

# Christian faith formation and culture: A theological study of the Nsenga people

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## **Abstract**

The antithetical antagonistic dichotomy expressed in the saying *Chikristu ni Chikristu, Mwambo ni Mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo niwachinkhalire* induces a dualistic approach to Christian faith among some of the Nsenga people belonging to the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ), Nyanje Presbytery, Sinda and Petauke districts, eastern province of Zambia. The saying literally translates as Christianity is Christianity and tradition is tradition. Christianity found an established tradition with two implications for the practice of Christian faith. First, it portrays Christianity and the Nsenga culture as antithetical. Secondly, it relegates Christianity to a newcomer and alternative life to traditional culture. This entails that Christianity is welcomed and valued as a ‘stranger’. The Christian faith has to be localised for it to transform the Nsenga people and culture from the inside. The Nsenga people belonging to the RCZ face the challenge of localising Christianity and making its teachings part of their conceptual systems.

This research proposes that the theological study of the Nsenga people and their cultural formation aims to understand the causes of antagonism between Christian faith and culture, as the starting point for contextual faith formation. Contextual faith formation will strengthen relationships with God, self, and others (humanity and the environment) through knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, and praxis. The research explores the possibility of RCZ faith formation to hermeneutically discern possible means of integrating the outcomes from the theological study of the Nsenga people and their cultural formation, in order to address the antagonistic dichotomy. It recommends an integrated, self-theologised and decolonised faith formation conducted by engaging the Nsenga people and their culture to bring about spiritual transformation. This calls for a responsible hermeneutics of the bible, culture, and the RCZ faith tradition.

**Keywords:** Faith formation, antagonistic dichotomy, hermeneutics, Nsenga people, Bible, culture, faith tradition, contextual, *Buku La Katekisma*, discernment

## **Declaration**

I, **Masauso Moyo**, declare that the thesis, which I herewith submit for the Doctoral Degree in **Practical Theology** at the University of the Free State, is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Moyo', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Masauso Moyo

30 November 2022

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## **Dedication**

To those who passionately love the triune God yet wrestle with their faith.

To my wife, Emeria Edina Phiri, and our children, Shalom, Madalitso Wezi, and Joshua Ernest Moyo.

To my Sunday School teacher, late Ania Njobvu.

To Mr Gladson Kamanga and Mrs Violet Ronia Moyo.

To the Reformed Church in Zambia and the Dutch Reformed Church

## **Acknowledgement**

This research was one of the massive tasks I have undertaken so far. It is undeniable that it has been attained by the grace of God through human support. God must be thanked for the grace and special opportunity he granted me to carry out this research. I also appreciate Mr Gladson Kamanga and his wife, (my sister) Violet Ronia Moyo Kamanga, for the guidance in the initial stage of my life and education. I acknowledge the input from my wife, Emeria Edna Phiri Moyo, and our lovely children, Shalom, Madalitso Wezi, and Joshua Ernest Moyo, for their inspirational presence.

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Finally, I acknowledge my supervisor, Dr Joseph Khamadi Pali, to whom I will remain indebted for his relentless companionship in all situations encountered during the research.

## **Abbreviations**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ATR	African Traditional Religion
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CLP	Church Leader Participant
HIV	Human Immuno Virus
RCZ	Reformed Church in Zambia
TLP	Traditional Leader Participant
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

#### *1.1 Introduction*

This chapter gives a general overview of exploring the prospects of using the outcomes from the theological study of the Nsenga people in the Sinda and Petauke districts in the Eastern province of Zambia for informing and enriching the practice of faith formation in the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ). It provides a road map on the research, which aims to contribute toward contextualising the practice of faith formation that would address the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy in the RCZ, by integrating the outcomes from the theological study of Nsenga cultural formation. The outlined road map explains the qualitative method and ethnography as the design of the study. The study also includes the research background, problem, methodology, questions, aim, and objectives. This chapter explains the sources of data, the means of data collection, and the process of data analysis in this study. It also clarifies the position, identity, division, and field of the research in practical theology. Finally, there is a pledge of allegiance to ethical standards and an explanation of how the research will contribute to the three areas of theology, namely the academy, the Church, and the community.

#### *1.2 Background*

Galgalo (2012:5-6) describes Christian in Africa as a stranger within, with the paradox of growing vibrantly yet being shallow and superficial at the same time. This entails that Africans are not at home with the Christian faith. Pali (2014:145) asserts that some of the African Christians still offer sacrifices to their ancestors. Dei (2019:15) indicates that some African Christians have a dual allegiance with westernised Christianity, as an outward conformity, and indigenous beliefs and practices, as an inward allegiance. The foreignness of Christianity in Africa is attributed to the way in which the missionaries presented the Gospel. This opinion has resulted in a deep quest for the contextualisation of Christianity, so that it becomes an indigenous faith. Despite numerous studies on the contextualisation of the Christian faith in Africa, Mokhoathi (2017:1) laments the insufficient critical evaluation of the means that would help fully express or practise Christianity within cultural contexts. He claims that the contextualisation of Christianity has resulted in syncretism, where it is amalgamated with African Traditional Religion (ATR). He argues that the

process of amalgamation results in *adiaphora* (things that fall in between), as it overlooks certain essential proponents from both religions considered to be critical for contextual Christianity. Mokhoathi (2017:1) cites the “pragmatic nature of African culture and religious heritage; and African traditional methods of healing” as the *adiaphora*. The researcher notices the other vital *adiaphora*, namely how the pragmatic nature of African culture and religious heritage, as well as the method of healing are passed on within and to the next generation. The researcher is of the view that the *adiaphora* of passing on essential cultural proponents (cultural formation) within and between generations is worth studying from a theological perspective, as its outcome has the potential to help contextualise the Christian faith in Africa.

In an attempt to contextualise the Christian faith, Bediako (1994:14) calls for the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood, by integrating the African pre-Christian religious experience and the African Christian commitment. According to Mokhoathi (2017:13, 14), “consideration of the *adiaphora* may provide the necessary clarity on how Christianity can best be expressed and practised within the African cultural and religious heritage”. Both Bediako and Mokhoathi’s advocacy for the identification of pre-Christian experiences, Christian commitments, and *adiaphora* may be vital for contextualising the Christian faith in Africa. Galgalo’s claim is, of course, built on the post-missionary critics who are against the missionary approach of presenting the Gospel with the aim of eradicating Africanness and replacing it with westernisation. This missionary approach is alleged to have been and continues to be the reason for Africans’ struggle in owning the Christian faith. In trying to redeem the situation, strong views such as Galgalo’s arouse a call for more effort in evolving a Christian faith that is both growing in vibrancy and depth.

The call for being authentically African is also expressed by Nsamanang and Tchombe (2011:82-83), who claim that the importance and impact of Africa’s ethnic map should no longer be minimised, treated as a side issue, or wished away, for it will “persist as a decisive factor that plagues the continent and most African nations, if it is not harnessed and used as a positive force”. Ethnicity has persisted as a decisive factor, as it antagonises theological debates and the practice of the Christian faith in Africa. However, the process of harnessing and using Africa’s ethnic map as a positive force needs to be explored in more detail. Apart from attributing the foreignness of

Christianity in Africa to the way in which missionaries presented the Gospel, studies should also consider the defensive nature of African ethnic groups as recipients. Indeed, culture is dynamic and evolving, as each subsequent generation modifies its practices (Nsamenang & Tchombe 2011:117). Taylor (1973:497) claims that, by nature, culture resists rapid change. This guarantees cultural change, although the reason behind its urgency determines the rate at which it occurs. Rapid change may be necessitated in a culture if the practices prove to compromise the peace, unity, dignity, and survival of the ethnic group. For example, Zulu and Mwendabai (2018) reported in the *Zambia Daily Mail* newspaper that Paramount Chief Gawa Undi of the Chewa people banned the tradition of *chidyerano* (offering a spouse to have sexual intercourse with a friend) and *ufisi* (arranging a man to have sexual intercourse with a newly initiated girl as a way of testing her sexual skills), due to the prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

At the point of evangelisation, Africa's ethnic groups esteemed the pride of keeping the purity of their cultures. Due to this, they were defensive and, to some extent, intolerant towards even inter-ethnic influence. The dividing walls of ethnicity, although resolved in some ways, are still evident in Africa as, in certain cases, they determine even political inclination. In the most unfortunate circumstances, these dividing walls have resulted in ethnic conflict such as between the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda, the Luvale and the Lunda in Zambia, and the Masai and the Kikuyu in Kenya. This shows that not only the evangelisation of the Gospel, but also the intercultural influence among African ethnic groups faced resistance. In view of this, the Gospel, as presented by the missionaries, although done with misplaced intention, was resisted like something perceived as a source of contaminating the purity of culture. In an effort to keep the purity of cultures, the Gospel was resisted, in some cases, and converts to Christianity were accused of being weaklings or betrayers of the African customs by their tribesmen who remained cultural patriots.

This research is of the view that solely blaming the struggle to embrace Christian faith on the way in which missionaries presented the Gospel in Africa is a halfway solution to the problem, as the recipients had to protect their values. Njoronge (2002:38-44) posits that the discovery of theological voices by Africans in their cultural contexts requires fighting against missionary Eurocentric cultures and influence on the church as well as the evils from local cultures. This implies that the African theological voice lies between foreign culture-contaminated Christianity

and hindrance within the local ethnic heritages. In short, the struggle to own faith is a shared responsibility such that ignoring the contributing factors from African cultures hinders the establishment of authentic indigenous Christianity. Of course, the demand for rapid change from cherished ethnic cultural approaches was an over-expectation. However, according to the Chewa people, *khoza lowa ndi mwini dzanja*. This literally translates as the “entry of the bracelet depends on the owner of the hand’s ability to allow it”. The full reception of the Gospel depends, to some extent, on how willing Africa is in localising it. Irrespective of the cause, this research accepts that the church in Africa is struggling to fully own its Christian faith, justified by three identified pointers to that effect.

### *1.3 Three major pointers of the struggle*

This study identifies three major pointers to the fact that some African Christians struggle to feel at home with their faith. First, the dichotomy approach to the Christian faith. Secondly, the recent increased demand for mediums of faith and perceived means of how God communicates. This resonates with ATR practices. Thirdly, the survival of the highly criticised ATR customs and practices alongside Christianity (its critic) for over a century.

#### *1.3.1 Dichotomy*

De Gruchy (2011:23) considers helping people to think theologically about their lives, about the witness of the church, and about the world as the large part of the church’s ministerial task. This is an innate aspect of African religious life which is lived as an expression of the relationship with, and in reverence of the sacred. Hence, the dichotomy of distinguishing lives, in general, from religion is foreign to Africans. African religion is a way of life and living in the visible sphere in relation to the invisible world (Kalilombe 1994:115). This means that life is visibly lived in constant consideration of the invisible world; hence, in African cultures, there is only one way to live life, that is, in relation to the sacred. The war of faiths in some African Christians is a sign that they are caught up between “two invisible worlds”. In this research, dichotomy refers to the war of allegiance, where people are torn between two seemingly appealing faiths that appear to be pulling in opposite directions, namely the world of Christian faith and the world of traditional religion. Both seem to be appealing, while simultaneously antagonising each other, hence the dichotomy. This dichotomy is evident in two ways.

### *1.3.1.1 Christian numerical dominance versus faith practice in Zambia*

The high percentage of citizens subscribing to the Christian faith compared to the insufficient indicators of its practice is evidence that some Zambians are struggling to appropriate faith. The contrast raises the question as to the effectiveness of the church's ministry of faith formation in Zambia. According to the 2010 census of population and housing, over 90% of the total Zambian population profess Christian faith (Zambia Central Statistics 2012:17). The report shows that Christianity enjoys popularity, as it translates into nine out of ten Zambians professing its faith, while other religions account for 2.5%, and non-religious people account for less than 2%. It is anticipated that the numerical advantage of Christianity in Zambia could result in raising responsible citizens, whose interaction with social realities will be based on Christian ethos and values (Freeks 2022:1) as the 'light of the world' and 'the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5:13-16). Contrary to the Christian ethical code, virtue, and values, the rate of corrupt practices, political violence, and financial irregularities is cause for concern in a country that is struggling economically. There could be many other contributing factors to the mismatch of the high percentage of religious people and low level of integrity, but one of the reasons is that some Zambian Christians still face the challenge of applying their faith in real-life situations. In other words, it seems that Christians are not fully equipped with theological literacy to think theologically (De Gruchy 2011:23), in order to apply faith in real life.

### *1.3.1.2 Antagonism between Christian and African cultural practices*

The struggle to own faith is also evident in the antagonistic dichotomy between Christian faith and culture. During the oral interviews for the Master of Theology degree research on "Chewa neonatal death grieving and healing custom", the researcher realised that Christians find it difficult to apply faith in real-life challenges and that there is a dichotomy between Christianity and practical life among RCZ members. During the interviews, some of the RCZ participants clearly indicated that resorting to African traditional practices arises from situations where Christian faith does not seem to provide a way forward for the need at hand (Moyo 2015:1, 24). According to Kalilombe (1994:131), the vast majority (of Africans) are still left behind, trying to cope with the new situation as best they can. Out of desperation, Africans fall back on their traditional culture. Survival hinges on the preserved remnants of traditional cultures with which they are familiar, and

bits and pieces of the new system. Cultural principles are preserved as a means for social and individual survival.

In desperate moments, some African Christians seem to resort to their tradition, as they are not sure that Christianity is capable of offering solutions. For this reason, in some instances, Christian faith is set aside to leave room for African traditional practices and vice versa. Hence, some congregants hold on to the so-called Christian and African traditional life antithetically. This means that some African Christians live with Christianity and ATR as antithetical options that are applied differently, as required by the circumstances. This dualistic approach to faith is usually expressed in the saying *Chikristu ni Chikristu, Mwambo ni Mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo niwachinkhalire*. This literally translates as “Christianity is Christianity and tradition is tradition”. After all, Christianity found an established tradition. In this sense, Christianity is a newcomer. This saying has two implications for the practice of Christian faith. First, it portrays Christianity and African cultures as two different ways of life with sporadic irreconcilable conflicts. Secondly, it relegates Christianity to a newcomer and an alternative way of life to the primary traditional culture. This entails that Christianity is welcomed and valued as a ‘stranger’. The treatment of Christianity as a ‘stranger’ is a recipe for instability or inconsistency of its praxis.

There is no doubt that some Africans perceive the positive aspects in Christianity and may be fully aware of what is expected of them as they embrace their Christian faith. However, they hesitate to apply it out of uncertainty. In this case, traditional customs are applied as a backup plan in case the Christian faith does not work. This understanding leads to the second implication that some of the Christians apply either the Christian or the ATR faith, depending on which one is considered appropriate at a particular time. Hence, both Christian and traditional faiths are practised for convenience’s sake. In some instances, the dichotomy becomes a source of conflict between the church and the traditional leaders, especially during marriage ceremonies, at pregnancy conception, childbirth, illnesses, and funerals involving church members who pay allegiance to both Christianity and African traditional practices. The antagonism becomes so tense, especially at funerals, that the church often threatens to withdraw its services or does so if traditional leaders insist on playing a part in the proceedings. In some instances, traditionalists know what the church wants, and they do their traditional practice in secret. It is clear that some Africans feel that

Christianity leaves a fissure that only traditional customs can bridge. This dichotomy creates conflicts within the church and among church members, as it causes internal friction in individual members who face a dilemma between two antagonistic allegiances, namely the Christian faith and the African tradition, in critical moments.

### *1.3.2 Demand for the resurgent ATR-related medium of faith and protective powers*

The other sign of not feeling at home with the Christian faith is the obvious increase in the demand for ATR-related practises such as prophetic consultation, dream interpretation, and medium of faith in Zambian churches. In prophetic consultation, the phrase '*kuona pa spirit*' ('seeing in the spirit') is used. This phrase is also used in consulting traditional doctors or prophets. This becomes more complex as, sometimes, the so-called church prophetic utterances bear witchcraft accusations like their counterparts in ATR. The issue of *chizimba* (singular) or *vizimba* (plural) is very common in ATR. *Vizimba* are tangible or visible things extracted from any perceived source of power within or with which a person desires to operate. It may also be places or acts that are viewed as having a certain attached significance. *Vizimba* are visible points of contact with the invisible powers. The use of mediums of faith such as anointing water, oil, brooms, and so on, used for exorcising evil spirits that are alleged to be the cause of misfortunes and bring about God's blessings, resonates well with the notion of *vizimba*. These tangible faith contacts are either sold or given free of charge.

On 3 October 2015, the *Times of Zambia* newspaper reported that a clergyman in Lusaka was selling anointed brooms and instructed his followers to use them to sweep every area of the house where they were experiencing problems. This included meal bins, refrigerators, beds, and all the places where his followers wanted to be blessed. These brooms were bought at a high price, since they came from a person perceived to possess spiritual powers. It is confusing that the highly demanded mediums of faith perform or serve the same functions as those advertised by traditional doctors in various media. For example, they all serve the purpose of securing marriage, promotion at work, accumulation of wealth, protection of homes and businesses from evil attacks, and so on. This recent resurgence of yearning for ATR-related mediums of faith shows the liveliness of the African approach to faith. It is also a sign that African yearnings have not been addressed, but suppressed. Hence, the re-emphasis on the mediums of faith has resulted in their resurgence. The

research intends to explore faith formation as the means for meeting the unattended to yearning of an African Christian.

In as much as the application of a more than 150-year-old Christian faith seems to be a challenge among some *Zambian Christians*, it appears that elements of the highly criticised African approach to critical issues of life are still alive. The struggle seems to validate the claim that African Christians do not feel at home with their faith with missionaries being blamed for presenting it to them in a Eurocentric way (Galgalo 2012:31-32). This also seems to prove the claim that some African Christians have a dual allegiance, for they outwardly conform to the westernised Christian lifestyle, yet inwardly retain the indigenous beliefs and practices about the Creator (Dei 2019:15). Mbiti (1977:30) suggests that, for Christian faith to be incarnated in Africa, it requires a proper use of the fundamental tools which he identifies as the Gospel, faith, and culture. Incarnation considers that Christianity is universal with a universal calling, expansion and integration which was “born in a particular culture” (Isch 2002:83). Incarnation makes universal Christianity an indigenous faith appreciated by the locals as their own.

The suggested integration by Bediako and incarnation by Mbiti of the Christian faith in Africa show that all those doing theology recognise ATR and cultures as preparation for evangelisation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Due to this suggestion, some African theologians prefer to call ATRs primal religions. In Africa, it is difficult to draw a line between culture and religion, as the former is a way of expressing the latter. The word ‘primal’ stresses that ATRs were not simply a way of life for the indigenous people but that, by and large, they also functioned as God’s way of preparing people for the reception of the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. As ATRs are perceived to have prepared Africans for the reception of the Gospel, Adamo (2006:12) views them in their plurality as a crucial part of life for the indigenous population that scholars should seek to understand other than being determined to exterminate. It is obvious that the efforts to exterminate whatever has to do with African cultures have not yielded their intended results.

The increased demand for the resurgent ATR-related expression of faith challenges the effectiveness of the missionary approach of demonizing and attempting to eradicate its way of doing things. Even if humanity has common biological imperatives, each society cares for its needs

differently (Kraft 2005:68). Africans, in their respective cultural societies, have different ways of taking care of needs that influence their receptiveness to the Gospel. The resurgence reveals that the missionary approach simply sent the African approach to health, social, and spiritual needs into hibernation. These have been awakened by the church's introduction of beliefs that are familiar to cultural practice through the use of faith mediums, prophetic consultations, and dream interpretations. As in ATR, the effectiveness of Christian faith formation strategies requires more than its current structured and formal building-linked approach. Faith formation has to be done in connection with the realities of life where all situations, circumstances, and events are perceived as opportunities for forming faith or learning points. This is an approach where life and faith formation are inseparably intertwined. As long as they live, Africans, in their cultural setting, do not separate teaching or formation from life, as they are worked out alongside each other.

### *1.3.3 The survival of the ATR practices*

As cited earlier, during research for a Master of Theology degree, the researcher discovered that a participant had to go to her village from the capital city of Lusaka, in order to learn about neonatal death, mourning, and burial customs (Moyo 2014:24). The most critical thing in this whole scenario is that ATR customs and practices still exist as an undercard way of life alongside Christianity. There are reasons behind the survival of African cultural practices. The above-listed three major pointers of the dichotomy between the Christian and the ATR faith, the recent increased demand for mediums of faith and communication with God, and the survival of the highly criticised ATR practices alongside Christianity for many years attest to the fact that there is a struggle of feeling at home with the Christian faith. In order to harness and use the African ethnic map as a positive force, the incarnation of the Christian faith, and considering the adiaphora as suggested by Nsamanang and Tchombe (2011:82-83), Mokhoathi (2017:1), and Mbiti (1977:30), there is need for a theological study of the African cultural formation. The researcher is of the view that the outcome of an inductive theological study may form a good basis for a contextual faith formation that may contribute to the Christian faith sinking its roots deep into the African church.

### *1.4 Research problem*

This research explores the problem of the antagonistic dichotomy which causes tension between Christianity and culture. The dichotomy shows the dilemma between the Gospel and culture among Africans. Meanwhile, life under ATR is pragmatic, for it is lived as a harmony between religion and its praxis, where the visible sphere expresses the invisible world (Kalilombe 1994:115). The dichotomy of *mwambo ni mwambo, chikristu ni chikristu, chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wacinkhalire*, literally translated as “tradition is tradition, Christianity is Christianity; Christianity found an established tradition”, is a sign that African Christians find it difficult to relate to the “two invisible worlds viewed as appealing”, yet with antagonising conceptual systems or pre-set means of coping with life’s challenges (Kraft 2005:273). They are caught up between Christianity and culture’s invisible worlds, which seem to have contrasting ways of handling the paradoxes of life.

The dichotomy further shows that the Christian faith is not yet at home in Africa, as it is still at war with culture. This antithetical approach to Christianity and culture arises from the perception that the two are irreconcilable antagonists. This calls for culturally sensitive or contextual faith formation which would address the dichotomy and harmonise faith in African Christians. According to Matthaai (2010:60), the goal of faith formation is to strengthen relationships with God and others, attained through the relationships, structures, and practices provided by the community of faith. The faith formation that strengthens relationships with God and others empowers a God-centred life, evident in revering God and caring for his creation. African cultural formation intertwines religion with practical life as a way of empowering community members to express reverence and belief in deities in their daily lives. The concept of *Ubuntu*, with its emphasis on linking self-identity to a particular community to which a person belongs, drives the passion to entrench and enforce the need for strengthening relationships with other human beings in the mind of members of African societies.

African cultural formation holistically strengthens relationships with deities and others (nature and human beings) through the principles of preparationalism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism, and holicism (Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2002:223). These principles thrive on the continued supporting relationships, structures, and practices of African communities, where each life crisis or event is converted into a learning and teaching opportunity. Meanwhile, the faith

formation process in the RCZ isolates its members from culturally shared relationships, structures, and practices to a gathering place and then sends them back into the cultural system to face real-life challenges. Most of life's challenges are faced outside the church building or gathering place, in cultural and social structures. Hence, African Christians face challenges within their cultural contexts and unique conceptual systems (Kraft 2005:273). Cultural conceptual systems are pre-set responses to any given challenge or life struggle that may either be in conformity or contrast with the Gospel. In the struggle away from church buildings, the voices of cultural relationships, structures, and practices seem to be closer than those of the church. The imminence of cultural influences in moments of crisis induces the approach of *mwambo ni mwambo chikristu ni chikristu; chikristu cepeza mwambo niwacinkhalire*.<sup>1</sup> This dichotomy further dualises church and home behaviour, church and workplace conduct, as well as spiritual and general life. The dualistic approach to life affects and renders theocentric Christian praxis ineffective in terms of transforming contexts. Faith formation has to address this dichotomy.

The church has to come up with a contextual and indigenous continuous means of forming faith that empowers African Christians to remain faithful in various contexts. The study explores the possibility of using cultural methodologies that work by being part of, among, and within the community's supporting relationships, structures, and practices, especially at times of life struggles. By the phrase 'part of', the research refers to the community embracing it as their own; the word 'among' refers to its being shared by the community. Meanwhile, the word 'within' refers to the context of its practice and relevance to the needs of the community, with the aim of actualising conversion to Christian faith as a call and vocation to transform cultures. Christians respond to God's call, continuously experiencing the deepening of their faith and life in communion with God in their respective cultural environments. The deepening of faith within a cultural environment will enable Christianity and the Gospel to influence from inside local cultures rather than simply being an overlay garment on top. The Gospel should cease to be treated as a foreigner, an alternative option, or an enemy of the culture. Rather, it should be treated as a sole focal point of cultural illumination. As opposed to being treated as a foreigner or a second option, Africans ought to own and embrace the Gospel so that they use the Christian faith as the main reference point. The study advocates for a faith formation that addresses the problem of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tradition is tradition, Christianity is Christianity; Christianity found an already established culture.

Christian-cultural antagonistic dichotomy that induces a dualistic kind of life. This is done with the intention of harmonising Christian practice in the Nsenga communities through a faith formation informed by the outcome of the theological study of the Nsenga people and their cultural system.

### 1.5 Research questions

The main research question that guides this study is: What possible outcomes from a theological study of the faith formation of the Nsenga people, on the one hand, and the RCZ Christian faith praxis, on the other, would hermeneutically inform the RCZ faith formation practices, in order to address the problem of the antagonistic dichotomy?

The above research question further raises the following secondary questions:

- What are the contemporary theological discussions and theories on faith and its formation? This will be discussed in Chapter Two.
- What are the significances and weaknesses of the current RCZ faith formation methods in addressing the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy? This will be explored in Chapter Three.
- What is the view of the participants on the formation of the Nsenga people and their culture form? This will be dealt with in Chapter Four.
- On the basis of the outcome of the theological study of the Nsenga culture, what should be the church's approach to faith formation? This will be discussed in Chapter Five.
- What should the RCZ do to conduct contextual faith formation among the Nsenga people? This question will be answered in Chapter Six.

#### 1.5.1 Aim of the research

The main aim of this research is to contribute towards a contextual faith formation practice that may address the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy, by hermeneutically engaging the outcomes from the theological study of the Nsenga people and the RCZ faith formation practices.

#### 1.5.2 Objectives

Arising from the above questions, the research objectives are as follows:

- To discuss the theological research and contemporary theories on faith and its formation. This is discussed in Chapter Two.
- To explore the significances and weaknesses of the contemporary RCZ faith formation practices in addressing the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy. This is engaged in Chapter Three.
- To discuss the participants' views on holistic and value-driven Nsenga cultural formation from a theological perspective. This is discussed in Chapter Four.
- To hermeneutically explore possible lessons that can be drawn from the theological study of Nsenga cultural formation for the purpose of transforming the faith formation process in the RCZ. This is dealt with in Chapter Five.
- To recommend what the RCZ should do, in order to conduct contextual faith formation among the Nsenga people. This will be covered in Chapter Six.

#### 1.6 Conceptual analysis

Faith has been a scholarly topic of discussion in theological and psychological disciplines. In psychology, faith is discussed in relation to development initiated by James Fowler, who introduces the faith development theory as a sequence of human developmental stages, whereby individuals shape their relatedness to a transcendent centre or centres of value (Fowler *et al.* 2004). Each stage exhibits an underlying transformation in response to the quest for ultimate meaning. The theory suggests that the human development stages of life are related to understanding the Supreme Being. New concepts about Supreme Being develop according to the stages in the growing process of human beings. Maddix *et al.* (2020:8) differentiate between faith formation and faith development. In their view, faith formation is a product of divine encounter, whereas faith development is considered a psychological study of the human innate. Counted (2016:146-172), a psychologist, views faith formation from the perspective of the God-attachment theory. God is considered to be the significant other to whom human beings desire to be attached.

The God-attachment theory, as suggested by Counted (2016:146-172), is a hybrid of psychology and theology used for the purpose of psychotherapy. It assumes that a person's positive or negative experience with caregivers has a significant influence on the formation of faith. The God-attachment theory is based on an understanding that people have the desire to relate to those who are mentally considered to be significant others. The sense of attachment to significant others,

which develops during the parent-child relationship at an early stage in life and continues to exist throughout one's lifetime, is the basis of relating to the Supreme Being, to fellow human beings, or to both.

This is where a positive experience with caregivers enhances the attachment with God while a negative one influences the search for a substitute attachment figure. The early childhood experience of the guardian or parental care plays a significant role in the formation of their faith. It is assumed that the effects of the care provided may last a person's whole lifetime (Counted 2016:147-148).

Unfortunately, both faith-development and God-attachment theories make of humanity and their circumstances producers of faith more than being divine providence. In as much as it is not explained in the faith-development theory whether the human innate aspect of faith is part of the gift of God or not, the fact remains that the discussion is more centred on humanity. Fowler generalises faith beyond religion, as he considers it to be a fundamental aspect of meaningful life, thereby indicating that it is not linked to God, but simply human innate nature. Meanwhile, the God-attachment theory reduces faith formation to a product of human fortunes or misfortunes encountered during early childhood upbringing. Counted (2016:168) acknowledges the limitation of the God-attachment theory, by emphasising "the role of Church leaders to disciple their young, fragile members to see God as more than just a mere attachment figure, or a temporal solution to their need for a meaningful attachment bond". There is thus more to faith formation than merely being a psychological development of the inbuilt faith and creation of human circumstances.

This research discusses faith formation not from the psychological human innate perspective under faith development, but as a practical theology topic from cultural and reformed perspectives. The inclination to theology entails that the study reflects on faith formation from God's perspective. Besides, in faith-development theory, one responds to God at a given human developmental stage. This research opts for faith formation, as it pays attention to how faith is formed in the human developmental stages. Okwalo (2008) approaches faith formation from the cultural, Roman Catholic, and Kenyan contexts, based on Gadamer's theory of conversation. In an attempt to apply the theory of conversation in the Kenyan context, he identifies *paraver* as an ideal structure where it is amply applied. Okwalo (2008:95) defines *paraver* as communal activities or deliberations on "governance, maintenance of law and order, the promotion of health and socialisation of members

into a communal life”. In as much as the *paraver* is effective in many ways, with its emphasis on communal experience, participation, consensus, and transformation, faith formation in Africa requires more than simply the *paraver* because learning values also rely on intra- and intergenerational teaching and learning. *Paravers* are communal meetings for shared values. Of course, some of the values are learned from the *paraver*, while others are accumulated from outside. The fact that participants take part in the process of forming one another entails that each one has an extra source of learning outside the *paraver*. This justifies the point that formation transcends the *paraver*. Moreover, Okwalo (2008:208) points out that conversation as an experience-oriented approach has many challenges, although he only cites two. The first challenge has to do with its possibility or attainability. The second challenge concerns the huge amount of effort on the part of learners and educators. The *paraver* is one of the values that shape institutions in Africa; hence, other formation processes have to be studied. This research approaches RCZ faith formation from the aspect of studying the Nsenga culture from a theological perspective.

### *1.7 Research methodology*

A researcher can use three empirical approaches for research purposes, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The mixed-methods approach combines the qualitative and the quantitative. Researchers use any of these three methods depending on the type, process, and aim of the research. This study employs the qualitative approach.

#### *1.7.1 Qualitative approach*

Nieuwenhuis (2007b:51) considers qualitative as a type of research focused on understanding various underlying social and cultural behavioural patterns. It mostly intends to find answers to the ‘why’ question. It studies people or systems through interaction with, or observation of the participants in their natural environment, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, its meaning, and interpretation (Nieuwenhuis 2007b:51; Hermans & Schoeman 2015:17). The need to know the depth suggests that the qualitative method studies the assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs, and values behind the perceived phenomenon through observations and questions. It aims at knowing the hidden reason behind the phenomenon.

#### *1.7.2 Why qualitative approach?*

The researcher assumes that there are hidden assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes behind the antagonistic dichotomy of *mwambo ni mwambo, chikristu ni chikristu chikristu cepeza mwambo onkhazikika* practised among the Nsenga people. The qualitative approach is used to gather empirical data, with the aim of understanding assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs, and values behind the antagonistic dichotomy of *mwambo ni mwambo chikristu ni chikristu chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wacinkhazile*, especially among the Nsenga people. It also intends to have an in-depth understanding of the conflicts and similarities of both the RCZ faith formation and the Nsenga cultural moulding frameworks. The researcher also assesses, from a theological perspective, how underlying reasons, motives, and root causes associated with the antagonistic dichotomy affect Christian praxis. Finally, the outcome of the qualitative research approach assists in recommending the way forward towards contextualisation of the RCZ faith formation tools and processes.

### *1.7.3 Research design*

The decision to settle for a research design depends on the goal of the research. The goal can be either descriptive, explanatory, concept, or intervention design (Hermans & Schoeman 2015:17). This study engages ethnography design, which is traditionally descriptive and interpretive (Fouche 2005:271) in nature, as it typically attempts to furnish an understanding of everyday life in a given culture, subculture, or group of people living in the special conditions under study (Gergen & Gergen 2018:3). Ethnography is writing about people, with a notion that they are meaning makers and interpreters of the cultural world they create and use. This requires the researcher to spend some time studying the lives of people in their natural settings and examine observable behavioural patterns, customs, and ways of life over an extended period of time, in order to holistically describe culture from a participant's perspective. The design also attempts to make sense of the inherent meaning of the culture's gestures, symbols, sayings, and artefacts (Osmer 2008:51; Mouton 2001:148; Berg 2009:190).

The design has been used from sociological, psychological, anthropological, medical, educational, and many other perspectives (Hustler & Goldbart 2005:19-21; Gergen & Gergen 2018:3-4). This present research approaches it from the perspective of practical theology. The challenge of the design, according to Clifford and Marcus (1986, quoted in Parker 2005:36), is that colonial masters used it to rule over the natives by observing, interfering, and controlling. However, according to

Hustler and Goldbart (2005:17), “several of early ethnographic studies were out of a desire to tell the story or to let the voice of the less fortunate, marginalised or less visible members of the society be heard”.

As a practical theology research, the design is used to gather new knowledge of, and insight into the spiritual practices of the Nsenga people, to understand influences behind their current state, and to explore the sum of unspoken yet firmly entrenched rules or patterns that govern their faith praxis. The insights gained from the ethnographic study of the Nsenga culture are a recipe for theological reflection and interpretation (Moschella 2012:226). The design also intends to bring out the silenced voices of the Nsenga cultural meaning makers, in order to understand the antagonistic dichotomy and to propose a contextual faith formation (Hustler & Goldbart 2005:17).

The use of ethnography in this study is driven by the desire to mitigate the impact of the antagonistic dichotomy, by improving the service of the RCZ faith formation among the Nsenga people (Hustler & Goldbart 2005:16). The researcher made unobstructed observations of the actions, gestures, sayings, rituals, and symbols of the Nsenga people and their means of forming culture. The observations also included reading literature on the Nsenga people, their culture, and the RCZ faith formation, as well as conducting in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, the RCZ clergy, and lay leaders from three congregations of the Nyanje Presbytery.

#### *1.7.4 Theoretical approach to practical theology*

This research is approached using the hermeneutical theory. Ganzevoort (2009) defines practical theology as “hermeneutics of lived religion”. Christianity, as a living faith, is a way of life in, with, and for the Triune God as he modelled it in God the Son, Jesus Christ. This Christ-modelled life is lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by God-breathed scriptures in contexts and specific Christian faith traditions. The life of a Christian lived by interrelating Scripture, contexts, and faith tradition can sometimes cause a problem of understanding. Magezi (2019a:119) avers that practical theology attempts to make sense of the life of faith in the world, as it tries to bridge the gap between faith in God and lived reality in the world. Hermeneutics addresses the problem of understanding encountered in the process of practising faith. With the hermeneutical aspect of practical theology in mind, Hendriks (2004:24-28) states that theology is, among others, about contexts, Scripture, and tradition. Meanwhile, according to Jansen (2007:2-6), hermeneutics is an “ever-widening

cycle of reflection on the problem of understanding involving identification, analysis and removal of obstacles to understanding”. The hermeneutical theory in this research is used to analytically identify obstacles and opportunities in contexts, Scripture, and traditions that will help faith formation address the antagonistic dichotomy.

This description of hermeneutics assumes that understanding is not straightforward. It is gained through a process of identifying, analysing, and removing obstacles, without which it remains elusive. Hermeneutics is a link between epistemology, the theory of knowledge and how it is gained, and the methodology or means of achieving a given task (Jansen 2007:2-6). Understanding can be described as the ability to connect the theory of knowledge and its source to the task or a practical way and use in life. Therefore, hermeneutics, as an approach to the problem of understanding, bridges the gap between theory and praxis (Jansen 2007:2-6). The antagonistic dichotomy between faith and culture, as observed in the saying *mwambo ni mwambo, chikristu ni chikristu, chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wachinkhalire*, is a gap in understanding the Christian faith and culture. It further creates a gap between the Christian content of faith and practice. This gap must be bridged for Christianity to become a living and lived faith within Nsenga contexts. The hermeneutical approach is used as a way of linking Christian theory to praxis in contexts, with the aim of understanding the meaning behind action and experience of the antagonistic dichotomy (Roberge 2011:6). The research understands that the antagonistic dichotomy is simply a manifestation of underlying beliefs and attitudes that may emanate from underlying beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes in both church and culture. The hermeneutical approach intends to identify, analyse, and clarify the hidden source of meaning that functions as obstacle to understanding the Bible, the Nsenga cultural context, and the Reformed faith tradition, with the focus on the RCZ faith formation practice.

The struggle of African Christians to live their faith has been blamed on the way in which missionaries presented the Gospel. The researcher suggests that obstacles may arise as a result of misunderstanding the Bible, the cultural context, or the Christian faith tradition. This means that obstacles to understanding can come from the church as a faith-forming community, from the culture, or from both. As a way of learning the meaning, actions, and experiences behind the faith and culture antagonism, the research uses the hermeneutical theory as a way of identifying and

analysing obstacles to understanding Christian faith from both the Nsenga culture and the RCZ faith formation guidelines. The identified and analysed obstacles are studied from a theological perspective and the final outcome is used to inform the RCZ on a more contextual faith formation that can address the faith-culture antagonism. It also suggests that a more contextual faith formation will empower the RCZ members to link their faith theories to practical life.

#### *1.7.5 Data collection*

Data was collected through a literature review, observations, and one-on-one oral interviews, as explained below.

##### *1.7.5.1 Literature review*

Literature review, which had already started, continued to be engaged as the means of familiarising and learning from other scholars who had conducted a similar study (Delpont & Fouche, 2005:263). It was also used to identify the scholarly study gaps, in order to establish a place for this research. The review involved reading literature on Gospel and culture, faith formation, minutes from the Elders' Council of three RCZ congregations in Nyanje Presbytery meetings, and Nsenga cultural formation methods.

##### *1.7.5.2 Observations*

The researcher observed the way of life, attitudes, beliefs, values, religions, and symbols of the RCZ faith and the Nsenga cultural formation, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the antagonistic dichotomy. The two were actively observed and data was kept in pictorial form and descriptive writing of actions or practices of the Nsenga people in their natural contexts.

##### *1.7.5.3 Interviews*

During the one-on-one interviews, the researcher had conversations with the participants. Each participant described his/her experience and reflection on the RCZ faith formation and the Nsenga cultural formation (Greeff 2005:287). Greeff (2005:287) views qualitative interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view, [to] unfold the meaning of people's experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations”. Oral interviews were conducted with traditional leaders and selected church leaders in the RCZ, Nyanje Presbytery. In order to facilitate participants' full self-expression, oral interviews were conducted

using semi-structured questions tailor-made for the role they play in the church or the Nsenga culture. The aim of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of faith and cultural frameworks, in order to know the causes of the antagonistic dichotomy.

#### 1.7.5.4 Selection of participants

Selecting participants is about choosing people who will be sources of data collection and the basis of their choice. It also refers to the process of selecting portions of the population for the study. This may also include incidents, events, settings, and activities to be included in data collection (Nieuwenhuis 2007c:79). Among the Nsenga people, the RCZ has two presbyteries, namely Hofmeyer and Nyanje. Nyanje Presbytery has been sampled as a good research ground. Out of fourteen congregations, only three congregations under the Nsenga people were sampled. The research also conducted one-on-one interviews with traditional leaders, reverends, evangelists, and lay church leaders from selected locations in the age range of 25 to 65 years. The research used a combination of purposive and snowball selection methods. The purposive method provided the researcher with a starting point, while the snowball method accommodated the flexible nature of ethnography. However, the snowball method necessitated the inclusion of participants outside the jurisdiction of the Nyanje Presbytery, cited as sources of data for the study, while maintaining the selected age range. The purposive sampled participants included the traditional leaders and the clergy and lay church leaders.

##### *i. Traditional leaders*

From traditional leaders, who are also RCZ members, the researcher learnt the challenges they face in combining the Nsenga culture and Christianity. From other traditional leaders, the study understood how culture and its values are preserved, transmitted, and formed in the next generation. This also shows how Nsenga participants react to the influence of Christianity among them. The pseudo names for traditional leaders start with TLP (Traditional Leader Participant) followed by a number particularising a participant. TLP1, aged sixty-four years, has been an *induna* to a chief for several years and does not belong to any church. TLP2, a traditional leader among the Nsenga people, aged between 40 and 50 years, is a member of the RCZ. TLP3, a retired civil servant with ten years as advisor to a chief, is a member of the Roman Catholic Church. TLP4 is a traditional leader among the Nsenga people and is currently not a member of any church.

TLP5, a traditional counsellor, aged 49 years, was born and bred in Nsenga land and is an elder in the RCZ. TLP6, a traditional counsellor, with many years of experience, is an RCZ member. TLP7, a village headman, who has been in Nsenga land for thirty years, is an elder in the RCZ. Church leaders under this category opted to be interviewed as traditional leaders and not according to their position in the church.

*ii. Clergy and lay church leaders*

The RCZ clergy and lay church leaders serving among the Nsenga people were interviewed orally. The pseudo names for both are CLP (Church Leader Participant) followed by a number that distinguishes one participant from the other. The research intended to learn from the Nsenga church leaders how they manage to be committed to both their Christian faith and their cultural practices; the challenges, extent, or borderline in playing these two roles. The interviews sought to know, from the non-Nsenga RCZ church leaders, the challenges they face in using the RCZ faith formation methodologies in the process of forming the Christian faith among the Nsenga people. It established the positives from the Nsenga cultural values transmitting and formation framework that can be used for effective Christian faith formation. Finally, it learnt of attempts to employ some of the means of transmitting and formation of cultural values among the Nsenga people.

CPL1, aged between 30 and 40 years, is a lay leader in the RCZ congregation E and a teacher. CPL2, aged between 35 and 50 years is a pastor in congregation E of the RCZ, holder of a Bachelor degree in Theology from Justo Mwale University, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Rusangu University, and a Bachelor degree in Public Health, as well as a presbytery leader. CPL3, aged between 60 and 65 years, is a pastor in congregation D in the RCZ Nyanje Presbytery, a Nsenga by tribe, and a presbytery leader due to retire. CPL4, aged between 40 and 50 years, is a pastor who has served among the Nsenga people for seven years, a holder of a Bachelor degree in Theology from Justo Mwale University, and a presbytery leader. CPL5 is a pastor who served among the Nsenga people for five years, a presbytery leader, and a holder of a Diploma in Divinity from Justo Mwale University. CPL6, aged 29 years, is a church leader and practising Clinical Officer who served among the Nsenga people for six years, a holder of a Diploma in Clinical Medicine from Chainama College of Health Sciences, and currently studies for a Bachelor of Art degree in Project Management with Information and Communication University. CPL7 is a

veteran section elder in RCZ who resigned from the traditional position of a village headman because he felt that the traditional position hindered the practice of his Christian faith.

### *1.8 Data analysis*

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b:99), “qualitative data analysis tries to establish how participants make meaning of a phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon”. It is also a process of ordering, structuring, and drawing meaning from the collected data (De Vos 2005:333). This means that there is more to data than participants’ words or visible actions can ever express. Data speaks something about both the participants and the phenomenon under study. It is thus difficult to analyse data separately from the participants. There are two approaches to data analysis. The first approach analyses data in the process of its collection, whereas the second approach analyses data away from the research site. This study used the first approach of iterative data analysis, as data collection and data analysis were done side by side, in order to build a coherent interpretation of the data (De Vos 2005:335).

#### *1.8.1 Coding*

Coding means marking segments of collected data with symbols, descriptive words, or unique identifying names which serve three purposes. Following these three purposes, data was coded, first as a way of collecting significant points from data; secondly, for rationalising data and gaining depth of understanding from the data and, thirdly, it enabled the continued discovery of deeper realities in the data codes (Nieuwenhuis 2007b:105). The research used pre-designed codes developed during the literature review and the process of collecting data. It also created codes from new and in-depth insights gained in the process of reading through data. The researcher used a combination of the two upon realising that certain data fell out of the pre-determined code. As an inductive study, with the emphasis on theology from below, coding was not limited to pre-determining a code upon realising that certain collected data demanded other new codes apart from the initial planned ones (Bosch 1991:423; De Vos 2005:338). Coding was done manually.

Using both pre-set and code developed during data collection, ample attention was paid to the cultural context, with an understanding that social, cultural, historical, and individual contexts

construct the reality of the antagonistic dichotomy (Korstjens & Moser 2017:275). This helped the researcher listen to the voices of the context objectively, without intentional interference to data collection and analysis. The research studied the Nsenga people from a theological perspective, by analysing their social, cultural, historical, and individual contexts. Finally, the meaning and understanding gained from documents, empirical data, and observations were correlated and contrasted. Through an inductive and iterative process, similarities and differences of content in the collected data were used to corroborate or disconfirm text theory.

### *1.8.2 Validity and reliability*

Validity and reliability have to do with the trustworthiness of data, to which Nieuwenhuis (2007c:80) refers as credibility, applicability, dependability, and confirmability. Validity is about how the data collected truly represents the measured phenomenon. Meanwhile, reliability is about the consistency of data-collection methods in producing results whenever they are used. In order to ensure reliability, the researcher compared and contrasted data by means of analytical observations, literature review, and one-on-one interviews. The supervisor supervised the process of interpreting the data by means of comments. To ensure validity, a review by an expert and a pilot study on both the Nsenga and English interview questions was done to ensure that they were clear to participants and that they tested what they were meant to test (Nieuwenhuis 2010:38, 80). All the gathered data was properly, timely, and accurately stored, in either written, audio, or video form, with the permission of the participants. As part of validity, interview questions and other necessary tools used to collect data were appended for transparency purposes.

### *1.9 Research ethics*

The researcher adhered to the ethical code of research and writing as approved by the Ethic Clearance Committee. He further adhered to the Harvard reference method throughout the research and writing of the thesis. The researcher was objective during the research and avoided generalisations. He also maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants (Nieuwenhuis 2007a:113-115). In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudo names were used and soft copies of the collected data were stored on an external hard drive, which had a password only known by the researcher. The researcher also sought participants' voluntary consent and informed them of their rights in the research process. Hard copies of the data were kept in a lockable cabinet

and keys were placed in an electronic safe in the office, which was only accessed by the researcher, so that no unauthorised person was able to have access.

### *1.10 Positioning in Practical Theology*

Practical Theology connects and is an interdependence of daily life and library, fieldwork and classroom, congregation and community, as well as academic guild and global context (Magezi 2019a:120). Since the study is broad with various identities, divisions, and fields positioning, it included defining practical theology as well as stating the identity, division, and field of the research.

#### *1.10.1 Definition of Practical Theology*

Hendriks (2004:19) views practical theology as an ongoing hermeneutical concern associated with discerning how the Word should be proclaimed in words and deeds to the world. Meanwhile Ganzevoort (2009) defines practical theology as the “hermeneutics of lived religion”. Religion is a way of life and through its hermeneutics aspect, practical theology attempts to make sense of the life of faith in the world, as it tries to bridge the gap between faith in God and lived reality in contexts (Magezi 2019a:119). The link of practical theology with hermeneutics renders it as endless theological reflections in conversation with contexts, in an effort to discern a way of proclaiming, demonstrating, and fulfilling the church’s God-given mandate in the world.

#### *1.10.2 Religious identity of the study in Practical Theology*

Ganzevoort’s (2009) use of the word “religion” in the definition of Practical Theology as a “hermeneutics of lived religion” implies that the discipline is not restricted to Christianity. It also applies to other religions. In the broad spectrum of practical theology, this study focuses on the Christian faith practice but, more specifically, it assumes the identity of Reformed Christianity. The reasons why the study assumes this identity is, first, that it is linked to the researcher’s reformed identity, and secondly, that the researcher intends to study the Nsenga people and contribute towards the RCZ faith formation practice among them.

#### *1.10.3 Division of study in Practical Theology*

Apart from Practical Theology being multi-religious and approached from various Christian faith traditions, it is also segmented into various divisions such as liturgy and homiletics, leadership and congregational studies, pastoral care and counselling, as well as faith formation (Nell 2016:1; Hendricks 2004:19-33; McClure 2012:269, 279). This study falls under the division of faith formation. St Francis Gabrini Catholic School views faith formation as “more than handling religious instruction”. It aims at congregants’ growth in faith, formation, and transformation, as well as the ability to live out the Gospel. Faith formation prepares congregants in their generations to proclaim God’s Word in word and action. It interacts with other subdisciplines such as leadership, congregation studies, pastoral care, and counselling, as well as liturgy and homiletics studies. Since faith formation cannot occur in a vacuum (Nishioka 2021:53), this research focuses on the Nsenga culture as a context of the study

#### *1.10.4 Field of study in Practical Theology*

Among the six concentric circles of practical theology, outlined by Ganzevoort (2009) as office, church, faith, religion, culture, and society, in his speech under the first fork in the road, the research mainly examines the church, culture, and faith traditions.

#### *1.11 Research contribution*

The Nsenga people of the Eastern province of Zambia are among a few ethnic groups that still pour libation to ancestral spirits during the *kuthila nsembe* and *tuwimba* annual<sup>2</sup> ceremony. The language of the Nsenga people influences the Ngonis under Paramount Chief Mpezeni of Chipata. The research intended to understand the methodology used in the process of building values and faith and of preparing the Nsenga people for a livelihood that exhibits cultural values and identity. The study resulted in contributing towards a workable approach to faith formation that will lead to the effective practice of Christian faith among the Nsenga people. The research took full cognisance of the three publics of theology, namely the church, the community, and the academic world. The research contributes to the three pillars of theology in the following ways.

##### *1.11.1 Contribution to African theology and faith formation academic studies*

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<sup>2</sup> The annual ceremonies for the Nsenga people where ancestral worship takes place as part of the event.

The research recognises other theological studies on the struggle of Christianity in Africa. Some studies have blamed the struggle of Christianity in Africa on the missionaries. Other studies go a step further, suggesting that it is the responsibility of African theologians to indigenise Christian faith within local contexts. The response to the question: “How shall theology indigenise Christian faith?” has given birth to a broad spectrum of approaches such as decolonisation of Scripture, liberation theology, enculturation, incarnation, integration of the Gospel, and so on. While in total agreement that the missionaries’ presentation of the Gospel played a crucial role in what Christianity has turned out to be nowadays, this research also focused on how Africans welcome the Gospel in their cultures. The way African cultures welcome the Gospel cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to the depth of Christianity on the continent. Kraft (2005:286) suggests that the world views of a culture determine the openness and sets conditions for permitting change. This implies that the Gospel has to penetrate the cultural world view core, in order for African Christians to fully embrace it. In order for the Gospel to penetrate the core cultural world view, in order to indigenise Christianity, the research suggests that contextual and learner-centred faith formation informed by a theological study of the African cultures is essential.

#### *1.11.2 Contribution to the church*

The Gospel must find its rightful place as opposed to the antagonistic dichotomy between culture and Christianity, which results in the mismatch of the church’s numerical dominance and low levels of practice of its faith, values, and ethos. The Gospel must influence from inside and not from outside, where it is referred to only in moments of convenience. It must speak to the world view core of the culture. Therefore, the church will benefit from the research through proposals for a contextual faith formation resulting from the theological study of the African cultures, so that the Gospel influences the core world view of the cultural communities from inside.

Engaging a contextual faith formation strategy will ultimately help the church effectively transmit and form faith in African cultural communities. Using the strategies with which Africans are familiar will reduce the gap between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar. This smooth transition will reduce the antagonistic dichotomy with which some African Christians are struggling. Jesus illustrated unknown issues of the Kingdom of God, using what is familiar and easy to identify with. The research encourages a faith formation strategy that will necessitate

Africans, who profess the Christian faith, to “do theology” in their respective communities, in order to improve the theological literacy levels (De Gruchy 2011:23). The improved theological literacy levels lessen the dichotomy, which leads to the mismatch of high numbers of Christianity and high levels of moral degeneration. The research particularly aims at being resourceful to the churches among the Nsenga people.

### *1.11.3 Contribution to the community*

Doing theology with the people, in their respective communities, makes of theology a continuous cycle of “confession, reflection and virtues” (Van den Bosch 2014:1). The word ‘virtue’ shows that doing theology is a goal-oriented conversation with the aim to transform Christians for the benefit not only of the church, but also of the community at large. This denotes that doing theology with the people should transform communities. The guidelines for faith formation methodology assist in harmonising professed Christian faith, its reflection and application among the Nsenga people for the transformation of their communities.

### *1.12 Limitations and challenges*

#### *1.12.1 Nsenga people and the RCZ Nyanje Presbytery*

This study was restricted to the Nsenga cultural-formation strategy, its effects, and dynamics among the Nsenga people. The Nsenga people are one of Africa’s matrilineal ethnic groups, located in parts of Mozambique and the eastern part of Zambia, segmented into ten chiefdoms headed by chiefs, with senior Chief Kalindawalo as their overall leader. It further zeroed in to the intra- and intergenerational formation of the Nsenga people and their culture in the jurisdiction of the RCZ Nyanje Presbytery. This is done in relation to RCZ faith formation.

#### *1.12.2 Death of the targeted participant*

While waiting for ethical clearance, one of the most important sampled participants passed away. She was a dedicated communicant member of the RCZ who also sang in the church choir and held traditional leadership among the Nsenga people. As a chieftainess, she was the custodian of the Nsenga culture and tradition. The combination of traditional leader and dedicated RCZ member was resourceful in the theological study of the Nsenga people. From the moment the researcher shared the concept of the research and its purpose, the prospective participant was eagerly waiting

for the time when she would provide data. Her death was a huge setback for the research, for she died with all the vital information for the research. The researcher prays that her soul may rest in eternal peace.

### *1.12.3 COVID-19 pandemic*

From the first confirmed COVID-19 case reported on 18 March 2020, the government of Zambia put stringent measures in place to reduce the spread of the virus. As a matter of urgency, on 20 March 2020, schools, colleges, and universities countrywide were closed. By 27 April 2020, Lusaka, the Copperbelt, and the Central provinces recorded 89 cases, 3 deaths, and 42 recoveries. In an effort to support the government in the fight against the spread of the virus, church mother bodies suspended all church gatherings. In her address to the nation, former Zambian Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services, Honourable Dora Siliya MP, cited church and traditional gatherings as among the super-spreaders of the virus. In view of this, although the church was spared, a directive to uphold the suspension of all forms of traditional ceremonies was issued with the exemption of funerals which were permitted with a restricted number of attendees and duration (Siliya 2021:2, 3). The measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 affected the usual activities of the Nsenga community and church gatherings, hence affecting the researcher's full observation of the Nsenga cultural ceremonies and faith formation in the churches.

### *1.12.4 Cultural and church record-keeping*

Record-keeping in the RCZ is generally a challenge; hence, it hampered the process of data collection. In Congregation D, all the past records and Elders' Council minutes went missing. Unlike at the presbytery and synod level, where minutes are recorded and distributed to delegates at the congregation, the church secretary only records in one book such that when it goes missing, it is impossible to retrieve the information. The missing of all information and minutes up to the tenure of the incumbent translates into a loss of the congregation's vital information accumulated over more than two decades. However, even the information and minutes recorded during the incumbent's tenure were not kept at the church as they were reported to be at the church secretary's home. Even if the RCZ does not have a clear guideline as to where the minutes and other recorded information should be kept, it is inevitable that they, being part of the church property, should be kept on its premises. The researcher could not find out why minute books were kept at the church

secretary's residence. The incumbent, despite making prior arrangements, visited sections located at some distance from the church.

#### *1.12.5 Shift in facilitation*

In one of the congregations, catechumen class members were having final lessons in preparation for baptism and covenantion at the time of the researcher's visit. The lessons progressed normally for some time but, upon knowing the purpose of the research, the usual routine was disrupted and shifted to a discussion on culture. Even if the researcher tried to be neutral, his presence influenced a change of direction. The shift deprived the researcher of an opportunity to observe a cardinal process of forming faith by way of preparing catechumenates for baptism.

