BRIDGES INSTEAD OF WALLS: INTER-RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AMONG TSONGA PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN OF MOZAMBIQUE

Abstract

Despite the efforts of the Protestant churches to keep their members away from the ancestral culture and religion, Tsonga Christians of Mandlakazi in southern Mozambique still engage African ancestral beliefs and cosmologies to explain and deal with their existential situations, either covertly or openly. Why do they behaviour so, and what can theologians learn about these inter-religious experiences? To approach these questions, data were collected using semi-structural interviews and participant observation and analyzed through ground theory principles. The study will argue that, whereas the official Protestant discourse is concerned in building walls that preserve the purity of Christianity as a unique truth religion, these Tsonga Christians find religious differences as bridges connecting people. So, drawing from post-colonial thought, the study argue that too deal correctly with this religious mobility there is necessary a theological shift from the purity and incompatibility model to the intercultural one, based on two main assumptions. First, hybridism is not deviation or pathology, but the real nature of lived Christianity and therefore the starting point for any relevant and meaningful theology. Second, as human means of seeking well-being, religions are incomplete, and therefore, instead of competing, they should cooperate and complement each other.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. **Purpose and Structure of the Chapter:** One of the challenges in culturally diverse states like Mozambique is how to move from simple multiculturalism to intercultural coexistence. This project aims to address this issue, focussing on inter-religious relations between Protestant Church and Tsonga ancestral culture and religion, known as *ntumbuluko*. It describes how and why Tsonga Christians in Mandlakazi, south of Mozambique, creatively engage, articulate and negotiate beliefs, values and rituals of their ancestral culture and religion. Although forbidden in official Protestant discourse, mobility ends up giving rise to relations of continuity and complementarity between the two religious expressions. Relationships of complementarity manifest themselves in the double religious engagement practice or religious belonging. The relations of continuity consist in the re-appropriation of ancestral cosmologies and rituals in the Christian religious discourse. They occur in the theologies of healing and liberation, here understood as discourses and practices concerning healing, prevention and demon delivering, resolution of social and spiritual afflictions which take place in some Churches, mainly those of the Zionist and Pentecostal type and in an isolated way, even among Protestant Churches. From the analysis of these dynamics it is expected to find lessons, values and elements that can illuminate and ground contextual theological reflections relevant to the mission of the Church today.

   The Church understands this religious mobility as a result of the spiritual immaturity (*a va helelangui)*, a pathology or deviation from the norm, which must be combated. From the data analysed, we consider that this discourse only represents the official or doctrinal position of the Church. But his normative and regulatory power has been systematically violated. We consider that mobility is not a deviation from the norm, but rather a standard of Tsonga Christianity, which stems from its intercultural and interreligious nature. Contrary to the claim of official doctrine, what is noticeable in practice is that conversion to Christianity does not mean an immediate and irreversible break with the *ntumbuluko*, but rather the beginning of a process of intercultural and interreligious negotiation and translation of concepts, values and experiences. Instead of breaking away, Christians who practice religious mobility, whether they are Ziones, Protestants, Catholics or Neo-Pentecostals simply translate into Christian language the same ancestral belief that spiritual or occult forces possess significant power to condition their lives. So they hope to find in Christ and the Holy Spirit divine power, far superior to that of the healers, capable of annihilating evil or demonic forces. so the challenge is how to translate ancestral cultural and spiritual expressions, values and meanings into a theologically relevant and meaningful discourse for the Tsongas while respecting the integrity of religious beliefs whether they be Christian or ancestral. Bearing in mind these observations we consider that, rather than preserving people from the diabolical contamination or pollution of *ntumbuluko*, Christian purity should mean a process of building up a loving and compassionate hearts, that is therefore ready to develop a brotherhood that goes beyond the boundaries of the family or the community, as is the case in *ntumbuluko*. Similarly, instead of building cultural and religious walls, the focus of pastoral care should be on the celebration and promotion, careful of course, of these intercultural and interreligious bridges that are already taking place, as a contribution to the promotion of peace and development that is meant to be endogenous and sustainable.

One must recognise that between Christianity and *ntumbuluko* there are similarities and convergences to be explored and, on the other hand, differences to be respected. Besides being the most correct expression of discipleship as taught by Jesus, promoting Christianity that stands out for its capacity to shape in people the spirit of reconciliation, brotherhood and collaboration for the common good, respecting differences, it is too important for the common good, which is our collective dream as a country. For as proven by the recurring discourses on tribalism, perceptions of social exclusion and political intolerance, recourse to religion to substantiate or explain violent extremism, not to mention the permanent war, interspersed by some moments of silence of the guns (Ngoenha, 2017), the ethnic and religious diversity that characterises us, instead of being a blessing, can become a curse.

Therefore, it is urgent to decolonize the official discourse of the Church. First, because it reproduces and promotes a pernicious way of thinking, very present in our society, which consists of constructing and presenting the other as subordinate, filthy or an enemy to be avoided or fought, just for being or thinking differently. Calling practitioners and ministers of ancestral rituals witches, pagans or gentiles (*va matiko, ma hedeni*) and the *ntumbuluko* himself *munyama* (darkness) and then preaching reconciliation and mutual respect is, to say the least, a lack of coherence. Second, instead of promoting purity, it fosters a syncretic and disguised Christianity. As the Church limits itself to prohibiting the practice of rituals and ancestral beliefs but without offering a plausible alternative, when people face some affliction they tend to turn to spiritual leaders who operate based on cosmologies and ancestral beliefs. In these interactions there certainly occur mixtures that are incompatible with the Christian faith and that are beyond the control of the Church. Furthermore, the official discourse fights the effects and not the cause. Consultation with healers, diviners, prophets or even the practice of rituals not foreseen by the Church are simply external manifestations of the ancestral cosmological-religious system that is still alive even among the so-called converts. Regardless of practicing ancestral rituals or attending healers, all those who operate with this cosmology practice syncretism in the sense that they mix two totally different systems of explanation. This is why many defenders of the official discourse who accuse others of being immature (*a va helelangui*) are also accused of being covert (*vo tumbela*). For they consult healers and diviners and practice in secret the same beliefs that they condemn in broad daylight. Therefore, with the discourse of rupture and distancing, the Church misses the opportunity to adequately understand people's deepest concerns and aspirations, which are behind ancestral languages, symbols and rituals. In this way, its practice and message are out of step with the reality of the people it is called to serve.

In this sense we argue that the strategy of demonizing *ntumbuluko* and *pathologizing* religious mobility only generates a contradictory Christian life and a culturally and spiritually alienated faith, but does not guarantee the so much desired purity. Instead of purity, what we have in reality is a hybrid Christianity, which is situated in the interstice between Western Christianity on the one hand, and African culture and ancestral religion on the other. This interstice or Third Space as Bhabha (1998) would say constitutes an opportunity to imagine and build a Mozambican Protestantism. That is way intercultural approach is very crucial.

This theological approach is fundamental because it allows us to deconstruct or decolonize the colonial matrix that presides over the official discourse of the Church. One of the reasons that may justify mobility is the inability or difficulty that the Church has to adequately address issues considered as part of the *ntumbuluko*, because it still works with the same heritage of Western Christianity that has always harassed and concealed the presence of African ancestral religions and cultures in its midst, under the pretext that they are superstitious or diabolical. Decolonisation, then, would be the recognition that, in addition to the truths to be taught, the Church also has the opportunity and obligation to learn, collaborate and enrich itself with the ancestral cultures and religions with which it shares the same social and spiritual spectrum. An intercultural approach, then, means recognizing that relevant and meaningful evangelization requires engaging the values, aspirations and sensibilities of the community, which are present in its languages, its myths and rites, its songs and performances, because they constitute the substratum people use to deal with their afflictions and even to understand and experience Christianity itself.

This chapter is composed of three sections. The first shows the connections and processes of intercultural translation that occur between the two religions, but at the same time offers a basic characterisation of *ntumbuluko* from the perspective of its practitioners. This characterisation lays the foundation for the theological reflection that develops in the following chapters. Although the emphasis in this study falls on the religious aspects, it should be clear that *ntumbuluko* is a holistic system, so that for its practitioners the distinction between the religious and the mundane does not make much sense. Based on the analysis of the phenomenon of religious mobility and the re-appropriation of the *ntumbuluko* cosmology in the approach to suffering in Christian cults, the second chapter discusses the assumptions of the intercultural theology of well-being. The third discusses, from the models of religious pluralism, the possibility of dialogue and interreligious collaboration between Protestantism and the *ntumbuluko*.

2. **Religious Mobility and Hybrid Identities:** From theological-missionary literature, religious mobility is seen as an evil to be combated. While the encounter the Tsongas experienced with the Zulus and their Ndaus subjects resulted in a process of intercultural negotiation and accommodation, with the missions the situation was different. They were forced to abandon the native culture and religious beliefs perceived as contrary to the Christian faith and civilization. The missionaries, whether Catholic or Protestant, despite their differences, endorsed modern progressive and evolutionist thinking, which placed the West and Christianity in a position of superiority over African cultures and religions, which for them were nothing more than pure superstition and magic (Ngoenha, 2000)..The first and certainly the most extensive ethnographic study among the Tsongas of missiological interest was carried out by Junod (1996) at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this work the ancient cultures and beliefs of the Tsongas are described in derogatory terms and the natives are described as savages or primitives, miserable sinners (Junod 1996). Even the very name Tsonga itself was imposed by him on these cultural groups, even against his will (Junod, 1996). Almost a century later, Chitlango (2004) developed a theological research grounded in the data. He describes the relations between both expressions as being "theologically unacceptable, missiologically incorrect, socially and denominationally explosive" (Chitlango, 2004:250).

Although carried out in different contexts, these studies, approach the relations between Christianity and ancestral cultural and religious practices from the official position of the Church. Thus they share the same idea that ancestral religion represents a danger for Christianity, for at least two main reasons: its immorality and the divinization of the ancestors. In this sense, dual religious practice and other forms of religious mobility are condemned as an expression of Christian immaturity. Agreeing clearly with the existence of differences between the two religious expressions, this study analyses the relations between the two religious expressions in a relational and collaborative perspective instead of the antagonistic or competitive perspective. It starts from the assumption that, in spite of the differences, it is possible and even desirable to identify and maximise the similarities and points of convergence, as the relations of continuity and complementarity suggest.

In fact several scholars, especially anthropologists, who have engaged, directly or indirectly, in the study of religious argue that the religious Tsonga identity is hybrid instead of pure as pretend the church. In her study of Maciene Anglican Mission - 1926/8 1974, Alda Saúte (2005) argues that instead of succumbing as simple victims of the proselytising and civilising agenda of Western Protestantism, which imposed the abandonment of their cultural practices, the indigenous religious leaders, in collusion with the community, 'creatively adapted their teachings to preserve Mozambican history and culture' (2005:245). Instead of a pure religious identity, free of ancestral beliefs and rituals, the native Christians opted for a hybrid religious identity, informed by the different religious beliefs and experiences to which they were exposed. This process followed at least two paths. One was to found or join churches that integrate local cultural practices, as in the case of zione-type churches. The other was to struggle within their missionary Churches to preserve, as far as possible, their culture, beliefs and lifestyles, using flexible strategies such as negotiation, concealment and camouflage, without necessarily entering into direct confrontation with the Church.

These two forms of mobility continue until today. In her work among the Tsongas of southern Mozambique, carried out in the 1990s, Honwana (2002) characterises these forms of double belonging by syncretism and sharing respectively. According to her, syncretism occurs in the Zionist churches, where in an official and open way ancestral beliefs are selectively mixed with the Christian faith. Compartmentalisation occurs among members of the Catholic and Protestant Churches and consists of practising the beliefs of the two religions but in a separate manner so as to maintain the integrity of each. Premawardhana (2018) also maintains that Pentecostal Christians in Maua also practice the ancestral religious beliefs, but at separate times. As can be inferred, these two forms equate to the dynamics that configure what in our view are the relations of continuity and complementarity respectively. Although for both Honwana(2002) and Premawardhana (2018), the double practice may occur separately, we consider that regardless of whether there is or not the spatial-temporal separation, hybridity is inevitable, because during this physical flow, a mental flow also occurs, that is, a negotiation or appropriation of values, symbols, concepts and languages. The hybrid cultural repertoire (Premawardhana, 2018), which people carry ends up being reflected in and influencing the practices of the religions they attend. These forms of mobility are also found in other Mozambican communities. Both the study of West (2009), conducted by the Catholic Mission in which a study among the Makuas of the Mueda plateau, and that

of Premawardhana (2018) conducted among the Pentecostal communities among the Makuas of Maua, in Niassa, though referring to temporally and geographically different contexts, both show that the people who adhered to Christianity, whether Catholic or Pentecostal, did not abandon ancestral beliefs and rituals. On the contrary they continued, whether in an open or hidden way, to consult the healers and other agents with the power to navigate the occult world. In the case of the Catholic community, West (2009) states that when a new priest was appointed. Instead of the traditional civilizing agenda, which involved cultural and spiritual uprooting, he started to integrate in his pastoral work the autochthonous cultural and religious practices, such as the initiation rites, the Mapiko dance and the sacrifices to the ancestors, and even to collaborate in the organisation and performance of the initiation rites, obviously introducing changes. With this attitude the situation changed drastically. The Church converted to the Macondes and precisely because of this it was able to convert the Macondes and ensure their growth. While the Pentecostal Churches insist on the irreversible break with ancestral beliefs and rituals (Premawardhana, 2018), the Catholic Church, perhaps because of the lessons learned in the past, seems to have finally surrendered to the demand for the right to hybrid religious identity hence its tolerance and even sponsorship of some cultural and religious practices (Premawardhana,2018; West,2009).

Mobility and double or multiple religious is pattern found not only in Mozambique. In his study on identities and multiple religious belonging among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Williams (2015) also notes that the ancestral religion of this people is very open to tolerate and embrace other religious beliefs. Because of this their adherents easily embrace Islam or Christianity, resulting in a multiple religious identity and belonging. The two ethnographic studies, one being a society called Chrislam (a combination of Christianity, traditional African religion and Islam) and the other an annual festival, also of an inter-religious nature, are a clear sign that, while leaders seek to assert themselves by their difference, people are increasingly seeking elements of unity between religions, as the motto that the founders of Chrislam claim to have received from God elucidates: one God, one religion, one people, one love. Indeed in many parts of the world the arrival of Western Christianity has given rise to identities to the phenomenon of dual practice or religious belonging and hybrid religious identities. As they do not fit into the agenda of missionary Christianity, they have been fought against or silenced, so they have always existed underground or in a hidden way. Today, with the opening that is taking place and above all because Christian theologians and clerics such as Aloysius Pieris and Raimundo Panikkar (Phan, 2003; Wesley, 2005) practice and collaborate with native practitioners of Asian religions with whom Christianity shared the same space, this phenomenon has begun to gain visibility, even within the academy.

3. **Theoretical and Methodological Procedure:** The research was ethnography but informed by grounded theory procedures (Charmaz, 2009). Thus, instead of extensive observation of the environment and all the details of the community, as is usual in anthropological research, ethnography focused on the events, actions and processes concerning the engagement of the religious practices and beliefs of the two religious expressions. Unlike the traditional method, grounded theology does not begin with established theories or theologies. Rather, theology emerges from data collected in the field that is compared and confronted with academic theology (Steve, 2017 Charmaz, 2009). So although we had some assumptions about the research problem, we always kept

an open and attentive mind to suggestions that emerged throughout the research. As the process of coding and comparing the data went on, the image of a hybrid Christianity emerged, in permanent interpenetration with *ntumbuluko,* but interpreted in different ways by the practitioners themselves. In the midst of this apparent disconnection, we raised the assumption according to which a relationship exists between these religions which can be described by two pairs of categories: rupture and incompatibility and on the other hand, complementarity and continuity. The first position is to found on the official discourse of the Church and, while the second one is held by many ordinary Christians. Although not publicly assumed finds greater expression in their daily life. The second challenge consisted in the search for theoretical references in the field of academic theology that could help us interpret and construct a theology from the interstices between ordinary and academic theology, or between formal Christianity, tending to be westernized, and that which is lived, tending to be *Tsonganized*. Throughout the readings, conversations, and constant re-readings of the data, we have progressively selected the following references in use here: intercultural theology, the theology of religious pluralism, and postcolonial theory.

Intercultural theology is relevant because it helps Christians to reflect on how to announce and witness the Christian faith in a context in which different cultures and religious experiences cross. This theology develops in the interstices, so it uses intercultural translation or hermeneutics. As proposed by Wesley (2005) and Hollenweger (2015), intercultural hermeneutics interprets and translates the symbols, the rituals, the narratives, the liturgical performances, in short, the discursive and behavioural elements originating from the different religious and cultural expressions to which people resort to express and experience their religiosity. Even when interpreting biblical texts, it is always from this intercultural perspective. He understands truth as a collective construction in the world of life and not so much as a transcendental intuition of the cognising subject, so he favours relational rather than monological biblical interpretation, the articulation between individual and community initiative, the dialectic between the individual and the institutions, between local or ordinary knowledge and academic knowledge, the multi and inter disciplinary approach.

The theology of religious pluralism helped us to interpret the discourses of continuity and rupture between the two religious expressions. Thus the position of rupture defended by the official discourse of the Church was framed in the *ecclesico-centric* model which considers the Church the sole and exclusive depositary of divine truth and therefore the only space in which salvation takes place. The position of is framed within the theocentric or pluralist model. As the ministers of the *ntumbuluko* do, instead of the exclusivist Christ conveyed by the Church, the theocentric pluralist model places God as the only centre towards which all religions gravitate (Hick, 2001; Panniker, 1990). Christ comes to be seen only as a valid mediator for Christians, just as other religions have their own. We find among lay practitioners of *ntumbuluko,* a middle position, according to which Christ also acts and can save people even in *ntumbuluko*. In the context of the theology of religious pluralism, this position is part of inclusive pluralism or Trinitarian Christology. It is on the basis of this model that the importance of a dialogical collaboration between Christianity and the *ntumbuluko* will be founded. It is true that because it is more focused on recognizing and valuing religious diversity, pluralism may be suspected of being a new way of essentializing and segregating religions and cultures,

as happens with some multiculturalist approaches, which would certainly be against the intercultural perspective we seek to develop here. Despite its name, pluralism actually converges with the intercultural approach, precisely because as Knitter (2002:241) has noted, rather than simply celebrating religious diversity, it seeks to promote dialogue and mutual learning between religions, and can therefore be described as correlational or mutuality theology. Pluralism assumes that, as humans that they are, religious people, and Christians in particular, are limited and therefore cannot claim possession of the single truth or narrative. Instead, while experiencing their truth founded on faith in Christ, they should consider that outside their denominations there are other religious experiences that are valid in the view of their adherents and that aspire to the same truth and universality. (Knitter, 2002; Panniker, 1990).

As it can be noted, all these theologies are post-colonial in the sense that, at the same time as they question the colonial matrix, they propose alternative ways of doing theology in line with the socio-cultural context of the global south. As developed by scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (Bhambra, 2014), or even Stuart Hall() and even Fanon(2008) who can be considered one of the precursors (Bhabhha,1998), the postcolonial theory is relevant in this work because it allows us to understand the colonial character of the official Protestant discourse and, at the same time, suggest other possibilities of doing theology from the hybrid space. Indeed, postcolonial theory questions the hierarchical and asymmetrical constructions present in Western discourse and claims the right of the colonized to have voice and space to tell their story by themselves and no longer as a subaltern or object of the West (Spivak,2010). Here, not even the paternalistic generosity of wanting to speak for or on their behalf will do. Thus in this study, the subjects from whom we obtained the data, are not mere interviewees. They are understood as collaborators, entitled to name and voice throughout the text. As can be noted, both the theology of religions and intercultural theology are postcolonial in the sense that they aim to make space for the voices, religious experiences and theologies of the global south, which have been ignored and subalternized by western theology, which has always claimed to be universal, normative and hegemonic. Although the pioneers of intercultural theology were concerned about secularism and the decline of Christianity in Europe, they share the idea that all theology is contextually conditioned and propose a Christianity that is relational, dialogical and open to learning from other experiences of relationship with God (Wesley,2005; Hollenweger,2015).

