

Environment, world-view and healing among the Zulu Christians (19th and 20th centuries)

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Abstract

The basic question raised in this article is how Christians within the Zulu community seek relief from illnesses. Do they turn to plant (herbal) or animal remedies, or do they regard this as an imbalance in the mind of the person afflicted. This article touches on the sub-themes of the habitat of a Christian community, religion and food and also how to consider the place of animals and humans within a Christian community.

There is in fact more said in the New Testament about evils spirits than food regulations, with the latter featuring more prominently in the Old Testament. In Bible times, sicknesses such as epilepsy would have been regarded as demon possession where as we would consider a medical intervention to solve that problem today. Nevertheless, how prevalent is faith healing today and what is the role played by the patient and the community in terms of customs and regulations held fast with the faith community being considered.

Ngubane would place an emphasis on the mind and Bosch for his part discusses the place of demoniac possession as a source of suffering in the lives of believers. The people included in this study are mainly from Mariannhill, Maphumulo and the Nyswa Reserve in the Valley of a Thousand Hills in KwaZulu-Natal.

This article refers to the disciplines of botany, zoology and anthropology. Therefore, the challenge for Zulu Christians is to synthesize these various disciplines into an integrated faith that is rooted within the South African context – or, perhaps even applies globally.

Introduction

This article focuses on the factors that lead to healing and health among the Zulu, as well as other South Africans who practice traditional medicine. The focus is on the Zulu because they are the specific group that some of the authors used as a case study within their research. Consequently, this study focuses specifically on the Zulu people, although general references are made to other ethnic groups within South Africa.

Literature review

The authors referred to for the purposes of this study are H Callaway, AT Bryant, S Marks, A Hutchings, H Ngubane, A-I Berglund, S Jwara and finally David Bosch. Of the eight authors whose work was consulted, three are Protestants, four are Catholics and the religious affiliation of Marks is not known. Moreover, of the eight authors, three are females and five are male, while two authors are black and six are white.

The literature review begins with AT Bryant's seminal work *Zulu medicine and medicine-men* (first printed in 1966 and later reprinted in 1983)¹ and H Callaway's *The religious system among the Zulu* (1970). These two works are foundational in the study of Zulu religion and healing. Later works by Ngubane and Berglund include a more sociological approach to the subject of the Zulu world-view and healing. Pieter GR de Villiers' work *Like a roaring lion ... Essays on the Bible, the church and demonic powers* (1987) does not focus only on the Zulu people as the previous authors do, but it is important to consider his contribution to the discussion given the importance of demon possession among the Zulu. An important unpublished thesis for this study is SM Jwara's thesis entitled *Healing ministries in the Zulu context: the potential of Zulu traditional medicine in the Catholic Church's healing ministry (with reference to the Mariannhill Mission)*. Jwara completed his thesis in 1998 at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

The question is often asked which came first the cause or the effect in terms of health matters. Is illness simply physiological or is it psycho-somatic? What is the source of illness within our society and specifically among the Zulu people? Is it the environment that makes people sick, a lack of hygiene, unhealthy practices concerning rituals involving blood or are these illnesses just psycho-somatic. This article seeks to trace the intricate links of causes and effects that lead to illness. It also considers healing practices and the possibility of a return to full health, depending on the diseases that are prevalent at that time and the cures that are available.

¹ This work was published as a result of Kelly Campbell's appreciation of the Zulu people and their knowledge of their local flora.

At this stage a clear distinction needs to be made between herbalists and witchdoctors/spirit medium within African traditional religion, including among the Zulu. Indicative of communing with the spirits is the viewing of the spiritual in the physical elements around the believer and the interpretation of these events and happenings by a spiritual guide. Within the literature on the subject of religion among the Zulu this is also referred to as divining. Herbalists, on the other hand, administer herbal remedies for specific ailments.

