

## **Farm ministries in the Hoedspruit area: Past and present**

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### *Abstract*

Missionary work came late to the eastern Lowveld, and specifically to the areas today known as Hoedspruit, Acornhoek and Bushbuckridge. The twentieth century saw the Swiss (Evangelical Presbyterian Church) and the Germans (Lutheran Church) doing missionary work in the eastern Lowveld, with the Roman Catholics making an entry through Mozambique. The Dutch Reformed Church began missionary work in the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge area in the 1950s. At present, however, these and other mainline churches have all but disappeared from the religious scene among farm workers in the area, and among black Christians, indigenous churches with a focus on healing ministries are dominant. This article traces the history of Christian ministries among farm workers in the eastern Lowveld, with particular emphasis on the Hoedspruit area. It focuses on developments since the Tomlinson Report of the 1950s led to the renewal of missionary work in the broader South Africa, including this area. Against this historical backdrop, the religious identity of farm workers in the Hoedspruit area is described with the help of a recent research project on the religious discourses that inform the way in which farm workers in this area – among whom there is a 28.8% prevalence of HIV infection – perceive illness and healing. Reasons for the departure of farm workers from the historically mission churches in favour of indigenous churches with pronounced healing ministries are identified.

### **Introduction: aims and sources**

#### *Aim*

The aim of this article is threefold. The first is to describe in broad terms the missionary outreach in the eastern Lowveld over the past 50 years. This history reveals the decline in missionary church influence in the region under

discussion, that is, the farming and “trust” areas of Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge. The influence of the Swiss Presbyterian, the Lutheran, the Roman Catholic and the Dutch Reformed/Uniting Reformed churches has diminished during the past 50 years to such an extent that almost none of the farm workers from this region still belong to them. Church membership among farm workers has instead shifted to indigenous African churches that offer healing ministries, including, to some extent, the Hoedspruit Farm Ministries (HFM).

The second aim of this article is to contextualise the historical phenomenon of previously missionised believers moving away from missionary to indigenous churches. This will be achieved through an account of the three-phase development of farm ministries in the Hoedspruit area from Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) tent ministries in the 1980s to the beginning of Sunday services for farm workers in the Kampersrus DRC church building, and the establishment of the HFM in the early 2000s. The article will describe how the HFM operates amid a multitude of independent churches that offer a variety of healing ministries to farm workers.

The third aim of this article is to present the findings of a research project entitled “Concepts of illness and healing amongst farm workers in the Hoedspruit area”, which was conducted in 2008 to examine the religious discourses that inform farm workers’ perceptions concerning the causes of illness and the prerequisites for healing. (“Discourse” is used here in the way it is understood in social construction theory. Discourses are grand narratives that run the lives of the people who believe in them.) It will be demonstrated, through the stories of farm workers, how these discourses are functioning within the farm ministries. This will be presented as one of the reasons for the departure of farm workers from missionary churches in favour of indigenous ones.

### *Sources*

To bring the first aim to realisation, that is, to provide a brief historical account of missions in the eastern Lowveld with a focus on the DRC missions in the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge area over the past 50 years, secondary literature was consulted, in particular Dons Kritzinger’s *Die onvoltooide sendingtaak in Noord- en Oos-Transvaal* (1982), and interviews conducted with Dionne Crafford, Koos Beukes, Danie Louw and Sias Botha, all former DRC ministers and missionaries from this region. Reflections by Nathaniel Mosehla, an elder in the Dullstroom Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA), as well as Rev Daniel Masinga, current minister of Rivoni, and his sister Martha, are referred to.

Information concerning the healing ministries among the farm workers in the Hoedspruit area has been obtained from agendas of the HFM

and interviews conducted with Pieter Dorey, Louis Scheepers, Andrews Mandosela and Harrie Grové, all of whom are involved in the HFM. Further information regarding farm workers belonging to churches with pronounced healing ministries was obtained from the research project entitled “Concepts of illness and healing amongst farm workers in the Hoedspruit area”, mentioned earlier. The final section of the article, in which the religious concepts concerning illness and healing informing farm ministries in the Hoedspruit area are discussed, also draws on information gained during the course of this project.