Grounded theology also proved to be a fruitful method for the postcolonial perspective that we tried to develop in this study. First because it allowed us to realise that lay members, despite their little or virtually no academic and theological training in particular, do not simply passively absolve the message from the pulpit. Rather, they critically and creatively appropriate the discourse of the Church and articulate it with other religious experiences to develop their own theologies that accommodate their cosmologies, goals and existential concerns. Secondly, this methodology showed us that theology or knowledge about God is more the result of lived and witnessed experience of how the community relates to God, rather than the exposition of doctrines or theological formulations a priori.

The contributors were of both genders and all declared themselves to be Christians, lay members and pastors from different denominations, mostly Protestant. Some had been successively members of two different Churches. This happens especially with women, because generally when they get married they start belonging to their husband's religion or denomination, unless both are of the same religion. Among the Christians interviewed it is worth highlighting five traditional chiefs, including one woman. It was they who provided us with most of the information about the n*tumbuluko*, since by inherent function, they and *the tinyanga*, (healers) are the only ones who publicly assume their condition of double belonging or religious practice. However, it should be clear that the concern of this study is not to expose or attack people or churches, but to address a phenomenon that concerns the whole Church in Mozambique. The recourse to the comparative method aims in part to show that this phenomenon happens a little everywhere. Finally, it should be said that this study does not intend to present finished truths. Far from that, it has to be seen as an embryonic and preliminary exercise, whose objective is to provoke debate and encourage further studies on a pertinent theme, still so little explored.

II.NTUMBULUKO AND ITS INTERFACES WITH CHRISTIANITY

Among the Tsongas of Mandlakazi, *ntumbuluko* and Christianity interpenetrate and complement each other in such a way that neither can claim purity. While the official discourse of Protestant and Neo-Pentecostals Churches holds that the Christian faith is incompatible with the ancestral beliefs and rituals that configure the Tsonga cultural and religious system known as *ntumbuluko,* people articulate these beliefs and rituals with the different Christian offerings. Even when converted, people still resort to the cosmology and ancestral thought system even to apprehend and experience Christianity itself. In this interaction occur an intercultural translation, which is a process consisting of the negotiation and translation of terms, symbols, gestures, values, behaviours and life experiences from one religion or culture to another (Burke, 2003; 2007; Santos, 2019). This process enriches both religious expressions, although there is also the risk of distortion. In fact this risk is more present among Christian translators, as they start from a normative and prejudiced position towards ancestral cultures and religions. The first segment will offer a succinct characterisation of *ntumbuluko* from the point of view of its practitioners and analyse interactions between both religions. The second one focused on spiritual explanatory of suffering intend to show how people use *ntumbuluko* either as an epistemological tool to give meaning and copy with social and natural phenomena or as apologetic tool used to defend their world vision and social order. As it will be demonstrated throughout this description, ordinary Christians in Mandlakazi who practices double religious engagement take religious differences as opportunity to find bridges which connect both religions, instead of walls or barriers as do the official Christian discourse. This understanding serves as a basis for reflection on the assumptions of intercultural theology to be developed in subsequent chapters.

1. **The Notion of Ntumbuluko:** *Ntumbuluko* is the term used in Changane to refer to elements that in Portuguese are loosely referred to as Tradition or Culture. Since it includes religious elements, it may also correspond to what is called African Traditional Religion. Instead of these vague terms, we prefer to refer to the Tsonga cultural system by

its proper name, *ntumbuluko*. This is important because it helps to distinguish within *ntumbuluko* the religious aspects from those that are merely cultural. In fact although some objects, behaviour and practices are used to express religious beliefs, they are not confused with them, as they can equally serve other functionalities or symbolise other realities outside the ancestral religious world. The lack of this clarity would have led many scholars to confuse aspects of African cultural life with religion (Akinmayowa (2015) and has led many Christians to advise against the use of certain objects, props or certain practices merely because they are associated with traditional medicine. Secondly, we believe that like any other religion, this one also deserves to be addressed by its proper name and secondly because, although it shares many characteristics with other African and world religions in general, it is autonomous and distinct from any other. We shall therefore try, as far as we are able, to describe *ntumbuluko* from the point of view of its practitioners in Mandlakazi.

During the research, the first time we heard this term was in a round of conversation in Machulane-Thavane, under a leafy maquis tree. As the local administrative structure, which was in charge of inviting informants, knew that the research was about religious values and spiritual experiences, they were careful to request Christian leaders and those linked to local ancestral beliefs for our talks. In this case, a traditional chief of the 2nd rank and two women pastors from the Church of the Nazarene were present. During the conversation the question arose as to what religious beliefs people mobilise in the search for their well-being. Using the Church's official teaching and her own life experience, Pastor Laura showed that the only legitimate and safe way to deal with situations that overshadow well-being is the Christian faith. It was in this context that Mr Albino Mondlane, a traditional chief and also a Christian baptised in the Catholic Church, presented his argument in defence of ancestral beliefs and rituals:

"We come from the *ntumbuluko* (*hi tumbulikile hi ka ntumbuluko*). So even if you are in the Church, when the time of suffering comes and you feel that the situation is not good, you can go back to the ancestors (*ka vafi*).... you can put the two together, because when a person is dead he lives in spirit form, so he can see God,...we who have learnt the doctrine have been told that God is Spirit (*Moya*), so if the person is dead he also becomes spirit (*moya*). So both the God we worship and our ancestors are all spirits... If you enter *ntumbuluko* and it doesn't work, you go to church. Everywhere you are looking for the solution to your problem''.

Let us start with the expression *hi tumbulukile hika ntumbuluko*. The two terms that constitute it are the verb and the noun respectively. In the infinitive mode, the verb *ku tumbunuka*, can mean to arise, appear or originate. It is in this sense that God, besides being designated by his name *Xikwembo*, can also be called *Mutumbuluxi*, that is, the Creator. The noun *ntumbuluko* can mean nature, either as the origin, a principle and essence of something or established order that has been observed throughout time. But it can also refer to elements not created by man, such as trees or rivers. Thus with the expression *hi tumbulukile hika ntumbunuko,* whose verb form is in the first person plural present tense, it seems that the leader wanted to show that he and all the other members of the community (*va changana*) or, to be more extensive, the blacks (*va lande*), share a common foundation or substratum that rests on ancestral beliefs, rituals and principles of life. As may be understood, *ntumbuluko* includes cultural and spiritual dimensions, which, though inseparable, should be clearly distinguished. In its strictly religious sense,

which is what concerns us in this study, *ntumbuluko* refers to rituals and sacrifices to the ancestors, because it is believed that, as the spirits, they cooperate with God in protecting the family against the hidden powers of evil and in providing well-being. While grounding them, this religious process is mediated by a set of symbols, values, languages and a cosmological and social order that configures the cultural dimension of the *ntumbuluko*.

While the official Church's position understands the two religions as antagonistic, Mondlane defends a compatibility and complementarity's relationship between them. This compatibility is based on the fact that both God and the ancestors, although ontologically different, are all spirits committed to the well-being of the living, and therefore have more possibilities and motives to collaborate towards the same end. This is why even someone who in the name of modernity or the Christian faith has disconnected himself from ancestral beliefs and rituals, if he is facing a difficult situation, can return to his *ntumbuluko*, where his essence resides. This return does not in any way imply a rupture, but rather a movement within the same spiritual spectrum in search of a solution to existential problems.

The possibility of leaving and returning eloquently elucidates the existential mode of being mobile and experimental present in the *ntumbuluko* and which will constitute the point of confrontation with Christianity. While those who argue from the official position of the Church defend a fixed religious identity, for the supporters of *ntumbuluko* what counts is not so much fidelity to a fixed religious identity, enclosed in this or that religion or Church, but rather the resolution of the problem that afflicts the person. Any agent, be he a healer, pastor, prophet or diviner, as long as he demonstrates commitment and competence in the domain of the occult and in mobilising God or the spirits for the resolution of the problem, is always welcome. This means that for these people conversion is a circular rather than a linear and irreversible movement (Premawhardana, 2018).

The *ntumbuluko* is a cultural-religious system that conceives the world from a holistic perspective. Unlike modern thought, which divides knowledge into compartments and life into dichotomous spheres such as spiritual and material, natural and supernatural, subject and object, *ntumbuluko* sees existence as a whole which interpenetrates and interdepends (Meneses, 2004). At least two aspects should be retained from this observation. First, despite the *ntumbuluko* has a very strong religious dimension, it is more than this. It contains and interconnects various knowledge, experiences, values and principles covering fundamental areas of life such as ethics, politics, rituals, medicine and epistemology. For instance the leader who presides over rituals and sacrifices is at the same time the head of the community. In other words, his leadership implies an accumulation of priestly and political functions which in the modern cultural system are clearly separated. And the *nyanga*, contrary to the modern physician, also functions as diviner, psychologist, counsellor and judge, since the healing process implies also approaching the spiritual and social dimension of the person (Honwana, 2000; Meneses, 2004). Secondly, the binary subdivisions of the type: natural and supernatural, good and bad spirits are not seen from the perspective of Manichean dualism, very frequent among Christians. The ancestors, for example, live and move between the physical and the spiritual world. Mbiti (1970) captured this dual belonging well by calling them dead-

alive. Similarly there are people with powers to move and act in both the physical and the occult world. Through appropriate mechanisms of negotiation, even the most violent spirits can be integrated as family members and even bring income, when they enable people to function either as healers or prophets.

Although it is a heritage that is preserved and bequeathed from generation to generation, the *ntumbuluko* is not frozen in time and closed in on itself to the point that it cannot evolve and dialogue with other knowledge's (Castiano, 2010; Gyekye, 1997). People appropriate the *ntumbuluko* in a contextual way, which is why it always appears as a pragmatic and flexible system, always open to give and take. In reaction to the process of traditionalization (Meneses, 2004) to which the ancestral African cultures are subjected, a consciousness of cultural difference emerged which even seems to indicate some self-essentialization, as can be seen in expressions such as " *hina hi valande* (we are black)" and others with the same content. In fact, between *va lande* (blacks) and *xi lande* (language, cultural or religious tradition of black African origin), the distinction between race and culture is tenuous. But this type of discourse appears as a strategy of defence or attack on African cultures whenever they are thought of, not as themselves, but as the opposite of modernity. If for some people African backwardness is due to the prevalence or insistence on preserving tradition (Ngoenha, 1994:108- 109; Fry, 2000), for others it is precisely the opposite: African failure is due to its uprooting, cultural and epistemological disqualification to which it is subjected. Therefore, the African cultural and spiritual universe, which for some constitutes a curse from which Africans should liberate themselves, for others is the substratum which should have been and should be the basis for thinking about a development which is not simple mimicry, but is adequate to the African context and cultural specificities (Ngoenha, 1992; Cahen, 1996; Lundin, 1996; Magode, 1996). In the present work, we seek to understand *ntumbuluko* for what it is in itself. This does not mean advocating the monologue or enclosure of the *ntumbuluko*. On the contrary, whenever justified, reference to Western culture is made, but always from a comparative or intercultural rather than normative point of view.

2. **The Place of the Ancestors:** The central standpoint of *ntumbuluko* in its religious dimension, are the ancestors (Muya,2012). After all they are the ones who bequeath to the new generations the norms, the principles and foundations of life. It is they who protect and provide for the well-being of their families and the community, and it is to them that sacrifices are offered. Precisely because of this they are also one of the main points of divergence between *ntumbuluko* and Protestant Christianity. Some translations of the concept of ancestor into Christianity are presented below. Although they are situated in opposite perspectives, the first two approaches are made from the hegemonic Christian position, hence their tendency to be prejudiced or dismissive.

The first, in fact the oldest and most popular, consists in considering them enemies to be fought. This combat was and continues to be justified from the idea that they usurp the place of God (Chitlango, 2004). Since people believe that ancestors are gods, capable of solving their problems, they offer them worship and sacrifices, which embodies the sin of idolatry. Some scholars have also gone along with the same interpretation. In his ethnographic work, Junod (1996:318), calls the Tsongas ancestors *xikwembo*, god or ancestor-god. After describing their religion which he calls

ancestrolatry, he concludes that it cannot be equated with the higher religions because their ancestor-gods, lack both transcendence and moral attributes (1996:365).

A century later, the social historian Alda Matsinhe (2005), also qualifies the ancestors as *swikwembo* and the sacrifices and prayers dedicated to them as worship of the *swikwembo*. However for *ntumbuluko* practitioners, ancestors are not considered and treated as gods or *swikwembo*. It is true that, according to some scholars, in some African cultures, certain ancestors who acquired a legendary, mythological or heroic status ended up being deified and came to be treated as divinities (Mbiti,1970; West,2009). But in the Tsonga spiritual universe there is only one God who is in no way to be confused with the ancestors or any other spirit. When people want to refer to ancestors, they call them *vafi* (dead), *vabeleki* (progenitors), va *kokwane*(grandparents) or *venyi va misava* (owners of the land) when it comes to those who belong to the royal family. All these designations make it clear that ancestors are dead people with the status of progenitors and that they continue to exist and live with their families as spirits. Therefore, if for some reason they are called gods, it must be in figurative terms. This may happen for example when someone refers to his progenitor as his creator, in the sense of a proximate or second cause, as in the following case:

"If the community presents any concern, I go to the sacred tree, where I will present the things that concern the community to the owners of the land (*venyi va misava*)...there I stand before my god (*xikwembo*) whom I have seen through my eyes, so that he can direct to the God whom I do not see through my eyes...do you even understand? That means that my father who left me is he my first god, which is even referred to in the Bible when it says honour your father and mother so that your days may belong here on earth under the sun...so I also follow that...I respect my father as the god I saw through my eyes and when I do that, I honour my first god."

The second approach, developed by the so-called theology of enculturation, which has never been successful, consists of co-opting or integrating the ancestors into Christianity by bringing them closer to Christ. A considerable number of African theologians, including Bénézet Bujo, John Pobee, Charles Nyamiti, Kwame Bediako think that Jesus Christ should be presented to Africans as the greatest of all their ancestors (Palmer, 2008; Beyers and Mphahlele,2009). While the first approach presents the ancestors as enemy entities to be fought, the second approach intends to integrate them into the Christian religious system. It presents them therefore as spiritual entities of good and with a status that places them very close to Christ. Because Christ is the greatest ancestor, the African ancestors cease to be demons and become divines or saints. Although appealing, this proposal clearly clashes with the understanding of the African peoples. As we have seen, the ancestor is a human being who, although dead, maintains his family connection and his action is limited within that family. On the contrary, Jesus Christ is recognized as a divinity whose saving power extends eternally throughout the universe.

Palmer(2008), a professor of theology in an ecumenical college in Nigeria, says he once asked students to write an essay talking about Christ as their ancestor. The result was astonishing. Out of the eighty students only three considered Christ as their ancestor and the remaining seventy-seven were clearly against it or hesitant. And the reason is that

Jesus does not fulfil the cultural conditions to be called an ancestor. Among several arguments presented, the most important here is the fact that Jesus is not a consanguineous relative, that is to say a member of the same lineage or ethnic group, with which one has historical or family ties. Secondly, while the salvation of the ancestors is restricted to the immediate and transitory interests of the members of the family, in Christ salvation is universal and eternal, although it also includes these material and contingent aspects.

Even the Zione Churches that recognise ancestors, do not treat them as gods or confuse them with Jesus Christ. As in the *ntumbuluko,* ancestors are seen as progenitors, with responsibility to protect and provide for the well-being of the family and to intercede for it with God, as the statement of Deaconess Delfina of the Jerusalem Church elucidates:

"I channel my concerns to father (*bava*) and mother. They in turn take my worries to Christ. They are the ones who will tell our Lord Jesus Christ that look, our daughter is suffering because of this and that situation. Help her... I can't help but mention my father in prayer, asking God to keep the living and the dead in communion, because when I speak of the union of the living and the dead, I mean the Lord and my parents, so that I may have blessing."

Besides their role as mediators, in some churches the ancestors may be converted or transformed into *tintsumi* (angels), i.e. protecting spirits that enable prophets to unveil the hidden world. In this case, instead of acting as a healer, the possessed person starts acting as a prophet or prophetess (Honwana,2002; Cavallo,2013).

From the point of view of *ntumbuluko* practitioners, ancestors are progenitors who, despite existing only spiritually continue to exercise their responsibilities of caring, protecting and advising the family and on the other hand, to deserve the respect and honour of their descendants. It is true that because they are deprived of their physical capacity, they can no longer carry out their responsibilities as they did when they had physical existence. But this physical limitation is compensated by the spiritual power they acquire with death. As communication cannot be direct, it is done indirectly through mediums and is exteriorized symbolically in rituals and sacrifices. As Granjo (2009) states, these rituals do not mediate the relation between the faithful and divinities, but between descendants and progenitors. Many scholars have shown (Langa, 1992; Martinez, 2009), that family relations between ancestors and their descendants are guided by the principle of ontological hierarchy that places ancestors in the middle between the living and God. According to this system, ancestors are in a socially and ontologically superior position in relation to their living descendants. So although the physically living members know that above the ancestors there is God, the top of the hierarchy, they do not approach him directly, if not indirectly through their ancestors. The physically alive channel all their concerns to the ancestors, because it is they who are primarily responsible for resolving them.

During our stay in the field, when we asked people to identify their religion, even those who publicly practice ancestral beliefs and rituals always indicated a Christian denomination and never their ancestral beliefs. The term *tsonga* used to refer to religion is

wukhongueli and is only applied to Christianity or Islam. When referring to sacrifices to their ancestors they use the terms *mhamba* or *ku phalha* and reserve the term *xi khongoto* for Christian prayer or worship. This is not a case unique to the Tsongas. Other cultural groups such as Makuas (Pramawardhana, 2017) or Makondes (West, 2009) in north of Mozambique do not have even the term religion in their languages. Thus theologians such as Idowu even go so far saying that these sacrifices are forms of veneration or expression of respect rather than worship (Vincent, 2016). Although from the point of view of the practitioners these rituals and sacrifices are performed as means of intra-family communication, they still constitute a religious practice, if we understand by religion the relation between the human being and some transcendental power (Smith, 2017:22) or with God in particular, because ultimately, all Tonga ancestral religiosity points to him. Therefore, what is at issue is not the non-religiosity of ancestral rituals, but rather the reductionist and exclusivist conception of the term religion as conveyed in Eurocentric thinking.

3. **Ku Dzungulisa Ndzava: Diagnosing Well-Being:** We have already seen that despite their strict monotheism, it is the ancestors who occupy a prominent place in the *ntumbuluko*. We have also learned that this greater visibility of the ancestors to the detriment of God is explained by the principle of ontological hierarchy on which the *ntumbuluko* cosmology is based. The next step is to see what the central value this religion seeks to realise is. Scholars such as Mbiti (1970), Langa (1992) or Bénézet Bujo, referred to by Muya (2012), state that the centre of traditional African religion is the preservation and promotion of human life, hence its eminently anthropological nature. Is the ancestral religiosity of the *va Tchangana* of Mandlakazi also directed to the same end? Considering that, notwithstanding their diversity, the purpose of the rituals of this religion is to ensure protection and blessings and or to restore the social and cosmological order, we understand that more than cure, health or promotion of human life, its ultimate goal is well-being, understood as a stable, peaceful and harmonious existence between people with themselves and between them and the ancestors, God and the environment. Resorting to the ritual greeting, apparently without a religious purpose, we try here to show that although it cannot be reduced to this, the ancestral Tsonga religiosity consists in engaging the spiritual forces of good, to fight against everything that prevents people from enjoying well-being.

The *kundzungulisa ndzava* is a greeting which takes place, or at least is expected, whenever two or more people meet for the first time or after a separation, which even if it was not physical or long, requires them to inform each other how each one spent that interval of time. In this dialogue, each of the interlocutors narrates and expects to know from the other, the existential situations they have faced or the way in which a certain event took place, for instance the trip, the stay at work or any other place. Therefore, this act can happen on the street, in or in any other place where people meet. Even people who live together in the same house or who have slept together must greet each other when they wake up in order to know how the night was spent, if someone had bad dreams and what their meaning probably is or what care this situation should deserve.

''Even if we met yesterday, when morning comes we have to greet each other; even if I am with my husband, with whom I sleep, when morning comes we have to greet

each other, to know how he woke up... when it is someone who is travelling, we also have to know how he travelled, the situation of the family. Even during the day, when we separate, as soon as we meet again, we have to greet each other, so that each one may know how the day has gone by; both the one who has been away and myself who stay here at home. When it is someone who comes from a place, we need to know how he travelled and how his family is. For example, you told us that you have travelled well and your leader is still on his way. *Ndzava* is just that."

