

SOME MISSIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES OF THE “CHRISTIANISATION” OF *CINAMWALI* AS *CILANGIZO* IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN ZAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the adaptation of the traditional Ngoni girls' initiation rite of *Cinamwali* into Christian *Cilangizo* in the Women's Guild in the Reformed Church in Zambia. It highlights the role of the Women's Guild in transforming the traditional values and structures of *Cinamwali* into the Christian *Cilangizo*, with a view to determine which carries Christian values and meaning amongst girls and women in the Reformed Church in Zambia.

Keywords: *Cilangizo*; *Cinamwali*; Reformed Church; indigenisation; girls; Zambia

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to highlight the contribution of the Women's Guild in the Reformed Church in Zambia in Eastern Zambia towards raising Christian and social values amongst the young girls. In particular it seeks to illustrate the role of the Women's Guild in its attempt at adopting and adapting the so-called heathen *Cinamwali* (instructions) into the Christian *Cinamwali* (instructions). We argue that their attempt is a form of indigenisation precisely because they use Christian resources to bridge cultural values. We also argue that their efforts are strategic since women in that society play a critical role in raising families.

UNISA 
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PRESS

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
Volume 42 | Number 3 | 2016 | pp. 178–190
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2017/2066>
Print ISSN 1017-0499 | Online 2412-4265
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METHODOLOGY

Besides a literature review, this study will utilise data generated from interviews among the members of the Women’s Guild at congregational as well as regional levels in the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ) in the Eastern Province. A focus group discussion was conducted with the female staff members at the Reformed Church Synod Headquarters in Lusaka. However, the rest of the research was done during a field trip conducted from 10–15 April 2014 at Madzimoyo, the kingdom of the Ngoni people in Zambia. Madzimoyo is 500 kilometres from Lusaka, east of Zambia. During the field trip, the interviews specifically focused on the elderly *Ngoni* women called *Alangizi* and also on some girls who had undergone the rite of passage (*Cinamwali*). The interviewees spoke relatively freely on the subject matter of *Cinamwali*; explaining what they believed are its values for a girl who has come of age in the *Ngoni* society.

DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CINAMWALI

According to these traditional counsellors, *Alangizi* or *Namkungwi*, *Cinamwali* is a cultural practice which cannot be done away with or ignored in the *Ngoni* tradition for a girl who has come of age; moreover, it has no alternative option. In light of the argument of the *Ngoni* traditional counsellors that *Cinamwali* is a cultural practice which should not be compromised, one would raise the question as to what cultural significance does this practice bring to the *Ngoni* girl who has come of age (*Ndola* or *Cisungu*) from a Christian perspective among the *Ngoni*-speaking people. In view of the above, there is a need to understand and define culture in order to appreciate its significance among the *Zambian* tribes and *Africa* in general.

CINAMWALI AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

In unmasking this untold story, it is important to note that women traditional counsellors (*Alangizi*) appear to be a library of information regarding the rite of passage under discussion in this research. These *Alangizi* are the mentors, the tutors, the wise women who possess vast experience in this practice and are highly respected in the community (Nyoka 1980, 93).

CINAMWALI AS A TRADITIONAL NGONI INSTITUTION

Alangizi (instructors) as mentors

Cinamwali as a cultural rite of passage is a social construction. A social construction discourse is a process by which practical knowledge is acquired. Knowledge here is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather something they do together like *Cinamwali* as a rite of passage for a girl-child who reaches the age of puberty (Gergen 1985, 266).

There are two principal mentors in *Cinamwali*, *Alangizi* and/or *Namkungwi* (instructor). These are mostly elderly women with broad experience in the practice of the rite of passage for the girl who has come of age in the Ngoni culture. These *Alangizi* are considered as the custodians of the *Ngoni* traditional rite of passage and other cultural beliefs and practices. It is said that these *Alangizi* follow the strict demands of their traditional or cultural beliefs in carrying out their tasks.

The *Alangizi* and society firmly hold that if a girl does not go through the rite of passage of *Cinamwali*, she grows up without cultural values; and therefore cannot make a good wife and cannot have a good future (Nyoka 1980, 93). They believe that a girl who is not initiated becomes a disgrace to the society. In this sense, *Cinamwali* as a rite of passage for the young girl is regarded as a school where a girl who has come of age should be mentored or tutored into becoming an adult woman; consequently acceptable to society, a pride to the parents and ready for marriage, according to Ngulube (1989, 185).