Callaway and Bryant lay the foundations

Rev Henry Callaway, born in 1817, was an Anglican minister who worked as a missionary among the Zulu in the 19th century. He was a contemporary of Colenso and Bleek. He had two publications: *Tales, traditions and histories of the Zulus* (1866-68) and *The religious system of the amaZulu* (1868-70). In the latter work H Callaway² recounts the story of creation when God asks a chameleon to take a message to the human community which says that all men must die. The chameleon was slow and ate fruit from a tree on his way to deliver the message. God then sent a lizard to take the message that all people will not die. The lizard arrived first and the chameleon arrived second. This left humanity with a mixed message but helps one understand how life and death are interpreted among the Zulu. This myth has a teleological significance as it helps the Zulu people explain the mysteries of life and death as they are experienced by the Zulu at present. A belief in the after-life was always present among the Zulu and the concept of resurrection does not begin with the advent of Christianity in South Africa. If someone was ill or has misfortune then an animal had to be slaughtered. The family could be informed by a dream or other means as to which animal was to be slaughtered in order to maintain harmony within the society. This story indicates the closeness of the Zulu people to nature. Not only are they reliant on plants and animals for healing but they also need animals to read signs about what is happening around them and to make sacrifices to appease the ancestors. Callaway like Bryant pays much attention to diviners and herbalists that do use medicine to harm so as to indicate the difference between the two types of traditional healers. According to David Chidester the following is to be noted: F Max Müller, John Lubbock, Herbert Spencer, Edward B Tylor, Andrew Lang and James Fraser "... depended heavily upon Callaway's texts not only to understand Zulu religion but also for evidence in building their own general theories of the origin and nature of religion."³

Alfred T Bryant arrived in Natal in 1883 as a member of the Trappist Order based at Mariannhill. According to John Wright the Mariannhill Mission in the 1890s and 1900s "became an unusually active centre of ethnographic and linguistic research."⁴ Bryant wrote a history of the Zulus entitled *Olden times* (published in 1929) and also an English/Zulu Dictionary. Within the discipline of botany Bryant has made a major contribution by listing 354 illnesses and the plants for their cure. Bryant also included their botanical names in Latin, their common names in Zulu and the manner of application to various illnesses.⁵ It is important to take cognisance of the closeness of the Zulu people to the environment. In Chapter 1 of *Zulu medicine and medicine men* Bryant pays homage to the Zulu people by mentioning the following:

Although the Zulu native is sadly lacking in the equipment requisite for the civilised (sic) life, he is astonishingly learned in the domain of his own environment. It is by no means an exaggeration to affirm that comparatively the average Zulu can boast of a larger share of pure scientific knowledge than the average European.⁶

This meant that average Zulu had a comparatively greater knowledge of herbal cures for such illnesses as stomach pains, venereal disease, baldness etc.⁷, than his European counterpart. This knowledge was based on the plants in the local area where these people resided and had varying degrees of effectiveness. What needs to be commended however is that whereas Europeans did not value these plants for the medicinal potential, the

² Callaway H, 1970. *The religious system of the amaZulu*, Cape Town: Struik, , (pp 1-6).

³ Chidester D, 1996. *Savage Systems*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, (p 152).

⁴ Wright J, A.T. Bryant and the 'Lala', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 38, Number 2, June 2012, (p 360). Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2012.682838>. Accessed on 15/11/2013.

⁵ Bryant did not include the sources of his information and this is a problem for us today as it raises questions about who is the rightful owner of this valuable information. In terms of indigenous knowledge systems it is knowledge held collectively by the Zulu people. However, the unique contribution of Bryant was to note down this information and to keep it for future generations.

⁶ Bryant A T, 1983. *Zulu medicine and medicine men*. Cape Town: Centaur, (p 7). Questions do need to be asked about what Bryant means by civilisation within the context of the quotation cited above. If it means refinement in music and art then that is a limited version of civilisation which does not negate the Zulu people of their form of civilisation which is found within their specific culture, religious and legal systems. It also needs to be noted that Bryant had a colonial world view which looked down on Zulu culture as being inferior to Western culture.