As can be understood, the question that introduces the greeting: *Mo yini ku pfuka* or *wo yini kupfuk*a, which has been translated as: *how do you do*, goes beyond the individual's biophysical health. It refers to life (*wu tomi*), but in the sense of social well-being. Through this greeting, the family becomes aware of situations of unease that threaten to disintegrate and destabilise the biological and social life of the family, such as illness, conflicts and disunity, the impossibility of forming or sustaining the home, spiritual torments, unemployment. These and many other misfortunes, summed up by the term *swikarato* (suffering), constitute the main theme of *kundzungulisa ndzava* in that as an obstacle to well-being, it is the existential challenge which people face daily.

If during the greeting any situation is raised, strategies of approach, advice or, in the case of illnesses, suggestions of medicinal plants, or competent persons who can help according to the hypothesis of their aetiology, also emerge. For example, the elder Olinda Ernesto Macacho says that if a young mother informs that her daughter is sick, she asks if she has been giving the child the moon medicine (*muri wa wheti).* If the answer is negative, she asks the mother to administer this remedy. Then she advises her to take the child to hospital. But if the illness persists, then she begins to suspect that it could be an illness caused by some spiritual entity. In this case, he advises the person to seek knowledge from healers and prophets about the hidden causes of the illness: "the person will seek to know what causes the illness to persist. For example, I who lost my parents have to know what my mother and father want for the *mhamba*...then I have to go, either to the muzione or to the nyanga".

In the study she conducted among the Tsongas of southern Mozambique, Meneses (2004) says that his informants used the term good life, but with the same meaning to which the concept of well-being described here refers. As he writes, To be in good health it is necessary to achieve an essential balance within oneself, to be at peace with one's family (including one's ancestors), with one's neighbours, with one's body (including hygiene), to be properly nourished (which nowadays includes having a job that guarantees one's livelihood) and protected from illnesses, whether natural or sent (Meneses, 2004:85).

As can be understood, well-being refers to the social and spiritual stability of the family or community. It is a holistic perspective, which interconnects supernatural forces, the living and the environment. This finding is in agreement with Prozesky (1984), for whom religion is a means of seeking well-being, understood as a perfect and lasting experience of joy, peace and happiness. However, because of the forces of evil, well-being is an ideal of life that is difficult to achieve in its entirety. People spend more time managing life (*ku renzeveta, phandar*), than enjoying well-being.

It should be noted that the family and by extension the community are places where social well-being is realised par excellence. It may be objected that this view stifles individual freedoms to the extent that the individual dissolves into the community. However, this is not the case. Far from dissolving individuality, this thinking is inscribed in the *Ubuntu* philosophy which, unlike Cartesianism that bases the existence of the human being from his individual capacity to think, it bases the humanity and dignity of the person from the intersubjective relationship he establishes with others (Gyekye, 2002; Castiano,2010; Ngoenha,2011). Like *Ubuntu*, what *kundzunguliza ndava* narratives claim is that human beings only self-realize and promote their individual potentialities in cooperation with others, that is, when they support and receive the support of others. A person's success is always collective because it relied on the intervention of other people and is only significant when it makes a difference in the lives of other people. In the same vein, Bono (2014), speaks of *Muntuism* or African personalism, according to which, while preserving his autonomy, the person is intrinsically connected with God and the Community. In the same way that the family is concerned about the well-being of each of its members, these in turn should be concerned about the well-being of others, because the suffering of one is the suffering of all. As many parents have noted, the fact that there are children and grandchildren who do not observe this greeting is seen as a sign of lack of consideration and absence of concern for the welfare of the family, in particular the parents. In this sense, the disappearance of the *kundzungulisa nzava* or, at best, its reduction to minimal formulas such as *u bom? ni bom* (are you doing well?, I am well), signals the progressive corrosion of family bonds and of the whole Cosmo vision on which they are based. It is ultimately the refusal of a social order based on the family in the name of another one, which puts the autonomy and freedom of the individual in first place. As the elder Olinda Ernesto Macacho would say, nowadays *ku tali xilungo, kambe khale a ku tali xitchangana* (nowadays one follows more modern life, when in the past one followed the *changane* tradition).

Notwithstanding the undeniable influence of the capitalist perspective that reduces well-being to simply "consuming commodities, goods and services" (Nogueira, 2002:120), for people in Mandlakazi, it is more than that. Although necessary, goods are not the sufficient condition. This approach seems to be closer to the though of Sen (2011), one of the critics of theories that reduce well-being to goods. According to this thinker, besides income and material goods, there are many limiting factors that reduce a person's ability to enjoy well-being. For example, a person with a physical disability, afflicted by an illness or deprived of his freedom, even if he has material goods, may not fully enjoy well-being, in the sense that these situations limit his ability to use his goods to live as he would like. In the *changane* context, we can add two other examples: spiritual torments or social isolation. In a context where family and community ties are fundamental, an abandoned, forgotten person, even with some material goods, does not live happily and in peace. In fact, the meaning of poverty in this context is not only the absence of material and financial resources, but also the fact of living in isolation, without a family or excluded from social ties. In the same way, those who live under spiritual torment or are victims of some magical action, even if they have possessions, do not live happily and in peace.

From all the description so far, we can say that from a religious point of view, *ntumbuluko* is a communication process mediated by a set of beliefs and rituals through

which living members interact with their ancestors, and through them, with God, with the aim of ensuring their social well-being. We noted that people tend to place social well-being above religious or doctrinal boundaries, hence their openness to engage religious beliefs and practices of both Christianity and *ntumbuluko*. We observed that, although it is a strictly monotheistic religion, those at the centre are the ancestors and not God; this is because relationships, both among the living and in the spiritual world, obey the principle of ontological hierarchy. We have also seen that the family is central firstly as a space for coexistence and self-realization and also as a means through which life is guaranteed, or at least its prolongation even after death. The ancestor only exists as long as he can interact with and be remembered by his relatives. Besides the privilege of being honoured by the descendants, the ancestor also has the responsibility of blessing and protecting them from evil. The following section describes in some detail the problem of evil in this religion.

4. **The Causal Explanation of Suffering and its Social Functions:** Although people are aware of the natural causes of suffering, there is a strong tendency to associate it with spiritual forces or magical powers. Because of that many scholars consider that the explanation of suffering in many Bantu cultures is based on the theory of spiritual causation (Zempléni, 1994; Cavallo, 2013). However, given that the spiritual and natural worlds interpenetrate and implicate each other, contrary to what may be claimed, the causal explanation of *ntumbuluko* is not entirely spiritual. As will be discussed below, the spiritual forces that cause evil are actually people acting on their own volition or under manipulation by a human being endowed with powers to do so and the motives that lead these spirits to torment people are wholly social. This assumption will be supported throughout the description of the following possible causes of evil: disobedience to ancestors, violation of purification rituals, witchcraft, *ku khendla*, tormenting spirits and deviant behaviour of some healers and prophets.

- **Disobedience to the Ancestors:** We have said that by their nature the ancestors are providers of well-being. But this happens only when they are obeyed. If family members disobey or neglect the ancestral principles they can be disciplined. For example, if the family does not perform sacrifices in their honour and memory, or when they are not consulted or at least informed about important aspects of the family such as, for example, the performance of sacrifices, the performance of the *lobolo*, the occurrence of an important journey or, in the case of the ancestors of the royal family, the construction of public works, the process of choosing and enthroning the leader, among other cases. This discipline may be administered in a direct way, when they cause some misfortune such as illness to the target himself or his children, or indirectly when they fail to provide for the well-being or protect the family or the community. In this case they discipline by omission. The lack of rain or the low productivity of the fields is some examples. There are cases in which they may inflict some evil, not for educational reasons but to induce the physically alive to come into contact with them. It happens when they want to communicate something. In that case, the disease serves as if it were a telephone ring tone that alerts the physically alive that someone among the ancestors is calling. And the way to answer the call is to do consultations.

The process of consultation, technically known by terms such as *ku renzeleka* (go round) or *ku huma* (go out) or even *kufamba uswi lava* (go looking for), can be done with one or several agents with spiritual powers, namely: diviners, healers or prophets. Through this consultation, they will know if the cause of the problem is the ancestors or others. In the case of ancestors, they will know which one and what he wants. For example, if an ancestor wants the parents to name the new born child after him, he can make the child have pain and or spend all his time crying. The same thing can happen if one wishes an offering to be given to him. Although there is no deliberate intention here to make the family suffer, this sign is nevertheless an evil insofar as it causes suffering in the family and in the person targeted in particular. The punishment for disobedience also occurs with the parents still alive. Besides their caring and educational responsibilities, the progenitors are also considered elders (*masungukati, madota*), who through their life experience have acquired knowledge, experiences and fundamental life lessons that make them true spiritual and moral authorities. For example, for leader Manuel Matsinhe, the problem of the disorganisation of the ancestral system of governance could be solved if a meeting were called with the elders, as only they know the principles of succession and indigenous governance, which have been distorted since the arrival of FRELIMO: "We should call leaders and elders (*masungukati*), those who are considered to be old. They are the ones who will tell us the law. So no one should hate the old; to hate the old is to hate *ntumbuluku*; it is in the old that the law is found, in the old days hating an old man was a bad sign, you could get sick".

However it should be noted that one's elder status does not always derive from one's age. It also depends on the position the person occupies in the kinship system and in the social order. The kinglet Dingane, for example, was the youngest community leader we had the opportunity to meet. At only eighteen years of age, he already held the position of leader of the first echelon, certainly the highest position in the so-called traditional leadership. In this capacity he received respect and honours even from people older in age. He had certain privileges and opportunities that others did not have. Speaking specifically of the *Kuphalha*, the leader Manuel Matsinhe, noted that this rite could be led even by a child, depending on his social position or determination by the ancestors themselves. "If one indicates the person who should perform the *kuphalha*, regardless of whether it is small it should be that one." Even in these cases, the young person by age comes to act with the elders and as the elder, which means that the sacredness of gerontocracy power prevails. Although elders do not have some innate or acquired spiritual power such as the azande witches described by Evans-Pritchard (2005), their sadness at feeling helpless or dishonoured can result in a negative energy that will overshadow or curse the lives of their offspring. The sadness of a mother who is helpless for her child for example, regardless of whether she is alive or dead, generates an involuntary curse on her child. Suddenly his life becomes all about failure, illness and or bad luck. Depending on the interpreters, this theory can have two different results: if the idea that the curse is the result of an intentional action prevails, that woman ends up being doubly punished. In the end, she will continue to be helpless and mistreated by her son, and now with the stigma of a sorceress. Knowing the family and social repulsion to which she will be subjected, the end of this woman is social death, and not infrequently, physical death as well. But if the interpretation that holds the son responsible for his suffering prevails, he will be

advised to honour his progenitors so as to attract blessings rather than a curse. Deaconess Delfina, for example, believes that many people who consult her suffer precisely because of forgetting their progenitors, so, she states: "after praying, I tell you that you are in conflict with your father, because since he left this earth you have never addressed a prayer to him. And the person asks, can I go to the healer? I say no, you just have to gather your relatives on the day your father died and fraternise together in his memory. That is enough, you will recover your health".

As one can notice, the diagnosis that is presented in the form of a prophecy is actually a culturally known argument that honouring and respecting ancestors results in blessings and the opposite results in a curse. Of course, as prophetess and not a healer, she presents her diagnosis in the form of a prophetic revelation given by the Holy Spirit. The possibility of healing lies in the positive energy that derives from the connection and family harmony. If after the ritual the illness persists, there will always be another explanation within the universe of spiritual or occult causation, but even so the ritual remains relevant because it managed to induce the family to reunite and honour their ancestors, thus keeping them alive and ultimately reproducing the family order based on respect for the elders. While the Church advises against sacrifices to the dead, the supporters of ancestral beliefs and rituals understand that this is a way of expressing respect and honour to their progenitors, because although physically absent, they continue to live with the family in the form of spirits. In this dispute, they also evoke the Bible. For example, for the traditional leader Pedro Francisco Mondlane, as we saw above, honouring and keeping alive the memory of the ancestors is not only a requirement of the *ntumbuluko*, it is also a biblical commandment: 'the bible teaches us that if your father has died you must have time to remember him. So we do that in a ceremony called *mhamba*, which in Portuguese is called mass. In fact, if the Church teaches that Jesus has his birthday, why is it, questioned Mrs. Lúcia Júlia Mathe, that when it comes to the ancestors "they say that everything ends at the burial?". We find the same argument in the work of Chiziane and Martins (2015). They also say that to worship or venerate the ancestors is to fulfil the fifth biblical commandment. But it is also a way to preserve the history of the family or of a community, depending on the cases. With Mbiti (1970), we can say that it is these rituals that avoid or at least postpone for some time the death of the ancestors.

Like many other people, Chiziane and Martins (2015), question why it should cause so much strangeness when in some churches ancestors are venerated or worshipped. As far as we know, this practice is found in the Catholic Church and in the Zionist churches. In the lectionary used in some Protestant Churches, such as the United Methodist Church, there is the so-called All Saints' Day, which from a liturgical point of view is dedicated to the memory of the dead. Therefore, the principle of respect and preservation of the memory of those who have died is present, regardless of whether it is observed or not. What no longer finds acceptance is the adoration and offering of sacrifices to ancestors, because according to the Christian faith, only God should be adored. And since Christ shed his blood, there is no longer any need to shed another blood for any saving act.

Finally it should be noted that the principle that disobedience breeds punishment and obedience results in blessings functions not only to legitimise the social order, but also functions at the community level to vindicate and legitimise the power of traditional chiefs in the architecture of the modern state. These leaders and other advocates of *ntumbuluko* claim that environmental crises, which modern discourse interprets as the effect of climate change, are actually the result of not valuing their spiritual work as custodians of the land and ancestral order. According to the recollections of Deaconess Delfina, in the old days, when there was a shortage of rain, they used to pray the *kuphalha*. After this prayer, the rain would fall. The same happened when there was a lack of production, for example of cashew nuts. Even the sowing of the seed was preceded by a kuphala. In fact, according to leader Albino Mondlane, in the past, when the *ntumbuluko* was followed properly, the chief received revelations, either directly or indirectly through mediums, about what was happening and what should be done. Once the required procedures and rituals were observed, the rain would fall and production would abound. In other words, the scarcity of rain, which modern discourse explains as a consequence of climate change and the harmful methods used by the communities, is interpreted as the result of the abandonment, misrepresentation or trivialisation of *ntumbuluko*. It signals the corrosion of the harmony and cosmic balance that presides over the relations between the ancestors, God, nature and men. As kinglet Albino Mondlane recalled, when the district government lamented the lack of rain, the traditional leaders asked to be given space to perform their rituals, and the problem would be resolved. In the absence of solutions to the socioeconomic crisis, the district government has no alternative but to give in. As happens all over the country, the traditional chiefs have become indispensable partners for the political powers. They feature prominently on commemorative dates such as Heroes' Day or the day of the battle of Coolela. They also preside over the *ku phalha* at ceremonies to lay the first stone for the construction of a public infrastructure, as a way of informing, asking permission and protection for the royal family's ancestors, euphemistically treated as owners of the land. Thus the patriarchal power already established in the family finds its effectuation also at the community level.

- **Violation of Purification Rituals:** Evil can also happen when someone comes into contact with contaminated people or objects before the purification rituals and procedures have been observed. For example if a woman who has just given birth starts having contacts with other people outside those assisting her or having sexual relations, even with her own husband before certain rites and procedures are performed, the child may become ill or die. The other example is of dead people. If the members of the bereaved family or anyone who was in contact with the dead person or participated in his burial do not observe certain purification rites, they may become ill or affect other people. Death and the dead themselves can contaminate or pollute the environment. They represent a very serious danger, hence the need to observe certain interdictions and care. Whoever comes into contact with a dead person carries the curse of death (*khombo* or *nzingo*), a negative and dangerous energy that can result in illness and death if it is not purified. Even the house where the person lived or died, household utensils especially those made of metal, become hot and therefore dangerous (*swa hisa*). Whoever uses these objects before they are

purified risks carrying the curse into his or her life or family, with all the consequences that this entails. This is why in the past; children were not allowed to see a dead person. When there was a death in a family, they were taken away as a way to spare them from the *nzingo*.

This thinking is not exclusive to Mandlakazi communities. Anthropological studies show that in many peoples, inside and outside Africa, people resort to rituals to deal with those events considered dangerous. During the course of their lives, people go through moments of transition from one social position to another, according to the social system in force. When someone finds himself in this phase, he stands in the middle between the previous position he has left and the new one he is entering. The baby in the mother's womb, for example, is neither in the group of the physically alive nor in that of the dead (spirits), in the same way, the corpse of someone who has just died, cannot be counted in the world of the physically alive, but neither is it yet part of the world of the spirits. Being uncertain, unknown and out of place within the social system, the person at this stage becomes polluted and dangerous. Thus the newly deceased, the baby and the mother herself, are in a dangerous situation and are equally a danger to others. In order to control or neutralize this danger, rituals are needed to pass this liminal phase and to integrate or aggregate into the new social position (Turner,1974; Douglas,1966). The problem is that this conception finds no space in the Church. It is true that, according to the testimonies gathered, some Zione Churches, given their greater closeness to ancestral cosmologies, administer purification rituals. The Catholic Church, if not practicing, at least tolerates them. But the Protestant Churches are clearly opposed. They maintain that the prayers and the Word preached in the funeral service are sufficient to purify and free the family from any impurity, so that there is no need for another ritual or sacrifice. Except that the principle of purification by the Word (*mu basisiwilwe hi rito*) advocated by these Churches does not convince some people. They feel that it is not enough to remove the curse of death. So if a family refuses to perform the ndzaka, the other death that comes will be associated with that fact. The chief Dingane witnessed one such case in his community. A family lost one of its members for the second time and the causal explanation given was the refusal of the *ndzaka*:

"When we became aware of the case, we asked if they had performed the *ndzaka* at the time of the first death. They told us that the Church had advised them not to perform ndzaka because they had already been purified in the name of the Lord...It was a sadness for us because we lost a person" - lamented the *régulo.*

Anthropologists say that the relevance of rituals lies in the fact that they help people realise certain values (Robbins,2014). The *ndzaka* realises a very important value, which is purification and the restoration of the social order destabilised by the occurrence of death. When the Church advises against its practice, without however presenting either another alternative ritual or a consistent explanation of death, it creates a void, which leads people to behave as disobedient or spiritually mature. Here the Church has at least two alternatives: promote a new understanding about death and the dead or include in its teaching and liturgy a Christian ritual of post-death purification. Otherwise, the risk of dis-authorisation will always be present.

- **Sorcery:** The most expressive cause of evil is sorcery (*wu loi*). Sorcerers (*valoi*) are human beings with the power to harm or even kill other people, even if invisibly. Such acts can happen either by simple rituals and curse words uttered against the victim, by the direct action of the witchdoctor himself or by spirits that he uses as instruments. Having already killed and sometimes eaten the flesh of their victims, sorcerers use the spirits of these or other people for their own evil ends. Sorcery is a very present phenomenon in people's imagination in Mozambique and around the world (West, 2009; Evans-Pritchard, 2005). However, at least in Mandlakazi, it is not an object of discussion or public conversation. There are possibly two reasons for this silence. First is that those suspected of witchcraft are very close people: family members, neighbours, colleagues from school or the service even church brothers. The same people with whom the person lives and socialises, who make up his community of belonging, are paradoxically the suspect group in the event of any misfortune. That is why it has not been easy or advisable to point them out directly. The other reason has to do with the need to protect the moral and physical integrity of the supposed witchdoctors. Generally, people suspected or accused of practising witchcraft are discriminated against, humiliated and, quite often, physically raped or killed. That is why the government advises against these practices. So the providers of these services avoid revealing the identity of the alleged sorcerers or when they do they tend to be cautious. For example, according to Bishop Julio Francisco Chissano, leader of the Zion Apostolic Union Church and representative of the churches at Mandlakazi District level, in his denomination they do not perform divination (*ku xokara*) to point out sorcerers and have advised other prophets to avoid this practice:

  "There is a type of prophecy that causes conflict in families. We help and advice those prophets not to create conflicts. I am talking about those who use *ku chokara* (a form of divination) we do not allow that...those who when they prophesy accuse other people of being witches, we do not accept it. We do not believe in sorcery. Even when things are difficult, we arrange certain alternatives *(ti lhulelo)* to heal without accusing people."