Sources consulted to provide an account of how mission churches in the eastern Lowveld made way for churches with indigenous healing ministries – with farm workers in the Hoedspruit area as case study – are thus oral interviews, published material, congregational histories, and agendas of constituting meetings, where available. Sources consulted to provide an account of present-day beliefs among farm workers concerning illness and healing are 210 interviews conducted with farm workers in the Hoedspruit area for the purposes of the research project entitled “Concepts of illness and healing amongst farm workers in the Hoedspruit area”.

### **Mission in the Lowveld, with a focus on Rivoni and Kampersrus**

#### *The eastern Lowveld*

The eastern Lowveld was missionised from three directions. It was missionised from the west by the Swiss Mission, which worked among the Tsonga as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Although it was a presence in the Soutpansberg as early as 1875, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church established itself in the Acornhoek area only later in the first half of the twentieth century (Kritzinger 1982:60).

The eastern Lowveld was subsequently missionised from the south by the American missionaries of the Church of the Nazarene, a church that soon became indigenised and is still firmly established in Arthur Seat in Acornhoek, where, since 1963, the Nazarene Theological College has been training pastors for church ministry.

The eastern Lowveld was missionised from the east, that is, from Mozambique, by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church remains the leading denomination in Mozambique, but has lost most of its members in the eastern Lowveld to independent churches (Kritzinger 1982:61).

The DRC was a relative latecomer to this region, but soon became a leading force there. Dutch Reformed missions took their inspiration from the Tomlinson Report published in 1954, which recommended missionary work among the black people as a way of enhancing their capacity in “independ-

dent” homelands and in trusts. Saayman (2007:75) notes that “in the Northern Transvaal the number of missionaries nearly doubled from 44 to 80 in the two years from 1956 ... whereas the number of DRC mission stations increased from 10 to 25”. The eastern Lowveld also benefited from this zeal, with a missionary station, Nkhensani, being established where Giyani is today, and – important for our thesis – Rivoni coming into being as a missionary outpost housing a network of full-time missionaries who worked in the areas now known as Hoedspruit, Acornhoek and Bushbuckridge.

Reminiscing about his inauguration as DRC missionary in the missionary church at Bedford in Kampersrus (25 km from what today is known as Hoedspruit)<sup>1</sup> on 18 August 1956, Carel Boshoff<sup>2</sup> testifies to both the scarcity of missionaries in the area in 1956 and the strong growth in DRC missionary work from 1956 to 1960, which included the work of Rev Nico Smith, who later strongly criticised DRC missionary politics:

Die Laeveldsending druk die afgelope jaar swaar op ons harte. Ons het ’n toer onderneem van Barberton en Nelspruit in die ooste oor Witrivier, Bosbokrand, Gravelotte, Tzaneen, Magoe-baskloof, tot in Pietersburg. Vandaar deur Sekoekoenieland, terug na Belfast – ’n ongerepte wêreld so ver dit die sending aanbetref. Op Pietersburg is ’n studentemaat, Deon de Villiers, op Tzaneen vriende, Dawie van der Merwe en sy vrou, op Nelspruit ds en mev Malan. Drie sendelinge oor ’n gebied van ruim 600 km en meer as 3 miljoen mense. Daar is wel ander sendingondernemings oos die Lutherse by Letaba, die Church of the Nazarene by Arthur Seat, die Rooms-Katolieke by Acornhoek, die Switserse sending by Bosbokrand, maar in die geheel tel die gekerstende mense nie meer as een of twee persent van die bevolking nie.

Anna en ek het besluit om die veilige beskerming van ’n gemeente in Belfast prys te gee en in die geloof die Laeveld in te trek. Die Here sal voorsien. Toe ons besluit rugbaar word, doen ds Brood en Katie Potgieter van Dwaalboom dieselfde en ds Joorie en Anita Jordaan van Premiemryn dieselfde en ook ds Nico en Helen Smith van Potchefstroom. En toe breek die wal. Binne vier jaar is in Noord- en Oos-Transvaal 22 nuwe sendingwerkkringe met sendeling en al, aangelê. Ons sou tussen Bosbokrand en die Olifantsrivier werk...