During this research trip to Madzimoyo in the Chipata district on 4 April 2014, an elderly woman (a traditional counsellor known in *Ngoni* tradition as *Mlangizi* or *Nam'kungwi*) in the focus group discussion pointed out that the *Ngoni* people do not have a name of their own referring to a girl-child who has come of age. Instead, they use the terms of the surrounding tribes: *Nsenga* people call a girl who has come of age *Ndola*; the Kunda people refer to such a girl as *Cisungu*; the *Chewa* people call such a girl *Cinamwali*; the Bemba people, who are the tribal cousins of the *Ngoni*-speaking people refer to such a girl as *Icisungu*; and the Tumbuka-speaking people also call a girl who has come of age *Cisungu*. All the above-mentioned terms are used interchangeably by the *Ngoni* people when referring to a girl-child who has come of age; the reason being that when the *Ngoni* warriors entered Zambia in the early eighteenth century, they did not come along with women from South Africa, but instead married women from the defeated tribes like the *Nsenga* and *Chewa*-speaking people of Eastern Zambia (Cronje 2003).

According to the *Ngoni* traditional practice of *Cinamwali*, a young girl undergoes serious mentoring through a specialised syllabus by *Alangizi*, the content of which a girl coming of age is expected to accept and believe before being pronounced an adult. They follow the oral syllabus as discussed in the following subsections.

A syllabus for *Cinamwali*

According to Nyoka (1980, 93) and Longwe (2003, 18–20) in the *Ngoni* as well as the *Chewa* culture, when a girl comes of age, she has to pass through the transition from *Buthu* to *Namwali*. The young girl has to undergo a series of lessons that will qualify her into adulthood. For one to graduate from *Buthu* to *Namwali* (puberty to adulthood), there are noticeable physical changes that appear on her body such as the development of the breasts, the hips grow bigger, hair grows in her private parts as well as in the arm pits (CCAP Synod of Nkhoma 1967, 10). When the girl experiences her first menstruation

period, she has to tell the grandmother or the mother or elder sister what has happened to her. Immediately when this is reported, the girl is put into confinement or exclusion from those other girls, as pointed out by Ngulube (1989, 185).

During this time, the girl will stop speaking to the father till after the initiation ceremony is over. This is a way of passing on a message to the father to let him know that she has now come of age and should be treated as an adult. Puberty is the stage at which an individual is described as having reached adulthood. It means this individual should be regarded a responsible member of the clan and of the whole society (Bruegel 2001, 191). Puberty is a very important rite of passage for girls in many African cultures, among such the Ngoni-speaking people of Eastern Zambia. During the period of exclusion, the girl has to undergo special lessons for one full month. As already pointed out, the lessons presented are oral and also practical demonstrations.

According to Nyoka (1980, 94–95) the instructions given at *Cinamwali* to a girl who has come of age in the *Ngoni* tradition, include the following:

- **Moral behaviour:** A girl is taught to behave as an adult woman refraining from “childish” behaviour. The instructors stress the importance of respecting others and self. (*Alemekeze ena komanso azilemekeze yekha popeza wakula.*)
- **Personal hygiene:** The girl is strictly taught to observe personal hygiene, most especially during menstruation (*akaluta ku mwezi*). During this time the girl is barred from cooking and if she does, she must not put salt to food under preparation. If she does that, it is believed that she will make those that eat the food become sick, as she is unclean. In most cases, it is believed that those who eat the food prepared by the unclean girl, will suffer from chest pains referred to as *m’dulo* or whooping cough, which can lead to death.
- **Respect for the elderly:** The girl-child is advised to respect all those who are above her age and should regard them as her own parents.
- **Care for relatives:** She is taught that when she is married she must take care of relatives when they pay her and her husband a visit. This should apply to both relatives from her side and those from her husband’s family.
- **Honouring the in-laws:** The young girl is advised that when she marries, her in-laws should be treated with great respect because they are the ones who provided her a good husband.