  But when reports of witchcraft reach the Traditional Chiefs, locally known *as ti hosi ta misava* are duly followed up. When sorcery is suspected a public meeting is called and with the help of experts a ritual is performed to identify the sorcerer. Unlike private cases, where the diagnosis and reparation, when it has to happen, are at the alleged victim's discretion, at this level both the process of identifying the sorcerer and the possible reparation are public acts and occur under certain procedures. Besides the presence of the public on the day itself, the healer who performs the ritual of identification of the witchdoctor must be recognized and authorized by the Traditional Healers of Mozambique Association (METRAMO). In addition, the government of the Administrative Post or District has to be informed. However, it should be noted that like the case of the Macondes studied by West (2009), or in other parts of Africa (Mbiti, 2001), the power to operate in the invisible in itself is neutral. Its goodness or badness depends on the legitimacy of its origin, but above all on the character and moral integrity of the person who uses it. It becomes evil if it has been borrowed or bought from a healer or sorcerer (*ku khendla*) and or if it is used to cause death or suffering. But if it is a gift or a vocation (divine or ancestral) and is used for

the common good, such as protecting against sorcerers, performing rituals that bring rain, preventing accidents, warding off plagues, it is considered good.

As a political and spiritual leaders Traditional chiefs are expected to have this power, not to do evil, but to protect the community under their jurisdiction against sorcerers. The fact is that in the ancestral system, the power to rule extends to the unseen world. "In a single area, no two wizards can reign"- said Chief Dingane. So even leaders not endowed with spiritual powers, at least must have a trusted healer by their side, who can advise them in this matter. We find the same perception in the memoirs of the leader Manuel Matsinhe. According to him, when there was a lack of cashew, the regulo used his powers to perform rituals that resulted in rain and the productivity of the cashew trees. Therefore, political power is associated with spiritual power. The two reinforce each other. In addition to the support of the healers, the chief, according to kinglet Dingane, should ideally have spiritual powers capable of dominating all the sorcerers in the area. In other words, he has to be the strongest wizard, to control the zone: "even we work like this...you can see me sleeping, but I'm actually working...".

From the point of view of the kinglet Dingane to have effective control, the leader has to have mastery of both the occult world and the visible world. Having already some skills in the occult world his challenge was to further develop the ability to control the visible world that is, dominating also those who act by day, based on arguments. That is why he showed a great interest in philosophy, because he thought that although it was a difficult discipline, it helped him to understand and control minds: "If you know philosophy, no one can disturb you... if a person comes at night, I will see him through tradition and he who comes during the day, I will see him through philosophy". This description shows the importance attached to people who possess the power to dominate the spiritual or occult world. The prestige and esteem of a leader, be he a prophet or a healer, is proportional to his ability to dominate and, or engage the spiritual forces of good to fight evil. Following Castiano (2010:74), in his interpretation of Tempels (1945), one can say that this kind of people fall into the category of sages, because they possess knowledge about the laws of forces, know how they interact and can dominate or engage them with a view to increasing life force, i.e. human life.

- **Ku Khendla:** *Ku khendla* is an act that exemplifies the immoral and or illegitimate use of power. It consists of someone requesting a power from a witchdoctor or a healer to help him/her achieve certain goals in life, for example, enrichment, success in some enterprise, promotion in service, charisma in leadership, protection, among others. At first glance, this seems to be a positive service. But this is not the case, since the condition of success and the payment of the service implies suffering even death for some members of the family. If the person who lends this power does not honour the demands, then the spirit who has been at its service or the provider himself will torment, even kill, both the beneficiary himself, if he is still alive, and members of his family, as a way of demanding payment for the service rendered or the fulfilment of some clause of the contract. Instead of helping, the spirit starts tormenting the family as a way of demanding justice. In this condition, it is called

mudliwa, that is, someone who has been used (literally eaten) without being paid and who demands the payment due. The family will be obliged to enter into a complex and painful process of negotiation with this spirit. Depending on the cases, this process may culminate in its expulsion, return or integration into the family. This last possibility occurs when the spirit accepts to stop tormenting the family and, in compensation, to receive one of the daughters as his wife. In this case, instead of *mudliw*a, he is considered a son-in-law (*mukonwana*).

According to Deaconess Delfina Sitoe, one of the very well-known *ku khendla* providers was Mungoi. As she told us, many families were wiped out because of the spirits of Mungoi. People who solicited Mungoi's spirits or powers would indeed get rich, but after some time, both the person who solicited and his family members would start dying. These deaths served as a sign for people to realise that the wealth the family boasted was not the result of natural effort. It is in this sense that the practitioners of *kukhendla* are considered agents of evil and objects of reproach in the community. For, in the name of self-centred interests, they mortgage the life of an entire family. Here *ku khendla* appears as a discourse of criticism against enrichment made at the cost of other people's suffering and death. In other words, just as in modern scientific discourse, those who flaunt wealth that does not match their income are suspected of illicit enrichment, money laundering or the practice of corruption, for the same reasons, the theory of spiritual or magical causation, would suspect these people of practising sorcery or *ku khendla*.

- **Vengeful and Tormenting Spirits:** With the entrance of the *Ngoni* people into Mozambique following the *Mfecane* migrations, two new categories of spirits emerged in southern Mozambique: the *mipfukwa* and the *swikwembo*. These spirits are the spirits of dead people from the Ngoni people themselves or of the *Ndau* people who, after their subjugation, migrated with the *Ngoni* from central to southern Mozambique when the capital of the *Ngoni* Empire was moved from *Manyikeni* to Gaza. The civil war also contributed to the spread of Ndaus spirits in the south, as there was much contact between the two groups at the time. Many Ndaus soldiers supposedly killed by those from the south or who died in the south became *mipfukwa* (Honwana, 2002).

The *mipfukwa* are spirits of people who died bitterly and with the power to return to take revenge (*ku pfuka*). People of these ethnic groups, particularly the *Ndau*, when killed are considered to have the power to return to take revenge on those who have killed them or caused them harm (Honwana, 2002). Such revenge which may extend to the family members of the targeted may even result in deaths. To leave the family in peace, they usually make demands, including the provision of a wife and a house to live in. When this happens the spirit is integrated into the family and becomes *mukonwane* or *mukwashane* (son-in-law). Instead of being a strange and vengeful spirit, it becomes a member of the family. Both healers and churches that provide spiritual or demonic deliverance services resort to the belief in this type of spirit to explain most of the difficulties women face in life, especially those related to infertility, setting up and or stabilising a marriage relationship. Known as husband of the night or spiritual husband, they are becoming popular in the milieus in urban

environments, thanks to their mediatisation in Pentecostal circles, these spirits, (Cavallo,2013; Fiorotti.2017).

But beyond the simple revenge or demand for spiritual justice, there are cases in which the torments aim at obliging the possessed to welcome the spirits and initiate themselves in the *nyanga* (healer) trade. This type of spirit is known as *swikwembo* and the torments caused by it are known as calling sickness or spirit sickness (Cavallo, 2013; Chiziane and Martins,2). According to Igreja (2003), after the sixteen-year civil war another category of vengeful spirits emerged in the centre of the country, known as *Gamba*, which, similarly to the well-known *mipfukwa,* find in girls their favourite victims. These spirits are the spirits of young soldiers who died in the war, having already been treated with the power of post-mortem vengeance. As they died without having had the opportunity to marry, when they appear they manifest themselves in girls, unless they do not exist in that family, in order to fulfil their dream of marrying and having children. From this assumption when some psychological alterations or trance manifestations occur in the girls they are immediately associated with the *Gamba* spirit. After negotiations, the spirit is tamed and integrated into the family, but in return it enables his wife to work as a healer. Instead of being victim of torments, the girl starts to play an important social role, which gives her power and respect in the community. According to Igreja (2003), the *Gamba* spirit is replacing the *pfukwa*, which, as mentioned above, is also a vengeful spirit, but incapable of qualifying people to be healers.

Despite their violence, especially in the first manifestations, the ngoni and ndaw spirits, when duly integrated in the family and submitted to due training, are capable of enabling the possessed to exercise the functions of *nhamussoro* (healer with powers of exorcism, divination and treatment of diseases). Some Zionist Churches manage to convert these spirits, in principle considered as diabolic, to Christianity, provided that the possessed, who may even be a practising healer, accepts to be converted. He will become a prophet, using the same spirits, not as *swikwembo*, but as t*intsumi* or *mimoya*. As can be understood, we have here a game of translation and negotiation of the meaning of spirits both within the ancestral spiritual universe and between this and the Christian denominations. In the *Ntumbuluko*, as in the *Ziones*, an evil spirit can be converted into a good and productive spirit. In the Neo-Pentecostal Churches, as will also be discussed in the following chapter, the spirits, generically called demons, tend to be seen indiscriminately as evil and in clear opposition to Christians.

- **Malicious Spiritual Service Providers:** Some healers are suspected of being charlatans, because instead of healing they spend their lives deceiving or harming others. For Honwana (2002), the practice of quackery may be associated with the country's social and economic crisis. But it also reveals the sharp degradation of moral values and principles that is witnessed in almost all social spheres. While some find in this charlatanism an opportunity to discredit divinatory practices and ancestral beliefs, others, while recognising the phenomenon, consider that the problem does not lie in the institution itself, but in its misuse by people driven by personal ambitions and interests. These are people who in principle have no spiritual vocation to exercise

the activity, but nevertheless buy or lend spirits through the *ku khendla*. Chiziane and Martins (2015: 96) also acknowledge that " there are criminal healers", but further argue that misconduct should not only be blamed on the healers, but also on the clients who entice the healers for evil purposes: "The patient is a Judas, a traitor. And that healer is a murderer" (Chiziane and Martins,2015:97). The authors appreciate the fact that the Church tries to combat this evil, but regret the fact that such combat consists only in demonizing and criminalizing healers by confusing them with witchdoctors. Instead, they feel that the Church should welcome, educate and transform the healers into morally upright people, for the evil is in the heart of the person and not in the institution itself.

In fact this accusation happens even among the Churches. The Nations for Christ Ministerial Church for instance, locally known as *ka Muhanyisi* (to the Saviour), has been accused of using false or magical powers to deceive people. Despite being recent, this Church has indeed attracted many people from other Churches, especially young people. While some see in the acts of that Church the manifestation of the power of God, which rarely happens in other Churches, others think that those practices are false for mere profit: "If the *munhanyisi* (saviour) is able to save, why doesn't he heal those in hospital? - so say some religious leaders who are still in doubt about the powers displayed in the Nations for Christ Ministerial Church. So the temptation or suspicion to misuse power is present in everyone. This is why Deaconess Delfina, instead of associating the phenomenon to a particular religion or group, she says that the difference is between those who work by vocation and those who work for money, that is between those who are passively possessed by spirits and those who buy or strengthen *(vo yengetela)* their divinatory or prophetic power.

In this last section it was evident that both well-being and ill-being depend on spiritual forces. Mbiti (2001) says that while people are not ignorant of moral evil, the fact that it is believed that no evil occurs at random, or by mere coincidence, even moral evil often ends up being related to the action of some spiritual force or occult power. This does not mean a total spiritualisation of evil as some advocate. For the spirits who cause evil are people who act of their own free will or under the manipulation of someone else, and the reasons for that action are social. The spiritual world is more a place of struggle to resolve social causes. Therefore, like Christianity, *ntumbuluko* explains suffering as a reflection of moral evil. The difference is that while in the Protestant tradition suffering is generally seen as the result of the violation of divine norms, by the victim himself or, in other cases by third parties, in *ntumbuluko* it is seen as the result of the action of magical or spiritual powers. As will be further elaborated in the following chapter, we find the same understanding in the theologies of healing and liberation, practiced in some Zionist and Neo-Pentecostal churches. As in *ntumbuluko*, the performances of these theologies, which otherwise attract many people, are more oriented towards the engagement of divine powers, in the struggle against spiritual or demonic forces that hinder people's well-being.

- **Concluding Considerations:** This brief description has shown that *ntumbuluko* and Christianity are different religious-cultural systems, but not antagonistic. The notions of ancestry, well-being and suffering, discussed throughout this text, although brief,

have shown that beyond incompatibilities, there are similarities and convergences. There are also common values often expressed and translated in different ways or even practices that are apparently the same but express divergent values. Let me recall just one example. We have seen that while in *ntumbuluko* ancestors are treated as providers and protectors, worthy of blood sacrifices. In Protestantism, the dead in general, play no role in the economy of salvation. The only provider and saviour, whose blood washes and saves all is Christ. However, the two religious expressions converge in the need to respect and preserve the memory of the ancestors. From the Christian point of view, the challenge would be to know how to explore and maximise the point of convergence. But another interesting exercise would be to study why so much attention and fear is given to the dead than to the living, even in our churches, or even to examine what kind of beliefs and values are behind the ceremonies alluding to the dead and the systematic visits to the cemeteries that take place on Saturdays in Maputo City. Is it mere preservation of the family memory or an effort to attract the blessings of the dead and neutralise their dangerousness? For nothing prevents people from resorting to Christian rituals to express ancestral and Christian values at the same time. This is an example that shows how difficult it is to draw a clear line, at least on a subjective level, between these two religions, given the interconnectedness of their beliefs and the cultural means of their expression.

Therefore, despite the official discourse claiming incompatibility and antagonism between the two religious expressions, in practice there are more continuities than ruptures between them. This observation leads us to think that it is possible and even necessary to develop a Christian theology based on these intercultural and interreligious connections, so as to make the Gospel of Christ more relevant, meaningful and present in all dimensions of people's lives. The second part of this study will be dedicated precisely to this undertaking.

III. RELIGIOUS MOBILITY AND ITS THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present article reflects on how to approach religious mobility. First of all, we will look at how the Church interprets and deals with this phenomenon. As will be shown, both the Protestant Churches and the Churches focused on healing and spiritual liberation advise against religious mobility because they consider it an attack on the purity of faith. The Protestant discourse preaches distancing and separation with *ntumbuluko*, the theologies of healing and liberation, demonizing healers and their rituals, but at some time they use ancestral cosmologies to explain and address suffering. Our assumption is that both strategies are neither culturally nor theologically consistent. While detachment results in an alienated and syncretic Christianity, instrumental engagement also promotes spiritual alienation and syncretism. Instead of being covert, here syncretism is institutional since it is formally promoted in worship. Following closely the relational and dialogical approach that the relations of continuity and complementarity suggest, we will interpret religious mobility and the hybridity arising from it as reflecting the intercultural cohabitation and translation between Christianity mediated by Western culture and African ancestral cultures and religions. In this sense we will argue that contrary to what the purity discourse claims, hybridity is not a pathological exception of the immature Christians, but the true face of Tsonga Christianity, which needs to be positively understood and explored. This is why we suggest intercultural theology as a fruitful theoretical reference to approach this phenomenon.

1. **Religious Mobility Among Protestant Believers:** From the analysis of the collected data, it is possible to identify at least two theories that Christians in Mandlakazi use to explain religious mobility. One, represented by the official discourse of historic Protestantism says that people move between different healers and churches because of their spiritual immaturity. The other, shared by the *ntumbuluko* and the *Zione* and Neo-Pentecostal Churches, says that people move around in search of solving their social and spiritual problems (*swikarato*). These positions also reflect the missiological tendency of each group. Historical Protestantism generally avoids offering healing rituals to its members, while both the *ntumbuluko* purveyors and the Zionist and Pentecostal churches make this service their main mission.

   - **The Thesis of Spiritual Immaturity:** The thesis of the official Protestant discourse is that people who transit through different healers or prophets lack spiritual maturity: they are not perfect, or have not yet matured in faith (*a va helelangui*). Spiritual immaturity means the absence of a firm, patient and persistent faith. Immature Christians are those who go to Church looking for immediate solutions to their concerns. In Protestant preaching they are described as those who often change colour like the chameleon or who go two ways. Instead of remaining pure in faith and fixed in their Church, they attend other religions or denominations. According to Carolina Jamal "In the Churches we are taught that we must come out of the darkness into the light, that we must not worship two gods...or walk on two paths". Therefore "those who still practice the *kuphalha*" have not yet accepted Jesus, they are only friends of the Church (*mungano wa kereke*) ".

     A mature person, who knows Jesus Christ, does not follow two different paths. He does not spend his life changing colour, like a chameleon, that is, he does not practise religious mobility. Therefore, for Pastor Laura Mausse, not even the argument of strange or persistent illnesses is enough to justify a return to the *ntumbuluko*. Although she acknowledges that it is difficult to abandon belief in the ancestors, she maintains that all problems, however difficult, should be handed over to God alone. Once converted, the true believer remains faithful and firm in the only God. "Even when the situation gets worse," the pastor assures, "we preserve in prayer and continue to go to the hospital. And if the person has to die, let it be at the hospital, because, according to the pastor, it will have the recognition and approval of the community, than dying at the home of a healer. Therefore, besides the fact of preventing a return to the *ntumbuluko*, those who opt for the hospital, in the view of the shepherdess, even when they die, leave a good example of faith, which ensures recognition and appreciation. While the hospital provides biomedical treatment, the Church provides spiritual and social care. In the Church, says the pastor, "we find family, we find brothers who will help us even when we can no longer do anything.

     Whoever trusts in this God who can do everything and controls everything does not need to fear or ask for help from any other spiritual power? Therefore, in the name of this faith, Pastor Laura advises against consulting the ancestors. And to support her position, she referred to the sad experience caused by her children's unemployment. She has brought them up with a lot of effort, but they are not getting

jobs. What I have done - says the Pastor - is to kneel and pray to God. I say to God: 'Here are my children, you gave me these children and the strength to teach them; today they have no jobs, they have nothing, do your will over them; I have already failed, may the Lord guide them'. Therefore, the values of persistence and perseverance in the Church even in difficult times are present even in Protestant teaching and preaching, as they contribute to building and protecting a pure and fixed Christian faith. For instance, during the Sunday school class preceding the service held on October 3, 2021 at the Church of the Nazarene in Thavane, the leader used the metaphor of the chameleon to exhort the members to avoid such behaviour.

- **The Thesis of Suffering:** Contrary to the official Protestant position, the Zionist and Neo-Pentecostal Churches recognise that people are in search of answers to their afflictions. According to Deaconess Delfina Sitoe, even members of Churches which prohibit healing consultations and rituals only comply with this orientation when they are experiencing moments of abundance (*nkama wa ku xura*), that is, a phase of tranquil and peaceful life. At that moment they behave as pure Christians, freed from ancestral beliefs. But when they are experiencing the phase of heat and hunger (*mumu ni ndlala*), that is the time of suffering, as is the case of those persistent illnesses that resist both the most devout and patient acts of faith and the best hospital treatments, then they return to the *ntumbuluko.*

  " When it's time of hunger, whatever you catch cook and eat, when the time of plenty comes, you will choose. The same thing happens when you are in suffering. You can pray, fast, but all that may not work. Then someone comes along and tells you, "Look, if you could just go to him, he could help you. Then you put your Bible and your prayers beside you and you go to him. He will tell you to go and pray to your ancestors (*famba uya phahla ka vafi va wena*), this is the only way that the person will live. Since you are in suffering, you will think, everything is the same. Then you will do *kuphalha*, though you are in the Word, for the time is of suffering."

  Besides ti *nyanga and mazione*, with the arrival of the Neo-Pentecostal Churches, mobile-prone Protestants now have yet another alternative for consultation. While some make only sporadic visits, others end up leaving their churches for the Neo-Pentecostals. Many pastors consider that this type of behaviour also configures spiritual immaturity because it results from a wrong understanding about the nature and action of God. They argue that such people do not seek God for who he is, nor do they respect his sovereignty. Instead, they seek a God who responds immediately to their afflictions and desires. That is why when another church appears apparently with more powers to make God act assertively and immediately, they move there. The experience of Superintendent Sergio Muhai is illuminating in this regard:

  "There are people who left our Church when Universal first came in. People went to Universal Church, but when the Honório Church appeared, the same people who had left for Universal, left again and went to the Honório Church. We started to witness that, because Mandlakaze is tiny, you can see these movements".

