Hong Kong, India (Hindi and Kannada), Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, Poland, Finland, Holland, Belgium, France and the United States, no discernible difference in thought processes could be detected.

"In other words, the dominant ways of qualifying experience, of describing aspects of objects and events, tend to be very similar, regardless of what language one uses or what culture one happens to have grown up in." 3)

Finally we may point out the findings of Jane and William Bright,⁴⁾ who describe several examples of people with essentially the same culture and religion, but with languages belonging to different groups, and of people with closely related languages whose culture and religion show a marked difference.

It seems as if we may happily conclude that at least from the angle of Venda grammar we shall have no problem in translating the Bible into that language !

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- 1) Op. cit., p. 120. The quotation from Carroll is from his book *Language and thought*. Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 110.
 - 2) *Language universals in anthropological perspective* (In Greenberg, J.H. ao. *Universals of language*, p. 243).
 - 3) *Idem*, p. 244.
 - 4) *In* Tyler, *Cognitive anthropology*, p. 67.

CHAPTER TWO
THE VENDA BIBLE

A History of the Venda Bible

The translation of the Bible into Venda was almost exclusively the work of Dr. Paul Erdmann Schwellnus, who was born in Vendaland, in the Soutpansberg district of the Transvaal, in 1877, as the second of four sons of a missionary couple sent out by the Berlin Mission Society.¹⁾

During the nineties his parents went to Germany for the education of their children, where all four sons were trained and ordained as missionaries. After the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 his parents and their three eldest sons and daughter returned to South Africa and missionary work, while the youngest son went to East Africa as a missionary. The daughter afterwards married a missionary in Vendaland, the father of the Rev. D. W. Giesekke, chairman of the Committee for the Translation of the Venda Bible, which is at present working on a new translation.

The Rev. P.E. Schwellnus unfortunately never had the opportunity of working among the Venda people. On arrival in South Africa he was sent to Mashonaland in Southern Rhodesia, and from there to the Pedi field of the B M S, where he worked for the rest of his life. He mastered the Pedi language (or Northern Sotho) just as well as Venda, and in the course of time also became the translator of the Bible into Pedi.

1) See the articles on his life and work in "Die Vaderland", "Rand Daily Mail" and "Pretoria News" of 4-3-1946.

He applied a fair part of his enormous energy to literature work in Pedi and Venda, and until recently most of the school readers available in these two languages were written by him.

He worked on the Venda Bible translation from 1933 to 1936, and completed this monumental work in three years. The complete Bible was published in 1938.

The translation was essentially one man's work. Mr. Schwellnus worked on it in Pretoria with nobody to assist him who was specifically qualified for this task. He had two Venda men whom he consulted regularly, one Johannes Ramarumo, and another old man whom he called "mein stinkendes Lexicon" ("my evil-smelling Lexicon"). He used to send copies of his translation to a few people in Vendaland who acted as a consulting or revising committee. These however, had such great respect for the abilities of Mr. Schwellnus, and were so eager to eventually get a translation of the Bible into Venda, after more than half a century of mission work, that they uncritically accepted his translation.

Shortly before his death in 1946, Mr. Schwellnus received a doctor's degree from the University of Stellenbosch in acknowledgement of his literary work in Bantu languages.

B A General appreciation of the Venda Bible

As has been noted the translation was undertaken and completed in about three years. Although it is really an amazing piece of work one can hardly expect one person, however gifted, to complete a thorough translation of the entire Bible in such a short period of time. Moreover, Dr. Schwellnus had not received any special training for the task of translating the Bible, and history has proven that a philologist is not always a translator.

True to the tradition of his times¹⁾, his work suffered from a literalist approach, which often resulted in awkward and even unintelligible renderings, especially in the Epistles. Venda Christians, like their brethren all over the world, do not appreciate criticism of the current translation. "Any criticism of the present Venda Bible text is considered sacrilege and as a lack of appreciation for a gift from God. The fact that certain passages cannot be understood, that, for example, a number has been rendered erroneously, an omission has inadvertently been made, is not considered as a short-coming, but rather as a lack of ability on their part to interpret the Holy Word of God." ²⁾

But once they can be brought to consider its style critically, they are usually quick to start pointing out places where its phraseology "a si Tshivenda" ("is not good Venda").

Some examples of this literal unidiomatic type of translation are the following:-

Rom. 1:17: "Ngauri kha eneo mafhungo hu dzumbululwa u lugisa ha Mudzimu hune ha bva u tendani ha isa u tendani. Vhunga ho nwaliwa ha pfi: O lugaho u do tshila zwi tshi bva u tendani." What a pity that such a central text in the faith of the Church is communicated in such a meaningless way !

Or how can this be called Tshivenda ? "Ri kha fulufhelo, hone ro tshidzwa. Tshe tsha vha tsho tou fulufhelwa arali tsha vhone, a tshi tsha pfi tsho itaho u fulufhelwa. Tsho vha vhone a tshi tsha pfi ndo tshi (lindela ndo tshi) fulufhela" (Rom. 8:24).

Many other examples like these can be given from the Epistles, e.g. Rom. 2:26; 3:16. In both 8:15 and Eph. 1:5

1) For a discussion of a scientific approach to Bible translation, see Nida, The theory and practice of translation, pp. 8ff.

2) Giesekke, D.W. Venda names for God. Bible Society of S. Africa, 1967.

the "Spirit of adoption" has been rendered Muya wa hana ("Spirit of youth").

In translating the long sentence in Eph. 1:1-14, Dr. Schwellnus seemed to have realized that such a long sentence sounds unnatural in Venda. He did not, however, reconstruct it so as to form a number of co-ordinated sentences, but just changed some of the commas between the subordinate sentences into full stops !

The Venda Dr. Schwellnus used in the separately published anthology of historical parts from the Bible, Mafhungo a Bivhili ¹⁾, is much more natural than that of the Venda Bible.

It seems as if his experience with Pedi greatly influenced Dr. Schwellnus, especially in his choice of terminology. Sothoisms, such as murwa ("son"), Murena (for "Lord"), abound. Even Mudzimu ("ancestor spirit" - for "God") must have been chosen under the influence of the Pedi term Modimo. Perhaps he just adopted the current church terminology of the Venda Church, which was to a large extent influenced by the fact that the first missionaries in Vendaland, Carl Beuster and Erdmann Schwellnus, used the Pedi Bible of Abraham Serote in their mission work, and that all Venda evangelists were trained at Kratzenstein, a Pedi area.

Yet there is also much to appreciate in the Venda Bible, and it is only fair to mention some examples of this too.

Dr. Schwellnus made good use of the descriptive ideophones which the Venda People are so fond of using in spoken language, thereby describing a whole situation in one or two words. Examples of this is Kongongo ("pitch dark") in Is. 8:22; ndi' zhambu kathihi ("do let me just take a quick nap") in Prov. 6:10.

1) Tshakhuma, Venda Literature Depot, 2nd Imp., 1962.

Unfortunately he sometimes used ideophones from Sotho (Pedi) which do not occur in Venda, eg. ito lo ri pinye (supposed to mean, "in the twinkling of an eye"), instead of the Venda ideophone, ito lo ri poi.

Dr. Schwellnus succeeded in exploiting the possibilities of the Venda language for forming long compound nouns — "sentence nouns" they are sometimes called — in books such as Proverbs. Some examples of where it has been done successfully are:

10:17: mulamba-u-vhudzwa (which occurs in everyday speech);

11:16: mupfuma-thendo . . . mapfuma-thundu;

12:25: malambilu matsikamuthu;

13:24: mutondathamu u lata riwana wawe;

17:18: thavhanyedza-u-khadana.

But unfortunately many or even most of the compound nouns he formed, failed to be recognized as good examples of Venda. They are too artificial.

When in a treatise such as this criticism inevitably has to be made, that does not detract from the mighty work Dr. Schwellnus has been used for by the Spirit of God. Venda Christians have found their salvation and spiritual nourishment from the Word of God in their mother tongue, given them through the work of Dr. Schwellnus. Young missionaries should respect this work and keep in mind the remark of Bruno Gutmann that missionaries in a new field are often forced by circumstances, lack of time and knowledge, and urgency of finding terms for conveying their message, to adopt what often later turn out to be unsuitable vehicles of the Christian message.¹⁾

1) Quoted by Bühlmann in Die christliche Terminologie, p. 78.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VENDA WORLD VIEW AND ITS APPREHENSION OF LIFE AS IT AFFECTS THE TERMS USED IN THE VENDA BIBLE

This treatise does not intend giving an exhaustive account of the Venda world view and social structure. It gives only a cursory sketch of some dominant features of Venda culture which are particularly related to the terms analyzed in the second section. Many aspects of Venda culture will therefore not be discussed, e.g. initiation ceremonies, birth and burial rites, kinship systems etc.

It will, however, be noted how consistent the whole Venda world view is. According to the premises on which it is based, it is a logically integrated whole.¹⁾

One must also keep in mind that a white man should approach this subject with due modesty, heeding the warning of Rev. G.M. Setiloane ²⁾ that "times have gone when a Western man could write about The Soul of an African, or The Eastern Mind. Now the African or the Eastern man himself can pour out his soul and open up his mind to his white brother who wants to know him so that he can serve him the better."

1) This has been stated very well by The Right Hon. J.C. Smuts in his foreword to Krige, Eileen Jensen and J.D. The realm of a rain-queen. Oxford Univ. Press, 1943, p. ix:

"The acid test of the investigator's understanding of the primitive people he studied is whether or not he makes sense of what appears to the ordinary observer as a mass of vices, follies, and superstitions. That is the test that the authors have satisfied. In this book customs and an outlook so different from ours as to be regarded from our point of view as irrational and perverted emerge as perfectly natural and coherent — nay, inevitable in the total context of the culture." See also Erasmus, O.C.O. Die godsdienstige begrip en uitlewing in 'n Tswanagemeenskap. Potchefstroom, 1970, p. 180.

2) The missionary and his task. (In I R M, Vol. LIX, No. 233, p. 64).

We are fortunate, therefore, in having available the work of an African who is also an anthropologist of high standing, ie. John S. Mbiti¹⁾, professor of Religious Studies at Makerere University College in Uganda, whose works have been valuable for the purpose of this chapter. In the course of our research we have constantly checked statements of native informants with others, and sometimes views held had to be discarded as more information proved them wrong.

There are no extensive ethnographic studies of the Venda people which could be consulted, except that of Hugh A. Stayt,²⁾ which is very inaccurate and has to be checked on every point as to the correctness of the facts and interpretations offered. Of 34 Venda terms picked at random in his book, 16 were not spelled correctly. . It is clear that Stayt did not know the Venda language. There are, however, excellent studies on the nearest neighbours and spiritual kin of Venda, i.e. the Shona³⁾ to the north, and the Lovedu⁴⁾ to the south of Vendaland. These studies have been very valuable. The bulk of information, however was gathered from the Venda people themselves, even before these books were consulted.

The many proverbs quoted should not be considered as proofs of statements made, but rather as illustrative material.⁵⁾

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- 1) African Religions and philosophy. New York, Praeger, 1969. African concepts of human relations (In Ministry, 9/4, Oct. 1969). Christianity and traditional religions in Africa. (In I R M, Vol. LIX No. 236, Oct. 1970)
 - 2) The Bavenda. London, Cass, New imp. 1968.
 - 3) Gelfand, M. African Background. Cape Town, Juta, 1965.
 - 4) Krige & Krige, The realm of a rain-queen.
 - 5) See Mbiti, African religions, p. 2:
"Proverbs in particular deserve a separate treatment since their philosophical content is mainly situational."

It is also necessary to point out that the processes of acculturation, which have had such a disrupting effect on the stability of the family life, has had very little effect on the spiritual life of the majority of them. Prof Mbiti says about African society in general,

"It would be wrong to imagine that everything traditional has been changed or forgotten so much that no traces of it are to be found. If anything, the changes are generally on the surface, affecting the material side of life, and only beginning to reach the deeper levels of thinking pattern, language content, mental images, emotions, beliefs and response in situations of need. Traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African peoples, though obviously this differs from individual to individual and from place to place. I believe, therefore that even if the educated Africans do not subscribe to all the religious and philosophical practices and ideas described here, the majority of our people with little or no formal education still hold on to their traditional corpus of beliefs and practices. ¹⁾ Elsewhere ²⁾ he remarks,

"In spite of all traditional religions have survived, they dominate the background of African peoples, and must be reckoned with even in the middle of modern changes."

The same could be said about the Venda in modern society. The traditional world view is still dominant.

1) African religions, p. xi.

2) Idem, p. 10. It is confirmed by Erasmus, Die gods-dienstige begrip, p. 285: "Hoewel die stam as eenheid sigbare tekens van verbrokkeling toon, is dit nogtans steeds 'n begrip met religieuse betekenis. Die stam het nog sy goddelike voorouers. Die voorouers van die stam het nog hulle invloed as werklike lede en skakels van die stam binne die struktuur van die stam."

The dominant theme:
the hierarchy of forces

In the traditional Venda world view the cosmos is experienced as an hierarchy of forces, each with a fixed place in the totality, and exercising influence or power on each other. Man has his own place in this hierarchy, somewhere below the spirits and above the animals and plants, a small part of an intimately related totality.¹⁾

This is a very short statement about a very complex reality, with many subordinate themes leading from this one dominant theme and bearing its stamp. It will be illuminating to discuss somewhat more in detail a few aspects of this dominant theme.

In the first place it should be noted that the sense of unity, of cosmic relationship, is very strong. Man ". . . belongs to the great cosmic relationship; he feels a certain affinity with the cosmos; everything in the world around him is akin to himself, is as it were a brother or a sister to him." ²⁾ This is the reason why in the Venda folk tales humans can so easily turn into animals and animals into humans. The dividing line is vague.

This strong sense of cosmic unity also means that ". . . no distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for Nature, Man and the Unseen are unseparably involved in one another in a total community." ³⁾

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- 1) See Bavinck, J.H. *Religieus besef en christelijk geloof*. Kampen, Kok, 1949, pp. 69ff.
Kraemer, H. *The Christian message in a non-Christian world*. London, Edinburgh House Press, 2nd imp. 1947, pp. 152ff.
Erasmus, *Die godsdienstige begrip*, pp. 185,6.
 - 2) Bavinck, J.H. *The Church between temple and mosque*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1966, p. 38.
 - 3) Taylor, J.V. *The primal vision*. London, S C M Press, 1963, p. 72.

Well-being and security means to the Venda, as to all Bantu, being integrated into society and through that being in harmony with the totality.¹⁾ Good behaviour means behaving according to one's proper place in it. This has profound consequences for human relationships, as we shall presently see.

The hierarchy of forces can mutually influence one another, and these forces can to a certain extent be harnessed and manipulated through magical techniques. This will be treated under the subject of "spirits and magic".²⁾

The harmony of forces in the totality can be disturbed in various ways, e.g. by neglecting mutual obligations, and has to be restored by the proper rites of a magical character.

The hierarchical character of the relation of the forces in the cosmos is also reflected in interpersonal relationships. We quote from Mbiti's "African religions"³⁾:

"In human relationships there is emphasis on the concept of hierarchy based partly on age and partly on status. In practice this amounts to a ladder ranging from God to the youngest child. God is the creator and hence the parent of mankind, and holds the highest position so that He is the final point of reference and appeal. Beneath Him are the divinities and spirits, which are more powerful than man and some of which were founders and forefathers of different societies. Next come the living-dead, the more important ones being those who were full human beings by virtue

1) Taylor, Op. cit., p. 74.

2) Taylor, ibidem. For a more detailed discussion, see Tempels, P. Bantoe-filosofie. Brussels, 1949, pp. 30ff.

3) pp. 205,6.

of going through the initiation rites, getting married and raising children. Among human beings the hierarchy includes kings, rulers, rainmakers, priests, diviners, medicine-men, elders in each household, parents, older brother and sister, and finally the youngest members of the community."

The concept of the hierarchy of forces accounts for the strong accent on seniority and status in Venda society.¹⁾

It also accounts for the wide-spread custom of approaching seniors such as parents and chiefs through intermediaries. Approaching them directly would mean breaking the cosmic chain of seniority and disturbing the harmony²⁾.

This concept also accounts for the static character and lack of individual initiative so often displayed by the Venda. One should not venture to acquire more status or influence than one already has by virtue of one's fixed place of seniority. To have too much power can be dangerous; it exposes one to suspicion of acquiring it by illegitimate means—black magic. Ambition is a perversity, not a virtue. It is more important to be in harmony with totality than to be powerful.³⁾

And finally, it explains the concept of taboo. The Venda word corresponding most closely to the concept of taboo is the verb u ila. It is used both with a transitive and intransitive meaning, which is either "to avoid something because of its superior position in the hierarchy of forces", or "to avoid doing something because it would mean trespassing against the rules of seniority".

1) See Erasmus, Op. cit., p. 108.

2) See Mbiti, African religions, p. 68.

3) Erasmus, Op. cit., p. 293.

In the intransitive sense it means "to be forbidden to do, or to be forbidden to approach or touch because of its seniority in the hierarchy of forces, or because doing it would mean disregarding the principles of seniority".

"Ri ila musingo wa ndou" ("we do not eat the elephant's trunk"), the people of the Singo sib say, because this elephant's trunk is associated with something in the history of the origin of their sib and therefore stands high in their hierarchical chain. Or a younger brother should not marry before his elder brother. "Zwi a ila", "it is not done", ^{the} principles of seniority.

The hierarchical concept seems to be the underlying motive in the phenomenon of totemism. The totem is something high up in the hierarchy of forces in the genealogy of a sib.

The concept of taboo as explained by Frazer ¹⁾ or Snaith ²⁾ does not coincide with the Venda concept of u ila. We have not found traces of negative taboo in the sense that anything is ila'd because it is supposed to be impure. Neither does it refer to something that can automatically hurt or destroy those who break the taboo because of its dangerous spirit power.

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- 1) Frazer, Sir. J.G. The Golden Bough. Abridged ed. London, Macmillan, 1957, p. 294.
 - 2) Snaith, N.H. The distinctive ideas of the Old Testament. London, Epworth Press, 3rd imp. 1947, pp. 37-8.

Ideas of God

Little more is thought and said about God among non-Christian Venda — and probably among most Christians too — than that He is the highest in the hierarchy of forces. He is so high above men that He is unapproachable except by special persons and in special circumstances. He has therefore very little influence if any on their everyday life. Religion is the sphere of the ancestor spirits and not of God the Creator.¹⁾

There used to be a cult of the supreme Venda deity, Raluvhimba. Actually there are three names for this deity, i.e. Raluvhimba, Mwali and Khuzwane.

Khuzwane is even today the supreme deity of the Lovedu, and it is almost certain that this name has been adopted from them. Khuzwane among the Lovedu is believed to be the Creator who made all things, including men, and left his footprints on certain rocks when these rocks were still soft. "But no one knows what has happened to him and no one ever thinks of him".²⁾

The name "Mwali" ³⁾ (probably a contraction of Muhali, "the courageous, stern-minded one", which is also used as praise-name for a chief) is according to most Venda an earlier name of Raluvhimba, the best-known name for the supreme deity.

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- 1) See Krige, Eileen Jensen and J.D. The Lovedu of the Transvaal. (In African Worlds. Ed. Forde, D. Oxford University Press, 2nd imp. 1955) p. 60.
 - 2) Krige and Krige, Rain-queen, p. 231.
 - 3) For a discussion of the Shona name Mwari see van der Merwe, W.J. The Shona idea of God. Morgenster, 1957, pp. 5ff.

It is quite clear from various legends ¹⁾ that he is by origin a deified chief, who used to rule at a place called Matongoni in Rhodesia, where he is reputed to have had children by women of the ancestors of the Venda. His son was called Tshilume ("the male divining dice") or Mutumbukavhathu ("First ancestor"), and the Venda chiefs trace their ancestry back to him. Mwali can therefore be regarded as the first Venda Chief. He seems to have had a great reputation, for even while living he used to be praised by the terms Mudzimu-muhulu, Muvhusa-Denga. ("Great ancestor spirit", "Ruler of heaven").

After his death he is believed to have travelled underground to Mubvumela at Matombo (the Matopo Hills, near Bulawayo in Rhodesia). When there is an earthquake, the Venda still say, Makhulu u a fhira ("Our grandfather is passing"—under the ground, of course). Or when a star shoots, they say it is Mwali walking along the clouds—thence, according to some legends, the name Raluvhimba, "Father of the Lanner, who travels faster than the African lanner".

Raluvhimba is said to have occasionally visited the Venda at Ha Luvhimbi, in Eastern Vendale, and in former years a special messenger used to be sent with a black ox and a black piece of cloth to Mubvumela in the Matopos as offering for Mwali.²⁾ A severe drought in 1942 was ascribed to the fact that Chief Mphephu had failed in that year to send an offering to Mwali.

This cult seems to have fallen into disuse now.

1) For some of these legends, see Mudau, E. Ngomalungundu. Pretoria, 1940.
Marole, L.T. Raluvhimba. Sibasa, undated.
Stayt, H. The Bavenda.

2) Stayt, Op. cit., p. 232.

Under the influence of Christianity the idea of a Creator-God has come to be generally accepted among the Venda. But this God does not seem to be a living reality in everyday life. He is the highest in the hierarchy of powers, originator of life and giver of rain, but he is no factor in the life of the people. "He is always far away, indifferent to human happiness, even indifferent - for all practical purposes - to whether men do good or evil".¹⁾ One cannot offend Him, and therefore cannot have a sense of guilt in his regard. He is not concerned. He has no influence on people's moral values.²⁾

Whereas the Christian's God, the God of the Bible, is infinitely superior and distinct from man and creation, yet nearer than one's nearest kin, the God of the Bantu, and of the presentday Venda, is but a remote part of the cosmos, very far away.

In so far as the Biblical idea of God has penetrated somewhat deeper, God has come to be regarded as the "good Father of all", who can never get cross with anyone. He cannot judge anybody. He only gives good things to men.³⁾

Some other important themes

Against the background of this dominant theme, we shall now deal shortly with three important themes which are in various ways related to it, and which recur,

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- 1) Phillips, G.E. The Old Testament in the World Church. London, Lutterworth Press, 2nd imp. 1948, p. 12, 13.
 - 2) See Mbiti, African religions, p. 207.
Du Plessis, H. 'n Banier van die volke. Potchefstroom, 1963, p. 63.
 - 3) See Taylor, J.V. Processes of growth in an African Church. London, S C M Press, 1958, p. 20.

sometimes one, sometimes more than one, whenever ideological factors are involved in Venda life. These themes are the Idea of the limited good, the Priority of interpersonal relations, and Spirits and magic.

A The idea of the limited good

It seems as if on the background of Bantu (and Venda) cosmology, as on that of many other "primitive" cultures, one detects the idea of a limited amount of cosmic good, which in Venda is called zwivhuya.¹⁾

This does not refer in the first place to "goods" in the sense of "material possessions", but rather to vital force, power, prestige, health, good luck etc.

This idea is typical in subsistence level societies, where there are seemingly limited natural resources. In expanding societies, such as modern industrial societies, the facts as observed by the people would deny such an idea.

Since the cosmic good is limited, it is believed that the amount of good possessed or controlled by a particular person can only be increased at the expense of someone or something else. On the other hand, when it seems to be decreasing, the logical conclusion is that it is being drawn away to somewhere else. The one exception is that of a chief, who is regarded as the pivotal point of the vital force of the tribe as a whole. When he becomes powerful and rich, it does not mean that he increases his own vital force at the expense of the tribe, but the tribe shares in his vital force, in the "good" he acquires, unless he rejects the obligations of reciprocity between himself and his tribe.

1) As it occurs, to give one example, in the song,
"Litsha izwo, zwivhuya zwi tshee phanda"
("Leave those things, the good things are still ahead").

This idea is one of the sources of the widespread belief among the Bantu that the whites in Africa can only prosper at the expense of the Africans themselves - by practising "colonialism", which is one of the most important grievances of Africans against the white man. That also explains why independent governments in Africa are more or less forced by the views of their people to nationalize the sources of wealth, so as to prevent this kind of exploitation.

An important manifestation of this "good" is life force or vital force.¹⁾ To understand what this means, one must first understand the Bantu concept of life and death. To the Bantu life and death are not absolute concepts as to the European. They are rather relative concepts with no clear dividing line between the two. Life to the Bantu is a dynamic process of constant increase (u engedzwa vhutshilo) of decrease (u fa, u fhetwa vhutshilo) in his vital force.

Therefore a Venda person can say, "Ndi khou fa nga ndala" ("I am dying of hunger"), when he has had a meal that same day; or, "Vhana vha khou fa nga mukhushwane" ("The children are dying of flu"), when they are running about and playing happily; or, "O mmbulaha" ("He has killed me"), when one had to pay an excessive price or has received an excessive punishment, or has been paid too little for strenuous labour. All this just means that the vital force of the speaker or his children is being diminished.

This being so, it is logical that there are degrees of life and death. When being asked about one's health,

1) For a detailed exposition of this principle, see Tempels, *Bantoe-filosofie*, passim. Though it is expounded from an European philosophical angle, it is very valuable in being the first study to draw our attention to the importance of the principle of "vital force" among the Bantu. See also Mbiti, *African religions*, p. 10, for a critical discussion. And see Shropshire, D.W.T. *The Church and primitive peoples*. London, S P C K, 1938, p. xix.

one can answer, "Ri kha qi tshila zwiṭukutuku" ("We are still living a very little bit") — meaning that one still has some little life force left.

These concepts manifest themselves in various ways in interpersonal relationships. For example, when a person works diligently, and his crops are consequently better than those of his neighbours, someone is bound to say, "U na maḁuxwane" ("He has zombies working for him"), by which they illustrate the belief that he can only prosper by employing the life force of other people for his own benefit, in an evil way.

There is the belief that medicine can be made by killing one person in order to strengthen the life force of another. ¹⁾

When a Venda mother observes that her co-wife's children are strong and healthy, whereas hers are sickly and weak, it seems only logical to her that the co-wife is drawing their life force away to her own children — that she, in a sense, is "consuming" them (u la). In this connection the expression "U dzula nga nṁe" ("She is using my vital force for her own purpose"), is also used.

This idea of the limited good is never explicitly stated by the Venda themselves as an abstract principle. But the "top of the iceberg" can be seen in the way it functions in their behaviour. It serves to explain behaviour which would otherwise have been inexplicable.

1) This is the motive in ritual murder. The purpose of the ritual murders is to obtain ingredients for a medicine of invincible power. Hence a human victim, as far better than an animal, is chosen. The living body is preferred to a dead one, and magically potent parts of the body are cut off to provide the most powerful ingredients.

Inter alia it explains the strong emphasis on reciprocity— though there are other important elements in the principle of reciprocity— among the Venda. It is important to discuss this because it recurs in terms used in the Venda Bible. It also throws light on the nature of black magic, which often consists of drawing away someone else's vital force for oneself.

B The priority of interpersonal relations

In Venda society, as in traditional African society in general, the focus of importance is upon the group rather than on the individual. This group means in the first place the family, including the ancestor spirits, but it also means the tribe,¹⁾ though in human behaviour this is a much less important social unit than the family.

There are many striking proverbs and sayings which emphasize this, such as: "Muthu ndi muthu nga muṁwe" ("A person is a person through another person"), meaning that man by himself is helpless and has little value. Or: "Muthu u bebelwa muṁwe" ("A person is born for the other"). Or: "A u tswukisi ndila u woṁhe" ("You can't tread open a footpath on your own"). Or: "Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu" ("One finger cannot take samp from the pot").

These sayings serve to illustrate that the individual Venda looks at his personal value as an integrated part of totality.²⁾

1) Shropshire, Op. cit., p. 17: "The tribe is an enlarged family under the guardianship of the ancestors of the chief."

2) See also Erasmus, Op. cit., p. 207.

Knowing one's proper place in the kinship group and in the tribe, and acting accordingly, is the highest virtue.

We are aware of the fact that this strong emphasis on the group is not a specific characteristic of the Venda or the Bantu only. The individualism which characterises Western European society, the constant need for individual responsibility and personal decision, is a recent development and falls outside the main-stream of history.¹⁾

Yet it needs to be discussed here, since it has a direct bearing on human behaviour in Venda society, which forms the cultural background of terms such as u luga and u tenda which have been used in the Venda Bible to refer to "righteousness" and "faith".

Even if it is true that the modern individualist in western society has to a considerable extent remained a socially orientated person within the framework of his individualism, there is a marked difference with Venda society. Here the priority of interpersonal relations is so strong that it has led to the development of an entirely different moral code.

Characteristics which are appreciated in Venda society are not, as in Western European society, those of honesty, truthfulness, frankness, integrity, resoluteness, consistency and perseverance in pursuing a goal, but rather of friendliness, complaisance, adaptability, pliability, the willingness to compromise, modesty, respect for seniors, open-handedness, the willingness to share what one has with others, everything that contributes to smooth interpersonal relations and to avoiding friction between persons.

1) See Carothers, J.C. The African mind in health and disease. Geneva, W H O, 1953, pp. 151,2.

Father M. Hannan, in Gelfand's "African Background"¹⁾ discusses the Shona abstract noun unhu. The noun in the personal class, munhu, means "a person".²⁾ When a person has unhu, says Father Hannan, " . . . that man has those qualities of self-control, co-operativeness and respect for elders that a Shona man is expected to have."

The Krige's³⁾ say of the Lovedu,

"The qualities that are most admired in adults and that therefore are most insisted upon in children are generosity and unselfishness and ability to live in peace with others. Quarrelsomeness is one of the worst faults." Unpleasant people, especially those who are quarrelsome, ambitious, or competitive, are often accused of witchcraft. It logically follows from their ambitious character that they are persons who would be trying to acquire more than their rightful share of the limited good.⁴⁾

Two more interesting quotes from the Krige's:

"The qualities and virtues which are stressed then, in the moral code of the Lovedu are moderation and temperance, compromise and agreement, humility, respect for the personality and the rights of others . . . Right conduct is relative always to the human situation and morality is oriented not from any absolute standards of honesty or truth but from the social good in each situation." ⁵⁾

1) p. 103.

2) The term "Bantu" comes from the same Ur-Bantu stem. The Venda form corresponding to unhu is vhuthu, which has in some places in the Venda Bible been used to translate the Hebrew term "chesed" ("faithful love").

3) Rain-queen, p. 110.

4) Idem, p. 268.

5) From African worlds, p. 78.

"Conduct that promotes smooth relationships, that upholds the social structure, is good; conduct that runs counter to smooth relationships, is bad. Courtesy and the respect due to age or seniority are thus of greater importance than truth. A son-in-law who, tired of always being imposed upon by his wife's father, truthfully signifies his unwillingness to help him by providing a goat would be guilty, in view of the special mutualities between families related by marriage, of unpardonable behaviour which might jeopardize his marriage. The correct procedure is to agree to help but to be always 'still looking for it' when approached for the goat." 1)

The word "agree" as used here by the Krige's is important. That is the term used in the Venda Bible for "believing in Jesus Christ" !

The Lovedu, together with the Shona are the closest spiritual kin of the Venda, and one might as well have substituted "Venda" for "Shona" or "Lovedu" in the quotations above.

What is said of the community at large is all the more valid for the family, which among the Venda embraces a much wider group than among white people. It is extended even to the ancestor spirits. Apart from respect for seniors, sharing is an extremely important characteristic expected from the members of the family. There is the Venda saying that "Vhana vha munna vha kovhekana na thoho ya nzie" ("The children of one man share even the head of a locust"). "A child is never permitted to eat alone and quickly learns as a matter of course that food is to be shared. Sharing of food is never an occasion for which gratitude is expected, but is the natural course of events." 2)

1) Ibidem. Also Mbiti, J. African concept of human relations (In Ministry, 9/4, Oct. 1969, p. 159).

2) Gelfand, African background, p. 98.

It should be kept in mind that this is a picture of ideal behaviour. The Venda being human, this is not always kept to. It sometimes happens that a woman carries two snuffboxes, one for herself and one, an empty one, for showing to people who ask her for snuff !

Since the family is such a closely knit unit, it is important that everyone knows his exact place, obligations and privileges in it. This has led to an elaborate system of family protocol in order to prevent friction.¹⁾

Yet again, Venda being human, it is not always possible for individuals to avoid friction. Especially in polygamous households there is often much mutual jealousy and even hatred. This is why so often in cases where someone is suspect of witchcraft, he or she comes from the closest family circle.