According to Nyoka (1980, 50–56) the *Alangizi* (traditional counsellors) also take a step further to train a girl who has come of age by preparing her for marriage in a traditional way. Some of the women we spoke to in the Women’s Guild condemn this practice as adding no Christian value to a girl-child. They argue that it is misplaced and a gateway for a girl-child to start misbehaving.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MARRIAGE

The lessons presented to *Cinamwali* in preparation for marriage, include the following:

- ***N'thyole***: It is an instruction designed to prepare a girl (*namwali*) to care for and look after the husband well. *N'thyole* is an act of bathing the husband. In most cases the girl is advised to do this in appreciation for the good things that a husband might have done for the wife.
- ***Nyam'kwenyelela***: This act is performed during sexual intercourse. It is the wife who performs it during sexual intercourse. In order to excite the husband during the sexual act, the girl is taught how to play with her waist (*kuvinilila*) to the joy and excitement, and pleasure of the husband. At some point, *Nyamkwenyelera* is enhanced by the act of removing pubic hair from the husband's private parts before the sexual act.
- ***Cimwesho***: This act is performed on the wedding day when the girl is handed over to the husband. This act is done to appreciate the husband as her “gift and master”. The girl-child is taught how to prepare traditional sweet beer called *thobwa*, which she gives to her husband whilst holding the cup. *Cimwesho* literally means to be assisted to drink.
- The other act taught to the girl-child is how to make the waist flexible through dancing by following the rhythm of drums with tunes and songs of *Cinamwali*. During this time, a girl-child is made to dance with her waist to the satisfaction of the traditional counsellors (*Alangizi*). This act is performed to prepare a girl to dance during sexual intercourse in marriage, exciting the husband as it is believed that such an act will prevent the husband from engaging in extra-marital affairs.

The other lesson presented to the girl who has come of age, is related to caring for the relatives and other people who pay them a visit at their home. This lesson is taught through the following proverb, *nipeni kabende nitwemo nthwilo* (give me a mortar to pound groundnuts).

Some aspects of these practices seem to undermine the dignity of young women, as they tend to promote submission to patriarchy. Feminist theologians such as Dolphyne (1991) teach that women must not be subjected to males.

Bruegel (2001, 192) in Moyo (2001) points out that the initiation ceremony (rite of passage) amongst the Chewa-speaking people is concluded with a dramatic performance of the Nyau dance (*Gule wamkulu* – a traditional dance) to signify the end of puberty (*Kutha Cinamwali*) and the entrance into adulthood. On this day, members of the community or village gather to witness the release from exclusion of a girl who has come of age (*kutulupidwa kwa Namwali mnyumba*). On this day, before the girl appears in public, *alangizi* (traditional counsellors) shave the girl's head, which is a symbol of opening a new chapter to adulthood. In most cases these practices have nothing to do

with Christian values and ethos. If anything, they make people enslaved; unless this is done, one will not be acceptable and fused into her own community (Nyoka 1980, 48).

It is undisputable that the Women’s Guild of the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ) plays a critical role in the activities and ministry of churches in Zambia and beyond (Groeneveld 1994). In the RCZ this is particularly the case with regard to the *Chigwirizano ca Azimai* (Women’s Guild). Presently it is one of the most vital fellowships among all other fellowships in the Reformed Church in Zambia. Nyoka (1980, 48–50) argues that there is need for a paradigm shift with regard to the practice of *Cinamwali* from the traditional one to that of Christian *Cinamwali*.

Precisely because this institution plays a pivotal role in promoting family values, the RCZ has adopted and adapted the traditional *Cinamwali* to be more reflective of the Christian *Cinamwali*. The Women’s Guild objected to the practice of *Cinamwali* associated with cultural practices and beliefs. The practice was condemned, as it was believed that it did more harm to the girl-child than it helped her morally. It was said that most of the tutored girls eloped and ended up with unwanted pregnancies. Members of the Women’s Guild pressurised and demanded that the practice of *Cinamwali* by the Women’s Guild should be distinguished from the heathen one (*Cinamwali ca Cikunja*). In the early 1980s, the late Mrs Beatrice Miti, who was the leader of the Women’s Guild for RCZ, appointed a committee which was chaired by Mrs Nyoka, a lecturer at Justo Mwale University. The women ministry made a wider consultation through focus group discussions and research. The outcome of the research was the compilation of a booklet entitled *Buku La Nehito Za Chigwilizano Cha Azimai Mu RCZ*. This booklet framed the instructions within the moral teachings and ethos of the Reformed theology. It was designed to guide the Women’s Guild in imparting instructions to young women within the framework of the Reformed Theology, as opposed to “*Cinamwali ca Cikunja*”, or “heathen instructions” (*Buku la cilangizo ca ana akazi mu RCZ* 1980, 48f).