  While the official Protestant discourse interprets mobility as pathology, a reflection of spiritual immaturity, for those who practice it means a search for an

answer to their social and spiritual problems. Although it occurs at an intra-religious level, it is part of the same mobile and experimental religiosity practised by the supporters of *ntumbuluko* and which places the search for well-being above religious or denominational boundaries. And even among Protestants it is not as strange as it might seem. Elder Olinda for example, who is very familiar with the Protestant doctrine of rupture and incompatibility, clearly said that in case of suspicious illness, she does not hesitate to advise a consultation with the healers or the prophets. When I asked him why he advised such concoctions if it was a practice forbidden by the Church he replied: " it is not that those of the Swiss Mission do not follow the *ntumbuluko*. They also follow it, only they do it in secret (*vo tumbela*)". So, although not officially admitted, the thesis of suffering is not at all strange among Protestants.

2. **Walking on Two Paths:** After examining the ancestral religion of the Tsongas, which he calls ancestrolatry, Junod (1996:385) and his encounter with revealed religions, arrives at the following verdict: "my conclusion showed the caducity of the Tsonga religion, which did not have the strength to resist the rise of revealed religions higher than itself; Mohammedanism and Christianity. Hence the ease with which the Tsongas convert to one or the other of these religions". This triumphalist discourse, which is still alive today, is not true. In fact, long before the missionaries (Saute, 2005), Christianity found among the Tsongas a spiritually fertile ground in which to prosper. Even after a century of evangelism, we find among senior Protestants, lay and clergy, the belief that spirits and other occult powers exercise or are capable of exerting some influence in their lives. This means that before being an observable practice, the problem of religious mobility stems from the presence of different cosmological systems in the same social and spiritual space. The gospel was preached based on a scientific and world view vision that is not compatible with mythological or magical beliefs, but it was and continues to be received and lived based on another cosmology that sees existence as being under the influence of spiritual or occult forces, capable of to influence human life both for good and for evil. Even after a century of evangelisation, we find among senior Protestants, both lay and clergy, very much alive the belief that spirits and other occult powers exert or are able to exert some influence on their lives. This means that before being physical or observable, religious mobility is mental. As long as the Church does not understand and give an adequate response to the ancestral system of thought and beliefs, religious mobility will prevail, regardless of whether it is visible or not. It is true that there are those who do not recognise the power of spirits. For example, drawing on the book of Ecclesiastes, Pastor Mabunda showed that the dead have no power to help the living. They have no conscience and are in total oblivion, and therefore should not be remembered:

"When we read in Ecclesiastes, in chapter five or night if I'm not mistaken, it says that the dead man is forgotten, his love is not known, his hatred is not known, his works are not remembered, all that is forgotten... we don't need to follow what they did, because they have no more power. That is what it says in the Bible that I read''.

In this specific case, spirits are dispensed with because they are considered null and void. But when compared with the dominant trend, this position is an exception, as the following examples illustrate.

Let us consider, the case of Mr Albino Malate. As a converted person, he says that he does not practise rituals and ancestral beliefs such as purification after death, divination: "If I want to do a mass, I don't need to lose money consulting the healers. I just inform my brothers and other relatives. We get together and celebrate in memory of our parents. Further he questioned the efficacy of the *kuphalha* community rituals, not because of their invalidity or incompatibility with the Christian faith, but because they were performed by illegitimate people. The rituals of asking for rain were not responded because they were performed by usurpers of the ancestral power that should be exercised by their own family. In the past, as the heads of the Matsinhe family knew that they were not legitimate, they would go to the legitimate family (Malate) to perform the *kuphalha* ceremony secretly on the night before the day fixed for the public ceremony. The rain would indeed fall and the community thought it was the result of the ceremony presided over by the kinglet, when in fact the rain fell because of the ceremony performed previously by the legitimate holders of the power of the *ntumbuluko*. Let us hear him, in the first person:

‘‘Each thing has its owner. There was a time, still in colonial times, when they wanted to cut down trees right there in *khokholweni*, but they couldn't because snakes came out. When they called my father, although he was still small, he managed because he owned the land. That is the tradition. Even here, after performing ceremonies in Coolela it used to rain, but today it no longer rains, because the *ntumbuluko*....In the year before last we went to do a mass at my brother's house. As he works with things of tradition (*ntumbuluko*), when we went there, *kuphalha* was done and when we were going to leave, a big snake appeared so that if it was to ask for something, the request would have been answered. The snake came, went around the tree and then left. That's the *ntumbuluko*. Even the healer when he saw the snake was about to faint".

There is also the case of those who, even though they declare themselves contrary to ancestral beliefs, engage them for the sake of family solidarity. For example, Carolina Jamal said that when her mother-in-law began to fall ill and go into trance, she was advised to go to the school of witchcraft (*ku txayeliwa*) and she, as her daughter-in-law, had to accompany her. "Out of an obligation to the household, I had to go with her to that house" - said the interviewee. This shows that although the preservation of family ties in many cases prevails over fidelity to religious principles in cases where they clash, the choice between these two values has not been easy.

Another situation that forces Christians to get involved in ancestral rituals is the existence of tormenting spirits, usually inherited from their ancestors. One of the cases occurred between two brothers of the same Church, the elder of whom is a pastor in the same Church. The elder asked for the services of witchdoctors to get rid of the spirits supposedly inherited from his parents, throwing them at his brother. The episode was told with the aim of defending ancestral beliefs and rituals and their priests against the attack or devaluation to which they are subjected by both the Churches and the government authorities, and at the same time denouncing the dissimulation and duplicity of the religious leaders:

‘‘See that banana tree! Last week when the owners of the house were taking vegetables they saw some objects and traces of some traditional ritual. When they presented the case to me, we asked the family to inform the husband since he is in South

Africa. As soon as they informed him, he gave permission for METRAMO[1] to enter. We called the healer and he told us that it was the brother of the owner of the house who left those products... if it was the government, how could it resolve this? *Ntumbuluko* is solved with *ntumbuluko*. Regardless of whether you have studied or not, that needs to be dealt with on the basis of *ntumbuluko*...so we are waiting for the two brothers to return''.

The leader, who witnessed and told me the case, thinks that the elder brother should have gathered the whole family to sort out the problem. Instead, he tried to get rid of the spirits by throwing them into his younger brother's family through a ritual. At the time of our interview, the younger brother was still waiting to return to resolve the case. And according to the leader, on the day of the meeting the Church's superintendent is expected to be present, as the superior of the Pastor who is being accused of practices regarded by the Church as diabolical:

"The church despises *xintho (ntumbuluko)*, so we are not considered, they say we are impure (*hi nyamile*), because we follow the healers. ...Now we want to know, where did he (the pastor) pick up filthy things, until he had the courage to pick them up and throw them at his brother? If was not him, who picked up these things?"

Another form of pastoral involvement is seeking protection or strengthening spiritual powers. During the workshop in Mandlakazi, two women healers argued that they have received pastors who seek these services. For them, this is not a problem. What puzzles them is the fact that the pastors condemn witchdoctors when they themselves go to the healers' homes: "You come at night, I help you, but when you are already preaching from the pulpit, you get excited and forget that you came to ask for help with me. Careful, we'll report you (*hit a ku paluxa*) " - said one of them. In the same vein Chief Zacarias Matsinhe, referred to the case of a female pastor who had the habit of speaking badly of the ziones and healers, when she herself sought help in the house of a *zione*. Chiziane and Mariana (2015:94), also lament the lie and hypocrisy of "the heads of many churches, who teach not to do ancestor worship, but seek healers on the sly to help communicate with their ancestors, in the solution of the deepest problems". In a talk given at the United Seminary of Ricatla, Matilde Muhocha, who is *nyanga* (healer) and university lecturer, also referred to this contradictory conduct of the clerical class. Speaking specifically of evangelical pastors, she said that although they criminalize and demonize ancestry and healers in particular, when they are facing spiritual disturbances they resort to the *ti nyanga*. And they accept the treatment proposed to them, including doing the *ku phalha* inside the Church. But in their sermons they criminalise the ancestors from whom they derive their prophetic gift.

"...the pastors of the evangelical churches when they look for us, they are seeing a set of disturbances that they think the solution is with us; they come to us...and we make the diagnosis and come to the conclusion that the gift of prophecy that he has comes from ancestry. Meanwhile he has criminalised and demonised his ancestry...the proposed solution we give is that he has to recognise these spiritual entities and probably go and do the *kuphalha* in his Church. And he says yes I agree and we do the *kuphalha* and when he receives the offertory, even before he gratifies God, he gratifies the spiritual entities.

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[1] This is acronym of Mozambican Traditional Healers Association.

However, by the time he communicates with his believers, he demonises and criminalises the spiritual entities."

The most striking case is of a pastor who also acts as a zione prophet and healer, with powers even to initiate other healers (*ku thwazisa*). When I was first told of this case, I asked myself: is it really true? Can a pastor, even a theologically trained one, be a healer at the same time? However when we heard the same information again in a public event, in the presence of the hierarchical superior of that Church, the case seemed very serious.

Last but not least, it is worth to mention the case of those who, even though they agree with the doctrine of the rupture, think that instead of a total and indiscriminate rejection, there should be a selective appropriation of certain values and knowledge of the *ntumbuluko*. For example, Mrs Carolina Muchanga and Mrs Carolina Jamal, community health activists and members of the Nazarene Church, think that at least the knowledge about healing through medicinal plants should not be rejected. According to their testimonies when it comes to the healing of *marumba*, the only safe option is the use of local medicinal plants. They claim that not even the hospital can cure this disease, so they resort to these plants, even though this may entail the risk of divine punishment. As one can understand, although they resort to medicinal plants, they do so aware or at least with the fear that they are sinning. Even if they have not been officially warned, as they know that medicinal plants belong or are associated with the world of *munyama*, their doubts make perfect sense. Be that as it may, their experience shows not only how people engage both ancestral and modern medicine for the treatment of their ailments but also shows that, at least from the communities' point of view, there are certain cases where ancestral medicine proves to be more effective than modern medicine.

These examples show the contradiction between the concepts of purity and conversion present in official Protestant doctrine. But at the same time they reveal the hostilities that exist between Christian leaders and the ministers of the *ntumbuluko* (traditional chiefs and healers). All the examples presented, both by the healers and the traditional chiefs, are intended to unmask the falsehood of the pastors who, in the light of day, attack and demonise the ministers of the *ntumbuluko* (*vá nyamile*) and their rituals, which in the dark of night they need for their survival. Instead of preserving themselves pure or staying away, Protestants engage the ancestral beliefs and rituals, which they publicly demonise. Likewise, instead of remaining fixed and steadfast in the Church, they adopt the same chameleon-like behaviour much fought in the pulpit. They confess the triune God, as the only spiritual power capable of everything, and when they face afflictions it is the spirits and the holders of occult powers that are most obeyed.

So, the so-called pagan or immature Christians, who notice these contradictory practices, also accuse them of dissimulation. We note two terms most commonly used to describe this behaviour. The first is *vo tumbela*, to say that these Christians practise secretly the same ancestral beliefs and rituals that they condemn in the light of day. The second is *ho xenghetelana*, to mean that with this concealment these Christians deceive or lie to others and to themselves, by demonizing ancestral beliefs and rituals that they themselves practice. This contradiction is also noted by the anthropologist Honwana (2002: 145,146). According to her, among the Protestants of Southern Mozambique there is a religious compartmentalization or double religious philosophy which consists of

practising ancestral beliefs and rituals in a separate and hidden way. However, this practice is only "secret because nobody talks about it in church, but it is not secret either, insofar as everybody knows about it". That is while Protestants are seduced by ancient beliefs and rituals, they want to ensure separation and distinction between the two religions and secondly, to ensure that their religious duplicity is secretive. They pride themselves on vilifying, at least in public, what they believe. This behaviour is interesting. It is that each member who practices the forbidden beliefs and rituals knows or in some cases suspects that the others also practice, but still, because there is a kind of implicit agreement, they all pretend that they do not practice, hence Honwana's(2002:162) puzzling question, "why keep it secret if "everybody knows that everybody knows"?

3. **Cultures, Gospel and the Colonial Matrix of Official Protestant Discourse:** If we were to answer the intriguing question of the anthropologist Honwana raised above, we would say that Protestants keep this otherwise secret in order to preserve this false image of pure Christians, liberated from ancestral beliefs and rituals, which they themselves know they do not and cannot have. In other words, the problem lies in wanting to be what they are not and cannot be. They are not Westerners. So no matter how hard they try, they will never be able to live Christianity based on the culture of the Western missionary. So when seen from an African perspective, religious mobility has a liberating meaning as it unmasks the falsehood of the Christian purity discourse and shows us the true face of Tsonga Christianity. It is situated at the intersection between the Western culture from which the theology and administrative structure guiding the Church have been elaborated and the ancestral African cultures and religions, from which Africans apprehend, integrate and experience the Christian faith.

However, while it is true that the Protestant God offers the Tsongas the notion of a moral and social community that goes beyond the lineage or tribal group, he remains distant and indifferent to their concrete problems, such as lack of rain, purification of contaminated or polluted people and environments, healing of illnesses, protection against sorcerers, among other demands. Therefore religious mobility partly reflects the need to fill this void. To fill it, the Tsonga ask for help from those whose God cares about their problems. And when the sheep pierce the fold in search of other pastures, the shepherds are also concerned. Some even begin to wonder if it is not time for the post-colonial Church to start thinking for itself about its theology and liturgies. In conversation with Superintendent Muhai, I noticed that while he criticised the spiritual immaturity of members who move between various Churches, he also acknowledged that his Church is not meeting the spiritual demands of its members as it should be. He questions the spiritual authenticity of the Neo-Pentecostal leaders, but nevertheless appreciates the vigour and results of their services. Even admitting the possibility of some leaders using magic, he admits that some may be acting under the power of the Holy Spirit, because even in his own Church, when the leaders actually had spiritual power, miracles happened.

"In that period I referred to from the years 1922 to 1975, as the Church was very fervent, evil spirits manifested themselves and were expelled, people handed over objects of their traditional beliefs and they were burnt, but now why doesn't that happen? Do we not have spirit problems? Do we not have similar situations? There are people who still rely on such things, but we go to church and come out as we went in. The practitioners of

witchcraft repented because the Church was fervent. When this practice appears again with the Pentecostal churches we started criticising them claiming that they cast out demons with magical powers (*vayo khendla*). Yes, some may cast out by diabolical powers, but others do not''.

With all its contradictions and ambivalences, religious mobility has to be seen as a restless faith, thirsty and still seeking, not to understand philosophically who God is, but to experience his presence and his action in the world of life. Some pastors, who are aware of this, develop some initiatives of services and programmes that seek to give biblical answers to questions linked to ancestral cosmologies, such as healing, the influence of spirits, miracles, exorcism, purification rituals, in order to contain the flow of their members. But these are only sporadic initiatives. In the name of purity, to this day the Church maintains the pattern of distancing itself from cosmologies and ancestral systems of thought. If these appear in the official Protestant discourse, it is always from a condemnatory perspective and never in a critical-comprehensive approach.

As children of modernity the missionaries who evangelised the Tsongas understood that African cultural beliefs and habits should be abandoned, since they represented the wild or primitive phase of human evolution, which should give way to the civilisation they brought (Junod, 1996). Consequently much of the cultural and social life of the communities is not, at least formally, included in the Church. A comparative analysis shows that this tendency to value the paradigms of modernity to the detriment of local cultures and knowledge found in the post-colonial church is structural, because it extends to other sectors. Once independence was obtained, the political and religious elites reproduced, either on their own or in collusion with the colonising powers, the same abyssal thinking (Santos: 2009, 2019) that the West used to sustain slavery and colonialism. Both the political project of state building, passing through sectors such as law (Ngoenha, 2016), education (Castiano,2005), politics (Meneses, 2009), medicine (Meneses, 2004 Honwana, 2000), just to mention a few, have always been thought of from Western categories and models, whether from the left or the right, and always making a tabula rasa or even opposing native cultural and religious experiences and knowledge. With religious freedom and pluralism, ancestral beliefs and cosmologies are increasingly gaining space, inside and outside the churches, giving rise to what Mbembe (2013) calls the revenge of paganism.

Besides being culturally out of step, the discourse of purity that underpins all the disqualification of African cultures and ancestral religions is also theologically untenable. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus did not understand religious purity in terms of observance of religious rituals and formalities. For him purity meant a clean, loving and compassionate heart. That is why he never excluded people on the basis of their cultural and religious practices. The example of this is his relationship with the Samaritans. The Samaritans were discriminated against and disqualified by the Jews because they were regarded as an impure people, made of mixtures between Jews and people of other cultures and religious beliefs. When Jesus told the Jews that their Father was the devil, and not God as they claimed, they responded by calling him a Samaritan (Jn8:48). In doing so they were exactly saying that Jesus is a demon, for to them, more than impurity, being a Samaritan meant belonging to the demonic world. The enmity that existed between Jews and Samaritans was such that they did not even speak to each other. Being Jewish, Jesus

himself suffered this rejection. Even so, through his love, he was able to approach them and gain their sympathy. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus not only breaks down the communication barrier between Jews and Samaritans, but also shows that contrary to what both think, a good relationship with God depends on the sincerity and honesty of the person.

The Good Samaritan, who is presented as a model to follow was a Gentile, impure and a violator of the law. One could not expect to learn anything from him. What makes him a role model is behaviour, not religious belonging. While the religious leaders ignore the dying man to preserve his purity and faithfully fulfil their rituals, the Good Samaritan interrupts his journey and spends some resources to care for him. It is precisely this selfless and indiscriminate love that makes him a model to follow. Therefore, intentionally and carefully, Jesus selected the characters and their proper roles clearly to teach his audience that the purity and authenticity of faith does not depend on belonging or even holding important positions in the so-called true religion, but on the practice of love.

When the early Church came into contact with non-Jewish cultures, the religious leaders used normative power to impose a single cultural standard under the pretext of preserving Christian purity. Paul probably because of his cosmopolitanism and his connection with the Gentile church approached the problem from an intercultural perspective. He also advised against the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols, but did not accept that non-Jewish Christians should be obliged to be circumcised. Unlike Paul, Peter although he had already been warned not to discriminate against people on the basis of religion during the vision of the basket containing unclean animals, was still stuck in his Jewish ethnocentrism. During his stay in Antioch, he shared food with the non-Jewish Christians, but when the other Jews arrived, he began to distance himself from the Gentiles so as not to be accused of socialising with uncircumcised people. In the name of Christian liberty, Paul opposed this imposition, showing that circumcision is a valid cultural tradition for Jews, but does not interfere with salvation, since this depends only on faith in Jesus Christ. The dispute was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem in favour of cultural freedom for non-Jewish Christians, provided they kept away from immorality and suffocated meats. Although the latter is still a purely cultural prohibition, this meeting has the merit of having clearly established that Jewish rituals, even though they may be useful for people's lives, do not constitute the criterion of salvation and therefore should not be obligatory. In other words, it showed that although faith is expressed through cultural means, it is not confused with them. It is unchangeable and therefore non-negotiable, but the cultural means and symbols of its expression vary with the context.

So the task of theology is not to demonise cultures, but to examine what cultural means, be they symbols, arts, gestures, languages, the community uses to express and experience its spirituality, its values and utopias and how all these elements can be translated and interpreted in the light of Christian faith. The strategy of demonising, silencing or get these elements invisible has failed to build up pure Christians. On the contrary, it has fostered syncretism and the corrosion of ecclesiastical authority itself. Although for some this disobedience is also associated with the claim of freedom of choice, including even the choice of religious beliefs, as sociologists claim (Bauman, 2005; Hall,2006; Hervieu-Léger, 1998), one cannot denies the point of view of

anthropologists for whom it reflects resistance to the imposition of degrading identities as well as to homogenizing tendencies which, under the guise of a pure and neutral Christianity, intend to impose exogenous cultural and religious values to the detriment of autochthonous ones (Taylor, 1994; Mbembe, 2013; West, 2009; Saute,2005; Hall, 2005).

