

doubt what he says fits into the general picture of missions in the history of Zimbabwe. Given the way the Lutherans are made to appear, the Church whose missionaries were quick to take sides with the freedom fighters, one wishes Bhebe spent more time on the religious factors in the European background culture of the Swedes which distinguished them.

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African Earthkeepers, Volume 1, Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care By *M. L. Daneel*. Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1998.

This is a remarkable book, about an attempt to save the environment by traditional religious leaders in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe. A second volume is envisaged, which will focus on the role of independent churches in the same endeavour.

The author is central to the endeavour. Although he is descended from White missionaries, he was brought up in Masvingo District and has maintained close links with the peoples of the district, recently through many years working with Independent Churches and helping them to establish an organisation for co-operation between them and with other churches. Daneel describes the sadness he felt at noticing how the forests he knew in his childhood had become depleted, and how he observed the land, denuded of trees, going to waste after the war for the independence of Zimbabwe.

The book begins with a brief account of the war, pointing to the documented roles of spirit mediums, of the cult of the High God Mwari, and of other traditional leaders. Traditional chiefs and spirit mediums lost influence immediately after the war as the new governing party took over control. Daneel links the loss of respect for traditional religious leaders and traditional religious values with indiscriminate ravaging of forests in the land.

The author describes how three associated organizations were established by religious leaders to focus on the natural environment, and to revive the woodlands by planting trees. The Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists involved traditional leaders; the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches involved independent churches; and the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation incorporated other churches. Using a narrative style that includes his own involvement, the author describes how interest arose in these various groups and how the organizations developed. Included in his description

Is some account of rivalries and divisions that hindered the development of the movements.

The book goes on to examine in some detail how ecology fits in to traditional religious values, and how traditional religious leaders encouraged a campaign of afforestation. "Earth-clothing" ceremonies to initiate tree-planting derived their symbolism from two sources.

One was the war for the liberation of Zimbabwe. Then as now, a common enemy united people from different chiefdoms and different spirit domains, to transform religious leadership from the local to a national level. This is illustrated by the involvement of ministers of the national government. The movement was explicitly proclaimed a war of the trees. The spirit mediums and other leaders of the movement reminded people of their role in the war. This symbolism helped people to unite behind their religious leaders, as they had done in the war of liberation.

The second source of symbols is the traditional veneration of ancestors, who own the land and care for its fertility. Earth-clothing rituals followed the patterns of more ancient rituals in honour of the spirits of the land. In these, spirit mediums provide the link between the ancestors and the living community. Daneel describes the involvement of the cult of Mwari, the High God, which supported the new ecological movement. The book contains sections on traditional use of trees and the symbolism surrounding them, and a section on wild animals, again paying attention to the relationship between traditional values and current ecological issues.

The war of the trees has been effective in two principal ways. It revived the value of traditional sacred groves, which had been violated in recent years. These provide reserves in which hunting is prohibited and trees may not be cut down. The movement also gave a sacred character to the planting of trees and the new woodlots created. It ensured maximum participation of the people in the programme of afforestation.

The author makes clear his own interest and participation. Chapter Five indicates his wider initiatives in encouraging co-operation between White commercial game farmers and the local communities with respect to the utilisation of wildlife resources. This chapter also points to encouraging more general environmental awareness in schools and elsewhere. Always the campaign was linked to traditional values.

In the final reflective chapter, the author speaks of his own home background at Morgenster Mission, which established his links with the people and their concerns. He speaks of the need to step back from the values of the enlightenment, and to pay attention to religious values, which have close links with our environment. The contents of the book illustrate the role religion can play in material development. The author also reflects on aspects of Christian theology, arguing for areas of co-

operation and understanding between Christianity and African traditional religions.

The place of the book in academic literature is problematic, which is one of the things that makes it interesting and valuable. It bridges the disciplines of Religious Studies, Social Anthropology and Theology. Although it abounds in rich, descriptive detail, the book is not simply a descriptive account of the use of symbols, such as an anthropologist might provide. The author was active in developing symbols from the past to meet a new problematic situation. We see him taking on the role of indigenous theologian. It is not always clear precisely how influential he was in developing the new religious symbolism. But this does not matter: his links with, and commitment to, the people and country makes him a participant in a way that anthropologists rarely achieve.

This book should appeal to a wide readership. It is well written and well presented with illustrations and an index. It provokes reflection on important religious and material issues that face many African communities.

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