What is more, the strict rules of protocol and seniority are sometimes so oppressive to young women that they find it unbearable. Of course there are women who have a higher status in the hierarchy of forces, such as the makhadzi, the chief's or father's sister,²⁾ and there are secret "societies" of women by means of which their members' aspirations to a higher social status can be satisfied to a certain extent. But there is only one way in which a young woman can enhance her status and prestige, and that is by practising a kind of "hysteria" which takes the form of a cult of spirit possession, malombo. Adherents of this cult are believed to have powers of healing and divination, and are even sometimes called mudzimu ("an ancestor spirit"). They acquire, for the duration of the "possession", the hierarchical status of the particular spirit who has taken possession of them. This will be discussed in detail later on.

1) See Gelfand, African Background, pp. 60,72.

2) See du Flessis, H. Die politieke organisasie van die Venda. Pretoria, Unisa, 1940, p. 46 and passim.

This whole social setup profoundly influences the Venda concept of "sin" and "evil". To the Venda "sin" is that which disturbs the harmony within the kinship-group or tribe (u tshinya, "to spoil", "to destroy", "to sin"). Evil is that which is directed against society and threatens its integrity and existence (vhuvhi, under which is classified vhuloi, witchcraft, malicious homicide within the ingroup; and avarice, vhutshivha — jealousy, not wanting to share, denying one's dependence on and obligations to the family and society)¹⁾

About this background to conceptions of sin, Mbiti²⁾ says,

"As in all societies of the world, social order and peace are recognized by African peoples as essential and sacred. Where the sense of corporate life is so deep, it is inevitable that the solidarity of the community must be maintained, otherwise there is disintegration and destruction. This order is conceived of primarily in terms of kinship relationship, which simultaneously produces many situations of tension since everybody is related to everybody else and deepens the sense of damage caused by the strain of such tensions. If a person steals a sheep, personal relations are at once involved because the sheep belongs to a member of the corporate body, perhaps to someone who is a father, or brother, or sister or cousin to the thief. As such it is an offence against the community, and its consequences affect not only the thief but also the whole body of his relatives . . .

.
It is not the act in itself which would be 'wrong' as such, but the relationships involved in the act: if relationships are not hurt or damaged, and if there is no discovery of breach of custom or regulation, then the act is not 'evil' or 'wicked' or 'bad'."

1) See also Taylor, *Primal vision*, p. 100.

2) *African religions*, pp. 205, 213. Also Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 226,7.

The extent to which the concept of the spirit world influences the everyday life of the Venda can hardly be overestimated. All spheres of life are pervaded by it: the family life; the relationship between a chief and his subjects; divining; all magical practices and medicine; sowing and harvesting; birth and death. The spirits completely dominate the life of the Venda, - and there is no part of life that can be regarded as outside the influence of spirits.

When faced with a crisis, the Venda, including the majority of Church members, do not turn to God, to Jesus Christ, for help and comfort, but to the ancestor spirits.¹⁾

A spirit, mudzimu, plur. midzimu, is that part of man which continues in a conscious existence after death.²⁾ It is also referred to by the terms murunzi, "shadow", muya, "wind, spirit" and tshitungulo, "a divining object" or "an amulet representing an ancestor spirit".

The Venda believe that the shadow of a person is his mudzimu, and that therefore a corpse throws no shadow.

In this conscious existence the spirits remain part of the extended family. They know what is going on in the world of the living. They are interested in the whereabouts of the family. They want to be remembered and share in the possessions and meals of the living in ritual.

1) See also Gelfand, African background, p. 110.

2) Idem, pp. 108,9, and Taylor, The primal vision, pp. 60,1. It is not possible to trace among the Venda a belief in the different aspects of man's soul as put forth by Taylor in the chapter, "The scattered self".

The midzimu are interested in the prosperity of the family, because they need the offerings of the family for their continued existence. They are, therefore, the protectors of the family and tribe, and no harm can befall either unless they are neglectful.¹⁾ "Witches, powerful as they are, can neither enter the village nor cause sickness without their connivance . . ." ²⁾

They are higher in the hierarchy of forces, and therefore more powerful than the living. But they are not as happy as the living,³⁾ and therefore they, paradoxically, provide a constant threat to the living on account of their jealousy. It seems as if in the dealings of the living with them it is chiefly the nature of the midzimu to complain ⁴⁾ if perchance they have been neglected, forgotten, or not been told of any important event in the life of the family.

1) Krige, Rain-queen, p. 231.

2) Ibidem. It is interesting to note the meaning of the frequently occurring Venda name for a person, Ndanganeni ("Scheme against me"). The complete saying from which it is derived, goes, "Ndanganeni nothe-nothe vhaloi, midzimu yo dzula yo langana kale", which means, "Scheme against me as you like, all of you sorcerers, the midzimu have long ago settled the matter among themselves".

3) See also Kagame, A. La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'Être, p. 370.

4) Krige, Op. cit., p. 232, 3:

" . . . in the majority of cases no definite reason for the complaint is either given or required; and frequently no special spirit is mentioned. It is enough to know the cause of the trouble and what rite is necessary to placate the gods. Even complaints of neglect are usually put positively: 'He complains that you should give him (his shrine) a libation'. The ancestors desire mainly to be remembered: they want their beads worn, their name revived, a beast or goat dedicated to and named after them. They also like to be told about journeys undertaken or marriages, in much the same way as the living, and to be approached with a libation."

The spirits are very real to the Venda, but there is no sign of affection towards them. They are rather a nuisance and a potential danger, and the offerings and prayers to them are not so much an expression of communion with them than a means of propitiating them and keeping them at bay.¹⁾

It is also a fact that midzimu are usually remembered and addressed in prayers only for a few generations back.²⁾ Beyond this they are hardly remembered, if at all; their "amulets" (zwitungulo) are discarded; they do not appear in dreams any more, and they do not "take possession" of any descendant in the malombo cult. They are forgotten, they do not exist any longer as far as the family is concerned. They have crossed the bridge of memory, never to return. The family of living persons pin their hope on the children and unborn babies of the future for the continuance of life.

"For that reason, African parents are anxious to see that their children find husbands and wives, otherwise failure to do so means in effect the death of the unborn and a diminishing of the family as a whole".³⁾

Mbiti says,⁴⁾ "'If you don't get married and have children, who will pour out libation to you when you die?' This is a serious philosophical concern among traditional African peoples. Unfortunate, therefore, is the man or woman who has nobody to 'remember' him (her), after physical death. To lack someone close who keeps the departed in their personal immortality is the worst misfortune and punishment that any person could suffer.

1) See Mbiti, African religions, p. 162.

2) Idem, p. 163, and Krige, Rain-queen, p. 239.

3) Mbiti, Idem, p. 107.

4) Idem, p. 134.

To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind."

It is important to take note of the belief in spirits for mudzimu is the term which has been chosen to refer to the Biblical concept of "God" !

Spirit power and magic

As soon as the Venda enters the realm of events such as illness, drought, lightning, sterility, death, misfortune, unusual success, prowess or power, the causes of which cannot readily be traced by observation, he looks up to what he regards as the ultimate cause of it — to the spirit world or to the world of mysterious evil or beneficent forces which really caused these events.¹⁾

The great majority of educated Venda, as all Africans, still believe in and fear magic, or try to use it to their advantage by consulting specialists.²⁾ They attribute success or failure in business or examinations, unhappiness at home, the inability to get promotion in work, defeat or victory in sport to it.

1) See Mbiti, African religions, p. 200.

See also Shropshire, Op. cit., pp. xxxi - xxxiii. Shropshire's remarks are very interesting, though we should warn against the theory of a "mysticism of undifferentiation" which he propounds. The fact is rather that the Bantu often sees two causes working simultaneously — his mind working along the lines of: "Who sent the mosquito that brought me the malaria? Why was I bitten and not the man in the room next to mine?"

2) Parrinder, G. Witchcraft, European and African. London, Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 129:

" . . . most educated Africans still believe profoundly in witchcraft, and there are statements made on many sides that the fear of witchcraft is increasing. The coming of European ideas and customs has unsettled society in Africa, and the increasing insecurity adds to the force of the belief in witchcraft which is held responsible for unknown and incalculable dangers."

Since the Venda have become accustomed to looking up to the sphere beyond the empirical for the causes of their misfortunes or good fortune, they tend to extend this attitude into areas where causes seem to the white man to be quite natural and obvious.

So when a person prospers more than others because he works harder than they and uses the correct agricultural techniques, they are sure to suspect him of having supernatural assistance in the form of zombies.¹⁾ The fertilizer he uses is regarded as having magical power.

Because of this, there is considerably less incentive to hard work in Venda society than in a "secularized" society.

On the other hand, misfortunes are always suspected of having a secondary cause.²⁾ The Venda saying "A hu na tshi no da nga tshothe" ("Nothing just happens by itself"), means that there is a secondary, spiritual cause to every misfortune. We have personally come across a case where a small girl was sent down a slippery slope with a heavy mortar. She slipped and fell, as could be expected, the mortar coming down onto her thigh and fracturing it. Her parents who had sent her as a matter of course ascribed this mishap to the vhaloi ("withches").³⁾

1) See also Krige, Rain-queen, p. 252.

2) See also Mbiti, African religions, p. 201.

3) See also Maile, M.L. A comparison and a contrast between African religion, customs, ceremonies and Scriptural writings. Bothaville, 1955, p. 64.

When afflicted with any kind of adversity, the Venda is not in the first place interested in how it happened, perhaps he knows it; what he wants to know is why it happened — who caused it and for what motive.

"Who is working against me, spirits of my ancestors, or witches?" is the nagging question to which he feels he must find the answer if he is to survive. Once that is ascertained, he can obtain the assistance of a nanga to divert the harmful influences or redirect them towards their source.¹⁾

This indicates that the all-pervading power, "mana", can be harnessed in many ways, positively or negatively, if one but knows the laws and correct ritual for harnessing it.

But the ritual is not effective in itself; it does not work *ex opere operato*. Even when magic rites are performed for killing an enemy, "hu fanela u vha hu na tshinyalo, a tshi funa u vhulaha" ("there must be a reason for hatred; the intent of killing must be there").

These two elements, the power of evil intent and the word pronounced with that intent, are essential elements of any rite, and are sometimes even regarded as being effective in themselves without any specific ritual.²⁾

1) See also Nida, E.A. and Smalley, W.A. *Introducing animism*. New York, Friendship Press, 1959, p. 37, and Taylor, *The primal vision*, pp. 53-55.

2) Taylor, *Op. cit.*, p. 48:
" . . . the universal belief that a man's brooding anger or envy very quickly can take on an existence and vitality of its own. It remains a true part of his self, yet moves out far beyond the perimeter of his physical presence and becomes an independent agent acting back upon him as well as upon others, both living and dead. 'Anger', says an Akan proverb, 'is like a stranger, it does not stay in one house'."

(Contnd on next page)

This is probably the reason why persons accused of witchcraft so often admit it, although they have not performed any magic rites with the intent of killing a person. The mumbled curses uttered in anger or hatred may be enough to harm an enemy! ¹⁾

If a wife grumbles about her husband who is working away from home, and any misfortune befalls him there, she is sure to be suspected of having killed him.. It is accepted that "u gungulela muthu e kule ndi u mu vhangela mafhanza" ("to grumble against a person who is far away is to bring a curse on him"). Or a father speaking longingly of his children when he is separated from them, is warned that this will cause them to cry and cause their mother trouble (u panzhilela).

To speak unkindly to an expectant mother or to an ill person is regarded as particularly dangerous. The life of the unborn child might be endangered, or the flickering flame of the sick person's vital force might be extinguished by the powerful gust of the evil word.

(contnd)

Mbiti, Afr. religions, p. 197: "There is a mystical power in words, especially those of a senior person to a junior one, in terms of age, social status or office position. The words of 'parents', for example, carry 'power' when spoken to children: they 'cause' good fortune, curse, success, peace, sorrows or blessings, especially when spoken in moments of crisis. The words of the medicine-man work through the medicine he gives, and it is this, perhaps more than the actual herb, which is thought to cause the cure or prevent misfortunes."

Among the Nguni peoples the belief in the lethal power of umona, "brooding hatred and envy", is very widespread. A.M. Pienaar, in an unpublished lecture, Die prediking onder die heidene in ons huidige sending-situasie, 1968, p. 6, draws our attention to the fact that umona belongs to the personal class of nouns.

- 1) The feeling of prestige accompanying the reputation of being able to manipulate supernatural forces may induce them to admit being witches. When lightning recently struck several houses of Venda in the neighbourhood of our mission, people were heard boasting that, "We haven't yet done everything we intended to !"

directed against him. "Ipfi livhi a li yi mulwadzeni" ("An evil word is not spoken at a sick person").

There is a more or less set formula for directing a curse, matamba mavhi, towards another person when the speaker is overcome by his anger. It goes like this: "Muli wannyo ya_{lo} ! Li kundwa na u vuwa, le pesu, lo fa. Line li tshi fa le fhasi hu a kon_{da} hone hu sa kon_{di}. Hufhani vha sa fi, vho tou tshetshela nga tshi_{ta}nga tsho_{the}. Mugogonono wa_{lo}. Tshalale !" This is so full of idiomatic obscenities and bitterness that it is almost untranslatable. It calls death down upon the object of anger by referring to her sexual organs. The reaction to this would be a shocked, "Ndi samba la fhedzi lila? A si matambatamba" ("Now tell me, is that an ineffective curse? Those are not socially acceptable curses!") And the person who has been cursed in such a way will most likely take measures to have her vital force strengthened.

The belief in the effective power of the word is strikingly illustrated in the Venda churches, where the belief is often encountered that the matter of a sermon is not as important as the effect produced by the personality of the preacher and the impact of the accompanying rites.

It is also interesting to note the way in which in some Churches biblical terms are used for cursing enemies. ¹⁾

Although the powerful word is necessary for rendering rites effective, magic is usually practised by performing definite magical rites, which work according to the

1) See Turner, H. W. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) (Two Vols.). Oxford, Clarendon, 1967, p. 280.

principle of sympathetic magic,¹⁾ consisting of "contagious" and "imitative" magic.

By "contagion"²⁾ is meant that objects which had been in close contact with a person, retain their affinity with that person, especially if the contact has stretched over a long time, so that on the one hand such objects can be used by enemies against that person by treating them in a prescribed way: On the other hand the power and peculiarities of that person still pervade those objects and can be passed on to others through their use.

For instance, hair from the ngozwi, the carrying skin of a small child, may not be allowed to fall into the hands of a stranger, since it provides him with a means of killing that child or harming it, e.g. by burning the hair together with harmful substances. Or the excrements or spittle of a chief is used to prepare powerful beneficial potions. Or a piece of cloth from the dress of a person who is known for his or her strong sexual drive might be used in the preparation of love potions or medicines for impotence.

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- 1) See Nida & Smalley, Animism, p. 34. And for the earliest scientific discussion of this principle, see Frazer, Sir J.G. The golden bough. Abridged ed. London, Macmillan, 1957, p. 14: "If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion."
- 2) Frazer, Op. cit., p. 49: "The most familiar example of Contagious Magic is the magical sympathy which is supposed to exist between a man and any severed portion of his person, as his hair or nails; so that whoever gets possession of human hair or nails may work his will, at any distance, upon the person from whom they were cut."

By "imitation" we here mean, to use the formulation of Frazer, that an effect resembles its cause, or that like produces like.

A very striking example of this is described by Van Warmelo.¹⁾ It is in connection with the rite of "u isa khombe mafhandeni", to provide a symbolical "wife" for a bachelor who dies unmarried. His relatives go to a place where one path branches off from another, and then make a little hole between the two paths very near the point where they meet. Small pegs are **driven** in all round the hole and cotton is interlaced in between them. A pick-handle is placed with one end inside the hole and mpambo, the beer for libation offerings to ancestor spirits, is poured out onto it.

"These paths, they say, are the wife of the unmarried man (The symbolism is rather crude but not difficult to grasp)."

There is more than one trait of imitation in this rite. The allusions to the sexual act by the symbolical acts are clear. Furthermore, a hoe is associated with women, since the fields are tilled by women. So we also have "contagious magic" in this rite.

Another example of the application of "Imitative magic" is the domba initiation dance for Venda girls. The dancers form one long row which in its movements imitates a moving python, which is regarded as the symbol of fertility, since the female reproductive organs are called "the snake of the woman".

1) Contributions towards Venda history, religion and tribal ritual. Pretoria, Government Printer, 1932, p. 189.

Aspects of the Venda world view that reflect more
than one of these dominant features

From A and B (The concept of the limited good;
Priority of human relations)

1 Property

Their world view determines the attitude of the Venda towards property. Vhana vha munna vha kovhekana na thoho ya nzie ("The children of one man share even the head of a locust"), so the Venda saying goes. This is also true for the extended family. The accumulation of wealth by an individual is frowned upon by the Africans themselves. To put one's money away in a bank, where the family or community cannot benefit from it, is regarded as stinginess and a great evil (vhutshivha, tshivhi). This means hoarding more than one's rightful share of the "good", or refusing to share it with others.

This is why a Venda man would rather invest in wives and children and cattle, which belong to the extended family, than in the more private type of investments. Real prosperity to him is not to possess much, but to control many. "The main principle is to maintain collective control, through the seniors, of individual property with a view to preventing losses and having assets available for distribution in case of need. For this reason a man is regarded as a sort of thief if, instead of investing in cattle and wives, he secretly puts his money into a Post Office savings account where

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- 1) Krige, Rain-queen, p. 110: "This does not mean that Lovedu children do not on occasion try to hide their sweets from others; but greater stress is laid on sharing food by them than by us and, what is more important, there are always half a dozen other children on the spot to share whatever is given."

nobody can see it and thereby evades being stripped by his impecunious and importunate relatives." 1)

Venda are inclined to be suspicious of rich people, and to rejoice over misfortunes which might befall them. "The majority would prefer to be worse off, provided others were in the same boat, rather than be better off if this meant that wealthy folk would be better off still. To the average Muvenda, poverty seems supportable, but the prosperity of another, insupportable." 2)

Of course one would not venture to suggest that Europeans never think of sharing anything or that they are never jealous of rich people, but it is true that sharing possessions is stressed much more among the Venda, and that they are much more prone to jealousy. This is demonstrated by the fact that in a large percentage of cases involving sorcery, the motive is believed to be jealousy, and this is exploited by the diviners when smelling out sorcerers: "Who is jealous of your success? It is he who sent that lightning to destroy your crops." 3) Or: "Who is it that says, 'People come to their shop and not to ours; people buy vegetables

1) Van Warmelo, N.J. Venda Law, Pt. V. Pretoria, Government Printer, 1967, p. 1062.

2) Ibidem, See also Krige, Rain-queen, p. 52:

"Moderate success is credited to industry, but immoderate success may be suspect; he who reaps much more than his neighbours is in danger of being looked upon as an enemy in league with anti-social forces Mutual helpfulness is highly esteemed and aggressive exploitation deeply despised . . ."

3) See also Krige, Op. cit., p. 269.

from them and not from us?'" This serves to confirm their suspicions, which are bound to have arisen when any misfortune befalls them, and of course it also confirms their belief in the powers of the diviner.

This attitude towards property tends to discourage ambition and initiative. Why should a person exert himself to climb on the ladder of success, if that would only mean exposing himself to continuous demands from his "impecunious and importunate relatives" who if allowed to, would stop fending for themselves and claim their rights to share the fruits of his industry? ¹⁾

From the traditional Venda point of view it seems logical that property should be owned mainly on a communal basis, i.e. by the family and not by individuals. ²⁾ This is of importance when the term for referring to the Biblical concept of "reward", malamba, will be discussed.

The onslaught of modern economic advance has made itself felt in Vendaland too. Most persons do not conform to ideal Venda behaviour any more. Many fathers now leave it to their sons to obtain wives from their own resources. There are many persons who take the cattle or money paid for the daughters of their deceased brothers, but do not provide the sons of their brothers with wives. Chiefs use the yields of the crops from fields tilled by the people for their personal purposes, and leave poor people and widows to their fate. Previously all this would have been unthinkable.

1) See Krige, Rain-queen, p. 60: "Individual achievement was of little account; no one was penalized because he attained only a very indifferent standard of efficiency or industry; people were devoted to a non-material ideal. A man's whole upbringing and training conditioned him to the ideal of reciprocity and helpfulness."

2) There are exceptions to this rule, of course. E. g., women may "marry" wives with cattle acquired through their own efforts, such as basketmaking or pottery.

One even finds some very rich people in Vendaland whose close relatives go begging for food. But such behaviour is frowned upon. This type of person is very unpopular with the people. It is taken for granted that he enriches himself in an evil way, and that he will not flinch from ritual murder in order to acquire more "life force" for himself.

2 Reciprocity

From the discussion of concepts of "property" it follows that the principle of reciprocity is fundamental and wide-spread in Venda society. This principle rests on the two pillars of the idea of the limited good and of the priority of interpersonal relationships.

It follows logically from the idea of the limited good that benefits received should be returned, otherwise one would be guilty of anti-social behaviour, hoarding more than one's rightful share of the good".

In the realm of interpersonal relations reciprocity expresses good neighbourship. The uniting force of gifts is very strong, and they play an important role in many social relations, such as marriage and the relations between chief and people.¹⁾

The concept of reciprocity manifests itself in the unwritten law that benefits and favours should always be returned in some form or other, even if the return gift is only a token gift, or even if it is rightly called "long-run reciprocity" by the Kriges, which means that not every benefit necessarily has to be returned immediately.²⁾

1) See Krige and Krige, The Lovedu, p. 56.

2) Ibidem.

Venda proverbs which illustrate this principle are, "Mutondi u tonda mutondi ngae" ("A benefactor is generous to another benefactor"); and, "U fha ndi u fhahea" ("To give is to hang up" i.e. in order to take it from the peg later at a suitable time).

If someone receives a gift and he is so desperately poor that he has nothing to put into the basket as a return gift, he will take a small piece of wood and put it into the basket. This will be regarded as a kind of pawn for a later occasion when his circumstances will have changed for the better. Hence the expression for being destitute, "Ri tshee matandani" ("We are still among the pieces of wood") !

There are many examples of this principle as applied in Venda society.¹⁾ Here are a few of them:

When a chief allots a piece of land to a person for cultivation, that person must tendela ("acknowledge his indebtedness and return the benefit") by sending beer made of the crops harvested from that field to the chief. He is also expected to till the chief's field, dzunde,

U mala and thakha, "marriage and bride-price"

One could hardly find a better example of how this law of reciprocity works than in the practices connected with marriage and the paying of bride-price.

1) For a description of the ways in which this principle of reciprocity is applied among the Shona people, see Gelfand, African background, pp. 78-82; 71, 72. We quote from p. 78: " . . . the African believes that some sort of tangible appreciation should be made whenever a service is rendered. It does not matter how little a person has exerted himself, but even if he has spent time in talking he feels he has made an effort and should be given something in return. In his eyes, even a glance means expenditure of energy and requires something in return."

The underlying principle of this system is that "for a consideration in cattle a family buys from another family one female unit of potential reproductive power".¹⁾

The term "buying" used here by Lestrade is not well-chosen; even the term "bride-price" is not quite suitable. Marrying a wife in Vendaland is not traditionally a commercial transaction, but rather a process of establishing ties between two families by the exchange of very valuable gifts — in casu a bride and cattle.

The principle of reciprocity is of essential importance. The Venda saying goes, "Mutupo u tevhela nombe" ("The sib is determined by the cattle"), which means that the children from the marriage rightly belong to the family that has paid the cattle for the "female reproductive unit" that has produced them. Biological fatherhood is of little importance against this background. The cattle determine the sociological father. Even a woman can be "father" to children if she has paid the "bride-price" for their mother. This woman has to get herself a mboho, a male partner of her choice or one assigned to her, so that she can bear children for her "husband".

This principle of reciprocity as applied in the "paying" of "bride-price" also explains why even Christians and relatively emancipated women insist on being "paid for". The law of reciprocity is so strongly felt that only when she has been paid for in accordance with that law, does she really feel that she belongs to the new group. When the "bride-price" has not been "paid" before marriage a wife will probably remind her husband as soon as a quarrel arises that he has no authority over her, since he has not "paid" the "bride-price" yet.

1) Lestrade, G.P. The Mala system of the Venda-speaking tribes, (In Bantu Studies, Vol. IV, No. 3).

For this reason it is obvious that the bride-price has to be returned when a wife deserts her husband without a good reason, such as prolonged ill-treatment.

The cattle determine the sib. A young man who has been neglected by his father during his childhood will yet feel that he belongs to his father's sib, because they have paid the cattle for his mother.

Legal proceedings, compensation and reconciliation

These matters are especially important because of the terms for "righteousness" and "reconciliation", i.e. u pfumedzana etc., which will be suggested to replace the present terms used in the Venda Bible.

The way court cases are approached demonstrate the importance of the principle of reciprocity in Venda society. Venda law " . . . is not penal and individualistic in character as our law, for the principle of equilibrium and compensation is of its essence".¹⁾ The purpose is to restore the balance by compensating the suffering party for its losses or injuries, and thereby effecting reconciliation.

"All the procedures aim, not at settling legal issues, but at effecting compromises and reconciliations." ²⁾

"The problem of the khoro lies, not in sifting evidence or in dispensing justice according to the law, but in adjusting personal differences within the general framework of the social structure. Success is achieved when personality compromises can be harmonized with the implications of the social system." ³⁾

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- 1) Shropshire, Op. cit., p. 41, speaking of Bantu law in general.
 - 2) Krige, Rain-queen, p. 186. See also Gen. Smuts in the foreword, p. x.
 - 3) Krige, Idem, p. 199. Khoro is the chief's courtyard. Here it means "the law court".

"The Shona is less interested in the punishment of the guilty party than in ensuring that the sufferer or offended person or family is fully compensated. There was no need to imprison the guilty party. Prisons have never existed in Shona society." 1)

Legalism

It is important to deal with this phenomenon because of the legalistic character of the concepts behind the Venda word for prayer to the spirits, u rerelela, which has been used in a number of cases to translate the Biblical terms for prayer.

The concept of reciprocity between persons is simply extended into the realm of the spirits, and prayers directed to the spirits while pouring out the libation offerings to them explicitly refer to the principle of reciprocity: We give you your due, so now we expect you to look after us and do your duty towards us.

From B and C (The priority of human relations;
Spirits and magic)

Spirit possession (malombo)

This phenomenon is important for our treatise because cults which resemble the possession cults have been carried into the Church, on the assumption that Muya or Mudzimu is similar to muya or mudzimu.

As has already been pointed out,²⁾ the underlying cause of this phenomenon is probably social, i.e. the

1) Gelfand, African Background, p. 87.

2) See p. 50.

subordinate position of Venda women. For some the only way of enhancing their prestige is "to become possessed", to believe or to pretend that they are possessed by some spirit of an ancestor, whose medium they become.

Dr. Van Warmelo describes this cult as follows:¹⁾

"The spirit of a departed ancestor is believed occasionally to make ill one of his (or, occasionally her) descendants, almost invariably a girl or woman. The divining dice, when consulted, say the illness is due to malombo. This means that the spirit wishes to take possession of the patient. Such visitation is looked upon as an honour and the subsequent proceedings are designed, not to exorcise the spirit, but on the contrary to let it in. The help of a medium (maine) is sought to this end. Such mediums are women tending, as far as we can see, to hysteria. They have already been through the same thing themselves and have their own spirit which helps them to deal with cases of malombo. The 'treatment' consists of singing, sometimes night and day for a week, by the bedside of the patient, to the accompaniment of rattles (tshele), until she sits up and commences swaying her body round and round and nodding her head, with ever increasing violence. Then suddenly she falls straight forward and remains stiff and unconscious for quite a while. It is said mudzimu wo wa, the spirit has 'fallen' i.e. has taken possession.

"The medium and her assistants, who are former patients, and are called her 'children' speak a special jargon among themselves, which they imagine is Karanga. When the mudzimu has 'fallen', he also speaks it, through the mouth of the patient."

1) Contributions, p. 141.

A person who has been possessed by an ancestor spirit gains considerably in prestige. She is believed to possess powers of divining. The initiates gather regularly for dancing and activating the spirit. 1)

There are strong sexual connotations in the relationship between the spirit and the possessed. The terms used for it is the same as for the sexual act (u hwela or u nyovha).

Fatalism

Although it is believed that the natural order and the spirit world can be controlled if the correct rites are performed, the facts as observed by the Venda in everyday life seem to belie this. The spirits seem to be very capricious and unpredictable in the way they send or allow misfortunes or good fortune.

"There is no such thing as resting secure because you have done all that is necessary for the gods; there is always some ancestor who can cause trouble, and it is best to wait and see what is wanted. Moreover, the ancestors are wayward; there is no knowing what they may desire." 2)

In these circumstances man often feels helpless and fatalistic in his attitude towards life.²⁾ By "fatalism"

1) It should be noted that some authorities deny the role played by abnormalities of character or hysteria in the malombo cult. D.W. Giesecke in a personal comment, and Krige, Rain-queen, p. 248. Personally we believe that it is probably often practised for other reasons, such as having touched objects filled with spirit power (thangu, "divining dice") or having been very ill, to the point of delirium, but that sometimes the consideration of prestige does play a role in this.

2) Krige, Idem, p. 233.

we do not mean here the belief in an impersonal cosmic force or order, but the attitude of helpless acceptance of things which are thought to be beyond control.¹⁾

This is vividly illustrated by the typical Venda expressions such as "Ri nga zwi ita hani? Tshashu ndi u sokou kondelela." (What can we do about it? We shall just have to put up with it.") Hence the ability of the Venda to suffer without complaining.

Names of children are also an eloquent expression of this fatalistic attitude. Kanakana, a child is named, ("Will it live or die, who knows?"); or Mbulaheni ("Go ahead and kill me, it doesn't matter"); or Namadzavho ("Meat for the sorcerers"); or Mukondeleli ("Endurer"); or Tshinakaho ("Tshi nakaho a tshi yi thambo, tshi no ya thambo ndi mutshinyalo" — "Something beautiful doesn't last, what does last is destruction"), and many others.

From A and C (The limited good; Spirits and magic)

Protective magic

Under certain circumstances witchcraft may be used in a way that is regarded as legitimate, i.e. when getting "medicine" for counteracting the work of the sorcerers and redirecting the evil forces against themselves.

1) See Ringgren, H. Fatalistic beliefs in religion, folklore and literature. Stockholm, 1967, p. 170. Erasmus, Die godsdienstige begrip, p. 228: "Met sy lewensgebeurtenisse lewe die Tswana gedurig in die spanning tussen daad en lot, tussen die mens se optrede en die noodlot. Die mens is slegs tot op sekere hoogte verantwoordelik vir sy daade en meester van sy lewe. Die ganse lewe is omring deur magte wat telkens ingryp en dreig om in te gryp in die mens se lewe . . ."

One kind of protective magic is musika, charms employed in such a way as to prevent a thief from stealing one's possessions. It can cause a painful itching of the thief's finger, which may compel him to confess. Or a stolen goat may start bleating in his belly and thereby prove his guilt. 1)

Another legitimate way of employing black magic is by practising madambi. This means that "medicines" are obtained from a hanga by means of which adversaries are scared. The Krige's describe examples of madambi among the Lovedu, who are closely related to the Venda, as follows: "Madabi, for example, has the power to transmute the nature of things. It is right for a husband to manipulate madabi in a way that will cause wild animals to appear while his runaway spouse works for her lover, for in this way he may frighten her into returning to him." 2)

From A, B and C (The limited good; Interpersonal relations; Spirits and magic)

Sorcery, vhuloi

This phenomenon has been discussed above 3) as an aspect of "spirits and magic". It has however, very important social connotations and the concept of the limited good is also involved in it.

This is important because the Biblical term for a "witch" has in some cases been translated by muloi, the Venda term for a sorcerer.

1) See Krige, Rain-queen, p. 256

2) Krige, Lovedu, p. 74. See also their Rain-queen, p. 255.

3) P. 56ff.