HEATHEN INSTRUCTION (CILANGIZO CA CIKUNJA)

As highlighted above, the traditional instruction (*Cinamwali*) rests on the role of *Mlangizi*, traditional counsellor. When a girl has come of age, she is put in exclusion for one month and the parents of the girl will have to look for an experienced traditional counsellor (*Mlangizi*) to mentor their daughter for that period of time. During such time, traditional herbs are fetched and given to the girl who has come of age (RCZ 1980, 48–49) and Ngulube (1989, 185).

The parents of the girl also enter into a covenant called *m’jingulo*, until the final day when the girl re-appears in public from exclusion. *M’jingulo* is a cultural practice whereby parents of the girl-child who has come of age, refrain from certain practice such as adding salt to relish and having sexual intercourse until the girl comes out from exclusion. It is believed that if *m’jingulo* is not done, *namwali* experiences what is called *m’dulo* – a whooping cough sickness as earlier alluded to (RCZ 1980, 48f). The

significance of this practice is to teach the girl-child who has come of age the sacredness of virginity and the importance of hygiene.

In the traditional *Cinamwali*, a number of lessons are taught, which include the following: honouring all adults; obedience to parents; self-respect; and healthy living through observing cleanliness during the menstruation period. It is strongly believed that during the menstruation period a woman becomes unclean, not fit for the company and society of others. If anything, she should live in exclusion for fear of defiling other people she comes into contact with. In this respect uncleanliness refers to the discharge of blood or monthly periods. A parallel is drawn with the Bible story in Mark 5:21–34, where reference is made to a woman who had a similar situation of the issue of the flow of blood she suffered for 12 years. This woman was considered unclean by the law, whereby she was unfit for the company and society of others. It was believed that this unclean woman could pollute all those with whom she came into contact, as her condition was itself of a defiling nature to all the members of society. She was regarded an outcast.

Similarly, reference is made to Leviticus 15:25, stating that if a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period, or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge; just as in the days of her monthly period, she remains unclean as long as the flow of blood continues. A bed on which she lies down becomes defiled, and anything on which she sits during this time, should be regarded unclean. Anyone who touches these objects is unclean and must wash his clothes and have a bath; he remains unclean until the evening. After her flow stops, she must wait seven days, and then she will be ritually clean.

In addition to the lessons mentioned above, there were also other lessons presented to the girl-child who reached puberty, which included those relating to marriage. Such lessons include respecting the husband, kneeling down before him whenever serving food or anything to him, bathing him, feeding him and exciting him in bed (RCZ 1980, 49). In short, she is taught to be subservient to her husband. During the traditional rite of passage the girl has to undergo many traditional norms, beliefs and teachings to qualify into womanhood (Nyoka 1980, 48). With regard to these rituals, there are many issues of gender and power to consider here.

FROM “HEATHEN” INSTRUCTIONS TO CHRISTIAN CINAMWALI.

Nyoka (1980, 50) asserts that the fundamental difference between the Christian *Cinamwali* and traditional *Cinamwali* is that the former involves the girl-child who is a believer and a full communicant member of the RCZ. The mother of the girl-child must also be a member of the Women’s Guild (*Chigwizano ca Azimai*) and in good standing. Equally crucial regarding *Chigwilizano ca Azimai* (Women’s Guild), the women

appointed as counsellors (*Alangizi*) must be Christians in good standing. The statutes of the RCZ stipulate that these counsellors (*Alangizi*) are found in each cell group or sections (*Madela*) of the congregation (*The Constitution, By-laws and Procedures of the Reformed Church in Zambia* 2013, 21–22). When a girl-child comes of age (*akakhala Ndola kapena Namwali*) in any section and has been put in confinement, the mother of the girl who is a member of the Women’s Guild reports the matter to *Mlangizi wa Dela* (section or cell group chairperson). Once *Mlangizi* in that section is informed, she has to devise a counselling programme for the girl who has come of age in her section (*dela*). At the same time, the same *Mlangizi* reports the matter to the Women’s Guild chairperson, who is the wife to the resident minister. Once a programme of counselling has been drawn up, the *Alangizi* from the other cell groups (*Madela*) will join their counterpart in presenting lessons to the girl-child who has come of age, using *book la Cilangizo* (a counsellor’s guide book).