#### *1.12.6 Gender barriers during data collection*

The male researcher faced a challenge in collecting data from women, as most of them were not free to speak, due to gender difference. It was difficult to have women participants because of the gender difference. The few women interviewed clearly withheld certain information regarding ceremonies or activities relating to sex and marital cultural formation on the basis of gender.

#### *1.13 Outline of the study*

The research consists of the following chapters.

##### Chapter One: General introduction

This introduces the research background, the problem, the questions, the aims, and the objectives. The introduction includes the methodology, and the ways of collecting and analysing data for the study. This was done from July 2019 to 15 May 2020.

##### Chapter Two: Theology and theories of faith formation

This chapter reviews theology and theories on contemporary Christian faith formation practices. It forms the basis for assessing the practice of faith formation in the RCZ, leading to the identification of its weaknesses and strengths. This was done from June to December 2020.

##### Chapter Three: Practices of faith formation in the RCZ: Its strengths and weaknesses

Under this chapter, RCZ faith formation was assessed on the basis of the effectiveness of its process, procedures, relationships, structures, and practices to invite people to faith, to strengthen faith, and to reinforce full communion with God. The discussion on the weaknesses and strengths was based on the ability of RCZ faith formation to empower members for the transformation of communities and continue formation of faith in the process of dialoguing with challenging and paradoxical situational contexts. This was done from 16 January 2021 to 30 March 2022.

#### Chapter Four: Participants' views on Nsenga cultural formation practices

This chapter analyses the Nsenga people and their cultural formation from a theological perspective, using the empirical data gathered. It focuses on the Nsenga culture, its intra- and intergenerational way of transmitting values, customs, traditions, and beliefs. It also studies the possible link of Nsenga cultural formation with the experienced antagonistic dichotomy towards the Christian faith. This was done from 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2022.

#### Chapter Five: Toward a workable RCZ faith formation process among the Nsenga people.

This chapter hermeneutically discusses possible lessons drawn from the theological study of the Nsenga people with their cultural formation for the purpose of informing faith formation in the RCZ. It explores how the outcome of the theological study of the Nsenga people and culture can be used to address the causes of the faith-culture antagonistic dichotomy among the RCZ Nsenga Christians. In short, it shows how faith formation can speak better to the Nsenga people, so that they live a harmonised and faith-empowered Christian life for the transformation of their social contexts. This was handled from 1 January to May 2022.

#### Chapter Six: Recommendations for contextual faith formation

On the basis of the findings in Chapter Five, this chapter makes recommendations and draws conclusions that will help actualise a workable RCZ faith formation among the Nsenga people. This was done from 1 July 2022 to 1 November 2022.

#### 1.14 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the problem of the antagonistic dichotomy among the RCZ Nsenga Christians. It provided the background and road map for the research work intended to inform the

practice of faith formation in the RCZ. Under the qualitative approach, ethnography was used as a way of studying the Nsenga people and their culture from a theological perspective. The hermeneutical theoretical approach is a means of interpreting Scripture, the Nsenga culture, and church tradition. It also outlines literature, interviews, and observation of gestures, symbols, activities, behaviours, and ways of teaching culture as a means of collecting data among the Nsenga people of Petauke District of Zambia. It proposed that the outcome from the theological study of the Nsenga people and their culture should inform the RCZ, thereby contributing towards its contextual faith formation practice, in order to address the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy. It covered the research background, problem, methodology questions, aim, and objectives. It also identified sources of data, means of its collection, and the process of analysing it. The research is positioned in the division of faith formation and conducted from the perspective of a Reformed identity, in the fields of church, faith, and culture under practical theology. The research contributes to the three pillars of theology, namely academic, church (especially the RCZ), and society, specifically the Nsenga community.

The next chapter, which consists of the literature review, discusses theories and the theology of faith and its formation in the RCZ. Faith and its formation in the RCZ are discussed from its historical background and contemporary framework.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGY AND THEORIES OF FAITH FORMATION

#### *2.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter introduced the problem of the antagonistic dichotomy of *mwambo ni mwambo, chikristu ni chikristu, chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wankhalire*, literally translated as tradition is tradition, Christianity is Christianity; Christianity found an established tradition as a sign that some of the Nsenga Christians are caught up between “two invisible worlds viewed as appealing” yet antagonise each other. Due to this antagonism, Nsenga Christians live with two seemingly antithetical faiths, namely the Christian faith and the Nsenga traditional religious faith. One of the dilemmas of Africa, as cited by Conradie (2020:121), is that, although the church is growing numerically, it is often struggling within the context of African spirituality. This dichotomy that antagonises religious and everyday life is foreign to Africans, whose lives are lived as a harmony between religion and praxis, where the visible sphere expresses the invisible world (Kalilombe 1994:115). It is, therefore, essential to harmonise Christianity and its practice through contextual faith formation, by addressing the problem of Christian-cultural conflict as well as the dualism of religion and life in general. The research further suggests a theological study of the Nsenga people by the church and community as one of the ways in which faith formation can be contextualised.

This chapter discusses the following question: What are the contemporary theological discussions and theories on faith and its formation? The objective of this chapter is to explore the theological discussions and theories on faith and its formation. Faith formation, which emanates from information, intertwined with reformation and transformation, is viewed as something that takes place within as well as away from the gathering of the community of faith in the process of experiencing life in daily living. Issues encountered within context, although antagonising, may present opportunities for the formation of faith. The chapter discusses faith as both a gift from God and a human responsibility under God’s grace. Hermeneutical and discernment activity at a communal and personal level are discussed as means for the formation of faith. It intertwines faith formation with everyday life because God is involved in all aspects of the believers’ lives.

## *2.2 Theology of faith formation*

Theologically, faith formation has been discussed from different perspectives. In some instances, faith and its formation has been reduced to inculcation of intellectual assent to certain Christian traditional beliefs (Bennett 2021:20). Bennett further asserts that such reduced versions of faith fall short of meeting people's deepest hunger for God. Botha (2021:1) supports Bennett's assertion, claiming that some churches are missing a fundamental practical transformational aspect of the call to follow Jesus, as expressed in the Gospel of Matthew. He claims that the call to follow Jesus involved Gospel embodiment and continuous bodily movement for fruitfulness. This required severe transformation and modification of life focus, involving actual physical shift in location. The early church is said to have been a transformed community for continuous transformation of communities. Botha (2021:3, 5) also claims that some people, identified as Christians, do not experience transformation; hence, they are theoretical and unpractical in faith. This means that the church's faith formation is superficial because it is not opening pathways for transformation and reformation (Moore 2011:380). Transformation is evident when the human body of the believer in Christ becomes a transformative agent (Botha 2021:5).

Astley (2018:16) argues that faith formation is more of learning Christ than of learning about Christ. This suggests that upholding a set of beliefs about Christ should result in being transformed, by assuming more of his likeliness. Christian faith formation involves acquiring fruitful information, which results in reformation and transformation. Formation is thus interlocked in personal and corporate information, transformation, and reformation (Simpson 1999:23; Moore 2011:380). However, diverse views of definitions of faith formation indicate different intended transformations. Roberto (2015:68) perceives transformation as living a Christ-centred life. He defines faith formation as "a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ". Christ is depicted as the companion, the way, and fullness of his image as a product of the lifelong formation of faith. Faith formation is viewed as a task undertaken in companionship with, within the confinement of, and finds or has its fullness in Christ. Christ is not only the measure of the fullness of Christian transformation towards whom all believers grow throughout their lives; Christ is also a companion and process passed through as their faith is being formed. Therefore, formation is about shaping and reshaping Christian life as modelled by, around, and in companionship with Christ. In short, it is maturing into a Christ-centred life.

Matthaei (2010:57) views faith formation as shaping Christian identity and strengthening meaningful and authentic relationships with God, others, and self. It focuses on transforming Christian identity and strengthening one's relationship with God, self, and others. The term 'strengthening' does not suggest hierarchical stages of relating with God, others, and self. Rather, it points to the reality that relationship, as a living thing, grows in maturity, understanding, and stability. Intentional faith formation is proposed as a means for cultivating the church's effectiveness, as it plays the role in *Missio Dei*. As the transformed and reformed church participates in the *Missio Dei*, God calls those who are not reachable with the Gospel to authentic relationships. The church plays its participatory role, by creating intentional processes that promote and develop identity, as well as urge members to be part of its service within various contexts (Matthaei 2010:57). The evidence of intentional faith formation lies in the shaping of Christian identity, the strengthening of vital human relationships, and the empowerment for participation in God's calling for the church on earth. This is fulfilled by exercising responsibilities of an informed, transformed, and reformed faith, coupled with using the respective gifts of the church members.

### *2.2.1 Complexity of faith formation*

Whether approached from Christ-centred shaping identity, or from strengthening vital human relationships, faith formation involves transmission and interpretation of faith for traditioning and transforming the church and its members (Simpson 1999:23). Traditioning is regarded as the process and means of forming faith through lifelong nurturing and formation of a Christian world view, character, and identity. The complexity of faith formation is that it must engage an eternal world view and its externalised identity and character. Faith formation is tasked with studying individual and shared identities and characters, in order to know and speak to the underlying world views. Matthaei (2010:57) describes Christian identity as knowing oneself as a Christian, assimilating "values, beliefs, and lifestyle of one who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ". Meanwhile, a world view is a way of understanding, experiencing, and responding to the world and of influencing upheld beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities, and commitments (Benoit *et al.* 2020:23).

However, in Africa, people also have their ethnic cultural world views and identity that play an influential role in character formation or in the way their lives are lived. This means that faith formation also faces the complexity of forming a Christian identity in already existing cultural identities. In addition, there is also the complexity of balancing universal Christian identity and its several identities. Christian and cultural identities influence traditioning and interpretation of Christo-praxis. Traditioning is about informing, transforming, and reforming the Christian view of the world, way of life, and self-understanding with the cultural context in mind. The traditioning aspect also focuses on both forming and nurturing Christian concepts, world views and beliefs on life, the world, and humanity (Benoit *et al.* 2017:26; Jacomijn *et al.* 2013:214). It is a way of nurturing and forming a contextual Christian world view, character, and identity.

Matthaei's description implies that traditioning identity brings about awareness and owning the Christian identity at a personal level, while being aware that it is also shared with other members of the church. Christianity is a faith of shared identity acknowledged at a personal level. It is also imperative that owning a faith identity stimulates the desire to assimilate its concepts, values, beliefs, and lifestyle. Faith formation is about forming self-identification with the upheld faith and integrating the significance of belonging, upholding, professing, and expressing it in everyday life. Therefore, faith formation is shaping faith in a way that its owner personalises, confesses, and exhibits it in the process of interaction with all forms of life situations within prevailing contexts. By nature, interaction with contexts generates new questions, and their responses bring about new understanding and, ultimately, reshape faith. Interacting with the prevailing contexts entails that the process of forming faith also involves the correct interpretation of the Bible, African cultural contexts, and Christian faith traditions. Interpretation, according to Simpson (1999:23), is about developing critical, evaluative, and analytical skills for interpreting the Christian culture and self-understanding in the faith and African cultural context that members of the church have been traditioned. The phrase 'Christian culture' points to the fact that Christianity has a generally accepted and communally shared way of life, based on the perceived correct interpretation of the Bible, contexts, and faith traditions. Interpretation assists in responsibly linking faith, the Bible, contexts, and church traditions. The elements of critical, evaluative, and analytical skills should be applied in both traditioning and transformation processes (Simpson 1999:23). At the traditioning level of faith formation, interpretation enables members of the congregation to "think

theologically”, in view of prevailing situations and circumstances (De Gruchy 2011:23). Faith formation, as an aspect of practical theology, focuses on ensuring that the theological thoughts are useful and relevant to everyday concerns of the social context (Magezi 2019b:313).

Approaching faith from the Reformed perspective, especially the Calvinistic tradition, with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God and total depravity of humanity, causes its formation to spiral out of human effort, the church’s programme, or abilities. The emphasis on salvation by grace implies that faith does not justify but God in Christ through faith. Therefore, faith functions as the means whereby incorporation into being a beneficiary from Jesus Christ and his deeds occurs (Schreiner 2015:45). Faith is the beginning and the means for continued growth in knowledge, relationship, and service to God. The importance of faith is stressed in Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith, it is impossible to please God”. Hence, no human work outside faith can impress God. Ephesians 2:9-10 states that Christians have nothing to boast about because the faith, whereby God justifies and sanctifies, is not a product of their work or effort. Faith formation becomes more complicated as faith is stressed to be a gift from God. The complexity is that faith itself, which has to be formed, is a gift from and remains in the transcendental God, who is a mystery. Unfortunately, faith formation seems to suggest the involvement of finite humanity in forming faith, the gift from the transcendental God.

#### *2.2.1.1 Forming the faith in the mysterious Triune God*

Faith in the mysterious Triune God is complex because, first, belief in the Trinitarian God is expected to influence and shape a way of life that contributes to human and planetary flourishing (Venter 2019:5-6). It implies that the church has to actualise what it knows about the Trinitarian God, by identifying and removing obstacles to human and planetary flourishing. Secondly, faith formation is complex, as the faith to be formed is in God, who is forever a mystery. The word ‘mystery’ implies God as transcendent, incomprehensible, and ineffable (Boyer & Hall 2013:153). God and mankind, although in a covenant relationship, are at extreme ends of infinity and finite, respectively. The word ‘transcendent’ refers to God, who is far above human beings by comparison, such that even his thoughts, ways, and works are far-fetched (Isaiah 55:9). Puthanangady *et al.* (2013:30) define the term ‘incomprehensible’ as the hiddenness of divinity and divine realities to human finitude, “unless God reveals himself”. Human beings know God

through his self-revelation. Although his self-revelation is sufficient for salvation, the sum total of what is revealed to humanity does not suffice to depict the whole divinity (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:31). God is incomprehensible, as a great deal about him remains hidden, even after he reveals himself to us. He is ineffable, since all words in the human vocabulary do not suffice to describe him, his ways, and his works. It is obvious that it is impossible to describe the transcendental and incomprehensible God. As God is transcendental, incomprehensible, and ineffable, Powers (1982:13) states that faith is a way of knowing the unknowable. It is a way of knowing the existence, understanding the relationship with, and being aware of the redemptive work of the Triune God in the life of an individual which is also corporately shared with other fellow believers in the body of Christ. Faith in the ineffable, transcendental, and incomprehensible God becomes more complex, as it is also a gift from him. Faith is a gift from God, serving as a way of relating with him, the ineffable, transcendental, and incomprehensible.

#### *2.2.1.2 The formed faith as a gift from God*

Apart from faith being the ineffable, transcendental, and incomprehensible God, the other complex aspect is that it is a gracious gift from him. The researcher acknowledges that faith has been studied from different perspectives. Fowler studied faith from a psychological and universal perspective and views it as a fundamental aspect for a meaningful life, concluding that all human beings have it, regardless of their being religious or not. Fowler acknowledges the uniqueness of faith in people, although it is considered to be universal and fundamental to human life. He perceives faith as a structured and sequential developmental process of constitutive knowing, which is in line with human development (Newman 2004:103). This view seems to indicate that faith is a human innate feature that develops in relation to the developmental stages of life. Fowler (1981:119) indicates that the journey of faith starts from infancy. Meanwhile, as Powers (1982:14) outlines the faith developmental stages, the first stage, which he calls nurturing, ranges from birth to the age of six years. The range in the nurture stage in Power's theory suggests that the pilgrimage of faith and its developmental stages start at birth.

Maddix *et al.* (2020:8) differentiate between faith formation and faith development. Faith development is viewed as a psychology theory, with the emphasis on human innate, while faith formation is considered to be a result of divine encounter. The opinion of the encounter with God,

as the source of Christian faith, proposes that faith is divine in nature. Puthanangady *et al.* (2013: 287) emphasise the divine encounter, by attributing genuine confession of faith in God to divine impulsion and inward witness of the Holy Spirit, whereby the Triune God attracts a person to himself. Confession of faith is further perceived as people's response to the acquittal from sin such that they step outside of themselves, turn their back on themselves and all their experiences to look to the promise that is made to, from outside, and above them (Berkhoff 1986:443). Therefore, both the acquittal from sin and the promises are from God. However, even when believers confess out of faith 'I believe', the first-person pronoun "I" is used as an object, for it is pronounced in response to the subject of God's gracious event of justification (Berkhoff 1986:443). No human being can believe in God unless s/he graciously reveals her-/himself. Both faith's growth and beginning do not proceed from the "very desire of faith or human nature but from a gift of grace by the Holy Spirit, who inspires change of human will from unbelief to belief" (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:287). Even transformation is a gift initiated by God (Pali & Baron 2020:96). Faith does not proceed from obedience; it precedes obedience and commitment to God's service. It is not even a result of preaching. Even the preacher cannot boast that the words of the sermon preached have brought faith in the hearers. As an infinity passion in the boundlessness of the Triune God, faith is viewed as limitless and beyond being a product of finite humanity (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:282). Faith thus qualifies as a gracious gift from God to human beings. By virtue of the Triune God being transcendental, incomprehensible, and ineffable, it renders mankind incapable of producing faith in him. Faith is only received as a free gracious gift and work of God in human beings.

As a gift from God, this entails that the Christian faith has its origin outside humanity, as it is of divine origin. In emphasising the divine source of faith, Migliore (1991:175) states that "Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit is a dynamic process of transformation into the likeness of Christ that is set into motion by the gracious initiative of God". Puthanangady *et al.* (2013:288) reiterate that, by the same act of God's grace, a person believes what God has revealed in Christ and his self-revelation in Christ. In the concept of faith as a gift from God, the believer's response is interpreted as simply human intellect and will cooperating with or yielding to divine grace (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013: 288). Faith is initiated by God and the cooperation or yielding of human intellect and will is also illuminated by God. Therefore, it is a gift in terms not only of being received from God, but also of receiving it under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Puthanangady *et al.* (2013: 288-289) equate faith with an echo. God speaks the word of revelation and creates a response to the spoken word in a person. In an echo, sound is not a product of where it bounces from, but where it returns; so is faith, for it bounces back to God, its origin. Justification as an act of acquitting mankind from sin does not reach its purpose unless the Holy Spirit inspires a response of faith in us (Berkhoff 1986:448). As the means whereby human beings respond to God's work, faith is understood as the starting point of a life of grace and its lasting foundation (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:289). Therefore, Christian faith is initiated and sustained in mankind by the Triune God through the work of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul speaks of things that come from the Spirit of God being discerned only through the Spirit. Since faith is the starting point and the permanent foundation of a life of grace, it is expected to be gratuitous in nature (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:289). This confirms that salvation is by faith in God and even faith is a gift from God; hence, mankind has nothing to boast about (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The view of faith as a Holy Spirit-inspired response, whereby mankind receives and remains in God's gracious salvation, leaves us wondering as to whose act is faith formation. What is the human (personal and church) role in the process of faith formation? As a gift from God, faith emphasises that Christian life is of divine origin and continues to be so permanently. The basis of Christians' relationship with the Triune God is from first to last on God himself. This concept, of course, ensures that Christian faith is built on a sound and unshakable foundation. It may, however, lead to a question such as: Why bother if, at the end of it all, everything is in the hands of God? The answer lies in the fact that, in as much as it is a gift from God and continues to be so, faith is also a human responsibility under the same grace of God.

### *2.2.1.3 The church and the task of faith formation*

Forming Christian faith as a human responsibility is the task of the church and its members. Dykstra (1996:252-253) asserts that the "Church as a faith community possesses formative power that can nurture people's faith, shape the quality and character of their spirit". Weber (2021:136) describes faith formation as a church process towards spiritual growth or promoting a Christ-like lifestyle. It is considered to be the task of the church which includes discipleship and promotion of spiritual growth towards maturity in a Christ-like lifestyle. The formative power of the church in the process of faith formation is in its being the body of Christ and participation in the *Missio*

*Dei* under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Faith is considered to be more than upholding a set of beliefs, for it also comprises a lifestyle and a means of relating with God and others. This research uses the word ‘others’ with reference to fellow human beings with the environment, as opposed to the common use of ‘human beings and nature’, with the understanding that human beings are part of nature. The phrase ‘human beings and nature’ weakens the purpose of unity and coexistence with the total creation of one Triune God. The phrase seems to put human beings in their own class rather than being an intertwined part of the whole creation of God. The church is tasked with forming a faith that enforces the coexistence of all God’s creation. Growth in faith, therefore, corresponds with growth in a relationship with God and his entire creation. By being good stewards, growth in faith is vivified by growth in relationship with the God-given environment. Meanwhile, faith is nurtured by the very communion into which it grows, for it is formed, developed, and owned within the relationship with God and others in the context of the church (Matthaei 2010:58; Dykstra 1996:252). The church carries out its faith-forming task towards and within contexts of communion with God and others (humanity with the environment). This is where the environment creates an atmosphere for the church to carry out its faith-forming task. The formed faith of the church is expected to intensify its value-adding bond to the environment.

Regarding responding to the environment, Dykstra (1996:252-253) states that, although the church has the formative power to nurture people’s “faith, shape the quality and character of their spirit”, it seems to be “weak in comparison with forces at work in people’s lives”. This weakness is said to arise from the church being caught up in the powerful pattern of sin and alienation, which estranges it from a healthy relationship with God and the environment. In spite of this, the church with its formative power is called to mediate God’s redemptive power, in order to restructure or transform the context. In order to retain meaningful and authentic relationships with God, others and self, the church ought to regularly rethink its ways of forming faith (Matthaei 2010:57), so that the faith formed keeps on challenging the powerful patterns of sin arising from its contexts. The church’s faith-forming task is carried out by means of corporate and individual responsibility.

Faith as a gift has to be received, accepted, studied, and explored (Itao 2010:3). To be gifted with faith has a corresponding responsibility of knowing it better, by making a serious inquiry into its nature. Although God gives faith as a gift, the aspect of receiving, accepting, studying, and

exploring it is a human responsibility, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, of course. The illumination does not invalidate human activity, for in as much as Paul speaks of faith as a gift from God in Ephesians 2:8-10, he also mentions keeping the faith in 2 Timothy 4:7. What did Paul mean when he said “I have kept the faith”? Scholars debate whether he meant keeping his allegiance to Christ or maintaining the purity of the Gospel entrusted to him. This research focuses on whether the statement indicates the keeping of faith as a human responsibility or not. The use of “I have” at the beginning of each of the three statements indicates some level of personal responsibility in fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. For Paul to use keeping the faith alongside fighting a good fight and finishing the race indicates personal passion, commitment, and sacrifice.

Apart from that, Paul speaks of the just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17). This points to the fact that faith is not only a gracious gift from God, but also something to live by. Van Aarde (2017:1, 3) indicates that living by faith is about trusting and relying on God’s trustworthiness and faithfulness which involves a change of one’s inner convictions and life. Therefore, even if faith is a gift from God, human beings are not render passive recipients or inactive beneficiaries. The church is an active participant in taking responsibility for the received gift of faith. Puthanangady *et al.* (2013:225, 256) describe faith as something that is both human and divine. It is thought of in the same pattern of talents that God entrusts to people and that grow by human action. Christians need to be good stewards of their God-given faith, as they are expected to do with other gifts and talents. Faith is a God-given gift entrusted to people who play an active individual and corporate role in its formation under the grace of God.

#### *2.2.1.3.1 The corporate role of the church in faith formation*

Faith is a relational process that is, from the beginning, a Holy Spirit-inspired human response to God’s salvific call to a covenant relationship with him (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:222, 287). According to Migliore (1991:189), in the New Testament, the word ‘ecclesia’ refers to a “unique and transformed way of being human in relationship with God and with others”. It is also described as a community of “mutuality, interdependence, forgiveness and friendship”. According to

Okwalo (2008:68), shared faith in God is central to a church's way of being *koinonia*. It is said that the word '*koinonia*' implies participation, sharing, trust, common purpose, and unity of interest. This suggests that the life of faith from and in the Triune God is not a lonely enterprise but a shared one with those who have received the same grace. Apart from God, faith links us to the self and other creatures (human beings and environment). Receiving the gift of faith is also God's call to co-existence with, but not limited to fellow believers who have received the same grace. The role of the church is to create a context for awakening, supporting, and challenging members' faith through its teachings (Osmer 1992:15).

In Acts 4:23-37, the awakening, supporting, and challenging of faith was done by preaching the Gospel, miracles, fellowship meals, teachings, prayers, and sharing, in order to meet members' physical needs. In *koinonia*, faith, as a Holy Spirit-inspired response to God, becomes a mutual responsibility that is awakened, supported, and challenged under the grace of God through mutuality, interdependence, sharing, and participation of all members of the church (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:222, 287; Okwalo 2008:68; Osmer 1992:15). All members of the church go beyond caring for their personal faith, in order to attain mutual edification. In so doing, the responsibility for the individual's faith is shared with fellow believers within the community of faith. This implies that faith formation is a mutual responsibility where members of the church contribute to the strengthening of each other's relationship with God, self, and others (Matthaei 2010:57). It is, therefore, important that the church regards each of its activities as a vital contribution towards the formation of its members' faith and empowerment for continuing personal responsibility for their spiritual growth.

#### *2.2.1.3.2 The role of individuals in faith formation*

Although being entrusted with faith is a link to corporate responsibility, it is also owned and cared for by individuals at a personal level. The Holy Spirit that empowers the human resolve to have a relationship with God is the first sign that faith, as God's divine gift, is at work. According to (Migliore, 1991:6-7), faith is about seeking the truth of God, thinking correctly, and transforming individuals, societies, and the world at large. The issue of faith as seeking God's truth, thinking

correctly, and transformation is sought at both individual and corporate levels in the community of faith. The community of faith should be an open collection of individuals who seek God's truth and transformation for themselves and their contexts. Berkhoff (1986:503) refers to Christian faith as a "person-oriented" or "personal matter" but, of course, not "personalistic". He implies that, although held at a personal level, faith is not self-centred, as it is exercised towards the edification of others and the renewal of the world. It is important that Christians express and grow in their faith through spiritual exercises at a personal level. Antonyamy (1999:329-360) outlines the following spiritual exercises: prayer, study of the Bible, meditation, self-examination, and learning by heart, among others. Bonhoeffer (1954:780) expresses the interdependence of personal and communal responsibilities of faith, by stating that, being alone in personal spiritual exercise, "Christian believers learn to live in the fellowship of the body of Christ rightly and, through fellowship with others, individuals learn to live alone in a right way".

Faith must be an individual believer's personal and the church's corporate responsibility. Christian believers are called into faith by Jesus Christ and they respond to it as individuals. The response at an individual level further incorporates a person into the fellowship of fellow respondents to the same gracious call to faith (Bonhoeffer 1954:77). This is important because, when members of the church overemphasise the corporate aspect of faith, it is likely to create a crisis of being spiritual in the church building and living otherwise outside it. On the other hand, overemphasising the personal level is likely to create an individualistic approach to faith. According to Bonhoeffer (1954:78), fellowship and solitude are complementary such that neglecting one at the expense of the other has "profound pitfalls and perils". Fellowship without solitude results in void words and feelings, while solitude without fellowship leads to perishing in "vanity, self-infatuation, and despair". Matthaei (2011:58) views communion with God and the community of faith as the context for faith formation, where an individual's journey in faith is guided and nurtured within the shared life of the church. However, this should not be one-sided, as all members of the church have to play a part in the shared life of faith, by challenging one another to grow and go out to serve (Everist 2002:13-18). The corporate responsibility of faith is thus a collective contribution of individuals towards the edification of one another.

It appears that Jesus' demonstration of spiritual exercises moves between solitude and corporate exercises. He demonstrated corporate spiritual exercise by entering Jewish religious gathering places such as the temple (Matthew 21:12-23; Mark 11:11, 12:41; Luke 2:41-52; John 18:20) and the synagogues (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:23-29; Luke 4:15-18; John 6:59). Jesus was introduced to the life of the temple during the performance of the purification rite and his being presented before God (Luke 2:22-35). The next indication of Jesus' entry into the temple was when he was twelve years old (Luke 2:41-52). After his baptism, Jesus participated in the corporate life and ministry of Judaism by teaching, preaching, and demonstrating the power of God's kingdom, by exorcising demons, healing, miracles, signs, and wonders. He also sought to realise the life and nature of his Father by promoting love, mercy, justice, and fairness. Therefore, Jesus was not only part of the Judaism corporate spiritual exercise, but he also participated by playing key roles in showing corporate life and the nature of the kingdom of God.

Apart from being part of, and participating in the corporate spiritual exercise, Jesus also had times of solitude when he went up the mountain alone to pray after sending the multitudes and his disciples away (Matthew 14:23). In Luke 2:52, Jesus is said to have personally grown in mind, stature, spirituality, and relationship with others. Solitary spiritual exercises show Jesus' personal commitment to the relationship with God. He used to wake up early in the morning at dawn to pray in a solitary place (Mark 1:35). The word 'alone' in this research does not imply loneliness. In this context, 'alone' is a voluntary self-isolation from the public to be with God, whereas loneliness has a negative feeling of being abandoned. Jesus' entire ministry starts in solitude in the desert (Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11), solo prayers, journey up to the cross, and ultimately being alone in the grave. According to Bonhoeffer (1954:77), it is impossible to escape individuality, for that is how Christians receive their calling into faith and will face God's judgement. Even the meaning of all corporate faith formation activities such as worship, prayer, preaching, catechesis, and service are processed at individual level. Due to diverse meanings, individuals will not grow in the same way in the process of corporately shared faith-building exercises. However, this does not undermine the corporate responsibility of faith, as individual believers are strengthened through mutual edification of the church. This shows that faith as the human responsibility of believers is an individual and corporate responsibility.

Faith formation as an activity of the church is based on the fact that it is a Holy Spirit-inspired human response to God's gracious call to salvation (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:287). Through their framework and processes, communities of faith provide the environment and opportunities for lives to be transformed by God through the process of faith formation (Matthaei 2011:57). The first role of the church in faith formation is to urge people to respond to God's call to salvation through faith. The second role is to guide and nurture people so that they keep on growing spiritually and offering services through acts of faith under the grace of God. The emphasis on faith as a human responsibility under God's grace is a reminder that its formation is not independent of God but, at the same time, believers are active participants in what he is doing in their lives. Therefore, the faith formation framework and processes must be put in place and used with total dependence on God.

#### *2.2.1.4 Fluidity of the significance of faith*

According to Powers (1982:12-13), faith constitutes content, reason or purpose, means, and acts of belief. The reason and meaning aspects of faith cannot be separated from interpretation of content in conversation with contexts. Although faith focuses on the centre of transcendental value and power, he also describes it to be a person's or group's way of moving into dynamic multiple fields of forces of life (Fowler 1981:4, 24). He further views faith as a way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that are perceived to constitute life. It is also thought of as a binding factor of human responses and initiative in fitting or contrasting with the perceived contexts. Antonisamy (1999:199) regards faith as the mother of obedience. Brueggemann (1996:71) speaks of faith as the means of valuing and celebrating oddity, with the full awareness of the existence of others in the face of every seductive and powerful imperial alternative. This means that these fields of forces do not always draw believers to a common goal because, at times, they antagonise each other. Fowler (1981:24) understands that faith organises and initiates responses in various contexts. However, some situations or contexts intensify the believers' strife among incompatible fields of forces such that faith struggles to order human responses and initiatives towards the centre of transcendental value and power.

In Christian terms, faith has a common factor in that it is from, and in the Triune God as the centre of transcendental value and power. The Triune God is the source as well as the one in whom faith

is anchored. Nevertheless, the significance of having faith differs from context to context and situation to situation. According to Mbiti (1977:29), “Christianity is the end result of the Gospel coming into a given culture whose people respond to the Gospel in faith”. In this case, culture is one of the contexts in which the Gospel is received by faith, in order to evolve Christianity. Although Mbiti (1977:28) mentions that the Gospel must traverse, judge, save, sanctify, beautify, and exorcise the demons in culture, the Gospel can accomplish its goals if the nature of the cultural contexts is considered. However, as a broadly shared context, culture forms the wider “frame of reference” (Kraft 2005:117). Dharmaraj (2014:41) speaks of serving contexts within the larger context. Culture is part of the larger context with specified contexts within it requiring faith response or application. Even if the larger context may never change or change over a long period of time, the rate of turnover of contexts within them is high. This makes contexts within contexts fluid because they always flow, with no definite shape as they keep on changing.

Faith has to be contextual, by considering both larger and ever-evolving specified contexts within it. This proposes that there is no universal answer to what it means to have faith in God, even in challenges shared by the larger contexts. Therefore, faith is faith in God within and among fluid contexts. Christians have to maintain the balance in their fixed faith in God, so that they remain standing in ever-evolving contexts or situations. They need to keep on translating their faith, in order to apply the significance of having it in fluid contexts. Christians have to figure out the meaning of believing in God in ever-evolving contexts so as to practise their faith appropriately. Under culture as a larger context, the cultural conceptual system functions as a frame of reference for responding to challenges posed by the encountered contexts within it. These conceptual systems are interpreted for appropriate responses to the encountered context within context. In Christianity, faith has to be an interpretable conceptual system. Therefore, faith has to be formed in such a way that it is lived, practised, and remains a guiding reality in the middle of twists and turns of contexts within context. It has to be translatable because its universal form may not be applicable in all unique and ever-evolving contexts.

### *2.3 Theories of faith formation*

Piaget’s *schema or rationale* and Vygotski’s *thema*, also known as reciprocity or relational, have dominated theories in the scholarly debate on faith formation (Kim 2007: 309-321). The *thema*

theory built on Vygotsky's study emphasises that faith is formed in reciprocal relationships of God to human, human to human, and human to contexts. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as growth under guidance or interaction with higher "others", is considered theoretically to be lower knowledge, while praxis or empirical is considered to be higher knowledge. The process of forming faith under *thema* or the reciprocity theory is cyclic, involving reflective observation on an experience, followed by critical analysis, of which the outcome is synthesised as part of human life or action. The *thema* theory places more emphasis on acquiring skills for praxis than mastering theories. Meanwhile, *schema* views faith to be formed out of human intellectual analysis of God's Word and work. It is on the basis of *schema* that scholars such as Fowler construct faith-development theories. However, the debate is slowly shifting towards integrated theory as a way forward for forming faith holistically.

### *2.3.1 Integration, the theory for faith formation*

In theology, integration is dominantly discussed as a theory that would contribute towards preparing students for holistic ministry in the church or making theological training relevant (Mwangi & De Klerk 2011:123). It is discussed as a corrective measure for the silo or banking system approach to theological education, where the content taught does not relate to the student's personal and social lived experience (Freire 1970:60-65; Dames 2012:36-38; Naidoo 2021:66-67). The argument in favour of the integrated theory is based on the claim that students produced under the dis-integrated theological training lack pastoral exposure and the necessary spirituality for ministry in the church (Naidoo 2021:66). She also claims that, after graduation, students struggle to put together the disarrayed theological disciplines and relate them to the vocational dimension. This means that theological training loads students with almost impracticable knowledge for their lives, church, and society. Integrated theological training synthesizes theory with practice not only as the final product, but also as part of the teaching and learning process. Theologians highlight three triads as areas that need to be formed in the process of integrated theological training (Naidoo 2021:69; Mwangi & De Klerk 2011:124). These triads are highlighted as knowledge, practice and context, knowledge, doing and being, mind, body, and heart. It is assumed that forming these aspects of the triads would help students obtain the required pastoral skills and spirituality for ministry.

Eusebio (2011:369) extends the use of the integration theory to faith formation through catechetical training. The integrated approach to faith formation is recommended with the aim of reforming present praxis during catechesis. The integration theory is regarded as a way of connecting morals, doctrine, and worship. Morals are restricted to obeying God's commandments, while doctrines are understood as personal knowledge of Christ. Morals, doctrine, and worship are to be integrated in an attempt to respond in a special way to the challenge of renewing society through catechesis (Eusebio 2011:369-370). Under the integration theory, catechesis is understood as a powerful force for transforming society by transforming individuals who undergo the catechetical process. According to Eusebio (2011:370), the integration approach achieves its goal, "by pushing beyond mere 'head knowledge' of doctrinal formulas on one side, or pious devotional ritualism on the other, as it fosters a truly integrated faith of loving Christian service and worship". It takes the process of preparing for the practice of the Christian faith as an inseparable entity of the doctrinal aspect of faith formation. At face value, the integration theory seems to be related to the *thema* theory, as they both discuss the importance of praxis. However, unlike the *thema* theory, the integration theory does not rank the relational experiences higher than theory. It views the relational experience and rational aspects to be of equal importance in the process of forming faith in all its dimensions. In this research, faith dimensions are discussed as areas in which faith has to be formed, informed, reformed, transformed, and addressed comprehensively.

### *2.3.2 The theory of dimensions of faith*

Faith formation is an integration process. The triads of knowledge, practice and context; knowledge, doing and being, as well as mind, body and heart are suggested as dimensions to be transformed through integrated theology. The theory of faith dimensions refers to constitutes of integral faith that have to be formed through individual and social spiritually edifying activities and events. The term 'dimension' is usually associated with measurements in terms of width, length, or diameter of shapes. Faith is said to have shape or areas that vivify its existence or growth, or else it would be impossible to discuss its formation. This means that, although faith is immeasurable, it obviously has indicators that help determine its existence. Faith formation is discussed on the basis of its perceivable dimensions. In this research, dimensions also refer to evident indicators for the existence or livelihood of faith. As there are different theological views on the set of triads, the discussion on dimensions of faith by theologians has taken many forms.

Osmer (1992:16), building on Nieburh's description of faith as a cube, develops the concept of the four sides of the faith cube. The dimensions of faith are discussed in terms of the sides of a cube. The theory suggests that as a cube, though being one, has a number of sides, so it is with faith. The four sides of a cube are described as belief, a personal relationship with God, commitment to God, and mystery. Osmer does not rigidly limit faith to four aspects, as he acknowledges the possibilities of the existence of other sides. However, Osmer (1992:15) suggests that faith, as a relationship of trust in God, whose loving kindness and faithfulness have been revealed in Christ, must be supported, awakened, and challenged through the ministry of teaching in the church. The ministry of teaching, in this case, targets the forming of beliefs, a relationship with God, commitment to him, and the realisation that he is and shall remain a mystery. Of course, faith cannot be supported, awakened, and challenged by means of teaching only, but also by means of other ministries of the church as well as symbols, signs, ceremonies, and so on. Faith formation means the shaping of beliefs, personal relationship with God, commitment to God, and an understanding that God will always be a mystery.

DeVries (2006:5) suggests that maturing in Christianity requires evident progress in the three dimensions of faith. These three dimensions are the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains symbolically referred to as the head, the heart, as well as the hands and feet. The head (cognitive domain) represents knowledge of the Bible, its teaching on God, his kingdom, the salvation story of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice for mankind's salvation and stable faith in God (DeVries 2006:6). The heart (affective domain) is about attitude, beliefs, values, and will. The hands and feet (psychomotor) represent skills, behaviour, or the practical aspect of faith. However, the discussion of the three dimensions of faith has been ongoing since the time of Augustine. Augustine proposed three "distinct moments" in which people dig deep into the realm of faith, namely *doctrina* or *regula fidei*; *intelligentia fidei*, and *experientia fidei* (Itao 2010:3). Maddix *et al.* (2020:viii) view faith as something that has theological, congregation, and global dimensions. They believe that these are the essential properties for its formation. The theological dimension focuses on the biblical understanding of faith and is viewed from the perspective of the historical movement of Christian traditions. The congregation dimension is about the role the church plays in forming the faith of its members. The global dimension focuses on the view that understanding

culture is critical for faith formation. Hence, it concerns growth in faith by learning from cultural diversity in the kingdom of God (Maddix *et al.* 2020:viii-x). These three interwoven dimensions work together to provide Christians with an essential framework for forming faith.

*Regula fidei* or *doctrina* is described as the truth that the church believes in, upholds, safeguards, and transmits. It is the content or what has to be known about faith. According to Augustine, *regula fidei* or *doctrina* forms the point of departure for a Christian to proceed on the journey of faith. Meanwhile, according to Itao (2010:4), believing is the starting point of spirituality, as it is vital for gaining more understanding of the truth. However, without the content of faith, no one would know what to believe. *Intelligentia fidei* is referred to as the understanding of what is believed. However, faith does not imply a passive embrace of the truth, for it has an intellectual aspect. The intellectual aspect is related to thinking about or reflecting on the contents of the embraced truth, in order to understand its meaning and being transformed by the same upheld truth. This facilitates the process of transformation, as people respond by becoming one with the appropriation of the truth itself (Itao 2010:4). *Experientia fidei* is a consequential imperative where the understood truth is concretised or expressed in a perceivable way by the one who possesses faith. *Experientia fidei* is Christian faith in its fullest flowering, concrete, alive, and acting in love (Itao 2010:4-5).

The symbol of the head, to which Maddix *et al.* (2020: iiiiv) refer as the theological dimension, represents content knowledge. Faith demands that Christians must know and grow in the knowledge of God, his works, and his involvement among his creation. The heart is the symbol of values, attitudes, and deep feelings developed after attaining a particular knowledge about God and his gracious work (DeVries 2006:6). The heart is also referred to as the convictions from understanding the known truth. This links the known truth to feelings in the one who upholds it as a way of being attached to the acquired knowledge. This means that all knowledge gained must translate into developing correlative values, attitudes, and feelings. The hands and feet aspect represents behaviour and actions of faith resulting from the knowledge attained and developed values (DeVries 2006:6). Hands and feet is also referred to as commitment to the truth. In short, faith is perceived as something that is formed in the dimensions of knowledge or content, attitudes or conviction, as well as behaviour, actions, or commitment.

### 2.3.2.1 *The theological dimension of faith*

The dimensions of faith consist of knowledge, associated values, and practice of the known liberating truth. In short, it is about knowledge, passion, and practice. In this research, the phrase ‘theological dimension’ is preferred to head or knowledge, to which Augustine also refers as *regula fidei* or *doctrina*. The description of *regula fidei* or *doctrina* as the truth, upheld, safeguarded, and transmitted by the church seems to leave less room for reflection. The theological dimension has been adopted to emphasise the aspect of continued responsible reflection on the knowledge gained. Reflection is vital for contextualisation or indigenisation of the known truth for personal and community transformation. This means that the theological dimension combines the *regula fidei* and the *intelligentia fidei*. The theological dimension enforces and continues to reinforce the ability to know the truth increasingly, but simultaneously inspiring responsible reflection in response to the known truth in relation to contexts at hand.

### 2.3.2.2 *The heart dimension of faith*

This research further discusses the dimension of the heart. The heart in the Bible is metaphorically portrayed as the origin of thoughts, motives, spoken words, feelings, and attitudes that translate into actions (Anthony 2019:17). The heart is also regarded as the person’s centre for both physical and emotional-intellectual-moral activities. It is the seat of emotion, inclination, will, priorities, and desires associated with discerning between good and evil (Anthony 2019:4-7). Allison, as cited by Maddix *et al.* (2020:6), refers this dimension to *orthopatheia*. *Orthopatheia* emphasises the attachment of feeling to the known truth. It is also about holding on to the known truth with conviction. According to DeVries (2006:6), the content of the truth about faith should have associated convictions, values, attitudes, and feelings. Therefore, the shaping of the heart or *orthopatheia* dimension concerns forming the human centre of desires, discernment, will, inclination, convictions, emotional intellect, and attitudes theo-centrally.

### 2.3.2.3 *The hands and feet dimension of faith*

This research also adopts *orthopraxis* (Maddix *et al.* 2020:6), to which DeVries (2006:6) refers as hands and feet in the third dimension of faith. It emphasises the practical aspect of faith with a view that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). This aspect is important because faith as a living thing should always result in action. Pali and Baron (2020:96) express the importance of

orthopraxis well and mention that God expects congregants to be agents of divine transformation who will help other people live as an image of God in their own context and transform social structures and practices to conform to the will of the kingdom of God. Leaders and members of the church at a local congregation, in their practice of faith, are meant to contribute to the betterment of their communities by transforming social structures. This stresses that the practical dimension of faith is indispensable to social issues.

#### 2.3.2.4 *The interdependence of the three dimensions*

It is important to know that the three dimensions are interdependent. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, Paul states: “If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship, that as a way of boasting, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” Leaders and members of the congregation can express the practical dimension of faith with self-centred motives. Acts of faith should always be motivated by an interior godly motive of love. He renders the practice of faith meaningless if it is not done out of love. The interior motive of love justifies any good act expressed outwardly. Anthony (2019:17) regards love as being far more than an emotional feeling because it is an intentional and well-thought-out commitment to form thoughts, motives, and actions around aspects to which God himself attaches value. Faith formation is meant to transform interior motives, so that they conform to the love of the Triune God. However, interior motives can only be right if they originate from responsible theological reflections. Therefore, each of the three dimensions contributes to, and depends on others. The theological dimension contributes to the development of good values, attitudes, and convictions, which ultimately result in the practice of faith without dichotomy. Simultaneously, the continued growth of the theological dimension is based on questions generated in the process of *orthopraxis* and *orthopatheia*. The antagonistic dichotomy may be a result of the failure to link these three dimensions. In view of this, faith formation is understood as the shaping of the theological, the attachment of passion to the known truth, and the practical dimensions of faith interchangeably.

Identifying the dimensions, of course, helps notice on which areas faith formation has to focus, but it does not provide the answer to how these three dimensions of faith are to be formed. In order to address the issue of how the three dimensions must be formed, this research engages hermeneutical and discernment as individual and communal processes of faith formation within

challenging or paradoxical contexts. Under hermeneutics of faith tradition, the research engages Osmer's approach of "catechesis as an interpretive activity". Discernment and hermeneutics are discussed with a view that faith formation is an ongoing activity that takes place within and outside church gatherings or assemblies. This concept is built on the belief that God's work of shaping people's faith is not limited to the church and its activities. Faith within and away from church gatherings is viewed as complementary and not as antagonising opponents. This means that God creates faith-forming opportunities at anytime and anywhere, even away from the spiritual structure, family, personal study of the Bible, and prayer.

#### *2.4 Faith formation as a hermeneutical process*

Faith is formed by integrating the dimensions of *orthodoxy*, *orthopatheia* and *orthopraxis* within respective contexts. Integrating the intentions of faith within context requires a hermeneutical process. In this research, faith formation is discussed as a hermeneutical process of integrating *orthodoxy*, *orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis* by means of interpreting the Bible, the cultural context, and faith traditions correctly. The theological discipline of Hermeneutics was introduced as a theory of Scripture interpretation. As an ancient text with timeless truth, the Bible was interpreted so as to relive its message within the contemporary context. Its concept developed further when Friedrich Schleiermacher introduced the aspect of hermeneutics as a theory of understanding. From that point, hermeneutics, apart from Scripture, included the interpretation of authors, editors, and impacts on the original hearers (Heitink 1993:180). Later on, Gadamer viewed hermeneutics as an art of understanding, involving the fusion of the historical, geographical, cultural, political, and socio-economic horizons of the text and the world of the contemporary reader. Hermeneutics bridges the gap between the world of the text and that of the reader through dialogue between the text and the reader (Venter 2014). Later on, hermeneutics included understanding the world behind the text (background of the Scripture), the world of the text (its literary style), and the world in front of the text (its meaning for the current context). Currently, hermeneutics transcends exegesis of the Bible, as it is about theology as a whole because bridges have to be built between old faith traditions and current situations (Heitink 1993:181). As a theological cross-cutting issue, hermeneutics includes the understanding of text, God, the world, and self (Venter 2014).

Furthermore, hermeneutical gaps have to be closed, by relating Scripture and faith traditions to prevailing contexts for a better understanding of God's continued involvement with his creation. According to Jansen (2007:2-6), hermeneutics has to do with identifying, addressing, and removing the hidden obstacles to understanding in the Bible, the context, and the faith tradition. Christian life is lived hermeneutically, as it involves continued wrestling with identifying obstacles in the process of linking knowledge and understanding of faith with praxis in the encountered phenomena. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in this research, hermeneutics is concerned with identifying and removing obstacles to understanding Christians in their attempt to relate Scripture, cultural context, and faith traditions exercised either as individuals or communally in their interaction with life's realities. Dichotomy among some Christians is a sign of the existing gaps between *orthodoxy*, *orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis* in situational challenges. The integration of the dimensions of faith is possible if the gaps and obstacles among them are identified and removed. The new understanding for coping with life issues is generated in the process of the hermeneutical struggle of interpreting Scripture, tradition, and contexts, thereby contributing to continued formation of faith. Faith formation is a hermeneutical process because Christians grow in the integration of *orthodoxy*, *orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis*, as they apply the Bible and faith traditions in dialogue with respective contexts.

#### *2.4.1 Scripture as a hermeneutical subject for faith formation*

Scripture plays a vital role in faith formation because faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), although it is not free from being misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misapplied. Similarly, the task of understanding God's Word has been the main preoccupation of his covenant people throughout the Bible. It is evident that, partly, the Bible addresses issues of its being misunderstood. Apart from the context of the authorship of the Bible and that of the contemporary reader, the problem of understanding also arises from the gap between God as the source of scripture who is wholly righteous and the people biased towards sin as his audience. The gap between God and people is more problematic than the author and reader contexts. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Paul writes about matters that are hard to understand according to the wisdom given to him. Luke 24:45 indicates that, even after witnessing the fulfilment of God's Word through resurrection,

Jesus still had to open the minds of the disciples for them to understand Scripture. It takes God through the Holy Spirit to enlighten and convince the hearts of mankind that the problem of understanding must be resolved. Therefore, the formation of faith starts by yielding to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in response to God's gracious guidance towards establishing a right relationship with him, which is vital for continued growth in understanding Scripture. However, resolving the gap between God and people does not mean that the fissure between the contexts of human authors and contemporary readers should be ignored. The Bible consists of the Word of God spoken to real contexts; yet its content remains true timelessly. God spoke not merely to give information, but also to bring about formation among his people. Therefore, for Christian faith to be formed, the hermeneutical approach to Scripture should responsibly consider the problem of understanding, due to gaps between God and human beings, as well as between the author's and the contemporary reader's contexts.

#### *2.4.2 Culture as a hermeneutical subject for faith formation*

Culture as something that is deeply embedded in people will always have an adverse or fostering impact on the formation of the Christian faith. According to Hiebert (1976:446), it is impossible to divorce a person from culture because no human being can think or operate outside culture nor live apart from society. Culture is a hermeneutical subject for faith formation, as it influences thought patterns, creates ecology for operation, and determines response to life encounters and road map for actions. Culture moulds people's present and shapes their future. The autonomy and freedom of individuals revolve around both knowing how processes of cultural social laws and order work and figuring out the means of applying these for the purpose of both achieving personal goals and contributing to social goals (Hiebert 1976:446). In an effort to emphasise the importance and impact of culture as an ethnic map, Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011:83-84) urge that culture must not be trivialised or wished away. Instead, they propose that African ethnicity is to be harnessed and used "as a positive force" for positive or meaningful change to take place.

The challenge of harnessing and using culture as a positive force in theology has been debated for a long time. Mbiti (1977:28) claims that forms of Christianity are produced by the interaction of the Gospel, Christian faith, and culture. The reference to forms of Christianity derives from an understanding that each culture has the right to evolve its own form or expression of Christianity

that is not dominated by others (Mbiti 1977:29). He views the Gospel as an object of faith that also illuminates, instils, generates, and inspires people's faith. Meanwhile, when the Gospel is received in faith, culture becomes a medium for sustaining, explaining, articulating, communicating, and celebrating faith (Mbiti 1977:28). Since there are thousands of cultures and each needs to have its own form of Christianity, does this propose that they should be "Christianities"? Regardless of plurality in its forms, Christianity remains one, although received and expressed differently in respective cultures. Mbiti is basically against the cultural monopoly of form of Christianity such as the westernisation of African Christians. This entails that the formation of faith must take place within Christians' cultural contexts for the transformation of the cultural context. Evolving such a cultural form of Christianity would definitely involve a hermeneutic approach to culture, with the aim of understanding the underlying cultural obstacles to accepting the Gospel. Although Mbiti (1977:28, 39) considers culture as the crown of man, on the one hand, he writes of its limitation in terms of liberating people, on the other. He claims that man-made culture is tainted by sin, hence subject to judgement and exorcism by the Gospel. The hermeneutical approach helps identify areas of culture in need of illumination, exorcism, judgement, and purification. Culture as a hermeneutical subject for faith formation would enable the Bible and faith traditions to speak clearly to people within their cultural contexts.

#### *2.4.3 Faith tradition as a hermeneutical subject for faith formation*

In the process of faith formation, hermeneutics is done with a view that uninterpreted faith traditions can hinder transformation and the ability to discern God's will in context. The discussion on faith traditions, especially after the protestant movement from Martin Luther's ninety-five thesis, is evidence of the church being a battleground for doctrinal inclinations or confessions of faith. Besides proclaiming the Gospel, European missionaries also converted Africa into an extension of their intolerant "rivalry and mutual suspicion" based on plural denomination-based "theological and doctrinal voices" (Herppich 2014:218). Unfortunately, these diversities were introduced to unite cultural contexts, and Christianity with its doctrinal diversity seems to fragment these cultures. Some faith-forming materials have sections that dispute teachings from other faith traditions, in order to justify their own. In as much as diversity enriches Christian faith, the

theological and doctrinal pluralistic creates tension within the church in its universality within one cultural context, thereby stifling the contextualisation of faith formation. The church finds itself in an awkward position to explain the doctrinal diversity before it proceeds into deepening the faith of Christians within their cultural context. The rivalry weakens the contextual formation of faith approach to a united culture.

Sell (2008:151) describes confessions of faith as “doctrinal roadblocks” erected against the perceived “untoward doctrines”. These doctrinal roadblocks have been used as a means of inclusion in and exclusion from the body of Christ. This means that denominations are characterised by sets of doctrines that function as criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of others. Chapter 3 of the thesis explains in detail that these sets of doctrines are further used as determining factors for ecumenical relationships. The same doctrinal roadblocks are used to catechise new members and to remain as standards for faith formation afterwards. Sell (2008:152) also cautions that forgetting that confessions of faith are subordinate leads to idolatry, while forgetting that they are standards is likely to result in heresy. The hermeneutical approach to faith traditions, as subject for forming faith, intends to maintain them as subordinate standards, in order to avoid degeneration into either idolatry or heresy. The approach is also vital, as the confessions of faith used to catechise members have foreign backgrounds and rivalry which are different from Africa. Catechesis must be interpreted, in order to attain a faith built for life within local cultural contexts.

#### *2.4.3.1 Catechesis as an interpretive process*

The interpretation approach, as articulated by Thomas Groome, is intended to assist individuals in the challenge of linking faith tradition with present reality. It is about theological reflection on individuals’ experience in their daily lives. It assists in interpreting Christianity and experience by connecting Christian perspectives, expectations, and practices with present reality. The approach enables Christian faith to continue making sense in complex and paradoxical situations (Seymour 1996:8). This shows that the pathway to practise Christian faith is not always smooth and easy. In the process of living, faith meets the challenges that call for responsible theological reflection in an attempt to understand Christian life. Catechisms, as instruction manuals for new converts, were generated from theological reflections, as faith sought to make sense of the then prevailing circumstances. This shows that they were not formulated in abstract but as consequent theological

responses to real social events and issues. This means that these were interpretive documents whose responses were based on the interpretation of Scripture, faith tradition, and contexts. They were instigated by questions arising from the interaction of faith and social challenges aimed at contributing towards transformation and a better practice of faith in communities. Catechists should thus have the ability to interpret Scripture, faith tradition, and contexts, so that they respond to contemporary challenges and opportunities for the thriving of Christian faith and practice.

According to Osmer (2005:237), catechesis is an “interpretive activity undertaken at both corporate and individual level by members of the congregations”. According to *Catholic News Agency* and Hundeshage (2004:49), the word ‘catechesis’ derives from the Greek word which means to echo the teaching, to instruct by word of mouth, and to repeat the sayings of another. The newsletter further states that catechesis, as the teaching of faith, is understood to be an interactive process in which the Word of God resounds between and among the proclaimer, the one receiving the message, and the Holy Spirit. Catechesis, as the process of instruction and repetition of the doctrines, is meant to internalise the fundamental truths of Christian faith. Therefore, it is not a lifeless or meaningless repetition of words, but a means of internalising it, in order to enhance faith in its theological, *orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis* dimensions.

Catechesis is also viewed as a lifelong process taking the form of initial conversion, formation, education, and ongoing conversion. Through the Word, worship, service, and community, catechesis seeks to lead all God’s people to an ever-strengthening relationship with God, who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Catechesis signifies teaching the first principles and basics of the Christian doctrine to adults who are in between joining the church and administration of the sacrament of baptism. It was also offered to children of Christian believers who were baptised as infants before they formally undergo the ceremony of admittance into partaking of the Holy Communion (Hundeshage 2004:49). The system of catechising is considered to include a short, summarised, simple, and plain exposition of Christian doctrine, deduced from the writings of the prophets and the apostles, and arranged in the form of questions and answers.