Contrary to what the official Protestant discourse claims, religious mobility does not necessarily result in syncretism. As the history of Israel and the Church itself shows, faith has been communicated and lived through intercultural mixtures, borrowings, negotiations and translations. For example, while the Christian Easter and Pentecost result from the appropriation and re-signification of feasts already known and practised in Judaism, Christmas Day results from a wise creative appropriation of the day of worship of the sun god, practised in the Roman Empire. That is, whenever necessary, religions adapt and reinterpret symbols and rituals of other religions to better express and communicate their beliefs. But when these mixtures happen uncritically, outside the critical judgment of the gospel, they can distort faith. So simply demonising or avoiding talking about mobility does not mean that it ceases to exist, but rather that it continues to occur outside of discernment. So if mobility begets hybridity, silence begets syncretism. As in the Church passes over those issues that people understand to be their real problems, so in times of distress they seek answers from other spiritual leaders who deal with those issues. Van de Kamp(2015:398), notes that most of the women she met "in Pentecostal churches had left either the traditional Protestant Church or the Catholic Church, complaining that the real problems of life were not being attended to there - e.g. divorce, domestic violence and the role of ancestral spirits". In the middle of this journey many unwanted mixtures can happen.

Notwithstanding its ambivalence, the hybrid or interstitial space (Bhabha, 1998) represents an opportunity to rethink the identity and mission of the church in the current context. The interstitial space allows us to understand which values and aspirations are present in the languages, symbols and rituals of the *ntumbuluko* and how they can be treated within the framework of Christian theology. Hybridity makes room to recreate, reform, renew, that is, to rethink or re-examine the cultural and theological foundations on which to build the Church without the usual colonial prejudices. The absence of this theological imagination in Protestant practice ends up perpetuating the socio-cultural and religious alienation of the African subject caused by colonial violence, with all the psychological and spiritual implications still to be studied.

As we have said, while criticising churches that provide spiritual healing and deliverance services, Protestants, both lay people and pastors, feel seduced by them. Many critics consider that the popularity and rapid growth of the healing and deliverance churches lies in their prosperity theology. This explanation has its share of truth. However, one cannot deny losing sight of the importance of using and even abusing ancestral cosmologies and belief systems. Considering this aspect and the great influence they have on Protestants, we will analyse below how these churches exploit ancestral beliefs and cosmologies.

4. **The Approach to Suffering in the Theologies of Healing and Liberation:** By theologies of healing and liberation we refer to the discourses and practices concerning healing, prevention and expulsion of demons, resolution of people's social and spiritual

afflictions that are carried out in some Churches in Mozambique mainly those of the Zione and Neo-Pentecostal type and that in a sporadic way are also found in some historical Protestant Churches. Some scholars indicate that like the *Zione* or independent Churches, the origins of the Neo-Pentecostal Churches rely to a large extent on the influence of Afro-American or African traditional cultures and religions. It is argued that some elements that characterise these churches, generally absent in the Catholic and Protestant churches, such as for example the demonic explanation of suffering, liturgies that tend to be oral, spontaneity, witnessing, the valuing of dreams and visions, a participative, intense and emotional spiritual experience, the connection between body and mind, the cults focused on healing through prayer and the engagement of divine powers, represent clear signs of re-appropriation and adaptation of ancestral African spirituality (Hollenweger, 2004; ANDERSON, 2010). Although the agenda of Neo-Pentecostal leaders is to combat African and Afro-diasporic ancestral religions, at the same time they appropriate their entire cosmological and spiritual arsenal. They fight the enemy in order to appropriate his weapons. In this sense we maintain that there is a relation of continuity, both in the explanation based on the magical-spiritual or demonic causation of suffering, and in the treatment processes (healing rituals and exorcism), so that the radicalised demonization to the healers aims at their replacement than rupture with the cosmology of the *ntumbuluko*, without which their whole discourse and ministry would lose relevance (Waweru, 2018). In both the focus of rituals is on the promotion of material well-being or prosperity. Therefore in these theologies the notion of salvation tends to be interpreted as an immanent rather than eschatological reality and instead of the traditional themes present in Protestant and Catholic theology such as sin and guilt, repentance and forgiveness (Prosén, 2020), the main concern is to engage the name of Jesus and power of the Holy spirit to combat the forces of evil and open the paths to success. But continuity is not only functional or merely instrumental. Besides the cosmology, there are also similarities with regard to the very emotional, joyful and participatory spiritual expression. In fact, Bediako (1996), in an approach that reminds us of the theology of evangelical preparation, observed that the so-called primitive religions that were considered by Western missionaries as pagan, actually shaped a fertile spiritual ground for the Christian faith to take root and grow easily. Even Junod (1996:385), who shows no appreciation for the ancestral religion of the Tsongas, is surprised by the ease "how easily the idea of the Christian God is accepted by the Bantu" and recognises that, by its nature, this religion presents a fertile environment for the Christian faith to flourish.

To support this point we will mention only two examples. The first case concerns observations made just before the beginning of the service in the congregation of the Zion Apostolic Union Church. While waiting for the officiants to enter to start the service, the congregation was singing choruses accompanied by the xigubo (drumming). As the singing seemed weak, twice a lady stood up to motivate the congregation to sing first with a rhetorical question, *a muna matimba*? And the time with this short speech: *"A muva zwelanga swako nyimani hita muteka loko hi muk*a. *Mo maha hi kuvateka muta navo kola…"*, which in a free translation goes like this: you should have told them to wait and in the end you would take them back home.

In the second speech we understand that for that mother the lack of strength or power *(matimba)* is due to the action of spiritual forces that may have been with some congregants. From the context one can clearly perceive such entities which are human,

because, although invisible, they dwell in the bodies of people and with them one can talk and negotiate ways of coexistence. Moreover, the prefix va is a quantifier that is generally applied to human beings, in this case as plural of human being. The vigour that followed, in a perfect combination of dancing, singing, drumming and clapping, signified, at least at that moment, the victory of the Holy Spirit over the spiritual power of evil, responsible for the weakening or reduction of singing. In fact, spiritual fervour, whether in singing, in prayer or in preaching, constitute, alongside the healings, evidence of the powerful action of the Holy Spirit. And it is precisely here, according to Bishop Chissano, that the apostolicity of his Church resides, which distinguishes it from the historic Protestant Churches and brings it closer to neo-Pentecostalism:

"We have the gift of praying to people, prophesying and treating their problems...if you know a tree that heals it is not bad to use. The bad thing is to go to the healers to do divination. Now churches like Nazarene, Assembly, are not Apostolic. Apostolic are those who have the power to lay hands on and heal, regardless of whether they are white or black...Those of the Universal are apostolic, but they use modernism".

In fact although the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as the Ministerial Nations for Christ Church, do not incorporate medicinal plants or spirits in their rituals as do the Zionist churches, they also address suffering based on the causation theory present in local cosmologies and perform rituals to liberate and or protect people from evil spirits (Fiorotti, 2017).

The second example also derives from observations made at Sunday services at a neo-Pentecostal church known as Ministerial Nations for Christ, locally known as *Ka Muhanyisi* (to the Saviour).

If during *ku ndzungulisa nzava* people tend to lament misfortunes, in the Ministerial Nations Church for Christ, the situation is reversed. Just as in the ziones here also evil spirits and tormentors are fought. The only difference is that here there is no negotiation or integration of the spirits. According to the liturgy of the service often followed in this Church, after the first prayer, which is preceded by a long period of praise, there usually follows the testimonial phase. At this time people are invited to the altar to testify to miracles or blessings they have received as a divine response to the previous Sunday's prayers. For example, in the Sunday service held on the sixth of February 2022, after the prayer, the leader asked the people who had participated in the previous Sunday's service to come and give their testimonies. Ten women came to the altar. Coincidentally, for all of them, the requests answered by God were not related to their individual needs, but to their husbands who were unemployed and, or who did not properly assume their responsibilities in the family. This, once again, demonstrates the intrinsic relationship between family well-being and stability. Their statements appear below:

"My husband was not working, but he already got a job on Friday. "Now My husband is an entrepreneur, he works in the rural hospital in Mandlakaze." "My husband was out of work for many months, but after the Sunday service he got a job on Wednesday." "My husband called and sent money to attend to the children". "My husband called on Wednesday calling me to go to South Africa on Friday."

In a cultural context where the man is seen as the family provider, when he doesn't have a job, women also become worried. To cope with this situation, they ask God for help, hoping that once they find a job, family life will improve. However, once they get the job, some feel forgotten, despite all their efforts in prayers. To reverse this situation and ensure that those husbands become interested in them again, new days of prayers may be necessary, even including some rituals. The Church looks like a stage of struggle, where, with the help of the leaders, the power of God is engaged to fight the forces of evil, which attack the stability of families. Following and reinforcing the belief of the witnesses, the worship leader took the opportunity to sustain that people's lives are played out in the conflict between the power of God and that of evil, both represented by their respective words: "the secret is words, if someone utters a curse word and says, may you die, there must be another word saying, may you not die in Jesus' name; if someone says, do not prosper, then the other word must say, may you prosper in Jesus' name. Everything we hear is the result of God's operation, God operated through the Word. Where the world says, this one is of no value; God says this one is of value. If you get used to hear the Word, pray, you won't need help anymore, and you alone will see results...you won't need the missionary or the evangelist...".

On one side we have the demonic power that speaks words of curse and the power of God who, through his servants, speaks words of healing and salvation. Although it is capable of tormenting people, the curse word has no power over those who believe in Jesus and participate in the Church, where divine power works through his servants. That is why people are encouraged to cultivate this spiritual power so that they are able to pray for themselves and for others. As one can see, prayer touches the most frequent concerns that people have. And there is a conviction that the divine word should produce its effects immediately. So when these powerful statements are answered by almost fixed and enthusiastic expressions such as "so be it", "I receive", as an expression of that hope or certainty that their worries will be resolved in the short term. Indeed in some cases they do not need to wait for another week to see things happen. Not infrequently the words of power pronounced even consist in the immediate breaking of the spell and curse of which the people are victims, in the provision of goods and desires that people need: employment, illness. The words pronounced before the prayer of breaking the curse, by a young leader, in the service held on "What we are going to write today, will remain forever. No-one will erase (Amen! Hallelujah! With applause) ... the words that I am going to write, the sorcerers will read, the angels will translate in the language of the place where you are, wherever you are. And if anyone says erase, the angels will say what Pilate said: what is written, is written. If Satan wrote curses in pencil, today we will reverse and write blessings in pen. Hallelujah, amen, applause. Maybe in other days you would come to Church and we would write in pencil; it was like this because you were still in the first or second class, but from today we are going to write in pen, you are already in the classes that deserve the pen...They will wish to put you down, they will wish to erase, but they will not succeed in putting you down, they will try to destroy you but you will be like the hill, they will send storm to shake you, but they will not succeed."

Here the confrontation between words is radicalized. Instead of spoken words it is now written words. It means that we are at a more advanced level of the confrontation, between the power of good and that of evil. Both words can have an effect. The difference is that the word of Jesus, spoken by the leaders of the Church, is stronger

(written in pen) while that of the devil is weak (written in pencil). The devil does indeed represent a threat, for he can curse, cause illness, block plans. But this effect works for those who do not have the power of Jesus. While Jesus, the word spoken in the Church, can erase the action of satan, the opposite does not work. Satan's word cannot erase Jesus'. And why do some attend Church but do not find the solution to their afflictions? The explanation is that, as they were still beginners, their word was written in pencil. Now, when the word is written in pencil, although it is divine, it can fail, because it is not yet strong enough to provide blessings and protection against Satan. Therefore, although freed, the congregants can never be happy, because at any moment they can fall victim to other curses or other demons, since even when they are expelled from a body they remain active. Instead of being definitive, liberation is provisional.

It is interesting to note that the Word represents God's creative power in the bible. In Genesis God creates through the Word and in the prologue of John's gospel Jesus is identified as the pre-existent Word who created all things. The Word that is evoked in these discourses is closer to the Hebrew dabar than to the Johannine logos. The Johannine Jesus, as logos, has little to say to those who, instead of metaphysical explanations, are looking for concrete answers to everyday challenges (Pieris, 2000). For them, what matters is Jesus as the Word of power and of life, who protects, who breaks curses, who opens paths. This is what can be attested, once again, in this prayer:

"From this day forward, whatever they have done against you, let it go in Jesus' name; let it be healed right now, be free in Jesus' name (repeated three times). If you came sick be free in Jesus name, I declare you free from this paralysis, these fibroids, in Jesus name...Everything that plagued your life, we cast out in Jesus name, any pain in your body be removed right now, in your bones receive life in Jesus name; if anyone is sick at home may you receive healing right now (so be it), be free right now, receive peace in Jesus name, receive light in your affairs, if anyone spoke curse words, I bless you in Jesus name. In your blood, sinews and flesh, receive life in Jesus name (I receive), let the spirit of life come into you right now (I receive); if you suffered addictions of drinking and smoking be free right now, if someone detained your mind from being intelligent, receive intelligence right now (I receive, so be it), receive intelligence right now. If someone buried things in your house, and you had no peace, receive peace right now (so be it); anything done to curse you I break those curses..."

We have here the image of an all-powerful Jesus Christ who is therefore the perfect and true answer of all the problems that people desperately look to healers for. Chiziane and Mariana (2015) do not hesitate therefore to call him a healer. Others understand that the function of a healer equates with that of neo-Pentecostal pastors themselves as Van Kamp(2015). But given the derogatory sense that the Church attributes to the term healer I don't think it would have the courage to call Jesus or his spiritual leaders healers. Regardless of the name, what seems to interest people is that they find spiritual leaders in the Church who are able to engage spiritual powers to resolve or at least present and pray for their afflictions. For example the most awaited part of the service and reserved for the end is the collective exorcism where the leaders move quickly through the rows touching people's foreheads. When that moment comes, congregants are placed in rows so that there can be corridors to facilitate the mobility of the exorcists who move around very quickly as they touch people on the heads sniffing

out possible demons. Those who fall or show signs of some psychological alteration are taken to the altar for a more personalised work.

At that point those who have brought photographs of people whose behaviour they wish to influence or change hand them over to the leaders for processing. So even if they are not resolved, the simple fact that the worship leadership takes the time to talk, to give guidance, encouragement and above all, to share with the people themselves moments of intense prayer for the resolution of these afflictions, has a positive emotional effect. In addition to the turnout itself, this can be attested to by body expression, lively speeches during testimony, applause and emphatic responses to the leaders' words and prayers such as: so be it, I receive, amen, hallelujah.

5. **Critical Observations on the Use of Ntumbuluko:** Healing and liberation theologies attempt to construct and communicate their discourse using the spiritual expression, languages and cosmologies of the *ntumbuluko*, the cultural as well as the spiritual universe of their audience. Therein lays to a large extent their popularity. The fact that the cult speaks the language of the people, touches on their problems, gives the opportunity for each person to pray freely and without complexes, even more so with full participation of the body (dance, word, song and emotion), this all touches the African soul and makes the cult a true healing experience. Just as in ancestral rituals, whether or not there is physical healing or the solution of some affliction, people leave relieved, renewed, joyful and ready to see miracles happening. However, with all their laudable efforts, these theologies have some critical aspects that stem, in my view, from an instrumental and therefore distorted appropriation of the *ntumbuluko*. They appropriate the cosmologies of the *ntumbuluko* simply to sustain their agenda of spiritual healing and liberation and not to promote an appropriate intercultural or interreligious hermeneutics. Consequently they distort both the Christian faith and the *ntumbuluko* itself since their critical potential and values that could inform a grounded theology of well-being are ignored. In the following I seek to develop this critique in some detail.

Although the Bible does not ignore the harmful effects of magic or witchcraft, in general, the standard for the explanation of evil is sin, be it individual or structural. Sin offends God in the first place, because it is a violation of his commandments and as a consequence produces suffering in the life of the human being himself. In Israel, for example, idolatry and bad political decisions by the leaders ended up bringing disgrace to the whole nation. For Adadevoh (2010), the curse theory is not sufficient to explain the suffering of African families and communities. From the biblical point of view, nobody is born destined to suffer or die because of an inherited curse. No matter what the cause of the sin, as long as the person repents and changes his attitude, he can receive forgiveness and overcome his situation, because what God wants for man is life in abundance and not suffering or death. That is why, besides the merely material aspects, salvation also contemplates the spiritual and eschatological dimension. In this sense, miracles cannot be seen as an end in themselves, but rather as a sign pointing to the King and the irruption of his eschatological kingdom.

A theology that explains all evil on the basis of demonic causation may even be appealing, but instead of abundant life, at most what it can offer people is disposition and hope to continue to survive. Even the hope that these theologies convey often ends up

becoming alienation (Fanon, 1965) or illusion (Serra, 2005), because, instead of facing the real causes of suffering, it numbs people with cathartic explanations that work more as painkillers than as modulators of developmental thinking. Instead of uniting and assuming their responsibilities, people start to consider themselves mere victims of witchdoctors, African spirits and those who are suspected of causing their suffering. This theology benefits the leaders and little the community. Because the idea that people live in an environment surrounded by demons, sorcerers and evil spirits, instead of liberating them, leads them to live insecurely and increasingly dependent on the powerful and protective action of the leaders. The same threats that exist in the *ntuumbuluko* cosmology also continue in the Church. The difference is that in addition to the healers and ancestors, they now have the option of Christian leaders. It is this competition that partly explains their hatred of the former.

This theology is also a good ideology for incompetent and corrupt rulers, since they are no longer responsible for their failures, but are seen as victims of the devil (Mbembe, 2013). In fact, if accidents on the roads or collapsing infrastructure are the result of the rebellion of spirits or the magical action of envious people, then we have no way of blaming human beings. Even when it exists, the influence of evil spirits does not exempt man from his responsibility for the evil done, because from the biblical point of view, it is his duty and it is within your power to resist any temptation, of whatever nature.

The theology of demonic causation diverts the attention of Africans from the main problem of their suffering, namely the corrupt, inefficient leadership, incapable of managing and transforming the resources at its disposal into wealth for all. Therefore, Adadevoh (2007; 2010) argues, it is urgent that we recover the first great commission, which is about stewardship (Gn1:28). Although in many cases there are more church members than disciples of Christ, the fact is that the Church is growing exponentially in Africa. But because the first great commission is neglected, the growth is only quantitative, with little or no impact on the quality of the spiritual and social life of those members. After the creation of man, God commanded him to be steward of all creation, which meant managing and using nature and available resources in a sustainable way for his well-being. After the fall this obligation was reiterated. Henceforth, man was to live by his own sweat, that is, by his physical and intellectual labour. Jesus insisted again on stewardship, particularly in his parable of the talents. And the centrality of stewardship is such that, alongside the law of love, it constitutes the criterion for the final judgement. In his parabole of gold coins(Mt25:14-14), Jesus affirms that the person or the people who, having resources at their disposal to develop themselves, and yet remain poor, even the little they have will be taken away from them, because, speaking in Kantian terms (1784), this person or people is guilty of their own minority or dependence. On the other hand the theology of spiritual healing and liberation seems not to be aware of or neglect the social and moral problems that the discourse of spiritual causation articulates. As discussed, so-called spiritual problems are in fact social, precisely because the spiritual agents involved are human and their causes stem from animosities and conflicts that are then resolved by resorting to spiritual or magical powers. Sorcerers who manipulate natural elements and use spirits of the dead to do evil, those who return after death to torment people who are still physically alive, as well as those who practice *kukhendla*, are always people moved by negative and self-centred feelings, such as greed, power, hatred, revenge and

supremacy. Suffering that results from non-compliance with ancestral rituals or procedures, for example, is totally seen as a matter between family members. Even tormenting spirits do not act on the case. They usually claim justice and reparation for their death or for service done and not properly paid for. In some cases these claims may be associated with the search for shelter and or the constitution of the family or even to restore the broken family order. In other words, the spirit which is translated as demons in Christian language, in Tsonga cosmology is in the majority of cases no more than a spiritualised representation of merely human interests. While in the New Testament demon refers to rebellious angels expelled from heaven (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6) and therefore enemies of God and man (Kunhiyop,2012) with whom cannot be for negotiation, in the *ntumbuluko* cosmology spirits are persons and are not essentially evil (Cavallo, 2013). Even though they are violent and dangerous, there is always possibility to negotiate. In many cases, their claims are actually resolved through intra- or interfamily negotiation, under the mediation of the mediums. In other words, the spiritual universe functions as an instance of power, just like the public institutions of the State, where people resort to solve certain problems (Igreja,2003). So however important it may be, all work of spiritual liberation that does not attack the social and moral aspects that lead people to resort to the spirits and occult powers, instead of eliminating the demons, will only contribute to their reproduction.