Sorcery ¹⁾ is believed to be by far the most important cause of misfortune, accident, sickness, death and even barrenness and impotence in the Venda community. "A hu na tshi no da nga tshothe" ("Nothing harmful happens 'by chance': everything is 'caused' by someone directly or through the use of mystical power"). "If you have your ears open, you will hear the names of people being blamed for misfortunes . . ." ²⁾

A muloi, "sorcerer" is the most feared and hated creature of all. He, or more often she, is the enemy number one of society, and by her very nature is intent on destroying other people, especially those nearest to her. A muloi is the embodiment of evil, the Bantu Satan. ³⁾

The most hateful characteristic of the muloi is that he is mostly intent on injuring those with whom he is in closest contact. No one — child, husband, wife, brother or father — ⁴⁾ is safe.

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- 1) The distinction made by Parrinder between a "witch", who acts unconsciously and a "sorcerer", who acts consciously, does not seem to be valid as far as the Venda are concerned. See his African traditional religion, London, Hutchinson, 1954, p. 117, and his Witchcraft, pp. 13,14.
 - 2) Mbiti, African religions, p. 201. See also Parrinder, Witchcraft, p. 129. The Krige's mention the interesting fact that of thirty deaths that came to their notice during their stay among the Lovedu, including a number of old people, none were thought to be natural — Rain-queen p. 223.
 - 3) Mbiti, African religions, p. 205, 213, and Krige, Rain-queen, p. 269. Gelfand, African Background, p. 94: "It is believed that this evil trait enters a person and possesses him . . . It is almost impossible to eradicate it or prevent it from acting through its host. Thus the witch takes pleasure not only in hurting strangers but in harming the members of his own family."
 - 4) Krige, Rain-queen, p. 263. They say, "The most prolific single source of witchcraft is the conflict of co-wives."

I have seen a man chasing his favourite wife away after having learnt from the diviner that she was a muloi. Even the children of such a wife are often sent away with her lest they contaminate the whole family because of their mother's influence.¹⁾.

There are different ways in which vhuloi (sorcery or witchcraft) can manifest itself.

a) In the first place the formula for cursing an enemy, or any other curse such as described above,²⁾ is called vhuloi, and the person who is guilty of harming another person in this way is called a muloi.

b A person can also go to a specialist (hanga) for obtaining magical drugs, either to put them into his enemies' food (vhuloi ha masiari, "day-witchcraft"), or for calling the lightning-bird (ndadzi) to their house.

c Vhuloi ha vhusiku, night-witchcraft, is practiced when the muloi rises before dawn or after sunset at night, stark naked, puts "medicine" into a small horn, and then blows into the horn in the direction of the person to be

1) See Krige, Rain-queen, p. 253:
"A witch is said to imbed witchcraft with its mother's milk, yet it involves learning, a process begun on the second or third day after birth, when its mother throws it up against the wall, to which it clings like a bat. On one occasion the anger of a grandmother that her grandchild had been 'taken out' of the hut (hu thusa) without her presence or knowledge was construed as due to a sense of frustration because this had prevented her from teaching the child witchcraft. The dullness at school of a certain girl whose mother was said to be a witch was ascribed to the difficulty of simultaneously learning two things: witchcraft and books. Since witchcraft is learnt from the mother (though one sometimes hears that the mother teaches her daughter, a father his sons), brothers and sisters of one mother cannot accuse each other of witchcraft without involving themselves . . . "

2) pp. 59 ff.

killed, mentioning the words, "nama vho ya mokhokha, u tuwa a hu na mulingo" ("They are gone for good; going away is no problem"), thereby asking his ancestor spirits in a roundabout way to kill the enemy whose name and sib name he mentions.

Animals such as the owl and thuri (striped mongoose), are believed to play a role in conveying this kind of witchcraft. The thuri is believed to enter the body of the victim and to eat away his "life force". When a Muvenda hears an owl hooting at night, he might say, "Vha khou rambana" ("They are inviting each other to mischief").

Because it is necessary to know a person's name and sib name if one wants to lowa (bewitch) him, the culprit in the case of vhuloi is usually looked for among the close kins or associates. It is believed that strangers cannot lowa each other.

d A fourth form of vhuloi is that of a person who is by nature so thoroughly evil that he or she leaves the sleeping hut at night, after having treated the other occupants of the hut to make them fall into a very deep sleep, and leaving some kind of animal, such as a hyena, sleeping on his own mat under his blankets, goes about naked at night, his eyes glowing like coals of fire, performing his evil work, eating away the life-substance of other people (nama na malofha, "their flesh and blood"), and thereby gradually killing them. Such a person is called tshivhimbili if male or muloi if female.

The evil nature of witchcraft also implies the belief that witches take away the "life force" of other people or the fertility of their crops in order to strengthen their own vital force or to increase the fertility of their own crops. "For this reason those who get rich by unknown means, or whose crops prosper while the fields of other people are not so forward, are liable to be accused of witchcraft." 1)

1) Parrinder, Witchcraft, p. 182. See also Krige, Rain-queen, p. 251.

The idea that one can be a witch without knowing it seems to be unknown to the Venda.¹⁾

Specialists (ǀanga, maine, mungome)

This feature is important, since the Venda specialists perform approximately the same function as the so-called "witch" (měkaššēph) that we read of in the Old Testament.

The ǀanga is the person who is initiated into the laws of manipulating the forces in the cosmos. Anyone who knows a herb with healing properties, and uses it, practices vhunǀanga, but only those who, by long training, and by endowment with powers of divining, are able to determine the cause of the harm done to his patients, and have the power to avert and redirect those harmful influences, can rightly be called ǀanga.²⁾

Other terms which are used for this office are maine, which has the additional connotation of being an intermediary between the tribe and the tribal spirits, who functions at ceremonies such as the murundu, the male circumcision lodge; and the obsolete term mudengu, which is only known in the saying "mudengu ha didenguli" ("a doctor doesn't treat himself").

A person who specializes in divining is called mungome, and is usually a Shangaan.

Although these specialists are often "on the lunatic fringe of society . . . often psychotic and emotionally unstable characters", they are to the Venda highly appreciated members of the community, the restorers

1) See also Mbiti, African religions, p. 202.

2) Krige, Lovedu, p. 62.

3) Nida and Smalley, Animism, p. 58.

of the vital force of the tribe, and the protectors of its members against evil, above all against witchcraft. They are the guardians of life, the only hope of the desperate Venda in his struggle against the forces of evil.¹⁾ A nanga is "no more a witch than an Inspector of the C.I.D. is a burglar".²⁾ He is the chief enemy of the witches.

Communication with spirits

This is important because the term used for "prayer" in a number of places in the Old Testament in the Venda Bible, is the technical term for communication with spirits, u rerelela.

This ceremony is based on the belief that the spirits want to be remembered and to be given their part of the good things that their descendants enjoy. They want to be given food, beer or snuff occasionally; they even sometimes demand that a goat be slaughtered for them. If they are not remembered, they face the danger of fading away into oblivion and non-existence, and they get resentful. That is why they cause illness among the children, droughts and other misfortunes (khombo). They may also appear to their family in dreams to indicate that they want to be remembered.³⁾

Nevertheless the living are not diligent in the observance of their duties towards the mudzimu. At sowing and harvest time regular offerings take place, but except for this the midzimu are usually disregarded until they remind the living of their needs.

1) See Shropshire, Op. cit., p. 405.

2) Melland, F.H. In witch-bound Africa. London, 1923 p. 199ff.

3) Mbiti, African religion, p. 27.
These are just a few references. There are many references to these phenomena in almost any book about Africans in general and the Bantu in particular.

The communication with the spirits takes on the form of a symbolical offering, a little beer or water spit on the ground, or poured on the head of the bull or goat that represents the spirits, or on the stones or malembe (copper rings or spearheads) associated with their names, or the blood of a fowl or goat is poured on the said objects. This is "food" for the spirits, and the prayers accompanying these offerings explicitly emphasize the principle of reciprocity, but in a much more crude and impolite way than it would be done in ordinary conversation. They are spoken to as if they are small children. They show no signs of affection and often hardly a sign of reverence and awe. Sometimes the term u sema midzimu, "scolding the spirits", is used for this ceremony! ¹⁾

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- 1) For examples of these prayers among other Bantu peoples, see Erasmus, *Die godsdienstige begrip*, p. 174; Krige, *Rain-queen*, pp. 239, 240:

"Hardly a week passes without some one in the neighbourhood having to phasa, and generally the prayer in these cases takes the form of a 'scolding' (hu rohana), in which the spirits are asked why they are causing illness and told to be satisfied."

"The fact that the gods were known in life is largely responsible for many of the outstanding characteristics of Lovedu worship. We must not expect a behaviour pattern of humble worshipper to omnipotent god. People pray to ancestors as man to man, scolding them or reminding them of their duties to their children. The following prayer, uttered when Pheduli was brought home, is typical: 'We say, here is your corn, Pheduli. What sort of person are you who do not live happily with your people? To-day all your children have gathered here. They have come to see you given corn. And to-morrow, when they depart, don't let there be a single one who remains troubled. Don't seize them, they are your children.' The difference between a spirit and the very old is not great, for an aged person is sometimes even referred to as 'our god' (mudimo wesu)".

Interesting though these examples are, we object to the use of the term "gods" for ancestor spirits. They are not regarded as "gods" by the Bantu.

A typical prayer heard from a Venda informant goes as follows: "So-and-so, let your grandchildren be struck with coolness (i.e. health) here in our yard. And you So-and-so (while each time spitting the beer or water on the ground), we do not forget you either. Why are you tormenting us? As for you whose name we do not know (presumably because he has died too long ago), eat this food which we are giving to you also. We are not neglecting you, so do not neglect us. Do not withhold from us that which we ask for. This that remains is mine, I also drink. Giver-to-the-spirits does not go to bed hungry."¹⁾

These are the associations accompanying the term. u rerelela.

Chief and people

This relation is important because the ways and terms of doing homage and paying respect to a chief in the covenant relationship between him and his people may provide one with terms and ways of expressing the relationship between God and his people, e.g. in the case of an offering.

Among the living the chief is the highest in the hierarchy of forces. He is regarded as the representative of the ancestor spirits in the community of the living.

1) "Iwe mukene, ri ri: Zwiḍuhulu nga zwi ṭhavhiwe nga phepho afha mutani. Na iwe mukeneḱene a ri u hangwi-vho. U ri ṭungufhadzela mini? Na iwe Thimuḱi, ḱla iwe zwezwi zwiliwa zwine ra khou ni fha na vhaḱwe. A ri ni dzimi, na inwi ni songo ri dzima-vho. Ni songo ri dzime zwine ra khou ni hambela. Izwi zwi salaho ndi zwanga, ndi a nwa-vho. Tshifhavhadzimu ha lali na ndala."

By virtue of his position as representative of the ancestors he is also the guardian of the land and of the traditions of the tribe.¹⁾

The chief is the pivotal point of the life-force of the tribe. When his power, prestige and wealth increases, the whole tribe benefits from it and vice versa.

Almost religious veneration is paid to important chiefs, especially Tshivhase. Being so close to the spirit world, a descendent of the first chief of the Venda who has become deified as Mwali, the chief is often praised in terms such as "Mudzimu wanga a mpfunaho" ("my ancestor spirit, who loves me"). Many taboos are observed in dealings with him. Most of his actions and possessions may not be referred to by the ordinary Venda names, special terms being used for them. Often he is not even addressed in the honorific third person plural, but by the use of impersonal construction: "Kha hu zwiwe !" instead of "Kha vha ambe !" ("Let there be spoken", instead of "Speakest thou"). In his presence one kneels and speaks in a subdued tone.

There is a covenant relationship between the chief and his tribe, a relationship of mutual sentiments and obligations, functioning according to the principles of reciprocity. The chief should intercede for the tribe with his own ancestors. He should ". . . attend faithfully to his official duties and not give priority to his private affairs; above all, he should deal promptly with cases that come to his court and with any other matters requiring his personal attention. He should always consult his councils, and seek confidential advice

1) See Pettersson, O. Chiefs and gods. Lund, Cleerup, 1953, p. 363;
Fortes, M. and Evans-Pritchard, E.E. African political systems. O U P, 3rd imp. 1948, pp. 16, 21;
Mbiti, African religions, p. 182.
Du Plessis, H. Politieke organisasie van die Venda. Pretoria, 1940, pp. 95ff.

from men of recognized standing, not from toadies or upstarts. He should preserve law and order, and administer justice fairly and impartially; his sentences should not be unduly harsh, and he should not inflict punishments wantonly. He should consider the welfare and security of his people and to this end perform the appropriate rituals for rain, good harvests etc., and try to preserve peaceful relations with his neighbours. He should safeguard the land and other rights of his subjects, and protect them from misrule by his subordinates . . . He should also be generous and hospitable, and reward his assistants: he may be forgiven much, but never for meanness and want of open-handedness . . ." 1)

The people reciprocate by bringing beer and providing labour for the chief's fields, for, after all, khosi ndi vhalanda ("a chief is his subjects"), or khosi ndi khosi nga vhalanda, ("a chief is chief through his subjects") Vhathu ndi mavhele, vha fa u tahulelwa, ("people are maize, they need to be weeded" i.e. "well cared for")

This covenant relationship sometimes functions in ways that sound very strange to us, and seem to be very selfish on the part of the chief and the royal family. This is not only the case with some undesirable individuals among the chiefs, but appears in time-honoured and religiously sanctioned customs such as the thevhula-ceremonies, where the tshifhe (intermediary) prays in the following words: "Shango li lile mukosi, hu vhe na ngozi, ri pfume ngazwo" ("Let the country resound with lamentations, may there be misfortunes among the commoners, that we may grow rich by the fees from the court cases.")

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- 1) Schapera, I. Government and politics in tribal societies. London, Watts, 1963, pp. 138,9.
 - 2) Van Warmelo, Contributions, p. 160. See also p. 174 for variations. The word ngozi is a Zuluism. The Venda term is khombo, a disaster caused by spirits.

When food and money get scarce at the chief's kraal, someone, usually one of the older women, will spontaneously and with little ceremony spit out a libation offering on the ground, with the words addressed to the ancestor spirits: "What about someone hitting another on the head? Or would no one set fire to someone's house?" She thereby intimates that the spirits of the royal clan should see to it that quarrels arise among the commoners, in order that they might bring the matter to the court, in which case part of the fee paid as penalty goes to the chief.

An evaluation of the Venda
world view

It should be clear from what we have said above that the Venda world view is a religious one. There are no secular compartments in it. Religious elements intertwine all its aspects. The only evaluation that can be made of it in this context is from a religious viewpoint, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as norm.

We cannot subscribe to the view that African religion is "a preparation for the Christian Gospel",¹⁾ just as the religion of the Old Testament was.

This form of religious relativism, which was already propagated by the resolutions of the International Missionary Conference in Jerusalem, 1928, and by the "Laymen's report: Rethinking missions", of 1932,²⁾ and which was so vigorously refuted by Hendrik Kraemer in his preparatory work for the Conference at Tambaram, 1938,³⁾ cannot be defended from either the Old or the New Testament itself.

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- 1) Mbiti, J.S. Christianity and traditional religions in Africa (In I R M, Vol LIX no. 236, Oct. 1970, p. 432).
 - 2) Du Plessis, H. Geskiedenis van die Sendingwetenskap. Potchefstroom, Pro Rege, 1960, pp. 117-8, 131.
 - 3) The Christian Message in a non-Christian World.

Martin Luther called the Old Testament "the cradle and swaddling-clothes in which Christ lies, to which the angel directed the shepherds".¹⁾ No "religion" can be said to be the cradle and swaddling-clothes in which Christ lies, whether African, ancient Roman or German — not even the religion of ancient Israel,²⁾ except in so far as they were obedient to God's revelation in the Old Testament, which was given to Israel alone.

The point of contact for the Gospel is not traditional African religion, but the revelation of God in nature,³⁾ of which Venda religion has retained hardly a trace, as is proven by the way in which it has ignored God the Creator. The judgement of the New Testament on all natural religion is also valid for Venda religion:

"They know God, but they do not give him the glory that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They say they are wise, but they are fools; they exchange the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, birds, animals, and reptiles."⁴⁾

This does not mean that many features of African culture may not be valuable in an African context, more valuable even than many features of traditional Western European Christianity as it presents itself to Africa. The Gospel is above criticism; Christ is God's final revelation; the exclusive nature of the Gospel cannot

1) Quoted in Phillips, G.E. The Old Testament in the World Church. London, Lutterworth Press, 2nd imp. 1948, p. 82.

2) See Gen. 31:34; Ex. 32; Amos 5:26; Pss. 81; 95 etc.

3) See Bavinck, J.H. Religieus besef en christelijk geloof, Kampen, Kok, 1949, pp. 118ff.
Berkouwer, G.C. Dogmatiese Studiën. De algemene openbaring. Kampen, Kok, 1951, pp. 107ff.

4) Rom. 1:21-23, TEV 1966.

be compromised. However, Christianity is not the Gospel. It may be that some features of African culture, isolated from their religious background and sanctified by a Christian faith, may be nearer to the ideal of the Gospel than modern European culture. As examples we may mention: the unity of the family, the strong loyalty to kin, the charisma of combining friendliness and modesty with boldness in witnessing for Christ, the respect for authority, the emphasis upon humility and courtesy, the great value which is attached to covenant relationships.¹⁾

But in the final analysis our evaluation can only be on a strictly religious basis, with Biblical revelation as norm. It is not an issue of African religion versus European religion, but that of God's revelation in Jesus Christ versus natural religion.

For our subject this evaluation is given mainly for the sake of pointing out the differences between the Venda and the Biblical world view.

African religion fails most tragically on the great question of what it has done about God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has repressed his truth.²⁾

It has fled from him, changed him into Mwali, a deified hero, and substituted the prayers to the spirits of recently dead people for the service of the one, true God.

It has referred him to the realm of the long-dead spirits, with whom there is no contact any more. He is looked upon as the one-time originator of creation, the highest force in creation, but to the Venda mind he is not essentially different from creation.

It denies the possibility of sinning against him and of being guilty before him or responsible to him, because it assumes that he does not care what men do.

1) See Rom. 2:14,15.

2) Rom. 1:18.

It is inclined to absorb from Christianity only those features of the knowledge of God which fit into its own context, and therefore has made of God — after the contact with the Christian message — merely a kind father who never harms anybody.

Against this idea of God religion has become utilitarian, man-centred, a kind of magic.

"Hu rerelela means both to pray and to utter a spell. Hu phasa is used both to approach the gods and with medicines when sending back disease to a witch . . ." ¹⁾

The inner disposition towards God or the spirits is not the important factor; the idea of love is absent; what matters is the performing of the correct rites. In God's word the contents of the message are the important element; in Venda religion the contents are of less importance. Sometimes they are not even understood, but that serves to enhance their mystery and power rather than detracting from it. And power is what matters to the Venda.

As for ancestrolatry, some churchmen have pleaded for retaining it and grafting it on to Christianity. So Shropshire ²⁾ said, "If Christianity cannot find a place for this worship then it has not yet found itself and is not the universal religion it claims to be . . .

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The tendency to this type of worship is a primal impulse probably rooted in the essential divinity of man and the second great commandment
it is futile to suppress it, and transformation and transmutation are the only possible solution. It is part of the very soul of the human race and represents the truth enshrined in the two-fold nature of the God-man, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

It is not possible to discuss all the disputable

1) Krige, Rain-queen, p. 241.

2) The Church and primitive peoples, p. 371.

statements and assumptions in this quotation. Shropshire assumes that man is not essentially different from God, but essentially divine. He ignores the difference between the all-embracing character of Hinduism, which follows from its monistic and relativistic premises, and the universal character of the Gospel, which rests on the fact that God is the Creator of everything and Christ the only Saviour, whose demands are valid for the whole world. The way in which the "very soul of the human race" is brought up as an argument does not seem to leave scope for the Biblical doctrine of the depraved character of unregenerated man.¹⁾

But apart from this, the form of accommodation suggested here is unacceptable. Ancestor worship or communication with ancestors tends to supersede Christ as Mediator and render his priestly office meaningless, as has been demonstrated many times even in Christian communities which practice the veneration of saints.²⁾

Ancestorolatry is senseless for those who believe in the resurrection. Christ is everything. To depart and be with him is enough, and any trace of ancestorolatry only detracts from this glorious Gospel.

Africa cannot accept Christ alongside the ancestor spirits; it is a question of either him or them; and the sooner this is realized, the better for meaningful communication of the Gospel to Africa. The problem with Christianity in Africa is that the necessity of this radical choice has never been fully realized. The many syncretistic movements in Africa testify to the truth of this.

The Church lives or dies, it is a real Church or an imaginary Church, according to its living bond with the living Christ alone. This is the tragedy of African religion.

1) Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9ff etc.

2) See Bavinck, J. H. Inleiding in de Zendingswetenschap. Kampen, Kok, 1954, P. 261.

It assumes the unity of the cosmos, God included. It disregards not only the chasm opened up by sin to separate God and man, but even the essential difference between Creator and creature. Therefore it has no place for the vicarious and atoning death of Christ.¹⁾ The cross does not make sense in the African context, and therefore Christ does not make sense to Africa, until the universal judgement on man is realised. As it is, salvation means nothing more than release from distress and misfortune in this life.

Since there is no place for Christ, there is also no place for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. He is confused with an ancestor spirit, and his indwelling and working is confused with that of the malombo spirits and the ways in which they manifest themselves.

This has profound consequences for sexual morality. Since the body of man is not realised to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, there is really no foundation on which to build a Christian sexual ethic. With the disruption of African society one of the conspicuous tragedies is the lack of norms and of conscience in this sphere, with all its unhappy consequences for family and community life.

As for interpersonal relations, one should guard against idealizing the strong sense of unity in African community life. In the first place, this unity is limited to what may be called "ingroup", the family and in a modified sense the tribe. Murder, theft, black magic and enmity is seen as sin only when directed against members of the "ingroup".

1) Erasmus, Die godsdienstige begrip, p. 304:

"Nou is Jesus Christus nog n onbekende by die Tswana en wie Hom nie ken nie kan nie die Vader ken nie. Christus pas nie eens iewers in die Tswana se sisteem in nie. Hulle het Hom ook nie nodig nie aangesien daar nie so n vakature in die veranderde vorme ontstaan het nie."

A weak point in African community life is pointed out by an African himself, Prof. Mbiti.¹⁾ This weak point is often overlooked, and we quote what Prof. Mbiti says, "This corporate type of close relations makes every member of the community dangerously naked in the sight of the other members. Everybody is loosely or intensely a relative, a fellow human, a brother, father or mother. Therefore everybody, within degrees, knows everybody else and everybody else's affairs fairly well to within certain limits. This corporate form of relations, is paradoxically the centre of joy and sorrow, of generous , tenderness and bitter jealousies, a sense of security and insecurity, forces of building and forces of destroying the community and the individual. It is within this context that frustrations, psychic disturbances, emotional tensions and other states of the inner person become readily externalized and formulated in such a way that blame is laid on an external agent. Therefore, every form of sickness, illness, pain, misfortune, sorrow, suffering, every death, every failure of the crop in the fields or hunting or fishing, every bad omen and bad dream— these and all the other unhappy experiences of the individual, are explained in the form of laying the blame on one or more members of the corporate community. People create scapegoats for their sorrows, and the shorter the radius of kinship and family ties, the more scapegoats there are."

The belief in and fear of sorcery is a tragic spiritual disease apart from any religious considerations. It disgraces innocent people and disrupts family life. It creates an atmosphere of constant fear and suspicion

1) African religions, p. 209.

among family members and neighbours.

In conclusion it might be useful to discuss very shortly the future of the traditional African world view in the face of the onslaught of the "Great Society", the worldwide industrial society that seems to be on its way into Africa too.¹⁾ It may be regarded a pity by many who would prefer to conserve the idyllic rural character of African society as it used to be. But it is impossible to stem the tide of industrialization.²⁾ Even if it had been possible, it is very doubtful whether it would be preferable to preserve the stagnant society of traditional Africa in our modern times with their problems of over-population.

Be that as it may, the "Great Society" has to be accepted as a fact. It seems as if many of the basic features of African culture will probably have to be destroyed before Africans can with any measure of success be integrated into it.

Its static nature will have to give way to a dynamic approach to nature and society. This will give scope for adaptability, innovation, development, individual and communal initiative, development and material progress, perhaps even competition, economically responsible exploitation of

1) See Park, R.E. Missions and the modern world (In American Journal of Sociology, 1944, p. 177);

"With the framework of the existing world economy which European commerce and industry have imposed upon the rest of the world, there is growing up a body of custom and social practices which are now more or less understood and accepted by all the diverse peoples that have come within the sphere of their influence. These constitute a culture or a civilization that is no longer local but worldwide and destined, it seems, to inherit the cultural traditions of all earlier and simpler peoples—the Great Society".

2) Hoekendijk, J.C. Kerk en volk in de Duitse Zendingswetenschap. Amsterdam, Kampert en Helm, undated, p. 273: "De losgekomen krachten kunnen niet met een Gandhi-program van terugkeer naar het spinnewiel worden bezworen."

resources, perseverance in persuing goals set, punctuality and a realization of the value of time, responsible family planning under the looming threat of the population explosion.

All this stands in direct contrast to traditional African culture, but if this change cannot be affected there seems to be no other future for Africans than that of a vast proletariat, infected with the greed of European society, but without the means of satisfying that greed. This will leave African society boiling with dissatisfaction and frustration.

They will have to learn that resources and wealth can not be increased by magical means,¹⁾ but rather by skill and hard work, and that corruption and nepotism, acceptable as it may be from a traditional African point of view, are destructive to the community as a whole.

1) For a very relevant discussion of the "cargo cult" mentality which results from the contact of people in a static society with a modern industrialized society, see Margull, H.J. Aufbruch zur Zukunft. Chilias-tisch-messianische Bewegungen in Afrika und Südostasien. Gütersloh, 1962, pp. 82ff.

CHAPTER FOUR
TERMS USED IN THE VENDA BIBLE,
WHICH REFLECT THE TRADITIONAL
VENDA WORLD VIEW

I Terms reflecting primarily one feature from the
traditional world view

Here we would like to discuss two terms which reflect the priority of interpersonal relations, which have been introduced into the Venda Bible, distorting the semantic components of the Biblical terms which they were supposed to translate.

A U tenda, lutendo, for "believe, faith"

1 The Venda term u tenda, lutendo

This term corresponds to the terms ho dumela (Sotho) and ku pfumela (Tsonga) that have been used in these respective translations of the Bible. It means "to assent", "to agree to a suggestion". It is important to understand this term in the context of the character of the people who use it.

The way in which the Venda use this term reveals much about the priority of interpersonal relationships among them. They place a much higher priority on responding in the way they think they are expected to respond, then on telling the truth. Smooth interpersonal relationships, especially with a dominant individual or group, has priority over anything else.

It is therefore regarded as bad form to refuse directly when asked for something which one does not intend to give. The correct way is to agree, u tenda,

and then forget about it or find some excuse for not keeping to the agreement. Thus u tenda does not necessarily mean that one means what one says. One can tenda with one's mouth while heartily disagreeing with the statement made or having no intention whatsoever to fulfill what one has just promised to do. This is not regarded as dishonesty, but is a matter of politeness.

The term u sokou tenda ("to consent reluctantly") is often used for expressing the fatalistic attitude of the Venda in the face of misfortune or force which he is unable to resist.

The form lutendo was introduced by missionaries to express "faith". According to the rules of derivations and their meanings in the lu-class, it should mean "the habit of readily consenting to everything". But since it is a coined word which does not have a clearly defined set of meanings in everyday speech, it has acquired a meaning in Church language of "steadfastness in the Christian life". "U na lutendo" means something like "he is steadfast in the face of persecution".

It is quite clear that the term u tenda has no element of "trust" in it.

2 The Biblical concept of faith

The most important Hebrew term for expressing the concept of "faith" in the Old Testament is 'mn' and its derivatives.

According to Koehler ¹⁾ the root means "to be steady, firm, trustworthy." The niph'al means "to prove oneself steady, faithful".

1) Koehler - Baumgarther. Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros. Leiden, Brill, 1953.

Around the hiph'il quite a discussion has developed. Koehler says that in Is. 7:9 it means "to feel safe, believe", and in places such as Hab. 1:5, "to consider as trustworthy, believe"; with bē it means "to trust in a person", as in Gen. 15:6.

Weiser ¹⁾ states that the hiph'il of 'mn, when used in the relation of man to God, has not a causative but a declarative meaning. This has evoked reaction from James Barr, ²⁾ who criticizes Weiser's article and calls it "heavily etymologyzing". He points out that one has to be careful not to think in categories like "causative" etc. in a strict sense when dealing with Semitic languages.

This is probably true, but the whole discussion of this form by Barr seems to be one of the points on which he has overstated his case. We refer to the discussion of Sawyer in Chapter one. ³⁾ Fortunately the meaning can be defined fairly closely from the immediate context. We prefer to accept the advice of Nic. H. Ridderbos ⁴⁾ to regard he'ēmin in each case as an internally transitive, intensive, intransitive hiph'il, and accept the meanings as given by Koehler, except in Is. 7:9. ⁵⁾

Although other terms are used more often for describing the relationships between God and his people (chesed, tsedeq), this term has come to be the fullest expression of the covenant relationship between God and Israel as seen from the human viewpoint, and as indicating the attitude of God's people to his covenant ⁶⁾ with the faith of Abraham, the father of the covenant, as example.

1) In Kittel, T W N T, vi, 186,7.

2) The semantics of Biblical language, pp. 176ff.

3) See p. 21 of this treatise.

4) Enkele beschouwingen naar aanleiding van ta'āminû in Jes. 7:9 (In Schrift en uitleg, Feestschrift Gispén, Kampen, Kok, 1970), p. 168.

5) See Ridderbos, Op. cit., p. 178, and N E B: "Have firm faith, or you will not stand firm".

6) Weiser, Op. cit., p. 197.

This attitude is one of an "utter and complete trust in God, a full recumbency on Him".¹⁾

Although it is firmly rooted in the Old Testament, this term is far more important in the religious context of the New Testament, especially for the purpose of our study. We shall therefore devote more attention to its use in the New Testament.

The Greek term that has been used regularly in the L X X to translate the Hebrew mn - pistis and pisteuō, "always involve to some extent the idea of "trust".²⁾

This component has been carried over into the New Testament. There ³⁾ pisteuō in the first place means "to put one's trust in God's word".

In the Gospels the component of trust is prominent where pistis, pisteuō occurs, e.g. in Mt. 15:28, " . . . You are a woman of great faith"; 17:20, "If you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, 'Go from here to there!' and it will go"; 21:22, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer"; Lk. 5:20, "When Jesus saw how much faith they had (i.e. the men who had opened the roof to get at him), he said to the man, 'Your sins are forgiven, my friend.'"; 8:50, "But Jesus heard it and said to Jairus, 'Don't be afraid; only believe, and she will be well.'"; the well-known Jn. 3:16; Jn. 14:12, " . . . whoever believes in me will do the works I do . . ."

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- 1) Snaith, The distinctive ideas of the O.T., p. 164. See also Buber, M. Zwei Glaubensweisen. (In Werken I, 1962, p. 655): "Beharren im Vertrauen zum fùhrenden und bundschlieszenden Herrn, vertrauendes Beharren im Kontakt mit ihm". Rowley, H.H. Dictionary of Bible themes. London, Nelson, 1968, p. 30.
 - 2) Snaith, Op. cit., p. 178.
 - 3) Bultmann, R. (In Kittel, T W N T, vi, p. 205).

The same is true of Acts, eg. in 6:5, ". . . Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit . . . "; 27:25, ". . . take courage, for I trust in God that it will be just as I was told".

Of course the coming of Christ and his work of salvation gave a more specific content to the faith than the Old Testament, i.e. of accepting the Gospel about Jesus Christ (Rom. 10: 14-17; I Cor. 1:21 etc.), but also of acting on that faith and standing in it (I Cor. 2:5; II Cor. 1:24; Gal. 2:20 etc.). Therefore we also hear of "the amount of faith" (Rom. 12:3), weakness in faith (Rom. 14:1), growth in faith (II Cor. 10:15) etc.