Sultana (2018:24) adds that catechesis also serves the purpose of the church's evangelisation mission, by deepening the faith which individuals supposedly already have embraced through the first proclamation. It is assumed that individuals in the church have a great deal of information about Christ and the Christian way of living, but they lack the embodiment of Christ-centred life. It is, therefore, vital that catechesis plays the role of initiating members of the church into having a personal relationship with Christ and of intentionally and systematically enabling all of them to grow in faith and discipleship (*Catholic News Agency*). Sultana (2018:25) further describes the aim of catechesis as accomplishing the tasks of embodying the "knowledge of faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching how to pray, education for life in the community, and missionary initiation into human experience". Sultana (2018:23, 26) views a lived reality or situation, reflection, and interpretation of the situation, appropriation of the meaning, and its eventual expression in a personal way as indispensable aspects of human experience. This implies that, through catechesis, faith is not only informed, but also formed, so that it contributes to personal transformation, resulting in meaningful participation in community life and the salvation mission of the Triune God in the world. As an interpretive activity, catechesis thus bridges the gap between faith and life experiences.

Osmer (2005:237) defines catechesis from a dramaturgical model as an interpretive activity undertaken by congregations and congregants who regard themselves as participants in the theo-drama of the Triune God and seek to better understand their roles in this drama, by deepening their understanding of Scripture and Christian tradition. The concept of theo-drama positions people as God's invitees, invited to understand and participate in their own identity, mission and vocation as God's people in the world by envisioning a world of peace, justice, wholeness, and well-being of all its inhabitants (Neil & Meyer 2013:1,4). The interpretive activity involves the responsible interpretation of Scripture, Christian tradition, and contemporary context (Osmer 2005:238). In Osmer, Nell and Meyer's views, the theo-drama seems to incline more towards participating in God's work here on earth than eschatological. Only people who are aware that they were created in the image of God and who have the conviction to be actors in the transforming work of God on earth undertake catechesis as an interpretive activity. Like any actor in a drama meditates and assimilates the role of the character to be represented, those who undertake the interpretive activity endeavour to study Scripture and Christian tradition, in order to play their roles in the theo-drama

accordingly. As in a drama, its success depends on how well each individual plays the assumed character. Osmer (2005:237) seems to communalise and individualise the interpretive activity task, by describing it as both a congregational and an individual undertaking. By studying the Bible, individuals draw closer to God, and find peace and personal meaning in him, in order to be better positioned to build and edify the congregation for the life of its calling as the people of God (Osmer 2005:238).

Howard (2017:31-33) avers that catechesis has a teaching and formational dimension. He suggests that the formational dimension of the catechesis process should be more than simply teaching about faith and preparing for sacramental celebration as, above all, it has to be a time when *confirmandi* are led to make conscious decisions to desire being whole again. Catechists are called upon to adopt the catechetical model that enables them to be companions of the *confirmandi* towards Christ's healing. This suggests an embodiment of the shared contents of faith by the catechumen in lived experience. Osmer (2005:239) identifies four patterns of interpretation that are nurtured in the dramaturgical model of catechesis. Each of these patterns has three steps that would assist the community of faith in playing its role in the theo-drama with a continued increase in efficiency and effectiveness, as it strengthens its relationship with God and understands its meaning. These patterns are elaborated in the following ways.

i. Interpreting the texts of Scripture and tradition

In this pattern, Scripture in terms of the Bible and tradition (doctrines and creeds) is interpreted and appropriated using three steps. The first step in this pattern is a movement from pre- to scientific understanding. Pre-understanding assumes that people are not blank slates, for they have questions, assumptions, concepts, experiences, and expectations concerning the scriptural texts or tradition. Catechists are given the opportunity to compare the newly introduced concepts with their pre-understanding. The second step is exegesis, where texts are examined using the appropriate tools (Osmer 2005:240). The third step in this pattern is appropriation, also referred to as *mimesis*. *Mimesis* is the appropriation of the text after a responsible analogy between its historical, social, geographical, political, economic, religious, and cultural world and our world (Osmer 2005:240; Conradie 2008:65-66). The appropriation of newly acquired understanding from a responsible

exegesis leads to a transformation of personal concepts, attitudes, perceptions, values, and beliefs that enable individuals to viably contribute to the transformation of the community.

Osmer (2005:241) suggests that the interpretation of biblical and traditional texts should open new possibilities for a new life and world. Therefore, claiming the appropriation of texts means committing to their forming and reforming ability such that the analogies of biblical and modern-day world are visible. This may involve breaking and shaping identity. Migliore (1991:52-53) proposes that scriptures are to be interpreted within theocentric contexts, for God is at the centre of witnessing to his reality, kingdom, and purpose in the biblical drama. Reading Scriptures theocentrically revolutionises an understanding from focusing on our own identity, power, and freedom as creatures created in the image of God to understand the true identity, power, and freedom of God. Through a theocentric interpretation of Scripture, human-created self-identity is broken down to give way to the formation of a God-linked identity. A theocentric interpretation leads to self-evaluation for the “rehabilitation or change in habitual behaviour issuing from the new allegiance and the consequent revaluation process” (Kraft 2005:273).

ii. Interpreting the present activity of the Holy Spirit

Migliore (1991) In reaction to the alleged forgottenness of the Holy Spirit, Migliore (1991:166) stresses that, when the Holy Spirit and his work are forgotten or suppressed, the power of God is apt to be viewed as “distant, hierarchical, and coercive; Christocentric faith deteriorates into Christomonism; the authority of Scripture becomes heteronomous; the Church is seen as a rigid power structure in which members rule over others, and the sacraments degenerate into almost magical rites under the control of the clerical elite”. Under the second pattern, Osmer (2005:242-243) calls for the interpretation of the present activity of the Holy Spirit which he terms “reading with the Spirit and reading the Spirit”. By reading with the Holy Spirit, he implies that new meanings of the biblical texts are discovered, as attention is paid to the present activities in human life and the world. The Holy Spirit reveals new meaning as the church engages in the interpretation of the Bible and contemporary contexts in its active presence and involvement.

The issue of reading the Holy Spirit seems to be contentious. The word ‘reading’ seems to reduce the Holy Spirit to some kind of a readable document or material. However, the term simply means

discerning the signs of the Holy Spirit's presence in contemporary experiences. According to Van Zyl (2013:110), discernment, as reading the Holy Spirit, occurs either knowingly or unknowingly. He argues that Christian discernment, as a matter of choice, "takes place at the juncture of 'not knowing' (being empowered by God) and 'knowing' (purposefully seeking the will of God)". His argument is based on the parable in Matthew 25:31-46, where the sheep are cited to have been unaware of feeding, clothing, and visiting Jesus in his vulnerability. Osmer builds the concept of reading the Holy Spirit on how its presence on the Gentiles guided the decision-making process in the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Both Osmer and Van Zyl indicate the need for discerning the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world nowadays. However, Van Zyl (2013:121) claims that it is possible to discern God's will and spontaneous righteous responses in daily life if one is in tune with God's mind and filled with his Spirit. According to Van Zyl (2013:111, 121), discernment occurs at the juncture of the human mind and God's Spirit at work; hence, it is also "regarded as a conflation of grace and nature".

This pattern also has three steps: experience of the Holy Spirit, searching Scripture and tradition, and integration. The first step has to do with testifying to the experiences and active presence of the Holy Spirit in the catechists' lives and the world. The Holy Spirit is experienced through its work in the process of justification, sanctification, and vocation (Migliore, 1991:174-184). In this step, it is assumed that, during the catechesis process, catechumens come with past experiences of the Holy Spirit which they share as testimonies. By sharing testimonies, catechesis translates catechumens' experiences into words, in order to build trust and open up to the Holy Spirit (Osmer 2005:243). The other reason for sharing testimonies during catechesis, linked to the second step, is that catechists are given an opportunity to clarify the misconceptions regarding the experience of the Holy Spirit.

The second step in the pattern of interpreting the present activity of the Holy Spirit is "to deepen and to test the experience critically by bringing them into dialogue with scripture and tradition" (Osmer 2005:243). The Bible itself warns against believing every spirit; they should be tested to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1), for even Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (1 Corinthians 11:14). A critical test may result in testified experiences of the Holy Spirit being confirmed, proven wrong, or in need of being revised (Deist & Burden 1980:3). In light of the

scriptural warning, critically testing the testified experiences of the Holy Spirit is important, for it helps prove that the experiences are authentic. The outcome of this process may either be confirmation or disapproval. In instances where it is established that the experience is truly from the Holy Spirit, a critical test helps clear and amend misunderstandings or misconceptions in the shared testimony. In the case of disapproval, counsel and guidance on the correct understanding of the experience must be provided. Osmer (2005:243) proposes that the means for identifying the source and clarification of the testified experience is to subject it to a critical test conducted through dialogue with Scripture and the Christian tradition. However, the Bible is to be interpreted competently and responsibly because even the devil used Scripture to test Jesus Christ in the wilderness (Matthew 4:5-6).

The third step in this pattern is “integration”. This may mean making the outcome from the critical test of the Holy Spirit experiences using the Word of God and tradition as part of one’s life. For Osmer (2005:244), integration is providing an opportunity to reshape or reframe the experience of the Holy Spirit in view of the scriptural lessons learnt. He emphasises the integration of concrete commitment, accountability, and continued encouragement for growth in experiencing the Holy Spirit. The second pattern starts with experience, proceeds with examination using Scripture and faith tradition, then continues with reshaping people’s experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This cycle is also endless, as the reshaped experiences of the Holy Spirit have to be re-shared, re-examined, and reshaped over and over for the rest of one’s life.

### iii. Interpreting the praxis of the congregation

Heitink (1993:151) views praxis as an action by Christians, within and outside the church, with the focus on the salvation of humankind and the world. Praxis must continue to be re-examined, in order for it to keep on undergoing renewal. Praxis is viewed as an embodied interpretation of Scripture and tradition by the congregation. According to Osmer (2005:244), the first step under interpretation is to pay attention to some aspects of the congregation’s current praxis. Under this step, an observation is made beyond the undertaken action, in order to understand the meaning of a particular practice to the congregation.

The second step is about interpreting the observed meaning or meanings of a particular practice in light of Scripture and tradition (Osmer 2005:244). According to Heitink (1993:151-152), “[p]raxis is always, at least in part, influenced by theory”. Christian theories are formulated or reformed through the interpretation of the Bible and persisting contextual scenarios in the process of seeking lasting solutions, alternatives, creating opportunities and options that would address the challenge at hand. Osmer (2005:244) links praxis to the way in which the congregation interprets Scripture and its tradition, with the aim of enhancing praxis within and in its wider context. As the church’s praxis is being interpreted using Scripture and faith traditions, both officially and unofficially adopted theories behind it must be considered. Therefore, in the quest for understanding practices with their underlying theories, questions are developed and clarified. From this dialogue, practices and their underlying meanings or theories are revised in light of the texts, guiding the church’s faith practice (Smith 2013:79).

The third step under the pattern of interpreting the praxis of the congregation is to “deepen understanding of the present practice or to initiate a process of reforming present praxis” (Osmer 2005:245). Under the third step, learners are given the opportunity to use the newly developed practice acquired from the interpretation of Scripture and faith tradition conducted in the second step. Osmer’s (2005:245) suggestion of deepening understanding or initiating a process of reforming present praxis seems to be a continuous process rather than a once-off exercise undertaken within a specified period of Christian life.

#### iv. Interpreting the contemporary context

Osmer (2005:246) uses the word ‘contemporary’ in relation to context from the concept of continuing creation and many other studies that seem to challenge the biblical and traditional notions with the capacity to antagonise Church members. He cites the biblical issue of man being the last of all of God’s creation versus the concept of evolution and championing women’s equal rights versus the traditional belief against the ordination of women in some denominations. The word ‘context’ can be time, situation, or geographically related. The word ‘contemporary’ also refers to present realities. This means that ‘contemporary’ is about issues or situations of life happening within a specified time and location. Contemporary context includes contentious social issues affecting or likely to affect people at the individual level.

Olorunnisola (2015:65) mentions that, from its inception, Christianity has been an engaging and communitarian faith, as it engaged communities' political, economic, social, and cultural worldviews". The church is considered to consist of people who are gathered to learn in an atmosphere where all its members are both teachers and learners, challenging each other to grow and go out to serve (Everist 2002:13-18). The service of the church is conducted by connecting with the public world through the lifelong cycle movement from learning to mission (Everist 2002:257, 289). Therefore, the church is supposed to be continuously engaged in the task of interpreting issues affecting society and individuals. Olorunnisola (2015:70) considers this to be a vital aspect because "the knowledge of Christ remains grossly inadequate if it cannot be put into practise for giving a new direction outside the community of faith". In other words, the opinion put across is that the claim to know Christ should be put into practice through the service of love within its wider contexts. Olorunnisola (2015:70) views the urgent need for Christian public theology to actively engage in a conversation of public interest with an understanding that it can offer complementary or supplementary approaches and alternative solutions to the very complex issues currently facing society.

The pattern of interpreting the contemporary context also consists of three steps. Under this pattern, Osmer (2005:246) mentions that the first step involves engaging the new knowledge, social movements, and cultural patterns of the contemporary contexts with openness. The use of the word 'openness' points to the fact that the church should engage the contemporary context with an open mind, as it brings about transformation of both the church itself and the community (Olorunnisola 2015:65). However, this does not imply that the church should uncritically assimilate whatever new knowledge is conveyed by the ideologies of social movement and cultural traits. Osmer (2005:247) recommends an open but critical-minded dialogue. The church in its public theology should subject issues, ideologies, cultural traits, and new knowledge to a critical interpretation, using Scripture and faith tradition with an open mind. According to Olorunnisola (2015:70), the keyword for public theology is Christology-centred conversation, contributing to the formation of personal decisions and collective policymaking in all spheres of human society. Through conversation and contribution to the well-being of humanity, the church will participate in continuing the creation and recreation of society.

The second step under the fourth pattern of interpretation creates a dialogue of the Bible and of tradition into dialogue with contextual issues (Osmer 2005:247). This seems to play two roles. First, the inherited beliefs, practices, the authority of the state, church, and society should undergo critical scrutiny (Osmer 2005:247; Migliore 1991:41). Secondly, contemporary trends are to be critically questioned on the basis of an interpretation of the normative beliefs and values of Scripture and tradition. The above two statements may seem contradictory, yet they are complementary. The church has and must never doubt Scripture, but it has and will always critique belief systems, traditions, and practices using it as normative. Therefore, Scripture critiques both church beliefs, traditions, and practices it develops, and the contemporary trends of the world. This challenge from Scripture helps the Church in its praxis embody and reflect the gracious reign of God as manifest in Jesus Christ, which is characterised not by authoritarian rule but by its nature of “authoring” new life and freedom in relationship with God and others (Migliore, 1991:43).

The third step involves helping participants to crystallise what they have learnt, by identifying new insights and forms of action (Osmer 2005:247). Learning should be more than simply assimilating information, for it also forms, reforms, and transforms a person’s world view (Simpson 1999:23; Thatamanil 2011:369; Moore 2011:380). It aims at changing the perspective as well as one’s practical life. Catechesis is meant to support an open and critical dialogue with the contemporary context and strive to enable people to make informed judgements about their beliefs and values. It provides opportunities to develop good reasons for beliefs, actions, and dialogue with people of different beliefs and values (Osmer 2005:247). Catechesis should aim to empower continued open-minded correct interpretation through Scripture, faith tradition, and the contemporary context.

The four patterns of interpretation and teaching discussed above seem to revolve around a cyclic pattern of pre-understanding or real-life experience to new lessons after critical examination and back to experience with new life and knowledge-empowered praxis. They follow Browning’s pattern of practice-theory-practice, with the practical aspect forming the point of departure and end result after critical analysis (Smith 2013:79). Hendricks (1999:6) indicates that each and every congregation has explicit and implicit theologies. Implicit and explicit theologies may be at both congregation and individual levels. Explicit theologies are officially adopted, to which the church

subscribes, contained in doctrines, creeds, and confession. Implicit theologies are unofficial but commonly accepted ways followed by a congregation in a way that there would be an uproar if they were transgressed (Hendricks 1999:7). The shift in the four patterns of interpretation and teaching from pre-understanding or experience to interpretation then back to informed practice provides a platform for expressing and subjecting implicit theologies to a critical scriptural and traditional test. This is essential because implicit theologies could inform explicit theologies. Therefore, the four patterns of interpretation are to be used in a cyclic way for the rest of one's life and not in a linear way for a given period of time.

### *2.5 Formation in faith conflicts*

As stated earlier in this chapter, Christian faith is lived hermeneutically in an attempt to translate Scripture, culture, and church tradition into a lived reality. Christians live by relating what they know to what they encounter in life. In other words, movement from knowledge to reality and reality to knowledge back and forth is taking place in the mind of a Christian. It is in the process of hermeneutical living that Christians encounter conflicts of faiths. Tang (2019:5) views conflict as a disruption of the preconceived normal way of living, which provokes painful anxiety. In such moments, Christians seek possible ways to resolve the conflict and reduce the pain of anxiety. At the point of responding to the faith conflict, the translatability of the acquired knowledge of faith is tested. Contextual faith formation is about how easily translatable the formed faith is in conflicting contexts. At the point of conflict, faith should not only be translated, but also formed further. Does the formation framework empower continued responsible forming of faith in the face of conflicts?

This question is very important, as conflicts of faith rarely take place during worship services because they mostly occur in normal daily life activities in places of work, homes, business places, schools, and many other preoccupations constituting Christians' usual routines. It is mainly in such places that conflict between faith and evil enticements acts with prejudice or in selfish, corrupt, unfair, and unjust ways that contrast with God's will. At times, this may also be understood as trials or temptations. It is important to constantly assess the situation, in order to establish whether the faith that is assumed to have been formed is sufficiently capable to respond to real-life puzzles by interpreting Christianity, God's present activity, and contemporary experience correctly

(Seymour 1996:8). The formed faith empowers Christians, so that they are able to link life, church traditions, and theological approaches to present experiences (Seymour 1996:8).

### *2.6 Faith formation as a process of theological interaction*

Smith (2013:16) claims that all Christian leaders do theology every day, as they constantly interpret Scripture, formulate beliefs, and live them out. His view of interpretation links Scripture to belief and the way in which life is lived. It is not clear whether this includes lay leaders or whether it is only the theologically trained clergy. Hendricks (2004:211) extends interpretation beyond the leaders to include all Christians because they are also involved in “vocationally based, critical and constructive interpretation of their present reality”. Christian life is lived as a manifestation of upheld beliefs and belief systems formulated on the interpretation of Scripture. It is thus important to encourage responsible handling of Scripture, by being aware that the nature of interpretation influences the kind of faith that is formed. Interpretation, as a reflective process on scriptural texts, is meant to be the task of all Christians because it “lies at the heart of human existence” (Osmer 2008:21). This means that church leaders no longer enjoy the monopoly of being the only interpreters of Scripture. In fact, Christians in the pew interpret Scripture and the preacher’s interpretation as the sermon is being delivered.

Venter (1999:3) defines interpretation as “a dialogue between the reader and the text”. Dialogue emphasises the conversation that takes place between the Bible and the reader in the process of interpretation. The process of reading the Bible will always demand some form of interpretation for two reasons. First, the Bible is, by nature, a book that draws people into dialogue simply by reading it, as it reveals the majestic God and his unsearchable active involvement in the life of his creation. If a person becomes aware of the existence of God and his presence, it results in self-scrutiny or examination. The Bible draws the reader into a deeper interaction that engages long-upheld attitudes, concepts, and beliefs. Therefore, reading the Bible involves the interactive interpretation of not only the Bible and the context, but also the readers.

Secondly, some Christians read the Bible as a reference to the questions arising from interaction with the realities of life. A reader enters into dialogue with the Bible, by asking questions and by listening to it (Venter 1999:3). The reader of the Bible tries to fuse the outcome of the dialogue,

so that they become part of the responses to encountered life contexts. Although efforts to fuse contexts and the Bible may lack competence in many ways, compared to those who have attended theological training, the fact is that interpretation does take place. As the interpretation of the Bible is done in dialogue with the context, beliefs whereby Christians tend to live, are formed. This means that faith formation may not take place in the church but in actual life contexts at the point of applying text in the face of issues at hand. The antagonistic dichotomy arises from a failure to coordinate the *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and theological dimensions of faith. Christians do not live in a vacuum. They exist in particular contexts that have their own distinctive problems, options, possibilities, and changing ambiguities. They live in a world that keeps on posing new questions of faith where existing answers or conceptual systems are unable to provide a way forward (Migliore 1991:3; Kraft 2005:273). The reason for this is that they do not seem to be sufficient means of addressing or presenting possibilities or options out of the contentious issue at hand. Since Christians reach a point of running out of alternatives within their acquired faith conceptual systems, it means that the formed faith must have adequate theological interpretation skills. This would provide a way of interpreting Scripture and contexts correctly for a coherent Christian response, especially in spiritually testing situations that may occur outside the church building. If faith is not well equipped, the disturbing discrepancy between the known content of faith and its actual practice will be inevitable (Migliore 1991:187).

Equipping believers with adequate theological tools for a correct interpretation of Scripture as part of faith formation is crucial because the larger part of interpretation is done in interaction with life situations. According to Mayes (2015:12), the Greek word in Ephesians 4:12 translated as “equip”, built from the word *Καταρτίζω*, was originally used in medical language as the healing and mending of broken bones. In other fields such as architectural pottery and clothing design, *Καταρτίζω* connotes complete or finished products. Mayes concludes that the Greek word *καταρτισμὸν*, translated as “equip”, implies completing or perfecting. It means being provided with all the necessities for efficient performance in the world and away from its manufacturing place. Therefore, equipping entails that Christians need to be prepared with adequate theological tools for their lifelong formation of faith, as they grow in perfection and completion in the manner that Christ Jesus modelled. Christians possibly spend at least an hour in the church during worship service and go out to continue dialoguing with scriptures in prevailing situations for the remainder

of the week. It is obvious that Christians spend more time, by reflecting on Scripture and contexts, away from the guidance of the professional theologian. In their contexts, they interpret or reflect on Scripture in interaction with the reality of life more than under the guidance of the clergy. Even if such interpretations or processes of reflection are unsupervised and unguided by professional theologians, they contribute to their belief systems and praxis. As a process of reflecting on the text or texts of Scripture, interpretation moves Christians to act in response to respective contexts (Pienaar & Müller 2012:4).

Smith (2013:22) defines theology as a “systematic study of God’s revelation and of people’s faith”, with the aim “to discern the will of God in situations so as to live and act in ways that are faithful to him”. Olorunnisola (2015:65) mentions that theological reflection takes place in the intersection of the academic world and the life of the church at all levels. Smith (2013:20) further cites the task of theology as “to study what God has revealed about himself and the world”, for the restatement of its “meaning and implications for our context”. In other words, the study of God’s revelation and people’s faith should respond to the questions: What is God’s will in this situation as stated in Scripture? What is the correct interpretation of Scripture and the situation at hand? Following a correct interpretation, the next question is: What is the right response to the present scenario? How can the response be applied to ensure faithful adherence to God and his will? Such questions are not exclusively asked by those who attended theological training, but also by all Christians on a daily basis, especially in times of crisis. Browning suggests that theological reflection must be a habit of reasoning through everyday issues and experiences confronting real-life situations where people reflect on their actions (Smith 2013:78).

### *2.7 Faith formation as a discerning activity*

Discernment is described as an ontological act of convictional knowing. It provides spiritual direction, by illuminating a “solution in unrelated and paradoxical events” because of faith (Tang 2019:1, 13). This illumination, as a way out of paradoxes, also occurs at an individual level. It is impossible for the church to provide its members with guidance on all paradoxes they meet in their daily lives. Discernment shows that spiritual life is more than what any human theological realm can contain. The fact that God, from and in whom faith is, is incomprehensible, ineffable, and a mystery means that no one or no community of faith can teach and depict everything concerning

how to relate with him through ceremonies, rituals, symbols, and symbolisms. Some issues are discerned by Christians themselves at a personal level, as they encounter God in their everyday life endeavours. Just as God is not confined to the church building or gathering, faith formation permeates believers' lives in communities and their respective paradoxical contexts. Therefore, all the issues that believers encounter in their daily personal and communal lives present an opportunity for the formation of faith.

After the disciples learnt from Jesus verbally and from the observation of his life, wonders, and miracles, he also promised them the Holy Spirit, the *Parakletos* who will teach them all things (John 14:26). The reference to the Holy Spirit as *Parakletos* implies that he will be near or handy to guide, counsel, or comfort the disciples. The Holy Spirit plays the role of *Parakletos* at both a corporate and a personal level. In Luke 12:11-12, Jesus urges his disciples not to worry about being brought before the authorities for trial over their faith, as they are assured that the Holy Spirit will intervene. This suggests that, whether they appear as individuals or as a group, the Holy Spirit will guide their response in any desperate situation. In Acts 15:8, the Holy Spirit serves as a mark of testimony that God also receives the Gentiles. This transformed the apostles' view of faith in the Triune God, as they understood it to be universal and all-inclusive in nature. Unlike Jesus, the Holy Spirit is an invisible *Parakletos*. As an invisible teacher, the Holy Spirit will teach in new ways to which the disciples must adjust. Discernment is the new way of learning.

Hendricks (1994:30) mentions a number of aspects about theology, one of them being the struggle to discern God's will for the situation. Currie (1991:389) links discernment to the means of identifying options and opportunities God presents to believers for decision-making. He stresses the point that discernment is an integral aspect of faith and a requirement when Christians are left with no "guidelines for choosing and acting in the face of changing circumstances, unprecedented challenges and new resources". All Christians experience problems relating to God's revelation, their faith and context, especially during times of crisis. Therefore, all need to be empowered with some form of systematic analysis of Scripture, faith, and context. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word 'discern' means to detect, recognise, or understand as different and separate through senses or mentally. It derives from the Latin word *discernere*, which may be translated as to separate, divide off, or distinguish. The word *discernere* is a construct from another

Latin word, *cernere*, which may be translated as to sift, decide, or determine. The fact that the will of God has to be sifted or determined in situations is an indicator that, at times, it has to be spotted among other existing options. The will of God has to be separated or distinguished and adhered to, among other options, otherwise Christians are bound to be misled. Discernment is described as deciding between competing voices; it is a process of sorting, evaluating, and distinguishing (Van Zyl 2013:110).

Hendricks (1994:30) uses the phrase ‘struggling to discern’ in defining what theology is all about, thereby signifying that the process of sorting, evaluating, and identifying the will of God availed to believers as an option and opportunity among competing voices is not easy. The phrase ‘struggling to discern’ renders the process complex. It points to the fact that Christians have to strive through the confusing and complicated or contentious process of identifying the will of God among other options (Osmer 2005:284). In view of the struggle to identify the will of God, Osmer (2005:288) proposes the need to take a deliberate step of “building up of a congregation into a community of discernment”, by making its members understand the “importance of discernment and offer them with concrete models of discernment that they can use”. The role of the church in faith formation is to take a deliberate step to empower Christians with concrete models and abilities they can use in the process of struggling to discern God’s will in various sober, “confusing, complex or contentious” situations (Osmer 2005:284). Faith formation provided by the church should empower the continued formation of faith in the process of interacting with life’s realities.

Hendricks (1994:30) further considers discernment to be more than rational, for it also has the mystery aspect. This means that its perception is attained fully by more than merely wisdom, intellectual and sensual ability. Although Hendricks (1994:30) does not rule out human output, he opines that discernment as a mystery requires more than human effort. Discernment involves the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making progressive judgement, by engaging a “truth-seeking mechanism which includes emotions, rational debates, discussions and consensus formation, consultation, especially Scripture and faith tradition, and the creative imagination” (Osmer 2005:285). The community of faith, as it does the exegesis of the world with its social realities and Scripture, which is the main source of faith and church tradition, must rely on the Triune God’s active presence and guidance through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, by his actively involved presence

and guidance, God helps the community of faith discern his will. In as much as the divine involvement may seem simplified, it arouses another challenge of discerning the significance of God's presence and guidance itself in various situations. It raises questions such as: How does one know the direction of God's guidance? How does one know that this is God directing me? What are the benefits of following God's guidance, especially in situations where following his Word seems to endanger one's life or livelihood? These questions do not have straightforward outlined guidelines or answers. This makes discernment in Christianity more divine than rational, as it takes the Triune God to reveal himself, teach believers to understand his omnipresence and means of guidance through "truth-seeking mechanisms" and the significance of following his ways (Osmer 2005:284).

### *2.8 Faith formation as a product of continued probing*

Although God reveals himself to his people, Osmer (1992:34) states that there is a limit to what is known about God. Many things about God remain a mystery, such that it is not even easy to understand the direction of his guidance and will in a given situation. The church will continue learning new things about God as he continues to reveal himself. The continued self-revelation makes doing theology an inexhaustible inquiry into what it means to have faith in God, who is and will remain a mystery. According to Migliore (1991:1), faith and inquiry are inseparable. Although viewed negatively, probing shows that human beings are active participants in receiving the revelation from God. In terms of inquiry, Moore (2011:378) mentions that "probing is a natural human act that takes many forms, and it is a shared activity of theological and religious studies, indeed of all education [which] leads to insight and to further probing ... It is a never-ending quest that encourages continued learning, wondering, and questioning". Probing is an inquisitive search for the truth of Scripture (the Bible) and faith traditions in view of the contexts. This is not done for curiosity's sake, but as a vital exercise of interpretation that contributes towards continued growth into knowing more about God and discerning his will within different contexts. Probing contributes to ceaseless growth in information, formation, Reformation, and transformation of Christians' faith practice. As one of the means of discerning God's will in situations, probing contributes towards one of the aims at strengthening the relationship with God and others as well

as the church's faithful witness in its respective contexts through word and action (Matthaei 2010:57).

The need for continued growth in Christian information, formation, Reformation, and transformation requires that congregants keep on growing in their interpretation, by probing Scripture and faith traditions, in order to know God's will, as they dialogue with realities in contexts. In the process of inquiry, faith as the matrix of meaning continues to undergo construction, negotiation, disassembling, and reconstruction during one's life, in an attempt to make sense of the world, life, and relationships with God and others (Radecke 2007:1). Moore (2011:378) views probing as an antidote to foolishness, for it prevents Christians from the dangers of not knowing or being lured into unexamined falsehood. This entails that knowledge must be examined, in order to establish its ability to edify the true reflection of the image of God and empower meaningful involvement in the *Missio Dei*. Faith formation empowers Christians with the abilities to keep on inquiring about issues related to the mystery of God and it encourages an ever-growing assurance of God's presence and guidance. To know more about God, strengthening faith and relationship with him requires that Christians keep on probing more into his mysteries. Congregants must be equipped with probing tools and skills in moments of striving to make sense of the world, their lives, and their relationships with God and others. The surety of continued formation of faith lies in the Christians' ability to probe Scripture and situations, with the aim of building belief systems that are capable of not only helping them uphold and grow in faith, but also effecting godliness in respective life situations. This is vital for Christians as "the light of the world and the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-16) called them to uphold their faith and serve as agents of transformation and change (Pillay 2017:1). As light thrives in darkness, its contrast, so Christians are expected to thrive in their faith praxis in the face of corruption, injustice, and all kinds of vices within their respective contexts.

Probing, as the means of faith formation, aims to reduce theological illiteracy and improve theological literacy levels so that congregants are empowered to think theologically (De Gruchy 2011:23). It empowers Christians with truth-seeking mechanisms to sift all the self-availing options in sober, complex, confusing, or contentious contexts, and be able to judge and determine the will of God among them (Osmer 2005:284, 288). This can successfully work if there is an

effort to strive for a lifelong ‘theological formation’, using every Church event as a means for improving ‘theological literacy’ levels and empowering congregants with probing skills for ‘thinking theologically’. This can be a success, if faith formation becomes a process of doing theology with the people for the sake of enabling them to engage their faith with life within a given social and cultural context. It is suggested that by doing theology with the people, in order to equip them better for the “fulfilment of their task of being the Church in the world” (De Gruchy 2011:23), rather than doing it for them or on their behalf.

### *2.9 Conclusion*

This chapter presented theological discussions and theories on faith and its formation. From a theological perspective, it highlighted faith formation as complex because faith is formed in the tension of its being of divine origin as well as a human corporate and individual responsibility. It discussed faith as both a gift from God and a human responsibility under God’s grace. The chapter also discussed the theory of integration, by integrating *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and the theological dimension of faith through the interpretive task of handling catechetical training. As a way of accounting for contexts, the chapter discussed the hermeneutical approach and discernment at both a communal and personal level as a means for the formation of faith. The hermeneutical approach and discernment mean that the process of forming faith is intertwined with everyday life as God is involved in the lives of believers in all life endeavours, even away from church gatherings. The church, with its structures, life, and practices, is tasked with empowering its members with discernment and hermeneutical skills, so that their faith continues to be formed in interaction with the paradoxes of life.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN RCZ PRACTICE OF FAITH FORMATION**

#### *3.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter based its discussion on the questions: What are the contemporary theological discussions and theories of faith and its formation? The objective of the chapter was to discuss contemporary theological studies and theories on faith and its formation. Faith formation, as strengthening one's relationship with God, self, and others, was debated as inseparable from the realities of life; hence, it goes beyond gatherings of congregants to include the hermeneutic approach to life and the discernment of God's direction in the interaction with the paradoxes encountered in daily lived experiences. Formation of faith, as an endless dialogue, entails that life issues encountered in context present opportunities for its continued growth. Theologically, faith was discussed as a gift from God and a human (personal and corporate) responsibility under God's grace. The chapter also discussed the hermeneutical and discernment activity as communal and personal means of forming faith.

The secondary question for this chapter is: What are the significances and weaknesses of contemporary RCZ faith formation practices in addressing the antagonistic dichotomy? This chapter aims to explore the significances and weaknesses of contemporary RCZ faith formation practices in addressing the challenges of the antagonistic dichotomy. These weaknesses and strengths are identified by assessing how the current tools and processes address cultural contexts. Using the hermeneutical theory, it attempts to identify the gaps and ignored potentials between Scripture and faith traditions, on the one hand, and the cultural context, on the other. Assessment was done, bearing in mind that the church as an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), through its faith formation practice, has to intentionally project the expected image of God to be formed. Assessment is also done to ensure that tools and processes serve as the means of witnessing to the grace of God in the world (Vorster & Van der Walt 2017:143). The church itself must as much as possible present the Gospel within respective contexts. The chapter also hermeneutically examines the historical background, the supporting structures, and the processes of faith formation texts. The strengths and weaknesses are determined by how RCZ faith formation facilitates the integration of theory and praxis, using Scripture, cultural contexts, and faith tradition.

The historical aspect discusses the formative background, bearing in mind that the current faith-forming frameworks are build-ups from past events and reflections. This was done with a view that faith formation structures, tools, and processes used to address contemporary contexts arise from specific historical backgrounds. It is impossible to be contextual in the contemporary set-up without reference to the historical contexts of the shared family backgrounds. The RCZ cannot totally divorce itself from a reformed faith family background in its quest to address contemporary issues. RCZ faith formation tools and processes are indispensably intertwined with its contributory historical events. In order to gain insight into the state of current tools for forming faith in the RCZ, the chapter begins by exploring the historical backgrounds that led to the building up of the Heidelberg Catechism, structures, and faith formation process.

Secondly, this chapter analyses the applicability of the *Buku La Katekisma*, an extract of the Heidelberg Catechism, as the main tool for forming faith within local and modern contexts. It also, to some extent, assesses the input of planned or unplanned, and programmed or unprogrammed, verbalised and non-verbalised activities of the RCZ to the formation of its members' faith as additional windows of God's revelation (Dreeckmeier 2005:55). Windows of revelation are defined as activities God uses to enlighten, strengthen, and enable growth among believers.

Thirdly, faith formation is discussed from the perspective of its process, means, and supporting structures. Under the process, means, and supporting structures, the chapter examines how the tools and contents of the RCZ are used, monitored, evaluated, and reinforced in the formation of faith of its members. It assesses the weaknesses and strengths of the process engaged in transmitting faith formation contents. The assessment was done, bearing in mind that the means of presenting content is as important to the effective shaping of people's faith as the content itself. The traditioning and interpretation were further assessed by the way in which they empower RCZ members in strengthening their relationship with God, others, and the self in the theological, heart, hand and feet dimensions of faith discussed in Chapter Two.

### *3.2 History of the Reformed Church in Zambia*

The Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ) started as mission work of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), Orange Free State Synod, South Africa, on 5 July 1899, at a place called *Magwero*, the eastern part of Zambia in Chipata, then called Fort Jameson (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:356). According to Cronje (1999:67) and Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:41), mission work started under the initiative of the local evangelist with permission from Mvera, the then Nyassaland mission headquarters for the DRC of Cape province, South Africa. He opted to spend his leave preaching the Gospel among the Ngoni people. Through him, Paramount Chief Mpezeni Ntuto Jere of the Ngoni people, who was incarcerated at Fort Maning, now called Mchinji district in Malawi, requested the DRC missionaries to preach the Gospel among his people. Due to the workload in Malawi and Zimbabwe, the DRC of the Cape province requested their counterparts of the Orange Free State province to fulfil Paramount Chief Mpezeni's request. In response to the request, the DRC of the Orange Free State sent Reverends P.J. Smith and J.M. Hofmeyr as the first missionaries. Accompanied by a delegation from Mvera, the missionaries arrived in Magwero on 5 July 1899 to start work in Chipata, Zambia.

The name *Magwero*, the first missionary station in Ngoni land under Paramount Chief Mpezeni, derives from the Chewa language. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:41) only links *Magwero* with the source of the Bua River. The word is plural for *gwero*, meaning origin, source, point of beginning, or cause. *Magwero* means that the place is a source, origin, or starting point of more than one thing. As a place, which the researcher has known since 1999, the area is hilly with a watershed on the east that extends into Malawi. The watershed is a source of the Bua River, on its eastern part on the Malawian side, the Dirika River, on its western part on the Zambian side, and the Kasambandola River, on the northern part between the Malawi and Zambia border, while the Champhala and Lutembwe Rivers are on the same northern part on the Zambian side. The springs that form the sources of the Dirika and Champhala Rivers are in the missionary land. Local people use the water from the two streams for gardening activities. The produce from the gardens is sold in Chipata City and, to some extent, in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. Due to perennial gardening activities, the place is beautiful and fresh in an evergreen environment.

### *3.3 Rethinking faith formation in the RCZ*

The call for rethinking the way of forming faith is very critical for the RCZ to exercise its formative powers effectively. Rethinking requires unbiased assessment of two aspects. The first aspect involves the RCZ's self-evaluation, where it has to identify its strengths and weaknesses in the faith formation practice within given cultural contexts. This exercise can be successfully conducted if the church gets feedback from within itself and its wider context. Getting information from the wider contexts may be a challenge if the RCZ misconceives the concept of a motto for its calling the world *Kuunika m'mdima* (light in the dark). The view of the church as the light and its object for evangelism as darkness may create a dominating and imposing mentality rather than transformation emanating from constructive dialogue. The misconception of *Kuunika m'mdima* to mean dominance of the illiterate may hinder the process of getting feedback from the community. The art of getting feedback from the surrounding community requires effective listening skills (D'Souza 1989:136). The feedback from outside gives the RCZ an opportunity to assess its impact from the recipients' perspective. Information from feedback increases self-awareness, and knowledge of the impact made, and it awakens awareness of what needs to change (D'Souza 1989:161), in order to attain a more applicable approach to faith formation.

The second aspect involves carrying out a thorough social analysis of the wider context. According to the USA Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation Technical Service Center (2001:1), social analysis includes examining people's values and beliefs to determine how people in their communities interpret the possible impacts of alternative actions on their day-to-day quality of life. In its quest to be increasingly contextual, the church should ceaselessly conduct a social analysis because people's cultural beliefs and values play a critical role in their response to faith formation processes. For example, the fear of being harmed by evil spiritual powers continues to influence the response to faith formation in Africa. Social analysis is done in an effort to know the needs, values, and beliefs of society, so that the church develops appropriate theological responses for the contexts. As the church's continuous self-assessment and analysis of its wider context, rethinking helps ascertain if the tools and processes of forming faith address the needs or struggles of the community suitably. The RCZ's continued self- and social analysis provides the full picture of what has to be worked on for improving its faith formation practice.

Rethinking reinforces the church's mandate to create an atmosphere for God to redeem his people in the midst of the power patterns of sin and alienation (corruption, degrading environment, and so on) at work in societies. It enables the church to avoid being part of the power pattern of sin or a passive observer and rather be actively involved in fighting evil systems, structures, and practices. Through rethinking, the church learns to use the possessed formative powers correctly, by successfully nurturing people's faith, and shaping the quality and character of their spirit as a way of liberation from sinful patterns and practices. In order to attain liberation, the faith formation process needs to embrace critical reflection which is vital for ownership, continued reformation, and faithfulness to more radical and counter-evil power patterns (Dykstra 1996:252-253; Mattheai 2010:57). The phrase 'formative power' seems to contrast the Calvinist view that the church is founded and sustained by God through his act of election, justification, and sanctification. The formative powers of the communities of faith are simply the means to create environments and opportunities for God to transform his people (Dykstra 1996:252; Mattheai 2010:57). Both the transforming and formative power of the church come from God. The church is the means whereby God is actively involved in the mission of transforming the world. Only God has the transforming power which he transmits, as the church provides a formative environment through its nurturing communion, structures, and practices.

For the RCZ to rethink its faith formation approach, it has to understand its role in God's transforming mission. The church plays an active participatory role in God's process of forming faith, by creating intentional processes of developing identities and vocation (Mattheai 2010:57) as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16). The term 'participate' signifies that God forms faith among people, with the church as his medium of necessitation. Therefore, God works out the transforming mission within and through the church's faithful and devoted services of witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Vorster and Van der Walt (2017:123), the church is created by the Triune God and he involves it in executing his eternal plan (*Missio Dei*) "to unite all things under the headship of Christ".

The term 'intentional' points to the fact that the church is not a passive but rather an active participant in the *Missio Dei*, as it creates an environment and presents opportunities conducive to lives to be transformed by God through the processes of faith formation (Mattheai 2010:57). The

fact that the church is an active participant in the faith formation process, through the creation of an environment that is conducive to growth, entails that it has to take full responsibility for the frameworks and processes it uses. The assessment of faith formation is not about assessing the way in which God works through the church because his ways and thoughts will always be inscrutable (Isaiah 55:8). It is about examining how effective the church framework, tools, structures, and processes of forming faith are in creating contexts and opportunities for God to touch lives. The RCZ is to rethink its faith formation approach, by reflecting on its effectiveness in building congregants' personal relationship with God, the environment, and fellow human beings.

### *3.4 Reformation era, the main background for the RCZ faith formation*

The theologies and theologians of the Reformation era have mainly influenced the RCZ's structures, processes, practices, and tools. These historical theological reflections continue to shape contemporary teachings, practices, and process of Christianisation in the RCZ. This entails that faith formation, by implication, has a rich history of reformed tradition through the contributions of the thoughts of many reformers. The list of theologians or reformers is endless. This research work highlights the theological reflections and practices of Martin Luther and John Calvin who were selected because the influence of their theological reflections and practice are evident in the RCZ's approach to faith formation. In other words, the selection is based on the RCZ's inclination towards the reformed faith tradition, whose beginning is in Martin Luther's critique of the medieval church that was further developed by John Calvin's reflections.

#### *3.4.1 Faith formation in Martin Luther's era*

According to Steinmetz (2004:253), reformation was characterised by continuity and discontinuity from the Roman Catholic. Among some discontinuities, reformation introduced doctrines of justification by faith, the authority of Scripture, and vocation which characterise Protestantism in all its diversity (Veith & College 2011:119). In order to enforce the discontinuities, Luther and his fellow pioneers of Protestantism assumed two faith formation tasks. The first task was to form the faith of the younger generation. It was an era of orienting the younger generation into the newly introduced practice of faith. The second task was to reform the faith of the older generation, which was believed to have been incorrectly formed. To the older generation in Luther's time, formation

of faith involved dislodging from the perceived wrongly formed kind of faith and reorienting into the new and correct understanding of faith. This radical approach was influenced by an opinion that the medieval church suffered from misguided and uncritical commitment to wrong principles (Steinmetz 2004:254). Martin Luther's Reformation movement, with its associated formation agenda, was inspired by his personal spiritual struggle. He abandoned his pursuit of a Doctorate in Law against his father's wish to join a strict Christian monastery life out of concern for his own relationship with God (Thomson 1976:4-7). His move into monastery life was a response to the teachings of the church that righteousness before God is merited by abandoning all things and joining the monastery life. As an option to monastery life, it was taught that the church had inherited a rich treasure of holiness through the devoted lives of the saints, which could be attained by observing spiritual ceremonies (Thomson 1976:4-7).

Luther's abandoning the study of law for a monastery life did not earn him the yearned spiritual satisfaction. Hence, he concluded that merited salvation was not the right means of relating with God. The perceived failure of the merited formation method of monastery life to bring about spiritual satisfaction made Luther continue with his quest for how one can be righteous before God. Contrary to merited salvation, which places human beings as earners of the right relationship with God, Luther, based on Pauline literature, discovered that we are justified by faith. Justification by faith emphasises that God is the one who takes the initial step towards our salvation, to which we respond by faith. He thus concluded that righteousness is not merited, but rather God-given through forgiveness of sin out of his grace, which is responded to by faith. Through Luther's discovery of justification by faith, God, his gracious activity events were placed at the centre of salvation rather than the human efforts to attain it. Human works was understood not as a contributor to the salvation, but as a human response to God's grace through vocation.

Luther realised that human beings are liberated, restored, and recreated by God's grace only. Preaching Christ was viewed as the means of feeding, making righteous, setting free, and saving the soul of a believer (Kolb 2007:5-7). Luther's discovery of justification by faith led him to criticise the church's teaching on merited salvation as misleading (Thomson 1976:4). He viewed the medieval church as the misguided body of Christ whose members were uncritically committed to wrong principles (Steinmetz 2004:254). As a way of providing the correct guidance, Luther

intended to reform the medieval church from within. He first attempted to reorient the misguided adults into the correct teaching about salvation and practices. He then formed the faith of the young ones with what he viewed as true teachings (Steinmetz 2004:254). The young ones had to be protected from incorrect or misleading teachings of the misled medieval church. With this view, forming faith in Luther's time took on a reactive and proactive form, for it was done as corrective and preventive measures. It is obvious that his excommunication led him to change his initial plan of attempting to reform the medieval church from within, rather than forming a splinter Christian group.

To speed up the correction and prevention agenda, Martin Luther promoted both home-based and church-based faith formation, with a view that family is the most convenient learning environment (Gangel & Benson 2002:139). He considered a home to be a suitable environment for demonstrating and observing faith. Luther believed that a verbal explanation of biblical teachings was inadequate to shape faith; hence, the need to communicate the Gospel by means of observable illustrations and examples. Matthew 5:15 speaks of putting the light on the lampstand and not under a bowl so that it gives light to all who are in the house. Just as light has a perceivable influence on human life, the Gospel should be communicated through observable illustrations and examples. He was also of the view that learning should be interesting, reinforced by concrete examples and observation, rather than done in abstract. In an effort to achieve this, he introduced the methodology of imagery, illustration, and repetition. This methodology engaged learners to participate in their learning process by observing, listening, and verbalising. This method was more engaging, as it enabled learners to learn using more than one sense. Despite the introduction of such, he preferred internalising the Word of God out of comprehension to information overload. Martin Luther also encouraged reflective learning under love-moderated discipline, while placing the Bible at the centre of teaching (Gangel & Benson 2002:139:139).

### *3.4.2 Faith formation in John Calvin's era*

Roman Catholic and Anabaptist form the contextual background of John Calvin's theological teachings and formation. Calvin believed that the Roman Catholic was a church and that its members were Christians in need of reformation from within (Thomson 1976:23). For Calvin, reformation was a correction of doctrinal errors and abuses of power by the church authorities.

The main reasons for reformation were to rekindle the divine light of truth, exhume the buried Word of God, re-embrace the abandoned virtues of Christ, restore the dignity of the undermined office of the minister, and priesthood of believers (Thomson 1976:28). The reason for reformation, combined with the Protestants' theological direction, had a direct influence on the practice of faith formation. Calvin's theology revolved around the sovereignty of God, his predestination, and total depravity of man which emphasises that mankind is totally sinful with no trace of goodness (Gangel & Benson 2002:145). He agreed with Luther that mankind is totally depraved, inclined to, and tainted by sin, and incapable of becoming righteous before God, unless he himself justifies them freely by his grace. Apart from a theological interpretation of the Christian faith, Calvin worked with structure, even beyond the church, to form Christians' faith. The following are some of the structures Calvin used for faith formation.

#### *3.4.2.1 Home as a structure of formation in Calvin's time*

In Calvin's time, faith formation highly esteemed the catechetical training for children. Children who were baptised as infants received catechism training at home, at school, and in the church as a way of preparing them for professing their Christian faith and admission to the Lord's Table by early adolescence. Children under catechetical training had to memorise a catechism believed to be a summary of Christian doctrine compiled for them by Calvin (Ochoa 2019:122). The memorising was done with an understanding that the Holy Spirit will illuminate children toward knowing God, viewed as the main aim of Christian life. It is claimed that catechism formation was successful such that the number of people on church discipline reduced from ten per cent in 1564 to one per cent by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of faith instruction transcended the acquisition of intellectual-assertive knowledge of God and his Word, as it also involved the declaration of the Christian faith and the application of the acquired knowledge in everyday life. It also focused on the relationship with God and other believers (Ochoa 2019:122).

#### *3.4.2.2 The consistory as a structure for faith formation*

Kingdon (2004:305-313) claims that John Calvin constituted the consistory as an added institutional structure separate from the family. The consistory was a structure mandated to monitor or supervise the content and educational processes for public formation of reformed faith. Its role transcended the monitoring of catechetical training, public theological education, and

discussions, as it also ensured adherence to the practice of the Christian faith. Later on, it also took an arbitrary role, with the mandate to reconcile members who differed from each other. However, with the passage of time, the influence of the consistory decreased, as it seemed to have lost track of its original responsibility of monitoring the educational system for the formation of a reformed faith. In its latter time, the consistory tended to be more of an arbitrating structure or a court than its initial intent of forming the reformed faith that it became involved even in petty issues, often with unreasonable judgements. However, at the time of its effectiveness, the consistory facilitated the growth of reformation and its faith in Geneva.

### *3.5 Faith formation in the Reformed Church in Zambia in the missionary era*

The earliest fruit of the RCZ faith formation framework and processes is evident in the baptism of its first nine Christians on 11 December 1904 at the first missionary station known as *Magwero* (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:73). Although much has changed, the contemporary faith formation process developed from the one laid down by the missionaries. However, from the outset, there are indications of African Christians living on borrowed theology, because the names of the first nine baptismal candidates (Lazaro, Filippo, Yosefe, Gabriele, William, Yohane, Bartimeyu, and Andreyia) are not African. The fact that their original names are withheld (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:73) affects faith formation, as it seems to suggest that Christianity was an escapism from or disowning of local culture. It is insinuated that a list of names, preferably from the Bible, was circulated, from which prospective baptismal candidates had to pick their Christian names. Verstraelen-Gilhuis does not mention whether the list of names was released on demand from the baptismal candidates or the missionaries. However, although the change of names seems to be a minor issue, it had a strong self-perception to baptised candidates on what it meant to be a Christian in an African community. None of the baptised members had a name from the local language, as all of them assumed foreign names, which were pronounced using the local dialect. Even if the change was not compulsive by law, these alien names clothed in a local dialect suggest one of the two or both influencing factors. The first factor is the possibility that, at that point, Africa had already started experiencing the effects of colonialism such that some Africans had foreign names. The second factor is linked to Beyers' (2010:6) claim that missionaries evangelised using a European culture imperialism and demonised African culture. With this attitude, it is possible that missionaries considered African names demonic such that they had renounced and replaced them

with the so perceived 'Christian' names at baptism. Christianity was deprived of its Africanness, as attested to in the antagonistic dichotomy because the change of names seemed to suggest that belonging to the Christian faith means a shift from Africanness to a foreign identity.

According to Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:73), the first baptised members underwent three structured and hierarchical stages before being baptised, namely hearers' class, which lasted three months, followed by a two-year baptism class, and finally the six-month *klass la papfupi* (class preparing for baptism). Progression to the next stage involved proper investigation on the candidates' knowledge and spiritual life. This investigation was done, first, by the teacher or the church elder and, finally, the missionary. Although the first nine baptised candidates underwent intense baptism class, which lasted for almost three years, coupled with a change of names, four of them ceased to be members of the church. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:73) records that, typical of African culture, Filipo, William, and Johane became polygamous, whereas Bartimeyu was expelled for drinking beer. These four, who were among the first nine to be baptised successfully, underwent all the intensive progressive scrutiny that tested their knowledge of the lessons taught and their lives by both the teacher or the church elder and the missionary. They still held on to Africanism. It is possible that some candidates did not qualify for baptism because they failed the three progressive scrutiny processes. It is not clear what criteria the missionaries used to determine a person's life as worthy or not fit for baptism at that point.

Lamulo 128 (1a) in Zolamulira ndi Zopangana Za Eklesia wa Cikonzedwe M'Zambia (RCZ constitution and resolutions) indicates six criteria for admittance into the catechumen class. First, a candidate for catechumen class had to be not less than fourteen years of age. Secondly, the candidates had to indicate a wholehearted repentance from evil to following Jesus Christ. It is not clear how they determined who had repented or not. Thirdly, they should not have been polygamous by marrying more than one wife or not being the first wife. Fourthly, the candidate was not married to a virgin girl. Traditionally, some girls were engaged at birth, thereby growing up as someone's wife up to the day when they were officially handed over to their husbands. Fifthly, the aspirant had to know how to read and be in possession of the *Buku La Katekisma*. Should the aspirant fail to read, the sixth requirement was that the pastor or evangelist had to confirm that, despite all efforts made, the aspirant for baptism had failed to read *chifukwa ca*

*kusowadi nzeru*. The Chewa phrase *chifukwa ca kusowadi nzeru* means “because of total privation of intelligence”. This implies that the ability to read was one of the criteria for a candidate to qualify for baptism.

The duration from baptism to cessation of church membership for Filipino, William, Johane, and Bartimeyu is unknown. In addition, the contributing factors to polygamous marriage are not recorded. In this case, it can only be assumed that, although the four went through all the processes successfully, it is possible that they continued to wrestle with unaddressed African yearnings deeply rooted within them. It seems that the impact of Africanness as ethnic map persisted as a decisive factor; hence, their reverting to the deeply rooted yearnings of an African (Nsamanang & Tchombe 2011:82-83).

The missionaries arrived when the four candidates had already learnt and been formed in their ethnic cultures. According to Hofstede *et al.* (2010:4-5), “as soon as certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting have established themselves in one’s mind”, they must be unlearnt before learning something different. It is understood that unlearning old patterns is more difficult than learning for the first time. The change of names, passing through the three phases comprised of *klasi lapatari* before and after *utsonyezo* (confirmation) and, finally, *klasi lapapfupi* did not address the embedded cultural world views. It is important that faith formation addresses or equips members to handle the issue of being a Christian in Africa and real-life challenges theo-centrally.

### *3.5.1 The success of faith formation during the missionary era*

Despite the disappointing stories that four of the first nine Christians who were baptised on 11 December 1904 ceased to be members of the church, due to polygamous marriages and beer drinking, the missionaries recorded a number of successful stories. One success story could begin with the remaining five members out of those who were baptised on 11 December 1904, although hardly anything has currently been recorded about them afterwards. However, not all is lost, as some of the impacts of the missionaries’ faith formation approaches are still evident. Among many recorded successes of faith formation, the research highlighted the following.

#### *3.5.1.1 The story of Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri*

Despite the disappointing stories of the four who were among the first nine Christians to be baptised under the missionaries, the account of Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri is very encouraging. He was baptised in 1907 by Reverend Smith at *Magwero*. Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri progressed through the process of being a teacher and an evangelist and he, finally, became the second RCZ indigenous member to be ordained as Reverend under the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in 1933 (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:73, 172). Cronje (1999:14) describes him as an outstanding person, while Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:172) writes about him as a “faithful preacher of the Word” dedicated to service, and a humble man. Unlike the first nine to be baptised and whose African names were replaced, Petro maintained his Chewa name ‘Pereka’, which means ‘to give’ or ‘to deliver’. Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri shows elements of living as a Christian within African cultural contexts. The maintenance of an African name, while assuming the name Petro, may be considered a sign of accepting the Christian faith within his Chewa identity. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:73) states that, a day before baptism, he had picked the name Shadrake. He received the name Petro via a dream, which is a typical African way of revelation. He dreamt of a man raising him out of the grave and naming him Petro. Luckily, Rev. Smith approved the name.