According to Ngulube (1989, 185) and Nyoka (1980, 49–50), some of the lessons presented to the girl-child who has reached puberty in the Christian *Cinamwali*, include the following:

- **Cleanliness or hygiene:** The girl-child is taught how to use sanitary pads (*akakhala ku mwezi*) during menstruation. A girl is taught to prepare well in advance even before she experiences her first period (*kuluta ku mwezi*). She is also taught how to dispose of the used sanitary pads without attracting the attention of anyone.
- **Bathing time after time:** *Namwali asambe tsiku ndi tsiku, ngati pali mwai ali kumwezi – m’awa ndi m;adzulo*. When undergoing periods, the girl is expected to bath at least twice a day. She is expected to remain private within herself and never show she is undergoing her period.
- **Refraining from befriending boys:** The girl who has come of age is strictly advised not to have boyfriends, nor to allow a boy or man to touch her body, as this may lead to a sexual act. In the current scenario of HIV/AIDS, the girl-child is taught the dangers of contracting HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases which are incurable and could make her barren till death. Purity of heart is emphasised as indicated in the Bible (Mathew 5:8). The girl is taught to remain faithful and committed to the Lord until such time that the Lord God gives her a life partner.
- **Refrain from early marriage:** *Alangizi* go further to give advice to *Namwali* not to go into early marriage until she is mature enough. The girl-child is warned about the implications of early marriage, which may include complications during child birth which can even lead to death as her body is not yet ready to bear children. In some cases women give birth through operations (caesarean section), resulting in physical complications. Sometimes babies die or even develop complications, which will be a burden to the mother (<http://www.smith.edu/ourhealthourfutures/teenpreg5.html>).

- In the Christian *Cinamwali*, unlike the traditional *Cinamwali*, a girl-child who has come of age is not taught anything related to marriage. These lessons are reserved until such time that a girl is about to enter into marriage. The reason is to prevent the girl-child to practise sex before marriage, which can lead to pregnancy and thus bring shame to the family and the church.

During the Christian *Cinamwali*, while in exclusion, a girl is allowed to go to school so that she does not miss lessons, but she is strictly cautioned that upon her return from school she should not be seen in public but should go into exclusion straight away. According to Nyoka (1980, 48–50) a girl’s public appearance due to school attendance does not affect the girl in any way, if the girl strictly follows instruction from *M’langizi*. Actually, as the girl returns from school, as she enters the village, she covers her head with fabric (Chitenge material so that no one sees her face and body) and the counsellor will await her return from school in the room where she is kept. This is not the case with the traditional *Cinamwali*, as the girl-child has to remain indoors for a month and is not allowed to even attend school.

SOME MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Issues of human dignity and power relations

The RCZ’s attempt to adapt the *Cinamwali* to Christian *Cilangizo* entailed a missional praxis commonly termed indigenisation. In his book, *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch argued that there are two dimensions to indigenisation. He asserted that:

Enculturation suggests a double movement: there is at once enculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. The gospel remains Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context. On the one hand, it offers the cultures the knowledge of the divine mystery, while on the other it helps them to bring forth from their living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought (Bosch 1991, 465).

In this respect context and culture are critical, precisely because they entail indigenous knowledge systems from which meaning is construed. The Women’s Guild adapted the Ngoni traditional cultural values within the Reformed Church in Zambia structures and theological ethos. As Bosch (1991) notes, indigenisation entails meaning-deriving from context. The Women’s Guild’s use of a biblical term, *Cilangizo*, literary meaning “instruction”, was an issue of indigenisation. In Scriptures, the instructions denote teaching of the Law of Moses. The instructions are associated with the “light of knowledge”, “knowing God”. The significance of renaming *Cinamwali* as *Cilangizo* (instruction) goes beyond mere naming. It entailed the transformation of the existing framework and the ethos of a very important traditional institution. In this respect, adopted from the Ngoni, the instruction of the young girls is constructed within the Reformed Church in Zambia’s theological framework. The involvement of the Women’s

Guild and the wife of the minister seems to make this obvious. For Bosch (1991), indigenisation entails taking “into account the meaning systems already present in the context”. In this case “the meaning systems” relate to the traditional *Cinamwali* with its teachings on values of human dignity, respect, moral behaviour and hygiene. The RCZ’s adoption of the *Cinamwali* is an attempt to give expression to the values of a local culture within Christian religious idioms, precepts and framework.

The RCZ adoption and adaptation of the traditional *Cinamwali* is crucial, precisely because in African society young girls and women play a critical role in nurturing and raising a family as *mbumba*. Girls and young women in the Nyanja and Ngoni societies are the pillar of family life. It would resonate with what Brigham (2006) said: “You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.” Therefore, the training of girls or young women is critical to the survival of the clan in an African context.