Besides the social problems behind the spirits, the theology of spiritual healing and liberation also neglects or simply dilutes the denunciation against structural sin that manifests itself, for example in suspicious enrichment and social inequalities (Fry,2000). More than ancient superstitions, the languages of sorcery and *ku khendla* are a continuously modernising critique against social inequalities and the suspicious or misuse of power. What makes the sorcerer or the lender of spirits a detestable person in society is his immorality, that is, the fact that he lives at the expense of the suffering and blood of others. It is not by chance that the biggest targets of these accusations are people in privileged positions including even rulers (Serra, 2005; Meneses, 2009; West, 2009). It is another language to speak and denounce illicit enrichment, money laundering or the practice of corruption. In either case, we have greedy people, even capable of killing in the name of wealth, who, knowing the immorality of their acts, act in hiding.

So with all its limitations, the language of magic (sorcery and *kukhendla*), is a criticism of what Pieris (1988; 2000), interpreting Jesus, calls idolatry, that is the worship of the god Mammon. It is interesting to note that the prohibition of serving two masters, which the official discourse uses to justify the repudiation of *ntumbuluko* beliefs and rituals, was uttered by Jesus to criticise excessive attachment to money or material possessions in general. Nor would Jesus advise the worship of a god other than the Father, but for the sake of honesty and fidelity to the gospel, it must be said that the lord or idol that Jesus forbids us to follow in this text is greed or obsession with power, be it economic, political or religious. It is in this sense that we can understand his insistent appeal for the one who wishes to be his follower to make himself "little one" servant'', and above all to carry the cross, that is become poor volunteers to fight against imposed poverty, as Christ himself did (Pieris, 1998; 2000; 2003).

It is also fundamental to pay attention to the social and cosmological meaning of evil present in ancestral discourses and rituals about evil and its cure. Illness and suffering

in general are not only a psychosomatic or individual matter. Besides the direct effects on the victim concerned, the evil also reflects or results in the breakdown of social relations and the cosmological order. This is why healing, even when it is an illness affecting a single individual, involves rituals of reparation and restoration of the broken social and cosmological order. In other words, contrary to individualist approaches, ancestral beliefs and rituals remind us that there is no effective cure without repair, reconciliation and social and spiritual harmony.

6. **Conclusion:** We intended in this study to reflect on the possibility of a Christian theology in the context of religious mobility. We noticed that both Protestants and Neo-Pentecostals consider the ntumbuluko as an evil to be fought, so mobility between these religions has also been interpreted as an evil to be avoided. Generally Protestants adopt the strategy of distancing, so they are more concerned with protecting their members from any contact with the ntumbuluko, than with attacking them directly, as Neo-Pentecostal leaders do. These, who consider themselves leaders in the spiritual battle against demonic forces, directly and vigorously attack the healers, their direct competitors in the ministry of healing and liberation, but at the same time creatively appropriate the same cosmologies and ritualistic principles of the *ntumbuluko*.

We have observed that both strategies do not represent adequate models for an intercultural theology of well-being that we seek to suggest here. First because they start from a normative and prejudiced position which does not recognise the *ntumbuluko* as a religion with its own autonomy and dignity, a basic condition for intercultural dialogue. Secondly, because both enable the flowering of the syncretism they allegedly claim to combat. While the strategy of isolation or distancing results in a syncretism practised in an individual and disguised way, the strategy of creative appropriation results in an institutional syncretism, that is, one practised officially and openly, even in the liturgy of the cult. Thus with this practice one runs the risk of prohibiting cultural practices which are harmless for the Christian faith and which, when properly appropriated, could enrich Christianity itself, and, on the other hand, tolerating those which effectively compromise the faith and should not be accepted at any price, as is the case of the explanation of suffering on the basis of the theory of the play of spiritual forces to the detriment of sin.

This is why we have argued that, rather than interpreting religious mobility and its ensuing hybridity as a pathology to be combated or shame to be hidden, they should be seen as a reflection of this violent encounter between two cultural and religious systems within the same social space, whose wounds are yet to be healed. Rather than spiritual immaturity, religious mobility should also be read as the expression of a restless, perplexed faith in search of its spiritual and cultural identity.

In regarding of these findings, we suggest that the best approach to the phenomenon of religious mobility would be an intercultural theology of well-being. The intercultural approach considers the hybrid or interstice between the Western heritage, ancestral culture and religion and the contemporary challenges of African communities as the appropriate space to think about theology. This intercultural and interreligious space is important because it provides the conceptual basis from which the gospel of Christ, which is a universal message, becomes concrete and meaningful for the communities. In this sense, we consider that autochthonous cultures and religions are the best wealth that

our ancestors have bequeathed us and are therefore the basis both for the production of knowledge and for social development that is endogenous and sustainable. They are what give us our identity and it is through them that we can participate and contribute to the progress of humanity. Like any other human creation, they certainly contain imperfections and incompatibilities with the Christian faith, but the solution is not to fight them or to subordinate them. On the contrary, they must be criticised, innovated and recreated. For it is through these means that Christ will become incarnate and live among us in order to save us.

The challenge of intercultural theology is first of all to understand the values, the forms of expression of spirituality, the aspirations, and systems of thought expressed in the *ntumbuluko* and from these to produce contextual theological reflections. But this implies a predisposition to listen, learn and be able to be questioned by them. This exercise is fundamental because, despite its claim to universality, we know that all theological and intellectual production in general is conditioned by the thinker's epistemic and ideological place or point of view. So this approach can help us refocus on the socio-cultural and spiritual life of the communities as the epistemological and moral place from which we read and interpret the bible and dialogue with other knowledge's, in search of a universality that is a collective construction and not a unilateral imposition.

IV. "GOD BELONGS TO ALL OF US": TOWARDS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION

In the second section we discuss how the Church can internally deal with the hybridity resulting from the dual practice or dual religious belonging, through an intercultural theology. The second challenge of this cohabitation, which we intend to discuss in this section, refers to coexistence and institutional collaboration. Can Christianity cooperate with the *ntumbuluko?* Can a Protestant clergyman enter into an honest and open conversation with a traditional healer or Traditional chief with a view to mutual understanding or some common good? As should have been clear, the answer to this question depends on the theological or doctrinal perspective. From the point of view of official Protestant discourse, the possibility of collaboration is almost absence since for *ntumbuluko* is in clear opposition to Christianity. But from the point of view of the *ntumbuluko* ministers, this possibility exists and is desirable, since for them, the two religions complement each other in the process of seeking well-being. From these perspectives, this chapter describes three models of relationship between *ntumbuluko* and Christianity, articulating them with those already established in the field of theology of religions, namely exclusivism or ecclesiocentrism, pluralism and inclusive or Christocentric pluralism. This last model is expected to theologically substantiate the possibility of an inter-religious collaboration between Christianity and the *ntumbuluko*, focused on the common well-being.

1. **Incompatibility Relations: Ecclesiocentric or Exclusivist Model:** In the official Protestant discourse, the *ntumbuluko* appears not only as different, but above all as diabolical, depraved and dangerous, and therefore must be fought against, or at least avoided:

''In the Churches we are taught that we must come out of darkness into the light, that we must not worship two gods, because when I leave the Church and go to worship another god, God cannot accept me, because I am going down two paths. But God said that there are two paths on earth, but you have to choose one that will take your life. So the Church teaches us to come out of darkness (*munyama*), which are these things of *kuphalha*''.

As it can be understood, while the Church is in the world of light (*ku wonekela*), the *ntumbuluko* is in the diabolical or dark world (*munyama*). ''A person who goes to church and still practices *kuphalha* is walking down two paths''. But it is also synonymous with remaining in darkness (*munyama*), when ''the Church teaches us to come out of darkness''. Therefore, practicing ancestral beliefs and rituals is committing idolatry and infidelity to God. For this reason, practitioners of *ntumbuluko*, despite attending the Church, are considered only as friends of the Church (*vangano va Kereke*) and not true followers of Christ.

The discourse of incompatibility and rupture configures what in the theology of religions is called ecclesiocentrism or exclusivism. For this model, salvation is only possible through the Church. Any other form or path other than the Christian way is excluded. According to Filho (2017:115), historically, exclusivism or ecclesiocentrism first appears in Roman Catholicism, from the saying of Cyprian of Carthage, one of the Latin priests, according to which "there is no salvation outside the church". Already in Protestantism, it is associated with the theology of Karl Barth, for whom God only reveals himself in the person of Christ and never in religions, since these are human projects doomed to failure.

Beyond the soteriological perspective, others argue that the foundations of exclusivism lie in theological dualism. In fact, from Platonism, a long tradition has developed in Western theology that interprets the world as being under the confrontation of two antagonistic powers (Langa, 1992; Clark, 2013). So you find on the one hand, God the Almighty and his angels, and on the other, Satan and his followers. However, although the influence of this dualism is undeniable, the strength of the incompatibility discourse lies in what some theorists call coloniality (Quinjano, 2009), abyssal or colonial thinking (Santos, 2009; 2017). For it is at this level that difference turns into opposition, not just metaphysical or spiritual, but above all interpersonal and intergroup. The black and pagan categories attributed to Africans translated into secular and religious language, respectively, the same colonial discourse, which represented African identity as the opposite of the Christian and civilized West (Clark, 2013). If the white is civilized, rational, religious, the black is the opposite of all that: uncultured, irrational, and superstitious. Therefore colonization, which is barbarism that is condemnable at all levels, became a process of civilization or the salvation of lost souls, thus having a moral and spiritual value never imagined. Besides to being simply dualistic, the discourse of incompatibility reproduces the colonial scheme, in which people are excluded, discriminated against or stigmatized, not so much for lack of character or competence, but for the simple fact of belonging to or practicing a religion or culture considered a priori to be diabolical or depraved. If what they practice is *munyama* (darkness) and not religion, then they are not religious, but *va matiko* (gentiles) or *ma hedeni* (gentiles). With political independence and especially with the advances made in the 2nd Republic in terms of

recognition and promotion of cultural and religious diversity the opposition between civilized and primitive; assimilated and indigenous ceased to exist, but it still continues in the religious field. Religion thus becomes a differentiating marker with the same role that race played in colonial times. So the official protestant discourse does not open space for a collaborative dialogue with the *ntmubuluko*, precisely because it is based on the colonial ideology that interprets African cultural and religious practices, not only as different, but rather as diabolical and in clear opposition with Christianity.

2. **Experience of ti Hosi ta Misava: Theocentric Model:** In the ecclesiocentric model, *Ntumbuluko* and Christianity are incompatible, as they are located at opposite poles. The understanding of the Traditional Chiefs, who are also priests of ancestral religion, is quite different. For these, both religions can collaborate and complement each other in the process of seeking well-being. They understand that despite their potential, *ntumbuluko* and Christianity have limitations. None of them can achieve all of the *tsonga's* aspirations and core values alone, so cooperation helps overcome this incompleteness. This commitment is not limited to speech. They themselves practice both religions openly and naturally, despite the stigmatization they face. When I asked kinglet Albino Mondlane why he mixed Catholicism and *ntumbuluko* in his rituals, he said that he was looking to capitalize on the common denominator of both. What then is this common denominator? I asked him – to which he replied: ''They all accommodate people's spirits. Those who believe in us the most, when we do our ceremonial, are accommodated". But it's not just other people's spirits that are accommodated. I believe that this hybridity reassures is good for his spirit too: ''I am a Catholic Christian. I leave the house, first I tie the palu (a traditional clothe reserved for religious rites) and I go to do the *kuphalha* and then I wear a suit and go to Sunday mass''.

While other Christians who practice religious transit visit other religions or denominations to solve specific problems in their lives that do not find space or solution in their denomination, often in a disguised way, the *ntumbuluko* ministers openly engage the two religious expressions and lasting. We can say that the former practice only the dual religious practice, but the latter not only practice two religions, but also identify with them. They therefore practice dual religious belonging (Ribeiro, 2018). Let's try to explore this experience a little, along the lines that follow.

Let's start with Zacarias Matsinhe, a member of the Church of the Nazarene, but with passage in the Catholic Church, where he was educated and baptized. He quietly practices both beliefs, although he is aware that dual religious affiliation goes against the doctrine of the Nazarene Church, of which he is a member. Like other leaders, he has under his guardianship the sacred forest where, it is believed, the spirits of the land reside. It is in his house that rituals for ancestors are carried out in the territory under his jurisdiction, as was the case with the ceremony of the first fruits and opening of the *wukanyi* season that we had the opportunity to witness. Unlike his church, leader Matsinhe advocates respect and mutual consideration between the two religions. His argument is that both religions are based on the belief in something invisible, so that their veracity lies in the belief of those who practice them: "Whoever goes to the *ganzelo* (altar) to perform the *kuphalha* does not see the ancestors, but even so he believes in the

its existence. In the same way, we also believe in God, although we have never seen him."

A man of strong convictions, leader Zacarias Matsinhe made it clear that even in his role as a traditional chief, he has always advocated tolerance and respect for religious diversity. Exploiting its social capital, it has openly challenged the official doctrine of its Church. By organizing the ceremonies of thanksgiving and opening of the wukanyi season, he simultaneously commits two serious sins according to Protestant doctrine, namely: idolatry and alcoholism. And since, according to local representations, this type of ceremony is associated with a phase of suspension or relaxation of the moral order, typical of liminal rituals (Tuner, 1974), we can associate these sins with the sin of immorality. Yet there are no indications that he was excommunicated or subjected to any disciplinary correction. On the contrary, it was he who, in the name of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence between religions, voluntarily stopped attending services for some time, following the conflict he had with his Church, when he demanded that the use of a derogatory language against zion healers and churches: "I had stopped going to church. Nobody kicked me out. I just don't like it when the Church speaks ill of other Churches. In the Church where I am (Nazarene), this happened, there was bad talk about *mazione* and healers".

When asked, during the workshop held in Mandlakazi, to suggest contents to be taught to theology students preparing for the pastorate, leader Zacarias Matsinhe could not be clearer and more objective: "say that God does not belong to anyone; God belongs to all of us". Twice he had already heard him speak in the same way, which shows coherence and consistency of his conviction. But he is not the only one to think so. Other leaders also understand that the *Xikwembo*, that is, the God who was always worshiped by their ancestors, is the same one they worship in the Church. So others leaders include also prayer in their *ku phalha* rituals. For example, the leader Ana Mondlane observed that at the beginning of the *Kuphalha* ritual *Xikwembo* is invoked, that is, the same God who is worshiped in the Church:"…first we invoked the spirits of our ancestors making a prayer to God: we have arrived here Lord, where your children are lying. By faith we know that their spirits are with you Lord and we say Amen. Then we take *n'dzenko* (cup made with pumpkin), pour the drink on the floor and say: here we are, the Mondlane family, because your community is happy, bring you this great offer of *kanyu* drink".

While it is certain that the notion of a single God predates the arrival of the missionaries, it is not possible to say with certainty whether the invocation of God in the *ku phalha* in the terms referred to here is a reflection of the current trends of appropriation of religious acts or even the manifestation of that theocentrism theological present in *ntumbuluko*. Be that as it may, the most important thing to note is that the ancestors are placed in the position of children of God, which shows that people are aware that they are just dead human beings, who are also under the grace of God.

Another example of the inclusion of prayer in the *ntumbuluko* rituals can be found in the experience of régulo Albino Mondlane. Unlike other Protestant leaders, the Roman Catholic Church of which he is a member recognizes and participates in *ntumbuluko* rituals. That's why when he has some ceremonies, he invites the Church to say the prayers. But ancestral rituals take precedence over Christian prayer, because: "we

Africans, in the Christian religion are assimilated; it's not our genesis... So, we start from ourselves and then we emigrate to the other situation".

According to the kinglet, the *ntumbuluko* has precedence because it is the first cultural and identity base of the Tsonga. Therefore, while manifesting openness to cooperation and complementarity, the régulo seems to be engaged in the struggle for the affirmation of the *ntumbuluko* before Christianity and the government. In another statement, he noted that even when it comes to public ceremonies organized by the government, the first to intervene is the *ntumbuluko* priest to invoke the ancestors through the *ku phalha*. In fact, in an interview he lamented the fact that the Protestant Churches try to devalue the *ntumbuluko*, when the Catholic Church, which according to his words is "mother of all Churches" values it.

As can be seen, the doctrine of complementarity of the *ti Hhosi ta misava* is based on the principle of the universality of God. The same God who is and is worshiped in the Church is the same one who has existed since time immemorial and is evoked in the *ntumbuluko* rituals. A curious fact, however, is that although they were Christians, in their apologetic speeches, they systematically omitted the name of Christ. Was this omission mere mistake or intentional? Our interpretation is that the omission is deliberate, not so much out of aversion to the figure of Christ, but precisely because its pluralist agenda would only be better defended from the name of God and not from a Christ already appropriated and presented by the Church as being exclusivist and hostile to *ntumbuluko*. And it is precisely this argument that led Presbyterian theologian John Hick (2005) to develop the theology of religious pluralism. The concern of this philosopher and theologian of religions, recognized as the greatest exponent of theocentrism (Objantoro, 2018), was to show that all religions are paths of salvation and that they lead their adherents to the same Ultimate reality, although known by different names. In this case, Christianity is just one of many paths of salvation. Because of human limitations none of the religions manages to apprehend and represent the ultimate reality in its fullness. Therefore, the idea that Christianity is the only or truest religion that exists is false.

With some pleasure, Hick (2005) observes that since Vatican II, the inclusivity model accepted not only among Catholics, but also among theologians of Protestant denominations, such as Anglican, Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, among others, began to develop. This model is based on the assumption that outside of Christianity, there are people who, even though they do not know or profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, lead a life that conforms to his teachings and who, for this reason, will be worthy of salvation. They are unconscious followers of Christ, known according to Karl Rahner's expression as anonymous Christians (Teixeira,2004; Delicata,2006). Likewise, it began to be admitted that non-Christian religions can be considered partial paths of salvation, which find their fullness or fulfilment in Christ. Even so, Hick does not feel comfortable with inclusivism, because although it does not exclude other religions, it subordinates them. Christ and Christians remain in the top position in relation to spiritual entities and adherents of other religions. While the grace of Christ goes only to Christians, and may according to them, overflow to some non-Christians, for the theocentrists "God belongs to all of us", as the leader Zacarias Matsinhe would say. It contains all people and all religions. Generally, defenders of pluralism seek to relativize Jesus Christ as one more mediator. Contrary to the assertion that Jesus is the only lord and saviour, pluralists

understand that he is just one, among many others that exist in other religions. Knitter(2002:255) for example, thinks that Jesus should not be interpreted as the cause of salvation, but as a symbol or sacrament whose salvation consists in the fact of showing us God.

While we agree with the pluralists' claim that God is present and active in all cultures and religions (Hick, 2001; 2005, Knitter, 2002, Phan; 2015), we cannot, in the name of religious pluralism, obscure or compromise the basis of the Christian faith, namely the uniqueness of Christ as the only Lord and Saviour. We can relativize Christianity, but not Christ. In other words, theocentrism is a very sympathetic model for relativists or postmodernists for whom there is no absolute or unique truth, since everything varies depending on the context and culture, but relativizing Christ and absolutizing God compromises the Christian Trinitarian understanding and therefore cannot fit the theological model we are looking for here. The adequate model has to be able to reconcile the claim of pluralism according to which all religions are paths that lead to the same God and the claim of exclusivism which says that the only way of salvation is Christ. It is this discussion that will develop next.