Education was one of the four basic missionary approaches to evangelisation. Petro Pereka Phiri displayed the character of a risk-taker in his contribution to the success of missionary work in education. While working as a teacher under the missionaries at *Magwero*, Petro Pereka Phiri used culture to draw the attention of his learners. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:172) records incidences where he used to dance with a mask on his face to draw the attention of the youngsters. Later on, he took the mask off and started teaching them the alphabet. As a Chewa from Kanthungulu village in Chief Mkanda, it was a huge risk to dance with a mask on one’s face to draw attention, to remove it, and to begin to teach later on. The Chewa people do not allow anyone to imitate even the sounds produced by *nyau*, their traditional dancer, such that removing the mask in the presence of the crowd was a great atrocity against his own tribe. He thus risked his life, by using African traditional culture in the mission of advancing the literacy levels through education.

#### *3.5.1.2 Four strategy approaches to faith formation*

As stated earlier, *Magwero*, the source of RCZ, is a watershed, the source of rivers whose water benefits reach far and wide. Just as the benefits of the water from the watershed in *Magwero* go

beyond the locals, as it reaches many people, so is the impact of the missionary work. Cronje (1999:54) explains that the missionaries approached their work using four strategies, which yielded far-reaching results possibly beyond their expectations. During the 1949 Golden Jubilee celebrations, a four-sided monument was erected at Madzimoyo with one of the mission approaches inscribed on each of the four plaques fixed on each side of the monument. The four strategies indicate the holistic approach to mission work with absolute respect for the totality of a human being. They also show that the missionaries were interested in the well-being of the evangelised people on earth rather than waiting for heaven. The approach also indicates that the missionaries viewed their targeted audience not as objects, but as people to care about. The four plaques are described as follows.

The first plaque depicts the approach of providing education in schools, symbolised by a teacher (Cronje 1999:54). This approach resulted in the opening of a number of schools. These included Madzimoyo, the school where the fourth republican President of Zambia, the late Mr Rupiah Bwezani Banda, was taught, and Katete Secondary School, which has produced a number of prominent Zambian government officials such as the former chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, Judge Esau Chulu. One of the most successful stories of the missionaries' contributions to education concerns the school for the blind which was informally opened in 1924 in Nyanje. In 1930, for unrecorded reasons, the school was moved from Nyanje to Magwero, where it is still located (Cronje 1999:67-68). In 1930, the government of Northern Rhodesia, currently Zambia, recognised the school. In Magwero, the school drew learners from Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as it was the only school in Central Africa. Modelled on the Magwero School for the Blind, other similar schools were opened in Central African countries.

The second plaque shows two strong arms lifting up two weak hands, depicting the ministry of healing those who are ill. As a way of fulfilling this approach, missionaries built a hospital in Nyanje in 1951 and one in Kamoto in 1960 (Cronje 1999:54, 67-68). Nyanje Hospital remained the only hospital in the Sinda District until 2021 when the government built a hospital. The hospital offers service to people from as far as Mozambique. Currently, the Kamoto Hospital remains the only one in Mambwe District. Apart from these two hospitals, the missionaries also opened a

leprosarium (hospital for leprosy patients) on an unknown date as well as a psychiatric hospital at Nsadzu mission station in the Chadiza District. These were opened to cater for the physical and mental health of the people in the areas of their mission work. The health of the people was regarded as vital.

The third plaque is a symbol represented by a cob of maize (Cronje 1999:54). The mealie meal from ground maize is used to cook Zambia's staple food, *nsima*. This symbol stands for poverty reduction, by providing skills training such as carpentry and bricklaying as well as boosting the food security, by introducing new ways of agriculture. As means of leading by example in agriculture and creating financial sustainability for the church, the missionaries secured farms for Magwero, Katete, Nyanje, Hofmeyer, Merwe, Nsadzu, Madzimoyo, Kamoto, Tamanda and Marlhebe. These are among the earliest established congregations. This shows that the missionaries' objective was a holistic formation of the people in their mission work.

The fourth plaque represents the approach to preaching the Gospel. It illustrates a woman in prayer. By preaching the Gospel, new mission stations were opened. In order to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel, evangelists were identified among the local people, some of whom were trained to become pastors. The RCZ has grown from one mission station in 1899 to nineteen presbyteries and over two hundred RCZ congregations spread over the ten provinces of Zambia, in 2022. It has also grown from two missionaries in 1899 to one hundred and eighty-one pastors and thirty-eight evangelists by 2022. By 2020, there were fourteen pastors with doctorates, a full professor, and three associate professors (Reformed Church in Zambia 2021:50).

However, this numerical increase, spread over diverse localities and ethnicity, brought about new challenges for the RCZ. Among many of the challenges the RCZ faces, this study focuses on the aspect of faith formation, which still remains foreign. Although the effects of the foreignness of faith formation will be reflected on in detail, as the research explores its weaknesses, it should already be known that Chewa remains a dominant language. Until recently, documents such as the church order and the minutes for all council meetings (including Synod) were in the Chewa language. Out of acknowledgement that the church spread to other ethnic groups, the RCZ resolved to uphold English as its official language. However, the remaining challenge is that hymns and the

*Buku La Katekisma* are in Malawian Chewa, a different language to the one spoken in Zambia. These documents are used countrywide, with the exception of the Mbala district, where they have been translated into Mambwe-Lungu. Unfortunately, some pastors use Chewa, even in areas of other ethnic languages. Although the RCZ from the missionary era emphasises the holistic approach in proclaiming the Gospel, it needs to examine its anthropology that shapes the transformational mission in its quest to form the faith of its members (Samuel 2020:81). The antagonistic dichotomy between some of its members indicates that more needs to be done in terms of RCZ faith formation tools, practices, and processes.

### *3.6 Contemporary RCZ faith formation tools*

Faith formation practices and processes in the RCZ are guided by the way in which it defines and determines the means of governing itself. Due to its subscription to the Reformed faith and theology, Article 4 of the RCZ Constitution, By-laws and Procedure states that the denomination is founded on the Bible, as the holy and infallible Word. This concept of the centrality of the Bible is symbolically exhibited by the tradition of positioning the pulpit at the centre of the front part of all RCZ church buildings and the practice of sharing the Word of God at the beginning of each gathering, as enshrined in the By-law and Procedure (BP) 55b. It emphasises a liturgy that puts God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit at the centre of worship. Article 4 further shows that its doctrinal standard is based on the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort (1618-1619).

Article 4 also refers to the Apostles, the Nicene Creed, and Athanasius as the creeds which the church recognises and to which it subscribes. The three creeds are said to be the means whereby the RCZ expresses its connectedness to the body of Christ. According to the *Buku La Katekisma* (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:361), the universal body of Christ is not only all-inclusive by way of incorporating people from different backgrounds according to their respective race and gender, for it also includes the dead, the living, and the yet to be born who had, have, and will respond to God's free will election through faith in Christ. In the *Buku La Katekisma*, the catholicity of the church is portrayed in two forms. The first concept is internal or RCZ with its past, present, and future in their respective ethnic backgrounds. This interpretation of catholicity implies that the church transcends the current membership, as it is extended to

include the deceased who belonged to the RCZ and those who will join in the future. It emphasises the RCZ as being an inherited and present living organism that has to be passed on to the next generations. Recital of the creed serves as a reminder of a shared reformed faith with its current, past, and future members.

The second concept of the Roman Catholic Church is ecumenical relationships. By its willingness to have ecumenical relationships, the Church acknowledges that it is wider and bigger than the RCZ. It is acknowledged that the RCZ is the church because the church is a local, denominational, and universal Christian community (Migliore, 1991:189). The RCZ is a complete church that is linked to the worldwide body of Christ Jesus, even to denominations of a different faith tradition to the reformed faith. It includes the RCZ and members from other global denominations who have responded to God's elective grace by faith in Christ. However, it is clear that the RCZ does not have an open-ended ecumenical relationship, as it divides the Roman Catholic Church into *mipingo imene tigwirizana nayo* (denominations whose doctrines and practices of faith agree with ours) and *mipingo imene sitigwirizana nayo* (denominations whose doctrines and practices of faith do not agree with ours). Article 42(1) of the RCZ Constitution affirms that the church may be affiliated to any ecumenical church organisations that are in tandem with its teachings and beliefs. The doctrines serve as boundaries.

These differences are not only drawn as means of those rejected or included, but they serve as borderlines determining the strength of the RCZ's ecumenical ties with other denominations. According to Article 42(4), the RCZ is open to collaborations "with other institutions such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) on matters that promote human dignity and justice". Although there is no clear policy, the RCZ grant-aided schools and hospital show evidence of partnering with the government, especially in terms of its diaconal obligation. They are called grant-aided because government supplements the church in running its hospitals and schools by means of grants and by paying salaries to workers. In some cases, the government permits the church to carry out community projects through its diaconal services. This shows that the RCZ may willingly partner with other organisations on matters of common humanitarian interest, even if their teachings and beliefs are not in harmony with its reformed faith. Article 42(4) also states that the "RCZ shall not enter into any permanent legally

binding agreements except those that are ad hoc” in nature. The legally binding agreement with other NGOs and FBOs will be temporary, based on a particular purpose. In its quest for ecumenical relationships, the RCZ prioritises fellow believers in Christ from other denominations who also share the reformed faith background, regardless of their geographical localities in the world.

In the acceptable ecumenical relationships, the RCZ respects the historical aspect of catholicity, for the church transcends the present generation as it includes the dead and the yet to be born who responded to God’s elective grace through faith in Christ. Through this concept, the church in its past, present, and future remains cohesive and interdependent. The interdependence points to the fact that the present and the future proceed from the past work of God in and through his church, while the nature of the body of Christ in posterity will complete the past and present church. Enshrining and reciting the creed express the RCZ’s relatedness to Christendom, other denominations, and its congregation. It is also considered to be the means of connecting the present to the past and the future, the local congregation to the universal church.

The reference to the above four doctrinal standards and the possible adoption of the new confessions clearly indicates that the RCZ, even in its quest to keep on reforming, will never get detached from the historical past of its reformed family. The use of the word ‘standard’ simply indicates that the mentioned four doctrines will remain faith frames of reference guiding all Synod Council debates in the process of attempting to incorporate new ones. This clearly suggests that the RCZ will assess newly introduced doctrinal standards through the lenses of the accumulative wisdom of the reformed family as enshrined in approved Creeds, the Canons of Dort, the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the Belgic and Westminster confessions.

The word ‘standard’ further implies that the explanation of the Bible in the Canons of Dort, the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the Belgic and Westminster confessions function as the measure for correctness of preaching, administration of sacraments, and all faith-forming activities of the RCZ. By-law and Procedure (BP) 54a states that “[t]he doctrine of the Church as founded in the Bible as the Word of God and as explained in the Doctrinal Standards of the Church (RCZ Constitution Article 4) is the foundation of the service of the Word, Sacraments and all activities of the Church”. Therefore, the doctrinal standards function as both the measure for the possible

adoption of the yet to be introduced doctrines and the life, service, and activities of the RCZ. The inclusion of all the activities of the church means that the doctrinal standards and the approved creeds function as the frame of the RCZ faith formation process. This indicates that the RCZ benefits from the historical developments of the Reformed faith's traditional doctrinal standards and creeds. It is obvious that the history in the reformed faith plays a critical role in the present state of the RCZ. As a way of reinforcement, during both the ordination into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and the commissioning of evangelists, candidates are called upon to indicate their acceptance and willingness to adhere to, abide by, and promote the doctrinal standards. This pledge of allegiance to doctrinal standards is repeated during inductions into a new congregation or during a special assignment. Elders are responsible for ensuring the purity of the ministry of the Word (teaching and preaching the Word of God) in conformity to the accepted doctrinal standards as frames of reference in mind (Reformed Church in Zambia 2013:60, 78).

Although the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort (1618-19) are cited as official doctrinal standards and subscriptions to the three creeds, with an indication of openness to other confessions that may be approved by its Synod Council in its practice, the RCZ emphasises only the Heidelberg Catechism and the Apostles Creed as tools for forming faith. The Heidelberg Catechism is used as a tool for preparing new converts and others for the public profession of faith during the administration of the sacrament of baptism and covenant for those baptised as infants (BP57a). The Catechism continues to be the means of shaping faith, even after baptism or covenant, as BP55d encourages the preaching of at least six sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism in one year. The Heidelberg Catechism is thus used as either a point of reference by way of conforming to it as a doctrinal standard, or as the main resource of the sermon. This implies that the RCZ is strongly inclined towards the history behind the Heidelberg Catechism and the Apostles Creed as lifelong tools for teaching and shaping members' faith. The exploration on the history of faith formation will focus on the history behind the Heidelberg Catechism.

### *3.6.1 The Buku La Katekisma as RCZ faith formation tool*

The *Buku La Katekisma*, containing extracts from the Heidelberg Catechism, was compiled for the Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa with the RCZ, Africa Reformed Church in

Zimbabwe, Church of Central Africa Presbytery Synods of Nkhoma in Malawi and Harare in Zimbabwe as affiliates (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:2). It confirms the claim by Dreyer (2014:1) that “Heidelberg Catechism remains an authentic expression of reformed faith which different denominations identify with”. It is maintained as confession, as content for catechetical instruction, and as a unifying factor of a number of denominations. As alluded to earlier, the RCZ subscribes, on paper, to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, and the Canons of Dorts (1618-19) as doctrinal standards guiding all the activities and the interpretation of Scripture. In fact, only an extract of the Heidelberg Catechism, as it is in the *Buku La Katekisma*, is used as a guideline for the service of the Word, the Sacraments and all the activities of the church (RCZ Constitution Article 4). This means that, while valuing the centrality of Scripture, the RCZ carries out the service of preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, governance, and all its activities with a strong inclination to the Heidelberg Catechism. The vast majority of the RCZ congregants have hardly any or no exposure to other doctrinal standards apart from the extract of the Heidelberg Catechism as it is enshrined in the *Buku La Katekisma*.

### *3.6.1.1 Contents and contexts of the Buku La Katekisma*

Although Magwero is the first RCZ mission station established on 5 July 1899 among the Ngoni people, the *Buku La Katekisma* is written in Malawian Chewa and is divided into seven instructional components.

#### *i. Kateksma*

This section contains the basic instructions on Christian doctrines in the form of questions and answers, with some commentary on the answers. It consists of fifty-two questions and answers extracted from the Heidelberg Catechism with its pattern of three divisions.

The first part consists of questions 1 to 20. Questions 1 and 2 begin with a description of who a blessed person is and explains how one can be blessed. It opens with the question: *Munthu wodala ndiye muntu otani?* (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:4-8). This question is a pattern of the first question in the Heidelberg Catechism: What is your only comfort in life and in death? (Hundeshagen 2004:60). The literal translation of *munthu wodala ndiye muntu otani?* is

“who is a blessed person?”. This is followed by a discussion about the misery of a person, beginning with the means whereby a person can know or become aware of sin and its consequences from questions 3 to 15 (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:8-46). The Holy Spirit and the Word of God are identified as the means of knowing or becoming aware of sin and its consequences. However, the Holy Spirit is not discussed in this part, as it only explains the Ten Commandments and the summary of the commandments by means of questions and answers for each one of them. This part ends with a discussion about the total depravity of man after the fall and its consequential condemnation. This is dealt with under questions 16 to 20 (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:47-61). The end of the first segment, with the misery of man, gives a good transition to the second part which deals with the redemption of man.

The second segment is covered by questions 23 to 46. It starts with an introduction of Jesus Christ as the sole Redeemer of mankind from sin and continues to discuss the issue of repentance and faith. It also gives a synopsis of the doctrine of the Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), the sacraments (Holy Communion and baptism), and the church following the pattern of the Apostles’ Creed (Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:61-134).

The third segment is covered by questions 47 to 52 and explores the issue of thanksgiving. This part explains that a Christian has to do good works as a way of thanking God for the gracious salvation received, vivifying faith, and evangelism. Good works include stewardship, prayer, studying of Scripture, charity, and evangelism. These works qualify as good if they are in tandem with God, according to his Word, honour him, and are conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:134-150). Finally, it also contains a summarised catechism for the elderly and consists of ten questions with brief answers (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:151-152).

## *ii. Mbiri yopatulika*

This section explains the Bible and God as its source because he inspired it. It contains stories and backgrounds of both the Old and the New Testaments. It highlights issues in the inter-testaments period as an additional build-up formulation to the New Testament (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:153-336). This section does not highlight scholarly study which

emphasises the involvement of Africa and Africans in the Bible story as a basis for Africa's ownership of the Gospel.

*iii. Mbiri ya Eklessia*

This section provides a brief history of the church, starting from its inception in Palestine, through the persecution under the Roman Empire, the freedom of the church after the repentance of Emperor Constantine, the medieval period, the reformation up to the work of John Calvin, and ending its segmented backgrounds of the denominations that subscribe to the *Buku La Katekisma* (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:337-358). The history of the RCZ is covered under denominations that subscribe to the *Buku La Katekisma*. However, it does not account for the evangelist who first preached the Gospel nor does it provide details of what led Paramount Chief Mpezeni Ntuto Jere to call for missionaries to start their work among the Ngoni people.

*iv. Za Eklesia*

This section gives a brief account on ecclesiology. It explains the meaning, nature, forms, and functions of the church. It also explains the church's governance system, as carried out through the congregation, the presbytery, and the Synod Councils. Finally, it briefly describes the functions of the offices of the pastor, the elder, and the deacon (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:359-372).

*v. Roman Catholicism, other religions, and mipatuko*

This section is divided into three parts and assumes the apologetic role against Roman Catholicism, sects, and other religions. The first is an apologetic approach that distinguishes Roman Catholicism teachings from Reformed Protestantism, especially on topics such as the sacraments, Holy Communion, purgatory, salvation, forgiveness of sins, veneration of the saints, and the office of the Pope.

The second part is known in Chewa as *mipatuko*, a plural form of the word *mpatuko*. The word *mpatuko* is a construct of the word *patuka*, which means branching out of the initial way, to be exceptional, or to diverge. The phrase *mipingo ya mipatuko* refers to the churches that were formed

as having a divergent doctrinal understanding. It classifies Pentecostal Churches, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventists, Zionists, and Ethiopian Indigenous Churches as *mipingo ya mipatuko* (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:373-389). The Chewa word *mipatuko* has influenced how the RCZ relates with other churches and treats members from *mipingo ya mipatuko*. It appears that the phrase *mipingo ya mipatuko* is used with a negative connotation, implying the untoward. However, under this section, the *Buku La Katekisma* highlights the main dividing lines between reformed faith teachings and each of the outlined groups or churches classified as *mpatuko*.

The third part focuses on *chikunja*. *Chikunja* is a construct of the Chewa word *kunja*, which means "outside". The word *chikunja* in the *Buku La Katekisma* refers to all forms of worship other than the Christian faith. It acknowledges the existence of other religions and their respective forms of worship. Under *chikunja*, the *Buku La Katekisma* discusses the fundamental beliefs of Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). However, ATR is not mentioned as explicitly as Islam, but it is deduced by reference to *Nyau* as *chikunja*. The mention of the *Nyau* dance, as one of the practices for *chikunja*, indicates that this part was written with the *Chewa* people in mind. *Nyau* is a specific and sacred traditional dance for the *Chewa* people.

vi. *Other instructions on Christian life*

This part is an initial introduction to the Christian faith, possibly in preparation for *utsonyezo* (confirmation), because the outline of the teachings contains the vows made during the confirmation ceremony. Its contents consist of teachings on repentance, temptations, how to help a new believer in Christ, how to do a personal study of the Bible, personal prayers, giving towards God's work, family devotion, evangelism, and the importance of fellowship with other believers at church (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:390-400).

vii. *Chionjezero*

*Chionjezero* is a Chewa word which simply means "supplements" or "additions" such as ideas, information, or anything else. In the *Buku La Katekisma*, *chionjezero* is used to refer to appendices or to an appendix. Under *chionjezero*, additional information deemed important for members of the RCZ is provided. It mainly contains a list of questions posed to candidates as they make vows

during confirmation, baptism, admittance to the Lord's Table of those who were baptised as infants or who became members of the RCZ from non-reformed faith churches. It also has additional information which is considered to be helpful in the personal study of the Bible and understanding Christian faith (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:401-428).

### *3.6.2 Contemporary RCZ faith formation process*

Faith formation in the RCZ is periodical and a continuous process. Faith formation as periodical refers to processes with attached space of time such as Sunday School (Children's Ministry) and Catechumen Class. These are time-bound faith formation programmes. Continuous processes are lifelong faith-forming activities such as liturgical services, as well as personal and family devotions. However, at some point, the continuous process runs alongside the discontinued one.

#### *3.6.2.1 Duration of the Catechism Class*

The duration of the Catechism Class has been revised from three years to two years and one year. Currently, the legally recognised duration for catechetical training is a minimum of one year (BP 57.3d). In practice, the catechumen period ranges from one year to slightly above or below one year. The variation is necessitated by the difference in number of times when *utonyezo* (confirmation) and the sacraments of baptism are conducted. According to BP 57.3b, "members shall be accepted into catechumen class at the occasion of the Holy Communion". In the RCZ, Holy Communion is administered at least four times a year, which translates into at least four confirmations a year. In practice, confirmation usually takes place during each preparatory service for the Holy Communion, especially in March, June, September, and December. However, BP 57.3b further states that "the congregation may on reasonable grounds allow confirmation to be undertaken on other special dates". The lack of guidelines means that the Congregation Council determines the terms for special dates when confirmation may be conducted. This implies that the number of occasions for confirmation may exceed four at the discretion of the congregation. Baptism occurs at least twice a year, in June and December. This difference in times for baptism and confirmation results in other members, particularly those confirmed in March and September, undergoing catechetical training for less than or exceeding the official minimum of one year.

Although teaching from the *Buku La Katekisma* continues by way of direct extraction of topics to be taught or by way of all RCZ sermons and teachings conforming with it, the challenge is that, at the initial stage, all the above-outlined contents must be taught to catechumen class members within one year. According to Zolamulira ndi zoikika za Eklesia Wa Cikonzedwe m’Zambia (Lamulo 128), the catechumen class is divided into three parts. The first part is known as *Klasi lapatari* before *utsonyezo* (confirmation), literally translated as “far away class”, possibly with reference to the distance to baptism. The second part is classified as *klasi lapatari* after *utsonyezo* (confirmation). The time period is divided into two. The elderly and the candidates who were baptised as infants and raised in Christian families could be in the catechumen class for a minimum of one year. Meanwhile those who were not baptised as infants were supposed to be in the catechumen class at this stage for not less than two years. The last part is known as *klasi lapapfupi*, and could last for two years, preparing candidates for baptism. Candidates were then baptised if they answered the required questions and showed the necessary Christian spirituality.

*Klasi* was conducted twice a week. On Wednesday, catechumenates learnt *mbiri yopatulika*, consisting of teachings on the Old Testament, the inter-testament period, and the New Testament. On Sunday, the catechumenates were taught using questions and answers extracted from the Heidelberg Catechism. This means that the *Buku La Katekisma* was handled in two hundred and eight sessions by those who were outside the Christian families and one hundred and four sessions by those who were baptised as infants and raised in Christian families. According to BP 57.3c, “after confirmation catechumen class members shall attend lessons once per week in accordance with the programme contained in the daily guide of every year”. Reducing the duration of the catechumen class to one year, attended once a week across the board, entails that sessions were reduced from two hundred and eight to fifty-two. Despite this reduction, the content to be covered remains the same.

### *3.7 Background to the Heidelberg Catechism*

The research considered the study of the background to the Heidelberg Catechism as a way of gaining insight into the context of its composition, with a view to relating it to that of the Nsenga culture. This is done in readiness for Chapter Four, where the possibility of how the teaching and use of the Heidelberg Catechism can be contextualised as a tool for forming the faith of the Nsenga

people. The research focused more on the authorship of the Catechism, as well as the external and internal conflicts within the protestant movement, among many influencing factors. These were picked with the assumption that the questions in the Catechism could have been asked by the Christian community at that time. It is also assumed that the answers in the Catechism respond to the actual questions of faith with which the church was struggling at the time of composition, authorship, and publicity.

### *3.7.1 Authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism*

The authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism is uncertain, as there is no trace of preparatory documents. Hence, researchers rely on the remarks on the work in correspondence during the period of compilation. It is assumed that the preparatory documents went missing during the ninety years of war (Strohm 2014:23). However, according to Strohm (2014:25), there is scholarly consensus that Zacharias Ursinus, the then professor of dogmatics, played a major role in compiling the contents of the Heidelberg Catechism. Dreyer (2014:3) claims that it was formulated because Frederick III wanted to end the religious wars by introducing a unifying standard confession to be used for catechesis and preaching in the Palatinate. He appointed Ursinus as one of the authors of the Catechism on the basis of his education in both Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

The scholarly consensus is based on two assumptions. The first assumption is the evidence of the theological influence of Phillip Melanchthon, who died during the compilation of the Catechism. Dreyer (2014:3) claims that Zacharias Ursinus once lived in the home of, and studied under Phillip Melanchthon, whose indirect influence is reflected in the compilation of the Heidelberg Catechism. The second assumption that Ursinus is the author, is that the same threefold outline of misery, salvation, and gratitude in the Heidelberg Catechism is reflected in his previous work on the *Catechesis Minor* (Strohm 2014:26). It is assumed that, since the *Catechesis Minor*, authored by Ursinus, shares the threefold main outline with the Heidelberg Catechism, this indicates the role he played in the formation of the Catechism. On the basis of these two reasons, scholars assume that Ursinus is the main influential contributor towards the formation of the Heidelberg Catechism. This means that scholars identify Ursinus as one among other unknown contributors to the formation of the Catechism. Dreyer (2014:3) refers to Ursinus as the primary author and

acknowledges the possible contribution of other theologians, especially Olevianus. The fact that Ursinus' work is identified among other unknown contributors shows his high level of influence in the process of compiling the contents of the Catechism. This further gives a clue to the theological thoughts that influenced the production of the Catechism.

### *3.7.2 Protestants' external conflict*

Good (1913:99, 102) identifies a pattern of historical, theological, and experiential factors in Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism is described as a catechism that is more experiential or rich in experience, as it constantly emphasises elements of experience. Reference is made to question one and its response as pointers to a theological response to the historical and social experiences of that time. One of the contributing factors to the formulation of the Heidelberg Catechism is the conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. Strohm (2014:20) suggests that “[t]he escalation of the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in France, the massacre of Protestants during their worship service at Vassy, the outbreak of the first French religious war is fundamental context of the composition of the Heidelberg Catechism between January and March 1563”. The ninety years of war and the persecutions of Protestants by the Roman Catholic Church demanded a theological explanation, in order to continue with faith formation in such a hostile environment. It appears that the theological response is provided at the beginning of the Heidelberg Catechism in question one and its response:

Question: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

Answer: “That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation” (Strohm 2014:16).

Since the external conflicts were a matter of life and death, one could ask such a question of faith. In contexts of uncertainty, theological responses, assuring the ceaseless belonging to Christ in life and death, became a source of hope to Christians. The Heidelberg Catechism was meant to address the prevailing theological concerns and questions raised by Christians.

### *3.7.3 Internal conflict within Protestantism*

The Heidelberg Catechism was published in Heidelberg, Germany, under Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate. His aim was to bring about harmony in his land, characterised by conflicts among

the Protestants divided along the lines of the high Lutherans, the low Zwinglians, and the Calvinists (Good 1913:98). These conflicts were often tense and marked by sporadic violence to the extent of fist-fighting (Dreyer 2014:2; Strohm 2014:21). The Lord's Supper is one of the major points of the internal conflicts of the Lutherans and the Reformer Protestants. Strohm (2014:21) cites a conflict that resulted in a physical confrontation between Lutheran General Superintendent Tileman Heshuser, who vigorously defended Luther's position, and Wilhelm Klebitz, who equally uncompromisingly defended Zwingli's teaching on the Lord's Supper.

Although Martin Luther's view of the Lord's Supper departed from the medieval Roman Catholic teachings of transubstantiation, he introduced the concept of 'consubstantiation'. The teaching of transubstantiation upholds that the elements of bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ by the power of God (Migliore, 1991:221). Consubstantiation disputes that the bread and wine became the real body and blood of Jesus Christ, but it upholds the physical presence of Christ in, with, and under the elements like water in a sponge (Migliore, 1991:222; Grudem 1994:994). He insists that Christ literally and physically gave himself to all those who received the bread and wine (Strohm 2014:21). Although they differ, both teachings of transubstantiation and consubstantiation maintain the view of the physical presence of Christ in the element of the Lord's Supper.

In an attempt to depart from the concept of transubstantiation, Zwingli goes to extremes as he considers the Lord's Supper to simply be a meal of fellowship and commemoration, in which the congregation confesses their belonging to the Lord for all the world to see (Strohm 2014:21). This seems to suggest that, in Zwingli's teaching, Christ is not present in the elements of the Lord's Supper but is only confessed to the world by the participating congregation. John Calvin's view lies between Martin Luther and Zwingli's teaching. Prior to his death in 1560, Phillip Melachthon argued that Christ's presence is not limited to elements but to the whole act of the Lord's Supper. Melachthon based his argument on John Calvin's teachings and insisted that Christ is present at the Lord's Supper, not limited to the elements but to the whole act. He believed that partakers are joined to Christ by grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, as they faithfully partake of the Lord's Supper (Migliore, 1991:222).

Such continued conflicts, attacks, and threats affected Frederick III's governance, due to its bearing on the social and political well-being of the Palatinate, to such an extent that he desired a Catechism that would unify the Church (Dreyer 2014:3). Frederick III thought that the end of the conflicts in the church would lighten the burden of governing the Palatinate. It is obviously difficult to govern divided people. Hence, the interest behind the formation of the Heidelberg Catechism was to unify the church, especially the Protestants in the Palatinate. From the outset, the call for the formulation of the Heidelberg Catechism was based on responding to the questions of faith emanating from the then social and spiritual context. It captured questions of common concern in faith practice among the Protestants. It was not formulated in abstract but in response to contextual issues of life with which Christians could easily relate. Answers to the questions responded to the Christians' worries, fears, anxieties, and concerns. For this reason, Osmer (2005:237) describes catechesis as an interpretive activity that enhances interaction of the Bible, contexts, and faith traditions.

### *3.8 Strengths and weaknesses of faith formation in the RCZ*

A person is described as a carrier of embedded learnt patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential actions. Although these patterns are learnt throughout a person's life, much of it is acquired in early childhood because, at that time, a person is most inclined to learning and assimilating. A person cannot act otherwise unless these patterns are unlearned. However, unlearning is more difficult than first-time learning (Hofstede *et al.* 2010:4-5). According to Article 6, membership in the RCZ is acquired through infant or adult baptism, registration in Sunday School as a child, confirmation into catechumen, and presentation of a transfer certificate from an RCZ congregation or denominations of the Reformed tradition. People from denominations whose doctrinal standard is not in tandem with the RCZ, although they are in possession of a transfer certificate, are recognised as members when admitted to the catechumen class. Doctrinal differences invalidate their transfer certificates as criteria for admittance to RCZ membership. However, depending on the levels of doctrinal differences, the time for being in the catechumen class can either be reduced or be a mandatory minimum of one year.

The various entry points into RCZ membership suggest that faith formation also takes forms in accordance with the stage or point when a member joins the church. For those who become

members through infant baptism, faith formation capitalises on early childhood's high rate of learning and assimilation. For those who join as youths or adults, faith formation is a process of unlearning learned patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting which are contrary to fundamental biblical teachings and the RCZ faith tradition. The strengths and weaknesses of RCZ faith formation will be determined by how the framework, tools, and processes are able to engage, support, challenge, and encourage members to reflect on Scripture, contexts, and church tradition for the reformation or transformation of their thinking, feeling, and potential acting. The reformation and transformation should result from the continued strengthening of the RCZ members' relationship with God, self, and the environment.

### *3.8.1 Strength of faith formation in the RCZ*

Despite the challenges from the missionary era, faith formation in the RCZ has been a serious constitutional matter. In BP57.1, the Congregation Council, also known as the Elders' Council, is tasked with the responsibility of instructing "converts, members and others in the teaching of Scripture as contained in the Heidelberg Catechism (*Buku La Katekisma*) in order to prepare them for public profession of the faith and to assume their Christian responsibilities in the Church and the world". Three aspects are evident in BP57.1. The first aspect is that instructing new converts, members and others in faith is an indispensable task of the congregation leaders. The second aspect is that constitutional empowerment of the Congregation Council must be the supervising structure for the instruction of members in faith. The third aspect is the mention of Scripture, as contained in the Heidelberg Catechism. People learn the Bible, with the Heidelberg Catechism acting as a tool for guiding its interpretation. This process aims to prepare converts for the public profession of faith as well as for assuming Christian responsibilities. In BP57.1, faith is viewed as something that must be appropriated, professed, and assumed as a responsibility. Catechumens should not have to wait passively until they profess their faith publicly, but they should participate in the life and service of the church upon confirmation. However, they are not eligible for responsibilities such as section, congregation, and denomination leadership (BP25.3). In BP26.1, elders are supposed to care for and ensure that members of sections and congregations are growing spiritually. They are also meant to supervise congregants, including the pastors' adherence to the

RCZ doctrine within and outside the worship service. The elders' continued supervision indicates that forming faith is a lifelong process. The strengths of the RCZ faith formation are as follows.

#### *3.8.1.1 Guided ecumenical approach to faith formation*

According to Migliore (1991:201), “[t]he unity of the Church is not primarily based on structures, offices, doctrines or programmes [but on] new fellowship with God through Christ in the Spirit”. He further suggests that “this does not possibly mean a lifeless uniformity or deadening sameness”. The unity of the church in Christ is also characterised by fragmentation or diversity. The Holy Spirit sustains the church in the mysterious tension of collective fragmentation, which is also known as unity in diversity. Sometimes denominations find it difficult to harmonise their incompatible diversities. Due to the incompatibility of the diversities, denominations currently tend to build ecumenical relationships based on the perceived reconcilable doctrines and faith tradition diversities. Bordering on reconcilable diversity, the RCZ is affiliated to Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Council of Churches in Zambia, All Africa Council of Churches, World Council of Churches, and other Reformed faith-based ecumenical bodies. Despite the diverse doctrines, creeds, and practices of faith, the church is one under the headship of Jesus Christ.

As alluded to earlier, Article 42(1) affirms that the RCZ may be affiliated to any ecumenical organisations that are in harmony or reconcilable diversity with its teachings and beliefs. By this, the RCZ does not operate with an all-inclusive or open-ended ecumenism. It exercises closed up ecumenism. Through Article 42(2), the RCZ seems to divide denominations into those with compatible and incompatible doctrines and practices of faith. The boundaries determine the establishment of an ecumenical relationship with other denominations. It is imperative that the RCZ clearly defines its reformed faith spirituality. This should not lead to segregation or prejudice.

#### *3.8.1.2 Past, present, and future linked faith formation*

The RCZ benefits from the historically accumulated Christian forming process. Its view of the church as a constitution of those who responded, are responding, and will respond to God's call through his elective grace connects the present church to the past and the future (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:361). This means that the present church can consult or peruse the activity of its past, as it navigates its way to fulfil its calling and service on earth. For

this reason, the RCZ, according to Article 4, subscribes to the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort (1618-1619) as its doctrinal standards and recognises the Apostles, the Nicene, and Athanasius as a means of its connectedness to other believers in Christ. This implies that the RCZ faith formation links current members to those who have been, are, and will be part of the body of Christ in the past, present, and future.

### *3.8.1.3 Emphasis on personal piety*

Some contemporary Protestants perceive the word ‘piety’ negatively. It is associated with judgmental attitude towards others, self-credited righteousness attained by the observance of rigid rules or regarded as a unique aspect for a specific category of Christians (Rice 1991:46). Piety is a way of expressing responsibility to God by those who have experienced his liberating grace. All Christians have some form of piety because their lives of faith are to be lived as responsible responses to God in the world (Rice 1991:46-47). Piety life lived is indicative of a living relationship with the Triune God established through the covenanting blood of Jesus Christ and the ongoing sanctification of believers into new creation by the Holy Spirit. It is about honouring and loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:28). In Calvin’s view, piety constitutes knowledge of God, attitudes of reverence towards him, and actions for the adoration of and service to God (Beeke 2004:33-34). In this context, theology is understood as the basis of piety life because knowing who and what God is (theology) trickles down to having the right attitudes toward him and to doing his will (piety), with the aim of glorifying and honouring him. Personal piety refers to having the right knowledge and attitude towards God, which leads to a life that honours God through self-dedication to him and his service.

Personal piety in the RCZ is based on its balance between communal and personal expression and experience of faith in the Triune God. Although there is no clear outline, the RCZ does have a clearly implied guide for personal piety that encompasses the right knowledge, attitude, relationship, and servanthood to God. For example, the Apostles’ Creed is recited collectively using the first-person pronoun ‘I’ (The Council of the Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:72-73). In reciting the Apostles’ Creed, individual RCZ members profess their personal

contents of faith in the Triune God collectively. Personal piety is further deduced from the teachings and vows made during confirmation, baptism, and when taking up various offices. Vows made during baptism, confirmation into Catechism and of those baptised as infants are done collectively; yet they denote personal commitment to God as an exercise of piety towards him (Reformed Church in Zambia 2015:45-50). These vows are extracted from the teachings taught prior to admittance into or during catechumen class. Personal piety in the *Buku La Katekisma* is portrayed as evidence of faith and as the means of thanking God in response to the gracious salvation believers have received as opposed to being a way of self-justification (The Council of the Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:134-136).

As deduced from the vows made during confirmation in the catechumen class, confirmation of those baptised as infants, and baptism, piety in the RCZ implies a personal voluntary wholehearted self-giving to the Triune God through Jesus Christ, participation in the *Missio Dei*, God-honouring worship services, and the exercise of personal spiritual disciplines. The emphasis is on repentance as turning away from evil, confessing it while believing in the redeeming and preserving grace in Christ Jesus which results in commitment and personal dedication to the relationship with the Triune God (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1968:390). This relationship culminates in service to the Triune God as a way of participating in the *Missio Dei*. This service is offered through evangelisation and giving tithes, offerings, and whatever may be requested by the church for the advancement of God's kingdom. Piety is further expressed by honouring the assembly of the saints, partaking of the sacraments, as well as personal prayer and study of the Bible (Reformed Church in Zambia 2015:45-50). Therefore, the word 'piety' is viewed as having a personal relationship with God, evidenced by living a life of self-giving to him and his service. The emphasis on personal piety encourages personal faith, experiencing the relationship with God, and practising faith. This is vital because personalisation of faith in Christ and its practice form a sound foundation for a strong and living church.

#### *3.8.1.4 Faith formation monitoring mechanism*

The RCZ has mechanisms for monitoring members' spiritual performance. Although they are limited by processes, membership cards and the Elders' Council (section Elders and Deacons) play a role in monitoring members' spiritual performance. Apart from serving as monitors, elders and

deacons are also expected to plan and facilitate the process of forming members' faith in their respective sections. Should elders and deacons be well trained in using the monitoring mechanisms, they could assist in the faith formation of congregants. Unfortunately, such mechanisms are, at times, not fully used and thus fail to serve their intended purpose.

*i. Membership card as monitoring mechanism*

All confirmed and communicant RCZ members possess membership cards, which have six functions. Four of the six functions concern a member, and the remaining two functions provide an opportunity to assess the performance of both the section elder and the pastor. In the first of the four aspects, the card bears a member's name, address, date of baptism, and the baptising pastor. The second part is a reminder of the vows made during confirmation, covenanting, or baptism. The third part assists in monitoring a member's commitment towards supporting God's work through giving. The fourth monitors how the covenanted and communicants partake in the Holy Communion. Unfortunately, of the four functions, more emphasis is placed on monthly contributions, thus reducing its functions to tithe collection.

*ii. Section elder as facilitator and monitor of RCZ faith formation*

Elders monitor and facilitate faith formation among the members of their section. An elder is tasked with equipping members in their section to participate in the life and ministry of the church. As a way of monitoring, elders must ensure that members of the section are growing in faith and play their expected roles. Meanwhile, deacons spearhead the diaconal services in their sections.

### *3.8.2 Weaknesses of faith formation in the RCZ*

According to BP 54a, "[t]he doctrine of the Church as founded in the Bible as the Word of God and as explained in the doctrinal standards of the Church (Article 4) is the foundation of the service of the Word, Sacraments and all activities of the Church". All interpretations of the Bible and church activities must be in tandem with the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort (1618-1619), the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession. These four doctrinal standards serve as measures of interpretation of the Bible. The weakness is that this can easily degenerate into the *Glossa Ordinaria*-related hermeneutical challenge arising from the Middle Ages (Jansen 2007:64). The *Glossa Ordinaria* perceived that the authoritative interpretations of Bible passages were in accordance with the compilation of the writing by church fathers and medieval theologians,

put together by scholars. Unfortunately, the *Glossa Ordinaria* determined later on how the Bible should be read and the meaning of the text. Finally, they became more authoritative than the texts themselves. BP54a, if misunderstood, can convert doctrines into *Glossa Ordinaria*, where they can become absolute authorities in determining the reading and meaning of the Bible. In as much as the RCZ belongs to a reformed tradition, Scripture should not be deprived of its central and authoritative voice on matters pertaining to the formation of faith.

As a guide, BP 54a has the potential to shift the RCZ from tradition into traditionalism if it is not properly checked. Harakas (2004:130) distinguishes between tradition, as “the living faith of the dead”, and traditionalism, as “the dead faith of the living”. Tradition provides for the interpretation of content and contexts, so that faith transforms the lives of Christians and their respective contexts. Traditionalism gives tradition a bad name because it is fixed, rigid, and does not pay or pays hardly any attention to the prevailing context (Harakas 2004:130). Doctrinal standards, as the measure of interpretation of the Bible, if handled fixedly and rigidly, can create a hermeneutical gap, and hinder the process in contextualisation of God’s Word. According to Herppich (2014:214), “[t]rue contextualisation remains an elusive ideal as long as ecclesiastical constituencies prioritise what in their context is regarded as biblical and theological norms”. Doctrinal standards facilitate a meaningful dialogue between the Bible, as the word of God, and contexts, in order to develop a contextual practice of Christian faith. Unlike the *Glossa Ordinaria*, doctrinal standards should not become more authoritative than the biblical texts but rather lead to a better understanding of the Bible within the respective contexts. Doctrinal standards should enhance theocentric and contextual reflection on the Bible, so that it serves as a unique witness of the Triune God for the transformation of contexts (Migliore 1991:49-54).

### 3.8.2.1 *Double hermeneutical gap*

Mburu (2020:84) mentions that “[t]here is the general consensus now that Africans need to move away from the Western approaches that have been imposed on them because they promote a ‘foreign’ way of reading the Bible which results into what is termed as a ‘double hermeneutical gap’”. Hermeneutical is a reflection on the problem of understanding done by identifying, analysing, and removing obstacles to understanding (Jansen 2007:2). Time, geographical, social, economic, political, and language differences become obstacles to understanding biblical texts. It

takes a hermeneutical approach to understand the Bible. Hence, reading it using a foreign way creates a double hermeneutics (Mburu 2020:84). This means that Africans have to understand the foreign way of reading the Bible before bridging the hermeneutical gap between themselves and the world of the Bible. An African reader starts by identifying, analysing, and removing Eurocentric influences in understanding the Bible. Article 4 combined with BP54a suggest that these doctrinal standards are the lenses through which the RCZ interprets the Bible. Although it is argued that the Bible is approached from a traditional point of view, it is important to read doctrines through the lenses of Scripture and not vice versa.

### *3.8.2.2 Untrained lay servants*

During the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCZ Synod, it was observed that the vast majority of the Sunday school teachers (teachers in Children’s Ministry), elders, and deacons are not trained for their services, thereby weakening the functionality of these critical offices. In response, directives were issued. First, that elders and deacons themselves should ensure that they undergo Theological Education by Extension in Zambia (TEEZ) training. Secondly, that congregations, presbyteries, and Lay Training and Empowerment Desk be tasked to organise trainings for Sunday School teachers, elders, and deacons (Minute number SM 2022/27.5 and 7).

### *3.8.2.3 Early indicators of weaknesses in faith formation*

Cronje (1999:14, 36) records three incidents which suggest the inadequacies between the missionaries themselves and their service of evangelising and equipping the evangelised for the practice of faith. Two such incidents are recorded under the subtitle “Only Sub-B”. Sub-B was the second lowest grade of the then education system in Zambia. It shows that Cronje was still in the initial stage in the process of learning the culture of the people to whom he was ministering. Both incidents are recorded from the conversation with Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri (Cronje 1999:14). These incidents clearly show that Cronje had hardly any knowledge or understanding of the indigenous tradition and culture; hence, the title “Only Sub-B”. It is possible that this was the case with the vast majority of the missionaries. The first incident was when Cronje, out of sympathy, wanted to call the men who were building the house to help the aged Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri dig a grave for his stillborn grandchild. He was not aware of the superstition that men would face disaster if they participated in the burial process of stillborn or neonatal babies (Cronje 1999:14).

The second incident involved a woman who was accused of having committed adultery on the basis that she was found walking along the path where the body of a man was found lying in tall grass, a few metres away. Cronje reacted in protest upon observing that the Elder Council seemed to tend towards resolving that the woman was guilty of the charge. In response to his reaction, Reverend Phiri, who was chairing the meeting, told him: “Sir, you have been staying among us for a long time, you speak our language; you think you know us – you are only in Sub-B” (Cronje 1999:14-15). Cronje was unaware of the belief that, in certain instances, adulterous action could result in one party facing death (Cronje 1999:15). Effective faith formation requires more than speaking in people’s tongue, for it is, above all, about knowing the people and their world view. Translation of the Bible and spiritual documents does not suffice, unless Christian faith is translated in and for their contexts. In view of this, effective faith formation requires that people and their world views be known and understood.

The third incident is recorded as Cronje returned to Zambia for a visit after five years of being in South Africa. Cronje (1999:35-36) observed that “the political spirit had also entered the Church”, which influenced the attitude and language of some RCZ Synod members. It is obvious that he was not pleased with the politically influenced change. He confronted one of the reverends, whom he had known since he was a student, who displayed an unusual behaviour. In response, the reverend indicated that he spoke that way out of fear of being stoned after the meeting. This response reveals the double standard, fear-driven life, evident in the difference between spoken words and personal beliefs, values, and convictions. Cronje (1999:36) concludes that, as missionaries, they “did not prepare the Church sufficiently for the great political upheaval”. His conclusion suggests that Christian formation should not only react to the past and the present but must also deliberately prepare members for the foreseeable future. The missionaries foresaw the political upheaval but did not amply prepare the RCZ for its coming.

#### *3.8.2.4 Localising pronunciation of foreign terms*

In this research, the phrase ‘foreign with localised pronunciation’ refers to the formation tools, structures, and processes that remain exotic, yet translated and pronounced in the local dialect. The first anomaly of the ‘foreign with localised pronunciation’ is evident in the names given to the first

nine people baptised at Magwero. Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:73) shows that names such as Lazaro, Filipino, Josefe, Gabriele, William, Johane, Bartimeyu, and Andreyra are not African names. The original names, replaced by new ones picked from the circulated list preferably drawn from the Bible, remain unknown. This shows the effects of European dominance, and of transplantation of foreign culture into African Christianity or both. Whatever the case could have been, it is clear that the call to Christianity created the “double hermeneutical gap” (Mburu 2020:84). Christianity was understood as escapism from Africanism to embrace a new culture and faith. It is not strange that some of the foreign names were given local pronunciations, for they could not fit into the local dialect. The localised pronunciation of the foreign names is a sign of the beginning of the double hermeneutical gap.

Unfortunately, despite undergoing baptism class for almost three years and a change of names, four of the first nine baptised ceased to be members of the church, by virtue of becoming polygamous and drinking beer. Filipino, William, and Johane became polygamist, whereas Bartimeyu ceased to be a member, due to his beer drinking. Polygamy was part of the African culture, while beer was a social drink. This shows that, although they had foreign names with localised pronunciation, they continued to struggle with the antagonism between the newly acquired Christian faith and the African culture. Further research needs to establish the contributing factors as to why nearly half of the nine baptised candidates, in their struggle with the antagonism of faith and culture, are no longer members of the church and fall back on the African culture.

The nature of the names also suggests that the faith formation tools, structures, and processes were foreign but with a localised pronunciation. The foreign nature of the faith formation framework created a “double hermeneutical gap” because Christianity was learned through the lenses of a foreign culture (Mburu 2020:84). The formation framework also had *adiaphora* because certain essential proponents for the localising Christian faith from both culture and Christianity were omitted (Mokhoathi 2017:1). The second one is the localisation of the English word ‘class’ to *klasi* in Zolamulira ndi Zopangana za Eklesia Wa Cikonzedwe M’Zambia (Lamulo 128). Some of the words have a local translation such as church *mpingo*, church service *chipembezo*, prayer *pemphero*, worship *kupembeza* but not class. Failure to find suitable translations led to localising

the pronunciation of the English word 'class' into *klasi*, while maintaining its foreign language and practice. In short, there was no comparative to the class system in the local cultural formation. This means that, although Africa had its own way of cultural formation, the church had to use the strange European approach of class system with its formal multi-layered clusters. This means that, in some instances, the language, content, and processes of faith formation were foreign.

#### 3.8.2.5 Triple hermeneutical gap

Although the number of theological scholars in the RCZ has grown, it is still lacking in terms of self-theologising. Despite existing for over a century and having spread to all the ten provinces of Zambia, with branches in Zimbabwe and Tanzania, the RCZ faith formation still largely depends on borrowed documents. The RCZ has no official syllabus or teaching material for Sunday School children. The *Buku La Katekisma*, which is one of the important formal faith formation documents of the RCZ, is in Malawian *Chewa*. Although *Chewa* is spoken in some parts of the Eastern province of Zambia, it is somehow different from the one spoken in Malawi. The RCZ uses the *Chewa* document in all other provinces, including Zimbabwe, except for the Mbala area in Zambia and Tanzania, where an extract of the *Buku La Katekisma* has been translated into *Mambwe-Lungu*. Besides the language, it can be deduced that the *Buku La Katekisma* was compiled with the *Chewa* people in mind. Discussion on the *Nyau* dance, as one of the practices for *chikunja*, shows that the practices of the *Chewa* people form the main background contexts of the *Buku La Katekisma*. *Nyau* is a sacred and exclusive traditional dance for the *Chewa* people. People from other ethnic groups may join if they undergo a special initiation ceremony into its secret cult. This means that even the *Chewa* people are deemed part of the *Nyau* cult after undergoing a special initiation ceremony. It is sacred to the extent that the *Chewa* people like *Nyau* call *chilombo* (beast) or *gule wamkulu* (big or great dance). It is also attached to their religious practices. The triple hermeneutical gap occurs as people from other ethnic groups learn the Heidelberg Catechism-branded Christian faith through the lenses of the *Chewa* culture. For this reason, the RCZ is known, in some parts of Zambia, as *Chechi ya baku Chipata* (a church for those who originate from Chipata). Chipata, the provincial headquarters of the Eastern Province, is used to imply the entire province.

#### 3.8.2.6 The RCZ motto *Kuunika M'mdima and African culture*

Despite having a number of individual scholarly opinions, the RCZ still lacks an in-depth teaching or clear policy direction on the Gospel and culture. The paucity in existing teachings take on the missionary cohesively counter-culture stance. Christianity and culture are presented as antithetical or irreconcilable opponents, where people are supposed to choose one at the expense of the other. This calls for an analysis of the motto *Kuunika m'mdima*, which drives the church's passion for, and approach to different contexts. In the motto *Kuunika M'mdima*, the RCZ depicts the way it views itself, and interprets the expected role of the church. It is obvious that the RCZ perceives itself as the light that must shine in the dark, possibly, contexts. The challenge is: Which contexts are referred to as darkness? The open-ended possibilities of interpreting darkness, in which the light must shine, can unfortunately end up in abuse and culminate into the Church approaching culture in a hegemonic way rather than engaging it in dialogue. The replacement of local names with foreign ones in the missionary era vivifies the interpretation of the motto *Kuunika m'mdima*, meaning overriding culture. The church as the light should share the Gospel by engaging communities in fighting evil powers and addressing social ills.

In the *Buku La Katekisma*, the teaching on culture resorts under the section called *chikunja*. This gives the impression that the RCZ is the light and *chikunja* is the darkness. Although *chikunja* in the *Buku La Katekisma* is defined as being outside Christ and his church, the emphasis is on four African ATR practices, namely ancestral worship, the cult of *nyau* (traditional dance of the Chewa people), *mdulo* (protection from mythical sex-related effects), as well as the fear and practice of witchcraft as *chikunja* (The Council of Reformed Church in Central Africa 1968:385-386). African culture is broader and deeper than the four mentioned practices that are simply condemned and not studied, in order to see how the light can shine appropriately in these perceived dark areas. This undermines the fact that the identified four cultural practices and many others have compelling underlying beliefs, concerns, and fears, so that condemning without finding the appropriate means to address them creates war within Christians. These beliefs are powerful decision dictators, especially in times of crisis. The war within Christians is evident, as some of them are torn between adherence to the culturally embedded beliefs and fear, and the Christian faith. Adequate faith formation should address the fears and beliefs, rather than condemning the practice of culture.

The Heidelberg Catechism, as the main measure of a correct interpretation of the Bible, affects not only the RCZ doctrine but also the practice of faith (BP54; Mburu 2020:84). Its content should contribute towards addressing the personal internal conflicts and fears of the RCZ members. Its inadequate and counter-cultural approach has a bearing on how the RCZ members practise their faith in relation with culture. The antagonistic dichotomy is a sign that the availed means of interpreting their faith in contexts at certain points leaves members trapped in handling matters at hand. It is also important to check the interpretation of the motto *Kuunika m'mdima*, for it has a bearing on the approach towards culture. The faith formation tools used by the RCZ must probe more into culture, by asking the right questions whose response resonates with the actual concerns of its members.

#### *3.8.2.7 Questions-and-answers approach in RCZ faith formation*

Cultural practices are informed, formed, reformed, and deepened by responses to questions arising from practical life situations. From biblical times, questions and answers have been used as one of the methods for informing, forming, reforming, transforming, and deepening faith in God. The Bible, especially the letters and epistles, were authored as theological responses to actual experiences encountered by the church in the process of its practice of faith. These questions were asked as an inquiry into understanding what it means to have faith in God within specific contexts. Responses to these questions challenged, supported, and strengthened faith as the church sought to improve its faith practice in dialogue with contexts. The *Buku La Katekisma*, the main tool for forming faith in the RCZ, uses the questions-and-answers approach. This entails that the church has continued to ask questions concerning its faith in God up to the point of the authorship of the *Buku La Katekisma* and, of course, it will continue to do so.

Questions are critical in the process of inquiring into and gaining life-transforming knowledge. According to Keith, only “the right questions [are] at the heart of effective communications and information exchange”. In its quest to seek understanding, faith needs to ask the right questions, the responses to which make up its formation process. Faith is viewed as a living and thinking matter whose thoughts are not driven by answers but questions (*Critical Thinking Handbook*). Mzumara (2016) adds that the answers to the questions asked form part of understanding that grows in accordance with the quality of the responses to the right questions posed. Questions are

infinite learning tools, as curious minds keep on enquiring even from new findings. The curiosity of the mind and the art of posing the right questions form the core of significant enquiry toward growth in understanding, formation, and transformation (Mzumara 2016). Growth in understanding is endless because new questions of faith arise from the newly found answers. The continued perfection of faith and its practice is an ongoing task and its formation involves a continuous dialogical task of questioning and answering in the process of reflecting on God, Scripture, and church tradition in conversation with specific contexts. Asking the right questions in specific contexts improves the effectiveness of informing, forming, reforming, and transforming faith, since questions are critical in creating inviting environments, structuring, acquiring, processing, understanding, assimilating, and embodying the content of faith. They provoke thoughts, demand solutions, awaken memory, enthuse the mind for new discoveries, and make learning memorable in the urge for new knowledge in new answers. The human natural desire for new knowledge in new experiences makes questions and answers a vital means of faith formation.

Although the question-and-answer method is very effective in formation processes, its effectiveness largely depends on good questioning techniques skills. This skill in faith formation boosts a meaningful reflection on God, self, and others, with the aim of growing in understanding the significance of these relationships within contexts. These questions should be constructed from the learners' perspective, by taking time to know their backgrounds, life experiences, interests, abilities, weaknesses, and strengths (Mzumara 2016). This entails that the "bottom up" rather than the "top bottom" way of doing theology with the people is encouraged. The church should not come with fixed and inflexible questions that must be imposed on its members. It should rather allow questions to arise from contextual contentious issues. Therefore, to continue growing in addressing the theological quests of its members for improved praxis in various contexts, the church should carry on re-questioning and reinventing the faith formation content, processes, and methodologies.