*Missionary work ensuing from Rivoni*

Carel Boshoff mentions Rev Brood Potgieter as one of the DRC missionaries who in 1956 left a secure position as minister of Dwaalboom for the eastern Lowveld. Brood Potgieter established Rivoni Mission in Acornhoek, 40 km

to the south east of Bedford/Kampersrus, and baptised the first eight (women) converts on 11 May 1958. During the 1950s three outposts were not only fruitfully functional in this area, but were also manned by black evangelists. The first outpost was at Bedford (Kampersrus), where Carel Boshoff was later inaugurated. It was originally founded in 1952 by Oom Willie Theron, with the first evangelists being S Mafutshanyane, D Masing, T Seotje and, from the early 1960s, Aron Metsileng. The second outpost was Rooiboklaagte, established by Rev Potgieter and, from 1964, led by evangelist S Masango. The third outpost was established on a white farm, Robertsdal, with evangelist P Mnisi, who had been working there since 1962 (Rivoni 1958–1968:4–5).

The 1960s commenced with triumph and tragedy. Rivoni was formally established as a missionary congregation on 12 August 1961, but the Rev Brood Potgieter died tragically on 26 January 1963, crushed by a falling water tank. Prof Ben Marais, later to become a well-known critical voice on race relations in the DRC, conducted the funeral. In 1963 Potgieter was succeeded by a young Dionne Crafford, who had just returned from studies in the Netherlands. During this time, Rivoni received substantial financial support from the white DRC congregations of Burgerspark and Lyttelton, then part of Pretoria, capital of the erstwhile Transvaal Province, due to the efforts of the then DRC secretary of mission, Rev Nico Smith. Crafford later pursued an academic career, leaving Rivoni for the University of the North in 1967, and becoming Professor of Missiology at the University of Pretoria in January 1976, where he lectured till his retirement 30 years later. Under Crafford and his successors, Rev Smuts, Nel, Enslin and Charles Nicholson, Rivoni administered 23 outposts in the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge region (Crafford 2009; Masinga, Martha 2009). This includes the farm workers of the Hoedspruit area, where the evangelist Daniel Masinga worked from Kampersrus.

In summary, then, Rivoni was founded as the result of the passion of white missionaries, expanded through the energy of black evangelists, supported by significant figures in the DRC missionary world, and placed on the map with the help of substantial financial contributions by white congregations. And yet, today, its influence in the region is minimal. In the next section, some possible reasons for this state of affairs will be proposed.

### *Black and white divide*

Kampersrus was constituted as a (white) Dutch Reformed congregation when it seceded from Graskop DRC on 13 June 1959, a month after Rev Potgieter baptised the first converts in Rivoni. The borders of Kampersrus and Rivoni

adjoin, and this was to become a bone of contention later in the 1990s, when Rivoni shed its status as mission station and became an independent congregation of the URCSA. The question thus arose whether it was Kampersrus or Rivoni that would minister to the farm workers in the Hoedspruit area.

For 30 years, from 1958 until 1988, the relationship between Kampersrus and the surrounding “black” areas was one of donor and receiver. Kampersrus paid a black evangelist to minister to black members in and around Hoedspruit/Kampersrus, housed theological students from the University of Stellenbosch who came to work in these areas from time to time, and gave a stipend to Rivoni (as is stated in the minutes of Kampersrus DRC). The Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950) took some time to catch up with the eastern Lowveld, and it was only after the Blyde River region was declared a conservation area in 1973 that the Shangaan and Pedi people, who are indigenous to the region, were forcibly removed to the trusts in Lorraine and Acornhoek, as well as to the homelands of Gazankulu and Lebowa. After that, contact between black and white could be achieved only through concerted effort.

In July 1989 a new pastor arrived at Kampersrus DRC. He was the young proponent Sias Botha, who had recently completed his studies at the University of Pretoria. During his student years he had become acquainted with the ideas of David Bosch, Willem Nicol and Eddie Bruwer, and as a result had developed an awareness of both black poverty and black dignity. This was during a time when DRC racial policies were governed by the notion of *Kerk en Samelewing* (Church and Society), and the establishment of the politically conservative Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (1988/89) pushed the DRC even further towards advancing the values of the white establishment.

However, as the new minister of Kampersrus DRC, Sias Botha accepted no compromises on racism. He recalls that when he arrived in Kampersrus as the pastor black people were still living alongside the road from the JG Strydom Tunnel up to Kampersrus. He mourns the forced removal in the late 1980s of black people who lived in the areas around the mission church in Bedford/Kampersrus, a mission church of which only ruins remain today. As newly appointed pastor, Botha soon engaged Kampersrus DRC in active participation with Rivoni, co-operation that was subsequently referred to as “ecumenics” and not “mission”. Congregants from Kampersrus DRC went to Rivoni to attend conferences, distribute food and hold Bible studies (Botha 2009).