⁷ SM Jwara affirms the point of the knowledge that Zulu people had about medicinal plants and agrees with Bryant that at times what was needed to improve the remedies was the correct knowledge of the dosages required for particular illnesses. Cf. Jwara, 1998, *Healing Ministry in the Zulu Context: The potential role of Zulu traditional medicine in the Catholic Church's Healing Ministry, with Special Reference to the Mariannhill Mission*, Unpublished master's thesis, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, (p 10).

local Zulu population did. As a result, the Zulus were able to harness their local flora for the benefit of the health of their community. It is important to note this knowledge and appreciation of the local flora does not constitute pantheism, where nature is actually worshipped. It simply constitutes a healthy respect for the local flora and its potential to benefit the local community. In that sense the Zulus served as earth-keepers who respected the plant life around them. There were also animal parts that were respected for having special qualities to enhance human healing and health. In this regard animals were also respected. This is recognised in the praise name system where a particular tribe would reverence an animal that was the same as their praise name. The *Ngwenya* tribe would respect the crocodile for example as that is the praise name of their clan. It is important to question: "Is this pantheism or simple respect for the integrity of creation?" It can be affirmed that the Zulu are concerned about their environment as signs in nature and in dreams give them messages regarding decisions to be taken in their daily life. Traditionally Zulus did not wear shoes and so there is concern about harmful mixtures and elements entering the body via the skin beneath their feet as well as being poisoned by food. This made the Zulus meticulous about keeping their homesteads hygienic, thereby preventing evil concoctions being placed in their homesteads by envious neighbours or enemies of the family or clan groups that they belonged to as a tribe.⁸

In *Zulu medicine and medicine men* Bryant concentrated on describing the differences of the medicine-man from the practitioners of harmful medicine, the nature of medical practice and the preparation of medicines, the physical and constitutional traits of the Native and finally the treatment of diseases. One of the most valuable aspects of this work is the Tables of Zulu medicinal plants. These tables are 16 and 14 pages respectively: The first table gives a list of the botanical names of the plants, the Native names, the portion used, the ailment it cures and then other page references. The second table does the same but in this case the list consists of the Zulu name first and then the rest of the information follows about the plants curative properties and the other page references concerning those herbs in particular.

Shula Marks, in her chapter entitled "The traditions of the Natal 'Nguni: a second look at the work of AT Bryant"⁹ (published in 1969) criticises Bryant for some of his theories concerning the migrations of the peoples into south-east Africa. Bryant attempts to assess and validate his theories with the tradition that he records in *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* and *A history of the Zulu*. Apart from the inaccuracy of Bryant's migration theories, he also fell into the trap of making value-judgements about the subject under scrutiny. The traditions that he recalls provide valuable information, but his casual style of writing does beg the question as to whether the information should be reworked into a more formal style – and one that pays more attention to what has been discovered by other scholars concerning migration theory. Marks discusses the correct use of the word *Nguni* before the *Mfecane* (wars of expansion started by Shaka so as to increase the Zulu empire) and then later the word "Zulu" is used to describe the Zulu People as a nation. The strength of Marks' critique is that she challenges the accuracy of Bryant's work. Since it would appear that in comparing the Zulu with the Greeks and Egyptians he filled in gaps that appeared in his work for lack of proper sources. Bryant wrote the folklore of the Zulus as he heard it and then completed it with his own theories when there were areas that were unclear. Bryant was assisted by the famous Father Mnganga when he was in Zululand. These assistants did not always agree with the final outcome of Bryant's work. Just like Callaway, a medical doctor, who had the help of a catechist Mpengula Mbande to systematize his basic data, Bryant had the help of Mnganga and others as sources for the history and commentaries that he wrote on Zulu medicine.