Questions and answers are not only a vital means of formation, but also monitor progression in faith and evaluate the effectiveness of Christian formation content, process, and means. The congruence of progression, in line with the aims and objectives of faith formation, is constantly checked by monitoring. The quality of answers provided reveals the level of knowledge,

understanding, and application of skills. According to Dreeckmeier (2005:113), questioning can be used to assess pre-knowledge or for problem-posing, in order to stimulate interest in the topic or problem being solved. Questions and answers promote dialogue such that they provide opportunities to know how learners are grasping new concepts through their responses. In so doing, misconceptions are corrected and understanding is perfected.

Since learners differ in their rate of understanding, observing responses to the questions and even the questions asked provides an opportunity to change the faith-forming approach. In this case, questions and answers should not be one-sided; they are supposed to come from both the church and the learners. Questions and answers help both slow and fast learners comprehend the teachings. The method promotes meaningful dialogue that may result in improvisation of clearer demonstrations, fresh investigations, and research. It may also serve as a way of encouraging learners to research and reflect more on the issue of concern on their own. The question-and-answer method creates a good transition from pre- to new understanding because it serves as the learner's reflective points for evaluation as it provokes new thoughts. Ultimately, the new answers found during reflection become part of new knowledge and understanding.

Technically good questions challenge, engage, and stimulate discussion, encourage exploration, and refine understanding the Christian faith in relation to the issue at hand. Since the formal initial stage of faith formation in the RCZ is about question and answer, it is important to assess how technically good the questions asked in the *Buku La Katekisma* are in engaging the Nsenga people within their contexts. It is equally vital to assess whether the answers provided respond to the theological quests of the Nsenga people. To establish how effective questions and answers are in challenging, engaging, stimulating discussion, encouraging exploring, and refining understanding Christian faith, the following points were considered.

- a. Do the means of faith formation pose the same problem questions asked by faith people in the Nsenga cultures? Conradie (2020:121) distinguishes between the theological framework of the West and that of Africa on the basis of the questions asked within these respective contexts. According to Forster (2010:250), Africans constantly strive toward conditions of health, balance, harmony, order, and continuity. This means that both Africans and people in the West

are inquisitive about their faith, but differ in terms of the drivers of the quest. Conradie (2020:121) suggests that the key theological quest for the West is: “How can I be made right with God?” In view of identifying being right with God as a key theological quest, Conradie suggests that, for the West, the means of justification and sanctification became the main theme. Meanwhile Prof. Randee Ijatuyi-Morphé claims that Africa’s questions are mainly driven by the quest to experience wholeness and harmonious co-existence with the living, the dead, nature, spirits, and the Supreme Being (Conradie 2020:121). Africa’s questions of life revolve around what Kalilombe (1994:122) refers to as harmonised interrelatedness.

Conradie (2020:122) argues that the African theological framework should focus on harmonious living, instead of living in a right relationship with God. In other words, questions asked in the RCZ faith formation tools must revolve around harmonising relationships with God, self, others, and the environment. This is vital because the two questions, “How can I be right with God?” and “How can I live in harmony with the visible and invisible being?” asked by the West and Africa, respectively, represent the uniqueness of their people’s spiritual quests. Theology from below, which addresses Africa’s unique theological quest, is needed if Christianity is to take root within its contexts. There is thus a need to assess whether the questions asked in faith formation tools or documents represent the actual spiritual quests of the people, especially when they are struggling within their respective African contexts.

- b. If questions are the same or similar to Africans’ spiritual quest, then the research must establish whether the responses given in the faith formation framework appropriately and adequately address these theological concerns and empower application within specific contexts. Do they appropriately respond to the challenges faced by members of the community of faith? Are they being overlooked or simply suppressed? Conradie (2020:121) speaks of a broken theology that neglects other essential aspects of human beings and their existence. It is not holistic but biased towards certain aspects of humanity. It is, therefore, important to inquire whether the RCZ faith formation framework exhibits a “broken theology that deals only with the spiritual well-being of people instead of their total well-being”.

- c. Questions of faith vary from one cultural context to another, for they arise from what is transpiring in a specific environment. The need for assessing the contextuality of the questions to the contexts of the Nsenga people is vital, considering that the RCZ uses the Chewa-inclined *Buku La Katekisma*, revised in 1968 (over half a century ago), as a tool for faith formation shared with the Reformed churches in Central Africa. With all the changes in terms of globalisation, theological studies, and research on culture and Christianity, there is a need to establish whether the *Buku La Katekisma*, as a faith formation tool, still addresses the contextual faith concerns of the Nsenga people. If not, then it renders the entire process of forming faith ineffective, for the questions asked do not lead to answers that respond to the concerns within contexts. This leads to an inquiry into the prospects of an interpretation of the questions asked in the faith formation documents, so that they are identical to the ones asked by the local people. In view of this, the following question needs to be considered: “How can RCZ have a faith formation process whose question and answers will represent and respond to the theological quest of its membership?”. The other question is: “How can RCZ have faith-forming questions in the Heidelberg Catechism that inspire the debate on theological matters of concern within context?” The RCZ must assess the effectiveness of the pre-set fixed questions-and-answers faith formation approach to all contexts for people to memorise.
- d. It is vital to bear in mind that ways of communication are as important as the message because the receptor constructs meaning by interpreting the information received through conceptual systems. As a way of avoiding misinterpretations or distortions, the sender of the message must convey it, bearing the receptors’ conceptual systems in mind. This is vital for the purpose of communication, so that the receptor constructs the same meaning of the message as intended by the communicator (Kraft 2005:115-116). Processes and tools of faith formation are bearers of the message; hence, they have to be on point in terms of transmission. Therefore, the question is: Do RCZ faith formation processes or tools convey the faith-forming information with consideration of the conceptual system of the Nsenga people, to enable them to get it clearly and interpret its meaning appropriately?

The answers provided should be applicable within the context of a Nsenga Christian. If they are far from being applicable or fall short of empowering continued interpretation and reflection on

the life of faith in responses to the challenges in specific contexts, then dualism is inevitable. This is important because faith formation processes not only facilitate aspects of knowing and doing, but also the aspect of being (Samuel 2020:120). The word ‘being’ indicates that people need to embody the Christian faith through processes of faith formation.

### 3.9 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the RCZ faith-forming tools, practices, and processes from the historical to the current era. It discussed the ecumenical approach, as connection to the past, present, and future, and emphasised personal piety as a strength of the RCZ faith formation framework. It also cautioned the RCZ against *Glossa Ordinaria*, where doctrines become restricting factors to Bible interpretation or are used in a discriminatory manner. The weaknesses were cited as undermining the effects and influence of culture, triple hermeneutical gap where RCZ Christians from other ethnic groups learn European-originated Heidelberg Catechism through the Chewa culture. This calls for the RCZ to rethink its approach to faith formation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE NSENGA CULTURAL FORMATION FRAMEWORK

#### *4.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the RCZ faith formation tools, practices, and processes from the missionary period to the contemporary era. It discussed the guided ecumenical approach and the connection to the past, present, and future. It also emphasised personal piety as one of the strengths of the RCZ faith formation framework. It also cautioned the RCZ against the *Glossa Ordinaria*, where tools of faith formation become restricting factors to Bible interpretation. The RCZ should also avoid using these tools in a discriminatory way. The weaknesses were cited as undermining the effects and power of cultural issues on believers. Hardly any or no concern for culture and tradition is evident in replacing cultural names with the ones selected by the missionaries, and the triple hermeneutic gap. The latter is caused by RCZ Christians from other ethnic groups learning the European-originated Heidelberg Catechism through the Chewa culture.

This chapter responds to the question: “How does the Nsenga cultural formation empower its members towards living a holistic and value-driven life within various contexts of their society?” Using an empirical study, the research in this chapter aims to analyse the Nsenga people from a theological perspective and how their cultural formation is conducted and contributes towards a holistic and value-driven life in response to the respective social contexts. Approached from the perspective of practical theology, the chapter was designed to gain new knowledge of and insight into the culture of the Nsenga people, and to understand the influences of firmly entrenched rules or patterns that govern their reflection, interpretation, and practices (Moschella 2012:226). Empirical data was gathered using a qualitative approach and ethnography, in order to understand assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs, and values behind the antagonistic dichotomy of *mwambo ni mwambo, chikristu ni chikristu, chikristu cepeza mwambo onkhazikika* among the Nsenga people. Chapter one may be consulted for further details on the research method. Data gathered from oral interviews, observation, and literature alternate in sequence.

Ethnography was used to allow the voice of the Nsenga culture to be heard in the process of indigenising faith formation through the hermeneutics of the Bible and the RCZ faith tradition. Besides one year of observation, the researcher also stayed among the Nsenga people for five years. This means that the observation lasted a total of six years. During these six years of intense interactions, the researcher learnt Chinsenga, the language of the Nsenga people, and observed their way of life and customs at various traditional events such as funerals, ceremonies, and dances. The literature review involved reading the RCZ Elders' Council Minutes of selected congregations in Nyanje Presbytery and books on Nsenga cultural formation. The study also observed both Christian and Nsenga cultural ceremonies, way of life, artefacts, attitudes, beliefs, values, religious symbols, and trainings, in order to gain an in-depth insight into the causes of the antagonistic dichotomy. One-on-one oral interviews were held with sampled traditional leaders of the Nsenga people and church leaders from three congregations of the Nyanje Presbytery, using semi-structured questions. However, during the data collection, some participants were recommended by the pre-sampled ones. Collected data was analysed iteratively, as its collection and analysis took place side by side for coherent interpretation (De Vos 2005:335). Keywords, pictures, themes, and any communicated or observed message were analysed, in order to gain insight into the underlying meanings. By way of the inductive and iterative process, similarities and differences in data content were used to add to, affirm, or argue against existing text theories. *Coding* was done by using pre-designed codes and allowing other codes to arise from the collected data. To ensure the validity and the reliability, all the gathered data was properly, timely, and accurately stored as either written, audio or in both forms, with the permission of the participants. Participants were also well informed on the requirements and their rights in the research process. To affirm their voluntary participation, they signed the interview questions and other necessary tools used in the process of collecting data.

#### *4.2 The Nsenga people: Their culture and religion*

The Nsenga people are one of Africa's matrilineal ethnic groups that migrated from the Lunda kingdom of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Even if the dates of their migration remain unknown, it is believed that they were among the earliest to settle in Zambia. Currently, they are in some parts of Mozambique which shares its boarder with Zambia's Eastern Province, especially near the Petauke Nyimba and Sinda Districts. In Zambia, the Nsenga people are found in the

Petauke, Sinda, Nyimba, and Feira districts, segmented into ten chiefdoms headed by chiefs, with senior Chief Kalindawalo as their overall leader. The Nsenga population totals almost two million (Zulu 2016:86). African Traditional Religion (ATR) is viewed as a means of communicating with *Nyamalenga* (the Creator) through the mediation of the ancestral spirits. In this regard, until now, the Nsenga people are among a few ethnic groups that still pour libations to ancestral spirits during the *kuthila nsembe* and the *tuwimba* annual ceremonies. Generally, the Nsenga culture comprises values, principles, behaviour, and traditions that are vital for survival, co-existence, peace, and harmony. The Nsenga traditional religion and culture are intertwined such that it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other.

#### *4.3 The Nsenga people as subject for theological study*

Human beings are an inexhaustible field of study, as they are continuously studied from various academic disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Biology, Anthropology, and so on. In this chapter, the theological study of the Nsenga people is discussed among many aspects of research. In Chapter Two, it was mentioned that one of the tasks of theology is “to study what God has revealed about himself and the world” (Smith 2013:20). People, being part of the world, qualify as subjects for theological study, regardless of their faith orientation. Building on Louw’s concept, Hendricks (2004:22) classifies this kind of study as “theological anthropology”, arguing that “[t]heological anthropology deals with the origin, nature and destiny of human beings”. Of course, it is possible to study humanity in other academic disciplines, but it is impossible to neglect studies on humanity when doing Theology. It is difficult to totally divorce anthropology from theology because, although theology is God-centred, it is done by way of human reflections on societies, in search of meaningful relationships with God, and for active involvement in *Missio Dei*. People are both researchers and the main audience of theological studies. Moreover, theological studies show the desire to have true self-knowledge and understanding of people’s place in the world, by learning more about the self-revealed God, the Creator. The emphasis on holistic and contextual aspects confirms that theology, which is inconsiderate of the totality of human beings, loses its relevance because it fails to get rooted within contexts. The current quest for African theology is an insistence on a theology that is not only sensitive to, but also addresses its audience, the residents of Africa in all aspects of life within their local contexts.

In this chapter, the theological study of the Nsenga people is based on four assumptions. Three of the assumptions are based on human origin, nature, and destiny, according to Hendricks. The first assumption of human origin (Hendricks 2004:22) considers the Nsenga, regardless of the historical account of their migration, as people whose true origin is in God, their Creator. They are part of the whole creation of God, created to reflect his image and likeness under the illumination of the Holy Spirit as all other human beings on earth.

The second assumption of nature (Hendricks 2004:22) views the Nsenga people, as their counterparts in all other ethnic groups of the world, as having fallen short in reflecting the perfect image of God, due to the entry of sin in the world. Hence, they are tainted by sinful nature. The imperfection of the Nsenga people means that they are also in need of redemption through Jesus Christ.

The third assumption is based on the fact that the Nsenga people also have a share in the destiny of God, their Creator. God's plan is non-exclusive. Therefore, they are an integral part of the people destined to receive salvation from the Holy Trinity through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In short, the basis for studying the Nsenga people from the theological perspective hinges on the fact that, although tainted by human sinfulness, they are subjects of God's redemption like the rest of his creation.

The fourth reason for the theological study of the Nsenga people is that they have contemplations in their attempts to understand the Creator. Chirinda (2021:81) claims that Africa is a continent of naturally religious people who believe that there is a power that comes from Heaven. Africans knew that there is the supreme God before the missionaries came to this continent. It is believed that this power reaches the earth in the form of rain, thunder, locusts, droughts, and many other manifestations. Apart from the concept of the existence of the Creator, they had the traditional concepts of sin, confession, and atonement prior to the missionary era. They believed that the wage of sin is punishment from *Nyamalenga* (the Creator) which can be averted through confession and atonement. The forgiveness by *Nyamalenga* is evident in the reward of rains in the case of drought and the removal of forms of calamity that befall humanity as a result of their deviant behaviour. This means that the Nsenga people had concepts of theodicy, evident in the belief that human

sinfulness is the cause of human suffering and that atonement is viewed as a way of restoring the harmonious relationship with *Nyamalenga*.

The researcher observed that the antagonistic dichotomy between culture and Christianity is the struggle of what to believe. It is, in fact, the tussle to relate the long-standing culturally upheld belief with the newly received one through the teachings propagated by the church. For this reason, the Nsenga people have several comparatives between the Christian faith and their contents of cultural beliefs. Therefore, the statement of *chikristu ni chikristu, mwambo ni mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wacinkhalire* indicates the Nsenga people's struggle between the Christian faith and the culture-based contemplations on points of antagonism. The dichotomy is a manifestation of some form of ATR reflections on the Creator, influencing how they ultimately live their lives in practical terms. The theological study of the Nsenga people transcends viewing them from the perspective of origin as God's creation, fallen nature in need of redemption through Christ's sacrifice, and having a destiny in God, as it includes considering the reflection on the Creator in the quest to make sense of their belief within respective contexts.

#### *4.4 Historical influences of cultural formation among the Nsenga people*

Realising that their current state is an accumulation of past experiences, the researcher inquired about the historical background of the Nsenga people from the participants. The data gathered through one-on-one interviews, observation, and literature show that the historical background influences the way in which the Nsenga people form culture among members of their community. In this chapter, the historical background discusses the Nsenga people's migration, past experiences, and social organisation. TLP2 and TLP3 opine that, although the Nsenga people are among the earliest ethnic groups to settle in Zambia, hardly anything is known about them. Zulu (2016:86) indicates that the limited information on the Nsenga people includes their origins and history. TLP2 and TLP3, as well as Zulu (2016:86) share the opinion that the Nsenga people share their history with many other ethnic groups of Central Africa, as they are perceived to have migrated into Zambia from the Luba-Lunda kingdom of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). TLP3 indicates that the Nsenga people might have migrated into Zambia with the Chikunda people, who are settled in the Mambwe District of the Eastern Province. TLP3 further mentions that, although they parted ways with the Chikunda people, the Nsenga people were

peaceful people without traditional leaders in terms of chiefs or an overall tribal leader. TLP2 indicates that they only had family leaders known as *atumvi* (the family leading uncle). Mwale (1973:26) records that the position of Senior Chief Kalindawalo, leader of the Nsenga people, was instituted by the Europeans. However, Mwale (1973:26) does not state which White missionaries or colonial masters instituted Chipenda to the position of Kalindawalo. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that, despite being among the earliest to settle in Zambia, the Nsenga people did not have ethnic traditional leaders up to the time of the European domination. It is assumed that the installation of a leading chief among the Nsenga people was for administrative purposes. It was aimed at establishing a governance structure among the local people for administrative purposes. Even if missionaries paved the way for the colonial governance of Africa, there is no evidence that they were involved in tribal governance issues to the extent of installing chiefs. Although Mwale (1973:26) does not state which group of Europeans installed Chipenda as Kalindawalo, the issue of formation of governance structure suggests that colonial masters did it. Unfortunately, until now, the conflict of the Nsenga people revolves around families under the genealogies of the Mundikula and Chipenda families. TLP3 indicates that the then leader Michael Nsangu falls in the generation line of Chipenda, who was installed by the Europeans.

Zambian ethnic groups follow either the matriarchal or the patriarchal system. The Nsenga people are among some of the Zambian ethnic groups who follow the matriarchal system, just like their Bemba, Bisa, and Chewa counterparts. This shows that the matriarchal system seems to be common practice among ethnic groups that migrated from the Luba-Lunda kingdom in the DRC. The system is called matriarchal because, although children bear their father's surname, they trace their lineage through their mother. With paternity, lineage is traced through the father. According to TLP1, the Nsenga families, although classified as matriarchal, are headed by a male leader called *atumvi* (an uncle). This means that, under typical Nsenga tradition, an uncle has more authority over his nephews and nieces than the father has on his sons and daughters. Like any other African ethnic group, the Nsenga people live in extended families. Therefore, the title *atumvi* is preferably attributed to the eldest among all the uncles who has to know the family background very well. Through the family leadership of *atumvi*, the Nsenga culture is as male-headed as the patriarchal system followed by other ethnic groups. However, history proves that women have played a major role in cultural formation.

TPL1, TLP2, TLP3, and TLP6 confirm that the Nsenga ethnicity in Zambia comprises ten chiefdoms, namely Kalindawalo, Nyanje, Nyamphande, Sandwe, Mwape, Mwanjawanthu, Mumbi, Nyalugwe, Lwembe, and Ndake. All the ten chiefs are superintended by Senior Chief Kalindawalo. Each of these ten chiefdoms is headed by a traditional leader known as *Mfummu* (chief), addressed as *Mambo* (chief) or *Chalo* (literally meaning the nation or world). The researcher observed that the Nsenga people have a philosophy which states that *chalo ni anthu*, literally translated as “world or nation is people”. It links the world, the nation not to land but to people. As opposed to materialism, the *chalo ni anthu* attaches significance and respect to humanity above material things. The *Chalo* attribute is addressed to the chief in recognition of his/her headship over the affairs of the people in the chiefdom. The traditional leaders of chiefdoms are (not according to their order of seniority) Senior Chief Kalindawalo (who is also the head of all the Nsenga chiefs and people), Chief Nyanje, Chief Nyamphande, Chief Sandwe, Chief Mwape, Chief Mwanjawanthu, Chief Mumbi, Chief Nyalugwe, Chief Lwembe, and Chief Ndake. By virtue of his name on the above list of chiefs, Chief Kalindawalo plays the role of heading all the Nsenga people as well as the Kalindawalo chiefdom.

#### *4.5 Nsenga cultural formation in times of crisis*

From his conversation with the participants on the historical background, the researcher realised that, despite having experienced a number of challenges, the Nsenga people are still strongly attached to their traditional religion and culture, even after being Christianised (Zulu 2016:86). Mwanjawanthu and his chiefdom went ahead to conduct *mwambo wa kuthira nsembe* (the ceremony of pouring libation to the ancestral spirits) until it was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to TLP1, *kuthira nsembe* is similar to the *Tuwimba* ceremony, only that it is done at a household or chiefdom level. TLP3 indicates that, in view of the pandemic, the Nsenga people are encouraged to pour libation to ancestral spirits under a tree called *msoro* in their respective families as a way of keeping their traditional religion alive and seeking the intervention of Nyamalenga during the pandemic. TLP2 attributes the continued survival of the Nsenga culture and tradition in tough times to its cultural formation system. The Nsenga people and their culture have survived the following challenges, among many others.

#### 4.5.1 *Domination by the Ngoni-speaking people*

The peaceful yet ethnically uncoordinated administration made the Nsenga people vulnerable and exposed to attacks by other tribes. Supported by Mwale (1973:25-27) and Chondoka (2017:17), TLP3 mentions that the Ngoni, the Chewa, and the Europeans took advantage of the Nsenga people's lack of tribal leadership structures. Chondoka (2017:17) confirms this allegation, stating that the Nsenga people offered hardly any resistance to the attack by the Ngoni people. The Ngoni people, originally known as *amanguni*, spent some time among the Nsenga people after escaping from King Shaka of Zululand, South Africa, under the leadership of Zwangendaba. It is said that Zwangendaba and his sister Nyamazana were among the army generals under King Zwide and his successor Sikunyana of the Ndwandwe people. The migration from Natal, South Africa, was prompted by fear, due to the defeat of the powerful Chief Zwide and Ndwandwe people by King Shaka of the Zulus. It is believed that, in approximately 1818, Zwangendaba ran away from Shaka's terrorising *Mfecane* wars with his *impi* (soldiers), leaving behind wives and children. The migration that started off with no particular preconceived destination as long as it was far enough from Shaka and his wars, resulted in the Zwangendaba-led Ngoni people settling in the Chipata District, Zambia, northern part of Malawi, Tanzania, and Mozambique (Chondoka 2017:16-17, 21).

Upon the death of Zwangendaba, the Ngoni people split into several groups, due to succession disputes. A good number of the Ngoni people followed Zwangendaba's first born son Ntuto, known as Mpezeni. The Ngoni people under Paramount Mpezeni Ntuto are currently settled in the Chipata District of Zambia (Chondoka 2017:xiii). On their way to the places where they are now settled, the Ngoni people raided the Nsenga people, and forcibly married their women as wives. According to Chondoka (2017:36), the Ngoni people's brutality of imposing themselves on women went to the extent of marrying the Nsenga men's wives by force. Although the Nsenga women were married as victims, the story ends with their victory, for they highly influenced the Ngoni people under Paramount Chief Mpezeni, settled in Chipata, Zambia, in many ways. To confirm the influence of the Nsenga women, this research highlights only two critical areas where the Nsenga women influenced the Ngoni people.

The first influence is in the field of language, as it is difficult for a stranger to differentiate between *Chinsenga*, the language spoken by the Nsenga people, and *Chingoni*, the language spoken by the Ngoni people. The similarity between the two languages arises from the fact that the so-called spoken Ngoni language completely diverged from its South African roots, due to the influence by the Nsenga language. It is usually assumed that language shifts from a regressive minority to a dominant language. Based on that theory, it was inevitable for *Chingoni* to be dominant, as the Ngoni people imposed their authority and dominated the Nsenga people. Chondoka (2017:37) is of the opinion that the Ngoni people started speaking Nsenga while they settled among them under Zwangendaba. Machinyise *et al.* (2020:625-627) attribute the death of *Chingoni* to intermarriages. They state that, naturally, all the people captured by the Ngoni people had to learn the *Chingoni* language, but intermarriage is cited as one of the major contributors to the extinction of the language, as children born from Nsenga mothers preferred speaking the language of their mothers rather than that of their fathers. In due course, the *Chingoni* language was confined to the older generation. Ultimately, some words were only used in royal praises and spiritual incantations. The Nsenga women, whom Ngoni men married by force, thus proved the assumption that dominant languages suppress the minor wrong, as things turned the other way round. *Chingoni* is spoken during the *Nc'wala* annual ceremony of the Ngoni people in eulogising royal tributes to Chief Mpezeni. Recently, someone prayed in *Chingoni* during the opening of the *Nc'wala* ceremony.

Although the Ngoni people won physical battles, the Nsenga people, by way of their women, impacted on the Ngoni people to such an extent that their language has been almost irretrievably lost. Currently, it would take a great deal of resources and commitment for the Ngoni people to restore their South African-rooted language. Kishindo (2002:221) describes an effort to revive *Chingoni* as a futile exercise likened to “flogging a dead cow”. Even if the Ngoni people have lost touch with the original language, they still hold very strongly onto their cultural traditions under the motto *ungoni sungaphere* (Ngoni nature, tradition, and culture will never cease) (Machinyise *et al.* 2020:625). They have maintained their patriarchal system, the annual *Nc'wala* ceremony (celebration of the first fruit), the *ngoma* (traditional dance), and many other distinguished practices that make them stand out as a unique ethnic group.

The second influence emanates from the strength of the matrilineal nature of the Nsenga culture, where women determine the lineage. Meanwhile, the Ngoni people are patrilineal, with their lineage traced through their fathers. After peace was established between the two groups, the matrilineal system of the Nsenga culture influenced the traditional relationship of both the Nsenga and the Ngoni people. The Nsenga people viewed themselves as uncles or mothers of the Ngoni people. This means that the Ngoni people were traditionally sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces by virtue of the fact that their forefathers were born from Nsenga women. During the funeral service of Chief Nyamphande, Chief Madzimawe, speaking on behalf of Paramount Chief Mpezeni and the Ngoni people, kept on referring to the deceased as an uncle. According to TPL1, an uncle known as *atumvi* or *amalume* in Nsenga, is the shepherd, leader, head, and custodian of the family and its genealogy. The word *amalume*, although literally translated as uncle, is a compound word that abbreviates the phrase *amama analume*. *Amama* is the Nsenga word for mother, while *analume* refers to masculinity, hence *amalume* is ‘male mothers’. As opposed to the English language, where the father’s brothers are also called uncles, it only refers to the mother’s brothers among the Nsenga. Meanwhile, the biological father and his brothers are called fathers, while his sisters are called *atata anakazi* (‘female fathers’). The use of *amalume* and *atata anakazi* indicates that some relationship terms are more linguistic than biological, where fatherliness and motherliness include both male and female, as determined by how the person relates to the child. TLP1 states that, among the Nsenga people, *atumvi* or *amalume* occupies a very important place in a person’s life. It is a special honour for the Ngoni people to call the Nsenga chiefs uncles or mothers. This indicates that the Ngoni people respect the motherhood of the Nsenga people. The uncle-nephew and niece relationship in matrilineal Nsenga is equivalent to father, son, and daughter relationship in the patrilineal system.

Although both the Ngoni and the Nsenga people respect each other’s sovereignty, they use their uncle/mother and nephew/niece relationship for mutual benefit. This sets a good example of how past conflicts between warring parties can be resolved and used as a positive force for mutual benefit. There is a similar relationship of peace for mutual benefit after the war between the Ngoni and the Bemba people, in the northern part of Zambia. In the Ngoni-Nsenga scenario, Nsenga women, due to their resilience, stand as an example that it is possible to evolve from a position of disadvantage to one of equality. This story is a sign of hope that it is possible to attain equality for

all mankind, despite the currently witnessed racial, status, gender, and other hegemonic points of differences causing hostilities in the world.

#### 4.5.2 *The Nsenga and the Chewa people*

During interviews with TLP1 and TLP2, the researcher observed that some of the Nsenga people are seeking emancipation from Gawa Undi and the Chewa people. It was observed that the Nsenga people seem to be heading towards a strong alignment with the Ngoni people, whom they view as *malisa* (nephews and nieces). The conflict seems to point towards the Nsenga people's desire for autonomy from the Chewa people. It is believed that Nsenga land is under Gawa Undi, the Paramount Chief of the Chewa people. The Chewa people are predominantly located in Katete and Chadiza as well as in some parts of the Chipata, Chipangali, Lumezi, Lundazi, and Sinda districts. It is claimed that the name for the Senior Chief Kalindawalo, the overall leader of the Nsenga people, is a compound word consisting of "*kalinda*" (guard, steward, overseer, or custodian) and "*bwalo*" (arena or area). Therefore, the compound word *kalinda bwalo* literally refers to a person who guards or oversees the arena or area. It is believed that Senior Chief Kalindawalo was installed by Gawa Undi, the Paramount Chief of the Chewa, to oversee the Nsenga people; hence, the title Kalindabwalo, which over time has come to be pronounced as Kalindawalo. This installation means that even the Nsenga people are under Paramount Chief Gawa Undi.

This is also evident in the order of the titles. One of the ways in which the Chewa people address Paramount Chief Gawa Undi is *mwini dziko*. The Chewa word *mwini* means the owner, while *dziko* is land, nation, or world. In this case, the word *dziko* refers to the land under the jurisdiction of the Chewa people. By the ascription of praise *mwini dziko*, Gawa Undi is depicted as the owner of all the land occupied by the Chewa people in parts of Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Meanwhile, the overall traditional leader of the Nsenga people is referred to as *kalinda bwalo*. This means that Senior Chief Kalindawalo is not the owner of the Nsenga land, for it also belongs to Paramount Chief Gawa Undi. The arrangement of addresses of praise seemingly ranks the Chewa chiefs above Kalindawalo, the overall traditional leader of the Nsenga people.

In their argument against the leadership of Gawa Undi over the Nsenga people, both TLP1 and TLP3 refer to a book written by Mwale. They argue that the book indicates that Gawa Undi passed

through Nsengaland three times, thereby indicating that the Nsenga people migrated into Zambia earlier than the Chewa people. Mwale (1973:26) claims that, initially, Kalindawalo was a steward of Paramount Chief Gawa Undi. As he passed through Nsengaland three times, Gawa Undi admired it because of its fertility. He thus moved Mundikula from Malawi and placed him at Chitete to oversee the Nsengaland he admired. This claim qualified Mundikula to be accorded the title of *Kalindabwalo*. Mwale further asserts that the letter ‘b’ from *Kalindabwalo* was dropped to be *Kalindawalo*, due to the Lala people’s failure to pronounce the name. The title *Kalindawalo*, as the overseer of the Gawa Undi’s wealth among the Nsenga people, remains up to this day, even after the death of the first appointed Mundikula. The title of *Kalindawalo* was converted from being a steward of Gawa Undi’s wealth to a leader of the Nsenga people by the colonial masters (Mwale 1973:26).

CLP2 mentions that some elements of the Nsenga people seeking emancipation from the Chewa people were evident during the burial of the late Letiya Banda, who was on the throne of the Nyanje Chieftainship. The phrase “who was enthroned” is used for the Nsenga people to distinguish chieftainship from the bearer of its office. It is assumed that office bearers die but not chieftainship. Therefore, prior to the burial of the body of the deceased office bearer, the successor has to be put in place so that the chieftainship remains. Chieftainess Nyanje is, by custom, regarded as the wife of Gawa Undi of the Chewa people. Mwale (1973:26) claims that the first Nyanje Gawa Undi’s wife was left behind on the trip from the Lala people to Mano in Mozambique because she became tired and her legs were swollen, due to old age. The relationship of Chieftainess Nyanje and Gawa Undi as wife and husband is not in real terms but only a symbolic recognition of the marriage of their foreparents. Due to this symbolic relationship, Paramount Chief Gawa Undi was supposed to attend the burial of the late Letiya Banda but he could not, due to arguments.

Against all odds, the Nsenga people still remain strongly attached to their identity, tradition, and culture. Despite suffering defeat against the Ngoni people at one point in history, court litigation over the succession dispute of Senior Chief Kalindawalo, and Christianisation, the Nsenga people remain committed to their culture (Zulu 2016:86). Christianisation of the Nsenga people points to the fact that they are under the influence of both their culture and Christian faith because both have become acceptable ways of life (Zulu 2016:87). However, there are times when the Nsenga people

are caught up in the dilemma between cultural and Christian faith ‘permissibles’ that seem to antagonise each other. According to Soko (2014:19), the antagonising tension between Christianisation and the desire of the indigenous people to live with their ancestral beliefs has existed since the missionary era. As attested to from the antagonism, the Nsenga people have preserved their culture, despite the pressures that would justify its loss. It is imperative for the church to understand the reason behind such a commitment to culture, so that the process of Christian formation among the Nsenga people is carried out effectively.

#### *4.6 Theological reflections among the Nsenga people*

From conversations with participants among traditional leaders on the tension between Christian faith and culture, the researcher classified responses as comparative and conflicting. The comparatives show that the Nsenga people have some theological reflections. TLP2 does not agree that there is an antagonising tension between the Christian faith and culture. TLP2 bases the argument on the fact that traditional leaders have never taken any disciplinary measure against anyone for belonging to a church or for practising Christianity. There is no mention of whether TLP2, a traditional leader and member of the RCZ, has ever seen or heard of any church member being disciplined on the basis of practising what is traditionally acceptable among the Nsenga people. However, TLP2 quickly points out that, if the researcher, being a professional theologian, observes antagonistic tension, then that is his own perception. This statement shows that the Nsenga people have no problem with Christianity, since it has been embraced as another way in which life should be lived among them. In other words, this simply shows that Christianity has a problem with the Nsenga culture and traditional practices. This implies that tension occurs when opposing factions pull in their respective direction. Since the Nsenga people are not pulling anything in their own direction but the church, there is no antagonising tension between the two. The church is blamed for its negative attitude towards the Nsenga culture.

While TLP2 implies that the church is against the Nsenga culture, TLP1 explicitly accuses the church of *kuwipilwa na mwambo wa Chinsenga*. The word *kuwipilwa* can mean harbouring bitterness, biased hatred, envy, or jealousy. Meanwhile, the phrase *mwambo wa Chinsenga* means Nsenga culture or tradition. By the phrase *kuwipilwa na mwambo wa Chinsenga*, TLP1 insinuates that the church has an unjustifiable and unfounded hatred against the Nsenga culture. TLP3, who

accuses the church of preaching against cultural practices out of lack of insight into its tradition, echoes similar sentiments. The church is accused of not taking the time to study the Nsenga culture, in order to gain in-depth insights. TLP1 further cries foul, as he accuses preachers in churches criticising the Nsenga culture without giving justifiable reasons. It is also believed that, due to such unfounded attacks on their culture, some of the Nsenga people are left in the antagonism between culture and Christian faith. TLP1 and TLP3 call upon the church to take the time to carry out a thorough study of the Nsenga culture, so that its significance is understood before being condemned. Both TLP1 and TLP3 mention that the church condemns culture out of ignorance or lack of understanding. This is a challenge indicating that the church is expected to study the Nsenga culture and make informed statements either for or against it.

TLP1 further criticises the church for reading the Bible with bias, for its members concentrate on the *chipangano ca ana*, referring to the New Testament, and omit *chipangano ca makolo*, meaning the Old Testament. *Chipangano* is a Nsenga word for covenant or agreement, while *ana* is translated as children. The reference of the New Testament to *chipangano ca ana* entails that, in a literal sense, TLP1 views it as a testament for children or youths. Meanwhile, the Nsenga word *makolo* simply refers to parents, the elderly, or the ancestors. The Old Testament is called *chipangano ca makolo* because it is viewed as having some elements related to the Nsenga culture and traditions which the New Testament does not. By implication, the concept *chipangano ca ana* and *makolo* comes from a perception that parents or the elderly are linked with the preservation of culture and traditions, whereas children and youths are associated with attempts to divert from it in search of modernity. The New Testament, being *chipangano ca ana*, is thought to be a departure from the tradition of the Old Testament. TLP1 claims that Christians avoid reading the Old Testament and deliberately focus on the New Testament as a ground for criticising the Nsenga culture out of unfounded hatred. TLP1 tends towards the Old Testament because of some similarities with the Nsenga culture.

#### *4.6.1 Traditional leaders' perspective: Christianity-culture comparatives*

TLP2 further argues about the non-existence of antagonism, by comparing Christian faith and the Nsenga culture. The claim is based on comparison, which suggests that the church and culture share a number of common grounds. The first comparative is that they are both interested in the

well-being of individuals and the harmony of the community. The second comparative is that both the church and culture, regardless of differences in mediation, are centred on the belief that all creatures are the work of the Supreme Being. The third comparative revolves around the Ten Commandments, as TLP2 claims that the Nsenga cultural ethos is similar to the Decalogue advocated by the church. Both the church and culture aim to ensure harmony between God and creatures, especially in human societies. The fourth comparative revolves around the Holy Communion, which TLP2 views as a meal of celebrating divine to human, human to human, and both divine and human to ecological fellowship. The desire to be at peace with the Creator, fellow human beings, and the environment, as a vital aspect of the well-being of humanity, is at the centre of both Christianity and the Nsenga culture. During *Tuwimba* and *Kuthira nsembe*, peace meals (foodstuffs and beer) are served to all those who attend the ceremony and ancestral spirits as a celebration of the visible with the invisible. It also involves vertical (towards the Creator) and horizontal (interpersonal and ecology) fellowships. Holy Communion is a celebratory meal around Christ's sacrificial mediatory role which necessitates vertical and horizontal reconciliation. According to TLP1, Nsenga ceremonies end with a meal aimed at restoring and maintaining relationships of harmony with both the visible and the invisible. Both TLP1 and TLP2 emphasise that interpersonal affairs affect the state of relationship with *Nyamalenga*, ancestors, and the rest of visible creation. TLP2 also mentions that, at times, the vertical and horizontal relationships are celebrated by sharing bread and *vinjo* (wine) during Holy Communion. The leader indicates that, in Nsenga, the relationship with *Nyamalenga* is celebrated by pouring libations while foodstuffs likened to Holy Communion bread and beer as wine, are served to people attending the *tuwimba* ceremony. During the *Tuwimba* and *Kuthira nsembe* ceremonies, vessels of beer, to which TLP2 refers as *vinjo*, are strategically placed around the *Tuwimba* arena. Unlike in the church, where Holy Communion is served to only those admitted to the Lord's Table, during the *Tuwimba* ceremony, food and beer are put in strategic places for easy access to whoever wants to partake, regardless of their ethnicity. Unfortunately, this results in indiscriminate consumption of alcohol, as beer is available to even children under the age of eighteen years.

TLP1, TLP2, TLP3, and TLP7 share the opinion that the Nsenga people also have a concept of human sinfulness, with an understanding of sin as the greatest barrier to the harmonious relationship between *Nyamalenga* and his creation. In Nsenga culture, sin is viewed as offending

the inaccessible *Nyamalenga*, the Creator and upholder of human harmony and well-being. Both Christians and the Nsenga people believe in the need for a mediator between the Creator and his creatures. Christians believe that the mediatory role has been and is fully fulfilled through God's self-sacrifice on the cross in the person of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the Nsenga people traditionally believe that the ancestral spirits play a mediatory role. TLP1 shares that the Nsenga people have a sense of human inadequacy to reach *Nyamalenga*. It is believed that ancestors are closer to him. The concept of the unbridged gap between *Nyamalenga* and people makes relationships with the ancestors extremely vital. The ancestors, as the in-between mediators, take petitions of the lowly humanity to the farfetched *Nyamalenga*. TLP2 shows that both Christianity and the Nsenga culture share the view of human inadequacy and the need for a mediator to gain access to the Creator. The only difference is: Who plays the mediatory role?

The other shared concept between Christianity and the Nsenga culture is the role a tree plays in their beliefs. Although TLP2 argues against the antagonism between culture and Christianity, he points out that, under traditional religion, there are petitions to *Nyamalenga* through the spirits of the dead under the "*msoro*" tree or shrine. Meanwhile, in Christianity, the tree is part of the process through the cross where Christ was crucified. By the cross of Christ for Christians and the *msoro* for the Nsenga people, the tree is viewed to be significant in reconciling human beings to the Creator. The Nsenga traditional religion attaches substantial spiritual value to the *msoro* tree. For unknown reasons, it is considered to be a burial place for miscarried fetuses and neonatal deaths. The *Msoro* tree is also a point of sacrifice and petition via the spirits of the dead to *Nyamalenga* (the Creator). It is believed that the Nsenga people petition the same God Christians worship in their churches. TLP2 claims that both Christians and the Nsenga people, under their traditions, worship God the Creator through different mediums and mediators. The concept of the tree in both Christianity and the Nsenga culture needs to be studied in-depth and thoroughly addressed.

TLP2 further points out that, under their leadership, the Nsenga people are encouraged to worship God in the church. However, when they return to their respective villages, they are under traditional leaders. This statement is significant as it shows a number of factors regarding the relationship between Christianity and culture. The Nsenga people and the traditional leaders welcome Christianity among them as one of the ways of reaching *Nyamalenga*. People spend far

less time in the church compared to the time they spend in the community. This entails that the Nsenga people are more under traditional rule than the church. The church can serve and teach faith to the congregants, but daily decisions are made in interaction with cultural realities. The Nsenga culture relates more to the Old Testament than to the New Testament. TLP2 relates with the Decalogue, whereas TLP1 keeps on referring to the Old Testament as being close to the Nsenga culture. TLP1 blames the church for being more inclined towards the New Testament and for underutilising the Old Testament in its critique on the Nsenga culture. The church is accused of doing this deliberately, in order to promote its desire to condemn the Nsenga culture. The Old Testament is viewed as resonating with their culture.

#### *4.6.2 Concept of theodicy among the Nsenga people*

The discussion reveals that the Nsenga people believe in three sources of calamities. First, calamities are the result of human sinfulness. The word *Nyamalenga* is a Nsenga word for Creator. It is understood that, besides being the Creator, *Nyamalenga* also possesses the ultimate power to sustain and bless creation. Although *Nyamalenga* is good and means well for the creatures, it is believed that human beings, through their sinfulness, provoke him to anger. When *Nyamalenga*'s anger is provoked by human sinfulness, he punishes them by withdrawing his goodness which may manifest in drought, pandemics, or unexplainable deaths. A belief that *Nyamalenga* is all-sufficient and lacking nothing indicates that human beings need him and not vice versa. Therefore, maintaining a good relationship with *Nyamalenga*, by avoiding sin, is crucial for the well-being of humanity. *Nyamalenga* is also understood as a forgiving God who, regardless of the level of anger provoked by human sinfulness, is able to relent and bless his creation once more. It is also believed that, although the effects of goodness and punishment from *Nyamalenga* reach living human beings, he is too transcendental to be reached, no matter how human beings attempt to approach him. The gap between *Nyamalenga* and the people is so huge that it requires a mediator to bridge it. Since the dead are considered to be closer to *Nyamalenga* and the people, they are considered to be in a position to play the mediatory role. During sacrifice or libation, their petitions are presented to the unapproachable *Nyamalenga* through ancestral spirits.

The other source of calamity is the angry spirits of the dead. A good relationship between the living and the mediating spirits of the dead is held in high esteem. As a way of valuing the relationship between the living and the dead, TLP2 shares that, in the absence of the *Tuwimba* annual ceremony

for the Nsenga people, families were urged to conduct *kuthira nsembe* under a *msoro* tree. The word *kuthira* means pouring and *nsembe* means sacrifice. Therefore, *kuthira nsembe* literally means pour the sacrifice, pouring libation. The exercise of *kuthira nsembe* is considered to be vital for the preservation of good relationships with the dead who play a mediatory role between *Nyamalenga* and the living. According to TLP3, calamity among the Nsenga people is a sign that the spirits of the dead have withdrawn their mediatory role; hence, they are not able to mediate between *Nyamalenga* and the people. Both TPL2 and TLP3 share the opinion that persistent calamities in the community can also come from the angry ancestral spirits.

CLP1 indicates that the Nsenga people perceive witchcraft as another source of calamity. Although witchcraft still falls under the sinfulness of humanity, it is highlighted on its own because the calamities emanating from the acts of human beings do not fall under punishment from *Nyamalenga*. CPL2 states that witchcraft is one of the most feared practices among the Nsenga people, as it is believed to be a manipulation of evil powers to victimise even the innocent for selfish ends. Therefore, calamity caused by witchcraft is perceived as a product of the wicked and inconsiderate human heart. Finally, the Nsenga people also believe that the cause of certain calamities may be scientifically explained. Calamities, regardless of the source, are to the greatest extent considered to be the products of human sinful activities. This means that human beings affect the environment, based on the condition of their hearts and the way in which they live in practicality. TPL1, TLP2, TLP3, and TLP6 indicate that it is important to preserve and transmit the Nsenga cultural ethos and values as means of effecting a harmonious community environment.

#### *4.7 Positive impacts of RCZ faith formation*

All the interviewed church leaders agree that the RCZ faith formation made some positive impact. CLP1 and CLP4 mention numerical growth as evidence of the effectiveness of the RCZ faith formation. CLP7 uses his testimony that he resigned as headman, the position he held for 25 years, in order to concentrate on his Christian faith as evidence of the effectiveness of the RCZ faith formation. CLP2 attests that he has seen Nsenga people being transformed spiritually. CLP3 points to the continued existence of the RCZ as evidence that its formation process is making positive impacts among the Nsenga people. However, CLP1 and CLP7 point out that, despite the numerical growth, some of the Nsenga RCZ members are still struggling spiritually. According to CLP7,

some are still stuck between cultural tradition and Christianity. CLP6 and CLP3 mention that some of the Nsenga RCZ members are not spiritually transformed, despite passing through all the processes of faith formation.

#### *4.8 RCZ leaders' perspective on the Christianity and culture conflict*

The researcher asked church leader participants to share points of conflict between the Christian faith and the Nsenga culture. CLP1, aged between 30 and 50 years, is a lay leader in congregation E and not a Nsenga by tribe, although he works as a civil servant among the Nsenga people. Being a leader in the church and civil service gives him an opportunity to interact with the Nsenga people, their culture and traditions from two aspects. The first aspect is through interaction with members of the community as a civil servant working among children. Through pupils, socialisation spills over to parents who are considered to be partners in the education of their children. Through this interaction, CLP1 has an opportunity to appreciate the Nsenga people in their natural environment. The second aspect is interaction with the Nsenga people from the perspective of their subscription to the Christian faith. The two fronts of relationship with the community enable CLP1 to have a better understanding of the Nsenga people.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the decline in or disappearance of witchcraft was predicted because of economic development, urbanization, education, and the rise of Christianity and Islam. However, it continues to be a social concern that draws the attention of a number of organisations (Cimpric 2010:9; Ashforth 2015:6). Some of the Nsenga people believe that all misfortunes are the result of witchcraft activities. This belief results in some congregants of congregation E getting involved into witchdoctor consultation as a way of establishing the cause of misfortunes. CPL1 and CPL2 give an account of a scenario where a boy drowned in a dam. The family, comprising members of congregation E, could not believe that the cause of drowning was natural. The researcher observed that the boy was allegedly bewitched, due to the belief that witchcraft, as a way of concealing evidence, can influence the mind of a person to make wrong decisions.

CPL1 also narrates that, in 2019, they handled one case involving witch doctor consultation and three similar cases in 2020. This is contrary to the RCZ Bylaw and Procedure (BP) 72.2f, which states that “[m]embers of the Church should not consult witch doctors, spiritists, engage in

witchcraft and any other such mediums that are contrary to the teaching of the Bible”. Anyone who transgresses this BP must appear before the Elders’ Council for a disciplinary process. It is said that the purpose and exercise of church discipline in the RCZ, according to BP 62.1, is to be “spiritual in character”, based on spiritual means and value intending to maintain the honour of God, purity of the body of Christ, and seeking the salvation of the one who has sinned. This suggests that discipline in the RCZ focuses not only on the affected individual but also on the entire church. For the church, it serves as a deterrent to other members but, in congregation E, the number of congregants consulting witch doctors increased by two in 2020 compared to 2019.

The first case is recorded under Minute number 4.1.6. of congregation E. It concerns a lady who was placed on six months’ suspension “*chifukwa cobvina mashawe*” (because of dancing *mashawe*). *Mashawe* are forms of spirits that are believed to possess people; hence, the dance is not part of the Nsenga tradition. *Kubvina mashawe*, like its synonym *kubvina vimbuza*, is viewed as a means of spiritual healing or mystical therapeutic dance performed by a possessed person (Moyo 2014:35). The possessed person dances as a process of healing. The researcher observed that the ritual dance is performed by the possessed person, with a belief that it is a way of *kunkhazika mashawe pansi* (appeasing or making *mashawe* settle down). This means that the *mashawe* spirits do not leave the person’s body. The person remains possessed but the *mashawe* calm down and are at peace. The word *kunkhazika mashawe* suggests a belief that the spirits torment or even threaten the possessed person with death, unless the ritual is performed. The other reason for the ritual dance is *kufumya* (exorcising spirits). It is believed that people possessed with *mashawe* may present with calamities, nightmares, and curable illnesses that do not respond to both conventional and traditional treatment. However, illnesses that do not respond to treatment, calamities, and nightmares are merely signs or symptoms requiring a diagnosis to establish whether the person is truly possessed with *mashawe*. It is possible to mistake a common illness with the one caused by *mashawe* spirits; hence, the first performance involves a ritual of establishing whether the person presenting signs of being possessed truly has *mashawe* spirit or not. This ritual is performed by a *ng’anga* (someone who is believed to be possessed by stronger spirits or an expert in exorcising or appeasing *mashawe* spirits).

During this first ritual, the names, number, type or types, and reason why the *mashawe* spirit possessed the person are established. Consequential rituals involve the beating of drums, to which the person possessed with *mashawe* must dance. The dances are usually conducted at night in the inter-farming seasons. The possessed person may dance once, for a number of occasions, or for the rest of his/her life. Despite being a pacification, the dance is also treated as entertainment to other people who come to watch the dance. Some of the possessed people perform the ceremonies against their wish but do so as a process of pacifying the *mashawe* spirits, in order to attain freedom from their torment. In some instances, appeasing the *mashawe* demands what is known as *kumwa chilopa* (drinking of fresh animal blood). The *mashawe* spirits prescribe the type of tamed animal from which *chilopa* must be drawn. Depending on the nature of the *mashawe*, the demand for such animals may range from a chicken to a cow. In many instances, they even prescribe the colour of the animal, especially pure black or white. There are instances when the demand is beyond the acquisition ability of the possessed person; the *ng'anga* negotiates for a lesser animal with the *mashawe spirits* on his/her behalf. It is believed that, in some circumstances, the *mashawe spirits* agree and settle for a lesser demand. However, in unfortunate circumstances, the *mashawe* may maintain the higher demand and continue to torture the possessed person until the demand is met. Out of fear that the possessed person may continue suffering under the oppression or die of *mashawe*, family members contribute towards the acquisition of the demanded animal and other requirements. In addition, it also happens that the *ng'anga* who helps the possessed person has to be paid for the services of identifying, dancing, and pacifying the *mashawe spirits*.

The practice of *kubvina mashawe* is said to be common among the Nsenga people within the jurisdiction of congregation E. However, *kubvina mashawe* and other spiritual dances are not restricted to the Nsenga people; they are also spread among other ethnic groups. For example, the *vimbuza* dance of the spirits is practised among the Tumbuka people of Lundazi in Zambia and the northern part of Malawi. Regardless of differences in names, these dances of the spirits have some similarities. All these dances include functional and non-functional *mashawe* spirits. 'Functional' refers to spirits that are believed to lead the possessed person into becoming a traditional healer, witch finder, or both. These possess the person as a solution to the community by providing medical services or identifying and fighting against the problem of witchcraft. For such *mashawe*, the purpose of the dance is *kukhazika pansi mizimu*, which means to make the spirits settle down

so that they perform their function or functions without causing illnesses and havoc on the possessed person and the people around him/her. Despite settling down, these spirits still lay down conditions that must be followed religiously. It is believed that non-functional spirits possess a person without any specific service to the community or benefit to the possessed person. Such spirits are not appreciated; hence, the process of dancing is performed with the purpose of exorcising them. Even if the church has a team of people called intercessors or prayer warriors who pray to exorcise the *mashawe* and the demons out of people, some members still consult traditional doctors. In congregation E, a congregant was on one-year definite suspension for opting to perform a ritual of practice of *kubvina mashawe*.

The second case recorded under Minute 4.1.4. of congregation E is about a congregant who was on one-year suspension for consulting and seeking medical help from a *ng'anga* (traditional healer) for her ill child. Such actions may be understood, if one knows the existing belief among the Nsenga people. It is believed that there are generally two causes of illnesses. These categories are based on the perception that the world is a complex of being scientific and of being more than scientific. The 'non-scientific' is understood to be the spiritual dimension of the world. Both the scientific and the spiritual dimensions of the world are appreciated and adhered to, although there is a strong inclination towards the latter. The researcher observed that, although the pastors and other church leaders offer pastoral counselling and prayers for healing some of the members, they are not convinced that the spiritual dimension of the church can address the spiritual dimension of their challenges. Congregants who consult traditional healers mention that *kupemphera nikwamene koma nikuyesa vonse vonse* (prayer is acceptable but you can also try other sources). Contrary to BP72 (2f), they believe that traditional healers are also sources of healing; hence, *nikuyesa vonse vonse* (try all available means of healing).

#### 4.8.1 *The world as scientific*

Using ethnography, the researcher observed that the Nsenga people believe that the world is scientific. The belief is on the premise that some illnesses, means of healing, and sources of well-being for humanity can be explained and resolved scientifically. Therefore, science is not viewed as an enemy or inferior but as an important ally contributing to the harmony of the human body and society. It can help fight some of the pandemics that cause havoc among people in

communities. All diseases that can be scientifically explained, diagnosed, treated, studied, and discovered are usually considered to be normal. The term ‘normal’ suggests that it is accepted and normal to contract illnesses. Diseases of this kind can be treated at the hospital with *mankhwala acizungu*. *Mankhwala* is the Nsenga word for ‘medicine’, while *acizungu* refers to its having been introduced by *azungu* (White people). The phrase *mankhwala acizungu* refers to White people’s medicine or conventional medicine. The reference to conventional medicine as *mankhwala acizungu* is viewed against the background that it was introduced by European missionaries among the Nsenga people. This is the kind of medicine that missionaries introduced as part and parcel of a holistic proclamation of the Gospel. It has been and continues to be believed that, for this kind of illness, a person must be taken to hospital for treatment.

#### 4.8.2 *The world is more than scientific*

The second type of illness is believed to be *matenda waku wanthu*, literally meaning ‘diseases from people’. This is not a scientific transmission of diseases, as explained by medical personnel, but it is transmitted by means of magic. Therefore, the source of this kind of illness is considered to be abnormal, beyond scientific explanation, study or diagnosis. With this concept, some of the Nsenga people believe that certain things are beyond medical scientific explanation, exploration, discovery, and experimentation. *Matenda waku wanthu* are categories of diseases that are regarded to be a result of *umfwiti* (witchcraft) or *masenga* (magic). Since witchcraft or *masenga* is spiritual in nature, these forms of diseases can only be countered by a higher spiritual source. Science is not regarded to be spiritual; hence, it is limited when it comes to treating such illnesses. It is then assumed that there is no conventional medicine that can heal *matenda waku wanthu*; hence, the ill person must consult a *ng’anga* or be taken to *oziwa mankhwala aciboyi* or *cimunthu* (those who know non-conventional medicine).

The researcher observed that a classification of diseases entails that some people believe that not all illnesses must be taken to a *ng’anga* and vice versa. This calls for the need to correctly establish the type of disease, in order to approach the right source of possible healing. It is assumed that failure to identify the source of the disease can lead to loss of life over curable diseases, due to a wrong consultation. Therefore, it is understood that, for *matenda wa ku wanthu*, a *ng’anga* must be consulted and the hospital on scientifically explained diseases. It is out of such beliefs and fear

of possible loss of life that the congregant consults a *ng'anga* over the illness of the child as s/he is convinced that the illness was *matenda waku wanthu*. As a way of trying to establish whether they acted out of ignorance, the Elders' Council asked the two congregants if they were aware of BP72.2f, which prohibits consultation of a witch doctor or spiritists. In response, they both indicated that they were very conversant with it but were seeking healing and well-being. It is obvious that the law does not address the fear of losing a beloved one, thus prompting consultation of the *ng'anga*. Depending on the inclination, some ill people start by attempting to go to the hospital with its conventional medicine, and then consult a *ng'anga* if they feel that the medical personnel are not making headway in terms of curing the illness. The shift takes place if they start suspecting that it is *matenda waku wanthu*. Some start by consulting *ng'anga* and then the hospital, upon finding out that the illness can be treated with conventional medicine. In some instances, both conventional and traditional medicines are combined. CLP6, a health worker, testifies that, due to uncertainty or lack of confidence in conventional medicine, some relatives illegally administer *makhwala aciboyi* or *cimunthu* to the patient admitted in the hospital ward.