Against this background, and against the background of the meaning of mn in the Old Testament, Paul's usage of the terms pistis and pisteuō has to be understood. In his writings it ". . . developed into loving trust and active confidence in a specifically Christian sense. Pistis (faith, confidence, complete reliance) thus comes to be used as the outstanding term for the Christian's attitude to God, just as agapē (love) is the outstanding term for God's attitude to the Christian." ¹⁾

The element of trust in faith is emphasized by the fact that Paul sees faith as a matter of the heart (Rom. 10:9) ²⁾ and not in the first place of the nous, the mind.

This does not exclude the concept of faith as fides quae creditur. The content of faith is important. The whole New Testament kerugma provides the content of the faith, and the acceptance of information concerning Jesus Christ is an essential element of "faith". We might again refer to Rom. 10:9, "If you confess with your lips,

1) Snaith, Op. cit., p. 178.

2) See Ridderbos, H.N. Paulus. Ontwerp van zijn Theologie. Kok, Kampen, 1966, pp. 271,2.

'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." 1)

Although for the obvious reason of comparison with the Venda term tenda, the main emphasis in our treatise falls on the component of trust, the component of obedience, i.e. acting on the faith, is essential to the New Testament concept of faith (cf. Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26). 2)

The difference in emphasis between Paul and Hebrews should also be noted. In Paul the emphasis is laid on trusting the word of God. In Hebrews it is on a life of perseverance with the word of God as pictured especially in Chapter 11. This is contrasted repeatedly with turning back or being discouraged and disobedient (10:38, 39; 3:12 etc.)

In James the term pistis, pisteuō is sometimes used without the component of trust, e.g. 2:19, "You believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe — and tremble with fear." Perhaps also in 2:24, "... a man is put right with God by what he does and not because of his faith alone." However in 2:23 emphasis is laid on trusting. It refers to the faith of Abraham that is mentioned more than once by Paul as an example of trusting faith (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3). The emphasis in James when speaking of faith, is on living in obedience to God's word (Ch. 2:14-26 !).

1) Ridderbos, Op. cit., p. 264: "Het is het geloof in die Christus, die voor de gelovige datgene betekent, wat van Hem in het evangelie geboodschapt wordt; die in de wereld is gekomen, die geleden heeft, gestorven is opgestaan is en leeft in de hemel. Alzo is Hij verkondigd en alzo hebben degenen, die in Hem geloven, in hem leren geloven, 1 Kor. 15:11. Daarom is het geloof, ook als het geloof in Christus genoemd wordt, in zijn wezen altijd mede door dit element van gebondenheid aan het evangelie in zijn concrete heilsinhoud bepaald."

2) Idem, p. 261.

In a few places, such as Rom. 3:3, Mt. 23:23, Gal. 5:22, Tit. 2:10 and probably I Tim. 5:12 ("promise", T E V), the term pistis has the meaning of "faithfulness",¹⁾ which has been disregarded in the Venda Bible, except in the case of Tit. 2:10, where it has been correctly translated, "u fulufhedzea".

3 A comparative analysis of "faith" and u tenda

Semotactic context: "Believe in the Lord Jesus"
(Acts 16:31).

Diagnostic components

believe in

tenda

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. accept the source of
communication as genuine
and authoritative | 1. ascent to message as
expedient |
| 2. regard the message as true | |
| 3. act upon the basis of the message | |
| 4. show confidence in the communicator | |

Supplementary components

1. for some christians
it has acquired a
deeper meaning
2. receiver under
pressure

From this analysis it is clear that the term u tenda does not convey the intended communication in this context. It might be considered in the context of Prov. 14: 15, "The simple believe every word", but it has no component of trust, which is so essential in the biblical concept of "believing". The difference in semantic components can be graphically demonstrated by substituting "assent" for "faith" or "trust" in each of the examples quoted on pp. 95-6 above! The effect is rather ridiculous.

1) See Bultmann, T W N T, vi, p. 204.

4 The effects of using this term on the life of the Venda Church.

In "The Christian Minister" of July 1969 ¹⁾ we find the following statement about faith by Albert N. Martin: "It is to be feared that we have turned to a Romish concept ²⁾ of faith in our day. We must never forget that one of the great issues which the Reformers brought into focus was that faith was something more than an 'assensus', a mere nodding of the head to the body of truth presented by the church as 'the faith'. The Reformers set forth the biblical concept that faith was 'fiducia'. They made plain that saving faith involved trust, commitment, a trust and commitment involving the whole man with the truth which was believed and with the Christ who was the focus of that truth. The time has come when we need to spell this out clearly in categorical statements so that people will realise that a mere nodding of assent to the doctrines that they are exposed to is not the essence of saving faith. They need to be brought to the understanding that saving faith involves the commitment of the whole man to the whole Christ, as Prophet, Priest and King as he is set forth in the gospel."

1) p. 13.

2) For a very interesting confirmation of this interpretation of Roman Catholic doctrine on faith, from a Roman Catholic scholar, see Bühlmann, Die Christliche Terminologie, p. 311: About the Swahili term -amini (trust, from Arabic amana, to be sure or believe): "Röhl hat mit diesem -amini ein Erlebnis, das ihn bewog, es abzulehnen. Er traf einmal mohammedanische Swahili bei einer magischen Geisteraustreibung. 'Wie könnt ihr solche Zaubereien tun, da ihr doch an den allmächtigen Allah glaubt?' — 'Natürlich glauben wir an Allah, aber wir vertrauen ihm nicht'. Für 'glauben' brauchten sie -amini, für 'vertrauen' -tegemea (sich lehnen an, sich stützen auf, vertrauen auf), woraus der Beobachter schloß, dasz, -amini 'glauben oder jede Hoffnung' sei. So braucht er in seiner Bibel immer -tegemea, z.B. Lk. 7:50; Röm. 1:8; Eph. 4:5; Hebr. 11:1 Nur Jak 2:19, wo vom hoffnungslosen Glauben der Teufel die Rede ist, läßt er -amini gelten." And then the very illuminating remark: (p. 312) "Anderseits kan -tegemea, dasz nicht 'glauben' sondern 'vertrauen' bedeutet, für den protestantischen Fiduzialglauben angehen, nicht aber für unsern katholischen Glaubensbegriff" !!

We quote at length from this article because what Martin says of the current concept of faith in the Church is even to a greater extent true of the Venda Church, and because the terms used for communicating that concept in the Venda Bible cannot be expected to communicate anything more than "a mere nodding of assent". I have during many years of evangelistic work hardly ever come across a Venda who, when confronted with the gospel, would not say, "Ndi khou tenda" ("I admit the truth of what you say"). What they really mean when saying this amounts to, "I believe that God exists, and I have no objection to the fact that he exists. I suppose that the rest of what you are talking about, is also true." They would often add, "Ndi sa tendi hani-hani?" ("Just imagine me not believing such an obvious fact!") To the experienced evangelist this is a clear indication that his message is rejected in so far as it has been understood at all! To get a negative answer, one would have to press on for a promise that the "convert" will attend the baptism class and come to Church on Sundays, and even then will he most probably just tenda in order to get rid of the evangelist, whether he intends to come or not. Isn't that what u tenda means?!

So when an inexperienced and gullible white man ventures out on an evangelistic campaign with great enthusiasm, and with great rejoicing returns with a list of hundreds of names of persons who "believed", he should not afterwards blame the Venda when only one tenth of those who were supposed to be converts actually turn up for baptismal instruction.

Moreover, it is not surprising at all that one often comes across Church members of many years' standing who do not have any assurance of their salvation or even realise that it is possible to have that assurance. They are vhatendi, "consenters". They have consented to a new way of life, to abandoning (some of) the old customs.

Lutendo means to them at most some steadfastness in that new way of life.

The concept of faith in religion is strange to Africa. It is an essential part of a religion of revelation such as Christianity or Islam, but not of a naturalistic religion such as Venda religion. Not faith and belief are important, but ritual; not so much the content of the word, but the power of it. ¹⁾ The terms employed for referring to this vital Christian concept in the Venda Bible have done nothing to effect a change in the approach of the Venda to religion.

It is a pity that not only in the Venda translation this has been the case, but in all the other Southern Bantu languages. In the Nguni languages the term ukukholwa, "to believe a fact", has been used for the places where the verb pisteuō occurs, and for pistis has been used ukholo, the deverbative of ukukholwa. In some of the older Protestant Bible translations in Zulu the term ithemba, "trust", has been used, but not in the new translation.

5 Other terms suggested

The obvious suitable term to be used here is the Venda term for "trust", u fulufhela (to trust), fulufhelo (faith, trust), which Schweltnus used for translating "hope", elpis. But for elpis the Venda term tshituvho ("longing") would be much more suitable.

1) See Brown and Hutt, Anthropology in action. London, 1935, p. 166. Also Westermann, D. Der Afrikaner heute und morgen. Essen, 1937, p. 206-9:

"Dem Afrikaner und den Naturvölkern ganz allgemein sagt man nach, dass der Kern ihrer Religion nicht im Glauben, sondern in den Riten besteh. Sie fragen sich nicht des näheren, wer und was jene Wesen und Kräfte seien, die den religiösen Lebensraum erfüllen, sondern wie sie auf einen wirken und was man tun müsse, um durch sie nicht geschädigt zu werden."

B U luga, u lugisa, for "righteousness", "justification"

1 The Venda terms u luga and u lugisa

The biblical concepts of righteousness have almost exclusively been translated by the Venda term u luga or derivatives of it.

U luga means "to become straight; in order; okay". In present perfect tense it indicates a state of being straight, in order or okay. Zwo luga means "It is okay."

This term is very commonly used to refer to the social characteristics of persons. O luga ("He is okay") means that the person in question does not have any undesirable characteristics, i.e. characteristics which disqualify him from being a member of the community. However, it is rather a neutral term, in the sense that it only serves to indicate the absence of undesirable characteristics, and not the presence of desirable characteristics. O luga is more or less synonymous to ha dini ("he isn't a troublesome person"). A person with this qualification will not be guilty of backbiting, aggressive behaviour or a vile temper, theft, affairs with other peoples' wives, or cruelty. He should not be too clever or ingenious, in which case he might be responsible for all kinds of devious schemes.

The causative form of this term, u lugisa, is used in Romans 1 for translating the biblical term "God's righteousness". It means "to put in order, to prepare, to cause to be okay". It is used by schoolboys for putting an enemy in his place, taking one's revenge on him, causing him to stop annoying one, synonymous to u latisa.

But this term is not as strong as the concept of "goodness". It does not include generosity or soberness. That would be vhuthu or vhuvhuya. A person can be lazy, a drunkard, he may have any number of mistresses (with the consent of their relatives, of course), and yet be regarded as o lugaho, ("a decent person"), because he is not troublesome. When the augmentative form of the verb is used, o lugesa, ("he is too untroublesome" — for lack of a better translation), it might mean, for instance, that he realises that others steal his fowls without him taking steps to prevent it, out of apathy.

2 The Biblical concept of righteousness

The Hebrew words referring to this concept in the Old Testament are tsedeq and tsedāqāh. There is no clear distinction in meaning. Tsedeq occurs 117 times, always in the singular, and tsedāqāh 155 times, fifteen of which are in the plural. ¹⁾

The opinion of Kautzsch ²⁾ which is still accepted by most modern scholars, ³⁾ is that the fundamental idea of tsdq is the state of corresponding to a norm, a norm which has to be defined in each particular case.

"Righteousness is therefore conformity to a norm; in origin it is neither punitive, nor distributive, nor justificatory, but in a general way fidelity to a state or to a way of acting or thinking . . ." ⁴⁾

It was used of weights or measures, e.g. in Lev. 19:36, and of sacrifices, e.g. in Deut. 33:19.

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- 1) Snaith, The distinctive ideas of the O.T., p. 72.
 - 2) Kautzsch, E. Die Derivate des Stammes tsdq im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauch. Tübingen 1881.
 - 3) See Jacob, E. Theology of the Old Testament (English translation). London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, p. 94.
 - 4) Ibidem.

The norm in question can also be one governing social relations. "An action which accords with the claims arising out of the social relation . . . may be referred to as tsedeq; and the pattern of conduct which adheres to the demands of the community relationship and so preserves society is recognized as tsedāqāh." 1)

"But in Israelite thinking, one relationship is supremely important, the Covenant relation between Yahweh and his people, and this has great significance for the understanding of personal and community righteousness in Israel and of the righteousness of Yahweh." 2)

Hardly any other passage illustrates the meaning of righteousness within the covenant relationship as forcefully as Deut. 6:20 ff. Here the faithful Israelite is instructed how to tell his son about the people's deliverance from Egypt. He should conclude his story with the words, "And the LORD commanded us to do all

1) Hill, Greek words and Hebrew meanings, p. 85.

2) Ibidem. Hill proceeds to say, "The Covenant-theme developed as an interpretation of the significance of certain events in Israel's history, and employed already familiar categories and terms. It is therefore not surprising that when tsdq was applied to Yahweh and to the covenant-people it should reflect the notions which were associated with the term apart from that particular relationship." Without subscribing to Hill's notion of the interrelationship between revelation and "interpretation", we would also like to repeat his quotation from Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, pp. 241, 2: "In the case of Yahweh, his righteousness implies the same kind of right conduct which in Israel upholds the law by means of judicial procedure: the justice appropriate to her side is determined by her position as the covenant people, in virtue of which she can count on intervention of the divine assistance in any danger which threatens her position."

these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be tsedāqāh for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us" (Deut. 6:24, 25, RSV). ¹⁾

This aspect of righteousness is being neglected in modern theology.²⁾ The accent is laid on the saving justice of God and on his partiality in favour of the oppressed ones. God's righteousness also implies, however, that his people conform to these standards, combined with the inevitable punitive aspect of his justice that goes with these standards. That was why the prophets reminded Israel that there was more to the covenant than a mere claiming of their rights.

"If Jahweh was to be faithful to his relationship and declare Israel 'in the right', then Israel must be 'in the right', she must have a 'righteous case, she must possess 'righteousness' that would reflect the character of Jahweh's righteousness." ³⁾

Prophetic utterances such as Is. 28:18, 'I will use justice (mišpat) as a plumb-line and righteousness (tsedāqāh) as a plummet; hail shall sweep away your refuge of lies, and flood-waters carry away your shelter" (N E B), do not fall outside the main-stream of Biblical teaching about God's righteousness. It is in keeping with the basic idea of conformance of God's norm. It is implied by the use of the root špht which is so often found associated with tsedāqāh. ⁴⁾

1) Hill, Op. cit., p. 96.

2) Van Ruler, A.A. (In Van der Woude, A.S. a.o. Kernwoorden in het christelijk geloof. Kampen, Kok, 1970, p. 52).

3) Hill, Op. cit., p. 93. See also Snaith, Op. cit., p. 77.

4) See Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 97.

Since "righteousness" is so inextricably connected with the framework of the covenant, it is always a concept of relationship, fashioned upon the everyday dealings between people. The emphasis is on acts of righteousness rather than on a supposed state of righteousness. The prophets did not speak of acquiring righteousness but of practising it. When speaking of the righteousness of God, the prophets pointed to its manifestations, his righteous acts. 1)

"The justice of Jahweh is not the type of the blindfolded maiden holding a balance in her hand, the justice of Jahweh extends one arm to the wretch stretched out on the ground whilst the other pushes away the one who causes the misfortunes . . ." 2)

It is in this relationship that the concept of justice as grace, salvation, deliverance, became so prominent in the Old Testament, especially in the later books. 3)

In the book of the Psalms it becomes clear that an important element of the righteous conduct of God's people is their delight in his revealed will (Ps. 1, 119 etc.). 4)

While taking into account all the differences in nuance, which in a translation may require different terms in the receptor language, the basic notion of being faithful to the demands of the covenant relationship is always present.

1) See Von Rad, G. Old Testament Theology, Vol. I (English ed.). New York, Harper and Row, 1967, p. 373. See also Jacob, Op. cit., p. 95.

2) Idem, p. 99.

3) See Idem, p. 101. Also Kuitert, H.M. De spelers en het spel. Amsterdam, Ten Have, 1964, p. 63; and Jager, H.J. Kernwoorden van het Nieuwe Testament. Amsterdam, Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1968, pp. 44,5.

4) See Von Rad, Op. cit., pp. 381,2.

The Greek equivalents, dikè, dikaïos and dikaïosunè, seem to be very closely related in meaning to the Hebrew terms. "We may say therefore that dikè connotes the norm (invested with divine sanction) for human conduct, chiefly for the conduct of men towards one another, and as such was logically regarded as 'right': that which is customary and conforms to the divinely recognised order is 'the right'. . . A person whose conduct conforms to the dikè is dikaïos." 1)

Of the 476 times the tsdq words occur in the Old Testament, they have been rendered in the L X X by terms related to dikaïos in 462 cases. This leads to the conclusion that the translators regarded the two sets of terms as closely related. 2)

"The idea of conformity to a norm and a general forensic reference are common to the meaning and developments of the words expressing 'righteousness' in both languages. . . In both Greek and Hebrew usage the word for 'righteousness' belongs to the terminology of relationships in community. In Greek, dikaïosunè is generally associated with the mutual obligations of men in human society, without reference (except in early writers) to divine sanction; in the Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, the behaviour of man within the community is governed by the requirements of the covenant relation, and therefore has reference ultimately to the conformity to the divine will." 3)

A new meaning is carried into the Greek term dikaïosunè when on nine occasions in the LXX it is used for rendering the Hebrew chesed: "an act of kindness" or "God's steadfast love towards his people". 4)

1) Hill, Op. cit., p. 99.

2) Idem. p. 104.

3) Idem, p. 102,3.

4) Idem, p. 106.

Against this background we can now investigate the meaning of this set of terms in the New Testament,

In the Gospels the meaning so closely resembles the shades of meaning found in the Old Testament that it is not necessary to discuss them separately. No new components are introduced. ¹⁾ The same is true of the writings of Peter and James.

However in the writings of Paul a new emphasis is noticable. This is so important for understanding what Paul means when using the terms, and the terms used in the Venda Bible are so inadequate to convey this meaning, that a detailed discussion is necessary.

David Hill ²⁾ gives a clear outline of how the emphasis on the forensic aspect of righteousness has developed in Paul's theological thought. "Our survey of the rabbinic teaching on righteousness and related themes will have demonstrated to the reader the intensity of the desire, on the part of the individual Israelite, to win, both in life and especially at the final judgement, the approbation of God. The path to this end was obedience to the precepts of the Torah, the inclusive expression of the whole Jewish religion. Within Judaism, the Law defined the demands of the Covenant and obedience was therefore the test of Israel's faithfulness to the Covenant. By faithfully observing the precepts of the Law, each Israelite renewed, as it were, the Covenant and accomplished in himself Israel's mission to and for mankind . . . We may fairly claim that the directions of thought outlined here formed part of Paul's inheritance as a Jew, within the mainstream of Pharisaic Judaism. Yet in his epistle to the Galatians there is set forth a doctrinal position which amounts to a fundamental rethinking and restatement

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- 1) In some places in the Gospels the forensic emphasis already appears, eg. in Mt. 27:19, and in the texts where the form dikaioō is used, eg. in Lk. 18:14.
- 2) Op. cit., pp. 139-142. See also Jonker, W.D. Grace and justification (In Ned. Geref. Teol. Tydskrif, IX, 3, pp. 137ff).

of the conception of 'righteousness'. Paul firmly rejects the Judaizers' attempts to make obedience to the Law the necessary extension or completion of faith in Christ: the break with 'works of the law' must be complete." Hill then quotes from Gal. 2:15 ff and proceeds, "The righteousness is a matter of being 'in the right before God', that is, a reckoning at the divine tribunal, not of being righteous in oneself . . . What is a matter of hope for the Jew becomes for Paul a present possibility and reality. When a man is united by faith to Christ in his death and new life, when he is found in him who is adjudged supremely 'The Righteous One' in God's sight, then he too is declared 'in the right' and set within the sphere of God's righteousness. The declaration of the believer's 'in the rightness' or 'righteousness' is the consequence of his being in Christ."

In a very compact form Hill here states three important elements in the Pauline teaching on righteousness: a) the rabbinical setting, b) its eschatological, and c) its forensic character.

Ridderbos ¹⁾ emphasizes the eschatological character of God's righteousness as expounded by Paul. ". . .this is the spectacular thing about Paul's preaching: he proclaims that the righteousness we are trying to acquire and for which we are working with might and main, has become present time already . . ." (italics are mine). Paul says, "But now God's way of putting men right with himself has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with law" (Rom. 3:21, T E V).

This mighty work of God has been accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:25,26; 4:25).

1) Ridderbos, H.N. When the time had fully come. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1957, p. 50.

When discussing the forensic character of God's righteousness, Paul reaches back beyond rabbinism to the Old Testament teaching of righteousness, to God's covenant with Abraham: "The Law and the prophets gave witness to it" (Rom. 3:21). And this witness is, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous" (T E V), or as the N E B translates it, "Abraham put his faith in God, and that faith was counted to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3 with reference to Gen. 15:6).

Here the doctrine of imputed righteousness is set forth. "Paul's first step is to fasten upon the word 'to count' (elogisthè). Evidently, if faith is 'counted' as righteousness it is not itself identical with, but distinguishable from, righteousness." 1)

The argument is elaborated in the following verses. "A man who works is paid; his wages are not regarded as a gift but as something that he has earned. As for the man who does not work, however, but simply puts his faith in God, who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is his faith that God takes into account in order to put him right with himself" (vss. 4 & 5, T E V).

The expression "to justify the wicked" is used more than once in the Old Testament, e.g. in Ex. 23:7; Prov. 17:15; and Is. 5:23, and in all these cases it is used in a forensic context. It does not mean "to make (ethically) righteous" but "to acquit", 2), and this is what it means in Rom. 4.

1) Barrett, C.K. The Epistle to the Romans. London, Black, 2nd imp. 1962, p. 88.
For the exegesis of these passages we also refer to Sanday, W. and Headlam, A.C. A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Edinburgh, Clarke, 1964, pp. 100ff; and Ridderbos H.N. Romeinen. Kampen, Kok, 1959, pp. 90ff.

2) Barrett, Op. cit., p. 89.

This acquittal is possible because of the vicarious death of Jesus Christ. "For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death, effective through faith" (Rom. 3:25, N E B). ¹⁾ This thought is put even clearer in II Cor. 5:21, "Christ was without sin, but God made him share our sin in order that we, in union with him, might share the righteousness of God" (T E V). These texts will be discussed more fully when the terms for reconciliation are dealt with. At this stage it is clear that the doctrine of imputed righteousness, a iustitia aliena et imputativa, a synthetical and not an analytical righteousness, rests squarely upon Scripture. ²⁾

The way in which this doctrine of imputed righteousness (iustitia aliena) has been put forward by some Protestant scholars has led to the erroneous idea that it amounts to a pretention on God's part that people are righteous who are, in fact not righteous; that God plays a game with man in this case, that he calls people righteous while knowing that it is not true. ³⁾

1) See Barret, Op. cit., pp. 77,8.

2) There is a wealth of literature on this subject. See Venter, A.J. Analities of sinteties? Kampen, Kok, 1959, p. 211 and passim; Barth, K. Kirchliche Dogmatik IV, 1, pp. 635, 668; and from a Roman Catholic angle: Küng, H. Rechtfertigung. Einsiedeln, 1957. Küng draws attention to many points of similarity between Protestant and Roman Catholic theology on the doctrine of justification, from which he infers that the differences are in many cases not of a fundamental nature; they merely reflect different accents. There is no room here to discuss the merits of Küng's views, but they do at least indicate that it has become possible for Protestants and Catholics to listen to the Bible together.

3) For an explanation of this view by one of its proponents see Brinkman, J. De "gerechtigheid Gods" bij Paulus. Rotterdam, De Vries, 1916, pp. 195ff: "Christus wordt door zijn gemaaktworden tot zonde niet subjectief en realiter tot zonde. Hij wordt als zondaar beschouwd en behandeld. Welnu, dan eischen verband en parallelie . . . dat wij nu op grond van wat met Christus geschiedde aangezien en behandeld worden als rechtvaardigen in objectieven, ideëlen zin, ofschoon wij het subjectief en realiter niet zijn."

On the other extreme we find the following statement Snaith,¹⁾ "We see no reason why God should indulge in the fiction of declaring the sinner righteous. The sinner is not righteous. Why declare him so? Still less do we see any reason why God should impart righteousness to the sinner . . . Since it is obvious that actual righteousness is out of the question, it is suggested that righteousness must be either imparted or imputed. That is, a man must have some sort of righteousness before he can be saved, even if either at the price of a fiction, or belonging to some one else. . . We fail to see that Abraham was credited with anything."

This argumentation cannot be accepted either. The forensic categories in which the Bible presents our justification does not render it fictitious. When God made Christ "share our sin" (II Cor. 5:21) on Golgotha it was surely no game or fiction, nor is it the case when we, in union with Christ, share the righteousness of God.²⁾

Paul does not endorse the alternatives as put forward by Snaith and Brinkman. To him the judgement of God is not a mere verdict without positive effects. It brings about a new state of life, a new reality, not through any change of "substance" in the sinner, but through his new relation to God.³⁾ He shares the righteousness of Christ, not only ideally but also actually. By faith he accepts that when Christ died, he died with

1) Op. cit., pp. 164,5,8,171.

2) See Plummer, A. A critical and exegetical commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. Edinburgh, Clarke, 1948, on II Cor. 5:21: "It is God's, not ours; it is the righteousness which characterizes Him and which He imparts as a grace to man (Rom. 5:17)." Also Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 23; Ridderbos, Paulus, p. 181; Berkouwer, G.C. Geloof en rechtvaardiging (Dogmatische studiën). Kampen, Kok, 1949, p. 83.

3) Dantine, W. Die Gerechtmachung des Gottlosen. München, 1959, p. 44. Also Berkouwer, Op. cit., p. 87,8.

him and when Christ rose, he rose with him. (Rom. 6:1-7 and many other places). This reality rests on the fact that Christ as the Head of the New Covenant died for his people and so completely expiated their sins that they become identified with him in his death; ". . . we recognize that one man died for all men, which means that all men take part in his death" (II Cor. 5:14, T E V). This is the same basic principle on which Paul argues in Rom. 5:19, "And just as many men were made sinners as the result of the disobedience of one man, in the same way many will be put right with God as the result of the obedience of the one man." The relation between the ideal and the real, between objective and subjective truth, lies in the fact that the believer "recognizes" (II Cor. 5:14, T E V, or: arrives at the conclusion, N E B, Greek krinantas) this fact of God's mighty act in Jesus Christ by faith. As a result he is established or incorporated into the covenant. ¹⁾

Established in this new relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the new man is filled with the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and enabled to "fully obey the righteous demands of the Law" (Rom. 8:2,4, T E V).

That is why in the writings of Paul, the term 'righteousness' still occurs a number of times with the nuance of meaning of 'life according to God's norm'. We refer to Rom. 8:4; 6:13; 6:16,18; 14:17; II Cor. 6:7, 14. This new life, in Christ, is a life according to God's norm (or: will, or: law).

1) For a discussion of the idea of "being in Christ", see also Calvin, J. Institutes of the Christian religion, III, XI, 10. L. Floor, in his dissertation, De nieuwe Exodus. Representatie en inkorporatie in het Nieuwe Testament. Potchefsroom, 1969, Ch. V, devotes a detailed discussion to the federative aspects of salvation.

3 A comparative analysis of the Biblical and Venda terms

It should not be necessary to point out that u luga is entirely unsuitable for denoting the punitive justice of God or his righteousness in terms of the covenant, as has been done in the Venda Bible.

Let us compare it with the Matthean usage of the term.

Semotactic context: "For John the Baptist came to you showing the right path to take" (Mt. 21:32).

Diagnostic components

righteousness

1. positive behaviour
2. conformance to God's will
3. approved by society

u luga

1. lack of negative behaviour
2. not disapproved by society

When it is said that John the Baptist came and taught people ndila ya u luga, "the way of u luga" it simply does not communicate anything. If a Venda would have to try to make something out of it, he would probably come to the conclusion that John came and taught people not to trouble others.

This central biblical concept, as translated in the Venda Bible, hardly ever makes any sense in the contexts where it occurs. Neither do derivations of the term which occur in phrases such as u laya kulugele (II Tim. 3:16, supposed to mean, "giving instruction for right living"), or u lugisa ha Mudzimu (Rom. 1:17, supposed to mean "how God puts men right with himself"), communicate any meaningful information.

4 The consequences of using this term for the life of the Church

We cannot blame the Venda people for not understanding anything about God's righteousness and his punitive

justice when they usually hear about it in terms of this word, u luga. To tell them that God o luga neatly fits in with the deistic Bantu concept of God. He is not concerned about us, and there is no need for us to be concerned about him.

In the second place they are taught by the Venda Bible that the only thing that is required of them is u luga, not to bother other people, which fits in neatly with their traditional ethics.

As far as the Pauline usage of the term is concerned, u luga in the Venda Bible does not communicate a thing. This is aggravated by the term used for "faith", i.e. u tenda, which just means "to consent", already discussed. "We are justified by faith", when translated back from the Venda Bible (e.g. Rom. 3:28), means something like, "we are put in our place by agreeing to it".

At this stage we think it necessary to draw attention to the fact that terms which mean the same as u luga have consistently been used in all the Bible translations in Bantu languages in South Africa. We have a suspicion that this is also true of a great number of Bantu languages elsewhere in Africa. Examples are Sotho with ho loka and all its derivations, from toka to boitokafatso; Zulu and Xhosa with ukulunga.¹⁾

1) See Studerus, P.R. (In Beckman, J. Die Heilige Schrift in den katholischen Missionen, p. 314). Studerus, one of the Zulu Bible translators, felt something of the inadequacy of this term in his article, "Das Werden einer Bibelübersetzung": "Auch die dort so häufigen Ausdrücke 'Rechtfertigung' und 'rechtfertigen' sind sehr schwierig. Ukulungisa ist grammatisch wohl korrekt, aber idiomatisch hat es stark den Geschmack 'einen mores lehren, in den Senkel stellen'..."

5 Terms suggested instead of u luga

There is no term in Venda which can be used in all places where the Hebrew or Greek set of terms occur.¹⁾ One will have to select different terms to give the closest natural equivalents possible in different contexts. Let us take the three most important shades of meaning which occur in the Biblical terms concerned.

a In the first place the saving justice of God. Let us take Ps. 31:1 as an example of context:

"With thee, O LORD, have I sought shelter,
let me never be put to shame.

Deliver me in thy righteousness . . ." (N E B).
"Righteousness" is here God's saving righteousness, his faithfulness to his covenant.²⁾ The Venda Bible has here, "ngauri a u taluli" ("for you show no favouritism"). In contexts such as these it would be much better to use the verb u fulufhedzea ("to be trustworthy, faithful, dependable").

b In the many cases where man's righteousness as an attitude to the covenant is spoken of, e.g. in Mt. 5:20 ("standard of life", T E V), we should use the term suggested by Mr. Giesecke in the new Venda translation, u pfa Mudzimu ("to obey God, to do God's will").

c When the emphasis is of a forensic nature, a very suitable set of terms would be those used by the Venda for settling court cases by reconciling two estranged persons (as described on pp. 68,69), u pfumedzana, u pfumelela. Here the emphasis is on restoring relations, which is also the case in many texts of Paul's writings.

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- 1) Bühlmann, Die christliche Terminologie, p. 106:
"Missionare Röhl, der eingehend die Sprache der Schambala erforscht hat, bekennt, dass er nach 13 Jahren Missionstätigkeit noch kein treffendes Wort für 'gerecht, Rechtfertigung' gefunden habe".
2) See Ridderbos, J. De Psalmen, I. Kampen, Kok, 1955, pp. 37, 262.

Let us take Rom. 1:17. Isn't it more meaningful to say, "We a pfumelelwa ha Mudzimu nga u mu fulufhela, u do tshila" ("He who is reconciled to God by trusting in him, will live"), than, "O lugaho u do tshila zwi tshi bva u tendani" ("He who is all right will live by agreeing")?

In this term u pfumelelwa the ideas of compensation, forgiveness and reconciliation are implied — the restoration of broken relations.