More recently in 1996 Anne Hutchings¹⁰ (as well as Gillian Lewis and Anthony Cunningham) published *Zulu medicinal plants (An inventory)* which focused more on the plants and their curative properties. Unlike earlier researchers, she decided not to investigate the aspect of divining and bad medicine. Hutchings (1936-2013), a Catholic laywoman, trained as an architect and went to live in the United Kingdom and Malawi before returning to South Africa. Later on in her life she became interested in the properties of plants and did research at the University of Natal's Botany Department. After this she attained her Masters and was then interested in ethno-botany. In her book on Zulu medicinal plants Hutchings offers a caution to not use any of the plants without consulting a practitioner who is an herbalist and to be aware that not all the cures have been tested in a laboratory. This work was begun in 1986 by Alan Scott who saw the need for a pharmacopoeia of traditional Zulu herbal medicine. The two others who helped Hutchings in completing this work were Gillian Lewis and Anthony Cunningham. In her book, Hutchings mentions that the Zulu medicinal plants are the best documented ethnomedical systems in South Africa. *Zulu medicinal plants* reports on "1032 species from 537 genera and 147 families".¹¹ The evidence proves that there is an ongoing interest in Zulu traditional medicine as we enter the third millennium. However, pastorally speaking, South African society is generally not as interested in the

⁸ This can be noticed if one travels to the Valley of a Thousand Hills and numerous other localities where traditional Zulus reside.

⁹ Marks, S 1969. *African societies in southern Africa*, edited by Leonard Thompson, London: Heinemann, (p 129).

¹⁰ Anne Hutchings approaches the subject from the point of view of botany and pharmacy. She updates the lists of healing plants used by the Zulu and documented in the 19th century. She recommends to use these medicinal plants one must consult a practitioner of traditional Zulu medicine.

¹¹ Hutchings A 1996, *Zulu medicinal plants*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, Preface, (p 1).

divining and harmful medicine aspects of Zulu traditional medicine. This might create an opportunity for the Christian churches to take up the challenge of waging spiritual warfare against evil spirits. Therefore, we need to ask the question as to whether we are ready as Christians to engage with people – whether sick or healthy – whose life experiences are different from our own. This means accepting that their patterns of living are relevant, even when they are at variance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This presents the Christian community with a challenge to ministry in new areas of pastoral responses countrywide.

Physical environment or world-view as answers to the problem of healing

Apart from the physical environment there are also the minds of individuals that can lead them to illnesses of various kinds. In medicine we talk about psychosomatic illnesses. Often the salient question is what is the initial cause? When diagnosing illness do we look at the physical symptoms or the mindset of the world view of the patient, which are the variables to be investigated in order to diagnose the cause of the sickness?

It is important to note that Berglund,¹² a Lutheran who worked in Maphumulo in the late 20th century, makes the assertion that “Zulu society is a community of the survivors and the shades (sic)”.^{13&14} This would mean, by consequence, that a man would exist within a community consisting of his wife, children and deceased relatives (also referred to as the shades, ancestors or *amadlozi*). This means that what happens in the land of the living is also mirrored in some sense in the realm of the dead and that these two worlds are interdependent. The ancestral spirits call for ritual killings when they are hungry and also participate in the process of conception within the clan to which they belong. The ancestors are present to the clan and they make their will known to the clan by signs which the survivors need to interpret. This is the world of the Zulu people: the close connection between the living and the dead which forms the environment in which they live. Berglund goes on further to say:

The shades [ancestors] reveal themselves in a man’s ability, or inability, to obtain work, in poor harvests, lost court-cases and also in salvation from many evils; they manifest themselves in the joys of a plenteous harvest, a large family and general prosperity.¹⁵