The researcher observed that four major reasons lead to establishing that an illness is considered to be *matenda wa ku wanthu*. First, when the illness does not seem to respond to treatment by *mankhwala achizungu* (White people's medicine or conventional medicine), the ill person may be taken to a health facility for treatment. However, despite being given the prescribed medicine, the ill person does not seem to be improving. Secondly, when medical practitioners fail to diagnose the actual disease, medical personnel may carry out all the tests related to what they suspect could be the problem but fail to establish the actual illness. Thirdly, when the medical personnel cannot tell or explain the cause of the illness, the cause is beyond scientific explanation. In such instances, the person is believed to have been bewitched. Fourthly, some Nsenga people do not have confidence in *mankhwala achizungu* (conventional medicine).

CLP2 narrates a very unfortunate ordeal that resulted in a congregant's death, due to COVID-19. The congregant tested positive and was quarantined at a COVID centre. The relatives sneaked the congregant out of the facility to a *ng'anga* for consultation and treatment. During the consultation, the *ng'anga* agreed that the patient had COVID-19, arguing that the case was not like any other, for it was COVID-19 *yaku wanthu*. CLP6, a health worker, testifies that, due to lack of confidence

in conventional medicine, some relatives illegally administer *makhwala aciboyi* or *cimunthu* to patients admitted in hospital because they are not certain which medicine may heal the patient.

Most of the rural health facilities in Zambia are ill-equipped in terms of medical equipment and personnel; hence, there is a high likelihood of failure to diagnose correctly, explain the cause, and administer the right medication for some of the diseases. Some facilities do not have laboratories to carry out even basic tests on an ill person. In this case, medication is prescribed on assumption. Some clinics are run by medical staff who are not qualified for the job. For example, due to a shortage of manpower, some clinics are run by nurses who prescribe and administer medication. However, people may not tell that the medical personnel handling the ill person is unqualified. They may simply draw the conclusion that the illness is beyond scientific explanation and remedy. The excessive pressure to lose a beloved one also contributes to people consulting a *ng'anga* or spiritist. Under such pressure, some Christians attempt any source that promises healing for their beloved one.

The third case is recorded under Minute number 4.3. This involved a congregant who appeared before the Elders' Council "*chifukwa ng'anga anawapeza na nyanga*" (because the witch doctor found the congregant to have charms used in witchcraft practice). By virtue of allegedly being in possession of charms of this nature, it was assumed that the congregant was involved in the witchcraft cult. Like in any other African culture, the issues of witchcraft among the Nsenga people increase distrust among community members, lead to tension and interpersonal conflict, and break down essential networks that ensure social harmony (Ally 2015:25). The congregant denied ownership of the charms that were allegedly retrieved from her house. She also denied the witch doctor's allegation of her involvement in witchcraft. Despite denying ownership of the charms and the practice of witchcraft, the accusation resulted in tensions, conflicts, and the breakdown of the fundamental family relations cohesion, essential for social harmony.

Given the background that the family members decided to call a *ng'anga*, due to the calamity that had befallen them, the accusation intensified. The purpose of consulting the *ng'anga* was to establish the cause of the calamity. Being accused in such an environment led to conclude that the congregant was among those who were behind the tragic occurrences. This was aggravated by the

fact that the concerned congregant opposed the idea of calling a *ng'anga* during the family meeting. The congregant, being part of the family, was caught up between the Christian faith and the clan bond. The congregant even tried to refuse a house-to-house search for charms on the basis that it was against her Christian faith, but the family imposed the whole ordeal on all its members non-selectively. Therefore, the entire process of searching for charms or articles of witchcraft was done against the congregant's wish. Unfortunately, during the search, the *ng'anga* allegedly found the congregant in possession of the charms, that were believed to have been used in witchcraft activities. The turnout of events could induce the family to conclude that the congregant was trying to hide witchcraft practices behind the Christian faith. It is difficult to establish whether the congregant's refusal was based on the Christian faith or on the knowledge that she was truly involved in witchcraft.

This accusation culminated in a huge debate in the Elders' Council in view of BP 72.2f, which states that “[m]embers of the Church should not consult witch doctors, spiritists, engage in witchcraft and any other such mediums that are contrary to the teaching of the Bible”. In as much as the family considered a *ng'anga* to be a solution that would reveal a witch behind the calamity, the Bylaw and Procedure is against both the consultation of a *ng'anga* and the involvement in the practice of witchcraft. Some members of the Elders' Council were of the opinion that she should be placed on definite suspension for practising witchcraft. In as much as the congregant was screened against her wish, the *ng'anga* (witchdoctor or witch finder) declared that she was involved in witchcraft. Others argued that, although BP72.2f speaks against witchcraft, it does not permit consultation of witch doctors and spiritists. CLP2 attests that, if the Elders' Council had to place her on definite suspension, it would have implied that consultation of witch doctors and spiritists is justifiable. Ultimately, the Elders' Council resolved not to place her on definite suspension, as the information originated from a wrong source – a *ng'anga*. It was further resolved that the congregant should undergo pastoral counselling with the resident minister.

Unfortunately, decisions of this kind put the church in a wrong standing with the community, especially with those affected by the calamity. Although church discipline in the RCZ is considered to be “spiritual in character”, based on spiritual means and value for maintaining the honour of God, purity of the body of Christ, and seeking the salvation of the sinner, it has been observed that

it is viewed as some form of punishment against the offender. Such a view of church discipline leads to definite, indefinite suspension or expulsion, while other measures are considered as offensive compromise. In cases of witchcraft accusations, the community expects a stricter punishment on the accused person from the church such that anything less than their expectation may be mistaken as siding with evil practice. The church is thus caught up in a dilemma between appeasing the community and standing by its own regulation of not agreeing with the consultation of a witch finder, spiritist, or witch doctor.

The issue of witchcraft among the Nsenga people is of social pastoral concern, as it does not only affect the accused person but also the alleged victims of such practices. Ashforth (2015:7) argues that, although the rights of the perpetrators of witchcraft have to be protected, there is also a need to serve justice for the victimised society. Justice on both the accused person and society implies that issues involving witchcraft demand social healing. Although a witch finder allegedly destroys the powers of witchcraft articles and tattoos suspects with charms believed to prevent the accused from further practice, the community continues to mistrust them. Social healing is important, because the thought of existing with witches and wizards in the family becomes a source of insecurity for both members of the community and the suspect. On the one hand, the community feels uncomfortable living with people who are suspected of being perpetrators of a subtle form of criminal violence that causes illness, death, suffering, and all kinds of misfortunes using mystical powers (Ashforth 2015:7; Cimpric 2010:1). On the other hand, the accused person is wary of possible community mob justice, stigma, and discrimination.

The resolution by the Elders' Council not to place the congregant on definite suspension because accusation came from a wrong source, a *ng'anga*, did not exonerate the accused, for the ordeal remains indelibly marked in people's minds. The researcher observed that, even if the church exonerates the accused because the community continues to perceive them as witches who are hiding or protected by the church, such accusations are associated with stigma and members of the community continue to discriminate and marginalise the accused. It is obvious that both the community and the suspected witches are in need of healing from the Gospel.

#### *4.8.3 Nsenga and RCZ cross-accusations*

As the participants were sharing points of conflict between Gospel and culture, the researcher observed that there are cross-accusations between some church and traditional leaders. CLP3, aged between fifty and sixty-five years, of the Nsenga tribe, defined the Nsenga people as stiff, naked, and not ready to change. As alluded to, TLP1 and TLP3 state that the church condemns the Nsenga culture without attempting to understand its meaning and significance to its people. TLP1 claims that the leaders of some mainline churches were called to a workshop to speak on contentious issues between Christianity and the Nsenga culture. He claims that the church leaders did not have any basis for condemning culture. However, this data could not be verified with written records. The mentioned traditional churches could not confirm having been invited to such a forum. Due to lack of documentation, it is difficult to validate the information provided by TLP1. However, lack of documentation or proper record-keeping from both parties does not rule out the fact that there are cross-accusations between Christianity and the Nsenga culture. CLP1 raises the following concerns with regard to Nsenga cultural practices.

- The high rate of divorce is attributed to lack of reasonable bride price. Nsenga culture being matriarchal, men do not pay *lobola* (bride price) but *nthengo* at the point of marrying. According to TLP7 and TLP6, *nthengo* is a payment by a man to the family of the woman he intends to marry as a sign of commitment to the betrothed. After paying *nthengo*, the man moves to the woman's village for *chikomwene* (the man shifting from his village to his wife's village). TLP6 suggests that *chikomwene* was conducted, in order to establish whether the man is able to take care of the family. Unlike *lobola*, whose cost is currently as high as twenty thousand Zambian kwacha, *nthengo* oscillates between one hundred and two hundred Zambian kwacha. Both TLP7 and TLP6 state that, after spending some years at the wife's village, the husband's relatives might redeem him by paying *nthakula*. *Nthakula* is derived from the word *kutakula* which means "to carry". This implies that, by paying *nthakula*, the husband can carry or take the wife and children back to his own village. However, even *nthakula* is not as costly as *lobola* because it is also between one hundred and two hundred Zambian kwacha. CLP1, CPL2, and CLP8 insinuate that, due to the low amount paid as a sign of commitment, it is easy for one to leave the marriage, hence contributing to a high divorce rate.

- The other accusation from CLP1 is that, among the Nsenga people, due to the practice in maternal homes, some fathers fail to take full responsibility of their children. CLP1, as a civil servant, observes that, whenever children are asked to come with their parents, mostly mothers show up, even when fathers are not held up by other commitments. This is viewed as a contrast of the biblical concept of a man being the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23). This practice has to be understood from the Nsenga practice where children, even after paying *nthakula* and bearing the father's surname, still belong to their *atumvi* (the uncles).

TLP3, a Christian, though not an RCZ member, laments over the competition between traditional and Pentecostal denominations in their endeavour to amass more members for themselves. TLP1 wonders whether the church is focused on proclaiming the Gospel or on extending denominational, doctrinal, and practice domains. The leader observed doctrinal, denominational traditions, and practice-based conflicts between denominations which, sadly, in some instances, scandalise each other. Some denominations have converted Nsenga land into a doctrinal, traditional, and practices battleground, with each one claiming to teach the truth about God. Unfortunately, TLP1 is confounded by all denominations' claim to have doctrines, traditions, and practices that are based on the correct interpretation of the Bible. This rivalry results into denominations lacking a united voice, scandalising each other, and ranking themselves above others, weakening the church's ability to make the Gospel sufficiently appealing to attract the Nsenga people. With its fragmented efforts, due to the emphasis on diversity at the expense of unity, the church ironically preaches the unifying Gospel of Christ to the Nsenga people.

Simpson (1999:23) suggests that Christians need to interpret the faith in which they were traditioned. Interpretation involves developing critical, evaluative, and analytical skills for interpreting the Christian culture and self-understanding in the traditioned faith. This means that members of the church are to reflect on the transmitted content of faith, in order to authentically appropriate and use it. The researcher observed that some RCZ members, although traditioned, are not fully empowered with the ability to interpret their faith. This is evident from the trend where some tend more towards church practices. The common explanation that some of the members can offer is *ku chechi kwasu olesha or obvomekezya lini* (this is impermissible in our church), even without an understanding of the biblical reasons behind it. Such explanations are usually given

when the practice of both permissible and impermissible aspects between and among denominations or with cultures arises. Each denomination has some unique permissible and impermissible aspects, which, at times, conflict with each other. For example, taking alcohol is impermissible in the RCZ, whereas it is permissible in other denominations, to some extent. RCZ members consider taking in any amount of alcohol to be sinful, which is not the case with other denominations. The question is: “Why are some issues sinful in one denomination and not in another, yet they all claim to be one in Christ and to use the same Bible?”

Unfortunately, in mainline churches, the concepts of doctrinal integrity, permissible, and impermissible are sometimes used as tools for winning people over to the denominations. Over the years, the church has revisited some of the impermissible aspects and accepted these as part of the permissible. For example, a few years ago in the RCZ, wearing make-up, mass prayer, and prayers of deliverance were impermissible, but they are now permissible. The issue of mass prayer, where people gather in the same place and pray simultaneously, led to the expulsion of five Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in 2001. In 2012, the RCZ adopted three liturgies, of which one allowed conducting mass prayers. “The unity of the Church is not primarily based on structures, offices, doctrines or programmes ... [It is based on] new fellowship with God through Christ in the Spirit” (Migliore 1991:201). TLP3 believes that faith in Christ should be the unifying factor where members of the church have to overemphasise fellowship with God and one another. Christians need to focus on their being people constituted by the Holy Spirit through a binding covenant in Christ rather than denomination-based differences, as they carry out mission among the Nsenga people. Competitions, pride, and scandalising each other based on denomination diversities weaken the approach to proclaim Christ and the formation of faith among the Nsenga people. The church needs a united voice in its mission work.

#### *4.8.4 Data on RCZ faith formation and Nsenga contexts*

During data collection, the researcher inquired if the *Buku La Katekisma*, as the main tool for forming the faith of RCZ members, has the ability to challenge, engage, and provoke exploration and discussions of faith within the cultural context of the Nsenga people. In other words, the researcher wanted to find out how contextual the *Buku La Katekisma* is on issues affecting the Nsenga people’s life and livelihood. According to Matthaei (2010:60), the aim of faith formation

is to strengthen the relationship with God, self, and others in terms of people and the environment. The formation of faith is necessitated by challenging, engaging, stimulating discussion, encouraging, exploring, and refining the understanding of church members. All the church leaders interviewed commended the *Buku La Katekisma* as a good tool for faith formation. Five of them, however, proposed that it should be revised. The first reason is that the *Buku La Katekisma*, as a tool for forming faith, must address issues affecting people within the current context. According to CPL2, the *Buku La Katekisma* is so generic that it does not fully address contextual issues and does not touch on practical issues such as marriage and an insightful address on culture.

CLP2 also indicates that the *Buku La Katekisma* was published in 1965, which is over five decades ago. Although the Nsenga people continue to adhere to their culture, many factors have caused huge developments over the past fifty years. Globalisation is one of the major developments that has affected the entire world, as cultures are trying to find space and identity in the global 'village'. CLP3 indicates that, since the church as a body of Christ is moving towards ecumenism where the emphasis is on oneness in him, the section on *Chiroma* (Roman Catholicism) *ndi mipatuko* (sects), especially on Roman Catholics and Pentecostalism, needs to be reviewed. The revision is suggested, in order to account for the changes that have taken place over the years in the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal movements. Due to lack of revision over the past five decades, the *Buku La Katekisma* still contains teaching issues that Roman Catholics and Pentecostals have changed. The teachings under *Chiroma ndi mipatuko* only highlight the negatives about Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism. Even if points of diversity between the RCZ and other denominations are to be highlighted, they are not meant to be presented in a discriminatory way. The revision of the *Buku La Katekisma* has to account for globalisation, ecumenism, developments, and positives in other denominations.

CLP3 also highlights that the second reason for the call to revise the *Buku La Katekisma* is that it does not address the cultural context-related issues of the Nsenga people. Weber (2021:136, 141) urges that faith formation should seriously consider the cultural contexts because people's faith is intertwined with their traditional cultural beliefs. The revision should aim to make the *Buku La Katekisma* as contextual as possible. He builds his argument on the claim that the inconsideration of the cultural context has resulted in Nsenga Christians finding it difficult to figure out the essence

of their faith. Some of the Nsenga RCZ congregants find it difficult to understand the essence of Christian faith, as is evident in the stories recorded in the Elders' Council minutes of congregation E. One story involves two congregants placed on one-year definite suspension for consulting witch doctors over their relatives' illness. In an interview with CLP1, it was indicated that, despite the fact that the concerned congregants knew the provisions in the RCZ Constitution, which is against such acts, they went ahead to consult a witch doctor in an effort to save the lives of their beloved ones. This is a sign that the faith formation processes and tools overlook some essential proponents from both cultural and Christian faith practices that are critical for contextual Christianity (Mokhoathi 2017:1). There is a need for more teaching than suspension.

CLP1 and CLP2 indicate that one of the issues congregation E faces is that some of the congregants skip church services, in order to be part of *vigubu*. As alluded to earlier, CLP2 suggests that *vigubu* was introduced as a measure to salvage marriages that seemed to be severed because of sexual issues. When asked if the congregation had made any effort to address the issue of sex-related divorces or broken marriages, CLP2 responded that nothing was done previously. This entails that, when the church keeps quiet on issues considered to be matters of importance and urgency, some congregants resort to cultural means. The researcher observed that the phrase *chikristu nicamene koma nikuyesako vonse vonse* is used to make members consider the cultural way of handling moments of crisis. This fully acknowledges the importance of the Christian faith but at the same time encourages the opening up to other sources of solutions. CLP2 proposes that the church put in place the means to attend to issues that *vigubu* is trying to address. However, *vigubu* is simply one among many issues of the conflict between Christian faith and culture that need to be addressed. The church's silence on issues that are viewed as pertinent puts some of the Nsenga people in a dilemma, even if they are conversant with the contents of church doctrinal standards, Constitution, and Council resolutions. Therefore, the revision of the *Buku La Katekisma* is based on the desire to have a component that addresses crosscutting cultural issues affecting the practice of faith among RCZ members.

The third reason behind the call for the revision is the Chewa language used in the *Buku La Katekisma*. Even if the book is used as a tool for faith formation among the Nsenga people, it is written in Malawian Chewa, which differs from the one spoken in Zambia. CPL2, CLP3, CLP4,

CLP5, and CLP6 indicate that the Nsenga people find it difficult to understand some of the terms in Malawian Chewa used in the *Buku La Katekisma*. The desire to use *Chinsenga* in institutions within the jurisdiction of Nsenga land is slowly gaining momentum after the study was carried out. Tembo and Nyimbili (2021:1, 8) report that a study to shift from using Chinyanja to Nsenga in grades one to four was conducted in selected primary schools in Petauke District. The outcome of the study indicates that learners understand the contents of the lesson taught by teachers better than when the lesson is presented in Chinyanja. The level of learning improved in such a way that teachers could easily identify and harness learners' potentials. This means that both learners and teachers benefited from the use of Chinsenga in primary schools. In some instances, congregants among the Nsenga people learn the Christian faith in the Chewa language. In congregation D, the researcher observed that a Nsenga teacher taught the catechumen class in Chinyanja. The claim by CLP2, CLP3, CLP4, CLP5, and CLP6 resonates with the research by Tembo and Nyimbili, as they point to the common need among the Nsenga people, namely to seek what they can relate to as starting point in their learning process. The formation process using a foreign language widens the problem gap between where people are and where the formation process intends to lead them. The church can capitalise on the outcome of the research conducted in selected schools in Petauke District on using the local language, in order to improve on faith formation among the Nsenga people. The revision would make the *Buku La Katekisma* as clear as possible.

Although the need to revise the *Buku La Katekisma* is genuine, considering the benefits that would come with it, the challenge is that the book is not exclusively RCZ, for it was formulated for "The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa". This means that all members of Reformed Churches of Central Africa in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia, as interested parties, have to be informed before the RCZ embarks on revising the *Buku La Katekisma*. The other challenge is that the council has not held a meeting recently, such that it is difficult to tell if it still exists. The idea of indigenising essential documents and processes is significant for the development of a faith formation that will speak to contemporary contexts. The formed faith in people will hasten them to competently contribute to the transformation of the Nsenga people out of awareness of, and sensitivity to the challenges faced by communities (Naidoo 2016:1).

According to CPL2, apart from revising the *Buku La Katekisma*, the church should strengthen *ulangizi*. *Ulangizi* derives from the word *kulangiza*, which literally means “counselling”. Each and every RCZ section (a division of the congregation) has at least one counsellor who serves in line with traditional counselling. S/he handles issues of livelihood from conception to death, especially through the rites of passage. However, CPL2 mentions that, in congregation E, the section counsellors were avoided, as families opted for non-Christian traditional counsellors. They accused the RCZ section counsellors of being superficial when it came to handling marital issues, especially the sex-related ones. Lack of depth on the reality of Nsenga marriage leaves a gap that women feel traditional counsellors successfully addressed. The feeling that Christianity leaves a gap when it comes to handling issues of life may not be restricted to marital counselling but to all other aspects of humanity. The RCZ tools and processes of faith formation must address society’s world views or deep struggles and convictions.

#### *4.9 Transmission and preservation of the Nsenga culture*

Participants were asked the question: How do the Nsenga people transmit and preserve their culture? From observation, the researcher deduced that the transmission of the Nsenga culture, known as *kumbizya* or *kusiya mwambo wa chinsenga*, means intra- and intergenerational passing on of culture, its values, and practices. Transmission has the component of *kusambizya mwambo*, which is teaching mostly through apprenticeship or in a practical way. The researcher acknowledges that the Nsenga culture has orally transmitted theories that are used to explain a cultural practice. It also has the component of *kusiyira ana mwambo*, which signifies that culture and its values are the richest treasure that parents must leave as heritage for their children, because they are useful for survival and co-existence in a community where *Ubuntu* is the way of living life. Meanwhile, preservation is about keeping culture with its associated values and ensuring that it is remembered, embodied, and practised in the life of the Nsenga people. Both transmission and preservation of culture are communal and individual responsibilities.

The researcher also observed that it is hard to separate the task of transmission from preservation of culture in Nsenga society. Intra- and intergenerational transmission is one of the most valued means of not only forming but also preserving culture for future generations. CLP5 affirms that intergeneration cultural formation has remained the secret for the survival of the Nsenga culture,

irrespective of oppression, suppression, and Christianisation. The goal of transmitting and preserving culture is more than handing down and keeping information, for it involves forming members of *unsenga* in a cultural way. The Nsenga people believe that the best way to preserve and transmit culture is through interaction with life and the livelihood of the people. For this reason, cultural formation is conducted in interaction with social experience from a person's earliest stage in life. In Nsenga cultural formation, failure is measured by a person's inability to convert the transmitted cultural lessons into practical life. According to TLP7, unlike the European class set-up, failure is not the result of being dull, but *kupulukira*. The term *kupulukira* means the inability to be formed. It shows that formation is not about reproducing the knowledge acquired, but the learner's ability to translate it into praxis. Practical life in lived reality is the goal of the Nsenga cultural formation process.

Formation among the Nsenga people dates as far back as the pre-colonial or missionary era. Mosweunyane (2013:50) indicates that, before colonialism or the missionary era, the Nsenga people, like any other African society, offered some form of training to their members. The assessment of the learners' successful acquisition of knowledge was based on selfless service to their societies. According to Chondoka (2017:36-38), blacksmiths among the Nsenga people had developed the technology of designing poisonous metal arrowheads and axes as weapons of war, which they used to fight the Ngoni people at Kafyula in the pre-colonial era. For such arsenals to be fashioned, there was some form of training ensuring that skills were handed down to the next generation. Mosweunyane (2013:50) further states that the training mainly focused on providing survival skills, shaping personality, physical and spiritual or mysticism aspects of individuals.

It is obvious that the Nsenga community had the means of forming religious beliefs and associated values in its members since the pre-colonial era. As one of the cultural formation processes, training was usually conducted in interaction with the reality of life. It still remains the means of empowering an individual for personal life, contribution to the well-being of the community, and harmonious relationship with the spiritual world. This kind of formation was mostly conducted in interaction with life experience. Therefore, experience is the most important teaching tool among the Nsenga people. This approach to training converted all life crises and transition into opportunities for teaching and learning. The training process concretised the intergenerational

relationship of the community. Transitions and crises presented an opportunity for the elderly to form cultural principles, values, beliefs, and customs in the life of the younger generation. The revival of the *Tuwimba* ceremony on 15 October 2022, after eleven years, is a sign that the Nsenga people give the transmission and preservation of culture the seriousness it deserves.

#### *4.9.1 Emphasis on early childhood cultural formation*

During one-on-one oral interviews with sampled traditional leaders, the researcher inquired as to the right age for the Nsenga people to start forming culture in a person. TLP4, TLP6, and TLP7 use the proverb *Mlamba tumpeta akali mnana*, which points to the passion for forming culture during childhood among the Nsenga people. *Mlamba* is the Nsenga name for a catfish, while the word *tumpeta* derives from the word *peta*, translated as “to fold” or “to bend” and the word *mnana*, meaning “wet” or “fresh”. This proverb can literally be translated as “we fold a catfish while it is still fresh or immediately after it is caught from the water”. Among the Nsenga people, for unknown reasons, dried catfish are folded in a brittle or breakable ‘u’ shape. The breakable state of the dried catfish shows that the most appropriate time for it to be folded is when it is fresh. The folding in a ‘u’ shape must take place at the right time, in a person’s early stages of human life. The Nsenga people believe that it is difficult to form culture in a grown-up person.

However, participants’ response to the question about the right time to start cultural formation differed, depending on their individual focus. While focusing on behaviour and values, TLP4 indicates that cultural formation starts as early as from conception. This claim is based on the fact that certain Nsenga rituals are performed upon establishing that a woman has conceived. Meanwhile, as a woman focusing on the initiation ceremony for girls, TLP6 mentions that cultural formation starts when the child is ten years old, because at that age girls are told *kuluta kulukolo* (to pull one’s clitoris so that it is stretched as a way of preparing for womanhood). This means that, for women, cultural formation includes preparation into the perceived Nsenga womanhood. Even if TLP6 touches on other areas of cultural formation, her views are strongly inclined towards preparing for womanhood. Children aged below ten years are left out. However, the formation of culture among the Nsenga girls starts before the initiation ceremony. TLP1, TLP2, and TLP3 indicate that it is difficult to tell when cultural formation starts, for it is conducted alongside life in its lived reality. This means that it is difficult to separate cultural formation from life lived.

TLP7 also indicates that, since the Nsenga people believe that life starts from conception, cultural formation, in some cases, starts as soon as conception has been confirmed through the rituals performed. Although Nsenga cultural formation predates the colonial era, it is in line with the views of Dawes and Biersteker (2011:116) who state that the development of the brain and the neurological system begins in the early stages of humanity.

The emphasis on forming culture at an early stage in life is concretised by the belief that it is difficult to correct one's personhood at a later stage of life. This is expressed in the proverb *Chimuti cowerema cukanga kuwinula* (a tree that is tilted cannot be straightened). The word *chimuti* refers to a big tree, as opposed to the word *kamuti*, which is a small tree or a tree in its tender age. This means that it is possible to straighten a tree in its early stage rather than when it is fully grown. Although the word *cukanga* implies that it is impossible to straighten a tilted tree, the implication is that the proverb shows the vitality of formation at the earliest stage of human life. The proverb is based on observed nature in that it is difficult to straighten a fully grown tilted tree (Ngalande 2015:74). To emphasise how difficult, it is to correct a grown-up person, TLP6 adds a proverb *kandolo ukabenda uyondoloka lini* (a bent sweet potato cannot be straightened). In as much as straightening a tilted old tree is possible, it is more demanding and stressful compared to when it is in its earliest stage of life. The antagonistic dichotomy between Christian faith and culture seems to highlight the challenge facing the church. Christianity is tasked with finding the means of straightening some of its members who are tilted towards the Nsenga culture and 'bending a dried catfish'. Although this seems to be impossible, the Gospel has the power to bring about rebirth.

According to Dawes and Biersteker (2011:97), moral strength and uprightness are simply one of the focal concerns of education in traditional Africa. Even if moral strength and uprightness can mean different things in various African cultures, social harmony is a cross-cutting primary goal for formation. Nsenga cultural formation is holistic, as it touches every aspect of human endeavour. The main goal of cultural formation for the holistic approach employed by the Nsenga people is to transform a person for meaningful contribution to the transformation of the community. As alluded to in Chapter One, the Nsenga culture, like any other African cultural formation, holistically strengthens the relationship with deity and others (nature and human beings). This is entrenched through principles of preparationalism (prepare for life), functionalism (play roles in

community), communalism (concretising communal coherence), perennialism (lasting participation), and holicism, as it touches all aspects of life (Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2002:223). All these principles start at a very early stage of human life under the inspirational proverb of *mlamba tumpeta akali mnana*.

#### 4.9.2 *Emphasis on the communal aspect of human early-stage cultural formation*

TLP6 indicates that raising a child is the responsibility of the entire family and community. The word *tumpeta*, a construct from the word *peta*, translated as “to fold”, is plural. The singular form of *tumpeta* (“we fold”) is *numpeta* which means “I fold”. The use of the plural signifies two aspects. First, the Nsenga people raise a child in a typical *Ubuntu* approach, whereby a child is raised within, by, and for the community. The formation of a person from childhood is not the individualistic *numpeta*, but the collective or shared practice of *tumpeta*. As the adage with reference to Africa states: “It takes a village to raise a child.” (Nsamenang & Tchombe 2011:120). Raising a child is not only restricted to biological parents; it is the obligation of the entire village. Among the Nsenga people, the communal aspect of formation is reinforced by the proverb *Chikumo cimo cingafwaye lini inda*. This proverb literally means that “one finger cannot break a louse” (Ngalande 2015:66). Just as it takes more than one finger to break a louse, achievement is attained through concerted efforts. In as much as the parental role in cultural formation from the earliest stage of humanity is appreciated, its true success is believed to be attained through shared responsibility of the family, village, and the entire Nsenga community rather than single-handed responsibility. Therefore, the Nsenga people uphold that it takes more than a village to raise a child. The responsibility of raising a child is far wider than simply a village, extended and nuclear family, but the entire Nsenga community.

Secondly, while it is a shared responsibility of the community, the plural word ‘*tumpeta*’ in the proverb *mlamba tumpeta akali manna* denotes that it should be the practice of the Nsenga people to ensure that the formation of culture in a person starts at an early stage. This custom is widely upheld by all its members. The fact that child development does not occur in a vacuum, it calls for the creation of a suitable environment as early as from conception, in order to facilitate holistic

growth. An appropriate surrounding is very important, for the early-stage development of the human brain and the neurological system is sensitive to its influences (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011:115-115). Taking advantage of the influence of the surroundings on a person from conception, the Nsenga culture endeavours to form the nurturing and supporting environment from the person's earliest stage. The Nsenga community prefers forming cultural principles, ethos, and values in its members at their earliest stage of life rather than at a later stage in a person's life.

In the exercise of forming culture in people at the earliest stage, Nsenga values and tradition are not only transmitted intra- and intergenerationally, but also preserved. It is believed that the best way to preserve culture is by ensuring that it is passed on to subsequent generations. This is vital for the Nsenga people because, like any other African ethnicity, they believe that social harmony and well-being are products of mutual contribution from well-raised members of community. The dignity, harmony, safety, and well-being of the community depend on the formation of cultural values at an early stage, thus empowering members to meaningfully carry out communal obligations. For the sake of upholding a dignified community where peace is upheld, all Nsenga people are obliged to adhere to the custom of shaping the life of a person at the earliest stage of life. Therefore, the community is obliged to raise people for its own well-being, for its present and future.

The RCZ has no defined faith formation documents and structures to support the policy direction for Sunday School (Children's Ministry). All interviewed RCZ church leaders lamented that there is no indigenous syllabus, curriculum, and textbook for teaching children. CLP3 and CLP4 further indicate that the materials used to teach children in the RCZ are picked at the teachers' discretion. They also lament that textbooks from the Church of Central Africa Presbytery, Nkhoma Synod, used in the past, are no longer in circulation. The shortage has resulted in people using any material available, irrespective of its doctrinal content.

#### *4.9.3 Means of cultural formation among the Nsenga people*

One of the questions asked during one-on-one oral interviews was: How do the Nsenga people form culture so that its members are empowered to live a holistic and value-driven life within their social contexts? This question enabled the researcher to gather data concerning the means and

processes of forming culture in members of the society. Apart from one-on-one interviews, the researcher also made personal observations and read literature. Answers to this question revolved around the Nsenga traditional leader structure, relationships in the community, proverbs, and ceremonies. These observed categories of responses are explained below.

#### *4.9.3.1 Nsenga structure and cultural formation*

All people within the jurisdiction of the Nsenga people are under its traditional leadership structure. During the interviews, TLPs indicated that people are encouraged to go to church but are always reminded that they are under traditional leaders when they return home. This means that the Nsenga traditional leadership structures of the Nsenga culture are attached to the livelihood of all indigenous people within the jurisdiction of its domain. The structures are attached to land, family ties, and social relationships, which are vital for a person's dignity, harmony, and well-being. In a population dominated by peasant farmers, attachment to land is considered to be the main source of livelihood. Currently in Zambia, land is either under the President, the councils, or traditional authority also known as customary land. The land under the President is surveyed by professionals, and ninety-nine years' title deeds are issued to its occupants. Under the council, although in the process of being phased out, the occupier is issued with a thirty years' occupant licence. Customary or traditional land is under cultural structure. Customary land is owned by the natives of the chiefdom as an inheritance from parents. In other cases, non-natives of the chiefdom may be allocated land through cultural structures if they ask to resettle. Should there be conflicts with cultural structures, the land can be withdrawn. For the natives among the Nsenga people, land is withdrawn by their being expelled from the village or chiefdom.

In view of this, the church has buildings, whereas the Nsenga cultural structures possess land. Unfortunately, in rural areas, church buildings are built on customary land. Despite being allocated to the church, the land still remains under the authority of the cultural structure. This means that these structures have the power, although not easily exercised, to withdraw the allocated land from the church. This creates a dilemma because the church does not own land, which is essential for peasant farmers' livelihood. Christians can only go as far as excommunicating a person from the church, whereas cultural structures have the power to withdraw land and expel a person from the

chiefdom. Due to their link to land, the main source of livelihood, the cultural structures are powerful enough to influence decision-making to the extent of antagonising the Christian faith, especially when it conflicts with culture. Therefore, cultural structures possess vital sources of human life support and sustenance. The Nsenga structures are more hierarchical, with the highest leader of the ethnic group and his council of *manduna* or *zinduna* possessing more powers than those in the lower ranks. All these levels in the structure play significant roles in the formation of the Nsenga people's culture. However, the family, as the closest structure to a person, contributes more significantly to the life of individuals from conception to death than any other level in the hierarchy. The traditional leadership structure, which also contributes to Nsenga cultural formation, is as follows:

- i. The topmost authority among the Nsenga people is Senior Chief Kalindawalo. Although he presides over the allocated chiefdom, the incumbent of this chieftainship also holds the highest position in the Nsenga traditional structure. Senior Chief Kalindawalo also has powers over all the Nsenga and non-Nsenga people under his jurisdiction.
- ii. The second in terms of authority hierarchy are chiefs with councils of advisors called *manduna* in their respective chiefdoms. The Nsenga ethnic group has ten chiefs who preside over the affairs of their respective chiefdoms. According to TLP1, each of the ten chiefdoms in Nsenga land has *manduna* or *zinduna* who work together with the chief in running its affairs.
- iii. The third in the hierarchy are villages under village headmen or headwomen. Villages are smaller units of the chiefdoms and consist of a clan or a number of closely related families whose houses are built around one another. These villages, headed by either a headman or a headwoman, form a basic administrative unit under the authority of the chief and Senior Chief Kalindawalo. Villages play a huge role in cultural formation, for they oversee families up to the individual level, ensuring that each one is shaped in the ethos, values, and principles of the Nsenga culture. Under the leadership of either a headman or a headwoman, it is the responsibility of each and every member of the village to safeguard peace, harmony, and

tranquillity. The village has the collective responsibility to implement and monitor the processes of cultural formation within and intergenerationally.

- iv. At the lowest level of the Nsenga structure is the family led by *atumvi*. Being ranked the least in structure should not be mistaken for being the least effective because the family forms the basic unit and structure for the provision and acquisition of knowledge in Africa (Mosweunyane 2013:51). The nuclear family may be under one village, whereas the extended family goes beyond. Nsenga cultural formation is a teamwork of the community, with the nuclear and extended family taking the leading role. The extended family is headed by *atumvi* (the leading uncle of the family). Therefore, cultural formation in individuals, from the earliest stage of human life, is understood to be the responsibility of parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, brothers, sisters, and the entire village.

Traditional leaders at all levels of governance are supposed to be custodians, monitors of adherence to, and transmitters of culture. Therefore, it is impossible to separate issues of governance from the formation of cultural values, ethos, principles, and life in members of the Nsenga community. The structure described above is designed in such a way that all Nsenga people contribute towards the governance and formation of the cultural way of life and livelihood but this becomes more inclusive at the lowest level of the structure. As the levels in the hierarchy rise, the number of people involved in governance decreases. The rate of interaction between individuals and lower ranked structures is higher, for it occurs mostly on a daily basis. The influence on an individual by those in the higher ranks is more indirect on members of the Nsenga community than with the structures in the lower ranks. It is possible for a member of the Nsenga culture to never have had an encounter with the chief of the chiefdom. Although they are far with hardly any or no direct contact with all the Nsenga people, the influence through the resolutions of councils trickles down to all members of the community. All structures of the Nsenga community, whether directly or indirectly, play a role in the formation of culture in its individual members.

#### *4.9.3.2 The significance of relationships in cultural formation*

The researcher observed that, apart from structures, cultural formation among the Nsenga people takes place through relationships. Cultural formation takes place in relationships of mutual sharing

and conversation. The family, in either its nuclear or extended form, serves as both a key structure and relationship for cultural formation among the Nsenga people. If a person's behaviour is judged to be good, the credit goes to the family. The opposite is also true: if bad behaviour is portrayed, the whole family shares the disgrace. Due to shared credit and disgrace, the family ensures that culture is formed, and that its adherence is monitored and preserved for subsequent generations. In addition to family, there are two vital relationships, *mkoka* and *chinungwe*. This means that apart from family, the Nsenga people are also divided into clans known as *mkoka* or *mikoka* (plural). Each of the *mkoka* is linked to others through another relationship called *chinungwe*. *Chinungwe* is a relationship between members of one type of *mkoka* to the other. These relationships are highly cherished among the Nsenga people and play a vital role in forming culture among members of their society, as explained below.

#### *4.9.3.2.1 The significance of mkoka as a cultural formation relationship*

From the interviews with TLP5, TLP3, and CLP4, it was observed that *mkoka* is another form of relationship among the Nsenga people which goes beyond the nuclear and extended family. They both affirm that *mkoka* or *mikoka* (plural) (a clan or clans) occupies a special place among the Nsenga people. CPL4, TLP1, TLP5, and TLP7 indicate that the Nsenga people believe that all people, including those from other ethnic groups, belong to one of their *mkoka*. CPL4 and TLP7 share a common view that, whenever a stranger comes, the Nsenga people ensure that his/her *mkoka* is identified. The people belonging to the same *mkoka* are considered to be relatives, even if they are not biologically related in terms of nuclear or extended family. TLP7 indicates that, through the *mkoka* relationship, members of the Nsenga community will always have relatives wherever they go. *Mkoka* is an important link such that it is imperative that all members of the Nsenga community know which one they belong to. CPL4, a pastor serving among the Nsenga people, was constantly asked to be identified with one of the *mkoka*, regardless of his belonging to a different ethnic group. The Nsenga people treat any of those with whom they share the same *mkoka* as a relative to the extent of assuming full responsibilities over their affairs in both good times and misfortunes. CLP4 indicates that the burial of the deceased cannot take place unless all members of the same *mkoka* discuss and accept that their relative has died and they resolve to bury the dead. If there are suspicions of foul play in a particular death, they will ensure that all issues are resolved before burial. According to CLP4, funeral programmes, where the cause of death does

not seem to be clear, prolong and the church has to wait until all members of *mkoka* agree to bury the body of the deceased. *Mkoka* ensures that human life is protected and that all forms of human abuse, neglect, or foul play leading to death are avoided.

According to TLP7, people of the same *mkoka* share moments of joy and help each other in need and rites of passage. In as much as cultural formation occurs on a daily basis, rites of passage are highlight moments for teaching culture. They are used as opportunities for the elderly to transmit cultural values to the younger generation, using mainly the apprentice method. During rites of passage, the older generation takes time to evaluate whether the younger generation is learning, observing, and preserving culture. It is also time for correcting all identified mistakes and ensuring that culture is upheld accordingly. The *mkoka* relationship plays a critical role during rites of passage; hence, it occupies a special place in the process of cultural formation, for it serves as a medium of transmitting, preserving, and ensuring adherence to culture. Among the Nsenga people, belonging to *mkoka* already links to another *mkoka* through the *chinungwe* relationship.

#### 4.9.3.2.2 *Chinungwe as a cultural formation relationship*

According to CLP4 and TLP5, *mikoka* are linked to others through another form of relationship called *chinungwe*. This means that *chinungwe* extends community relationships. Apart from the role grandparents play in cultural formation by providing counsel to their grandchildren, the inter-clan relationship called *chinungwe* contributes to shaping culture among the Nsenga people in a unique way. There is a similar relationship, called *chimbuya*, between the Ngoni of Eastern Province and the Bemba people of Northern Province. This was established after a series of tribal wars between the Ngoni and the Bemba. A *Chinungwe* relationship is established by virtue of belonging to a particular clan within the Nsenga community. The people involved in a *chinungwe* relationship are called *anungwe*. *Mikoka* in *chinungwe* share light moments and help one another in times of crisis. This is a vital relationship for the formation of culture. TLP3 and TLP6 state that, although wrong-minded people abuse it, *chinungwe* is very helpful. To justify the point, TLP3 tells a story about the death of his brother:

“My father was retired and old in age when his eldest son passed away. Financially, he was unable to meet all funeral expenses to give his beloved son a befitting burial. The loss was so painful for at his old age the deceased son had become one of the sources of strength and hope. My father was not only broken-hearted due to the demise of the son but was also stuck in terms of where he could get money to finance the funeral.

In the evening of the fateful day one of *anungwe* came and observed the intensity of the pain he was passing through. By nature of their relationship, one of the *anungwe* started teasing him until he also started laughing and sharing jokes. The following day his *anungwe* mobilised all that was need; transport, coffin, food and met other funeral expenses”.

Although some dirty-minded people abuse the *chinungwe* relationship, the above story serves the following purposes:

- i. Care and lightening the burden in painful or sorrowful moments. Kinoti (2002:27) cites loving, listening, accepting, communicating, understanding, respecting, openness, sensitivity and availability, supporting, promoting, responding, cooperating, participating, and sharing as caring. TLP1 uses a Nsenga proverb, namely *muyako ni pa mavuto*. It simply means a true friend is known in difficult times or when one is in need of help. All people need moral, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual support at some point in time. *Anungwe* serve as true friends who render support in times of need. They help when aid is needed most.
- ii. Openness: This is one of the most important qualities of relationship in the process of formation, for it contributes towards being approachable. Under openness, *chinungwe* serves two purposes. First, to confront observable evil practice in *mnugwe* until it is corrected. Some evil practices in the community thrive on silence. It is not all evil practices that people are unable to see. Some of such vices may be known by the public but people are not courageous enough to confront them. As alluded to earlier, a *chinungwe* relationship does not respect status or age; therefore, it is the responsibility of the *anungwe* to confront their *mnungwe* until they are oriented in the right direction. At this level, *chinungwe* is a relationship of monitoring and correcting one another, so that all members of the community live according to cultural ethos, values, and principles. Secondly, people may have issues that they may find difficult to share, out of fear, shame, stigma, and discrimination. If such people are not given space to open up and omit the stigma, they are likely to break down mentally and harm themselves or the community. *Chinungwe* is also meant to create an environment for openness so that *anungwe*, who are closed up, withdrawn, and keep life’s devastating issues, find someone to talk to. *Chinungwe* creates space for opening up on burning issues affecting *anungwe*, so that a possible solution may be found. TLP3 mentions that, because of the

nature of an open relationship confronting evil and correction provided by *anungwe*, social healing occurs in moments of crisis. In other words, *chinungwe* breaks the silence, by confronting evil and helping others open up.

- iii. Relieve stress. *Chinungwe* is a free, relaxed, and jovial relationship that is meant to create light moments among the Nsenga people. Such a relaxed relationship relieves stress.

#### 4.9.3.3 Proverbs as words of cultural formation

The researcher observed that proverbs are exceedingly used in the Nsenga cultural formation process. They are means of preserving and transmitting culture. In agreement with Manfredi (2019:3), TLP6 describes proverbs as a mine of wisdom whereby realities such as peace, social harmony, love for life, and respect for humanity and property are highlighted, learnt, and re-affirmed. The use of proverbs goes beyond highlighting, learning, and re-affirming the essential realities of life, for they also function as reservoirs of wisdom. TLP6 adds that they communicate a deeper and richer meaning. As is the case in any other African ethnic group, the Nsenga people use proverbs as one of the most effective ways of transmitting and preserving cultural values and ethos. African cultural knowledge, being oral, requires that its content of values, beliefs, ethos, and principles for social cohesion be as memorable as possible. The wide range of culture demands a high level of aptitude to store orally transmitted information in the brain. Proverbs are one of the means whereby Nsenga cultural types of knowledge are transmitted and preserved. Although there was no convincing explanation for the use of proverbs among the Nsenga people, the researcher observed the following characteristics that make it easy to store the proverbs in the brain:

- i. Short and easy to remember. Nsenga proverbs survive because they are formulated in such a way that they are as easy to remember as possible. In Nsenga proverbs, few words are arranged in such a way that they act like memory stickers on a human brain. Members of the community are able to memorise as many proverbs as possible, for words are easily converted into mental pictures. The memorable nature of proverbs is due to the fact that they are built from daily life experiences or things to which members of the community easily relate.

- ii. Bear rich messages vital for living a holistic life in a few words. As an African ethnic group, the Nsenga people strive to experience wholeness and live in harmony with the living, the ancestors, nature, spirits, and *Nyamalenga* (Conradie 2020:121). Proverbs are tools for transmitting culture as well as storage facilities for the profound message of experiencing wholeness with the vital vertical and horizontal worlds in contexts. Through proverbs, useful cultural values and ethos for holistic life are shared and kept within, and transmitted to future generations.
  
- iii. Draw listeners' attention. Proverbs are crafted in such a way that they are sweet to hear and create curiosity for understanding. They are powerful means for cultural formation because of their nature to generate interest and appetite for knowledge. Proverbs effectively actualise transformation of the mind as they bear value, moral, ethos, and principles shaping messages.
  
- iv. Enthuse personal reflection and interpretation for appropriate application within contexts. Wisdom among the Nsenga people is not only measured by how many proverbs a person is able to recite, but by how meaningfully one is able to apply them in context. Therefore, it is by design that proverbs are flexible, appeal to the mental faculties, and provoke reflection and interpretation for suitable application within contexts. Due to the respect the Nsenga people attach to contexts, some of the proverbs seem to contradict each other, yet they are complementary. The aim of having proverbs that work in tension is to strike a balance where extremes in terms of their application would cause harm or may not yield the intended results. For example, one of the proverbs states: *chiwaona mkuleni conkhezi mwana angacione lini olo kuti akwere pa mtenge* (what an elderly person sees while seated, a child cannot see it even if he or she climbs on top of the roof). On the other hand, there is a proverb that states: *ciwaona mwana cokalawa mkuleni angacione lini olo kuti walala camala* (what a child sees while crawling, an elderly person cannot see it even if he or she lies down on a tummy). The purpose of such proverbs is to avoid self-exaltation of a particular age group. The tension of the two proverbs promotes an open-minded atmosphere, in which both the elderly and the young can learn from each other. All proverbs share the common characteristic of being flexible, in order to provide space for interpretation, reflection, and applicability in various contexts.

- v. Proverbs are user-friendly. Proverbs are easily owned by members for they are made by and for the community in their language, based on the observation of nature or life experience. The ownership empowers the competent usage of the proverbs. Members of the Nsenga community competently apply them because they are based on things with which they interact on a daily basis. As user-friendly means for cultural formation, proverbs challenge, guide, support, motivate, and capacitate meaningful decision-making. In short, they bear rich values, beliefs, and principles intended to form people for maintaining social peace and harmony.

#### *4.9.3.4 Ceremonies and cultural formation*

Tembo and Mambwe (2021:202) cite cultural ceremonies as the means whereby societies preserve and transmit their norms, values, behaviours, customs, and beliefs. The Nsenga people consider someone to be well-formed if there is observable knowledge about culture, treasuring its values, principles, and beliefs which are to be skilfully applied in an appropriate way by contributing toward harmony in society. Traditional knowledge, which consists of vital truth about Nsenga culture, its values, principles, and aspirations, is transmitted and received orally and preserved in the brain. This information has to be transmitted and preserved because it is beneficial for an individual's link to the whole society. The attachment of an individual to the community entails that a mistake made by one person causes embarrassment to the entire community. To avoid communal shame or disgrace, due to an individual's mistake, inculcation of culture becomes a mandatory communal responsibility. Of course, nowadays, some people have started recording knowledge in written, video, or audio form. By comparison, there is far less recorded knowledge compared to unrecorded knowledge, and its preservation depends on human memory. Ceremonies, symbols, signs, and proverbs play a crucial role in helping to transmit and preserve knowledge.

The transmission and preservation of culture among the Nsenga people are as important as the two sides of a coin. For the Nsenga people, *kuphunzisa mwambo* (teaching tradition or culture) and *kusunga mwambo* (keeping or upholding culture and traditions) go hand in hand. Transmitting of cultural knowledge is considered pointless and a waste of time if there is no willingness to preserve and uphold it. If there is no transmission of culture, there will be nothing to preserve. Ceremonies

occupy a special place among the Nsenga people, as they create opportunities for ensuring that cultural norms, values, behaviours, customs, and beliefs are passed on, valued, and expressed in lived reality. Ceremonies facilitate the process of cultural formation, by engaging the senses of hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Cultural formation leaves a lasting impression, as the process involves a person's emotional, mental, social, and physical aspects. For this reason, ceremonies are not lifeless activities or routines, for they play a significant role not only in the transmission and preservation, but also in enlivening the cultural way of life. During ceremonies, some symbols, signs, proverbs, and meanings of the performed rituals are explained as vehicles of norms, values, behaviours, customs, and beliefs.

One of the most important ceremonies which is gaining prominence among the Nsenga people is *chinamwali*. CLP1 and CLP2 of congregation E report its new version called *vigubu*. *Chinamwali* is a Nsenga initiation ceremony. It serves the purpose of preparing pubertal girls for adulthood and their expected social roles in the community. It is also a moment when girls who have reached puberty are trained in matters of sanitary hygiene and behaviours of self-preservation and relationships with others. *Vigubu*, as stated by CLP2, is in the form of *chinamwali*, as it is also an exclusive women's ceremony, but it is intergenerational in nature, irrespective of one's marital status. CLP2 states that the ceremony has become popular because it is meant to save marriages. Tembo and Mambwe (2021:202) attribute this new phenomenon to four reasons behind this new interest by adult females to temporarily lay aside all parental responsibilities and subject themselves to being coached in traditional principles. The first reason is the desire to end stigma and discrimination associated with not being initiated. The second reason is to end or avoid being scandalised by sexual partners for lack of cultural sexual knowledge and skills of impressing a man in bed. The third reason is that females attempt to save their crumbling marriages. The fourth reason is preparation for marriage for those getting married at an older stage in life. Although these reasons seem to be personal, the introduction of *vigubu* shows that the issue has become a social concern among women. The practice was introduced as a way of redeeming marriages and mitigating the rapidly increasing divorce rate. Both CLP1 and CLP2 lament that *vigubu* has contributed to low numbers of members attending Sunday worship service. The desire to be trained in cultural norms, values, behaviours, customs, and beliefs on gender roles and in-depth sexuality

lessons, among others, which draw adult females' attention, demonstrates that there is a search for authenticity in a cultural hybrid caused by globalisation.

#### *4.10 The significance of cultural formation*

The researcher asked participants why the Nsenga people valued cultural formation among members of the community. According to TLP6, this is important because it is believed that *kwao kwa munthu ni nkhalidwe*. The word *kwao* means the home, *munthu* is a person, and *nkhalidwe* is behaviour. Therefore, *kwao kwa munthu ni nkhalidwe* literally means that the home of a person is his/her behaviour. This implies that a person with good behaviour will always be welcomed in any home or community. It also suggests that a person with bad behaviour will be rejected in communities or homes. These words are spoken with an understanding that the Nsenga people are mobile. Hence, cultural formation prepares them to fit in any community. This means that the purpose of cultural formation is balanced between communal and personal benefits, for it is also interested in individual members of the community. It also implies that Nsenga cultural formation is for the benefit not only of its community, but also of other communities. In response to the question as to why the Nsenga people value cultural formation, TLP7 states that it is believed that *kusunga mwambo ni kusunga umoyo* (preservation of culture is preservation of life). Culture is more than mere identity because it is also viewed as a way of preserving life. With such an understanding, it is clear that culture is preservation for security purposes. The significance of cultural formation lies in the belief that it shapes behaviours that enable a person to be welcomed in any society and that it is a way of preserving life.

#### *4.11 Conclusion*

The data for the theological study of the Nsenga people and their cultural formation was gathered through observation, literature review, and one-on-one interviews with Nsenga traditional and church leaders in three congregations of the RCZ Nyanje Presbytery. The data gathered served to gain an in-depth understanding of the underlying realities behind the antagonistic dichotomy of *chikristu ni chikristu; mwambo ni mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wachinkhalire*.<sup>3</sup> The researcher learnt that the Nsenga people perceive culture as a means for self-identity, a way of life and survival. Culture is formed through transmission and preservation, using proverbs,

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<sup>3</sup> Christianity is Christianity, tradition is tradition Christianity found an established tradition.

ceremonies, structures, and relationships for the purpose of strengthening the relationship with *Nyamalenga* (the Creator) and contributing to the well-being of the community. This cultural formation takes place in interaction with life experiences or in view of anticipated new roles. This is where life experience forms the basis for new lessons and anticipated way of life as a motivation for cultural formation. Application of the lesson learnt in all the vital relationships and adding value to the society is the measure of how well culture is formed in a person. The theological study of the Nsenga people reveals that the RCZ needs to learn more about the Nsenga culture, in order to engage them meaningfully in the process of faith formation.

The next chapter examines the issue of how the RCZ, in its quest to localise its faith formation endeavours, can learn from the outcomes of the theological study of the Nsenga people and their means of cultural formation. It will also explore how the RCZ can hermeneutically address the fears, concerns, and inadequacies of the Nsenga people, in order to improvise a comprehensive approach to faith formation for spiritual transformation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TOWARD A WORKABLE RCZ FAITH FORMATION PROCESS AMONG THE NSENGA PEOPLE

#### *5.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter explored the process of cultural formation practised among the Nsenga people of Zambia. It drew stories of hope from exploring the background of the Nsenga people. The chapter also studied the Nsenga people from a theological perspective, by considering them from three aspects. The first aspect is that the Nsenga people are God's creation, created in his image. The second aspect is that like all other human beings, they too have fallen short of God's righteousness (Romans 3:23) and are in need of salvation. The third aspect is that the Nsenga people have a shared destiny of receiving salvation from God in Jesus Christ. The chapter indicated that the Nsenga people have concepts of the origin of nature, theodicy, sin, the need for mediation, and atonement. Sin is mainly regarded as the main cause of disrupted vital relationships, resulting in human calamity. As part of the theological study, the chapter also recorded the way in which the Nsenga people transmit and preserve their culture. It also accounted for the Nsenga cultural formation as a task done through ceremonies, structures, relationships, points of crisis, and proverbs in interaction with realities. Cultural formation goes hand in hand with life in its lived reality.

Having explored the Nsenga culture from a theological perspective, this chapter responds to the question: "How can the RCZ use the outcome of the study to indigenise its faith formation?" Its objective is to explore possible lessons from the theological study of Nsenga cultural formation for the purpose of informing the RCZ faith formation process, so that the issue of antagonistic dichotomy can be addressed. The antagonistic dichotomy is expressed in *chikristu ni chikristu; mwambo ni mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wachinkhalire*. In this chapter, the RCZ is discussed with an understanding that, like any other church, it is expected to be an institution that transforms society, thereby making the transformation of communities one of the major aims for its faith formation service. It suggests that faith formation becomes a lifeless routine or fruitless undertaking if it does not lead to transformation of the church and its wider context. This is based on the belief that transformation should be the outcome of a successful faith-forming process. The

chapter proposes that the outcome of the theological study of the Nsenga people is important for contextualising faith formation, for it highlights how points of contact, structure, and practices can be used in forming a Christian faith that can be owned by the Nsenga people.