Botha (2009) recounts that back home, in Kampersrus DRC, the outreach to black members during the 1990s developed in three phases. The first was the tent ministry run by *eerwaarde* (Reverend) Koos Beukes, the DRC’s Secretary for Evangelisation, who, for 35 years, from January 1973, travelled

through the rural areas of South Africa with tents of different sizes from which evangelisation campaigns were held. Botha recalls the five years (from 1989 to 1994) during which Beukes and his team came to Kampersrus during Pentecost and stayed for a month, filling up each of the four tents with 200 black people, singing and listening, and talking personally to the black evangelists. Since one of the tents was erected in the area between the *pastorie* (manse) and the church at Kampersrus, Botha also recalls that the white people of Kampersrus often joined the tent people as a token of solidarity and to enjoy their way of worship. Following these tent services, black leaders were identified and trained as evangelists to minister to the farm community.

The second phase started in 1995 after the church council of Kampersrus (see Notule NGK Kampersrus) had decided on 17 November 1994 “dat daar Sondae om 12h30 in Kampersrus ’n erediens vir die plaaswerkers gehou word”. At the time of writing, these services for farm workers were still being held in Kampersrus church. For a long time a lay preacher, Pieter Lekwade, held the services, which at the time of writing were led by Sophie and pastor Louis Scheepers of the HFM.

The third phase of the Kampersrus outreach to farm workers was heralded by the formation of the HFM. Although it was already noted on 4 March 1993 that “Die Kerkraad keur dit goed dat daar ’n sending aksie (sic) onder plaaswerkers geloods word”, the HFM was constituted much later, during a meeting held on 4 June 2001 (see Notule). This was after Sias Botha had left the Kampersrus congregation to become a full-time farmer on a family farm near White River.

The years 1997 to 1998 were eventful years for this region. Drakensig DRC amalgamated with Kampersrus DRC in 1997, and Sias Botha left the ministry in July 1998, leaving the congregation in the care of Rev Pieter Dorey, formerly from Drakensig. The latter was co-functional in establishing the HFM in 2001 as an ecumenical outreach between the Reformed and charismatic churches of the region. In Rivoni, tension between the white pastor, Charles Nicholson, and the church council came to a head. Nicholson was sent to Rivoni, subsidised by the GSK (Gemeenskaplike Sendingkommissie), which consisted of congregations from the Circuits of Lydenburg and Barberton. In 1997, the church council of Rivoni appointed Rev Daniel Masinga as their pastor. Masinga had trained at Turfloop Seminary at the University of the North, and bears the name of his famous father, who worked as an evangelist in Kampersrus. Masinga was to be paid by the church council, which was experiencing a shortage of funds, while Nicholson received a substantial salary from the GSK. The church council of Rivoni wanted Nicholson to leave office and the GSK salary to be paid to Masinga (Louw 2009). In 1997 the GSK dissolved, and the subsidising congregations withdrew. Charles Nicholson left the congregation, and his suicide in 2008

has been partly linked to the traumatic events of 1997 (Louw 2009). The church council of Rivoni still struggles to pay Masinga's salary, and for a while he was forced to take up employment as a teacher.

Relations between Kampersrus DRC and Rivoni URCSA broke down, and at the time of writing contact had not been re-established; Rivoni is still ministered by Rev Masinga, who has to serve 36 stands using public transport after having suffered a stroke that affected his speech and one leg (Masinga, Daniel 2009; Mosehla 2009). Although roughly a hundred people, mostly women, still gather for the service in the Rivoni church building on Sundays, the output and religious influence of Rivoni in the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge area has been severely impaired by the events of the past ten years.

### **Healing ministries among farm workers in the Hoedspruit area**

#### *Inability of the Reformed churches to satisfy the healing needs of black believers*

The reduced influence of the URCSA in the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge area is not attributable solely to the racial breakdown between white and black in the area. The inability of Reformed churches to indigenise is another reason for reduced Reformed influence in the region (Beukes 2009), as is the rigid structure of churches in the Reformed tradition that withholds liturgical and decision-making power from lay believers (Kritzinger 2009).