In discussing medicine Berglund focuses on medicine and manipulators, morality and symbolism. Within the Zulu world-view medicine is powerful and can be used for good or for bad. Berglund gives the example of the plant *ingcino* (*Scilla rigidifolia*)¹⁶ which can be used to fix a spear-head to a handle or to close a woman’s womb so that she may not conceive. The same material is used either positively or negatively. This type of medicinal usage involves morality, as in Western medicine, but also symbolism. It is therefore important to mark the difference between Western medicine and Zulu medicine in terms of how both are practiced with the various similarities and differences. Among the Zulu, medicine only works if the patient is in good moral standing and is free of negative emotions such as anger and guilt. The cause of the illness has to be established for the future healing of the patient to take place. Despite the fixed traditions of taking certain medications for specific illnesses, there is also room for the herbalist to use symbols and imagination in the cure of certain illnesses.¹⁷

Harriet Ngubane,¹⁸ a Catholic laywoman and sister of the well known priest Father Johannes Ngubane, in 1977 did research among the Zulu in the Nyuswa Reserve in the region of the Valley of a Thousand Hills, points out the importance of colour in the healing of the Zulu in that area of KwaZulu-Natal. Ngubane states that “[...] colour plays an important and dominant role in symbolism related to treatment of mystical illness”.¹⁹ The important colours are black, red and white. With sunset, comes the transition to ill health, and with sunrise, comes to the transformation to good health. Sunset is red, night is black, sunrise is red and in turn sunlight is white. With the return of another sunset, the cycle of the day is complete. Another important colour is *luhlaza* (green-blue) which symbolises vegetation, the sky and the sea. These symbolic colours are important in the process from sickness to health. The colours black, red and white are also the colours of the medicines. Colour thus forms part of the world-view of every Zulu person who becomes ill. Therefore, what needs to be healed is not simply the physiological aspect of illness, but the symbolic world as well as the spiritual world. Ngubane goes on to mention: “Treatment with such coloured medicines is initially intended to establish a balance

¹² Berglund also lectured in 1990s on inculturation at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

¹³ The word shades refers to the ancestors which is translated as the *amadlozi* in isiZulu.

¹⁴ Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu thought patterns and symbolism*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1976, p 197.

¹⁵ Berglund, Op cit, p 197.

¹⁶ Berglund, Op cit, p 345.

¹⁷ Berglund, Ibid, p 350.

¹⁸ Harriet Ngubane (1929-2001) tried to discover her vocation as a Catholic nun at the Dominican Convent of Montebello. She left the convent and then trained as a teacher at Mariannhill. She then married Jethro Sibisi and they had 7 children together. In the meantime she completed her Masters in Anthropology at the University of Natal. She then had the opportunity to Cambridge to complete her doctoral studies. Later on in her career she taught at the University of Cape Town and was also a Member of Parliament.

¹⁹ Harriet Ngubane, 1977 *Body and mind in Zulu medicine*, London: Academic Press, (p 113).

between the person and the environment.”²⁰ Black and red expel the bad that is in the body. Each of these colours contains different powers that have an effect on the body. Black is also the colour that symbolises darkness and pollution, so those persons are considered to be in darkness and do not possess the light. White is associated with the light. For instance, in a ritual killing, a white goat is chosen above the other goats to call upon of the ancestors of the clan.

The challenge to be earth-keepers

Spirit possession can lead to an abuse of flora and fauna as the person who is unwell continues to use natural elements to heal a problem that is more focused within the spiritual realm. Certain plants and animals can become extinct if caution is not used in the remedy of problems that are of a spiritual nature. The use of animal hides, such as leopard skin, denotes royalty and can endanger our wildlife reserves.