### *5.2 Conformity or spiritual transformation*

The antagonistic dichotomy among the Nsenga people seems to confirm the claims by Botha (2021:3, 5) that some people who are subscribed to the church have never experienced spiritual transformation. Hence, they are theoretical and unpractical in their faith. The experience of spiritual transformation is said to be personal, as God inspires truth, communicates, guides, and makes his presence known to a believer through the Holy Spirit. It is viewed as an internalised awareness involving an emotional response to God's truth (Pretorius 2008:159, 161). According to Pali (2016:166), spiritual transformation leads to a profound change in relationship between humanity and God, resulting in change in mind, spirituality, behaviour, and relationship with other creations. Those who profess Christian faith need to experience the life-transforming presence and interaction with God, as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Some RCZ members resort to conforming rather than spiritual transformation. This conformity takes different wrong forms such as conforming to the denomination or spiritual leaders rather than to the image of God, as exhibited in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. McNeal (2005:28) speaks of putting much effort in doing church and not in exploring what it means to be a Christian within contexts. People's spirituality is measured by what they do in and for the church, rather than exploring what it means to be a Christian in their communities.

Faith formation programmes can either lead to conformity to church traditions, requirements, norms, and practices or transformation. It is easy for the RCZ to mistake the Nsenga people's conformity to church traditions with transformation. Transformation in Christianity is perceived to start with conversion. Conversion into the Christian faith differs from conformity. Conversion is viewed as an encounter with God, who frees a person from self-enclosure and radical lovelessness and ushers that person into self-transcendence (Kgatla 2017:2). Kgatla further alleges that the change from ATR into Christians was not genuine conversion, but a way of conformity to inward and outward pressures, which induced submission to the perceived dominating force. Kgatla views conformity as either rational or irrational. Rational conformity is characterised by

guided thinking, assessment of the situation, and arriving at a decision after considering all options for the purpose of existential safety. Irrational conformity is more intuitive or instinctive. It is influenced by external pressure. Kgatla (2017:2) also claims that conformity was the option in the dilemma of choices influenced by punishment and incentives such as rewards or seeking protection.

Conformity to church traditions among the Nsenga people is evident in the term *ku chechi kwasu olesha or obvomekezya lini* (this is impermissible in our church) recorded in the previous chapter. In this case, conformity is coerced by fear of denominational rules, regulations, and structures in terms of church councils and not out of reverence for God. It is also reinforced by the incentive of the pride of identifying oneself or a sense of belonging to the church. The synonymy of conformity to spiritual transformation can be mistaken for authentic conversion, which involves shifts in attitudes, opinions, understandings, and convictions born out of genuine spiritual experience that dislodges the Nsenga people's previous orientations in order to connect with God. Historically, conformity has been blamed on the missionary approach of demeaning and demonising African culture, which exerted pressure on some of the local people to seek the Western culture-oriented Christianity as a source of protection or criterium for civilisation. Holding on to culture and Christian faith antagonistically is a sign of inner struggle to handle both. This further shows that the church, from the missionary era, undermines the Nsenga people's view of culture as a way of life and security. It seems that, as part of evangelism, incentives would lure a person out of the cultural-oriented view to Western-oriented Christianity. After 123 years of RCZ's existence, the antagonistic dichotomy between culture and Christian faith still exists. This continued dichotomy indicates that some Nsenga people still perceive incentives in both culture and Christianity. After more than 120 years, the RCZ cannot continue to blame the missionaries. It must work towards localising its faith formation approach by taking issues of culture seriously.

It cannot be ruled out that the desire to benefit from the incentives or to fear punishment, some of the Nsenga people went beyond conformity to church tradition and were genuinely converted into the Christian faith. However, in the process of being the means of mediating spiritual transformation, the RCZ faces the challenge of converting some of its members from conformity to church traditions to conformity to Christ. This entails that conformity only becomes logical if it

is the work of the life-transforming Holy Spirit in the process of building a Christ-like image. Conformity, as growing in the *imago Dei* (image of God) as displayed by Jesus Christ, is cited as one of the processes under transformation. In as much as conformity serves as the evidence of striving for the desired wholeness, as observed in Jesus Christ, its sustenance depends on the transformation of human beings. Transformation is an inner aspect, whereas conformity is the result of what is happening in the invisible inside. Conformity to Christ should display the inward transformation. However, any form of conformity without inward transformation is not real and unsustainable. The antagonistic dichotomy may be as a result of producing members who conform but are not transformed. It is, therefore, vital for the RCZ to assess whether the faith-forming process leads its members among the Nsenga people to outward conformity or to conformity emanating from transformation. However, the antagonistic dichotomy may also arise from members who are truly transformed, yet lacking spiritually empowering faith formation that equips them with the ability to constructively reflect on situations of life. In the absence of empowerment to face life threats, some Christians revert to old familiar ways of handling crisis, irrespective of the newly acquired faith in Christ. Faith formation must empower people with continued interpretive skills of what it means to be a Christian within respective contexts, or else they get stuck in their effort to practise faith.

### *5.2.1 Faith formation for spiritual transformation*

Spiritual transformation is expected to be the main desired outcome, as the church carries out its task of forming faith. Spiritual transformation can imply that the church itself undergoes renewal. It can also mean that the church serves as an agent whereby God spiritually transforms the world (Beyer 2021:40). It is difficult to separate the two, for they may not always be sequential but are likely to take place alongside each other. God continuously transforms the church spiritually and he simultaneously works through it to transform societies. Spiritual transformation among the Nsenga people is complex because, from pre-missionary era, they view the world as spiritual. The Nsenga people have held the relationship with the spiritual world in high esteem, especially with an understanding that it animates the physical. In addition, before the coming of the missionaries, the Nsenga people had the means to communicate and co-exist with the world of spirits and had concepts of theodicy, sin, and atonement. Spiritual transformation, in this case, is about transiting from culturally upheld forms of understanding and relating to the spiritual world and one another.

The antagonistic dichotomy indicates that some Nsenga people are still caught up in the transition from their culturally upheld spiritual world to that of Christian faith. They are struggling to fully trust Christian ways of handling life, especially when they feel endangered. The fact that congregants seek help from the perceived traditional spiritual world and later on appear before the Elders' Council for a ruling is a sign that they still perceive incentives in both spiritual worlds. The antagonistic dichotomy further indicates their struggle to understand if the spiritual world of the Christian faith can respond to all the issues of their cultural spiritual world. The antagonistic dichotomy is the result of being stuck in between the two incentives and fears, hence the allegiance to the Christian faith and culturally upheld view of the spiritual world. This means that all RCZ tools and processes used for forming faith among the Nsenga people should facilitate the crossover to, and the embodiment of the Christian understanding of the spiritual world.

The facilitation of spiritual transformation, as a shift from one old form of spiritual state to another, requires an understanding that the Nsenga people struggle with the world of the spirits. The use of the term 'spiritual' does not suggest that the transformation under discussion neglects the totality of humanity or reduces people to mere souls. Spiritual transformation is holistic, as it considers totality or all human endeavours. It becomes a reality if there is awareness for the need and willingness to change, culminating in personalised conversion and taking responsibility for continued growth in the new life. As opposed to other forms of transformation, awareness for the need for spiritual transformation, according to Christian understanding, is divine in nature. The term 'spiritual' entails that that kind of transformation comes from God, who also sustains and ensures its continued growth. In view of this, Hermans (2013:172) states that, although people may desire spiritual transformation, it can only take place under divine intervention. The opinion presupposes that spiritual transformation is beyond human beings' ability to attain.

This does not imply that human beings become completely passive, as they actively participate in the process of spiritual transformation under God's grace. Humanity participates in two ways. The first is in the fact that change occurs in people, for they are the ones who are being transformed. This means that those who undergo divine transformation have to exhibit a shift from the old form of life to a new one that is worked out by God. It further entails that the claim to have been transformed by God has to be vivid in the difference witnessed in the lives of the claimants. The

second one is that God transforms the world through the people he has transformed, as he incorporates them in the *Missio Dei* by his grace. Those who claim to have been transformed by God should also be willing to carry out the services that will transform the world. This further suggests that one of the indicators of having undergone God's transforming grace is the willingness to serve as his transforming agents. For this reason, it is highly expected that the numerical dominance of those who profess the Christian faith, as people who claim to have been transformed by God, needs to translate into transformation of communities. One of the means whereby God, by his grace, incorporates the church into being an active participant in spiritual transformation is its activities, tools, and processes of faith formation. The church is transformed to serve as God's means of transforming the world.

The task of the church is not a matter of merely leading its members through the faith formation process, in order to fulfil the programme, but rather to attain spiritual transformation. This means that faith formation activities, processes, and tools need to be as objective as possible in terms of the desired transformation results. Spiritual transformation involves a shift from one form of life to another. The concept of 'shift' points to the fact that there are certain issues or things must be relinquished, in order to embrace newness. Spiritual transformation is the movement from a particular point of departure to a unified self under God's guidance. Faith formation starts by identifying the present state and projecting the desired form to be pursued. What shifts should manifest at the end of the process? After identifying the starting point and visualising the desired form, faith formation should be a process that leads people to shift from the current to the idealised state. The concept of 'shift' also shows that spiritual transformation can be traced, with a point of departure and a point of intended outcome. The shift in spiritual transformation means increased embodiment of the life of Christ and his kingdom. The shift in transformation needs to have a traceable intended outcome reflecting growth in the life of Christ and his kingdom. As Christians are in the yet and not-yet state in terms of perfection, spiritual transformation is a continued embodiment of the godly life, as exemplified by Christ.

Being active participants in the transformation suggests that Christian life is marked by testimonies of what God has and is doing in and through his church. On the one hand, these testimonies have to be shared between members of the church because God has worked out the newness of life in

them. On the other hand, testimonies have to be spoken by the community, which has witnessed God's transformation through the service of the church. According to Venter (2015:175), transformation has a definite direction in terms of memories of the past, which include historical events, knowledge, and experiences. This is essential because present reality is viewed in comparison with the past, where the current is understood to be a product of the transformation that the community has undergone because of the services of God's servants. On the issue of definite direction, Venter proposes that there is a continued attentiveness to the present reality with a better projected future in mind. There is a need for a clear understanding of what is going on, why things are happening the way they are, the spiritual, social, mental, and economic effects of present reality on community, how things are supposed to be, and practical steps towards the idealised transformed society (Osmer 2008:4). Transformation needs to have a definite direction for an improved future. This means projections of the ideal future are cast with the full awareness of both past and present experiences. The future then becomes more informed, due to the acquired knowledge from the past and the present. Transformation continues to account for the past experiences, the present reality with its opportunities, and projects a better future.

Faith formation facilitates the shift from the present state of embodiment of Christ and the life of his kingdom to the desired one in the process of spiritual transformation. It takes place through the gap, between the shifts. Spiritual transformation encompasses interpreting the present activity of the Holy Spirit, texts of Scripture and tradition, as well as contexts by moving from pre-understanding to scientific, responsible exegesis, *mimesis* which is appropriating texts and deepening scriptural analysed spiritual experiences (Osmer 2005:240-247). Hermans (2013:172-176) suggests five dimensions of a spiritual transformation process as given form, re-form, con-form, transparent form, and beyond form. The given form is the state that needs to be changed; re-form is the new state; con-form is the desired wholeness in the newly-attained state; transparent form is referred to openness towards more newness despite the attained one, and beyond form will be attained in life hereafter. This outline proposes that the aim of spiritual transformation is to shift from the given form to the beyond form. This, however, can only be attained by fulfilling the shifts indicated in between. This outlined assumption is based on the thought that spiritual transformation is a process of self-awareness and the need to unify the divided self. In this instance, human beings become aware of their struggle with divided, fragmented, and split experience within themselves

and the desire for self-unification. The split in human beings is said to be between good will and bad actions, and not knowing how to become better, even if they may be unhappy with them (Hermans 2013:171). God works out transformation by being the source, means, and end through all spiritual shifts from being a lost person to eschatology (Browning 1983:179). In Christianity, spiritual transformation is the movement to conversion into the newness of life in God through Jesus Christ under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, culminating in the eternal eschatological hope for the believers (Igboin 2013:171).

Spiritual transformation is effective, considering that it is a human undertaking (Venter 2015:184) and that it has divine influence (Hermans 2013:171). Hermans speaks of transformation as a process where human beings are both passive and active. The word 'passive' emphasises the human inability to bring about transformation apart from divine intervention. Although the active part of humanity is not fully explained, it points towards what has been alluded to earlier, that human beings actively participate in what God is doing in their lives. The active part of human beings suggests that God works in, through, and with people to bring about transformation. The use of the words 'in', 'through', and 'with' indicates that God works out transformation in the inner lives of people. Through these transformed people, God reaches society with transforming grace. Therefore, the active part of human beings does not suggest that they are equal partners with God, but that they are of service to him in response to the work of his grace within and among them. God still remains the owner of transformation, in which human beings, by his grace, are incorporated as active participants. Spiritual transformation implies not only solving all issues affecting Christians among the Nsenga people, but also empowering them for their meaningful spiritual interactions with God, by using spiritual resources and opportunities to manage life situations so that life is lived more effectively (Knoetze 2015:7). By spiritual resources and opportunities, Knoetze refers to the Bible and the community of faith.

The process of spiritual transformation is not a mechanical one with rigid formulas or fixed moulds to be used in effecting change for all people within their respective contexts. Knoetze (2015:7) suggests that spiritual transformation should not be confused with fulfilling an adopted formula, methods or strategic programmes designed by experts. The empirical data gathered in the previous chapter proves that the means and the areas in need of spiritual transformation vary from context

to context. Under this discussion, the word ‘context’ refers to geographical, social political, economic, historical, and other situations, with the emphasis on culture. According to Venter (2015:174), “[t]ransformation has specific time and space co-ordinates”. With reference to transforming education, which was affected by the ideology of apartheid, it can be concluded that Venter uses the word ‘co-ordinates’ to suggest that transformation resonates with contexts in terms of experiences in space and time. It also identifies the means to address such contentious issues hindering individual and social wholeness. The difference in form of contention issues from context to context entails that certain tools and processes of transformation lose their relevance with the passage of time or change in terms of place. There is a need for the Church to consistently revisit its tools, thoughts, approaches, and processes of faith formation, so that they remain relevant enough to continue bringing about the desired spiritual transformation.

The process of spiritual transformation among the Nsenga people requires identification of specific issues of interest that need to be addressed and opportunities to be harnessed, in order to attain individual or social wholeness. Spiritual transformation, in this case, can be attained if fear of the evils from the spiritual world are addressed and commonly shared contents of beliefs such as sin, the need for mediators, and theodicy are clarified. Spiritual transformation among the Nsenga people is likely to take place if there is certainty that the spiritual world of the Christian faith is able to meet the challenges arising from all forms of spiritual worlds. This is important, since one of the reasons behind the antagonistic dichotomy is the uncertainty expressed in the phrase *nikuyesa vonse vonse* (trying all available means). This indicates that the spiritual world of the church is one option among many other spiritual worlds. It is believed that other spiritual worlds can also be considered. The process of spiritual transformation must address these concerns.

Since spiritual transformation is divine in nature, the church, as a body involved in the *Missio Dei*, is supposed to discern its role and God’s direction throughout the entire process. Van Zyl (2013:110) categorises Christian discernment into knowing and unknowing. According to Van Zyl, discernment, as a matter of choice, takes place at either the junctures of “not knowing” or “knowing”. By unknowing, he refers to moments when human beings, without being aware, are empowered by God to make the right decision or arrive at a correct answer. Knowing is used with a notion that, at times, human beings, while fully aware, purposefully seek the will of God.

However, it is possible that discernment can take place in a combination of both ‘knowing’ and ‘unknowing’. This raises more questions such as: In relation to faith formation, how can the church knowingly seek the will of God in the context of its services? What is the right starting point of faith formation? Is it the tools and processes or the discernment of the context? When does discernment end in the process of forming faith? This chapter will respond to these questions, for they are crucial for the church to carry out faith formation which is likely to facilitate spiritual transformation that would address the antagonistic dichotomy in the practice of Christianity.

### *5.2.2 Faith formation for transforming communities*

The concept of ‘*Missio Dei*’, where the transformed Church is actively participating in the mission of God, suggests that Christian faith, as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ, is about transforming communities with which it comes into contact. In John 17, Jesus Christ prays that the Father should not take both present and the yet-to-come disciples out of the world. He further prays that, just as the Father sent him with the salvation mission into the world, he sends them to the same world as a way of continuity. Therefore, the mission of the church is God’s mission of transforming the world into an embodiment of the life of his Kingdom. This positions the church as an agent of God’s transformation (Pillay 2017:1). This means that the formation of Christians should consequently be the formation of community transformers. Christians are called out of, remain part of, and are assigned to the community with God’s agenda of transforming it with the life of his kingdom. As *Missio Dei*, this means that the church does not operate on its own but that God is the one transforming the world through its services. The RCZ, like any other church, is challenged to improvise a faith formation process that would develop members who will transform the world and not merely conform to its traditions. The antagonistic dichotomy between some congregants may be a sign of struggle to domesticate Christian faith in their daily interaction with contexts. This calls for a more indigenous process of faith awakening, challenging, and supporting that would facilitate Christian formation, maturity, stability, and praxis (Osmer 1992:15). Usually, congregants who merely conform to the denomination cannot bring about transformation in their respective communities.

Transformation as a human undertaking, by knowingly discerning what God is doing and saying, involves a process of critical analysis of contexts. The faith of the transformers of communities

has to be formed in such a way as to enable them to analyse the context under God's illumination and project the required transformation. The way in which faith formation is done determines the way in which the people who undergo it will practise their Christianity. In his critique of the education system termed "the banking system", Freire (1970:73) views this as a hindrance to the development of so-called critical consciousness. The banking system type of education classifies the teacher as the owner of knowledge who is above the learner. Meanwhile, learners are viewed as the recipients whose role is to store the knowledge transmitted by the teachers. The learners' role in the learning process is simply to receive, adapt, and conform to the knowledge as transmitted by their teachers. This is deemed to be the kind of education that incapacitates the learner's vital critical consciousness for coming up with intervention that would transform the world. Learners become consumers of knowledge which does not equip them with the abilities to be transformers of the world or of their respective communities. Such knowledge becomes passive and dies with the learner.

The failure of Christendom to convert its numerical dominance in Zambia into an exhibition of Christian values and community transformation as part of participating in the *Missio Dei* points to the way in which faith formation is done. It reveals that the process of forming faith produces some levels of conformity to denominations or church leadership; hence, people fill the pews every Sunday but lack the ability to transform their community. It is important to revisit the faith formation strategies the church uses to transform its members, in order to make a difference in their respective communities. The banking system creates a scenario where learners fail to relate what they learn with real-life situations in such a way that it generates conformity without transformation and, sometimes, perpetual spiritual dependence. Conformity void of transformation induces antagonistic dichotomy when faith is tried and tested. Freire (1970) describes the banking system of education as a hindrance to the learners' ability to find solutions to the issues at hand. The researcher argues that it is a catalyst for thinking antagonistically to what is taught. The antagonistic dichotomy is the evidence of attempts to seek solutions outside the deposited knowledge through the banking system. Human beings, by nature, seek solutions when pressed with a need, especially when deposited knowledge seems to be an invalid means of addressing the issue at hand. Banking of knowledge does not eliminate critical thinking, but it fails to facilitate constructive critical interpretation and independent growth in the faith. Since what is deposited

into learners through the banking system is not part of the solutions, people seek answers outside the learning system or banked knowledge. This shows a clear distinction between what is learnt from the life lived in community and in class.

The RCZ needs to improvise a faith formation framework that has to be created with, in, by, and for the community. This is based on Freire's claim (1970:72) that "[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other". This statement shows that it is impossible to have a monopoly of faith-forming and life-transforming knowledge for three reasons. The aspect of invention and re-invention shows that knowledge is not static because it keeps on evolving; hence, learning at personal and corporate levels is endless. It also entails that faith formation is a mutual process between those considered to be conducting it and those whose faith is perceived to be formed. This is important because all Christians need a continued awakening, challenging, and support of faith so that it keeps on being formed and maturing (Osmer 1992:15). On the part of the RCZ, this begins with self-theologising, as most of the materials used for faith formation are based on borrowed theology that is limited in terms of addressing contentious social and environmental issues within local contexts.

The RCZ can also learn from the intergeneration form of teaching and learning as practised among the Nsenga people. Intergenerational learning is emphasised by way of two complementary proverbs that seem to contradict each other, as shown in the previous chapter. The first proverb is *chiwaona mkuleni conkhezi mwana angacione lini olo kuti akwere pa mthenge* (what an elderly person sees while seated, a child cannot see even if he or she stands on the roof). The second proverb is *ciwaona mwana cokalawa mkuleni angacione lini olo kuti walala ca mala* (what a child sees while crawling, an elderly person cannot see even if he or she sleeps on a tummy). This refers to intergenerational learning, where the elderly can also learn from the young. It shows that learning is attained by considering each other's perspectives, views, ideas, and knowledge. However, it does not suggest passive assimilation of others' viewpoints, but it emphasises the assessment of one's views in light of the others. This reminds one that the RCZ should realise the need to rethink its faith formation methodology. Bosch (1991:423) suggests that "contextual theology is theology from below". This study suggests that for the RCZ's formation of faith to be

inductive enough, it should not only be from below, but also with and for the spiritual transformation of the below. This implies that RCZ faith formation among the Nsenga people must facilitate spiritual transformation and not merely conformity to its spiritual leaders, doctrines, and traditions. The RCZ needs to be open-minded as it facilitates faith formation. The word ‘open-minded’ means that, as opposed to approaching the Nsenga culture with a fixed mind, adhering to already prepared tools and processes, the RCZ must consider the perspectives, knowledge, or concepts of the local people that need to be engaged, in order to attain faith formation. Discernment through a theological analysis of culture is needed to achieve an inductive faith-forming approach.

### *5.3 Theological analysis of the Nsenga culture as a process of discernment*

This study suggests that the starting point for faith formation among the Nsenga people should be the Nsenga people themselves and not the tools and methodology. Faith formation has to proceed from a theological analysis of the Nsenga people and their culture by way of a discerning and hermeneutical process, otherwise its practice would be reduced to what Freire terms “the banking system”. Freire (1970:60-65) condemns the banking system of education that ranks the teacher as the possessor of knowledge above the student, who is rendered a mere recipient of knowledge. The banking-system approach to faith formation does not fully develop critical thinking competences for Christo-praxis; hence, the antagonistic dichotomy. Freire (1970:60-65) advocates for the liberating dialogical approach to learning that encourages mutual learning between teachers and learners. In the dialogical approach, the teacher learns the learner in order to find out how best to facilitate the learning process. The teacher facilitates exploration by posing the problem, in order for both the learner and the teacher to arrive at its solution. Problem posing is understood to be effective in bringing about transformation, for it stimulates reality-based creativity, true reflection, and action. Although the world is under global influence, Christians’ spiritual struggles revolve around the contexts of their faith practice. Discernment suggests that God, out of his love, is moving towards people (Bosch 1991:334), and the church, in its practice of faith formation, should be abreast with his move. Discernment, by way of a theological analysis of the Nsenga culture, plays a vital role in terms of knowing the actual problems that need to be posed and explored, in order to attain a liberating solution to the antagonistic dichotomy experienced among RCZ members in Nsenga land. It also accounts for the opportunities and resources God presents in and through the cultural context. A theological study of the cultural contexts provides a basis for the

right approach towards inductive faith formation that can address the antagonistic dichotomy and empowers action for the transformation within the context or contexts of the Nsenga people.

The emphasis on discernment, in this chapter, is from understanding that God is already saying and doing something in, through, to, and for the Nsenga people. McNeal (2005:24-25) speaks of the Church being attuned to the movement of God, who is at work in the world. God goes ahead, then he invites and commands the church to be part of his move within various cultural contexts. It is inevitable for the RCZ to discern God's involvement in the Nsenga culture, where it is facilitating the formation faith. The theological study of the Nsenga people and their culture enables the RCZ to know the already prevailing move of God. Some African theologians refer to ATR as a primal religion, with the view that God used it to prepare Africa for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Han and Beyers (2017:19-22) note some points of consistency between Christianity and ATR as the basis to claim that ATR prepares Africans for the Gospel. Han and Beyers (2017:19-22) perceive these consistencies as "contact points or a meeting place for communicating the Gospel". However, it is also argued that similarities in concepts between ATR and Christianity should not be confused with similarities in content. Concepts may be similar, but different in terms of content.

In as much as the Nsenga people have concepts of origin of nature, theodicy, sin, mediation, and atonement, the content of such beliefs is different from the Christian understanding thereof. For example, the issue of atonement is anthropocentric, as it depends on human efforts to pour libations to the mediating ancestral spirits so as to obtain forgiveness of sin from *Nyamalenga*. Meanwhile, in the RCZ, Christ is the priest, atoning sacrifice, and mediator. Therefore, transformation to African Christianity is perceived as embracing not only clarified and corrected contents, but also concepts. Although Mbiti (1977:36) advocates for capitalising on the positives in African cultures, he also states that the Gospel must evaluate, judge, and transform culture. The Gospel has to clarify and correct the Nsenga cultural concepts that are similar to those of the Christian faith. In view of this, the role of the RCZ in the faith formation process is to clarify, correct, and instruct with regard to contents and concepts in light of the Gospel. Christian faith formation should facilitate spiritual transformation, which necessitates a shift to the nature and contents of concepts, as illuminated by the Gospel. A theological analysis of the Nsenga people and their cultures is essential for effective

use in identifying aspects of concepts in need of illumination by the Gospel. It helps devise appropriate ways of proclaiming the Gospel to African cultures.

A theological analysis forms a good point of departure in spiritual transformation, as it is one of the means whereby the RCZ can discern what God is saying and doing in, through, and to the Nsenga people within their cultural contexts. In this case, a theological analysis assumes that God is not moving towards people (Bosch 1991:334), but that he has already arrived, has been present and actively involved among them. Spiritual transformation, being divine in nature, entails that the RCZ should take the time to listen to God, who has a message for his people. Through discernment, those sharing the Gospel do not repeat the mistake made by the missionaries of failing to distinguish God's message for Africa from their culture. According to Cachia (2013:70, 84), "[l]istening is a central element of discernment". As the RCZ rightly believes that it has been charged with the mandate to preach the Gospel, it should bear in mind that God the sender is also actively involved in communities.

Osmer (2005:242-243) talks about "reading with the Spirit and reading the Spirit", who is already actively present in all contexts. Reading with the Spirit emphasises the importance of the RCZ being under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in its interpretive task of the right Gospel for the people in contexts. Reading the Spirit has to do with understanding what the Holy Spirit is already doing in, through, to, and among the people whose faith is being formed. This entails that, before the Church speaks, it must take the time to listen and observe what God is already doing and saying in, through, and to the culture. Discerning God's active presence in all contexts through active listening is an integral part of the church's process of inventing inductive faith formation tools and processes. The challenge is: How can the RCZ listen to or discern the active presence of God in contexts? How can the RCZ read with and read the Holy Spirit in communities?

Van Zyl (2013:111, 121) suggests that "discernment takes place at the juncture of the human mind and God's Spirit at work". This works against the view of overspiritualising the means of discerning God's work. Van Zyl (2013:111, 121) describes discernment as something that occurs in the "conflation of grace and nature" based on the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46. According to Matthaëi (1998:130), the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit can use

human efforts to achieve God's purposes. He also believes that transformation is God's initiative, therefore human structure, relationship, and practice serve as a "means of deepening communion with God through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit". The word 'conflation', therefore, suggests that discernment emanates from divinity being infused in the human effort to fulfil God's purpose. The grace of God is assumed to be at work in human input, effort, decisions, research, and contemplation. It signifies that discerning God's will, voice, and his work among the Nsenga people can take place in the normal and usual human routines. This suggestion dispels the notion that discernment only takes place in extraordinary or mystical ways, as it includes the usual routines of human activities. It also closes the gap between the knowledge about Christian faith and the practical aspect in human lived experience. Hence, conflation of God's grace and the human mind or activity forms the foundation for a theological analysis of culture. The aim of the theological study of the Nsenga people, as a discerning process, is to improvise a practical faith formation that facilitates spiritual transformation and not conformity to church traditions. The claim by the Nsenga people that Christians condemn their cultural practises without taking the time to understand them shows that lack of a proper theological analysis of the culture as a discerning process is one of the major contributors to a conformity without transformation. This theological study of the Nsenga people, as a discerning process, identifies factors that induce conformity to traditions and obscure spiritual transformation.

Culture among the Nsenga people constitutes accumulative stories of hope, struggles, corrected errors made in the past, and provisions for coping with life. It forms a criterion of judging right and wrong, wisdom and foolishness, as well as the acceptable and the unacceptable. The lenses are used to sieve any information presented, even the Gospel before it is assimilated as part of the lived system of the people. Spiritual transformation, as an inward experience worked out by the Holy Spirit, internalises the godly nature, perceptions, values, attitudes, beliefs, and principles that are vital for translating Christian faith into a lived experience in fluid contexts with all its twists and turns. A theological study of the people with their culture is an attempt to know the underlying fears, visions, aspirations, inspiration, hopes, and joys behind cultural practices. Condemning practices without fully understanding the reason why they exist may create resentment and resistance against the Christian faith or an inferiority complex which may be a recipe for outward conformity as the means for gaining approval from the denomination or spiritual leaders.

Condemning cultural practice without an attempt to understand the underlying beliefs is like handling symptoms while neglecting their causes. If the Gospel is to heal the Nsenga people within their respective contexts, a proper theological diagnosis must be carried out to establish the world view behind cultural practices. Therefore, a theological study of the people and their culture as a discerning process should be an integral part of establishing a workable faith formation process.

The proverb *apao ni mizyu ya kacele yukumana pansi* (the indigenous people are like roots of a fig tree which meet underneath) calls for discernment by means of a deeper theological study of the Nsenga people and their culture. The research was also informed that *mwambo uyakine niobvuta kuti a mpingo auziwe cifukwa ulufisame* (it is hard for the RCZ to know certain aspects of culture for they are hidden). Just as the roots of the *kacele* tree diverge on top and meet underneath, the indigenous people have a deeper relationship. This proverb implies that there is a deeper and unseen side of the indigenous people which is more authentic than what strangers see. Since Christian, in the dichotomy of *chikristu ni chikristu mwambo ni mwambo; chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wacinkhalire*,<sup>4</sup> is treated as a stranger, it implies that it remains ignorant of the deeper cultural issues of the Nsenga people. Discerning the underlying issues of the Nsenga culture and improvising approaches for forming faith requires the RCZ to be part of the underneath meeting of *mizyu ya kacele*, in order to bring about spiritual transformation. The RCZ also needs to form the faith from the underneath meeting of *mizyu ya kacele*, so that it addresses the underlying world view, or else it will remain superficial and spiritual transformation will be elusive.

Although Christians have a shared eschatological hope in God, their point of departure in the transformation journey differs. Different points of departure in transiting from one form to the desired form in the transformation process require the discernment of the areas in need of change. It responds to the question: Is the transformation shift from what to what or from where to where? Cultural context determines people's starting point of their transformation journey. Even in culture the questions may be asked: Is it the whole culture that must change or some elements within it? The culture-eradication approach used by the missionaries considered the perceived demonised African culture as a point of departure. The correct discernment of the point of departure and the projection of the ideal state are vital for effecting the required transformation. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> Tradition is tradition Christianity is Christianity, Christianity found an already established culture.

generally in the Christian faith people are transformed from the bondage of sin to freedom in God through Jesus Christ. Yet another question may be asked: From what form of sin bondage should they be freed from? The discerned point of departure determines what exactly needs to change and the nature of faith formation tools and processes to be employed to realise transformation. Since the point of departure differs from context to context, the transformation road map will also differ in line with the prevailing situation. The researcher engaged the qualitative theological study as a means of understanding the assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs, and values behind the antagonistic dichotomy of *chikristu ni chikristu; mwambo ni mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo onkhazikika* among the Nsenga people (Hermans & Schoeman 2015:17). The outcome of the theological analysis of the Nsenga people aimed to inform the church of an indigenised faith formation.

#### *5.4 Localising faith formation through the hermeneutics of the Bible, culture, and church tradition*

Schreiter (1989:759) postulated that revelation has enduring value, for it speaks universally to every culture, at all times, and in all places, but it also has elements of being embedded in culture. Cultural embeddedness needs to be inculturated and contextualised in respective cultures. The cultural embeddedness of the revelation is expressed well by Olorunnisola (2015:62), who described Christianity as an engaging and communitarian faith, as from its inception it engaged the Graeco-Roman and Jewish world, philosophical, social, and religious world views. In the process of this engagement, both the engaging Christianity and the engaged cultures were transformed. This transformation does not necessarily imply changing the Gospel to suit culture, but rather indigenising it for its practicality within cultural contexts. This implies that Christian faith has been hermeneutical in its approach to cultural contexts from the beginning.

Indigenous faith formation tools and processes develop from the hermeneutical interplay between the Bible, culture, and church tradition. Jansen's (2007:2-6) definition of hermeneutics as an ever-widening cycle of reflection on the problem of understanding, involving identifying, analysing, and removing the obstacles to understanding, raises a number of concerns. It shows that understanding is not obvious, as it is gained if its obstacles are identified, analysed, and removed. Unfortunately, hermeneutics cannot be ignored, as it bridges the gaps that are viewed as problems to understanding. However, in this study, hermeneutics is used to identify not only problems or

gaps, but also the possible bridging points between the Bible, the Nsenga culture, and the RCZ faith traditions. Hermeneutics, in this view, not only seeks obstacles to be removed, but also explores opportunities within culture to be harnessed. In this research, bridging point suggests that hermeneutics is not only the identification of problems that must be removed but also seeing opportunities that would serve as points of entry and settlement of the Gospel within and among the Nsenga people. By identifying and analysing possible bridging points or opportunities, indigenous faith formations can address the Nsenga people comprehensively. Although the obstacles will be discussed, the main focus of this chapter is to highlight the possible bridging point or opportunities for faith formation in the Bible, the Nsenga culture, and RCZ traditions. In this case, as an approach to the problem of understanding and identifying the bridging point, hermeneutics can serve as the means of bridging the theory and praxis gap (Jansen 2007:2-6).

The study suggests that the Bible, the Nsenga culture and the RCZ tradition may have some problems and bridges of understanding that need to be explored, in order to craft a contextual faith formation framework. The hermeneutical gap of the Bible arises from the fact that it came as a book in the hands of the missionaries coated with a foreign culture and written from a different social, political, philosophical, historical, geographical, climatic, and economic context. Regardless of some similarities between ATR practices and the Christian faith, cultures still need to understand the Bible. The bridge is that the Bible is the Word of God, who created the whole universe and all people and their cultures. It contains the Gospel of God's salvation and the newness of his kingdom which is valid, relevant, and needed by all cultures of the world. The message of God's kingdom in the Bible does not isolate or discriminate; it unifies and equalises people of all races, gender, and culture. Therefore, although considered foreign, it has the message of God that is needed for informing, reforming, and transforming cultures in the pattern of his kingdom characterised by love, peace, and justice.

The Nsenga culture has problem gaps in the form of obstacles to understanding which alienate it from the life of the kingdom of God, while simultaneously possessing points of contact that the RCZ can harness and use as a positive force in fostering a faith formation framework that may address the challenge of the antagonistic dichotomy. Contextualised faith formation serves the purpose of ensuring that its tools and processes address the needs and respond to the questions

asked by the indigenous people concerning the application of Christian faith in realities. There is an attempt to link faith to life in its lived reality. It is about coming up with theological responses to the concerns of the Nsenga people, so that the Gospel truly transforms them by addressing their fears, concerns and worries. RCZ contextual faith formation may also harness the opportunities in the Nsenga culture that present entry points for localising and owning the Gospel. In the process of contextualising faith formation, the RCZ is required to identify obstacles to understanding as well as opportunities for owning the Gospel among the Nsenga people. The identification, analysis, and removal of obstacles to understanding, coupled with taking advantage of the entry point for the Gospel, reduce the problem gap between the known and the unknown. Transforming hermeneutics may take course if faith formation facilitates a meaningful trilogy of the Bible, culture, and church tradition. In this instance, the worlds of the Bible, the Nsenga culture, and the RCZ faith traditions are in constant conversation for the formation of authentic Christian faith.

Attention needs to be paid to Nsenga cultural voices for the RCZ to apply the right faith formation approach to effectively address the antagonistic dichotomy. The use of tools meant for the Chewa people among the Nsenga people is a sign that their cultural voices are not heard. God brought the RCZ to the Nsenga cultural context to listen and take a correct step towards the formation of their faith. It is, therefore, imperative that the RCZ responsibly discerns what God is doing and saying among, through, and to the Nsenga people, by analysing their culture theologically for contextualised faith formation. The researcher opines that such faith formation is likely to speak to the core of the Nsenga cultural world view that determines the openness and sets the conditions for permitting the transforming power of the Gospel (Kraft 2005:286). Faith formation should be a cyclic movement from studied context to methodology.

### *5.5 Hermeneutics of the Bible, the Nsenga culture and church tradition*

Hermeneutical reflection on the tension between Gospel and culture is vital for the church to effectively participate in the *Missio Dei* among African cultures (Dames 2013:3). The continued resolution of this tension will go a long way in ensuring the indigenisation of faith formation. The successful indigenisation of faith formation tools and processes proceeds from the hermeneutical interplay of the Bible, culture, and church tradition. There is insistence on the equal importance of the text and the context because context influences the way of doing things, the world view, and

the construction of reality, even the interpretation of the Bible (Fiorenza 1988:3). The importance of equity is based on that the fusion of the two leads to understanding. It is a fact that the selection and interpretation of texts in preaching, counselling, and other matters is usually based on context. It is also true that the Bible is interpreted from the perspective of oriented Church tradition. In this research, the hermeneutics of the Bible, the Nsenga cultural context, and the RCZ with its reformed tradition is important for the formulation of an indigenous faith formation framework. It is significant for hermeneutics to link epistemology to methodology in the process of faith formation (Jansen 2007:2-6). In other words, the texts of the Bible and the RCZ faith formation tools can be meaningfully presented for the transformation of the cultural context by way of responsible hermeneutics. Elements of the antagonistic dichotomy among the Nsenga people indicate that they continue to hermeneutically struggle to link the learnt Christian faith in its reformed tradition to practical reality. It also signifies that the hermeneutical process for forming faith transcends church programmes, as Christians ceaselessly attempt to fuse the learnt content of faith with its praxis in cultural contexts interpretively.

The definition of hermeneutics as an ever-widening cycle of reflection on the problem of understanding, involving identifying, analysing, and removing the obstacles to understanding (Jansen 2007:2-6) shows that understanding is not obvious. It is only gained through the exercise of identifying, analysing, and removing its obstacles. This approach seems to reduce hermeneutics to an exercise of identifying and removing the obstacles in culture. The Nsenga culture not only possesses obstacles, but also presents opportunities for understanding. The obstacle identification and removal approach to hermeneutics may result in an oversight on the opportunities for understanding within the Nsenga culture. In this study, hermeneutics is not only used as a problem or gaps identification process, but it also notes possible bridging points between the Bible, the Nsenga culture, and the RCZ faith tradition. 'Bridging point' suggests that hermeneutics is the identification not only of problems that must be removed, but also of opportunities within the Nsenga culture that would serve as coordinates for the Gospel. Identifying and analysing possible bridging points or opportunities for indigenous faith formations can comprehensively address the Nsenga culture. Although the obstacles will be discussed, the main focus of this chapter is to highlight the possible bridging points between the Bible, the Nsenga culture, and the RCZ traditions. In this case, hermeneutics, as an approach to the identification of the obstacles and

opportunities to the problem of understanding, serves as a way of closing the theory-praxis gap or the gap ‘between living in the world’, the lived reality of the Nsenga people, and the proclaimed life of faith (Jansen 2007:2-6; Dames 2013:4). The antagonistic dichotomy thrives in the gap between the lived reality and proclaimed life in Christ. Hermeneutics is required for Nsenga Christians to live a unified life in Christ.

### *5.5.1 Problem and bridges of understanding in the Nsenga culture*

There is no better starting point in identifying the opportunity that the RCZ must harness in the process of forming faith than viewing the Nsenga people from the theological perspective. The theological study emphasises viewing the Nsenga people from God’s perspective. This perspective considers the Nsenga people as part of the creation of God, as bearers of the *imago Dei*. Migliore (1991:122-125) considers *imago Dei* to be a life of relationship with God and the complementary others. The term ‘complementary’ suggests that it is human beings and the whole of creation that humanity lives as intended by God. *Imago Dei* also suggests that it is in the co-existence in these vital relationships that the Nsenga people find their true identity. The Nsenga people are created to have a covenant relationship with God and the remainder of his creation. However, as with any other ethnic group in the world, these vital relationships constituting the *imago Dei* among the Nsenga people are tainted by the fallen nature of humanity. By being bearers of the image of God, the Nsenga people are called by God into a relationship with him and other creatures. On faith formation, the RCZ acknowledges that, although the Nsenga people share the fallen nature of humanity with the rest of the world, they remain God’s people, destined for salvation in him through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. God’s call to relationship should be the focal point of the faith formation tools and processes.

The theological perspective of the Nsenga people also studied their existing reflections on *Nyamalenga* the Creator, the concepts of the origin of nature, theodicy, sin, mediation, and atonement. The Nsenga people’s belief of sin is considered to be the main cause of the disrupted peace and harmony with *Nyamalenga*, nature, and human society. Sin disrupts the harmony because people are predisposed to self-sufficiency and self-indulgence, leading to separation from God and losing a sense of living in communion with others (Matthaei 2010:60, 86). Because of sin, even churches are sometimes reduced to conflicts of self-interest groups. Faith formation

enables and strengthens the relationship with God, self, and others (people and the environment). As a way of restoring harmony, the Nsenga people seek to amend their relationship with *Nyamalenga* when signs of having sinned against him are evident. These ways of keeping a harmonious relationship with *Nyamalenga* have been transmitted and preserved within their cultural formation systems, structures, and practices intra- and intergenerationally.

The RCZ ought to note that, regardless of the practices, a harmonious relationship is the main purpose for cultural formation among the Nsenga people. The highlight of the Nsenga cultural concepts that are similar to those upheld in Christianity reminds the RCZ that faith formation needs to assess how it can shift from the known to the unknown. The challenge is how to facilitate a transition from the Nsenga cultural to the Gospel concept of mediating harmony with God, in order to generate a new experience, a life of love in, through, with, and for God. The Nsenga cultural formation is carried out as a way of reinforcing relationships of harmony with both the visible and the invisible beings. The need for harmony with invisible beings shows that human existence is influenced by the physical, or scientific and spiritual dimension. It entails that human relationships should transcend interpersonal engagements, for they have to embrace the unseen *Nyamalenga* and his creation. The Nsenga people struggle more with the spiritual aspect of the world which is normally perceived to be both the source of relief and the cause of pain. The well-being of humanity is based on maintaining a good relationship with *Nyamalenga*, the provider of all good things, peace, and harmony. In fact, the Nsenga people struggle with the invisible, *Nyamalenga*, and other spiritual powers that are believed to be capable of shaping and influencing lives either for better or for worse than the visible world in its quest for communal and personal harmony (Mwakabana 2002:19).

RCZ faith formation can learn from the Nsenga cultural formation. Culture among the Nsenga people is guided by the desire to create communal responsibility and participation. Through cultural formation, the Nsenga people are raised, taught, and trained to strive towards a life that is enjoyed to its fullest, peacefully, and undisturbed at an individual and communal level (Mwakabana 2002:19). Each member is expected to be an active participant in the realisation of a community that is good for all. For this reason, the greatest possible attention is paid to the cultural formation process, with the intent to produce active and meaningful contributors to its community.

The desire to produce members who actively participate in ensuring the well-being of the community motivates the selection of the lesson and the process of cultural formation. It is anticipated that, after being formed, culturally all members have to plough back by adding value to the community. Therefore, under the Nsenga cultural formation, members are formed by and for the edification of the community. This is in line with the concept of the church being the body of Christ consisting of many parts, and existing for the benefit of fellow members and the community through *Missio Dei*.

RCZ faith formation, like cultural formation, should be conducted in interaction with life experiences or in anticipation of the new roles to be assumed. Life experiences must be respected, as the RCZ carries out the task of faith formation among the Nsenga people. They must also contribute towards improving social well-being and facilitating harmonious relationships with God, self, and others. The measure of a well-formed faith is based on one's ability to apply faith in all vital relationships and to add value to society.

#### *5.5.2 Opportunities for faith formation among the Nsenga people*

The historical background of the Nsenga people presents the RCZ with faith formation opportunities that have to be accounted for and used. The first opportunity is its strong culture preservation abilities, regardless of the challenges faced. Zulu (2016:86) attests that, despite suffering defeat at the hands of the Ngoni people at one point in history, the court litigation over the succession dispute of Senior Chief Kalindawalo, and Christianisation, the Nsenga people remain strongly attached to their culture. The second opportunity is the resilience of the Nsenga people to influence equity from an inferior position. This has significantly changed the way in which the Nsenga and the Ngoni people currently co-exist in contrast to their past. The Nsenga people were victims of the Ngoni war expeditions and grabbing of their wealth. Apart from that, Ngoni men married Nsenga women by force. As unfortunate as the history of the two ethnic groups is, the current bond is that of equity with the Ngoni people, addressing Nsenga people as mothers and uncles. This shift is linked to the third opportunity, which is the influence of the Nsenga women on the Ngoni people under Chief Mpezeni of Chipata District, Zambia. The complete divergence of the spoken Ngoni language from its South African roots, such that it is closely related to Chinsenga (language of the Nsenga people), shows the formative power of the Nsenga

women whom Ngoni men married by force. The RCZ must harness and use these three opportunities.

### *5.5.3 Aspects of the Nsenga cultural formation*

Both Christianity and the Nsenga culture are transmissible, formable, and preservable. They both thrive through the transmission and preservation of content, beliefs or convictions of the heart, and the formation of a particular kind of life and practices. Chapter three highlighted that Christian faith includes the cognitive, also known as *regula fidei* or *doctrina*. The *regula fidei* or *doctrina* has to do with the content of faith that is to be known by anyone who professes Christianity. It also includes the affective aspect, known as the *orthopatheia* (Maddix *et al.* 2020:6), referring to treasuring the known truth in the heart or upholding it with conviction. Finally, it has psychomotor or *orthopraxis* or *experientia fidei* (Itao 2010:3; Maddix *et al.* 2020:6) as the practical and implementation aspects of the known and upheld truth. This is where the known truth becomes the person's lived reality. These aspects are interdependent, as they validate each other. Hence, the process of forming faith must ensure a balanced growth in all three dimensions. The Nsenga cultural formation has three important aspects: *kuziwa mwambo* (knowing the culture), *kusungwa mwambo* (preserving or keeping the culture), and *kunkhala monga mwa mwambo* (living as required by culture). These are vital and interdependent in the process of forming culture among the Nsenga people, as one ensures the continuation of the others. Cultural formation consists of a set of means for necessitating *kuziwa mwambo*, *kusungwa mwambo*, and *kunkhala monga mwa mwambo*.

#### *5.5.3.1 Kuziwa mwambo wa chinsenga*

*Kuziwa mwambo wa chinsenga* (knowing the Nsenga culture) forms an integral part of the cultural practice of the Nsenga people. This goes hand in hand with *kuphunzisa* or *kusambizya mwambo wa chinsenga* (teaching or transmitting the Nsenga culture). *Kuphunzisa mwambo* is held in high esteem because it is believed that the best way to preserve culture is to transmit it to others, especially the younger generation. Knowing culture also consists of embracing the Nsenga “conceptual systems” or “worldview” (Kraft 2005:273). This conceptual system encompasses how the Nsenga people learn, generate, process, and use the acquired knowledge. Kraft further suggests that, instead of converting persons, the Church should preoccupy itself with transforming the

cultural conceptual system, also known as world views. It is difficult to understand how Kraft isolates conversion from transformation and how he perceives that one can take place without the other. However, it is worth noting that the transmission of culture involves conceptual systems and practices, which are the means of viewing and interpreting life with experiences. It also involves handing down crucial cultural practices for upholding harmony of relationships with both the visible and the invisible or in the horizontal and vertical. Among the Nsenga people, transmission is motivated by a belief that culture serves as a guide to relationships that are vital for human existence in peace, tranquillity, and prosperity. Therefore, transmission of culture is like handing over the vitalities of life essential for the survival of its people, not only in the here and now, but also in life after death.

#### 5.5.3.2 *Kusunga Mwambo wa Chinsenga*

All cultural practices are meant to meet a perceived need among ethnic groups. African cultural societies live as an inseparably intertwined community with both the invisible and the visible world, where it is believed that one's actions have a communal implication. In some cases, refusal to adhere to conceptual systems may lead to isolation and stigma. *Kusunga mwambo wa chinsenga* which may be translated as preservation of the Nsenga culture, is held in high esteem. The phrase *kusunga mwambo* assumes the form of adherence to culture, with an emphasis on approaching life encounters and experiences as per cultural tradition. It also ensures that cultural customs and practices continue to exist in the current and future generations. The opposite of *kusunga mwambo* is *kutaya mwambo* (losing track of or departing from culture, its practices, values, and customs). With this understanding, culture among the Nsenga people is more than simply a socially shared identity because it is a means for the survival, harmony, and well-being of the community. Culture and the well-being of society are thought to be intertwined, such that *kutaya mwambo* is considered to be a big risk that may affect the individual or society in some cases. Therefore, *kutaya mwambo* is as good as losing the self and endangering the well-being of society. Society may be affected, depending on the nature of the case or level at which a person has failed to preserve culture. It is perceived that one person's irresponsible act can affect the entire community. The effects of shared consequences are likely to affect future generations that may not be aware of what happened. The Nsenga people think intergenerationally; hence, preservation of culture is for the well-being not only of the present but also of the future generation. It is out of the sense of shared consequences

in the present or future generation that shared responsibility in ensuring that culture is preserved becomes a significant factor. Preservation of culture is selfless, as it contributes to the well-being of both the present and the future generations.

The social responsibility and intergenerational consideration are vital bridges that the RCZ can harness in its quest to form the faith of the Nsenga people. Faith formation should prepare people for social responsibility in terms of the present and future generations. In this research, social responsibility refers to Christian action with consideration of the well-being of others within the currently shared society. Social responsibility is extremely essential in the closely linked globalised world, where one irresponsible act can badly affect others. The global climatic change should awaken a sense of intergenerational consideration. Salvation should be taught as more than simply the redemption of an individual soul with distant future well-being. In as much as thinking eschatologically is one of the key hopes of Christianity, salvation should be taught along with considering the present and future generations. Posterity should not judge Christianity to have been part of the build-up to the negative consequences of the future sufferings.

#### *5.5.3.3 Kunkhala monga mwa mwambo (living according to the culture)*

The whole essence of forming culture is *kunkhala monga mwa mwambo*. The transmitted and preserved knowledge has meaning in its practicality in the daily experience of life. Spiritual transformation is divided into eschatology and conversion, which is described as something that takes place in human lifetime on earth. Scholarly debates, based on Lonergan's argument, suggest that conversion as a human lifetime experience consists of the intellectual, religious, moral, and affective conversions (Igboin 2013:169-171). Intellectual conversion involves the removal of misconceptions and myths, while religious conversion is about total change of a person arising from an unrestricted experience of God. Moral conversion is described as being truly good, whereas affective conversion concerns overcoming the self-centred life which is replaced by living in relationships with others. This means that life is no longer lived individualistically but socially. Therefore, spiritual transformation is something that takes place inside a person, yet perceivable with human senses.

Under ATR, life is not lived in compartments or dichotomy of spiritual and daily life. Human life is lived as one coherent whole, an integration of religion and daily endeavours. This understanding seems to contradict the information that sub-Saharan Africa is highly religious; yet some of its countries are among the poorest in the world, with nine of them accounting for being among the most corrupt in the world. It is also stated that, although the region is highly Christianised and Islamised, elements of ATR are still deeply embedded in some of the people (Agbiji & Swart 2015:1, 2). Under ATR, African societies are non-compartmentalised, for religion and culture are inseparably intertwined. In fact, Africans blame the moral decay of societies on the failure to preserve or live according to their culture upon infiltration of Western cultures. It is assumed that preservation of culture is the way forward to curbing the immorality witnessed in some sectors of African communities. In view of this, the dichotomy, life in Africa, is caused by Africans hanging or oscillating between two or three religions that seem to antagonise each other. The coherence of religious lived life can be attained once again if the faith formation process strives to settle the matter of religious antagonism in African societies.

The phrase 'living according to culture' denotes that the cultural formation process is linked to practical life and experience. The process is considered wasted, if a person who passed through it fails to apply the lessons learnt in lived experience. Cultural formation is a process of shaping out a particular way of life that is shared for social harmony through the maintenance of relationships with visible and invisible beings. Like any other African community, the Nsenga people live a social and communal life nurtured and sustained by a network of interdependencies. This network involves individuals, community, the spiritual world, and the natural environment (Mwakabana 2002:19). Living according to culture among the Nsenga people is nurtured by and for the community. It is based on the understanding that values all its members as potential and dependable contributors to the well-being and peace of society. The insistence on formation for living a cultural adherent life is one of the contact points on which the RCZ process of forming faith can build. The practice should not be an inculcation of reformed faith theories to be used as "doctrinal roadblocks" serving the purpose of determining who to include and exclude (Sell 2008:151). The faith formation programme has to equip people to uphold the principle of always reformed and keep on reforming. This ongoing personal transformation is not limited to the

individual soul. There should be a deliberate insistence that those transformed have to keep on taking up roles that improve the livelihood of neighbouring societies.

Olorunnisola (2015:69) calls for change in the conversation of the church: from Christology, with reflection on the identity and significance of Christ, to Christo-praxis, with the emphasis on Christ-centred practical action that can influence contexts in a concrete way. This means that, for the church to effect social transformation, it has to engage in practices that show the love, justice, mercy, and care of Jesus Christ. However, such practices may, at times, put the Church in conflict with oppressive power structures, such that it may mistakenly opt to withdraw for the sake of its safety at the expense of public engagement with existential issues (Dames 2013:3).

#### *5.6 Lessons from the Nsenga proverbs*

The Nsenga proverbs, though orally transmitted, are short and easy to remember. They bear rich messages vital for living a holistic life and serve as tools for transmitting culture, as storage facilities of the profound messages, and as experiencing the wholeness of relationships with the vital vertical and horizontal worlds. Proverbs are designed to draw the listeners' attention, and enthrone personal reflection and interpretation for appropriate application in specific contexts. They are user-friendly, as they are made by and for the community in their language based on the observation of nature or life experiences. Learning from the nature and functionality of proverbs among the Nsenga people, the RCZ can make faith formation memorable, bearer of rich messages that are vital for living a holistic life and draw listeners' attention. The RCZ can also learn that the process of faith formation needs to have the capacity to enthrone quality reflection and interpretation for appropriate application in contexts.

#### *5.7 Faith formation among the RCZ children*

According to UNICEF, the first one thousand days of life, from conception to a child's second birthday, are crucial for ensuring that the child survives and thrives in health and development in life. The effects of upbringing in the first one thousand days go beyond the child, as they contribute to society's long-term health, stability, and prosperity. The Nsenga people believe that *mlamba tumpeta akali mnana*<sup>5</sup> prioritises early childhood formation of culture. Meanwhile, the RCZ is

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<sup>5</sup> Catfish is folded while it is still fresh.

weak in terms of ministry to children, as the number of trained Sunday School teachers was still low, as observed by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Synod (Minute number SM 2022/27.5, 7). Until 2004, the late Rev. Joseph G. Phiri, a graduate from PETRA College with a Diploma in Children Ministry, was assigned to coordinate the ministry to children in the entire RCZ. His role was to train Sunday school teachers and ensure that all the necessary materials for teaching children in the church were made available. In 2004, he was attached to an organisation involved in rural missions and was posted to a Sesheke District for missionary work. Since his departure until the present, nobody has been officially appointed to coordinate ministry to children. However, in 2010, the services of the department were unofficially incorporated under the RCZ Youth Desk until 2012, when the Lay Training and Empowerment Desk was established.

In the 2017-2021 strategic plans, in an effort to strengthen discipleship, the RCZ projected to train 8,500 Sunday School teachers by the end of its term. Unfortunately, less than 100 Sunday School teachers were officially reported to have been trained by the Lay Training and Empowerment Desk. In the 2022-2026 strategic plan, under strategic issue, “Enhancing spirituality”, the number of Sunday School teachers to be trained was projected to be 8,500 once again. Upon observing the low number of trained Sunday School teachers, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Synod Council resolved that congregations, presbyteries, and Lay Training and Empowerment Desk must organise trainings for Sunday School teachers. The realisation of this targeted number is questionable, as the Lay Training and Empowerment Desk tasked to carry out the training is currently non-functional. This shows that the RCZ does not take seriously the issue of forming faith in a person at the earliest stage in life.