It is obvious that the Christian *Cinamwali* has almost entirely borrowed from the traditional one, nearly substituting one feature with the other. One common feature is that both forms are communal-oriented activities involving parent(s) and senior women in the village, or senior women of the Women’s Guild. Secondly, the role of the instructor or a counsellor is crucial to the institution. It is upon this feature that this rite of passage can stand or fall. However, the involvement of the leadership of the Women’s Guild, notably the minister’s wife, distinguishes the Christian *Cilangizo*. It shows the critical role that the church plays in the life of young women in the initiation process. It is almost as if the church is saying that “it is too good to leave the lives of young women only to the non-Christians”. The authority of *Namkungwi* is replaced by the counsellor.

Equally important is the emphasis on the values of respect for the elders – a very critical value in the African communal life. It is a value that resonates with the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Old Testament, respect for the elderly was critical to the balance of life in the community. The issues of personal hygiene are also important to avoid sicknesses.

Very close parallels exist regarding instructions and rituals that regulate the life of a young virgin, *buthu* and *namwali* among the Ngoni and the *betulah* among the Jewish. Both stress exclusion and rituals of cleansing. The Jews refer to “purity” laws and the Ngoni call these rituals and rules of cleanliness.

The Jewish rituals for young woman

In the Jewish traditional custom, when a girl reached the age of puberty, she was called *betulah* - in Hebrew. This word defined her as an adolescent girl who had reached adulthood but not yet given birth to her first child. It is sometimes translated as “virgin”, but in fact it relates more to her age group than her physical state. She probably began to menstruate at about 10–12 years of age. The onset of menstruation was celebrated, because it showed that the girl had passed from childhood into womanhood. When reaching the age of puberty, she was introduced to the special customs that Jewish women

followed, particularly those relating to menstruation (<http://www.womeninthebible.net/3.2.Majorm>)

During her monthly period or menstruation period, a Jewish woman was relieved of many of her normal duties. Some of these duties included the drawing of water and carrying water from the well. She did not have to serve food to members of the family. She did not have to go to the marketplace. She did not have sexual intercourse. The days of her menstruation period were regarded as a time out; a time for herself. On these days, she was relieved of a number of her duties; she had time to think and rest.

Special rules guarded her privacy and rest at this time. They were called the “purity laws”. These laws made it impossible for members of her family to demand that she does her normal tasks.

After her menstrual cycle, a woman was required to bathe herself from head to toe in a special pool of clean water, called a *mikveh*. Each small community would have its *mikveh*, and towns and cities had large numbers of them – some public, and some private. The *mikveh* pool had to be designed and built a special way, so that it had:

- Enough headroom under water to allow complete immersion.
- A supplementary tank for gathering clean rain water.
- A small pool at the entrance for washing hair, hands and feet before entering the main pool (in 2 Samuel 11:1–5 Bathsheba is bathing herself after her monthly period when David sees her).

The purpose of the monthly bathing in the *mikveh* was for physical and spiritual cleanliness. The washing of the body was a tangible way for a woman to renew herself, refreshing mental, emotional and physical energies. It was a ritual that periodically gave a woman the feeling of a fresh start.

The rules of ritual cleanliness meant that most people were obliged to wash themselves, wash their clothes and put on clean clothes at frequent intervals. There is no doubt that the hygiene that resulted from the purity laws was beneficial to the health of the whole population. Where mothers maintain personal cleanliness, there is much less infant mortality, and so the cleanliness of Jewish women benefited the whole population.

It is difficult to say whether the laws regarding cleanliness arose from a conscious connection between cleanliness and good health, or an intuitive one. Indeed, Jews at the time (and now) would state that the rituals of purity laws were obeyed not for their logic, but because they were part of being a Jew.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we argued that the adoption and adaptation of the *Cinamwali*, or the coming of age of the young girl by the Women’s Guild in the RCZ, is critical to the role that women play in Eastern Zambia. In particular we have shown that their action entailed a very important missiological principle, namely indigenisation. In this respect, we argued

that it is their ability to cross the Ngoni cultural frontiers in using the Dutch Reformed Church structures and Christian values that makes the innovation of *Cinamwali*, a very significant missional praxis. The critical aspect of this lies in the ability of the Women’s Guild to transform a very important aspect of the Ngoni cultural institution into one that the Christian community can use. In other words, we argue that the Christianisation of *Cinamwali* entailed the Women’s Guild’s attempts to transform a very important aspect of the Ngoni traditional culture.

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