In this article, I will focus on one reason in particular for the failure of the Reformed mission/ecumenical outreach in the eastern Lowveld. Reformed outreach in the eastern Lowveld has failed because Reformed churches do not seem to have responded adequately to the healing needs of black believers, in particular to those of *farm workers*, who, as a result of insufficient financial resources and transport, have little access to modern healing facilities, and whose lives are governed by religious and cultural discourses that view the causes of illness and healing differently from Reformed theology.

To answer the question of whether there are non-Reformed ministries that fulfil the spiritual need of farm workers for physical healing, and if so, how they succeed in doing so, it is necessary first to examine the religious discourses supporting the HFM before moving on to other healing ministries to which farm workers have access.

#### *The establishment of Hoedspruit Farm Ministries*



HFM was the brainchild, or rather the heart child (Scheepers 2009) of Nollie Wilkens, a local farmer from the farm Bonanza, and member of the Hoedspruit Christian Church. He drew his inspiration from Farmers' Hope Ministries, active among farm workers in the Malelane area, and organised a meeting with Pastor James Scheepers, who headed this ministry. A meeting took place on Bonanza on 12 November 2000, and it was decided to follow the Farmers' Hope Ministries model of farm ministry. A *moruti* (lay preacher) was to be appointed to work in the compound of each participating farm, with the farmer making a contribution of R10 per farm worker. Training was to be done by Scheepers. Within the next four months five *baruti* (lay preachers) were appointed to work on the farms Essex, Mariepskop Estate, Driehoek, Bonanza, and Hamman.

In spite of the charismatic beginnings of HFM, its institutionalisation was carried out by the Reformed churches – an inspiring act of interdenominational co-operation. On 4 June 2001 in the Van Rensburg Hall, a constituting meeting under the leadership of Rev Pieter Dorey of DRC Kampersrus was held, with 15 people present: 10 from Reformed churches (8 from DRC Kampersrus, 1 from the APK and another from the NHK), 3 from the Hoedspruit Christian Church and 1 each from the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Faith Mission. Initially, the intention was to follow the Amos Agrimin model, which aims not only to reach the spiritual heart of farm workers, but also to enhance “Christ-centred agriculture” and to assist in the social reconstruction of rural areas (Dreyer 2009).

According to Louis Scheepers, son of James, who was called as the pastor overseeing the ministry, HFM also initially embraced a vision of development and training additional to guiding farm workers towards a personal relationship with Jesus. However, at the time of writing, HFM was struggling financially and the incumbent *baruti* remained poor amidst a sea of farm worker poverty.

The HFM, then, focuses on placing *baruti* in the compounds to take care of the spiritual needs of farm workers. This includes their spiritual need for physical healing. The project entitled “Concepts of illness and healing amongst farm workers in the Hoedspruit area” started off by interviewing the nine *baruti* appointed by the HFM. These interviews reveal an interesting ignorance of Reformed ministerial practices, and a healing ministry that possibly goes further than even the charismatic leadership of the HFM suspects.

Of the nine *baruti* interviewed, six are male and three female. There does not appear to be any reluctance to appoint women to this job, but women *baruti* seem to be subjected to female stereotypes. When one of the women pastors fell ill, her unmarried state was considered the reason for the clots in her blood. The perceived solution was for her to get married and to have sex so that her blood would start flowing easily.

The level of education of the *baruti* ranges between Grades 8 and 10. They are predominantly Shangaan, but some are from Mozambique, and one from Zimbabwe. Most have not previously belonged to a church. Seven are unemployed except for this calling, and two work as *nompilos* (care givers) for Hlokomela, a local home-based care unit. These two *baruti* are obviously caught in the tension between Hlokomela's teaching on illness and health, and that of the HFM. For instance, the *baruti* of the HFM preach, according to their own testimony, that condoms are sinful and should not even be talked about in public. "The Lord will condomise you" is an informal slogan of the HFM, while Hlokomela, through its *nompilos*, not only promotes but also distributes condoms. On the other hand, both *baruti* and *nompilos* promote (male) circumcision (performed in hospital and not "in the mountains"), the *baruti* because Jesus was circumcised, and the *nompilos* because circumcision makes a man 60% less susceptible to HIV infection.