II Terms reflecting more than one feature of the traditional world view

A From A and B (The idea of the "limited good"; Human relations)

1 U rengulula (for "redeem")

(1) The Venda term u rengulula

When discussing this term with Venda one is struck by the fact they show a compelling inclination to interpret it against the background of the all-embracing concept of reciprocity that underlies the whole cosmological and sociological structure of the Bantu.¹⁾ When the term u rengulula is used it implies that there must be a person who is redeemed, a person who redeems him/her, a person or body from whom he/she is redeemed, and a specific ransom. The last element is essential to the meaning of the term u rengulula.

1) The same is true of the terms ku kutsula in Tsonga, go rekolla in Northern Sotho, and ukuthenga or ukukhulula used in the Xhosa Bible.

(2) The Biblical terms translated by u rengulula

In the New Testament we find this term used to translate lutron and its derivatives.¹⁾ We must discuss the Old Testament meanings conveyed in the L X X by this set of terms in order to understand their setting.

In the Old Testament (LXX) the word lutroomai occurs 99 times, 45 times for rendering the Hebrew term g'l and 43 times for rendering pdh.²⁾

G'l is connected with the Old Testament institution of gēullāh as expounded in Lev. 25:24ff, where the duties of the go'el are mentioned. Its basic purpose is to keep the inherited land of a family in the possession of that family.³⁾

The verb expresses the action of "standing up" for a relative⁴⁾ in different situations, some of which might involve the payment of a ransom, eg. Lev. 25:48, where the Venda term u rengulula has rightly been used in the translation.

As distinct from pdh, g'l never refers to a voluntary ransom. It presupposes a bond of kinship between the person who performs the act and the one ransomed.⁵⁾ The ransom always refers to the restoration of the property concerned to its former owner.⁶⁾ This aspect is important and it explains the predilection of the prophets for this term when referring to the deliverance of Israel from perils and bondage: the covenant people

1) For a detailed discussion, see Büchsel, F. (In T W N T, IV, pp. 329-359); Hill, Greek words and Hebrew meanings, pp. 49-81; Stamm, J.J. Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament. Bern, 1940, pp. 10-45.

2) Hill, Op. cit., p. 53.

3) Stamm, Op. cit., p. 28; also Buhl, F. Die sozialen Verhältnisse der Israeliten. Berlin, 1899, p. 59.

4) Hill, Op. cit., p. 53.

5) Stamm, Op. cit., p. 30.

6) Idem, p. 29; also Merz, E. (In B W A T, 20, 1916, p. 46), quoted by Stamm.

have been freed by and for their rightful master.

The term pdh in the Arabic and Ethiopian languages refers to commercial transactions. ¹⁾ In the Old Testament it is not found in this sense, but only in a religious context, originally as technical term for redemption of the first-born, who belongs to God, Ex. 13:11-16. ²⁾

Both terms, g'l and pdh, are often used in the Old Testament in a metaphorical sense, to indicate salvation by the LORD.

G'l is used for salvation of individuals in texts such as Gen. 48:16; Job 19:25; Hos. 13:14 (parallel with pdh); Mi. 4:10; Ps. 103:4; Ps. 107:1ff; Ps. 119:154. In all these texts the original juridical meaning is not explicit, in some of them it is not even implicitly present. In all cases it has been translated by the Venda term u lamulela, ("to come to the aid of someone weaker"), which seems to be a very good natural equivalent for it.

In Ps. 69:19 g'l has been translated with u lwela, ("to take the part of"), while pdh, which occurs parallel with it in the same verse, has been translated with u lamulela. This is acceptable.

Pdh occurs with the same meaning and in the same context of salvation of the individual by God, eg. from enemies (II Sam. 4:9 and I Ki. 1:29; also Jer. 15:21, in all cases of which Venda has u lamulela); from illness (Ps. 69:19, u lamulela); from unjust enmity (Ps. 55:18, u tshidza, "to save"); from oppression (Ps. 119:134, u lamulela).

1) Stamm, Op. cit., p. 11.

2) Ibidem.

In all these cases, where God and not a human person is the subject, the idea that something given in the place of someone, the component of reciprocity, has receded into the background and disappears.¹⁾ It should not be conveyed in translation, and Schweltnus realized this when translating the Old Testament. That is why he used almost exclusively the term u lamulela ("to come to the aid of a weaker one") to translate it.

Both Hebrew terms are also used of the redemption from Egypt and Babel. G'l in Ps. 106:10; Ex. 6:6; 15:13; and Ps. 74:2. In all these cases it has been rendered by u lamulela. But in Ps. 77:16 by u phulusa, "to save". Pdh refers to the redemption from Egypt in Deut. 13: 6 (u lamulela); 21:8 (u lamulela); in 9:26 it is translated by u bvisa, "to bring out of".

In this context g'l and pdh are used as synonyms of terms such as jts' (in the hiph'il: "To bring out of"); 'lh (in the hiph'il: "To take up to"); and ntsl (in the hiph'il: "to deliver").

Where g'l refers to the deliverance from Babel, Schweltnus suddenly starts translating the term with u rengulula, thereby introducing the element of reciprocity, which demands that a ransom be paid. An instance of this is Is. 48:20. Yet in Is. 51:9-16 pdh in the same context is translated by u lamulela, while in Sac. 10:8 he uses u vhofholola, "to set free".

The way in which these two terms are used in the Old Testament indicates that their original meanings have receded entirely into the background, especially as far as the idea of a ransom is concerned. They have both acquired the meaning of "deliverance by God's power because

1) Stamm, Op. cit., p. 16.

of his loyalty to the covenant relation with them". 1)

In summarizing we can state the following: (a) Both terms in the course of history lost their technical character, in a commercial as well as in a social sense; (b) their original meaning still exerts some influence in a few contexts (eg. the idea of loyalty to a relation in g'l); (c) both denote salvation from personal distress, and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and Babylon. Both have lost the idea of reciprocity in most cases. Both are translated by rhuesthai in the LXX. 2) The emphasis is on the release rather than on the ransoming process. 3)

We may assume that the terminology of the New Testament is based on the Greek usage of these terms in the LXX. 4)

The term lutrōsis occurs three times in the New Testament. In Luke 1:68 and 2:38, it has been rendered by u rengulula in the Venda Bible. Here the idea of a ransom is definitely absent, since the text refers to the deliverance of God's people in the same sense as their deliverance from Egypt or Babylon. This also applies to the verb lutroomai as used in Luke 24:21, where the Venda Bible also uses u rengulula.

The terms lutrōsis and apolutrōsis used in Hebr. 9:12, 15 ". . . in connection with Christ's blood ought not to be interpreted in terms of paying a ransom-price without careful consideration of their contexts and without assessment of the theory of Old Testament sacrifice which such an interpretation implies", according to Hill. 5)

1) Stamm, Op. cit., p. 41.

2) Idem, p. 45. Rhuomai means "to rescue".

3) Hill, op. cit., p. 58.

4) Idem, p. 67.

5) Idem, p. 69.

From here onwards we cannot accept Hill's interpretation of the lutron-terms without some reservation. It is true that in these places, as in the history of the paschal lamb and in I Pet. 1:18, where the author refers to the lamb, the metaphor should not be forced into the scheme of "foreign ownership — price paid to former owner — restoring to original owner". However, the notion of ransom is so tied up with the vicarious nature of the suffering of Christ and the death of the paschal lamb that it cannot be disregarded. ¹⁾

Our objection against the term u rengulula does not lie in the fact that it introduces the idea of a ransom, which in many cases would be quite true to the meaning of the original, but in that it forces the metaphor into the scheme of reciprocity.

In some cases, such as in Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; and Eph. 4:30, where apolutrosis has been rendered by u rengulula, the idea of ransom is absent, the meaning being that of "deliverance".

The other New Testament term that is sometimes translated by u rengulula is (ex-)agorazō. In Gal. 3:13 and 4:5 it is translated by u rengulula, and in I Cor. 6:20 and 7:23 by u rengwa ("to be bought"). The context in which it occurs in the Venda Bible creates the impression that God or Jesus Christ paid a price to our former owner (the Law or the curse of the Law). This is, of course, misleading. Friedrich Büchsel ²⁾ specifically

1) See Ridderbos, Paulus, pp. 210,1.

2) In T W N T, I, p. 126.
Also Rowley, H.H. Dictionary of Bible themes. London Nelson, 1968, p. 80. Dodd, C.H. The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Moffatt N.T. Commentary), London. Hodder and Stoughton, 14th imp. 1960 pp. 53,4 (referring to apolutrōsis).

warns against objectifying the term and creating a myth of some transcendental transaction out of it. He points out that Paul is not interested in the hypothetical buyer or seller, but in the fact that we have been set free by Christ at the expense of his blood.

(3) Comparative analysis of the Venda and Biblical terms

Semotactic context: "But Christ has set us free from the curse the Law brings by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13, TEV).

Diagnostic components

redeem

1. alien control
2. mighty act of God
3. release from condition

u rengulula

1. alien control or possession
2. fine or compensation
3. change of ownership

Had the idea of a business transaction been only a supplementary component of u rengulula, the possibility of confusion would have been somewhat less. As it is, the Venda (or Tsonga, Sotho, Xhosa) reader of the Bible is compelled to come to the conclusion that the blood of Christ must have changed hands, and is now in possession of another autonomous power that stands on the same level as God himself.

This term is quite suitable in contexts such as Ex. 21:30; Lev. 25:47-52 and Hosea 3:2 (for translating pdh), but it cannot be used for communicating the concept of our redemption through Jesus Christ, because God never paid a price to a former owner of his people.

One should not be surprised, therefore, when preachers come up with a kind of pawn-shop theology when explaining the doctrine of redemption.

(4) Terms suggested instead of u rengulula

In many contexts in the Old Testament the verb u lamulela fits in very well. But in a context such as Gal. 3:13, that verb might create the impression that God takes our part against the Law and approves of our conduct when we trespass against it.

We propose rather to use the term u vhofholola ("to loose, untie") as has been done in the Sotho and Tswana translations (ho lopolla; go golola).

This term u vhofholola is used where one pays the fine for a person who has been arrested for not being able to pay his debts or taxes. Here the emphasis is, however, not on the sum paid but on the act of releasing, which can also be accomplished without the payment of a ransom, as is the case when a powerful person intervenes on behalf of someone.

The verb is derived from u vhofha. ("to tie, bind" or "to come to a decision"). U vhofholola is the inersive form of the verb, and therefore means the undoing of the act of u vhofha.

If we analyze this term in the same semotactic context as the term analyzed above we get the following picture :

Diagnostic components

1. alien control
2. intervention by a third party
3. release from condition

Supplementary component

1. payment of a price

This term should be a great help in gaining a better insight into the Biblical doctrine of redemption.

2 Malamba (for "reward")

(1) The Venda term malamba ("wages")

Working for a fixed wage used to be rare in traditional Venda society. In their relations with neighbours or kin, the Venda, like the Lovedu,¹⁾ used to have a great dislike of anything that is clearly and primarily a commercial transaction. The emphasis in interpersonal relations was on mutual helpfulness,²⁾ and reciprocity was expressed by the giving of presents or rendering of services without immediate reward in the form of money or anything that looked like a payment.

The idea of being an employer was suspect in itself, since employers tend to be progressive and progressiveness was identified with anti-social methods of enriching oneself.³⁾

The term malamba means "wages for work". It is most probably a derivation from the verb u lamba, "to decline a marriage proposal or any invitation, or to refuse to accept a person or to deny having communion with him". Together with the meaning of reward for services, malamba expresses that the labourer has no further claim to any benefits — in a sense it terminates the relationship.

Malamba is reserved for strangers. It is never given by a father to a son. That would amount to terminating the family relationship and denying him any further filial privileges. Father and son belong to the same family unit and possess the same communal property, therefore the laws of reciprocity do not apply to them in the same way as in their connections with outsiders. Property changing hands within the family unit does not involve a change of ownership. It is still owned collectively, and

1) See Krige, Rain-queen, p. 65.

2) Idem, p. 60.

3) Idem, p. 61.

no one has been deprived of anything. So there is no need to restore a balance.

So strong is this feeling of solidarity that a father would never dream of thanking his son for services rendered and vice versa — not even among the present day Venda where words to convey one's thanks have been introduced from Sotho (u livhuha) and Afrikaans (u dankisa).

In many places where the Bible speaks of the reward God gives to his children, it has rightly been translated by other terms, such as mukovhe ("share, portion"), eg. in Genesis 15:1; 30:18; and in Matth. 6:2,5,16.

In other places such as Is. 40:10; Matth. 5:12; Lk. 6:23; I Cor. 3:8,14; Rev. 11:18 malamba is used.

(2) The Biblical idea of reward ¹⁾

The idea of reward is not exclusively linked with the terms with that specific denotation. It is implied in many contexts where the term "reward" does not occur, eg. in Mt. 24:47 ("... the master will put that servant in charge of all his property"); 19:29 ("... anyone who has left ... children or fields for my sake, will receive a hundred times more ..."); 25:34 ("Come and receive the Kingdom ..."); and in Paul, II Tim. 4:8 ("... the crown of righteousness ...").

For the sake of comparing the Venda and Biblical terms, it is advisable, however, to concentrate on those places where the terms for "reward" occur, for it is there that we also find the Venda term malamba.

1) For a detailed discussion of the idea of reward in the New Testament, see De Villiers, J.L. *Die loongedagte in die Nuwe Testament. (Exegetica)*. Den Haag, van Keulen, 1957. Also Preisker, H. Misthos. (*In T W N T*, IV, pp. 699-736); and Rowley, *Dictionary of Bible themes*, p. 85.

The Hebrew term sākār and the Greek term misthos are usually translated by "reward" in the English versions. They basically mean "reward for something done" or "wages for work".

In the New Testament the term misthos almost always refers to the Kingdom of God and salvation.¹⁾ It is promised to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Mt. 5:12 and Lk. 6:23 — both translated by malamba in the Venda Bible!) and to those who sacrifice much for Jesus' sake (Mk. 9:41 — also malamba) or accept his messengers (Mt. 10:41, malamba).

The reward consists of receiving a share in the Kingdom and entering into it (Mt. 25:34).²⁾ This is important when considering the term malamba. Is malamba apt to convey this notion? The Biblical idea does not mean that relations are terminated. On the contrary, it implies entering into a rich, never-ending communion with God in his Kingdom.

Another element of importance in this context is the idea of the Lord-servant relationship between God and his people. The servants are part of the household (douloi), are cared for by the Master but do not receive wages for their work, because they belong to him; they are his possession.³⁾ They are also his friends, because he confides to them the secrets of his Kingdom (Jn. 15:15). Their "reward" is to be given honour and responsibility in the Kingdom of their Lord (Mt. 25:21,23). They remain part of the "household" of their Master.

1) De Villiers, Loongedagte, p. 10.

2) See Ridderbos, H.N. De komst van het Koninkrijk. Kampen, Kok, 1950, p. 204.

3) De Villiers, Op. cit., p. 51.

Their position is even better understood when contrasted with that of the hired labourers, of whom we read in Mt. 20:1-16. The difference between them and the servants is shown clearly in Mt. 21:33-46, where the hired labourers maltreat and beat the servants out of enmity against their Lord, thereby acknowledging the unity between him and his servants. They themselves do not belong to the Master; they are on a contract which is terminated when the work is finished and the wages have been received. In Jn. 10:12 they are described as undependable people. The very fact that they are hired men and do not care for the property of the Master, proves this point.

The term for reward may therefore have a commercial background, but Jesus gives it a new content: the share in his Kingdom which the Father gives to his people in his sovereign love and grace (Lk. 12:32!). There is no relation whatsoever between their achievements and their reward. They do not serve with an eye to reward.¹⁾

There are texts where the term malamba will suit very well, such as in Mt. 6:2,5,16 (the reward of the Pharisees, which they have had already, and where Schwellnus, strangely enough, uses mutendelo, "a return gift"); Acts 1:18 (the money Judas received for betraying his Lord); Rom. 4:4 ("A man who works is paid; his wages are not regarded as a gift . . ." TEV).

It is also apt where the reward is meted out in the form of punishment, as in II Pet. 2:13. Schwellnus did not use malamba here, however; he preferred tshe vha dishumela ("what they have deserved").

1) De Villiers, Op. cit., p. 12.

(3) A comparative analysis of malamba and "reward"

Semotactic context: God will give the faithful their reward.

Diagnostic components

reward

1. special benefit rather than routine

2. undeserved

malamba

1. benefit terminal to interpersonal relationships

2. deserved

This analysis points out that malamba would fit perfectly into the context of Matth. 6:2,5,16: "You've had your reward", but that in the case of God's children it would mean that they receive something valuable after which they have no further access to him as his children, whereas the reward actually consists of having constant communion with him.

(4) The consequences of using this term in the life of the Church

As it is, it is very difficult for Venda Christians to accept the fact that God is our heavenly Father to whom we stand in an intimate relation. He is addressed as iwe, "you" (the way an animal is addressed), he is called Khotsi, "the Father", whereas no Venda addresses his father as khotsi. And on top of that the Venda is taught God will reward him. This serves as proof to him that God cannot really be our Father, that we do not belong to the same household, that everything we have, does not belong to him as well, that we shall not do anything for him unless there is an immediate reward waiting for us. He remains a stranger to us. Unfortunately the prayers and stewardship of the Venda church often create the impression that this is precisely their trend of thought. These terms could only serve to strengthen this type of "theology". Working for wages is generally associated with employment by whites. The use of the term malamba in connection with God might serve to strengthen the idea that he is "the white man's God".

(5) Other terms suggested

A term which would fit well into the context where God rewards his children, is mukovhe. This word has actually been used in a number of places in this context (See above p. 126). It means "the portion one gets of the whole, eg. the communal property; one's share". It is derived from u kovha ("to divide and share").

The idea of sharing, as has been explained in a previous section, is basic to interpersonal relationships and especially family relationships in Venda society. It is taken for granted that a father and his children share everything. This term would therefore also convey the element of unity and communion between God and his children.

3 U dipfumedzanya na . . ., for God's reconciliation of the world to himself

The verb u pfumelela or u pfumedzana expresses the idea of reconciliation. It is quite suitable to express this idea in a Biblical context too. The specific grammatical form in which it has been used in II Cor. 5:19, however, distorts the components in such a way as to render it unsuitable in that context.

(1), The Venda expression u dipfumedzanya na . . .

This expression uses the interesting term u pfumelwa ("to be reconciled to a wronged person by making amends"), with its derivatives u pfumelela ("to act as intercessor for an offender and make amends for him") and u pfumedzana ("to become reconciled to one another"). U pfumedzanya is the causative of the last mentioned form, and means "to reconcile two persons". The form we want to discuss here, u dipfumedzanya, is u pfumedzanya with the reflexive concord di-, and therefore means "to reconcile oneself to a person one has wronged". This particular form has been coined by Schwellnus. It is unknown in ordinary speech.

This set of terms, u pfumelwa etc., reflects the nature of Venda law with its strong emphasis on reconciliation between litigants rather than punishment of the guilty party.¹⁾ The concept of reconciliation is therefore not strange to the Venda; on the contrary, it is more natural to their world view than to Western European culture.

But if it is said in II Cor. 5:19 that "Mudzimu o dipfumedzanya na shango", "God has reconciled himself to the world", it means that the cause of the estrangement lies with God.

A detailed discussion of the whole Biblical idea of reconciliation would not be relevant to our treatise. We intend dealing with it very briefly, concentrating on the aspect of a) where the cause of the estrangement lies, and b) from whom the initiative comes in the act of reconciliation.

1) See p. 68. For a very interesting and illuminating discussion of the terms which in the Lovedu language have the same meaning as u pfumelwa etc., we refer to Krige, Rain-queen, pp. 192-5, from which book a few quotations follow here:-

Pp. 123,3: "The second procedure, that called hu khumelwa (to beg pardon, to reconcile), has an enormous province and a profound significance, not only for legal arrangements, but in the whole culture. The procedure uses a mukhumedi, the emissary who intervenes on behalf of one of the parties to beg the pardon of the other. Its essence is not humiliation of the one, but bilateral reconciliation: thus people often talk of hu khumejana, to beg pardon of one another, to become reconciled. If A., to whom B. has lent her pot, breaks it, A. should send an old woman as conciliator (mukhumedi) to express regret and to ask forgiveness."

P. 194: "Hu khumelwa is the predominant procedure in the districts, and everywhere it is considered especially appropriate to adultery, damage to crops, and 'blood' cases or bodily assaults; it is often the only permissible procedure in family disputes; and it is praiseworthy in theft cases. It may involve an elaborate series of acts, to some features of which we may refer."

P. 195: "Hu khumelwa is the only proper initial procedure in cases of damage to crops. The owner of the cattle is called to see the damage, begs pardon with a goat, and is told to strengthen his cattle kraal. If depredations continue, he may be taken to the khoros."

(2) The Biblical concept of reconciliation

"The Hebrew word kaphar (whether it originally means 'cover' or 'wipe out') has as its object sin, a sin or the sins. It deals with expiation and has a non-personal emphasis. The Greek equivalent (hilasmos, hilaskesthai) is not found more than three or four times in the New Testament. The New Testament prefers a new word: katallagè, katallassein (in Ephesians and Colossians apokatallassein). This word refers to the reconciliation between two persons (kat-all-assō means to change a person into an allos). ¹⁾

Katallassō is used for the reconciliation between husband and wife (I Cor. 7:11), and also for that of man to God (II Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10). ²⁾ Paul uses it to express the new relation between man and God resulting from the sacrifice of Christ, a relationship of peace instead of enmity. ³⁾

There exists a close link between the Biblical teaching of reconciliation and of justification. Ridderbos⁴⁾ shows how in more than one place "reconciliation" is used as parallel and equivalent of "justification", as in Rom. 5:9,10 and II Cor. 3:9 and 5:20 ("the ministry of righteousness" and "the ministry of reconciliation"). In II Cor. 5:19 Paul explains reconciliation as "no longer holding men's misdeeds against them" (N E B), which is as close to the idea of justification as possible. The difference in nuance between the terms dikaioō and katallassō comes from the different background from which they have their origin, the one from a forensic-religious sphere and the other from a social sphere. ⁵⁾

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- 1) Berkhof, H. and Potter, P. Key words of the Gospel. London, S C M Press, 1964, p. 43.
 - 2) Büchsel, F. Katallassō (In T W N T, I, p. 255).
 - 3) Honig, A.G. Meru en Golgotha. Franeker, Wever, 1969, p. 120.
 - 4) Ibidem. See also Ridderbos, Paulus, p. 197.
 - 5) Ridderbos, Paulus, p. 197. Also Kümmel, W.G. Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1969, p. 182.

Whereas theologians are fairly united on the theological meaning of katallagè, there is much difference of opinion between them on hilasmos, especially as to its object. Some theologians cannot accept the idea that the sacrifice of Christ had an element of expiation in it, that he had to become the object of God's wrath so as to effect the reconciliation between God and man, and that satisfaction and appeasement were necessary. ¹⁾

While recognizing that we are here dealing with divine truths in human speech, this cannot be a reason for avoiding the issue. God has revealed himself to us in anthropomorphic terms and that is the only way we can think of him and his truth. We therefore have to take the way the Bible speaks of God and his wrath seriously and literally. We must accept this to be the truth as God has revealed it to us in an understandable way. And this truth is that both God's divine wrath occasioned by sin and his love are taught in the Bible. ²⁾

The way leads from Rom. 1:18, where we are told that "God's wrath is revealed coming down from heaven", to Romans 3:25, where we are told that "God offered him (Christ) so that by his death he should become the means by which men's sins are forgiven" (T E V). Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, remain objects of God's wrath (Jn. 3:36).

1) Honig, Op. cit., pp. 121,2.

2) See Calvin, J. Institutes of the Christian Religion Book II, Ch. XVII, 2.
Confessio Belgica, Art. 21.
Honig, Op. cit., p. 122.

This teaching on the wrath and judgement of God is part of the apostolic kerugma (message). ¹⁾ Jesus "rescues us from God's wrath that is to come" (I Thes. 1:10, T E V).

This wrath of God is just, because the guilt of estrangement and rebellion is to be found with man, as is so forcefully demonstrated by Paul in Rom. 1:18ff. This is the reason why Christ's sacrifice, his atoning death, was necessary. Because of God's wrath man had to die, and Christ died man's death, our death. ²⁾

So the guilt lies with man, but the initiative in reconciliation comes from God. This is the Biblical teaching on the love of God — not that appeasement was unnecessary, but that he loved us (I Jn. 4:10) in spite of our sins and set in motion the work of reconciliation in order to forgive us. ³⁾ He is one in his love and wrath, and these should not be played off against each other. ⁴⁾

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- 1) See Dodd, C.H. The apostolic preaching and its developments. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 8th imp. 1956, Ch. I.
 - 2) Bakhuizen van den Brink, J.N. Verzoening (In van der Woude a.o., Kernwoorden, pp. 30,37.
 - 3) Idem, p. 37. Also Kümmel, Op. cit., p. 183; and Ridderbos, H.N. De komst van het Koninkrijk. Kampen, Kok, 1950, pp. 159-161.
 - 4) See also Honig, Op. cit., p. 126,:
"Het wil ons voorkomen, dat hier iets aan het licht treedt van een zekere religieuze ergernis. Niet omdat het intellectueel bijzonder moeilijk te verwerken is, hoe God zowel subject als object in de verzoening zou kunnen zijn, maar omdat een God die verzoend zou moeten worden, niet of niet gemakkelijk aanvaardbaar wordt geacht voor menselijk religieus besef."

For a discussion of the whole subject in more detail, see also Hill, Op. cit., pp. 23-48;
Dodd, C.H. The Bible and the Greeks, London, 1935, pp. 82-95.

(3) A comparative analysis of the Biblical and Venda terms

Semotactic context: "God has reconciled men to himself through Christ. . ." (II Cor. 5:18).

Diagnostic components

<u>reconcile</u>	<u>u dipfumedzanya na...</u>
1. man estranged from God	1 God estranged from man
2. guilt lies with man	2 guilt lies with God
3. God induces man's return through Christ	3 God provides compensation

We want to emphasize the fact that according to the Venda Bible the guilt must lie with God.

(4) The consequences of the use of this term

The impact of this expression must be seen against the background of the wide-spread belief among the Bantu that God has left man for some unknown and unfathomable reason. "God has gone away," as Taylor puts it. He continues, "The African myth does not tell of men driven from Paradise, but of God disappearing from the world. It is man, not God, whose voice calls through the desolate garden: Where art Thou?" ¹⁾

(5) Terms suggested instead of u dipfumedzanya na . . .

We suggest using the same verb root, but in another form, ie. "Mudzimu o nea vhathu Kristo sa Mupfumeleli wa u vha pfumelela ha Mudzimu." Both the guilt of man and God's initiative are expressed by translating it in this way: "God gave men Christ as Mediator to reconcile them with God".

The fact that the same verb is used as for "justification" is no problem for as has been pointed out, the two terms are very close in meaning.

1) Taylor, Primal vision, p. 84. See also Mbiti, African religions, p. 97.

B From B and C (Human relationships; Spirits and magic)

Mudzimu, "ancestor spirit", for "God"

1 The Venda term mudzimu

Dr. J.H. Bavinck once wrote, 1)

"When we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ we need a word to indicate the name of God. Every language in the world has some word by which it refers to those exalted beings who are supposed to have created the world and to have established the world order. It is obvious that none of these words are suitable to indicate the Lord and Father of Jesus Christ . . . It is clear that we take a great risk every time that we take a word of a heathen nation and introduce it into the gospel. There is much at stake, because the name we choose for God may be full of contamination, a name which invokes ideas which are exactly the opposite of what we should like to suggest. But one thing is inevitable: we shall have to use a pagan word, in spite of the many dangers of misunderstanding which accompany its use."

Now the first missionaries in Vendaland, and in their footsteps Dr. Schwellnus, thought fit to use a Venda term which was not only "full of contamination", but, what is more, does not refer to "exalted beings who are supposed to have created the world and to have established the world order", ie. mudzimu, "an ancestor spirit". Almost none of the attributes of God are present in this concept.

- 1) The Impact of Christianity on the non-Christian world, p. 47,8. For further illustrative material we refer to Latourette, K.S. History of the expansion of Christianity. London, 1939, Pt. III, pp. 340-352; Rosin, H. De vertaling van de Godsnaam in het Indonesisch (In De Heerbaan, Sept.-Okt. 1952); Capell, A. Names for God in Oceanic languages (In The Bible Translator, Vol. 20, No. 4, Oct. 1969).

This word belongs to the mu-, mi-class of nouns,¹⁾ which usually indicates non-personal "living" objects, such as trees, fire, wind, shadow, rivers, villages, the rainbow, the Milky Way, medicine, the body and some of its parts.

Many things which are connected with ancestor worship are called "mudzimu".²⁾

So the black goat, cow or bull designated as the representative and embodiment of the ancestor spirits to which the sacrificial beer (mpambo) is offered, is called mudzimu.³⁾ When the family is too poor to keep a cow or goat, stones are erected as their substitutes. These are called kholomo ya fhasi ("the beast of the earth") or kholomo ya midzimu, ("the beast of the ancestor spirits").

1) See Meinhof, C. and Van Warmelo, N.J. Bantu-Phonology. Berlin, Reimer, 1932.

2) For a similar term in another part of Africa, in Anuak, a Nilotic language of the Sudan, see Nida, Toward a Science of Translating, p. 91, where he discusses the term jwok, pl. juu. This term can mean, in different contexts:

1. The one who made the world and everything in it.
2. Gods of the earth, which are predominantly malevolent.
3. The family shrines.
4. A grove of trees.
5. A medicine man.
6. The white man (ie. he has special abilities).
7. Radios, cars, airplanes, phonographs, and electricity.
8. Anything startling, except a ghost.
9. Illness.
10. Fate.

Also Erasmus, Die godsdienstige begrip, pp. 70,1.

3) This is, of course, not limited to the Venda people but a wide-spread phenomenon among the Bantu peoples. So eg. the Batswana call their cattle modimo wa nkgo e metsi, "the ancestor spirit with the wet nose"

Another instance of animals being called mudzimu is that of the baboons on Lwamondo Mountain. It is said that once, long ago, by barking they warned the local tribe of the Swazi invaders. Henceforth they were regarded as the midzimu of the people of Lwamondo.¹⁾

Even a chief is often saluted by the praise name of Mudzimu wanga, a mpfunaho ("My ancestor spirit, who loves me") This is because the chief is looked upon as the living link between the tribe and the ancestor spirits of his fathers.²⁾

1) See Junod, H.A. Some features of the religion of the Bavenda. (In The South African Journal of Science vol. xvii, 1921, pp. 219), says that each member of the Mulaudzi clan living at Lwamondo, when he dies becomes a baboon and goes to the sacred hill of Lwamondo to dwell there.

2) See also Petterson, Chiefs and gods, who concludes his study on Bantu Chieftainship as follows, p. 363: "Summing up, the chief's authority is thus founded on the fact that he is regarded as the representative of the national ancestor gods, ie. the dead chiefs. At their commission and with their aid he reigns over his tribe. He is their living representative in the tribe; he is the national intermediary link between the past and the present in tribal life". Lestrade, G.P., Some notes on the Political Organization of the Venda-speaking Tribes, in Ethnological Publications of the Department of Native Affairs, Vol. 3, Pretoria, 1950, Appendix I, p.v : "But not only is the chief thus regarded as semi-divine during the greater part of his life: towards the end of it, or sometimes long before, he actually confers godhead upon himself, when after abjuring all contact with women, and putting away his wives, he performs a solemn solitary dance, u pembela, which makes him in very truth a god, Mudzimu."

Although one cannot agree with the translation of Pettersson and Lestrade of "god" for mudzimu, their observations nevertheless serve to illustrate the close association of the chief with the spirit world.

"Even an old person can be referred to as mudzimu, if he is older than anybody else in the vicinity." ¹⁾

The Domba, the python dance for initiating Venda girls into womanhood, is also called mudzimu, ²⁾ though it is more often called midzimu (the plural of the same word) which is probably a more correct way of saying that it is connected with ancestor-worship. Often it is called zwidzimu, as in the expression, "Domba ndi zwidzimu zwa Masingo, a vha na zwifho" ("The domba is the ancestor rite of the people of the Singo sib, because they do not have a sacred grove"), used by the Vhaṭavhatsindi, Vhalaudzi and the other sibs who inhabited Vendaland before the arrival of the Masingo.