### *5.8 Limitations of the Nsenga culture*

The Nsenga culture, like any other culture, is man-made; hence, it has limitations in terms of how far it can lead mankind (Mbiti 1977:31-39). Although culture needs to be harnessed and used as a positive force and as a way of considering the adiaphora for incarnating Christian faith, its power over people is temporary, whereas the Gospel is eternally powerful (Nsamanang & Tchombe 2011:82-83; Mokhoathi 2017:1; Mbiti 1977:30). Mokhoathi (2017:1) laments that the insufficient “critical evaluation of how Christianity is to be fully expressed or practised within the cultural contexts” has resulted in syncretism, where it is amalgamated with ATR. Similarities between

cultural concepts such as sin, theodicy, the need for the mediator, and the belief in the createdness of all nature should not be mistaken as sameness. These should, in fact, be the reason for opening up to the Gospel so that it traverses, judges, saves, sanctifies, beautifies, and illuminates culture. Authentic Christian formation requires the Nsenga people to avoid the syncretism of mixing Christianity and ATR, by consulting and pouring libation to the spirits of the dead. The inclination to one Testament at the expense of the other is not part of the Christian faith. The Nsenga people need to understand that the law and the prophets find their fulfilment in Christ Jesus. Hence, in Christianity, both the Old and the New Testament form a complete canon expressing God's love and involvement in the world.

### *5.9 Conclusion*

This chapter responded to the question: "What are the possibilities of using the outcome of the study in indigenising the RCZ's approach towards faith formation?". It explored possibilities of addressing the antagonistic dichotomy between Christian faith and culture, using the faith formation process that is informed by the outcome from the theological study of the Nsenga people. The outcome of the theological study of the Nsenga people is that the RCZ should realise the need for faith formation from, by, and with the below (Bosch 1991:423). In order to conduct inductive faith formation, the RCZ should also discern what God is saying and doing among the Nsenga people within their cultural context. The discerning process may require that faith formation be done in, with, by, and for the spiritual transformation of the Nsenga people. The spiritually transformed Nsenga people will, in turn, take up the task of transforming communities spiritually. The responsible hermeneutical process identifies, analyses, and harnesses opportunities discerned from the Nsenga culture which bridges the gaps and resolves problems between the Bible, culture, and faith tradition. It must promote aspects of knowing, preserving, and transmitting, as well as living the Christian faith for personal and social transformation. Faith formation, as a means of transmitting the rich message of God's love in Christ, must be easy to remember, draw listeners' attention, and enthrone personal reflection and interpretation for appropriate application within contexts. The early onset of faith formation, using contextual tools and in interaction with the community, is recommended.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTEXTUAL FAITH FORMATION AMONG THE NSENGA PEOPLE

#### *6.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter explored possible lessons from the theological study of Nsenga cultural formation that would inform the RCZ faith formation process in the quest to address the antagonistic dichotomy between Christian faith and culture. It highlighted three important aspects of cultural formation: *kuziwa mwambo* (knowing culture), *kusunga* (upholding or preserving culture), and *kunkhala monga mwa mwambo* (living according to the culture). These are necessitated by intergenerational and integrated *kusambizya mwambo* (teaching or forming culture) through traditional leadership structures, relationships, and ceremonies. The formation of culture is done in interaction with life in its lived reality starting from the early stages of human life. The chapter also pointed out discernment and hermeneutical approach as means for identifying and analysing the hidden elements of the Nsenga culture useful for coming up with a contextual and meaningful faith formation.

This chapter responds to the secondary question: What should the RCZ do to conduct contextual faith formation among the Nsenga people? The chapter's objective is to recommend what RCZ should consider for it to contextualise faith formation among the Nsenga people. It proposes that the RCZ should engage the community for social healing. The chapter also calls on the RCZ to theologise itself, restructure and decolonise its theology and theological training, as well as revise the *Buku La Katekisma*, the main tool for faith formation, so that it addresses the cause of the antagonistic dichotomy. It clarifies that the suggested recommendations do not intend to isolate the RCZ from the body of Christ but are used for developing a relevant and contextual faith formation that would address the causes of the antagonistic dichotomy between culture and Christianity.

#### *6.2 Faith formation by engaging the community*

The church exists to serve God in the community. Olorunnisola (2015:62) describes Christianity as an engaging and communitarian faith, which engaged the societies with which it came into

contact from its inception. Until the present, one of the ways in which the church offers services to God is by engaging the community on social issues Christo-centrally. For the Nsenga people, the world is more than scientific, for it includes the divine or the spiritual dimension. In fact, the world is believed to be more under spiritual influence than scientific. For this reason, occurrences are interpreted and understood more in a spiritual than in a scientific way. According to Mwakabana (2002:16), by “believing in the existence and reality of the spirit world and spiritual being, ATR holds that what happens in the spiritual world affects the mundane world and vice versa”. Both the Nsenga traditional religion and Christianity emphasise the importance of vertical and horizontal harmony. This means that the Christian formation process involves engaging the Nsenga people towards a shift from one form of religion to another. This shift may mistakenly be thought of as being easy and straightforward, due to traceable similarities between Christianity and the Nsenga traditional religion. The truth is that the similarities are a source of antagonism between the two, unless the Christian faith is understood and owned. The antagonistic dichotomy experienced among some members of the church is the result of the missionaries’ triumphalism approach towards ATR, so that there was no opportunity for proper engagement of the local people theologically. It is a sign that the triumphalism approach did not address issues of concern; hence, some Christians get stuck when faced with issues that culture is viewed as offering solutions and Christianity is perceived to be silent or provide unconvincing explanations. The church needs more than simply a set of restrictive rules of dos and don’ts enshrined in the constitution and resolutions of the councils. This research recommends that the RCZ needs to strengthen its faith formation system by engaging the Nsenga people theologically, with the emphasis on clarifying similarities with regard to the spiritual world, although not neglecting the scientific world.

Wigg-Stevenson (2018:423) mentions that ethnographic theology is a way of producing theological knowledge. Ethnography, as descriptive and interpretive writing about people with a notion that they are meaning makers and interpreters of the cultural world they create and use (Fouche 2005:271; Gergen & Gergen 2018:3), excavates the underlying beliefs of the visibly lived life. In ethnographic theology, the descriptive and interpretive story of the people is written from God’s perspective. It shifts the focus “from theological traditions in texts” to “theological traditions embodied in the practice”. In view of this, ethnographic theology critically examines the relationship between daily and academic theology, and the tension between the empirical and the

theological modes used to produce theology. It places more emphasis on analysis “from Christian practices” than “of Christian practices” (Wigg-Stevenson 2018:423). Ethnographic theology, therefore, produces new knowledge that enhances the practice of Christian faith, by observing praxis interpretively with an aim of bridging the existing gaps between theological theories and practically lived life. The theory and practice gaps are sometimes created, due to differences between the theory taught and obtaining cultural scenarios. Faith formation based on ethnographic theology engages people in their lived reality with an aim of linking theory to praxis.

In this research, ethnography is used to possibly close the gap between the RCZ faith formation texts and processes, on the one hand, and its practicality among the Nsenga people, on the other. In some instances, the gap is evident in the antagonistic dichotomy of *chikristu ni chikristu mwambo ni mwambo chikristu cepeza mwambo ni wacinkhalile*, which fosters an antithetical dual allegiance to culture and Christian faith. Approached from the ethnographic and theological perspective, the study upholds that God is the owner of both the Nsenga people and the church. Sharpe (1974:15f, as cited by Bosch [1991:409]) suggests that God, as the owner of the mission, goes ahead of those sent to preach the Gospel and prepares recipients within “the context of their own cultures and convictions”. Therefore, the church does not take God to the people; God takes the church to the respective missionary tasks. God sends the church with the faith-forming task he is already doing and speaking in, to, among, and through the Nsenga culture, irrespective of religious practices. It is then imperative that the church, in its quest to form faith among the Nsenga people, discerns God’s move among both the church and the contexts. Osmer (2005:240-247) suggests that interpretation should involve interpreting the texts (Bible and church tradition), the present activity of the Holy Spirit, the praxis of the congregation, and cultural contexts. As a way of discerning God’s move, this research recommends that the RCZ must engage the Nsenga people and culture to ensure a practical, relevant, effective, and efficient faith formation (Hoffman 2021:5-6).

Engaging the Nsenga people in the process of forming their faith suggests a shift in approach from church-centred activities (McNeal 2005:21, 27) to Christ-centred community inclusiveness or “public responsibility” (Fiorenza 1988:4). The term ‘church-centred activities’ implies church activities focused on benefiting the church or done separate from the community. Community

inclusiveness or public responsibility entails that the activities of the church must be done in partnership with the community for the benefit of both congregants and the community. Faith formation should not disassociate itself from contextual issues. The phrase ‘public responsibility’ refers to considerate hermeneutics, whose aim is to ensure a holistic approach in the process of forming faith. It also fights all forms of abuse and instead promotes unity, peace, equity, dignity, and inclusivity by transforming the community. RCZ congregations in Nsenga land have a mission to engage people, so that Christianity permeates their religion, culture, politics, economy, and social relationships (Quayesi-Amakye 2011:165). The silence of the church on matters that affect the community is referred to as disinterest or false neutrality (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza, 1988:4). The call to engage the Nsenga people is based on the fact that their cultural formation process is done by engaging them in their lived reality or interaction with real-life experiences, with the intention to improve social harmony. The aim of cultural formation is shared benefit from the effort of ensuring the perpetuation of social harmony, peace, and tranquillity. In other words, their approach to cultural formation is intentional engagement of community members for the benefit of all. Through responsible hermeneutics, the RCZ needs to engage the Nsenga people, in order to facilitate the permeation of its faith in all human endeavours so that it informs, forms, transforms, and reforms the community.

In order to effect the contextual faith formation process, the RCZ ought to go beyond teaching only its members. A church that avoids the wider community and only considers itself and its members dies, for it loses its identity. Unfortunately, such a church is ultimately rendered irrelevant in the community (Hendriks 2004:21). It is imperative that the RCZ initiates programmes where the Nsenga people are engaged in interactions on social issues that affect their well-being or rights. The interest of the RCZ should not be restricted to its members, but should include the welfare of the entire community. After all, the Nsenga community influences the way in which congregations and congregants practise faith. The RCZ members are part of the broader community; they are, therefore, affected by whatever happens in the wider cultural context. In short, the church and cultural contexts not only influence each other (Hendriks 2004:70-71), but also share members. One of the sources of the antagonistic dichotomy is the fact that members are intertwined in a cultural system, which forms the context for practising their faith. A transformed community that meaningfully resolves the faith and culture tension, a catalyst for dichotomy,

lessens the burden for, and accelerates the Christo-praxis. Unresolved tension affects faith praxis. The RCZ has to engage the Nsenga people and their cultural beliefs in Christo-centric conversation using correlational hermeneutics, which promotes transactional dialogue for the purpose of localising faith. Engaging the community would assist in discerning and re-articulating faith formation, as it enables the church to view Christianity from the observers' standpoint (Laxa 2021:1, 6). Correlational hermeneutics identifies, analyses, and engages areas of comparisons, contrasts, and compliments for the faith formation, in order to appropriately respond to issues that need to be addressed and to capitalise on opportunities to attain the transformation of culture (Hendriks 2004:21).

All formation starts from somewhere or something and progresses towards the desired change. However, God has been, still is, and will always be the focal point of faith-forming dialogue in the whole process because, in Christianity, the formed faith is about and in the Triune God. Despite being Christo-centric, the transactional approach stresses that conversation should not be a triumphalist, suppressive, or oppressive attitude, but a liberating one, by allowing the voice of the people as meaning makers and interpreters of their culture to be heard (Gergen & Gergen 2018:3). Engaging the Nsenga people originates from the view that God can work out transformation on, with, and through them. God starts the process of transforming the Nsenga people from where they are, by speaking to them in their context and world view, in order to necessitate social and internal personal renewal. This renewal involves forming and transforming the mind, spirituality, emotions, and behaviour for social benefit. It emphasises that culture contexts, where God finds people, need to be harnessed as a positive force for its transformation, domestication of the Gospel, and illuminating grace of God (Hendriks 2004:75; Nsamanang & Tchombe 2011:82-83). In this chapter, the term 'domesticate' refers to owning it as part of their own community and not limiting it to a small group or a few individuals. This entails that in as much as the Gospel is global, it can be owned by any culture in the world. However, this does not seek to align itself with the idea of making the Nsenga cultural identity a source for practising theology. It proposes a non-prejudiced view or attitude towards the Nsenga culture and its reflection as the starting point for the formation of faith, while considering culture as a "reciprocal transformational agency" (Dames 2013:1). The theological study of culture, as a way of discerning what God is doing and saying in various contexts, opens up possibilities of formulating a contextual faith formation that is able to speak to

social needs meaningfully. The sustainability of the formed faith depends on how the community owns it. This further suggests that there should be a shift from engaging the community to the community engaging itself in faith formation. The church has to initiate methodologies that can assist the community to engage itself in the formation of its faith.

### *6.2.1 From church to community self-engagement*

In social psychology, self-engagement creates a sense of responsibility and commitment to performance, as self-system is activated such that self-concept is invested in the performance. This heightens the performance level and ability to overcome obstacles (Britt *et al.* 2006:2100-2101). In this research, self-engaging is about owning the Christian faith with a sense of responsibility and commitment to it and developing competent reflections for its meaningful application within context. It is for the Nsenga people to develop the competencies for handling all the social challenges and using the opportunities within their cultural system in a Christo-praxis way. Self-engaging accounts for culture being deeper than its perceivable aspects. The Nsenga people live in conversation with the lived realities that have been responded to in a cultural way in shifting contexts in terms of time and situations. The deeply rooted or hidden aspects of the culture, which they create and use, influence the Nsenga people in interpreting life and its meaning (Fouche 2005:271; Gergen & Gergen 2018:3). Self-engaging faith formation is likely to address the hidden aspects of culture. The community engaging in faith formation needs to empower abilities to analyse underlying cultural influences theologically, so that faith is applied suitably within various contexts. Faith formation within cultural contexts has fostered individual and social interpretation and *mimesis* of Christian faith for praxis in their societies (Osmer 2005:240-247). Although this seems far-fetched, the church remains mandated to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). The church can capitalise on the fact that its members are part of society as its wider context to strategize a self-engaging faith formation among the Nsenga people. Exhaustive theological self-engaging enable the Nsenga people to converse with the complex realities of Christo-praxis.

This calls for a shift from over-focusing on numerical growth and compliance to denomination traditions to more emphasis on producing Christians who engage their own societies theologically. The over-emphasis on numerical growth other than the quality of Christians produced has, in some cases, regrettably resulted in competing for members within the body of Christ and creating

Christians who depend on the perceived spiritual elites rather than building a community that engages itself theologically. Unfortunately, this has caused divisiveness, contentions, and wrong self-perceptions among denominations which work against the Church's ability to engage the community in faith formation. Depending on self-rating, some congregations and ministers have degenerated into either the inferiority or the superiority complex. These wrong self-perceptions have weakened the church and deprived it of the united force in its God-given mandate as the prophetic voice to the world for vivifying the nature of his kingdom in the communities.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on church regulations somehow creates allegiance to a denomination that lacks the ability to translate faith into a transforming power. Faith is meant to improve the quality of humanity, by embodying the life of the kingdom of God as taught and revealed in Christ Jesus. The church's exercise of engaging societies remains fruitless if the engaged community or individuals within it do not come to the point of self-engagement. Faith formation ought to lead people to a point of self-engagement, so that they reflect on their lives and meaningfully contribute towards authentic social transformation. Self-engagement is a sign that the message disseminated through faith formation has been received with conviction and personalised. It is at that point that passion to make a difference and contribute to the welfare of the community is generated. The cultural formation process of the Nsenga people is socially self-generated and self-engaged for the well-being of the community. Christian faith will remain an antagonising force void of its transforming power for as long as the formed faith does not empower continued reflection for self-theologising and self-engagement on matters of social and personal concern.

Cultural formation thrives on the principles of "preparationalism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holisticism" (Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2002:223-231). According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka, learning culture takes place through imitation, initiation ceremonies, apprenticeship, and oral literature. The acquired form of culture is then applied in the communal spirit to life and work. This suggests that cultural formation is self-engaging and contextual for it is done with, in, by, through, and for the community. The phrase 'with the community' refers to its all-inclusive nature. The elderly lead in the preservation and transmission of the Nsenga culture, with a notion that they have accrued vital cultural memory from many years of existence. However, the processes for forming culture such as imitation, initiation ceremonies, apprenticeship, and oral

literature take place intergenerationally. The process is a participatory exercise of the entire community. The phrase ‘in the community’ emphasises the localised nature of the cultural system, where the Nsenga community is the forming environment. Community members do not shift to a learning place, for the cultural community is also a formation environment (Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2002:223-231). The community is the place of teachings, learning, and implementation in the cultural formation process. The knowledge for formation is drawn from the community’s past experiences, present reality, and projected future.

The phrase ‘by the community’ suggests that the community is fully involved in the process of forming culture in its members. All members of the Nsenga community belong to a genealogy called *mkoka*. Nsenga communities, through *mkoka*, in collaboration with the *chinungwe* relationship, take full responsibility to ensure that culture is formed among its members. As cited earlier, despite globalisation providing an environment for cultures to learn as much as possible from each other, the Nsenga community upholds the belief that it is their responsibility to ensure that its members are shaped in a cultural way, using the means they devise and own. *Mkoka* and *anungwe* believe that they are obliged to form culture because it is common among the Nsenga people to blame the entire family for the misbehaviour of an individual. Words such as *aliyekulange ku wefuma or ku ufumila* (you were not instructed or groomed in a cultural way by the community you come from) are considered to insult the entire community. The need for cultural formation is intensified partially as a way of avoiding communal embarrassment or shame through the misbehaviour of its members. Apart from the *mkoka* and *chinungwe* relationships, structures of authority from the village to the ethnic level play an important role in ensuring that culture is not only formed, but also adhered to. This means that the formation of culture includes monitoring the progress of community members in embodying cultural values and principles, by observing the way in which members contribute to the lived experiences of the community.

Meanwhile, the phrase ‘through the community’ resonates with the common African adage: “It takes a village to raise a child” (Nsamenang & Tchombe 2011:120). Raising a child includes forming a life that respects cultural guiding principles, values, and world views. The community is not only the transmitter or teacher, but it also serves as the means whereby culture is formed. This means that culture is formed by the entire community in each of its members. This formation

takes place as the community passes through various shared experiences of life together. In this way, the formation of culture is not detached from the lived reality of the community. It is done in a practical and natural way, for it takes place there where life is lived. At times, the processes of forming faith antagonise people, for the social setting of the church is different from the lived experiences. The interaction between formation and lived experience ensures that culture is not only owned by the community but also easier to adjust to when new challenges of life arise. The community illustrates cultural formation, as it becomes part of the means of coping with and living life.

Finally, the phrase ‘for the community’ simply means that the community benefits from its formation efforts. The Nsenga people believe that the way in which life is lived in the present determines one’s life after death. Like many other ATRs, good life with ancestors after death is an anticipated reward for those who maintain peaceful relationships with both the visible and the invisible worlds. This means that they strive for a life of peace with the living and the living dead in the here and now. Cultural formation “for the community” implies that the process of forming culture in a person is for the good of both the visible and the invisible worlds, the present life and the one yet to come. Self-engaging cultural formation is conducted for the benefit of the community in the here and now with consideration of life after death. Cultural formation is conducted with an aim to prepare to add value to the community itself.

The cultural formation in, by, through, with, and for the community creates a sense of belonging, ownership, identity, and cultural pride. The Nsenga people respect other cultures, for they believe that *mlwendo ndiye awela na kalumo kakuthwa* (foreigner came with a sharp knife). This implies that the Nsenga people believe that a foreigner can bring better ideas or ways of handling the challenge at hand. Although they are willing to learn from other cultures, they simultaneously have the desire to maintain their own values and principles. For this reason, they remain strongly attached to their traditional religion and culture, even after being Christianised (Zulu 2016:86) and interacting with the Ngoni and the Chewa people. Out of the desire to maintain their cultural values and principles, the Nsenga people produce tools, processes, and practices to be used in the formation of all members, especially children, who are considered to be the posterity of their culture. These are produced within the cultural system and are handed down to the next generation

through an intergenerational cultural formation system. Intergeneration means that formation transcends the living subcultures, for it includes the ancestral line and future lineage.

Osmer (2005:240-245) discusses the interpretation of text and tradition, the present activity of the Holy Spirit, the praxis of the congregation, and contexts. This interpretation revolves around a cyclic pattern, moving from pre- to scientific understanding, listening to Scripture to mimesis, real-life experience to new lesson experience and knowledge, empowered praxis. Although Osmer argues that the knowledge, social movements, and cultural patterns of contexts are to be engaged in dialogue with Scripture, his methodology, as a formula for catechesis, focuses on the people who come to church. The Nsenga way of conducting cultural formation challenges the church's approach of doing theology for the community. At the same time, it calls upon the Church to seriously consider the possibility of advocating for doing theology with, by, through, among, and for people in their cultural contexts. The latter demands a change in approach, as the church is required to engage the community in the formation of faith with a willingness to adjust its approach. The church should regard the Nsenga people as collaborators in doing contextual and constructive theology useful for their knowledge, life, and perception of the Christian faith.

### *6.2.2 Faith formation for social healing*

The RCZ needs to consider addressing issues of illnesses, the spiritual world, witchcraft, marriage, and sex that seem to cause antagonism among the Nsenga people. The Nsenga people need interventions and social healing from the effects of witchcraft fears and suspicions, marital security, and lack of sexual satisfaction, causing emotional, physical, and psychological pain as well as social divide among them. The Nsenga culture, as a promoter of a social bond, entails that contentious issues affecting individuals have a social dimension. In its quest to form faith, the church should step out into the community to bring a message of hope and healing to the afflicted society rather than restricting itself to church gatherings and opportunistic funeral programmes. The church, as an institution, must take the initiative to reach out on issues that affect the community, in order to convey the message of God in such situations. The silence of the church on matters of concern leaves members vulnerable to the antagonism between the ATR and the Christian faith.

All social ills affect the practice of faith in the Triune God; yet the practice or application of the same faith brings about social healing. When faith is practised for the healing of society, transformation occurs. Faith formation needs to deliberately confront social ills, in order to necessitate social healing. Transformation has to do with leaving the old in order to embrace the new and better way of living life within the same given context. Therefore, transformation is one way of social healing. The church is both the bearer of the message and the agent for God's transformation. This positions the church as a beacon of hope in the face of disruption of human well-being (Pillay 2017:1). The church's practice of faith formation should be more than simply converting and evangelising people for heaven, as it has to actively aim at improving the livelihood of the people here on earth. The church has to actively innovate means of addressing the social and spiritual situations in different communities (Matsuoka 1999:24; Musa 2021:88).

Although it is agreed that the Gospel must transform culture, the way it does so requires inculturation. Schreiter (1989:758) attributes the unmet inculturation of the Gospel in the cultures of the church to two reasons. First, the Church lacks the methodologies of inculturation and the tools that would enhance continued constructive and meaningful dialogue between faith and culture. Lack of methodology entails that, although the church may desire to inculturate the Gospel, it is incapacitated in terms of tools to use and how to go about it. The second reason is that the church is reluctant to permit experiments on inculturation and sanction those that are workable. A church with the desire to inculturate is in a better position than those that do not even see the need to do so, for they do not distinguish between the universal and the cultural embeddedness of Christian faith. RCZ's approach to culture is mainly a monologue, with hardly any or no room for engaging it in dialogue. It only points to the supposed cultural evils that must be eradicated, and is silent on the positives that must be emphasised or upheld.

The process of forming faith should take time to engage the conceptual system of the Nsenga people and the reasons behind their practices. This must start with studying the underlying existing reflections, unwritten theories or world views of their culture. Knowledge of, or about culture will help facilitate a smooth transition from culturally upheld contents of reflections to faith in Christ, as contained in the Gospel. Cultural practices are the fruit of underlying beliefs. Although they are not perceived with human senses, they are powerful in terms of determining people's course of

life. Attacking culture without addressing the underlying fears, values, beliefs, or world views is like plucking fruits out of a tree with the hope that it will bear desirable fruits. Introducing the Christian faith without addressing the underlying beliefs behind the culture is like introducing an optional set of reflections. The inward contention between newly-introduced Christian and cultural reflections sometimes becomes the main cause of antagonistic dichotomy in points of dilemma. Continued dialogue between Christian faith and culture provides space for ongoing identification and addressing the implicit theologies among members. Implicit theologies are unofficial but commonly upheld and accepted knowledge, confessions, and reflections on the Christian faith (Hendricks 1999:6-7). These implicit theologies have to be addressed, for they are capable of antagonising the officially upheld theologies.

Mbiti (1977:31-39) states that, being manmade, culture is said to have limitations beyond which it cannot take mankind. In its limitation, culture is temporarily all-powerful over people, while the Gospel is ultimately all powerful. The other limitation about ATR, according to Mbiti (1969:4), is that, in its plurality, it has no universal dimension as each one is bound and limited to the ethnic group that practises it. This implies that the influence of ATR only goes as far as the boundary of ethnic groups. This is in contrast to the Gospel, for it is universal in terms of containing the truth for all times and places, while bearing God's unique message for each culture. The transcendent, nature of the Gospel in terms of its universality and having the truth for all at all times with a unique message for each context, entails that it has the power to link cultures. The Gospel is the message that intends to unify the world under the Triune God, its Creator, redeemer and sanctifier.

The Gospel must, therefore, take people over beyond the limitation of any culture. The concept of the Gospel taking over beyond the point where culture reaches its limits seems to suggest some form of passing on, as in a relay. This raises questions such as: When does the Gospel take over? What is the state of the people before and after the Gospel took over? Do the people become cultureless after the Gospel has taken over? The researcher agrees with Mbiti (1977:31-39) that the Gospel being from God is perfect; hence, it is supposed to judge, illuminate, and transform the imperfect and limited man-made culture. Anything man-made possesses some elements of human fallen nature and it needs the enlightenment of the Gospel, in order to serve the purpose of enhancing the fullness of mankind's well-being. Mbiti further claims that, unless Africans become

a depository for the Gospel and allow it to take root in their cultural settings, they will remain unfaithful in the sight of God.

ATR was, if not still is a religion for the cultural communities in Africa. In some instances, it may have been practised as in the pre-colonial era, but its influence is still evident. Antagonism between Christian and African cultural practices that is evident through the ATR-related approach to faith and reverting to its ways of addressing contentious issues of life, attests to the liveliness of the African approach to spiritual quests. The RCZ faith formation processes must facilitate the Gospel taking root in the Nsenga cultural settings or contexts. This study suggests that faith formation should be conducted in interaction with the realities of life, where all situations, circumstances, and events are perceived as opportunities for forming Christianity or learning points on matters of faith. This approach inseparably intertwines life and faith formation. The Nsenga people do not separate cultural formation from life in its lived experiences, for these are conducted alongside each other for as long as someone is alive. The following question requires further exploration: How can Christianity become a faith for the community of the Nsenga people?

### *6.3 Decolonising faith formation*

Bosch (2011:259-260) claims that there is nothing like pure Gospel, for it always comes to people in cultural robes. The missionaries mistakenly associated their idea of the Gospel with the Gospel. This failure to distinguish between their culture and the Gospel led the missionaries to judge conversion as conformity to their way of life. Beyers (2010:1) asks this crucial question: “Can an African understanding of religion make a contribution to the understanding of what religion is?” This question is asked with an understanding that tradition, as expressed in rituals and ethics, is a social expression of the community’s religious experiences. In African communities, dualism between the physical and the spiritual life is a strange phenomenon because life is lived as a mutual influence of the physical or spiritual or the visible and invisible. In other words, the question is: Is the African understanding of religion worth considering in enhancing the praxis of religious faith? Responding to this question may have some challenges, as some churches still view the European culture’s imperialistic approach of the missionaries demonising African culture with absolutism. According to Beyers (2010:6), in Africa, religion is not viewed as a separate entity, but as part of human existence, a normal way of viewing and experiencing the world. In African cultures, belief

and action belong to a single whole; hence, it is difficult to draw a borderline between religious and cultural formation (Mbiti 1969:4). The concept of the 'single whole' suggests that cultural and religious life are lived alongside each other. Christianity is meant to be lived as a single whole or without dualism between spiritual and general life.

Dube (1996:38) defines decolonising as being aware of the imperialists' exploitative force and its various strategies of domination, the conscious adoption of strategies for resisting imperial domination, as well as the search for alternative ways of liberating interdependence between nations, races, genders, economies, and culture. From Dube's definition, the advocacy for decolonisation is from the view that some texts, actions or speeches consciously or unconsciously perpetrate the domination of perceived superiors over inferiors. In his view, decolonisation liberates, equalises, and unifies the perceived superiors and inferiors. It restores respect for all humanity and cultures. In this research, decolonised faith formation suggests that, although the Gospel is good, eternal, and liberating, the missionaries and even Africans themselves have consciously or unconsciously presented it to Africa in a suppressive manner. Issues of racial and masculinity supremacy were and, to some extent, are perpetrated alongside the proclamation of the Gospel. It calls for a shift from European cultural hegemony to respect of African cultures as the receptors, meaning makers, and bearers of the Gospel. It also invites the church in Africa to assess its own proclamation of the Gospel, so that it does not become another form of oppression.

Decolonisation means that the RCZ must be aware of all forms of consciously or unconsciously adopted domination within its faith formation tools, methods, and ideologies. For example, the earliest sign of colonisation is replacing the African names of the first RCZ baptismal candidates with foreign names before baptism (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:73). This was a sign that Christianity intends to abandon Africanness and assume foreign culture. It also shows that Africans cannot be Christian enough, unless they are Europeanised. Unfortunately, some congregants get caught up between two cultures. Such forms of domination arising from European cultural backgrounds, obscuring the true reflection of the Gospel among its members in the faith formation framework, must be identified and rectified. The process of identifying elements of suppression is vital because domination creates an impression of inferiority and superiority; hence, it is likely to produce congregants who merely conform to the church without actually being transformed. The claim by

Kgatla (2017:2) claims that some Christians were not converted from ATR but were rationally or irrationally induced by the missionaries to inwardly and outwardly conform to the Eurocentric way of life. This is a wake-up call for the RCZ to revisit its faith formation.

Rather than domination which creates inferiority, faith formation processes and tools have to respond to the Africans' questions on faith, so that Christianity takes root in Africa. From data gathered in Chapter Four, there is a need to respond to the questions addressing the struggle of the Nsenga people with issues of the spiritual world. The only way to address people's needs, which are key to an authentic embrace of the Christian faith, is by asking appropriate questions. Such questions can only be asked if the church takes time to discern people's battles of faith. Decolonising texts and processes of forming faith are a shift from people's assumed needs, based on borrowed tools, to giving them an opportunity to voice their struggles. Therefore, decolonisation approaches faith formation from the bottom rather than deductively. It also ensures the integrated process of forming the faith of the congregants. This recent resurgence of yearning for such shows the liveliness of the suppressed African approach to issues of desperation, as those who fall back on traditional cultures do so only as a measure of responding to desperate situations. According to Kalilombe (1994:131), some Africans, although striving for newness, still fall back on traditional cultures as a way of responding to times of desperation. Decolonisation allows Africans to ask and re-ask their own questions as their faith seeks to understand God, who has called them to salvation and whose responses empower the application of faith for the transformation of respective contexts.

The RCZ is meant to identify some oppressive elements arising from its own interpretation of Scripture, its motto *kuunika m'mdima* (lighting the darkness), and its implementation of faith formation ministry. Elements of demonising all that concerns African culture, to the extent of blindfolding the points of contact for the Gospel in need of harnessing, must be eliminated. Finally, the RCZ must responsibly adopt liberating strategies suitable for forming a faith that is able to empower participation in the transformation of all cultural contexts. Decolonisation suggests that the domination of one culture over another hinders indigenisation, as it produces a Christian who is torn apart between two worlds. Unfortunately, such a faith cannot effect transformation of contexts. For the purpose of closing the hermeneutical gap between the background of the church,

traditional texts, and contexts of its membership, the dualistic approach to Christianity and its practice, as seen in the antagonistic dichotomy decolonisation, is supposed to be done.

Faith formation tools need to be liberated from the Malawian Chewa language. Malawi shares a boundary with Zambia in Eastern Province. Although Magwero, the first missionary place, is under Chief Mpezeni of the Ngoni people, all faith formation materials were in Malawian Chewa. The missionaries from the Orange Free State possibly took advantage of the tools translated by their counterparts from Cape Province who were based at Mvera in Malawi. The language and illustrations used in the tool for forming faith show that they were designed for the Chewa people of Malawi. Chinsenga, the language of the Nsenga people, is very different from the Malawian Chewa. The problem gap of understanding is that a person must learn Malawian Chewa, in order to use the faith formation tools. This must be considered because language plays an important role in the way in which the message is received. According to Mbiti (1969:4), “[s]ince traditional religions occupy the whole person and the whole of his or her life, conversion to Christianity must consider his [or her] language, thought patterns, fears social relationships, attitudes and philosophical disposition if that conversion is to make a lasting impact upon the individual and his [or her] community”. Even if they are general similarities, there are also differences that make one African culture unique from the other. The domination of the Chewa language among the tools and processes of the RCZ forces its members from other ethnic groups and towns to learn about Christianity from the foreign African cultural context. The use of tools and processes designed for one culture to form the faith of people from a different cultural background omits essential issues worthy of consideration.

#### *6.4 Self-theologised faith formation*

In response to Reverend Cronje’s reaction to the issue of the woman presented before the Elders’ Council, as discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Reverend Phiri stated: “Sir, you have been staying among us for a long time, you speak our language; you think you know us – you are only in Sub-B” (Cronje 1999:14-15). Of course, it was unfair to judge the woman as having committed adultery on the basis of walking along the path on which the dead body of a man was lying a few metres away. Unfortunately, Cronje does not record the Council’s final resolution on the issue. The main point Reverend Petro Pereka Phiri was trying to emphasise was that Reverend Cronje should understand the world view on which the Council based its argument. The statement “only Sub B”

somehow not only appeals to Cronje as a person, but also refers to his and other missionaries' approach to faith formation practice and processes. Despite having gone through the process of catechetical training and being communicant members for over two years, The Elders still had a cultural inclination in their deliberations at the Council. This shows that, although the process of forming faith condemned African cultures, it did not speak to the core issues of their world views. It also means that the formation of faith remained among the people and its message was presented in the language of the locals, but it remained a stranger. Self-theologising accounts for the fact that, although people may be Christians, yet cultural concepts still play a role in the way in which they perceive and analyse issues in the lived experience.

Decolonisation is meant to enable the RCZ to theologise itself. This means that decolonisation is more than identification and countering suppressive elements of faith formation, for that would create an awkward theological vacuum or antagonism. The final end of decolonisation is coming up with an indigenised faith-forming approach that resonates with the community. Bosch (1991:203) speaks of the intertwinement of colonialism and mission at the dawn of the modern era. Hendricks (2004:10) bemoans the ineffectiveness of the African church in meeting the needs of its continent. This is attributed to the continued use of theological methodologies, which adhere to the missionary or deductive way of doing theology. This entails that the church in Africa uses borrowed methodologies to theologise itself. The church needs to devise its own methodologies for doing theology in Africa, in order to come up with theological responses to its questions of faith. As one of the churches in Africa, the RCZ also survives on borrowed theology; hence, it does not only require to decolonise but also to self-theologise its faith formation.

Bosch (1991:383) describes self-theologising as the fourth "self" added to self-supportive, propagation, and sustaining. Discernment is essential in the process of self-theologising. Jesus' ministry is marked by perceiving more than face value. He is cited to have perceived intentions (Matthew 22:18), thoughts (Mark 2:6-7; Luke 5:22), concealed craftiness (Matthew 22:23-31), and inward source of expression (Mark 8:27-30, 32-33). Discernment goes beyond outward expressions, as it also perceives the hidden causes. This affirms that Jesus did not speak in abstract terms. He spoke to concrete issues in the experienced realities, by addressing underlying beliefs, world views, attitudes, and principles behind expressions. Jesus' responses at times transcended

human actions and behaviours, for they were meant to address the people's deeply embedded and invisible perceptions. Jesus ate with sinners and allowed them to touch him because they were equally in need of God's salvation. Discerning underlying world views behind cultural practices is cardinal for contextual faith formation. One of the underlying reasons behind upholding culture is to cope with and avert the possible challenges of life. Since, in African culture, the visible is an expression of the invisible, there is more to it than what is perceived by the human senses. Self-theologising is a theology constructed from being aware and from the intention to respond to the deeper underlying perceptions, so that transformation takes place from within. Face-value observation is the entry point for inquiry into the hidden, yet forceful motives behind cultural practices. Self-theologised faith formation will not only speak to face-value observation, as it aims to speak to the deeply rooted quests of humanity arising from cultural beliefs. Condemnation of the observed practices, without addressing the underlying root causes, is likely to lead to false conformity. Spiritual transformation occurs when change takes place from the inside and is expressed outwards.

As opposed to ethnocentrism, where one's cultural orientation is the basis of approval, self-theologising must be theocentric. It ought to arise from the hermeneutics of the Gospel, the cultural context, and church traditions as means of discerning God's will. Missionaries approached African culture with a judgemental mentality, without engaging it with responsible hermeneutics; hence, they ignored essential bridges that would have helped evangelise Africa. They ignored the Africans' emphasis on a holistic approach to understanding unity, which forms the basis of meaning, rituals, and social values (Beyers 2010:8). Among many African ethnic groups, including the Nsenga people, religion is a lived reality exhibited through unity, value, a sense of meaning of life, and rituals performed. Africans derive their lived experience from their religious beliefs. Communities exist as religious entities guided by orally transmitted values, meanings, and a set of rituals to be performed, considered to be the means to uphold harmony with the transcendental powers. Contrary to scholarly opinion, the Nsenga word *kutetelela* does not suggest manipulation of the transcendental power to their advantage, but it is a way of pleading with or intercession to the invisible powers, so that harmony is restored with and among the people. The plea is made as a means of acknowledging the supremacy of the Creator and the vulnerability of the people if he withholds his sustaining power. Therefore, religion is also viewed as a relationship with

transcendental power, as expressed in the conduct of society. The idea of linking religion to daily life is to be harnessed, regenerated, and reinforced under the illumination of the Gospel. The holistic hermeneutics of the Gospel, the culture, and Church traditions also bridges the chasms between Gospel and culture, as well as between public and private life, so that issues affecting the lived reality are attended to from the perspective of God's praxis (Dames 2013:8).

Self-theologising is not only for addressing needs. It also capitalises on the opportunities and potentials that God has bestowed on Africa. Africa is not only full of needs. It is, above all, full of divine opportunities and potential. Some of the solutions to Africa's challenges are embedded in its God-given potentials and opportunities. This entails that God did not only give Africa needs so that solutions arise from somewhere outside but within itself. In fact, God put provisional resources in Africa to address its own challenges that antagonise faith practice on the continent. In as much as needs are not supposed to be ignored, it is essential to strike a balance by considering the theology of nurturing potentials and opportunities with which God has blessed Africa. These potentials and opportunities were there before the arrival of the missionaries, attesting to the fact that God was at work in Africa before their coming. The church is placed within a context, at the same time God presents the context with what it constitutes before the church as its area of service. In the process of theologising itself, the RCZ must account for the opportunities that would meet the needs of Africa. Through self-theologising, African theologians reinforce responsible stewardship over all forms of Africa's God-given resources. In self-theologising, the RCZ, as part of being stewards, must develop a theology that promotes creativity, innovation, accountability, transparency, and integrity among its members, in order to maximise the usage of potentials and opportunities for social well-being. Since faith formation includes strengthening the relationship with creation (Matthaei 2010:69), it is imperative that self-theologising must have some form of accounting for the ecology.

Although faith and cultural expression are not to be separated from one another, this does not suggest that culture should merely be endorsed as it is. Mbiti (1977:31-39) suggests that the Gospel is supposed to judge, illuminate, and transform culture. Self-theologising reflects theo-centrally on both the needs and the opportunities in culture for its spiritual transformation (Bosch 1991:386). It harnesses and uses the African ethnic map as a positive force and a way of considering the

adiaphora that are essential for incarnating Christian faith (Nsamanang & Tchombe 2011:82-83; Mokhoathi 2017:1; Mbiti 1977:30). It is essential because individuals continue to interpret faith at the point of experiencing life. Self-theologising ensures that theology is digestible and interpretable by congregants in their interactions with lived reality and their effort to participate in the society-transforming *Missio Dei*.

It is also vital that the local church does not become “too local”, by isolating itself from the global church in the process of self-theologising (Bosch 1991:386-387). A balanced tension between being local and connection to the wider body of Christ needs to be maintained. In order to avoid being too local, Bosch suggests that self-theologising has to take place alongside interculturalisation. Interculturalisation encourages interactions and learning from other contextual theologies, whereas self-theologising facilitates the Christian faith taking root within the local contexts. Interculturalisation is a reciprocal relationship, in which self-theologised churches from their respective contexts learn from each other. This means that all local churches must have something to bring to the theological table drawn from faith experience. Self-theologising guarantees the local church’s resourcefulness to the wider body of Christ. This ensures that the local church, apart from merely learning from the wider church, also develops capacities to contribute to the continued learning process of the body of Christ. Self-theologising is not self-isolation; it is respecting diversity in unity and fulfils the purpose of interculturalisation. The researcher is of the opinion that, if there is self-theologising, there should be inter-theological interaction where locally formulated theologies interact and transform one another. For this transforming interaction of theologies to take place, there is a need to be aware of one’s own theological view, to develop a healthy attitude towards other theologies, to be aware of the existence of other theological practices and views, and to be competent in cross-theological skills (Herppich 2014:207). In fact, self-theologising enriches inter-theological interaction and broadens the learning base for the global church. Therefore, the domination of Western theology starves both the West itself and the wider body of Christ. In view of this, both self-theologising and inter-theologising are vital for the growth of the local church and the church in its catholicity. It serves the purpose of indigenising the Gospel, whereas inter-theological interaction links the local church to the oneness of the global body of Christ. Christianity, being translatable in nature, stands a better chance of mediating cultural conversations for authentic interculturalisation.

However, self-theologising may successfully take course in the RCZ if its members, especially the theologians, respect and appreciate their being divergent from others. If the uniqueness of the RCZ is being undermined by its own theologians, then the drive to strive for championing their own theological voice dwindles. Unfortunately, the silenced theological voice results in uninterpreted conforming to exotic theologies. The dichotomy is a pointer to some theological gaps in the faith formation tools and processes, which can only be closed by self-theologising. This does not mean that the RCZ has no capacity to theologise itself, as it is well-equipped theologically to do so. There are currently uncoordinated individual contributions to the theological academy shelved in the libraries. This means that these individual efforts have no or hardly any impact on the church's practice of forming faith. It is high time that the RCZ appreciates its theological expertise and uses it to develop a self-theologised faith formation for its own and the global church's benefit.

#### *6.5 Revision of the Buku La Katekisma*

The proposals for decolonisation and self-theologising also indicate that the *Buku La Katekisma*, the main tool for forming faith in the RCZ, needs to be revised. It is the main document used for catechetical training and remains the only readily available doctrinal standard for measuring the correctness of all teachings and activities in the RCZ. Although the book may be good for interculturalisation, as it already links the RCZ to five other Reformed faith denominations in Central Africa, it does not effectively serve the purpose of inculturation. A revision of the *Buku La Katekisma* is vital for various reasons. The first reason is inculturation, as stated earlier, so that RCZ members are prepared to practise their faith within contexts. This can be achieved by striking a balance between self-theologising and interculturalisation. The second reason is that the *Buku La Katekisma* was first published in 1965, revised a year later (1966), and improved over fifty years ago in 1968. This means that the *Buku La Katekisma* was revised twice in three years since the first publication, yet nothing has been done for over half a century. Revision is necessary, as some of its contents have been overtaken by events with the passage of time. The polemic approach towards other denominations emphasises pointing out the negatives that seemingly suggest that other denominations do not have anything good to write about (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1965:375-387). Unfortunately, some of the issues spoken against are no longer the focus of the denomination, for they have also undergone reforms. For example, Pentecostals

no longer focus on speaking in tongues as a sign that someone has received the Holy Spirit. The revision of the *Buku La Katekisma* is also important because so many developments have taken place over the past half a century. These developments suggest that a number of questions have been raised regarding faith that call for theological responses. In general, the *Buku La Katekisma* mentions hardly anything about the church's participation in community transformation or about issues affecting the community. It speaks of works of charity and sharing the Gospel with non-Christians under the subtopic *Nchito zabwino*, translated as good works (The Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa 1965:139-140).

However, this does not sufficiently prepare members of the church for the contemporary issues affecting people's faith and community. The inadequacy of the RCZ faith formation was cited as early as the 1970s. Upon observing the perceived strange awkward politically motivated behaviour of one of the reverends, Cronje (1999:36) confesses that they "did not prepare the Church sufficiently for the great political upheaval". Until the present, the *Buku La Katekisma* does not adequately prepare people to respond to issues such as culture, global warming, HIV and AIDS, new dispensation of multi-party democracy, and corruption, among others. The aim of self-theologising is to provide theological responses to the needs and opportunities within contemporary local contexts. The church must continue to theologise itself, so that faith meaningfully responds to problems posed by new developments taking place within context. This calls for the revision of the *Buku La Katekisma*.

### *6.6 Restructuring theological training*

It is critical that faith formation equips congregants to be major stakeholders in promoting the well-being of the community (Onzima 2020:161). Congregants are members of both the church and the communities. This means that they are well positioned to fulfil their role of fostering transformation in their societies. The antagonistic dichotomy is a sign that some of the congregants are finding it difficult to apply their faith within their contexts. The church needs to revisit its faith formation framework, so that it equips congregations and congregants with Christo-praxis faith for the transformation of their societies. This should start with revolutionising theological training, in order to equip pastors for service that transforms the community (Onzima 2020:161). Martinez (2018:12-13) cites God as being at work in both the church and the community in an

unexpected way. The church is challenged to pay attention to what God is doing within itself and the community, in order to stay abreast of his work. Theological institutions must, therefore, equip students to discern what God is doing, even in unexpected ways. Justo Mwale University in Lusaka has always intended to conduct ministerial training for holistic service, with a mission to provide quality, contextual, Christ-centred, holistic education that should empower persons to serve the church, the academy, and society. However, the focus is still strongly on preparing people for service in the church, with hardly any attention given to equipping students for community transformation. Justo Mwale University was cited to have tensions among the students with issues of gender, denomination diversity, and engaging pastors who supervised students' practical work (Banda *et al.* 2020: 167, 173, 181). If Justo Mwale University is unable to engage its key partners in training theological students, it means that it is difficult to equip its trainees with ways of improvising methodologies for engaging communities theologically.

#### *6.7 Strengthening ecumenical relationships*

The church is understood to be thriving on unity in diversity, where diversity is considered to be the means for enriching unity. It is verifiable in history that the church has sometimes acted violently and with an attitude of intolerance towards its own meaningful diversity. Prill (2018:161-162) mentions that, alongside the Gospel message, Western missionaries also brought their culture, for they did not understand or value the difference between the two. Therefore, their mission work was about Christianity and Western culture, on the one hand, against indigenous African beliefs and culture, on the other. He identifies a strong sense of cultural and spiritual superiority among the Western missionaries; they considered their culture to be matchlessly above that of Africans. Proclamation of the Gospel by European missionaries was also an indirect conversion of Africa into an extension of their intolerant "rivalry and mutual suspicion", based on "theological and doctrinal voices" divergence (Herppich 2014:218). They came as denominations with sets of doctrines and confessions of faith arising from their theological wars. Conversion was about being converted into Christian faith, Western culture, and a particular doctrinal inclination. These confessions of faith act as "doctrinal roadblocks" against perceived "untoward doctrines" (Sell 2008:151). Although the church in Africa has more indigenous leaders, the missionaries inherited battles in terms of church doctrines, traditions, and practices that are still evident in denominations among the Nsenga people.

### *6.8 Future research*

The researcher, being male, had a challenge in collecting data from women, as most of them were not free to speak, due to gender difference. The few women interviewed clearly withheld certain information regarding ceremonies or activities centred on sex and marital cultural formation on the basis of gender. The researcher recommends that a female theologian should take up the study on issues of sex and marriage, which seem to antagonise faith and culture. It is also recommended that research be carried out on the way in which the Nsenga men view the place of women and sex in marriage.

### *6.9 Conclusion*

This chapter explored the question: What should the RCZ do to form contextual faith among the Nsenga people? Its aim was to recommend what the RCZ has to consider, so that it conducts contextual faith formation among the Nsenga people. For the RCZ's faith formation to be effective among the Nsenga people, it has to decolonise tools, processes, and approaches. The process of decolonising involves identifying oppressive approaches inherited from the missionaries and local cultures, so that faith formation can heal the communities. As part of decolonisation and self-theologising, the *Buku La Katekisma* must be revised again after more than five decades since the last revision. It must include teachings on cultural aspects, especially those that antagonise people's faith practice. Finally, an antagonistic dichotomy indicates that faith formation transcends being an instruction, a programme in a church gathering, or individual counselling by a pastor because it continues outside the church. It should not be mistaken for insubordination against Christian faith but a negotiation around it in the face of perceived powers and activities working against the well-being of humanity. It is about seeking solutions where the available teachings of the church do not seem to be providing an adequate way forward or out of the precarious situation at hand. It also urges the RCZ to account for the opportunities in a culture that would aid its task of forming faith among the Nsenga people. Faith formation should empower more individual reflective learning.

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**THEOLOGY**  
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Department of Practical &  
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 Departement Praktiese &  
 Missionale Teologie

**Interview Questions for Church Leaders**

Dear Church Leaders, this is research conducted by Rev. Masauso Moyo for the purpose of PhD studies.

The aim of this research is to develop contextual faith formation framework that may address the challenge of antagonistic dichotomy in RCZ through integration of outcomes from theological study of Nsenga cultural formation.

The information you will provide shall be kept private and will be combined with the responses from other participants. Your personal details shall not appear in any report so that no one will be able to know you or any other individual in the research. The interview will take 30 minutes of your time. I would appreciate your assistance.

Are you willing to take part? YES/NO

Signature of the participant(s)..... Date: .....

**1. Demographics of respondent**

		Gender	Male	Female
Age	18-35			
	35-65			
	65 and above	Fieldworker notes:		

**A. Background questions**

- What is your role in the Church and your involvement among the Nsenga people?
- What is your ethnic group?

**B. Formation in the church**

- What are the strengths and weakness of RCZ faith formation processes?
- How compatible is RCZ faith formation with the Nsenga culture?

C. Formation in the church and its impact in society

- Are there evident impacts of the RCZ faith formation among the Nsenga people? Explain your answer.
- In which areas do you think the RCZ faith formation should improve in order to have or improve its impact among the Nsenga people?

E. Culture and faith

- What are the points of conflict between Christianity and culture among the Nsenga people?
- Have you made any effort to engage the community the Christianity and culture conflict before confrontations occur?

F. Is there any information you would like to add?

Appendix B



**THEOLOGY  
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Departement Praktiese &  
Missionale Teologie

**Interview Questions for Traditional Leaders**

Dear Traditional Leaders, this is research conducted by Rev. Masauso Moyo for the purpose of his PhD studies

The aim of this research is to develop contextual faith formation framework that may address the challenge of antagonistic dichotomy in RCZ through integration of outcomes from theological study of Nsenga cultural formation.

The information you will provide shall be kept private and will be combined with the responses from other participants. Your personal details shall not appear in any report so that no one will be able to know you or any other individual in the research. The interview will take 30 minutes of your time. We would appreciate your assistance.

Are you willing to take part? YES/NO

Signature of the participant(s)..... Date: .....

**1. Demographics of respondent**

		Gender	Male	Female
Age	18-35			
	35-65			
	65 and above	Fieldworker notes:		

**D. Background questions**

- For how long have you been in Nsenga land?
- What is your position/responsibility among Nsenga people?
- For how long have you held your position?
- Which religion or Christian denomination do you belong to?

**E. Formation in Nsenga culture**

- What is the Background of the Nsenga Tribe?
- How is Nsenga culture;
  - Transmitted?
  - Preserved?
- Why do Nsenga people view the transmission and preservation of culture as an important thing?
- At what stage of human life do Nsenga people start forming culture in a person?

F. Hostile Opposition

- What are points of difference between Christian faith and culture?
  - a. How do you handle them? (If any)
  - b. Do you have any proposal how these points of differences can be handled?

G. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix C



**THEOLOGY  
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**Translated interview questions for Traditional Leaders**

Muli tyani, uyu ni kafukufuku wocitika na Abusa Masauso Moyo mokwanilisha cisambizyo ca PhD.

Cilingo ca kafukufuku uyu nikupeza njira zoyavyiramo nkhalo ya chinsenga kukuzya chikhulupiriro ca akhiristu kuti chinkhalidwe cosiyanisha umoyo wansita-nansita usile zofuma mkuziwa ciyambi.

Malizu iti tilawizyane awe chinsinsi casu koma aikiwe pamo navati ambine aniuzye kwa mamineti makumi atatu. Olo kuti akalembewe mkafukufuku sinikatomola zina or kumunkhala. Ningatembezye ngati mgazomere kunithandiza pa kafukufuku uyu.

Ko mzomera kutolako mbali?                      Inde/yai

Signature of the participant(s).....                      Date: .....

**2.        Za otolako mbali**

		Gender	Mwanalume	Mwanakazi
Zaka	18-35			
	35-65			
	65 nakupitapo	Oyavya:		

**A. Makonsho oziwana**

- Mwankhala zaka zingananyi m’unsenga?
- M’namaudindo otyani m’unsenga?
- Mwankhala zaka zingati paudindo wanu?
- Nchito ya udindo wanu niyotyani?
- Ko nimwe mpingo wanji?

B. Mwambo wa Unsenga

- UNsenga weyamba lini ndipo ufumira kuni?
- Ninjira zotyani zamene zuthandizira kuti mwambo acinsenga;
  - Uziwike nakusungika?
  - Upangike mwamsenga aliyense?
- Ko ni nthawi yanji maphunziro awa ocitikira?

i. Kupangika kwa Unsenga na phindu yake

- b. Nkofunikira kotyani kuti mwambo usungike kuphunzisiwa na kupangika mwa a Nsenga?
- c. Ko mudziwa tyani kuti uyu munthu wamwva olo wapulukira pa mwambo wacinsenga?

F. Kusi yana pakati pa Uthenga wa chikhristu na mwambo

- Ko nipani pamene chikhristu na mwambo vucita ngati vashushana? Fotokozani yankho yanu
- Ko ninjira zotyani zitingayendepo, kuti makangano uyu usile luweme-luweme?

G. Pali mau alionse umufuna ikapo?

Appendix D



**THEOLOGY**  
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**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

Neo, \_\_\_\_\_, nusimikizya kuti ofufuza anipempha kuti nitoleko mbali mkafuku-fuku kao ndipo aniuzya njira, phindu and nthangwanika zoyembezeka mkafuku-fuku.

*(Please indicate your choice by circling the appropriate option):*

- |  |      |     |
|--|------|-----|
| a) Nawerenga kapena anifotokozero ndipo namvwisha monga mwa mndandanda wa kafuku-fuku.                               | Inde | Yai |
| b) Anipa mphata okwana okonsha makonsho ndi nine olipereka kutolako mbali mkafuku-fuku.                              | Inde | Yai |
| c) Navwisha kuti kugwapo kwangu nikolipereka tyala ndipo nina ufulu ofumamo nthawi iliyonse osapiwa mulandu ulionse. | Inde | Yai |
| d) Nuziwa kuti za mukafuku-fuku uyu zikalembewe mophiphilisa mrepoloti, buku olo zofuma m'tsonkhano wamaphunziro.    | Inde | Yai |
| e) Nuzomera kuti zojambula zajambuliwa luweme.   | Inde | Yai |
| f) Nalandila no saina cope ya civomerezo ciziwitso ca kulora.  | Inde | Yai |

-----  
Mazina ya otolako mbali

-----  
Siginacha ya otolako mbali

-----  
Full Name of Researcher

-----  
Signature of Researcher



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, ....., confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| g) I have read (or had it explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.                       | Yes | No |
| h) I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.                               | Yes | No |
| i) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without a penalty (if applicable). | Yes | No |
| j) I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report.                              | Yes | No |
| k) I agree to the recording of the interviews  | Yes | No |
| l) I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement   | Yes | No |

-----

Full Name of Participant

-----

Signature of Participant

-----

Full Name of Researcher

-----

Signature of Researcher

## Appendix F



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

20-Oct-2021

Dear Rev Masauso Moyo

#### Application Approved

Research Project Title:

**Christian formation and Culture: A Theological Study of the Nsenga People**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2020/1390/21**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

**Dr Adri  
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