All the *baruti* of the HFM engage in healing physical illnesses through prayer, the laying on of hands, and the casting out of demons by commanding the sickness "to go out". They all – except the two also working as *nompilos* – believe that only Jesus, and not the clinic, can heal a person ("God is our mechanic; our garage is in God"). They furthermore all agree that illness does not come from God, but from the devil. At the same time they believe that HIV is punishment from God for living a sinful life. All the *baruti* believe that God can cure HIV and AIDS. One of them claims that he has cured three people of AIDS (with God of course being the actual healer). Another reports that she has an arrangement with the clinic (Hlokomela) according to which she brings people infected with HIV to the clinic after praying for them. The other *baruti* say that they do not actually know any people who are HIV positive, and that people do not disclose their HIV status to the *moruti*.

#### *Other healing ministries among farm workers in the Hoedspruit area*

Of the 210 people interviewed for the project "Concepts of illness and healing among farm workers in the Hoedspruit area" half were women (105) and half men (105). Almost half (96) were Pedi, and a quarter (51) Shangaan. Another quarter consisted of migrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

Two-thirds of those interviewed were farm workers living in compounds on farms in the Hoedspruit region. Therefore they were not seasonal workers, but workers living permanently on farms.

What is of importance in the context of this article is that the interviewees belonged to 58 different churches, and only 10 belonged to a mainline/mission church (5 to the Roman Catholic Church, 1 to the Uniting Reformed Church, 1 to the Anglican Church, 1 to the Wesleyan Church and 2 to the Lutheran Church). Of the interviewees, 40 belonged to the Zion

Christian Church, which makes it the church that figures most prominently among the group of farm workers under discussion. The Jerusalema Apostolic Church and the Nazarene Revival Church were also well represented. Many of the farm workers go “home” over weekends and attend churches there. However, churches most frequently visited by farm workers are those that are accessible to them from within the Hoedspruit region.

It must also be noted that two-thirds of the farm workers had changed their church affiliation during the preceding five years, and two-thirds of them during the preceding *two* years. Interviewees often cited the fact that a specific church had become accessible nearby as a reason for changing churches. Examples of such reasons are: “I changed from the Roman Catholic Church to Jerusalema because Jerusalema is nearer;” and “I changed to the ZCC because that is the only church here.” The church to which the largest number of farm workers had belonged since birth without changing to another church was the ZCC.

Almost a third of the interviewees in the compounds claimed that they regularly attended services held by the HFM while “formally” belonging to another church. Reasons for their attendance of HFM services included the supportiveness and accessibility of the *baruti*, and the fact that the *baruti* prayed for them when they suffered misfortune or illness.

The most frequent response to the question “Why do you attend a specific church?” related to the fact that the pastor offered healing in times of sickness. Other reasons were supplied, but the range of answers was fairly narrow. Interviewees reported going to church to worship, to listen to the Bible, and to be taught how to live moral lives. In addition, the church buries their deceased and supports them when they suffer losses. However, the main reason why farm workers in the Hoedspruit area attend a specific church is because they have experienced some sort of physical healing there.

It is appropriate at this point to include accounts of church healings by farm workers, and the discourses that inform these accounts.

### **Farm worker accounts and the discourses that inform them**

#### *Stories of healing*

More than half the farm workers interviewed during this project were functionally illiterate, signing their names on the consent forms with a cross, or writing their name with difficulty and without a surname. Amidst illiteracy and poverty – and consequently a lack of career opportunities and transport –

80% of the farm workers interviewed related a story of healing, of how they visited a church in the vicinity and were healed from physical illness.

According to the accounts, instances of church healing fall within two categories. The first category of healing takes place through prayer and the laying on of hands. The healing practised at HFM falls within this category. Healing in the second category is effected through the additional use of holy water, tea, coffee and herbs.

Many of the illnesses from which farm workers believed themselves to have been cured were described in general terms such as: I could not walk; there was a fever burning in my body; I had no power; my head was hot; my eye was dark; my nose was bleeding; my body was sore for a week. Also, farm workers went to the church for healing when they experienced dizziness, or had a recurring headache, a stomach ache, a rash or other skin disease, a sore throat, an eye infection, or an unexplained nose bleed. These were often described as symptoms of bewitchment.

Other illnesses from which farm workers claimed to have been cured were cited as cancer, tonsillitis, bladder infection, asthma, sugar diabetes, or a stroke. It is claimed that conditions such as barrenness and miscarriage are also cured by the church.

The church also heals from anger and fear, as well as stress, depression and unpopularity.