Spirit possession has been studied by a number of anthropologists as Ngubane mentions Bryant (1949, 1970), Junod (1927), Sundkler²¹ (1961), Krige²² (1937), Hunter (1947), Kohler (1941), Loudon (1959, 1965), Hammond Tooke (1962), Laubscher (1969) and Marwick (1966).²³ It is important to note that the Supreme Being in Heaven reigns with the Princess of the Sky in the spirit world above the earth. The ancestors live in the world below the earth and are concerned about the everyday happenings of the people on the earth. In the world below there are three types of spirits which are the spirits yet to be born, the spirits of those who have recently died and the ancestors proper – those long deceased. From conception to birth, the baby is within the spirit realm, yet to be born and when the child is in the first year of life, a sacrifice called *imbeleko* is performed. This is done so as to place the child’s spirit under the protection of the ancestors of its parents. Divination is part of the role played by a female when the spirits of her ancestors possess her. Divination happens through the daughters of a clan. If a man is possessed by his ancestors’ spirits, he becomes a transvestite since he is performing the duty proper to a female.

In 1987, David Bosch²⁴, the Afrikaner missiologist, discussed the problem of evil among the African peoples of South Africa by stating that there is a belief in good and evil within African society. However, there is a contention that there is no accurate translation for the word Satan. Bosch points out: “It is seriously to be doubted, however, that these translations are appropriate.”²⁵ There are names for evil divinities but not the name of Satan *per se*. *uSatana* is an adoptive from English and *ubusathane* (the reality of Satan) is the same as *ubuthakathi* (witches-sic). This leads us to the conclusion that the source of evil is not with the divine but rather with human agents like the witches (sic) ... practitioners of harmful medicine. Within African cosmology, the witch (sic) is the source of evil.²⁶ In ancient Persian religion there are two conflicting divinities, the god of good and the god of evil. However, when discussing monotheism, we need to explain how the reality of good and evil emanates from the one Godhead. It was thought that with a Western-styled education that the indigenous people would be freed from certain superstitions, but this has proved to be a false hope.

The people of South Africa and, especially, the Zulus have been good earth-keepers for decades. Practices like waiting for rain and participating in dry farming, depending on the rain, made these people sensitive to the cycles of rainfall in the areas in which they lived. Practices such as slashing and burning of local vegetation has helped to tame the earth and rid it of unnecessary insects.²⁷ However, these same slash and burn techniques have proven harmful as well during the progress of migration from one area to another, since soil erosion can also result from slash and burn techniques in providing for food for animals or preparing the soil for cultivation.

To sum up this section, it is important to note the issue of spirit possession and the notion of what is clean and unclean within society. There are dietary customary laws in all societies, as indicated in the Old and New Testaments. The challenge that remains for us today is to be cognisant of the fact that God created the earth and that what was created by God is good. There are problems of spirit possession among many cultural groups, including the Zulus, and they come to seek assistance on a spiritual level. We also have a duty to be good earth-keepers, since God has made humanity custodians of all creation.

²⁰ Ngubane, Op cit, (p 113).

²¹ Bengt GM Sundkler wrote the important work *Bantu prophets in South Africa* which was published by Oxford University Press in 1948 and then reprinted in 1961 and 1964.

²² Eileen Krige deserves a special mention as she encouraged many females to study anthropology as to improve the circumstances of women nation-wide. Her primary area of study was among the Zulu people.

²³ Harriet Ngubane, Op cit, p 140.

²⁴ David Bosch was a public intellectual, missionary and theologian. He was not an anthropologist or historian. However, his input is relevant to the present discussion on spirit possession that is part of the Zulu world view. He spoke Xhosa and had worked at Madwaleni, Decoligny and Menlo Park in Pretoria. He was married to Annemie Bosch.

²⁵ David Bosch, “The Problem of Evil in Africa. A Survey on African Views on Witchcraft and the Response of the Christian Church” in *Like a roaring lion ...Essays on the Bible, the church and demonic powers*, by P de Viliers 1987, Pretoria: UNISA, (p 40).

²⁶ Ibid, (p 41).

²⁷ Insight gained while doing pastoral work in Bergville in 1991. These slash and burn techniques in farming are still being practiced today.