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- 1) Giesekke, Venda names for God, p. 4. See also Krige, Rain-queen, p. 124: "The widespread suspicion that they have personal contacts with the world of darkness enhances their power, while their elevation, in anticipation, to godhead, for they are already so near death that they may be referred to as gods (vadimo), invests their dignity and their wishes with a supernatural halo."
- 2) See Van Warmelo, Contributions, pp. 53, 63: "An informant of royal blood...said Ndi Mudzimu, which may mean that it is connected with ancestor-worship. . .What the native has in mind when he says Domba ndi mudzimu is difficult to grasp. It probably means that it is a custom hallowed by age-old tradition, a breach in the observance of which would provoke the wrath of the departed ancestors." That is also the reason given for the custom of dancing quite naked at night time, when the young folk are by themselves: Domba ndi mudzimu (p. 63). In other rites connected with ancestor-worship u phasa (bringing libation offerings to the ancestors, pp. 167 & 175), or drawing water for the thevhula-libation offerings (p. 156) and pounding the millet for the thevhula-beer (p. 156) "the work is done in a nude state in imitation of their departed ancestor, who now lies buried, and who also does not wear anything. He is naked like a Zulu, therefore they must also do likewise, it is to make them like the deceased" - Prayers to the ancestors to kill some person by witchcraft, are also performed in a nude state.

In the same sense the circumcision lodge is sometimes called zwidzimu zwa Vhalemba, "the ancestral rites of the Vhalemba", by the Masingo, who are not allowed to attend it.

The specific meaning of the -dzimu terms must in each case be determined from the context, but it is clear that they always refer to ancestor worship in some form or other.

2 The Biblical idea of God ¹⁾

How can one speak of God otherwise than in a doxology? It would have been fitting to start this section like Augustine his "Confessions", in wonder and adoration. "God" does not seem to be a subject for a dissertation, but rather for prayer and meditation. One feels at a loss as to how to approach the subject. Yet it has to be done. If the Word of God has to be translated into the Venda language, then this most important term in the Bible has to be carefully considered, not only from a devotional angle, but also from a theological one.

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- 1) For further information on the subject, see the following list of literature which has been consulted:
De Groot, J. and Hulst, A.R. Macht en wil. De verkondiging van het Oude Testament aangaande God. Nijkerk, Callenbach, undated.
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Had this been done in the first place, surely a term other than mudzimu, ("an ancestor spirit"), would have been chosen.

In dealing with this subject we do not intend discussing the Hebrew and Greek terms for "God" or "god". We have no indication of how and under what circumstances and with what considerations the patriarchs or their fathers started using those terms, and it would not be wise to argue from a supposed analogy between their position and that of the Venda. What is important is what content they gave to those terms from their experience with God as he revealed himself to them.

In the context in which we deal with this subject, it is not necessary to give an exhaustive account of the idea of God in the Bible. We assume that Bible translators and theologians should know God. We intend being very brief and to the point, and wish to concentrate upon those attributes of God that distinguish him from midzimu, including Mwali, the first mudzimu of the Venda.

God the Creator

The opening words of the Bible tell us about God the Creator, who ". . . spoke, and it was; he commanded and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:6,9). This immediately focusses the attention on his eternal character (Ps. 90:2), his self-sufficiency (Acts 17:25; Rom. 11:36), his sovereignty (Rom. 9:6ff),¹⁾ his uniqueness (Hosea 8:5,6; Is. 44:6 and passim in Isaiah 40ff).²⁾

The holy God

It is difficult to define what God's holiness means, ". . . the most intimately divine word of all . . ." ³⁾ There are many aspects to it, and every attribute of God is also in a sense an aspect of his holiness. ⁴⁾

1) See also Jacob, Op. cit., p. 37; Herbert, Op. cit., pp. 35ff.

2) Wolff, Op. cit., pp. 400,3.

3) Snaith, Op. cit., p. 36.

4) Vriezen, op. cit., pp. 160ff.

Where the Hebrew root qdš is used, the main emphasis seems to be on God's otherness. ". . . I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hosea 11:9). ¹⁾
"The Holy could . . . be designated the great stranger in the human world, that is, a datum of experience which can never really be co-ordinated into the world in which man is at home, and over against which he initially feels fear rather than trust—it is, in fact, the 'wholly other'." ²⁾

The idea of holiness is in a way related to the idea of "positive taboo", something unapproachable, mysterious and dangerous. ³⁾

The element of awe-inspiring exaltedness, "gleich erhaben und furchtbar", ⁴⁾ is also present in the concept of holiness. This is affirmed by the close link that exists between God's holiness and his glory, which is an aspect of it. ⁵⁾ In Is. 6:3 we hear the seraphim in God's presence calling to one another,

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts:

the whole earth is full of his glory."

The God of the covenant

The idea of a covenant between God and his people contrasts sharply with the religions of the people surrounding Israel, who regarded themselves as "sons of the god" in the literal sense as being his (or their!) descendants. In the covenant relationship they are God's people by adoption, and he is their King and Protector. ⁶⁾
In the frame-work of this covenant Israel learns to know

1) Snaith, Op. cit., pp. 36, 51.

2) Von Rad, Op. cit., p. 205. See also De Groot and Hulst, Op. cit., p. 176; Proksch, O. T W N T, I, p. 91.

3) Jacob, Op. cit., pp. 86, 7. See also Herbert, Op. cit., p. 11, and Otto, Das Heilige.

4) Köhler, Op. cit., p. 35.

5) Vriezen, Op. cit., p. 161.

6) Herbert, Op. cit., pp. 27, 9.

him as a righteous God, who can be trusted to be true to his obligations in the covenant. By experience they learn of his faithful love, chesed.

Even the strong anthropopathism which the Bible uses for describing God's attitude towards his people, his "jealousy", is inseparably connected to his faithfulness in the covenant as well as to his uniqueness. That is why the names of other gods may not even be mentioned by his people (Ex. 23:13).

The same is true of God's anger, which is the reverse side of his love. The prophets who most strongly emphasize God's love, Hosea and Jeremiah, are also those who in the most vehement forms proclaim his jealousy and anger ¹⁾ (Hosea 5:12,14; Jer. 13:12-14).

The living God

The term "the living God", that is so characteristic of the Bible, contains a strong element of contrast with the heathen deities. The gods of the heathen are indeed powerless to save their people. ²⁾ The God of Israel is active in his protection of his own people (Ps. 18:47 — or 46 N E B; 121:4; Dan. 6:20). ³⁾ He is also active in punishing his enemies (Hebr. 10:31).

"God is known by what he does. He is not the product of men's thinking. He is not . . . the result of men's wishful thinking or of men's fears or of men's hopes, he is the One who comes into the human arena, which he has prepared for this very purpose, and takes action." ⁴⁾

1) Vriezen, Op. cit., p. 168.

2) Du Plessis, 'n Banier van die volke, p. 66.

3) De Villiers, Die lewende God, p. 90.

4) Herbert, Op. cit., pp. 1,2.

3 A comparative analysis of the Biblical and Venda terms
Semotactic Context: God created the world.

Diagnostic components

God

1. a sentient being who was never human
2. supreme over all beings

Mudzimu

1. a sentient being, previously human
2. not necessarily the greatest
3. gradually fading in power

When comparing these two terms, one is immediately struck by the dissimilarity in diagnostic components rather than by the similarity, although they share the common component of being supernatural.

As far as the semotactic context is concerned, we are faced with the problem that the context chosen here does not fit in with the concept mudzimu, since it forces into a biblical context a term which is incompatible with it. But that is precisely our problem with the Venda Bible!

God is the sovereign Creator of everything. The midzimu are creatures, at the most somewhat higher in the hierarchy of forces than living humans on earth.

There is an essential difference between the God of the Bible and man. On the other hand the midzimu are closely related to man. They are just the next stage in the hierarchy of forces.

This difference between God and man is int. al. manifested as holiness. The spirits cannot be said to be holy. They are dangerous in the same sense as powerful human beings or witches.

There is no idea of glory associated with the midzimu. An exception may be Raluvhimba, of whom it is said in the legends that when he used to visit the Vhavenda at Ha Luvhimbi, O vha a tshi tou vhauma, "He had a shining

appearance".

Whereas the covenant between God and man is a decree of the sovereign God, the relationship between men and the midzimu is of a genealogical nature. The midzimu have as little choice in it as the humans. The relationship cannot be broken by the spirits either. They cannot choose other people as their descendants. Their fate is wounded up with that of their offspring.

God is the righteous One. He can be trusted. He is true to his word and promises. He will never forsake his people unless they first turn against him. The midzimu are capricious. There is no knowledge as to what their next whim might be. One just has to wait and see.

God shows his faithful love, chesed, towards his people, who do not deserve anything. This idea is developed in the New Testament concept of charis, "grace or mercy". The midzimu look after the tribe so that their own existence might not be threatened. They are propitiated by offerings on a basis of reciprocity, but they are not interested in the inner feelings of the living towards them, so long as they are remembered and cared for. They do not show or expect love.

Their jealousy has nothing to do with uniqueness or love, but is the result of the fact that they are not as happy in their state among the dead as are the living people on earth. Their anger is due to resentment at being neglected.

They are not alive. They cannot be depended upon to act on behalf of the living. That is the source of the fatalistic attitude which so characterizes the Venda.

They are not living in the real sense; they are vhafu (the dead ones); mirunzi (the shadows). They are not eternal, since they were born as men, and died, and are believed to gradually fade away into the unknown.

So according the original meaning of the word mudzimu, which is still generally associated with it by the majority of the Venda people, it would be more correct to say that God is not mudzimu than to say that he is one. Any Shona would be shocked to hear God termed a mudzimu (the Shona word means exactly the same as in Venda); and the same applies to a Zulu: just fancy him calling God umzimu, or idlozi, or ithongo, which means the same as the Venda mudzimu.¹⁾

To what extent has this word brought with it syncretistic influences from the realm of the shadows? Has God perhaps become the first ancestor of the Venda, king of Hades, perhaps the greatest of the midzimu, but qualitatively the same as they?²⁾

1) Tsonga employs the term Xikwembu for "God". This means the same as mudzimu in Venda. See Schneider, T. The divine names in the Tsonga Bible, Bible Society of S.A., 1967, p. 6: "The noun xikwembu, or rather its much more usual plural swikwembu, not only refer to ancestors; they constitute, from an anthropological point of view, the key-terms of ancestolatry in Tsonga speech. In terms of religious values, one could not find a 'lower' concept on the scale of traditional supernaturalism, a more 'down-to-earth', precise and common name. The word xikwembu, duly qualified, may represent the nearest cultural equivalent of a personal and ever-present pantheon of forefathers; it is however the most culturally conditioned, the least neutral name one could have chosen to translate Elohim or Theos. All the Tsonga people knew the swikwembu and dealt with them daily. Would they likewise come to know the living God and his dealings with them? The choice was a risky one. Whether it was done on purpose or not, we do not know. Southern Sotho may have again shown the way here, since modimo-badimo also refer to ancestors in that language, the singular Modimo having nevertheless been chosen to refer to the christian God."

2) For further discussion, see Schneider, Idem pp. 10,11. also Jahn, Muntu, p. 64.

4 Theological distortions in the life of the Church in Vendaleland which result from using the term Mudzimu

Since the problems of communication arise from the background of an animistic culture, it is well-nigh impossible to determine to what extent syncretistic trends that are observed in the life of the church are the direct result of the use of terms which carry the wrong information, and to what extent these trends are just a retarded step towards complete christianization, which might have been expected even if less animistically loaded terms had been used. There are many factors intertwining here: on the human side, the quality of mission work generally, and on the supernatural side the inscrutable work of the Holy Spirit — "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, RSV). Yet we believe that the Spirit operates through the Word of God, and that the Word can only be understood and do its work when it is communicated in a meaningful way. When false information is communicated, a false faith can be expected as a result.

Therefore the powerful influence of traditional African religion as well as ineffective, incomplete communication, which hampers the work of the Holy Spirit, are factors to be reckoned with.

The term Mudzimu

One could have expected that, when the term for "an ancestor spirit" was chosen for referring to "God", confusion would be the result. This suspicion is vindicated by the observation of actual syncretistic trends in the life of the Venda church.

What aggravates the problem is the wide-spread belief among the Bantu people, including the Venda, that the Creator is identical with the first ancestor of the tribe. That means that the Venda, who already is inclined to see no qualitative difference between God, the spirits and human beings, is strengthened in this belief by being told that "Yehova ndi Mudzimu", "Jehovah is mudzimu" (I Kings 18:39). It would have been more conducive to effective communication if it had been taught that the LORD is not mudzimu!

Use of the second person singular

This belief is further strenghtened by the unfortunate way God is addressed, i.e. in the second person singular (iwe, u-). This may correspond . . . literally with the Hebrew and Greek, but it creates an irreverant atmosphere as used in the Venda Bible.

Some Venda still use this form when addressing their own children, although it seems to be rapidly being replaced by the third person singular or second person plural. Otherwise it is only used for addressing animals, such as dogs or cattle, and ancestor spirits. The Venda-speaking Lemba are an exception here, since they use it more or less like the English form "you" in the singular, but the Venda themselves use the second person plural when addressing a child or anyone without rank (inwi, ni-). Married people, strangers, or anyone with rank is addressed in the third person plural (vhone, vha-), except among persons who have known each other from childhood or by a father when addressing his married son, etc.

In the Venda Bible God is throughout addressed in this way. Consequently Venda Christians do the same when praying. ¹⁾

1.) See also Giesekke, Venda names for God, p. 2.

Venda Christians have been told that this way of addressing God is even more respectful than the third person plural, and most of them have come to accept this theoretically. But this is not natural to them. When left to themselves, as with the Zionist sects, some prefer to use the third person plural, and some Christians refuse to use the second person singular, even if told to do so by missionaries or ministers. But the majority use it, and it reflects and re-inforces their feelings of irreverence in prayer.

Another unfortunate decision of Schweltnus was to use the impersonal locative form Mudzimuni in connection with God (eg. zwo bva Mudzimuni, "it comes from Mudzimu" in Rom. 8:27). This form with -ni is only used in connection with persons when the speaker does not refer to particular persons, but to the place where they stay, in a very vague and indefinite sense, eg. makhuwani ("in the country of the whites"). When a particular person is referred to, the form with ha, the locative possessive concord, is used. If we say Mudzimuni it strengthens the idea of a vague impersonal spirit world to which God belongs, and his personality recedes into the background.

These terms and usages serve to pull God into the sphere of the midzimu, as if he were one of them. It is very difficult for a young Venda Christian to regard God as his Father in heaven, when he is taught to address Him in the second person singular, which no Venda would dream of doing with his own father. The Biblical idea of God our Father should inculcate great respect and also a sense of nearness, yet both seem to be lacking in the Venda church. Otherwise why should the majority of Church members rebel against the mere thought of having to address God in the same way as they address their fathers on earth, instead of addressing him like an ancestor spirit?

"Other midzimu"

One should try to understand the reaction of a Venda convert, who hears God called "Mudzimu wa Abrahamu, Mudzimu wa Isaka, Mudzimu wa Yakobo" ("Mudzimu of Abraham, Mudzimu of Isaac, Mudzimu of Jacob"). Who can blame him for associating God with Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's ancestor spirits? Now he knows full well that it has never been the custom to communicate with the ancestor spirits of other people. They do not belong to his "ingroup". He does not even know their totems and taboos. How can he possibly communicate with them? So how can we expect him to feel any affinity for this mudzimu?

Against this same background, let us imagine our Venda convert listening to the first commandment of the Decalogue, "Ndi songo u vhona u na midzimu isili" ("I do not want to see you have strange midzimu"). To him this means that he should rerela ("pray") only to his own midzimu, which is exactly what he has been doing all along!

The term -khethwa

The breakdown in the communication of the Biblical message might not have been so serious had an appropriate Venda term been found to translate "holy". Unfortunately this was not the case. The term khethwa ("chosen") that is used for referring to this important concept does not carry any meaning for the Venda.

The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit

This lack of communication is also seen in the way in which "being filled with the Holy Spirit" (Muyamukhethwa) is equated with a form of spirit possession among the independent syncretistic sects. This phenomenon of spirit possession has been discussed in the third chapter, but here we should discuss its "christianized" form.

In Venda mudzimu and muya (wind, spirit), are often used as synonyms, so that it is only natural for the Venda to regard the Holy Spirit as a Mudzimu. The form in which the gospel was brought to them by some of the earlier Pentecostal groups, with its emotionalist approach and strong emphasis on speaking in tongues, ¹⁾ served to give rise to this kind of confusion, because it fitted naturally into the Venda concept of being possessed by a maio bo-spirit.

Other aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit receive scant attention. Baptism is regarded as equivalent to being born again. Conversion means joining the particular group. Sanctification is displaced by ritual purification, which fits in with the traditional Venda world view, and is not associated with the work of the Muya (Holy Spirit). ²⁾

The strong syncretistic nature of this kind of possession cult can be seen from the form it takes. It resembles closely that of the malombo cult. Often there is wild dancing, singing and shouting which lead to the climax, possession, when the "possessed" falls to the ground

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- 1) See Sundkler, B.G.M. Bantu prophets in South Africa. London, Lutterworth, 1948, pp. 48, 247.
 - 2) For discussions of this phenomenon among other African peoples, see Sundkler, Op. cit., p. 200: ". . . what to the European appears as religious emotionalism, is actually a variety of stages of Christianized possession . . ." Baäta, C.G. Prophetism in Ghana. London, J M Press, 1962: ". . . a sort of baptized African spirit possession." (p. 140).
Lanternari, V. The religions of the oppressed. New York, Knopf, 1963, pp. 38, 9. :

"A modern interpretation of pagan traditions is found in the worship of christian angels and of the Holy Ghost, whom the natives regard as the spirit of the dead. . . In many pagan cults the living become possessed by the spirit of a deceased person, who acts through them, but in the Zionist doctrine it is the Holy Ghost who works in the believers, hereby carrying on the tradition in modified form."

and lies there quite stiff. The sounds uttered also resemble those of the malombo, such as the roaring of lions, the grunting of pigs (especially when the "powerful" name of the bishop is uttered), the howling of a hyena or a variety of other sounds which are uttered on the spur of the moment. ¹⁾

Since the speaking of a strange language, such as Karanga, is regarded as a sure sign that the possession has taken place in the malombo, it is small wonder that one observes the same phenomenon in the form of possession practised by the syncretistic sects. This "language" is often a mixture of meaningless sounds which are monotonously repeated, resembling the sounds recorded by Sundkler in his "Bantu Prophets". ²⁾ They are often English words, picked up by the speaker during his stay in the towns, such as "fish and chips"! In one group the formula "Molitha, reksheni!" is very popular. Some of the bishops and superintendents have developed this practice into quite an art. They memorize long "prayers" in these cultic languages, beginning eg. with the formula, "Oh Gotte de Tada", and then switching to phrases from various other languages with which the speaker has some acquaintance, adding some self-coined language for good measure. The Zionists themselves, of course, take these "languages" quite seriously. To them it is the Spirit (Muya) working in them that causes such utterances and the mere hint that these grunts or languages are not a genuine work of the Muya is regarded as a gross insult. The reply would be a hurt, "Hufha vha sa khou qiitisa!" ("But they are not doing this of their own accord!").

1) Oosthuizen, G.C. The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit in the independent movements in Africa (In Van den Berg, J. a.o. Christusprediking in de volkerenwereld. Kampen, Kok, 1965), p. 187: "... failing more spectacular demonstrations ... a Zionist prophet must at least produce the typical Zionist snort during a service to show that the Spirit is very near" (quoting from Sundkler, Bantu prophets, p. 248). See also Oosthuizen, G.C. Post-Christianity in Africa. London, Hurst, 1968, pp. 119-148.

2) P. 248.

Prophecy

Since a person who is possessed by a malombo spirit is supposed to be a medium of that spirit and is therefore able to point out witches or the causes of misfortunes and diseases, one should expect the same practices among the Zionists. And they are indeed very generally practised among them. Of course, since they regard themselves as Christians, they call this "prophecy". But this prophecy consists of pointing out witches or persons who used European medicines, ¹⁾ or thieves, or those who committed the offence of eating pork. Sometimes predictions are made about household troubles that are expected such as divorce or quarrels. These are also often the subject of the "revelations" of malombo mediums or diviners. The revelations and predictions are introduced by the formula, "Muya u ri . . ." ("The spirit says . . ."). ²⁾

Now, how can one blame the Venda Christians for behaving like this when they are constantly exhorted to pray (rerela) to Mudzimu and to bring him zwidzimu (things connected with ancestor worship)? ³⁾

The concept of God among Christians.

Finally we would like to make some observations about the concept of the nature of God among Venda Christians. We here refer to those Christians who do not believe in the midzimu.

It seems as if to a certain extent the biblical teaching of Mudzimu has filled the vacuum left by the deistic concept of God among the traditional Venda. Yet God seems to be drawn into the sphere of "vital force" which dominates the Venda world view. He is the

1) Thereby breaking the taboos of the group.

2) See Sundkler, Op. cit., p. 252.

3) See next section, pp. 160-161, 166-167.

powerful rather than the Holy One. It seems to be very difficult to present him to the Venda as the Righteous One and the Judge of the living and the dead. When sometimes the coming judgement is preached, it is not so much a call to repentance and holiness than a propaganda call for baptism into the group. The very widespread concept of the cosmic and indulgent "fathership" of the Creator has not been uprooted yet. ¹⁾

5 Terms suggested as substitute for Mudzimu

Several substitutes for mudzimu have been suggested and may be considered. The first possibility is a reduplicated form of Mudzimu.

a Mudzimumdzimu

This form occurs inter alia in a modern Venda song, which ends with the words,

Thendo, thendo, ha Mudzimumdzimu wa taduludulu,

"Praise, praise, to the real Mudzimu of the highest place".

The reduplicated form of the noun in Venda indicates a thing or person who conforms to all the characteristics which can be expected from his kind. So muthumuthu (from muthu, a person) means a person who is everything one can expect from a decent person. Mudzimumdzimu means a mudzimu who is everything one can expect from a decent mudzimu. Against the pagan background this would mean a mudzimu that looks well after its grandchildren and sees to it that the children are healthy and the crops plentiful, so that it might get its share of it. For the instructed Christian the term Mudzimumdzimu would mean the real God, the one who conforms to all the standards that can be ascribed to God. The reduplicated form of nouns

1) For a detailed discussion of the whole phenomenon of syncretism among the Venda, see Van Rooy, J. A. *Sinkretisme in Vendaland*. (Th. M.-thesis). Potchefstroom, 1964.

with a favourable meaning or in a favourable context tend to acquire the meaning of "the best".

The problem with this term is therefore that its meaning is determined by the religious and psychological context in which it is used. It would however be advisable to use it sometimes and to suggest that Venda Christians use it. Especially in times of spiritual renewal the people might start using a term such as this as an expression of the renewal. When new terms are introduced through renewal movements, they are much more likely to succeed than if introduced by a team of Bible translators who are suspected of tampering with the Word of God!

b Mwali:

This term is considered because the Shona equivalent, Mwari, is now exclusively used as a substitute for the term which was employed by the pioneer missionaries in Mashonaland, ie. mudzimu, which means the same as in Venda. In Vendaland it is also used by some Zionist groups who object against the word Mudzimu on account of its pagan associations. Perhaps they feel it is inadequate. But the phenomenon is interesting. Here is an indigenous group which tends to be syncretistic, and one would expect them to chose Mudzimu, yet they prefer a term that refers to the one God.

If we analyse this term together with the Biblical term "God", we might get the following graphic picture of the differences in meaning between these two terms.

Semotactic context: God created the world

Diagnostic components

<u>God</u>	<u>Mwali</u>
1. a sentient being, supreme over all beings	1. supreme God of Venda
2. unique	<u>Supplementary components</u>
	1. first ancestor of Venda
	2. other tribes may have others
	3. deistic

This term would certainly have been much more suitable than mudzimu if it had been introduced in the first place. The missionaries among the Shona people when referring to God first used the Shona word mudzimu, which means the same as in Venda. Fortunately they made the wise decision at an early stage to change to Mwari, and among the Shona Christians today it is generally accepted that Mwari is not mudzimu, and that a Christian should have nothing whatsoever to do with midzimu.¹⁾

In the mission work among the Bantu peoples to the north of the Venda the local term for the "High God" has generally been used to refer to God, eg. Leza, Nzambi, Mulungu, Kalumba.²⁾ In these tribes there has been less confusion of God with ancestor spirits.

The legends about Mwali mentioned above³⁾ are not remembered by many people. However, the problem is that many Christians have come to regard him as a heathen deity and Mudzimu has become to them the Father of Jesus Christ.

c Musiki ("Creator")

In the Venda Bible this term is used to refer to the concept of "Creator". Usually it is used in combinations, such as Musika-Isiraele ("Creator of Israel") in Is. 43:15. Dr. Schweltnus seemed to have preferred the term Muvhumbi, ("Moulder"), also used for "potter", for translating "Creator". The verb u vhumba means "to mould, to shape", and the deverbative noun yumba means "potter's clay".⁴⁾

1) See Gelfand, African Background, pp. 115. 78.

2) See Smith, E. African Ideas of God. London, Edinburgh House Press, 1950, for many examples.

3) P. 41.

4) Cf. term Muumbi ("Creator"), from kuumba ("to create") in the languages Kamba, Saramo and Shambala as alternative for Mulungu ("God") — Bühlmann, Terminologie, p. 140.

There is, however, a more suitable term, Musiki, from the verb u sika ("to create something which has not existed before", eg. u sika mulilo, "to make fire" or u sika nwana, "to bring forth a child" (of a man and woman together). The word Musiki ("Creator") is used in that form in the accepted version of the Apostles' Creed.

The semantic components of this term correspond with those of "God".

General acceptance of the term Mudzimu

In concluding we might say that, apart from the possibility of a movement of spiritual renewal among the people as a whole, it would be extremely difficult for a small group of people to try to introduce new terms for God in Venda. To the Venda Christian Mudzimu is the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The term seems to have received ready and wide-spread acceptance right from the start.

At this stage we would like to quote from Henri A. Junod's *Life of a South African Tribe*,¹⁾ in which he says the following of the adoption of the Tsonga term Xikwembu (= mudzimu in Venda) for "God": "It is wonderful to notice how easily the idea of the Christian God is accepted by the Bantus. They have scarcely any difficulty in believing that this is the real God to whom worship is due . . . It seems as if one were telling them an old story, with which they had been quite familiar but had now half forgotten. In regard to the Thongas I believe the psychological process to be as follows. When they hear of the Xikwembu, who is in Heaven, there at once takes place in their minds a coalescence, or reunion of the two main characteristics of their two religions; -- their Xikwembu is personal but not transcendental; their Heaven is transcendental but not personal. God, the real God who is preached to them, is both personal and transcendental; it is as if two different kinds of electricity suddenly came into contact.

1) London, Macmillan, 1927, Vol. II, p. 449.

with each other in their minds and produced a flash of light . . ."

Later investigation has indeed proved that he was too optimistic in his evaluation of the meaning attached by Christians to the term Xikwembu. However, he was quite right in observing the immediate acceptance the term met with, though this might have been a dangerous sign. Too ready an acceptance should sound a warning. The term chosen may be too compatible with the religious views of the listeners. This is the case with the Venda as well as the Tsonga. The term met with immediate acceptance. Many standard expressions, both among professing Christians and non-Christians, refer to God as Mudzimu. "Mudzimu ndi muthihi" ("There is but one God"), they say, especially when referring to the divisions in the Church. "Mudzimu u na maanda" ("God is powerful"), "Mudzimu u hone" ("there is a God"), "Mudzimu a si n'wana" ("God is no child") -- all of these are expressions to indicate God's ability to answer prayers, to protect them from evil or to cause something unexpected to happen, such as bringing together old acquaintances who have not met for a long time. ¹⁾

This term has taken root in the hearts of earnest Christians. It is noteworthy that they have brought about a significant change in grammar, and therefore also in meaning, when they prefer to use the concords of the mu- vha-class, the personal class, with Mudzimu, with the meaning of "God", instead of using the concords of the impersonal mu- mi-class, to which this noun originally belongs. The form of the noun lends itself to it, although this change has not been brought about in any of the Sotho languages. The Venda seem to have got accustomed to it and even heathens do it quite automatically.

1) For similar expressions in Tsonga, see Schneider, Divine names in the Tsonga Bible, p. 8.

Trying to replace this term, especially in a Bible translation, would meet with the same reaction as would an attempt to replace the English "God" with another term. For instructed Christians the term has been filled with a new meaning. To them it means the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and nobody else. The other midzimu, they feel, are no mudzimu; they have usurped God's title. There are no other midzimu. The midzimu of the heathen are midzimu i siho, "non-existing midzimu".

There is some consolation in the fact that the term mudzimu may have apologetic value. When the Venda are told by the Bible that they may have no other midzimu beside God, this also becomes an unambiguous condemnation of ancestor worship ! ¹⁾

However unfortunate the choice of mudzimu has been, it seems to have come to stay, and to fill the need for a Christian term for calling upon God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1) See Bühlmann, Terminologie, pp. 72,3:

"Im Gegenteil, manche Anlehnung an die heidnische Kultsprache erklärt sich gerade aus dem Kampf gegen diesen Kult. Wo der Kirche der Versuch einer rücksichtslosen Ausrottung kultischer Gepflogenheiten nicht gelang oder Aussichtslos erschien, da hatte sie eine mildere Waffe: sie liesz die heidnischen Formen (Wortformen oder rituelle Formen. D. Verf.) bestehen, erfüllte sie aber mit christlichem Inhalt und verdrängte damit den ursprünglichen heidnischen Gedanken. Dieses Vorgehen gehört zu den wichtigsten und bewährtesten Methoden der alten Missionare."

C From A and C (The "limited good";
Spirits and magic)
Tshidzimu ("a witch doctor's fee"), for "an offering"

1 The Venda term tshidzimu

The stem of this noun is the same as that of mudzimu. Mudzimu is an ancestor spirit; tshidzimu, from the tshi-zwi- class, the so called "thing-class", means "a thing connected with the ancestors".

Most informants agree that tshidzimu is the beast slaughtered for the ancestors when the nanga ("witch doctor") attributes an illness to the displeasure of the midzimu. After the patient has been treated by the nanga and has been cured, a goat (or very rarely a bull) is slaughtered by the nanga as an added propitiation besides the libation offering (u phasa), which is in this case regarded as insufficient. Since the nanga performs the rites connected with the slaughtering, and he gets a big portion of the slaughtered beast, it has come to be regarded as his "fee".¹⁾

Tshidzimu is also used to refer to the goat slaughtered at malombo (possession cult) ceremonies which, of course, are also connected with ancestor worship.

When the uninstructed Venda reader is told in Gen. 4:4,5 that ". . . the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering (tshidzimu), but for Cain and his tshidzimu he had no regard", he will naturally try to make sense of it in the framework of his knowledge of tshidzimu ceremonies. It implies that both had been ill, the cause of the illness being Mudzimu, that both tried to appease Mudzimu by gifts but that Cain's tshidzimu was not accepted because he did not offer a goat or bull as Abel may have done.¹⁾

1) Van Warmelo, N.J. Tshivenda-English Dictionary.
Pretoria, Government Printer, 1937, sub tshidzimu.

In the plural form zwidzimu is sometimes used for indicating initiation rites. They say "Domba ndi zwidzimu zwa Masingo" ("The domba is the ancestral rites of the Masingo sib"), or, "Mula ndi zwidzimu zwa Vhalemba" ("The circumcision lodge is the ancestral rites of the Lemba"). This form zwidzimu is probably used here in a derogative sense for referring to an alien mudzimu, since the tshi- zwi- class sometimes has a derogative connotation.

Dr. Schweltnus most likely employed tshidzimu on the assumption that, when the term mudzimu in the course of time has acquired a new meaning, tshidzimu would share in that shift of meaning. So far, after more than thirty years, this has not happened. Even literate Church members are sometimes at a loss as to what is meant by tshidzimu in the Bible.¹⁾ Schweltnus sometimes, for no obvious reasons, used other Venda terms for translating words which a few verses before had been translated by tshidzimu. These terms are tshipfumelo ("a gift of reconciliation"), tshithavhelo ("a beast slaughtered for guests") and musumo ("the chief's portion of an ox or cow that is slaughtered"). This shows that he himself was not quite satisfied with this term, but had difficulty in finding a more suitable one.