However, farm workers – with a few exceptions – do not approach the church for healing from STDs, HIV and AIDS, although a prevalence study by the University of the Witwatersrand conducted in January 2008 with 1500 farm workers in the Hoedspruit region who volunteered to participate indicated that 28,8% of the workers are HIV positive (Evian 2008). In addition, women do not disclose to their pastors the injuries they have sustained as a result of domestic violence. More than a third of the women farm workers reported physical abuse in their intimate relationships, but none reported going to church for healing in these instances.

#### *Discourses informing the healing practices of farm ministries*

These stories of church healings suggest that churches are believed to be capable of healing all kinds of illness, yet only 14% of the farm workers interviewed indicated that they would pay a visit only to a church in times of illness; the large majority prefer to combine church and clinic in their quest for healing, an option that has become more realistic since Hlokomela has erected 14 clinics in prefabricated structures on farms in the Hoedspruit region. The accounts of church healings reported above, then, seem to tell less of miraculous healings than of integrated healings, with the churches offering the spiritual side of holistic healing.

The farm workers, it seems, believe that the causes of illness are spiritual. Healing, then, also has to be dealt with in a spiritual way. Consequently, in terms of the questions asked in the questionnaire, the lives of these farm workers appear to be directed by a few simple but powerful discourses, which may be summarised thus:

- (1) God makes you ill to punish you or tell you something.
- (2) The devil makes you ill to fight God.
- (3) You get ill because you ignore the Ten Commandments.
- (4) God can cure all illnesses, including HIV and AIDS.
- (5) You will be cured only if you believe.

Only a small percentage (12%) of the farm workers interviewed indicated that they visited a traditional healer. However, Harrie Grové of Bavaria Estates testifies to farm workers borrowing significant amounts of money to visit a traditional healer and perform the prescribed rituals (Grové 2008). On the other hand, only three of the interviewees stated that they did not believe that the church has the capacity to heal.

A calculated guess would be that the majority of the farm workers prefer to go to different healers for different illnesses; as one man said: "I go to the doctor for wounds and worms, to the pastor for headaches and colds, and to the traditional healer when traditional medicine is needed, like when I have eaten something wrong." Another reported: "I go to the church, the clinic and the traditional healer, wherever God directs me."

#### **In conclusion: final analysis**

Originally a small number of mission churches came to the eastern Lowveld to spread the Christian message, and for 50 years the Hoedspruit/Acornhoek/Bushbuckridge area was dominated by the DRC. However, a wide variety of African independent churches subsequently took over the spiritual care of black believers in this region. Because of a breakdown between the white DRC and the black URCSA, and because of the inability of Reformed theology to accommodate the healing needs of the impoverished black community, the influence of both the DRC and URCSA has dwindled away almost completely in this region.

This situation has had a particular bearing on farm workers in the Hoedspruit region. The HFM was founded in 2000 to attend to the spiritual needs of farm workers, and although it is partly driven by Reformed churches, it has become independent in its healing ministry.

However, the religious discourses on which the HFM and other independent churches that cater for the farm workers rely may prove to be dangerous to the health of farm workers, and to the integrity not only of

Reformed theology but of Christian theology in general. Although a majority, if not all, farm workers believe that the causes of illness are spiritual, they themselves prefer to benefit from an integration of church healing, indigenous healing and modern medicine. However, at the moment healing ministries among farm workers place healing solely within the realm of God's *supernatural* acts, and discount *natural* acts of healing – as presented by indigenous and clinical healing – as sinful. Farm ministries, including the HFM, often place the health of believers at risk by forbidding condoms and supporting gender relations that leave women's bodies vulnerable to assault and HIV infection.

History may point to a future in which *baruti* will be trained – whether from a Reformed, charismatic or independent theological stance – to deconstruct religious discourses on illness and healing that are harmful to both the physical and spiritual health of believers, and to shift these discourses towards a theology that integrates ecclesiastical, clinical and indigenous insights into holistic healing as dictated by the preferences of farm workers.

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**Endnotes**

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- <sup>1</sup> The small church in Kampersrus was originally built by Oom Willie and Tant Lottie Theron together with the evangelist Seth Mofutsanyane. Its ruins are still visible next to the Orpen road.
- <sup>2</sup> Carel Boshoff later became Professor of Missiology at the University of Pretoria, and, following his retirement, co-founded the white homeland Orania.