The network of factors affecting healing

The human person is the key determinant either living in an environment that causes healing, eating something that leads to illness, living a life-style that is harmful to one's health or finally having a mind-set that is a cause of not being well within the society in which we live. This applies to all people and not just the Zulu. However, what is pronounced among the Zulu is the attention and care placed on the environment in which they live and in particular what has been imbibed as daily nutrition. Sickness can result from causes within the body or causes from outside the body or the home environment. The relationship that the family has with the ancestors is also important as the ancestors have to be informed of any changes happening within the family such as a wedding or a death. If a particular family among the Zulus is troubled by misfortune then an animal has to be slaughtered to appease the ancestors. The members of the family and the head of the house-hold are at the core of the network of factors that keeps the families within the clan happy and healthy.

Concerning the environment it is to be noted that culture is the adaptation to the physical and social environment. Culture is therefore dynamic since the physical and social environment are in transition. Society has to adjust to this transition and realise that there are difficulties to the manner in which we respond to these changing circumstances. To name just a few, there are contaminants in the water we drink and the air we breathe, as well as natural disasters; all of these crises call for an appropriate response from us. It would be absurd to apply a spiritual solution to something that is not related to the spiritual world. However, there is room for spiritual solutions in the response to death. Therefore, a tsunami or water borne disease needs to be responded to at an appropriate level: the contaminated water source can be purified in time, whereas the effects of the tsunami have to be dealt with as best as possible and the people affected have to pick up the pieces of their lives and carry on.

The causes of illness are varied. Among the Zulu, the world-view is extremely important, as emotions and virtues play a part in the physical healing of persons. As mentioned previously, guilt or a lack of forgiveness could prevent a Zulu person from healing. In Western medicine psychosomatic illness is a recognised phenomenon and the same is true in the Zulu context. In the area of pastoral counselling, a wife might call in the minister because her husband is drinking alcohol in excess. The husband responds by saying that he drinks because his wife nags excessively. So where does the problem begin? Is the fault to be placed on the alcoholic husband or on the nagging wife?²⁸ In fact, such complexities are not unique to the Zulu nation, but are common throughout South African society. Another problem is the search for the onset of HIV and AIDS: there is much controversy about where the pandemic began, despite the fact that the means of transmission and the survival of the virus are well known.

In the search for the essence of healing, it is worth bearing in mind that there are many sources of healing: society needs to be aware of the contamination of the environment; there is the matter of personal hygiene; and there are also customary rituals where disease can spread, such as circumcision of a group of male teenagers, symbolising their passage into manhood. There is also the area of psychology and group consciousness: healing can be effected through behaviourist psychology and the Rogerian approach of being non directive and simply listening to the patient, thus helping the person solve their own problems. Finally, there is also spiritual healing and the testimony in the Bible that if one has faith that one can be healed by the person of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The question raised at the beginning of this article was how Zulu people in Maphumulo, the Nyswa Reserve and Mariannhill respond to illness. It is important to note the Zulu culture is rich in medicinal cures. The challenge is in how the Zulu adjust to the contemporary environment. This will involve choices made by clan members to retain or forgo aspects of their traditional culture. However, culture is not a static reality; it is always in a state of flux, changing so as to help people adapt to the physical and social environment in which they find themselves. Therefore, as tried and tested methods prove more successful than other means of healing, the more reliable methods will increasingly be adopted to bring about healing for the Zulu people.

In the final analysis, a holistic approach is required to effect healing among the Zulu. The importance of medicine, psychology, sociology, ecology and morality all have a part to play in the practice of healing among the Zulu, as well as members of other ethnic groups within the context of South Africa. There is sufficient evidence that religion and the environment is not a new theme within South Africa, since it started as an interest to missionaries of the 19th century and it remains a topic of interest to the Zulu community of Christians and other South Africans.

²⁸ Insight gained from doing pastoral work in Eastwood in Pietermaritzburg in 1983.

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