1) Note the following interesting comments of the Rev. D.W. Giesekke in a private letter:
 "Cain merely gave maize or fruit, Abel gave fat sheep, and they were several — madzhivhulo a masambi. Besides God knew that Cain was a bad fellow who had mbiti ("fits of anger") and tshimbevha ("treachery"). On the other hand Abele o vhanga ("disregarded his brothers seniority") by giving better sacrifices than his elder brother. God should have accepted Cain's sacrifice. God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice was the cause of Cain's act of murder. That is why God could not kill him and could only banish him to the land of Nod. As it was really God's fault he had also to protect him from being murdered by others." This demonstrates how a Venda may reinterpret what happened because he sees it against the background of his own culture.

2 The Biblical concept of offering

In Israel the offering is the most important act of external worship. It is a form of prayer, a symbolic act, in which God accepts an offering by which communion with him is established, and sin is expiated.¹⁾ The offering also contains the element of a tribute paid to a sovereign as expressed by David in his prayer recorded in I Chron. 29:14,²⁾

"But what am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to give willingly like this? For everything comes from thee, and it is only of thy gifts that we give to thee." God does not need the gift as do the heathen gods, who are even believed to eat the offerings presented to them,³⁾ but he graciously accepts it and thereby commits himself to fellowship with the person or people who bring the offering.⁴⁾

Of the concepts of tribute, communion and expiation sometimes this one, sometimes that one predominates in different situations, but rarely with the exclusion of the other elements. "What generally happened was rather that, whenever sacrifice was offered, several motives were involved, and these imperceptibly passed over one into another, with the probable result that one of them became prominent and determinative."⁵⁾ It is probably partly for this reason that there is no clearly defined technical terminology for the various offerings, not even in the

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- 1) De Vaux, R. Hoe het oude Israel leefde, Vol. II. Roermond-Maaseik, Romen 1962, p. 379. Also Von Rad, G. Old testament Theology, Vol. I (English ed.). New York, Harper and Row, 1967, pp. 253,4,260, and Hubert H. and Mauss, M. Sacrifice: its nature and function (English Tr.). London, Cohen and West. 1964, p. 97.
 - 2) De Vaux, Op. cit., p. 380. Also Ten Boom, W. Oud-Testamentische kernbegrippen. Amsterdam, Holland Uitgevers, 1948, p. 111: "'Korban' kunnen wij het best vertalen door: entreebiljet voor een audiëntie."
 - 3) See Du Plessis, 'n Banier van die volke, p. 76.
 - 4) De Vaux, op. cit., p. 380.
 - 5) Von Rad, Op. cit., p. 255.

book Leviticus. One term is used for various offerings and on the other hand one kind of offering can be referred to by various terms. ¹⁾ The authors who deal with offerings are generally vague as to the exact meanings of the specific terms.

We are not interested here in all the technical distinctions between the various kinds of offerings as described in the book Leviticus, but only in the terms which have been translated by tshidzimu in the Venda Bible.

There is very little consistency, if any, in the way Venda terms have been chosen for translating the different Hebrew and Greek terms for "offering". The only term that has been more or less consistently translated is chattā't, ("a sin offering") ²⁾, which is rendered by tshipfumelo ("a gift for obtaining reconciliation") in Ez. 40:39, and elsewhere always by the much less common term tshipfumelelo, which means the same. This seems to be an appropriate term.

The term 'āšām ("guilt offering") is sometimes rendered by tshidzimu tsha mulandu ("a tshidzimu of guilt" as in Num. 6:12) and sometimes just by tshidzimu (Ez. 40:39). It does not seem to be possible to define the difference between this and chattā't. ³⁾ Both are zwipfumelo in Venda.

'ōlah ⁴⁾ ("burnt offering") is rendered by tshidzimu tsha u fhiswa ("tshidzimu for burning") in Gen. 8:20. In Ex. 29:42 and Ez. 40:39 it is rendered by tshiḥavhelo ("an animal killed for a guest"), and elsewhere by the usual tshidzimu, eg. in Gen. 22:2; I Sam. 7:9; Ps. 51:21 (in Venda vs. 19); II Ki. 16:13; Lev. 4:24.

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- 1) De Vaux, Op. cit., p. 324. Rendtorff, R. Studien zur Geschichte des Opfers im Alten Testament. Neukirchen, 1967, p. 66.
 - 2) De Vaux, Op. cit., 332,3.
 - 3) Ibidem, Rendtorff, Op. cit., pp. 199ff, deals with these two terms under one heading as with one offering.
 - 4) Rendtorff, Op. cit., pp. 87-89.

The inconsistency of translation is even more obvious when we come to the terms qorbān and minchāh, translated in the LXX by dōron and thusia or prophora respectively. Both have been translated quite arbitrarily by tshidzimu or musumo in different places. Musumo is the part of a slaughtered animal that is given to the chief.

Qorbān, the most general term for an offering, ¹⁾ which in Greek is rendered by dōron, is translated in Venda by no less than four different terms. It is rendered by musumo in places such as Num. 5:15 and Lev. 1:2ff; by tshidzimu in Lev. 27:11; Num. 9:7; and Mk. 7:11; by musumo wa tshidzimu ("a musumo consisting of a tshidzimu") in Lev. 1:10; and by tshifhiwa ("gift") in Hebr. 5:1; 8:3; 9:9.

Prophora is rendered by tshidzimu in Acts 21:26; 24:17; Rom. 15:16; and Hebr. 10:10,14,18. Yet in the same chapter of Hebrews (10:5,8), as well as in Eph. 5:2, it is rendered by musumo.

Thusia (as Greek translation of minchāh or zebach) is translated by tshidzimu in Gen. 4:3ff; Lk. 2:24; 13:1; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 4:18; Hebr. 5:1; 8:3; 9:9; and by musumo in I Sam. 2:17; and II Ki. 16:13.

The confusion in terminology becomes evident when we compare the translation of the two terms thusia and prophora in Ps. 40 and in Hebrews. In Ps. 40 they are rendered by zwithavhelo na zwifhiwa ("animals killed for guests and gifts"), whilst in the parallel place in Hebrews 10 the same two terms are rendered by zwidzimu na misumo.

1) In Leviticus, Numbers and Ezekiel it is used as genericum for all offerings, see de Vaux, Op. cit., p. 327.

In the light of the discussion above it does not seem necessary to distinguish in Venda between the terms qorbān, minchāh and zebach, with their Greek equivalents dōron, thusia and prospora.

3 A comparative analysis of the Biblical and Venda terms

Semotactic context: "I will acclaim him with sacrifices before his tent" (Ps. 27:6 N E B).

Diagnostic components

<u>sacrifice</u>	<u>tshidzimu</u>
1. giving of valuable object for failures or benefits	1. propitiation
2. man to God (lower to higher)	2. to spirits (lower to higher)
3. allegiance	3. involves magical techniques
4. communion	4. communal meal

The only common component is that of "lower to higher".

4 Terms for "offering" suggested instead of tshidzimu

There are several terms reflecting the custom of giving gifts or tributes to chiefs.

The first is tsumbavhulo. It refers to the pot of beer taken to the village head (mukoma) when a man has brewed a quantity of it. Here the emphasis is not on allegiance or subjugation, but on sharing. This term does not seem to be suitable.

Another pair of terms is mutendelo or madzimba. Both refer to the beer taken to a chief by the commoners who have been allotted fields for ploughing. This beer is made with the crops harvested from those fields. The emphasis here is on reciprocity. Benefits are returned for benefits received. The problem is that the element of subjugation is rather weak here, and that this term is only used in connection with beer, not with other gifts.

Another term which may be considered is the term which Schwellnus himself used in many places as alternative for tshidzimu, ie. musumo. This is the part that is given to one's chief or father when one kills an ox or cow. It should be one of the hind-quarters. The word also sometimes refers to any other material benefit one shares with a superior, thereby acknowledging his claim to possess it all, but it is first and foremost associated with the hind-quarter of a head of cattle. This term seems to be more suitable than any of the others considered so far.

The term we would like to suggest is nduvho. It is derived from the verb u luvha ("to pay homage to . . ., to acknowledge the superiority of . . .", at the same time usually asking for a favour). It is sometimes used as a synonym for "asking something from a chief", eg. "Ndi luvha ndimo" ("I ask for a field to plough"). The deverbative noun nduvho means "a gift of allegiance", which corresponds closely with Köhler's translation in his "Lexicon", of minchāh ("offering of allegiance"). Schwellnus often translates the Greek dōron (as rendering for qorbān) with tshifhiwa ("a gift"). But a gift to a chief is never called tshifhiwa, it is called nduvho.

This term nduvho has in it the elements of subjugation, of reciprocity (asking for a favour), of being taken up into the same community as the chief in allegiance to him. Only the element of expiation is missing. Nduvho seems to us to be the most suitable term to be used as a generic term for "offering".

- D From A, B and C (The "limited good";
Interpersonal relations;
Spirits and magic)
- 1 U rerela or u rerelela ("to communicate with ancestor spirits"), for "to pray"
 - a The Venda terms u rerela and u rerelela
These terms mean "to communicate with and

propitiate the ancestor spirits". It is derived from the verb u rera which means "to discuss formally" or "to state a court case". From this verb is derived the noun murero, "a proverb". U rerela might be the applied (dative) form of this, in which case it would mean "to speak formally for a purpose", or it might be a contraction of the intensive form, u rerelela, which means the same as u rerela and is the more common form.

U rerelela is infrequently and irregularly practised. It is usually occasioned by a specific need, such as illness or some misfortune, or the desire to take revenge on one's enemies by witchcraft. It is usually of a preventative nature, since it is mainly intended to prevent the resentment of the spirits. The spirits are regarded as a nuisance and u rerelela is the only way to get rid of them. ¹⁾ U rerelela consists of some verbal communication accompanied by a token offering, usually in the form of some water or beer which is spit on the ground. Usually it is explicitly stated that this is done in order that the spirits should protect the family and stop causing illness among the grandchildren — "do ut des".

U rerelela usually points to the activity of a group of which one person speaks on behalf of others, the only exceptions being that of persons living by themselves, and of people practising vhuloi (black magic). The most senior person present usually performs the rite.

There is usually no trace of reverence in this rite. Sometimes it is even called u sema midzimu, "to scold the spirits" (ie. for failing to perform their duty and for making a nuisance of themselves).

1) See Krige, Rain-queen, p. 233: "Religious rites among the Lovedu tend . . . to be addressed to those spirits that cause trouble and in the absence of illness there may be no rites at all."

b Biblical terms for prayer

There are three Hebrew terms that are translated by u rerela. The first is brk in Dan. 6:11,12. In this context the Hebrew term means "to kneel and praise God". We do not intend discussing this further, since this is the only instance where this term has been translated in this way, and there are obvious better renderings which are employed elsewhere.

In Seph. 3:9 the Hebrew term for "to call upon the Name of the LORD" (qr' bēšēm) is translated by u rerela.

The other term rendered by u rerela is pll, which is generally used for "to pray" in the Old Testament. This term, pll is usually rendered by u rabela, which we shall discuss shortly. In some places, especially in the later books of the Old Testament, which were the last to be translated by Dr. Schweltnus, for no apparent reason the term u rerela was used instead. Such places are, Jonah 2:1; Jer. 32:16; and Nehemia 1:4 (whereas in Neh. 2:4 the term u rabela is used for rendering the same Hebrew term).

The term pll is the most important and frequent term for referring to prayer in the Old Testament. Its meaning is determined by the Old Testament teaching of the God of the covenant who is faithful, righteous, full of constant love, but also holy.²⁾ In prayer the believer approaches him as one person another, yet he realizes that he is the sovereign Lord who must be approached with due respect.³⁾

Prayer in the Old Testament is not highly formal. The contexts in which the term u rerelela occurs in the Old Testament, is one of informal personal prayer. Jonah was in no position to perform prayer rituals in the belly of the fish. Prayer is here, as so often in the Old Testament, essentially what Hannah says (I Sam. 1:15),

1) See Gispen, W.H. Het gebed. (In Gereef. Theol. Tijdschrift, Vol. 58, pp. 21ff).

2) See Herrmann, J. in T W N T, II, p. 787.

3) Idem, p. 789.

that it is "pouring out one's soul before the LORD". 1)
What Moulton 2) says of prayer in the New Testament, that
it is basically "speaking to God", is also true of prayer
in the Old Testament.

The basic elements of the Lord's prayer of the
New Testament are all present in the Old Testament.
There are Psalms of submission (Ps. 2), of praying for
material needs (though this is not prominent, and is
never isolated from spiritual need, eg. Ps. 38), for
forgiveness (Ps. 51), for protection from evil (Ps. 52).
Doxology forms a prominent element (Ps. 118).

c Comparative analysis of u rerela and "pray"

Semotactic context: "I mourned for some days, fasting
and praying to the God of heaven"
(Neh. 1:4).

Diagnostic components

<u>pray</u>	<u>u rerela</u>
1. verbal communication directed to God	1. verbal communication directed to <u>Mudzimu</u>
2. submission	2. ritualized
3. confession	3. for benefits expected
4. intercession	

The person to whom the u rerela is directed is in
this case determined by what the receptor understands
when he hears Mudzimu in connection with the verb u rerela.
The analysis is somewhat difficult in the case of u rerela,
because the whole concept does not fit into the context
in which it is used here. Submission, confession and
intercession are prominent in Nehemia's prayer, but these
are no elements of u rerela. U rerela is to ask favours,
often in a rude way, in return for offerings.

1) Vriezen, Hoofdlijnen, p. 317.

2) See Moulton, H.K. The nature of prayer in the New
Testament. Bible Society of S.A., 1967.

d Results in the Church of using this term

The use of this term in the Bible can be expected to strengthen the association with ancestor spirits when addressing God. We have already mentioned that an alternative form of u rerelela is u sema midzimu ("to scold the spirits"). ¹⁾

These associations with prayer are present in the mind of many Venda, and they are strengthened by the use of a term like this one in the Bible. The prayers of Venda Christians often show very little respect. They tend to dwell on trivialities and often become casual and longwinded discussions, with God in the role of an unimportant and patient listener. Sometimes, when the praying person is really in earnest, his prayer follows the pattern of increasing in volume, and ending in shouts and shrieks directed to God — a mode of behaviour that is extremely rude by all accepted Venda standards of politeness. A Venda sometimes shouts at his wife when he is drunk or when he is annoyed with her, or he might shout at another person during a quarrel when he completely loses his self-control. But this is frowned upon as very undignified behaviour. One would never shout in this way when speaking respectfully, as when addressing a chief.

Yet this way of praying is the rule rather than the exception with most of the independent "Zionist" churches in Vendaland. We have heard other Christians deriding

1) P. 79. It is the same with the Lovedu (hu rohana medimo) or the Tswana (go omanyanya baswi), which also means "to scold the spirits" (for neglecting their duty). About the Tsonga Junod writes in his Life of a South African tribe, II, pp. 423,4:

"When some great misfortune is the occasion for this religious act being performed, the petition is preceded, or followed, by a regular insulting of the Gods. There are two words used to designate this curious part of the prayer: holobela or holobisa, to scold the gods, or rukatela — should be rhuketela — the actual word for "to insult".

Zionists at prayer with the words of Elijah in I Kings 18:27, "Cry aloud. . .perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened !"

This kind of prayer can degenerate into real scolding sessions when the participants are of the opinion that God has neglected his duties towards them. The Rev. D.W. Giesekke of the Berlin Mission Society at Tshakhuma relates an experience during January 1966, when he was present at a Zionist prayer meeting for the purpose of asking for rain during the severe drought of that year. The prayers went along these lines:

"Come along, come along !

Do you think that we are bl . . . fools treating us like this? We want rain, much rain, not just a few drops, and we want it now. What is going on with you? We have waited long enough now!" — and all this in the second person singular, which is regarded as extremely rude in itself, since many parents do not even address their own children in this way. It is reserved for "scolding the spirits".

e Terms suggested instead of u rerela

The terms u rabela ("to pray") and thabelo ("prayer") are the ones generally used for referring to prayer in the Venda Bible. They have been introduced from Sotho go rapela, ("to plead"), which is the generally accepted term for "prayer". This set of terms has also been accepted by the Venda people, but unfortunately it has acquired a restricted and formal range of meanings, as could be expected of a borrowed term. Actually it usually refers to a Church service rather than to spontaneous individual prayer. It is not readily associated with informal forms of prayer, whereas in the Bible prayer is in the first place personal and informal.

The use of this term discourages spontaneous personal communication with God. It was illuminating to hear the objections of an educated Church member against discarding

thabelo and u rabela for "prayer". When the alternative u humbela (Venda for "to ask" — as a request) was suggested, his reaction was, "It is better to stick to rabela as u humbela appears to be more personal and there is a possibility of refusal while in rabela we don't think of refusal."

When the form u amba na Mudzimu was suggested, he wrote, "U amba na Mudzimu means a dialogue with God, but God does not speak, he listens. A ri koni u amba na muthu a sa ambiho" ("we cannot converse with a person who does not speak.").

This man, a well instructed Church member, has inferred from the terms used and from his experience with prayer in the Church that it is not personal, that it is a monologue, and that it is not possible for God to refuse our requests ! Unwittingly he provided a strong argument against thabelo etc. by emphasizing the associations it conveys with an institutionalized (ie. formalized, specialized, ritualized) form of prayer.

A term which is often used spontaneously by the Venda themselves is u humbela ("to ask as a request"). This usually refers to informal personal prayer. It is noteworthy that in the Greek-speaking Christian Church of New Testament times there was a tendency to move away from very ceremonial terms such as proseuchomai etc. to more everyday terms such as deomai, aiteō and erōtaō, all of which can be translated by the Venda u humbela. In the Gospel of John proseuchomai is entirely discarded.¹⁾

Another possibility which has been exploited in our Bible school at Sibasa, with very satisfactory results, is u amba na Mudzimu ("to converse with God").²⁾

1) Moulton, Op. cit., p. 2.

2) Idem, p. 1.

Other suitable terms are u luvha ("to pay homage and at the same time ask a favour or gift", see p. 166), and u losha ("to greet politely by clapping the hands, also for expressing thanks"). U losha is especially suitable for thanksgiving prayers, since this is the original Venda term for expressing thanks.

By using terms such as these, if not to the exclusion of thabelo, at least sometimes as alternatives for it, the spontaneous, informal and personal character of Biblical prayer will be accentuated.

2 U fhatutshedza ("to apply magical techniques for inheritance") for "blessing"

This term is included because it is a glaring example of certain terms carried into the Venda Bible for the purpose of rendering Biblical terms to which they are not even remotely related.

a The Venda term u fhatutshedza

The meaning of this term can best be explained by describing the ceremony it refers to.

When a person who has had some possessions dies, some time is allowed to pass after the burial, in order to consult a diviner as to the cause of the death. After this has been ascertained, the relatives gather at the door of the deceased person's sleeping hut. A witch doctor, nanga, or the senior family member present then smears white ashes or the dung of the fish eagle (khuwadzi) beneath the eyes of those present at the ceremony, in order that their eyes may be opened to "see" the possessions left by the deceased. This ceremony is called u fhatutshedza or u tora phatutshedzo. Its purpose is to prevent the jealousy of the deceased's spirit from causing them harm when they divide its possessions among themselves.

The verb u fhatutshedza is the causative of the applied ("dative") form of the verb u fhatuwa, "to open one's eyes on awakening". It therefore means "to cause to open the eyes to the possessions".

b The Biblical concept of blessing

"The term, to bless, barak, means to communicate one's strength, one's vitality, one's self to another, to enable another to achieve his aims, to give him the capacity to be vigorous, effective — in brief, to be with him. Blessing belongs to the relations between persons. On the other hand, to curse . . . in Hebrew means to withdraw one's support from another, to leave him alone or desert him, so that he becomes weak, directionless, and so loses weight, cracks up and is destroyed. To paraphrase, then, Genesis 12:2,3: 'I will be with you and will support and strengthen you, so that you can support and strengthen others. I will strengthen those who acknowledge and accept your strength, and he who refuses to have fellowship with you, who turns away from you, who treats you with contempt, I will abandon him and let him perish. Through you all the families of the earth will find their true being and strength! In a word: 'Through you I will fulfill the purpose of man's creation'." ¹⁾ In these rather "animistic" terms Philip Potter describes the meaning of barak in the Old Testament. We would say that "to bless" means that the power of God is active in the broadest sense on behalf of the blessed.

In the Bible the source of blessing, the one who really blesses, is always God. Even when a father blesses his child, like Isaac blesses Jacob, he says, "May God give you . . ." (Gen. 27:28). The same applies to priestly blessings, eg. Num. 6:23-7, "They shall pronounce my name over the Israelites, and I will bless them."

In the later stages of Israel's history the act of blessing tended to take on cultic forms and became centred in the temple and priesthood. ²⁾

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- 1) Berkhof, and Potter, Key words, pp. 28,9. See also Westermann, C. Der Segen in der Bibel und im Handeln der Kirche. München, Kaiser, 1968, p. 32, and Ten Boom, Oud-Testamentische Kernbegrippen, pp. 217,8.
- 2) See Westermann, Op. cit., pp. 38,9, and Beyer, H.W. in T W N T, II, p. 753.

In the New Testament the most important new element in the concept of blessing is the soteriological emphasis it acquires (eg. Gal. 3:8ff; Acts 3:25ff; Eph. 1:3) in connection with the work of Christ. The blessing of Abraham is also interpreted in this light.¹⁾ But that does not mean that the emphasis is now exclusively on future salvation. The element of God's powerful presence in his Church in this world is also emphasized, for instance in Rom. 15:29 ("I know that I shall come with a full measure of the blessing of Christ.").

Where Jesus himself is the one who pronounces the blessing, the meaning is very close to its Old Testament concept (eg. in blessing the children, Mk. 10:13-16, the bread, Lk. 9:16 etc., and the disciples, Lk. 24:50).

In some places the blessing refers to eternal salvation (eg. in Mt. 25:34, I Pet. 3:9).

A radically new Christian element is the admonition to bless those who curse one (Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14; I Cor. 4:12; I Pet. 3:9), by which act the power of the curse is broken by blessing.

c A comparative analysis of the Biblical and Venda terms

There is no need to present a schematic analysis of these two terms. Nobody seems to know why this term has been chosen. The Venda in general fail to grasp its meaning in a Christian context. It is a testimony to their infinite patience that they accept this term in the Church and even sometimes use it themselves out of loyalty to their teachers.

d Terms suggested to replace u fhatutshedza

Venda Christians seem to prefer the term mashudu ("good fortune") when referring to "blessing". The verb

1) For the discussion of the concept of blessing in the New Testament, see, Westermann, Op. cit., pp. 96,7.

formed from it, u shudufhadza ("to make fortunate"), is used for "to bless".

This is a very well known and frequently used term in Venda. Many children are named Mashudu. U na mashudu means "he has good fortune", "he is lucky". It can also refer to the possession of desirable characteristics, especially generosity, in which case the expression is used, "Ndi mashudu awe-vho", "He is blessed with a generous character".

The Venda say that no person on earth can bestow mashudu. Some even say that the ancestor spirits cannot send mashudu, only Mwali can do so. It cannot be procured through magic techniques, but there seems to be no objection among our informants to the thought that it can be asked from God, the Creator.

It also cannot be used when inanimate objects are blessed. In that case derivative forms such as "to cause to bring mashudu" will have to be used.

In a few instances this form is used in the Venda Bible, e.g. in Num. 6: 24, 27 (whereas in vs. 23 the term u fhatutshedza is used, for no apparent reason).

3 Muloi ("witch of sorcerer"), vhuloi ("sorcery")

The meaning of sorcery among the Venda has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three (pp. 73-6). The terms for indicating "sorcerer" and "sorcery" have been used not only in the Venda translation, but as a matter of fact in all other translations into Southeastern Bantu languages, except Xhosa (but also in Shona). This has had a far-reaching effect upon the theological views and the behaviour of Bantu Christians, especially those of the syncretistic Bantu sects.

As we have seen, muloi is a person who is by nature intent on destroying other people, especially those nearest to him. To the Venda he is the embodiment of evil, the most feared and hated creature of all.

a Biblical terms translated by muloi and vhuloi

The Hebrew term měkaššēph, as found in Ex. 22:17, Deut. 18:10, and Mal. 3:5 is rendered by muloi. The term nchš ("to divine") is rendered by vhuloi.

The měkaššēph, however, seems to have been a respected and appreciated member of the pagan society in Old Testament times, not the embodiment of evil and enemy number one of society that a muloi is believed to be among pagan Venda. In Jer. 27:9 the měkaššēphim are mentioned together with the prophets and diviners as belonging to the same class. In Ex. 7:11 we find Pharaoh's měkaššēphim competing with Moses, and in Dan. 2 they are found in the respectable company of the wise men of Babylon. This indicates that they were not regarded as enemies of society at all, but were appreciated and regularly consulted, even in the kings' courts. Their function was not to destroy life and society, but to protect it. ¹⁾

In traditional Venda society a muloi would be summoned to the chief's court for one purpose only and that was to be killed as soon as possible, but never for the purpose of consulting him. Whereas the "sorcerers" of Biblical times might have directed their control of spirit powers negatively against their enemies, the muloi prefers to work against those nearest to him -- even against his own children.

The translator seemed to have sensed this problem, and whereas in the aforementioned places the term muloi was used to translate the biblical term, or the term malinga (a mistake, since it should have been malingo which means the same as vhuloi, "black malicious magic")

1) For a fuller discussion of the functions of these specialists in Babylonian and Egyptian society, see Du Plessis, 'n Banier van die volke, p. 79; Parrinder, Witchcraft, pp. 120,1; De Liagre Böhl, F.M. Th. De Babylonisch-Assyrische godsdienst (In Van der Leeuw -- Bleeker. De godsdiensten der wereld. Amsterdam, Meulenhof, 1956, pp. 90-92).

as in Nah. 3:4, he realized that it did not fit into the biblical context and he used other terms instead, such as madambi ("magical powers") in II Kings 9:22; Is. 47:12, and Micha 5:11; dzihang ("witch doctors") in Jer. 27:9; mingome, ("diviners") in Ex. 7:11; and vha dzithangu ("people using divining bones") in Dan. 2:2.

b Comparative analysis of muloi and měkaššēph

Semotactic context: "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Ex. 22:18, R S V — Note the Venda translation: muloi wa musadzi, "a female witch")

Diagnostic components

<u>sorceress</u>	<u>muloi</u>
1. communication with spirits other than God	1. involves communication with ancestor spirits
2. specialist	2. may or may not be a specialist
3. involves divination	3. negative (evil intent)
4. institutionalized	4. anti-social
	5. secret

The second component under "sorceress", ie. "divination", refers to another important function of the měkaššēphîm.

As far as the biblical sorcerer (-ess) is concerned, his magical power can be applied positively, for protecting society, when predicting disasters, explaining dreams, providing love potions, making rain, or it can be applied negatively, e.g. when punishing thieves. But even when applied negatively his use of power is sanctioned by society.

Sorcerers are disapproved of by God and their existence

1) See Parrinder, Op. cit., p. 121.

among his covenant people is forbidden because the principles on which they work, those of spiritism and idolatry, are unacceptable to him. They communicate with spirits other than God, while the prophets communicate with God alone. The people should learn to trust in God and in him alone, in his providence and in his guidance into the future. The future should not be scrutinized by diviners or soothsayers, but should be left in his hands in child-like faith. He cannot be forced to change his decisions by way of magical techniques, but should be approached in humility and with repentance. For this purpose no religious specialists are required, on the contrary, they would stand in the way of his people. Each child of his has direct access to his throne of grace. That is the reason why no sorcerer or diviner may be found among his people. ¹⁾

c The effects of these terms on Venda Christians

If a pagan Venda should read in Ex. 22: 17 that a woman who is a muloi (a muloi is usually a woman!) should not be allowed to live, he would immediately agree. ²⁾ That he does not need to learn from the Bible. According to his beliefs that is the only thing which has to be done with a muloi. Heathens and the members of the Zionist sects, can never forgive the white government or the established churches that they refuse to take steps against vhaloi, but rather protect them against the revenge of society, and even passed laws against the pointing out and victimization of vhaloi which, to the Venda mind, adds up to a vast conspiracy against Venda society. Formerly, before efficient European control had been established among the

1) Parrinder, Op. cit., p. 121. See also Phillips, G.E. The Old Testament in the world Church. London, Lutterworth, 2nd imp. 1948, p. 125.

2) See Parrinder, Op. cit., p. 16.

Venda, people who had been pointed out as vhaloi by diviners used to take refuge in mission stations. To the Zionists this is proof of the apostasy of these churches. They never cease pointing out from the Venda Bible that a muloi should not be allowed to live, let alone to be accepted as member of a church! One of the main activities of the prophets who constitute a large portion of the members of these sects, is the pointing out of vhaloi.

Church members fail to understand why disciplinary steps are taken against them when they act against vhaloi or consult diviners for this purpose. 1)

d Terms suggested for replacing muloi and vhuloi

There is a person in Venda society who has almost exactly the same function as the měkaššēph had in Biblical times. He is the ňanga or mungome, the "witch doctor" or "diviner", whose functions have been described on pp. 77,8. 2) These functions correspond to the rite of nchš ("to divine"), which has been translated by vhuloi in Lev. 19:26.

If in all places where the term měkaššēph occurs in the Hebrew, it had been translated by ňanga or mungome, this would have been much more correct, and it would have resulted in a much more meaningful communication, because now the Venda would have realized that one of the pillars

1) Note the following remark by Phillips, Op. cit., p. 11: "Even worse consequences might follow from a misinterpretation of the few Old Testament references to witchcraft, that special curse of Africa, as implying its reality even when they condemn it, for example, in the precept, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Ex. xxii. 18). We shall revert to this subject in a later chapter, but one of our correspondents goes so far as to say: 'In Europe this apparent divine endorsement bound the chains of witchcraft around whole nations for centuries. It might do the same for Africa!'"

2) See also Parrinder, Op. cit., pp. 14, 139, 181, and Mbiti, African religions, pp. 166ff.

of his society (just like the mēkaššēph was a pillar of Babylonian society) has been removed by God so that he might put his trust in Christ alone.

Instead of malingo or vhuloi in Nah. 3:4 etc., we suggest the term madambi, discussed on p. 73 ("magical practices for scaring people"). This type of magic is believed to be performed only by a trained hanga and no one else.

4 Tshivhi ("an evil deed"), for "sin"

a The Venda term tshivhi

The term used for sin is zwivhi, the plural of tshivhi, a substantive formed from the adjectival stem -vhi, ("evil", "bad"). Tshivhi means "an evil deed", by which the Venda understand a strongly anti-social deed or attitude such as murder within the ingroup, (including sorcery or robbing a person of his livelihood) and excessive stinginess or avarice (vhutshivha, vivho). It not only disrupts social relationships, but is thoroughly anti-social. It is not the kind of crime or offence that can be made good by compensation or by paying a fine — even nowadays when capital punishment for sorcery is prohibited by law. Rather than imposing heavy fines on vhaloi, "sorcerers", (which is synonymous to vhavhi, "evil ones"), such persons are ostracised and driven out of the community.

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- 1) For a discussion of the Bantu concept of evil, see also Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, p. 180-2: "But the essence of sin in the primal view is that it is anti-social . . . The Lugbara distinguish between 'bad deeds' which are dealt with by human response such as beating or fighting, and 'sin' which is mystically punished by God and the ancestors". "The sinfulness of so-called sexual sins does not reside in their sexuality, but in the fact that the dangerous intensity of the act is channelled against the proper structure of the family and becomes an attack against its members. So the adultery of a husband is thought to endanger the life of his wife or his unborn child . . ." It should be noted that Taylor regards 'sin' here as synonymous with 'evil', tshivhi.

Tshivhi is not a "relational" term. It does not refer to the breaking off or endangering of human relations. A muvhi does not belong to the society. Tshivhi cannot be expiated.

b The Biblical concept of sin ¹⁾

It will be noted that in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the accent is strongly on the relational aspect of sin, whether on the relation to one's fellow men or to God. This is illustrated by the terms used for sin in the Old Testament.