3. **Gloria Vasco Sitoe's Experience: Towards an Inclusive Pluralism or Trinitarian Christological Model:** As we have seen, both the pluralism of the *ti hosi ta misava* and that of the academics rejects, in the name of the equality of all religions, the central principle of the Christian faith about the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ as the only saviour. Therefore, although it represents an advance when compared with the exclusivism of the official Protestant discourse, it does not constitute a good basis for the Christian theology of religious pluralism. Now let's consider the experience of Glória Vasco Sitoe, a Christian and lay practitioner of ancestral beliefs and rituals at the same time. That experience constitutes an interesting exception to the theocentric pattern of *ti Hosi ta misava* and at the same times a critique of the exclusivism of official Protestant discourses. After her mission as master of ceremonies during the opening party of the *wucanyi* season (*xikuha*), held at the house of leader Zacarias Matsinhe, we had the opportunity to talk with her about the importance and constraints of her dual religious identity. Next, she shared with us one of the strategies she uses to get around the doctrine of incompatibility between Christianity and *ntumbuluko*:''The bible says that you should not follow the *numbuluko* of your grandparents, because they walked in darkness (*ava famba munyameni*); it is you the living who worship God who will regenerate (*kutsula*) those who were in darkness. When we do *ku phalha* we inform the grandparents but at the end I make the Lord's Prayer, to regenerate those who are in darkness".

Although she does not explicitly mention the name of Christ, when she intercedes for the regeneration of her ancestors praying the Lord's Prayer, which is a normative model of prayer instituted personally by Christ, Mrs. Gloria Vasco Sitoé is convinced that Christ is present in the *kuphalha* and active on *ntumbuluko*. But at the same time it rejects ecclesiocentric exclusivism. She accepts the teaching that ancestors must be regenerated, as she is aware that they too depend on the grace of Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Saviour of all men. The only but profound difference is that, unlike to official Protestant discourse, regeneration takes place within *ntumbuluko*. At the same time that the uniqueness and universality of Christ as an absolute saviour is reaffirmed, Christianity is

relativized, insofar as it is no longer considered as the only space or means through which salvation takes place.

Contrary to the claim of the exclusivists, for Master Glória, Christ is neither against the *ntumbuluko* nor cloistered in the four walls of the churches. Christ also acts and regenerates people who seek God in *ntumbuluko*. This thought seems to be adequate to support a Tsonga inter-religion theology. For it manages, at the same time to safeguard the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation for all human beings (Acts 4:12) claimed by exclusivism and, on the other hand, it recognizes and respects the claim of the pluralists, that the other non-Christian religions are equally ways of salvation. This means, in other words, recognizing that the grace and truth that the Tsonga experience in the Church can be found and celebrated in his *ntumbuluko*, even if in a different and/or implicit way, since the seeds of the Word that act in different cultures also arrive here. and religions.

4. **Towards a Theology of Interreligious Cooperation:** Are there consistent theological arguments that support the complementarity and assumption of master Gloria, according to which the *ntumbuluko* is also an autonomous religious expression that experiences in its bosom the grace and salvation freely given by Christ to all human beings (1 Tm2 :4). Despite the shudder that such a statement can cause for pharisaic and colonial thought, the truth is that there is an extensive theological literature that recognizes the Holy Spirit, who blows wherever he wants (Jo3), God is acting and saving people even outside the Church. The names of this theological approach vary according to the authors. Dupuis calls it inclusive pluralism or pluralist inclusivism. D'Costa (1990) calls it Christocentric Trinitarianism or Trinitarian Christology. In Pieris (2000:202), we can call it corporate Christology, starting from his conception of Christ as a Corporate Person (Corporate Person). Without worrying about the designations, we will argue in favor of dialogic collaboration between Christianity and the *Ntumbuluko*, engaging these theologians who, like Mestre Glória, while affirming the uniqueness and universality of Christ, relativize Christianity, as a of the paths, along with so many others, that God can use to save people. Basically, three types of arguments are presented: Trinitarian, soteriological and missiological.

Trinitarian theology constitutes the starting point to support inclusive or Christocentric pluralism (D'Costa,1990; Dupuis, 1988; Delicata,2008), as it is based on the idea that God is one and diverse at the same time. He is and always reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet, one God. So both the cultural and religious diversity and the eminently social nature of man (Aristotle,), are actually participations of this triune and relational nature of God. The gift of tongues and the alliance with Abram are, among others, enlightening examples (Geffré, 1989). God gave human beings different languages, but they still communicated and understood each other. The confusion of languages that occurred during the construction of the tower of Babel happened not because God was against diversity, but rather to end the Adamic sin of wanting to occupy the place that exclusively belongs to Him. Even so, God's initial project was symbolically restored at Pentecost. Possessed of the Holy Spirit, people from different nations spoke in their different languages and yet God understood them and they understood each other. Culturally diverse but united in the same Holy Spirit. If God is in permanent relationship

with himself, he is also with human beings. In the same way with Abram, God promises through him to constitute a world of several nations, and Abram would be the father of them all. And here we must understand the word nation not as a state, but as a people or cultural group. God is the God of nations, of diversity. Unfortunately, some people interpret the election of Israel and the Church today, as a privilege and exclusivity, when in fact they mean mission or symbols through which God accomplishes his mission and his plan to gather all nations before Christ (Fp2:10-11).

The second argument is of a soteriological order. If the first argument resides in the God, unity and diversity, the soteriological ones resides in the articulation between the universality and the particularity of the mystery of salvation and, evidently, of revelation (Schwobel, 1990). Unlike the mutually exclusive positions of ecclesiocentric exclusivism and pluralism, inclusive pluralism or Trinitarian Christocentrism recognizes the salvific presence of God in other non-Christian religions, while also recognizing Christ as the normative and definitive authority of God's revelation (Clooney, nineteen ninety). Indeed, the bible shows that God revealed himself to human beings in their religions, even before Judaism, through the Word and the Spirit in the alliances that he was progressively making with human beings. First with Adam, then with Noah, then with Abraham and Moses and finally in Jesus Christ through the incarnation, which constitutes the culmination of this process, in which God engages in a personal way with human beings (Dupuis, 2002).

This understanding is not new, as it already exists even among the fathers of the Church. Starting from the Pauline conception according to which the Mosaic law was the guide that God used to lead the Jews to Christ, Clement of Alexandria understood that philosophy was for the Greeks, what the law was for the Jews. Both guided their respective peoples to Christ. The same thought can be found in Justin, according to whom, before the incarnation, God manifested himself to all men of good will and honest life through the seeds of the Logos (Lógos spermatikós), that is, of the universal reason that participates in the divine Reason. . Therefore, even before incarnation God had instituted means for men to be saved (Frangiotti, 1992:20-22). It is on this basis that Chitlango (2004:227) supports the thesis that the positive elements of ntumbuluko constitute evangelical preparation for Christ. But the hypothesis of the propaedeutic use of the ntumbuluko to lead the Tsongas to Christ, if it does not disappear, at least it is weakened by denying that such elements result from divine revelation. Even admitting the hypothesis of divine inspiration or revelation, contrary to Greek philosophy or the Old Testament, with the coming of Christ, the positive elements of ntumbuluko are discarded and give way exclusively to the gospel. That is, in Chitlango (2004:215) the ntumbuluko does not have the same spiritual value that Greek philosophy and law have in Clemente. This understood that everything that was good in the Greek philosophical systems, although provisional and partial, had been given by God and that it was not abolished with the arrival of Christ, just as the Mosaic law was not abolished. Despite its propaedeutic nature, philosophy continues to help "true religion by lending it its methodology to guide those who come to faith through the path of demonstration" (cited by Frangiotti (1992:46).

Like Mrs Glória Sitoé, the claim of theologians who defend inclusive pluralism is that it is Christ who saves and not the Church. For this reason, while underlining the

uniqueness and universality of Christ, they relativize Christianity. Second, they argue that although the incarnation of Christ, who as the means through which God revealed himself as a concrete person, is the most complete and unsurpassed manifestation of God, it is not the only one. This means that, although qualitatively the Jesus Christ event is superior and unsurpassed, it should not be seen as exclusive or absolute, but rather as being in relation to other forms of revelation that God uses in other religions. Returning to the concept of seeds of the Word, they argue that the values and positive teachings present in the rituals, doctrines and practices of different religions are not only inspired by Christ but also flow into him. According to Dupuis, the non-incarnate Christ, who does not know the spatio-temporal limitations of the incarnate Christ, is present and saves people in other religions outside of Christianity (Delicata, 2008). But Geffré (2013:9) understands that it is not necessary to tweak the inseparability of the two natures to explain the presence of Christ in other religions or even the relativity of Christianity. On the contrary,"…it is the very paradox of the incarnation, that is, the presence of the absolute of God in the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth, that leads us not to consider Christianity as an absolute as the exclusive way of salvation of all others"

Through incarnation, the Universal became concrete in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who succumbed on the cross to regain his universality again in the resurrection. Thus, while admitting that the unconscious or implicit presence of Christ in other religions, through what he calls Christianity, namely the human impulse to live according to Christian values and the openness of every human being to the divine, for being historical and contingent, the Christ event cannot be seen as absolute and exclusive, that is, as if he were the only mediator.

The particularity of Christians is that they are witnesses and bearers of the message of universal salvation, which other religions do not know. However, instead of making them superior or better than others, this particularity demands greater responsibility and cooperation from them. They need to be witnesses and concrete symbols of the God of nations and communion, always keeping in touch with other religions and cultures, as other means that God uses to indirectly lead people to salvation. Second, they are also dependent on Christ, for neither they nor their religion saves anyone. Furthermore, the historical and interpretative nature of the very truth that they announce and testify shows that it cannot be understood as a definitive fact. That is, although the gospel message is universal and absolute, its historical mediation, because it is done by human beings, is contingent and partial. Therefore, Christianity is a paradoxical religion. Is a sign and testimony of the universal, but under existential contingencies of an epistemological, ethical and cultural nature? It is called to being holy and perfect, but by itself incapable, because of the sin that enslaves her (António da Silva, 2009).

For these reasons, its relationship with other religions is not one of superiority or exclusivity, but of mutual complementarity. If all human beings have the same origin, yearn and walk, albeit through different religions, towards the same kingdom of God, then Christianity and these religions can and should dialogue. Since none of them has the fullness of revelation and truth or is immune to sin, then dialogue will allow them to learn, enrich and perfect and complement each other. It is not a matter of unilateral, one-way complementarity, in which some teach and others limit themselves to learning. It is a

dialogue that seeks to find bridges, without cancelling out or disguising differences. This dialogue also results in conversion, but not in the sense of proselytise, as Christians usually do. Rather, this is a mutual conversion to God (Dupuis, 2002), or as Pieris (2000) would say, the shift from a mindset of supremacy and self-satisfaction to a mindset of detachment and renunciation in favour of well-being. of others, especially the poor. Rather than a change of religion, conversion is freedom from the misuse of power whether spiritual, political or economic, from the spirit of hatred and envy that drives people to practice *ku khendla* and witchcraft. It means becoming a little person, a poor volunteer and joining other poor people to fight against the poverty imposed by circumstances. Conversion simply means rejecting idolatry, understood here as the use of power for self-satisfaction and the impoverishment of others (Pieris, 2003).

Despite including other religions, Hick thinks that the principle of uniqueness and exclusivity of Jesus turns out to be exclusivist because only Christians have the possibility of being saved. However Pannenberg (1990) notes that Hick's criticism is based on a misinterpretation of Mt 25:40. In fact, although many Christians use this text to support the exclusion of non-Christians, it does not say that judgment will be based on religion. The text just shows us that everyone will be judged and saved by Jesus (Acts 17:30) and that, as in the parable of the good Samaritan, the criterion for judgment will not be belonging to this or that religion, but rather the law of love for God. According to Schwobel (1990:42), if it weren't for the superposition of the colonial bias, even the Protestant theology according to which salvation is the exclusive work of God, independent of any action, be it religious, moral or intellectual, would have been enough to prevent the Church from ecclesiocentric exclusivism.

The ecclesiocentric tendency has been present since the birth of the Church. However, whenever man, either as an individual or as an institution, takes precedence over Christ, the result is demonic. The Church begins to confuse or even overlap with Christ. Instead of the Church serving Christ, the terms are reversed. The Church appropriates or supersedes Christ. In the name of Christ, she proceeds to determine who is saved and who is undeserving. In the vision of the vessel containing a meal made from unclean animals according to Jewish tradition, Peter, then the highest leader of the Church, was taught that outside of Judaism and the nascent Church Christ sees pious and God-fearing people, so that although he does not knowing directly, are saved anyway. Yet the weight of tradition and ethnocentrism was stronger than the gospel of Christ. The second lesson left for Peter and for us is that Christ's salvific presence in other religions does not nullify the Church's special responsibility, even in relation to these religions, as Peter's own visit to Cornelius elucidates. But this revelation should at least remind us of two important things: that Christ is not the exclusive property of the churches, since he is the God of all creation, and secondly, that this Christ is at work even outside the Christian religion, in ways that are out of our understanding. If we have the courage to decolonize our minds and reread Jesus from this perspective, we will notice that Christian purity does not consist in demonizing or discriminating against people. On the contrary, the purity of the Christian faith consists in a humble heart, full of love and compassion for people, especially for the marginalized or the little ones, not so much because they are saints, but because it is for them that Christ came and died, it is to them that we are sent to to serve and it is in this service that our salvation lies, both cosmic and eschatological.

Finally, we have the missiological argument. Having found that in Asia the poor were mostly members of non-Christian religions, Pieris (1988) concluded that to be relevant the Church must cooperate and work alongside other religions in the fight against involuntary or structural poverty. Therefore, the theology of pluralism must treat the themes of inculturation and liberation inseparably. For him, the point of convergence and criterion of authenticity of religions is their commitment to liberation, which necessarily involves transforming the oppressive and imperial mentality into a welcoming and sharing mentality. In other words, the fundamental point in relations between religions is not whether or not people profess Christianity, but whether or not their attitudes and behaviours are favourable to God's libertarian project present in all them and most expressively in the alliance of love and hope that Christ established with the poor. Like Dupuis (1988), Pieris (1988, 2000) understands that the Church only becomes the body of Christ when it voluntarily and humbly strips itself of power and becomes poor to fight against imposed poverty. For in Christ, God chose the victims of poverty regardless of religion and became one body with them.

However, unlike Dupuis, for him the complementarity between Christians and adherents of other religions should be symbiotic rather than symmetrical. Pieris (2000) thinks that asymmetric complementarity places Christianity in a relationship of superiority in relation to other religions and cannot be a good basis for cooperation (Premawardhana, 2011). Instead of asymmetrical relationships, he advocates symbiotic complementarity. Symbiosis is understood as the movement in which members of different religious traditions gathered in basic human communities, not just Christian base communities, as proposed by Latin American liberation theology, live and work together in the fight against poverty, respecting the integrity and irreducibility of each religion. The absolute character of the truth according to the Christian witness must not be interpreted in terms of excluding others from God's grace or trying to engulf them in the Christian faith, but rather in terms of relating to them within the framework of respect for irreducible religious diversity. That always converges to the same realm of peace and justice. That is, the focus here is not on which the best or true religion is, but rather how religions can work together for common well-being, while learning from each other about what is unique and meaningful in each of them. . If there has to be a loan of values and experiences or even a change of religion, it will be a voluntary process that results from a conscious and intentional decision by the person and not by imposition (Pieris, 1988; 2000).

Pieirs is not alone in giving primacy to collaborative work over their doctrinal differences and incompatibilities. As noted, the discourse of *ti Hosi ta misava* is more geared towards building social bridges rather than doctrinal walls. Even when, for apologetic reasons, they use arguments of a theological nature, they do not stop insisting that the complementarity between the two religions resides in the pursuit of well-being and not so much in doctrine. In other words, they are concerned with a complementarity that, without erasing differences, focuses more on collaboration for a common purpose. In this sense, they agree with theologians for whom interreligious dialogue has to occur in the context of collaboration for a collective purpose and not so much to discuss doctrines (Pieirs, 1988; Moltman,(1990:154). Therefore, bearing in mind that differences are often social constructions used to disparage other groups or to justify conflicts and violence, it is urgent not only to recognize and value cultural and religious diversity, as pluralism

defends, but above all to promote intercultural relationships that emphasize more values such as relationality, cooperation and collaboration, as this is what will allow the maximization of potential and harmonious and peaceful coexistence. As Hans Kung(1993:186) said, ''there will be no peace among nations without peace among religions''.

5. **Conclusion:** The question posed in this study was whether there were theological foundations or not to justify collaboration between Christianity and *ntumbuluko*. The arguments discussed here allow us to state that collaboration between Christianity and *ntumbuluko* is not only possible but also desirable. The two religions are different paths, which seek to reach the same and only God. Because it is founded on the experience of God's definitive and unsurpassable self-revelation in Christ, Christianity does have a special vocation, but given its historical and contingent character, it is partial and limited, so that it needs to share its experience and at the same time, to be open to knowing, living and collaborating with other religions, as is the case of the *ntumbuluko*, its closest neighbour. This openness is not intended to combat, deny or disguise differences. It simply means manifesting your vocation as a herald and builder of peace among men and a witness to Christ's unconditional love for all people, especially the marginalized. In this sense, the discourse of complementarity as articulated by the *ntumbuluko* ministers captures Christ's message better than that of stigmatization and exclusion, defended by the official Protestant discourse. We also underlined that collaboration is a way of bearing witness to one of God's communicable attributes, namely, unity in diversity. Being one and different at the same time, God is in a permanent relationship and communion with himself and with the human being, who is also one and different. The relational perspective, in addition to being in accordance with the divine nature, frees us from colonial dualistic thinking, based on mutually exclusive binary relations. In other words, it is about maximizing what unites or brings us together, without denying or hiding what makes us different.

With great satisfaction we have seen a commendable effort on the part of the Protestant Churches in this sense. Several ecumenical and interfaith initiatives have been developed. One of the successful examples of this proposal was the cooperation between Protestants and Catholics in the process of seeking peace in Mozambique (Sengulane, 1994). The only one missing from all these efforts is *ntumbuluko*. It could be said that this absence is related to the fact that it is different from other religious, either from the point of view of institutional organization or doctrinal. But differences exist even in those that cooperate with each other. Despite being Christian Churches, from a doctrinal point of view, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism present very profound structural differences that make them different and well separated from each other. Suffice it to say, for example, that in Catholicism the priesthood is exclusively male and is obligatorily celibate; that unlike Protestants in Catholicism, saints are venerated and prostrated before statues, not to mention the doctrine of Mariology completely foreign to Protestants. But even so, these differences did not prevent the two institutions from cooperating. It was possible because the focus of cooperation was not doctrine, but a common good of greater interest to the entire country, which is peace. Secondly, despite being different, both respected each other as equal in dignity. There was mutual acceptance and respect, so

neither used the differences as an opportunity to belittle, ridicule the other. Outside of that cooperation would not have been possible.

So what prevents Protestants from cooperating with *ntumbuluko* is the dualistic and colonial thinking that lies behind the incompatibility discourse and which makes it difficult to recognize it as a religion with equal dignity. The idea still prevails that indigenous cultures and religions are not only different from Western culture and Christianity, but are also its opposite. Therefore, for the simple fact of belonging to the said diabolical world, the ministers of the *ntumbuluko* are automatically disqualified and discriminated, regardless of their character, their skills, and their human dignity.

Incredible as it may seem, who loses with all this is not only the *ntumbuluko* and its ministers, but all of us. Firstly, by indiscriminately demonizing *numbuluko*, we are also disqualifying our own knowledge and experiences, which for centuries have helped us facing life. Many studies show that, in addition to magical-religious practices, healers and other practitioners of *ntumbuluko* have knowledge in various areas of knowledge, such as mental and psychological disorders (Honwana, 2002; Igreja, 2003; Chiziane and Martins,201) . Likewise, we know that these people are experts in medicinal plants. If these people, had the necessary support, as some of they said, this knowledge could be evaluated and systematized for the development of an African medicine. Instead of demonizing, we should critically appropriate our knowledge and elevate it to the status of science. Western science and philosophy, which we all admired, developed from the knowledge of Egyptian priests (Reale and Antiseri, 2003:121; Diop). By considering in a preliminary way and without prior examination, irrelevant or diabolical local knowledge and the respective depositories, we participate, perhaps unconsciously, in the neo-colonial project, of destroying African epistemologies and, in this way, putting an end to the dream of an effectively free and autonomous Africa (Santos, 2009. Secondly, from the social point of view, instead of promoting peace at the level of families and communities, demonization contributes to the promotion of exclusionary thinking, which we can also call tribal, according to which the development of someone or of a group necessarily involves excluding members of the other group, represented as subaltern or enemy. It is this way of thinking that, in part, is at the origin of exclusion, the crisis of national unity and the permanent tensions between Mozambicans. As a witness and promoter of peace, the Churches should have a discourse and practices consistent with her mission.

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