The most general term is cht', chattā't, which is almost always translated in Greek by hamartano and hamartia. Both the Hebrew and Greek terms mean basically "to miss the mark, to make a mistake, to err" as, for instance, the picked men from the Benjaminites, "who could sling a stone and not miss by a hair's breadth", of Jdg. 20:16. ²⁾

Another frequent term is 'wh, 'awon, ³⁾ sometimes translated by hamartia and related terms in Greek, and sometimes by other terms such as adikia and anomia. This term basically means "to be crooked, to be wrong", and lays stress on the purposeful character of sin and

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- 1) For detailed discussions of the concept of sin we may refer to
Knierim, R. Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament. Gütersloh, 1965.
Gelin, A. and Descamps, A. Sin in the Bible (English tr.). New York, Descleé, 1965.
Jacob, Theology of the O.T., pp. 281ff.
Manson, T.W. The teaching of Jesus. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963. pp. 308-311.
Jager, Kernwoorden, pp. 132ff.
Ten Boom, Oud-Testamentische Kernbegrippen, p. 228.
Pop, F.J. Bijbelse woorden en hun geheim. The Hague, Boekencentrum, 1951, pp. 225ff.
Quell and Grundmann in T W N T, I, pp. 267ff.

2) Knierim, Op. cit., pp. 55ff.

3) Idem, pp. 237ff.

on the guilt that results from it.

The term peša' 1) is translated in Greek by various terms, such as asebeia, parakoè and hamartia. It means basically "rebellion, revolt, a rebellious spirit".

The term most frequently used for "sinner", is rāšā' ("the one who is in the wrong, who is culpable"). 2)

None of these terms are used exclusively in a religious context. Their religious character, when designating "sin", is derived from the context in which they occur, as "missing God's purpose", "being guilty before God", "rebellious against God". In the Bible wrong is wrong and sin is sin, because it harms and disturbs the covenant relationship with God. This is vividly expressed in David's confession lēkā lēbaddēkā chātātī ("Against thee, thee only, have I sinned", Ps. 51:4, R S V).3) That is the essence of sin.

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- 1) Snaith, the distinctive ideas of the O.T., pp. 63,4 emphasizes that it is wrong to translate peša' as "transgression, trespass or crime", but that it must always be translated as "rebellion". For this term, see also Knierim, Op. cit., pp. 143ff.
 - 2) See Gelin, Op. cit., p. 18.
 - 3) Almost all authors stress this relational character of sin. See Quell, Op. cit., p. 279; Ten Boom, Op. cit., p. 228; Pop. Op. cit., p. 227; Kuitert, Op. cit., pp. 104, 5; Bakker, J.T. Zonde en schuld (In Van der Woude a.o., Kernwoorden, p. 25): "Het Oude Testament kent een hele reeks van woorden voor wat wij zonde noemen: misslag, onrecht, rebellie, ongerechtigheid, dwaasheid, enz. Dat is geen lagere trap van godsdienstige en zedelijke ontwikkeling, die wij achter ons hebben. Maar het gaat altijd om zeer bepaalde daden van ontrouw, bondsbreuk, wetsovertreding, schending van naastenliefde en gerechtigheid". And see Jacob, Op. cit., pp. 281, 4: "God is the one who enters into relationship and who makes the covenant, sin is a breaking of this relationship. 'Your sins', says one prophet, 'make a separation between you and God' (Is. 59:2). The whole of the sin vocabulary confirms this fundamental aspect of breaking: chattā' is the missing, the abandoning, of the straight road, 'awōn is to turn aside or to become lost, shown not only in act but in thought . . . finally peša' expresses open rebellion".

The fact that a number of different terms are used to refer to this concept, points out that there are different aspects of sin. However, these terms have not consistently been translated by corresponding Greek terms in the L X X, but especially the term hamartia has often been used for translating them. This indicates that they all point to one concept.

The way in which these terms are used in the poetic parrallellism of the Psalms, more or less as synonyms, also testifies to their basic unity. In Ps. 32:5 we read, "I acknowledge my chattā't to thee,

and I did not hide my 'āwōn;

I said: I will confess my pěša'im to the LORD".

This does not exclude the possibility that different shades of meaning are conveyed by the different terms. In Job 34:37 we read, " . . . for he adds peša' to his chattā't". Sometimes the emphasis is on the sinful act, sometimes on the attitude behind it, and sometimes on the condition of guilt that results from it, but all these terms always have on the background: the disturbance of the covenant relationship with God.

In contrast with the Greek concept of sin as fate, the idea of personal responsibility and guilt is prominent in the Biblical concept of sin (Ps. 36; Ez. 18 !).

The New Testament concept of sin is rooted in the Old Testament. We need only to refer to the words of the prodigal son, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you" (Luke 15:21, T E V). ¹⁾ We should take note of two important additional elements emerging from the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

1) See Descamps (In Gelin and Descamps, Op. cit., pp. 50ff); and Grundmann, Op. cit., p. 306 : "Sünde ist weggehen aus dem Vaterhaus, ist Gott-losigkeit und Gottesferne . . ."

The important new emphasis in the teaching of Jesus is the character of sin as a condition of the soul, analogous to disease in the body. ¹⁾ "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mk. 2:17 A V).

In the teaching of Paul the universal enslaving power of sin is emphasized, especially in the first chapters of Romans. ²⁾

In summarizing we note that there are three diagnostic components of this term which are essential for comparing it with the Venda term tshivhi.

1. It is a trespass against God;
2. it leads to disruption of relationships between man and God and between man and man;
3. it brings about a state of guilt; and it can be expiated.

The third component need not be argued. The New Testament teaching of the atoning sacrifice of Christ is only understandable in the context of sin and guilt.

c A comparative analysis of "sin" and tshivhi

Semotactic context: "All wrongdoing is sin . . ." (I John 5:17).

1) See Manson, Op. cit., p. 308.

2) See Ridderbos, Paulus, pp. 96ff. Also Grundmann, Op. cit., p. 313.

Diagnostic components

sin

1. tresspass against God
2. disrupting relationships
3. expiatable

tshivhi

1. strongly anti-social behaviour
2. unacceptable to society
3. not expiatable

From this analysis it is clear that tshivhi is extremely limited in its area of meaning. It only refers to a very strongly condemned perversity. Telling the Venda that "all wrongdoing is tshivhi" confuses him. Wrongdoing is a relational idea, in the Bible as well as among the Venda. Tshivhi is no relational idea.

Let us take the example of adultery — already very limited in its meaning in Venda. Adultery is not tshivhi; it is u tshinya, "to spoil, to commit an offence", or vhuvhava "theft". Actually only the fifth and the sixth commandments from the decalogue could apply to tshivhi. But then again it would exclude ritual killing or the killing of twins, which are looked upon as the result of vhuloi, and therefore have to be exterminated.

d The results of using this term in the life of the Venda Christians

The consistent use of this term for "sin" in the Venda Bible makes it very difficult to foster a sense of guilt among young Christians. Many missionaries are driven to the edge of despair when Christians, after years of instruction, can still state, apparently with a clear conscience, A thi na zwivhi ("I have no zwivhi"). They thereby seem to deny any sense of guilt before God or any consciousness of having trespassed against his law, while in the meantime they have only denied having committed homicide or sorcery or having being guilty of avarice. This is the result of a breakdown in communication. They have regularly heard the pastor praying for forgiveness of zwivhi, which they were sure did not apply to them.

The argument has often been heard that the strongest possible term must be used for indicating sin, so as to emphasize its evil nature. It does not work out that way. By using this term, tshivhi, the meaning of what sin is, is inevitably limited to a few strongly anti-social acts or attitudes, and people make their sinful conduct acceptable under the influence of this term. Had a term been used which expresses relations and the disrupting or damaging of relations, it would have helped the mind of the young Christian in pointing his attention to the person against whom the offence had been committed — to God. There is an evil inclination at the root of it (Gen. 6:5), but the essence of sin is harming the relationship with God.

e Another set of terms suggested: u tshinya,
vhutshinyi

U tshinya means "to spoil, commit an offense, make a mistake to which some moral stigma is attached".¹⁾
Vhutshinyi is the noun formed from this verb.

The term u tshinya is used in a few places in the Venda Bible for "sin" such as in Luke 15:18 ("Father, I have sinned against God and against you"), Gen. 6:11, 12 etc. It seems as if the translator sensed that, since human relationships were involved here — that between father and son — the term tshivhi would not fit in here. This term comes naturally to the Venda when confessing guilt: "Ndo tshinya" ("I have done wrong"), is almost synonymous to, "Ndi na mulandu" ("I am guilty").

It is typical of the strong principle of reciprocity in Venda society that for each offence (vhutshinyi) there is a definite fine. When that fine has been paid, the balance is regarded as having been restored and the demands of the principle of reciprocity observed.

1) Van Warmelo, Tshivenda-English Dictionary, sub tshinya. Van Warmelo also gives as one of the shades of meaning "to sin".

It is difficult to fit the vicarious suffering of Christ into the context of tshivhi. Tshivhi cannot be paid for. It is not a matter of guilt and justice, only of removing the muvi ("evil one") from society. It does fit into the framework of vhutshinyi. "Wa sa lifha u a lifhelwa" ("If you do not pay yourself, someone else pays for you"), the Venda say.

All the commandments of the second table of the decalogue fall under this term, except covetousness. There are also differences as to the meaning of "theft", "murder", "adultery" etc., which are determined by the whole conceptual scheme of Venda religion. In the last chapter we shall try to indicate how this conceptual scheme can be replaced by a Biblical one to provide a new context in which all these terms and commandments may receive a Biblical meaning, and sin may be extended into the personal relation with God.

We conclude our discussion of this term, tshivhi, by pointing to the fact that it has not been used in the Venda Bible only. In the Sotho languages a semantically and etymologically related term has been used: sebe, plural dibe. The objections against tshivhi will probably apply to this term also, as well as to the terms zvakaipa and zvoipa used in some of the more northern languages. In the Nguni languages the verb stem -ona and its derivatives have been used in all Bible translations, and in Tsonga derivatives of -dyoha. They mean the same as -tshinya, and are more suitable than those in the Sotho languages.

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Since all the Bible translations in South African languages are now in the process of revision, this is the time for reassessing the terms used for referring to all important Biblical concepts. There are many more examples of terms that could be quoted from the Venda Bible, which do not convey the meaning of their corresponding Hebrew and

Greek terms. In all cases there are other terms in Venda which are much more suitable for translating the Biblical ones. This is probably the case in other languages too, as we have pointed out in some cases in this study. The task should be tackled in a systematic and scientific way, and not in the haphazard manner terms have been adopted in the past. We should not obscure the clear meaning of God's Word for Africans by using misleading terms in the translation of the Bible.

CHAPTER FIVE

CREATING A NEW CONTEXT

As we have seen, it is possible to find more suitable terms for substituting those contaminated with associations from the traditional African religious sphere. It is, however, never possible to find substitute terms with exactly the same meaning as the Biblical ones. 1)

By following the guidance of the immediate context in the Bible, fairly close renderings of the meaning in the source languages can be obtained. There is another factor, however, which is so important that it often determines the meaning of terms in their local context. This factor is the overall context. 2)

Where the Christian Gospel is communicated, the overall context is provided by the total world view and knowledge of the receptor. If he is an instructed Christian, steeped in the teaching of the Bible, new information is fitted into this Biblical context. Unfortunately the average Venda is not at home in the teaching of the Bible. Nor is he "tabula rasa". In the previous chapters we have described his cultural and ideological background which in many respects does not correspond to God's revelation in the Bible. Therefore an attempted communication may fail, even though the best terms available are used, just

1) No two words in any two languages ever have exactly the same meaning. See, for instance, Nida, E. A. Message and Meaning, New York, Harper, 1960, p. 89.

2) See Nida, E.A. Bible translating. London, United Bible Societies, 1962, p. 230: "The philosophical and theological aspects of the word may be intensified through the reader's experience. It is the Bible that must give meaning to the words, just as surely as the words give meaning to the Bible. That is to say, the totality of contexts is of utmost importance in defining the meaning of a word in the Bible". See also Bühlmann, Christliche Terminologie, pp. 69-71.

because the message disregards the importance of the overall context. ¹⁾ The result is that the Venda, on receiving the message, involuntarily fits it into the overall context of his own religious background. ²⁾ Because he lacks the Biblical background against which the message should be interpreted, he has to lift it out of its Biblical context and reinterpret the message in terms of his own, if he is to make sense out of it. ³⁾ Communication is, therefore, not safeguarded by using the correct terms only.

This is what actually happens wherever the Gospel is communicated in Africa, because it is, as a rule, communicated in bits and pieces without regard for and reference to either the wider African or Biblical context. Exceptions to this rule are few and far between.

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- 1) See Bühlmann, Christliche Terminologie, p. 68:
"Aus all dem löst sich die Erkenntnis heraus:
das Entscheidende sind nicht neue Wörter, sondern neue,
und zwar organisch aufgebaute Vorstellungen! Der
Missionar musz genau an dem Punkt ansetzen, wo der
Zuhörer steht. Er musz gleichsam mit heidnischen Ohren
hinhorchen und die gesamte heidnische Weltanschauung bis
in ihre tiefsten Grundtöne erlauschen . . . So gilt es
kein Ausweichen, kein Aneinander-Vorbeireden, kein
unbezogenes Nebeneinander-Wohnen von Heidentum und
Christentum, keinen Synkretismus".

See also Mbiti, J.S. Christianity and traditional
religions in Africa (In I R M, Vol. LIX No. 236,
Oct. 1970).

- 2) See Nida, E.A. Message and mission. New York,
Harper, 1960, p. 87: "When communication takes place
between sources and receptors who have different cultural
backgrounds, one must expect a high degree of restructuring
of meaning. That is to say, whatever concepts are com-
municated are reinterpreted in terms of the total conceptual
framework of the different context. People do not leave
such conceptions floating about in their minds, unrelated
to their total conceptual map of experience. People simply
have to fit their ideas together into a whole or suffer the
corrosive effects of neurotic tensions. Therefore, any new
idea must be accomodated to the old, or the old must be
modified to fit the new. And in most instances both the
new and the old are changed".
See also Sundkler, B.G.M. The world of mission.
London, Lutterworth, 1965, p. 208.
- 3) See Erasmus, Die godsdienstige begrip, p. 303, and
Phillips, The Old Testament in the World Church, p. 99.

"The 'mission' churches have not really and honestly come to grips with the African world view, with their spirit world and magic, because of the superior attitude that it is evil or that it does not exist." 1)

Geoffrey Phillips 2) states that "The weakness of some of the older catechumen-courses was that they ignored the primitive animistic ideas in the mind of the hearers, and consequently were only half understood". We think that this is a British understatement. This trend Phillips observed is surely not only a "weakness of some of the older catechumen-courses", it is the dominating trend in baptismal instruction to new converts, in catechumen-courses and in theological education among all Bantu people. Even in cases where the African religion is taken into account, it cannot, as far as we could ascertain, be called "really and honestly coming to

1) Oosthuizen, The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit, p. 194. See also Du Plessis, n Banier van die volke, pp. 82,3: "Soos uit die voorgaande blyk en in die volgende verder duidelik sal word, het die Here die heidendom, soos gesien in die magiese opvattinge, verering van voorvaderlike geeste, mitologie en politeïsme nie geïgnoreer en eenvoudig maar net die openbaring van die waarheid, sonder n konfrontering met die heidense agtergrond, gegee nie. Daar was n gedurige worsteling met en konfrontering van die heidendom in sy baie vorme, n eeuelange aanhoudende worsteling. Teen hierdie donker agtergrond van die heidendom en in hierdie worsteling en konfrontering werp die voortgaande openbaring van God sy strale van lig en lewe al helderder oor mense wat in die duisternis en bande van die dood sit.

"Hierdie houding en metode vorm n skerp kontras met die sendingpraktyk soos dit meestal in die verlede en soms ook tans nog toegepas word. Daar vind in die prediking, die belydenis en die persoonlike kontak nie n ware konfrontering van die heidendom met die Woord van God plaas nie, omdat die heidense godsdiens en magie as kinderagtige dwaasheid en bygeloof bestempel word. Dit loon nie die moeite om die wese daarvan te deurgrond en nog minder om die Woord van God in n ware ontmoeting daarteenoor te laat spreek nie. Die heidendom word met een handgebaar van die tafel afgevee".

2) Op. cit., p. 120.

grips with the African world view". In his thorough study on "Theological discussions and confessional developments in the Churches in Asia and Africa" ¹⁾, G.C. Oosthuizen does not mention one instance of a Church that really came to grips with African religion in its teaching and literature work. The creeds adopted by the African Churches practically ignore the problems of African religious life.

The results can be seen in the life of the African Churches. Very often they do not demonstrate that God is different or more powerful and active than the midzimu. ²⁾

If all this is true, it is high time in Africa that this confrontation takes place. It is high time that "mission" Churches and "indigenous" Churches — in as far as the Church in Africa can be called indigenous — come to grips with African religion. When instructing converts, members and Church leaders alike, the new context of God's revelation in the Bible should be communicated in the form of a meaningful confrontation with the old world view. Its purpose should be to create, in the shortest time possible, a new overall context into which the various parts of the new message can be fitted. All efforts should be directed at creating this new context. In carrying out this task, emphasis should be laid on Biblical history. History is concrete by nature and resembles the African way of conveying ideas more than a thematic doctrinal treatment of Biblical truths. When Bantu want to tell something about the character of someone, they tell a story about him that illustrates his character.

This is exactly what the Bible does. The patriarchs, Israel, and the disciples of Jesus, learned to know God from what he did in history — his mighty acts of deliverance culminating in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death.

1) Franeker, Wever, 1958. See e.g. p. 251, and his conclusion on p. 284.

2) See also Erasmus, Op. cit., p. 301ff.

Under the guidance of God's Spirit the believers of the Old and New Testaments handed down the narrative of God's mighty acts in order that their descendants might also know him as they had come to know him. ¹⁾ If the same approach should be applied when instructing Bantu Christians, the predilection of the Bantu for story-telling can be exploited to their hearts' content.

Bengt Sundkler reports an Easter sermon of the Rev. Michael Mzobe ²⁾, in which this Zulu minister pictures Adam as sitting on a balcony in heaven, watching the History of Revelation unfold on the earth beneath, crying out, "Icala lami, icala lami elikhulu" ("My guilt, my great guilt!") as he sees sin doing its destructive work among men from the death of Abel to the crucifixion of Christ. At last Adam finds rest and peace when beholding Christ rising from the grave. What a wealth of meaningful communication in one great sermon! A Venda cannot fail to understand this message.

In this historical approach it is important to keep in mind that the Old Testament reveals a strongly apologetic character which is directed against the heathen environment of ancient Israel. Because of this it contains a wealth of material which reveals God's will and truth as opposed to the naturalistic religions. ³⁾

Very little has been published on this topic, which surely deserves more attention than it has received from missionaries and missiologists in the past. Some very

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- 1) See Phillips, Op. cit., pp. 39-45, 99, 100; Kuitert, Op. cit., p. 21; Kraemer, The Christian message, pp. 65ff; Erasmus, Op. cit., p. 301; Van Peursen, C.A. Hij is het weer! Kampen, Kok, undated, pp. 10, 11, 59. Though we do not agree with everything these authors say, they are right in emphasizing the historical character of God's revelation in the Bible.
 - 2) The Christian ministry in Africa, London, S.C.M Press, 1960, pp. 283-4.
 - 3) See Du Plessis, Op. cit., pp. 82-3.

valuable contributions have been made by men such as John V. Taylor, ¹⁾ H. du Plessis ²⁾ and O.C.O. Erasmus, ³⁾ from whom some ideas have been incorporated into the scheme below. Up to the present time, however, these contributions have been on a very small scale. On the mission field and in training institutions we have hardly seen any practical application of the principles indicated in these studies.

In concluding this thesis we wish to give a short schematic comparison of the African and Biblical views on God and totality — not to be used in that form as instruction material, since it has been arranged thematically and not historically — in order to provide a reference for comparison while dealing with Bible History in the communication of the Gospel to the Venda. This is followed by a very short sketch of the History of Revelation with emphasis on its specific appeal to the Bantu.

The idea of God and of totality

The Venda

God is part of the cosmos, the highest in a hierarchy of forces which is at no point interrupted; there is no discontinuity between God and the cosmos.

God is remote and not concerned with what men do. If he is called "Father of all", this only refers to him as Creator and supreme Head of all, but implies ⁴⁾ no personal relationship.

Because there is no relationship between man and God, man cannot disturb any relationship by sinning — he cannot sin against God.

The Bible

God is transcendent, essentially different from his creation, incommensurable (Is. 40:20ff). There is a discontinuity between God and the cosmos.

God has bridged the chasm between himself and man in Jesus Christ. He "became a human being and lived among us" (Jn. 1:14). He is concerned with everything we do (Gen. 3:9; Ps. 139).

Because God has created man for his service, in order to be holy and righteous, man can sin against God. This results in guilt and man will be called to account for it.

1) The primal vision.

2) 'n Banier van die volke, Ch. VIII, XVI.

3) Die godsdienstige begrip en uitlewing.

4) See Taylor, The primal vision, pp. 90, 121-2.

The Venda

God is "Deus otiosus", an idle God. The everyday life of people falls outside the scope of his rule. Only strange and extraordinary occurrences are sometimes ascribed to him when people find no other possible explanation for them. Giving life or taking it is the function of the midzimu, not of God.

God is unknown, like the spirits of the long-dead ancestors are unknown. Nobody ever has direct contact with him.

The Bible

God is "the living God". He acts in history. He delivers his people. He is active in everything that happens, whether usual or unusual (Job 1:21). Not even a single sparrow falls to the ground without his consent. Even our hairs are numbered (Mt. 10:29,30). "As a father has compassion on his children, so has the LORD compassion on all who fear him" (Ps. 103:13).

God has revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ. He who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9). We may know him and have fellowship with him.

Totality

Man, the midzimu, the world and its creatures, and even God, are looked upon primarily as parts of the totality. Man's supreme purpose is to be integrated into this totality. His supreme bliss is to be completely involved in it and at harmony with it.

Man is integrated into the totality through acknowledging his place in his own family and tribe, the midzimu included. His well-being is dependent on his being involved in the life of his kinship group. What lies outside this circle, is not relevant to him. There are no obligations towards those outside his small circle, including God.

The totality and its harmony is disturbed on account of man's sin (Rom. 8:18-25), but God is creating a new harmony (Eph. 1:10), "to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as Head" (T E V). This work will be completed in the consummation of his Kingdom (I Cor. 15:22-28). Man finds his salvation by being integrated into this Kingdom, and his purpose by being involved in it (Mt. 6:33).

On account of its descentance from Adam mankind is one family (Acts 17:26). By becoming estranged from God, this family has become estranged from one another. Their unity is, however, restored in Jesus Christ, the Head of the new covenant and of the new humanity. One is integrated into this new humanity by being baptized into Christ.

Communication through the History of Revelation

One should guard against the temptation to try and write a "Venda catechism" on the lines of the schematic analysis as presented above. The Venda will not understand it. They do not even have terms for "totality", "cosmos", "being integrated", "involvement", "hierarchy of forces" etc., just as they do not have terms for describing the features of Venda grammar. They do not philosophize about language, they speak it. In the same way they do not philosophize about being integrated into totality, they live it. They will, however, grasp the differences in world view between themselves and the Bible when these differences are communicated to them in the form of history, as in the case of Israel.

The first chapters of the book of Genesis are especially rich in divine revelation as opposed to naturalistic religion. They show God as the sovereign Creator, and thereby tell men that they are but creatures, essentially different from God. Being the Creator, God is unique. He is not Mudzimu among the midzimu.

Gen. 1 reveals God as the sovereign Lord of History. There is a beginning of all things in his Word by which everything has been created. On hearing this, the Bantu realizes that his circular concept of time is broken. If there is a beginning, this leads to the conclusion that there must also be an end. Genesis 1 points to Revelation 22, the creation to the consummation, to the new heavens and the new earth.

The description of the days of creation shows us the abundance of God's providential care. There is no "limited cosmic good". God is the limitless source of "good", and he gave his children more than they need. Before he created them, he carefully prepared the earth as a home for them, and he even hung the heavenly bodies in the sky to serve as lamps for them (Gen. 1:15-17). These are not gods as is the case in pagan religions.

One's share in this abundance cannot be obtained by magical means, and it is not necessary to try to obtain it that way. One simply has to ask one's heavenly Father for these things. He is concerned with his children and has appointed them heirs together with Christ.

Gen. 1 and 2 teach us that man is not subjected to nature as a slave who has no choice but to accept his particular role in the totality. He needs not fatalistically accept what nature and the spirits working in it bring over him. On the contrary, he was created as king of nature, destined to rule over it and to develop its potential to the utmost, in responsibility to God. This kingship has been taken from him because of his rebellion against God. He became an enemy of God, and even started abusing God's earth and destroying God's precious gifts in it. The kingship is, however, restored in Jesus Christ.

These chapters also show us that mankind is one family, descending from a common ancestor. Adam is their first "chief", the head of the covenant in which they also participate. The following chapters show them what happened to that covenant.

In Genesis 3 we are taught that the cosmic order is no longer harmonious. It has been violently disturbed by man's sin. The totality has been broken because man has broken the covenant with God. The result is man's estrangement from God and from his fellow men, even from his family: man and wife accuse each other; brothers kill each other.

Gen. 3 also teaches us that death, calamities and strife are neither a natural phenomenon of the cosmic order, nor are they the results of sorcery or the work of dissatisfied spirits; they are the inevitable results of man's rebellion. By breaking the covenant, man became separated from God, the only source of life, and it is only through faith in Jesus Christ that he will be united with him again.

Against the idea of the cosmic fatherhood of God, the "indulgent celestial grandfather", Gen. 3 teaches us that the father-child relationship between man and God has been broken in the fall of man and has been converted into one of estrangement and enmity. Man by nature hates God so much that he crucified his Son. Gen. 3 contains a valuable contribution towards providing the context for Biblical terms in Venda for "sin", vhutshinyi, and "guilt", mulandu.

Against the deistic nature of African religion Gen. 3 teaches us that God does not leave man alone. He comes down to him in the garden of Eden and calls him to account for what he has done. He pronounces his judgement over man. He curses him and he curses the earth on his account. But then God does not leave never to return, as is the case in African mythology. He gives man a promise of future salvation through Christ, and during succeeding generations he continually visits man to call him back until he himself becomes man in Jesus Christ.

Against the idea of a natural, genealogical relation between god(s) and man, the Bible speaks of election in Jesus Christ, and of a new covenant. This is illustrated in the election of and covenant with Abraham and his descendants. One can only enter into this new covenant relationship by faith, and those natural descendants who do not believe in God, as Ishmael and Esau, are rejected. This election and covenant may in some cases demand that natural kinship ties are broken, as in the case of Abraham (Gen. 12:1). Christ has come to bring enmity between the closest natural relations.

The history of the deliverance from Egypt provides the context for the term "redemption". God, Yahweh, is the Deliverer of his people. He is the Lord of nature, not the wise men or magicians of Egypt or their gods. The magicians of Egypt (and of Vendaland !) are powerless against him. Even the gods of Egypt, from the Sun God

to the Nile, are shown to be nothing more than forces of nature that are controlled at will by Yahweh.

In listening to these histories the Venda, like Israel, will learn to know who Mudzimu is. Though they have no suitable term for "holiness", they will learn what it is by learning who Mudzimu is. They will learn about the terrifying aspects of his holiness when listening to the history of Sinai, of the golden calf, and of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10). They will, however, also learn about the other aspects of his holiness such as his faithful love (chesed) for his people in not deserting them even when they rebel against him (Hosea; Jer. 31:20; Is. 49:15).

The conflict between the prophets of God and baalism in Canaan provides striking examples of prophetic teaching about God as the Lord and Giver of life (I Kings 17), rain (Ch. 18), wheat and oil (Ch. 17), fertility of the soil (II Kings 2), deliverance in war (Ch. 3), health (Ch. 5), and as the Lord of fire (Ch. 1). ¹⁾ These histories provide the context for the term "blessing".

These are only a few sketchy remarks for the sake of illustrating what we mean by saying that the history of the Old Testament has a rich and relevant message for the Venda too. The New Testament teaching is of no less importance.

Let the messenger of the Gospel for a moment put himself in the place of the Venda receptor, who still lives in the conceptual sphere of a hierarchy of forces. What a tremendous revelation will it be for him to learn that this hierarchical scheme has been broken through by

1) See Bronner, Leah. The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as polemics against Baal worship. Doctor's thesis at Pretoria University, 1964. She demonstrates how all these attributes had been ascribed to Baal in poems found at Ugarit.

Jesus Christ when he became man like one of us in our weakness and poverty. What a message to hear that we have our Kinsman as constant Intercessor with God in heaven. What an overpowering revelation to be taught that God, the Creator, has come so near to us that he lives within us as the Holy Spirit.

In Christ God's Kingdom has come on earth. This is the new totality, but how different it is from the Venda totality. In the Venda totality one automatically has a place by birth, but the Kingdom is given only to some in God's grace (Lk. 12:32). Receiving it is not malamba ("wages"), it is mukovhe ("a child's share"). The world, the old totality, is doomed to destruction. Only the Kingdom of Christ will remain. To belong to this Kingdom, Christ says, is not an inescapable fate, it is a responsible choice of faith and repentance and of following Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:15,17). In this Kingdom the existing hierarchical order is turned upside down once more; it is given to the poor in spirit and the meek (Mt. 5). The first will become last and the last first; the greatest must regard himself as everyone's servant, as Jesus has demonstrated in his work and suffering.

In the Kingdom of Christ it is not possible to strengthen one's "life force" at the expense of someone else, but one has to die in order to live (Mt. 16:25 and par.).

In the vicarious death of Christ the nature of sin as well as the righteousness and holiness of God are demonstrated in unparalleled clarity, and the context for the terminology which refers to reconciliation is provided.

When Christ rose from the dead those who belong to him were freed from the bondage and power of sin. They need not bow to their fate in the totality, but they are free again to serve God as his children and subjects. This is what the demand for righteousness in man means.

What is more, when Christ rose, death was conquered. Those who are restored into fellowship with him through faith (trusting in his victory) have the promise of the resurrection and eternal life. Their future is assured in him. They need not look forward to a miserable existence as spirits fading away from life, but to a glorious resurrection in a body like Christ's own glorious body. They need not care for spirits any more, or be afraid that their children will neglect them or forget them after their death. They belong to Christ, and that is all they need. The childless person is eventually in no worse position than the one with many children.

Even the tribe need not despair of their future and of that of their country. By being integrated into the new covenant with Christ their Head as the Israel of Christ and the Venda people of Christ, they are assured of their future in Christ's eternal Kingdom. ¹⁾

We are convinced that the Venda people, when hearing the Gospel presented to them in this way, will of their own accord reject many of the terms which have been discussed in this treatise. These will not fit into the new overall context any more. They will say, "We do not merely tenda ("agree") to the Gospel, we now believe it, we trust in God (fulufhela) !"

1) See Coetzee, J.C. Volk en Godsvolk in die Nuwe Testament. Potchefstroom, Pro Rege, 1965, pp. 319ff.

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It will be noticed that in some cases the publisher is not mentioned in this list. This is due to the fact that the booklet with rules for the bibliographical outlay of theses was only received about two months before this thesis had to be handed in, and it was not possible at this late stage to find the publishers of all the literature consulted in the earlier stages of the research.

List of periodicals referred to or
quoted from

Abbreviation (if any)	
	American Journal of Sociology
	Bantu Studies
B W A T	Beiträge zum Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament
	Beiträge zur Evangelischen Theologie
	Biblica
	The Bible Translator
	The Christian Minister
	Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses
	Evangelische Theologie
G T T	Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift
	Die Goue Kandelaar
	De Heerbaan
I R M	International Review of Missions
	Journal of Semitic Studies
	Kerugma und Dogma
	Language
	Mvelaphanda
N G T T	Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif
	Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie
	Pretoria News
	Rand Daily Mail
	Theologische Literaturzeitung
	Die Vaderland
	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
	Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie