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The Binga Outreach: Towards intercultural mission in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the challenges that confront the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ) in reaching out to other groups of people in Zimbabwe. They discovered that they were defaulting to the missionary paradigm of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) that founded the RCZ more than a hundred years ago. In reaching out to the Tonga people in the Binga area south of the Zambezi River and the Kariba Dam, their basic approach is described as a cross-cultural mission. The principles of intercultural mission, based on passages such as Acts 15, challenge this approach. The article deals with the implications in practice and the challenges that still confront the RCZ.

1. INTRODUCTION

The critical question of how Jesus Christ's Gospel message should be presented in the world, especially to people of different cultures, will always confront faith communities, now and in future. Basically, the RCZ is a one-culture, Shona-speaking Church. This old but critical question confronted her during her first outreach to proclaim the Gospel to a non-Shona ethnic group, the Tonga community in Binga. This article wants to focus on the challenge to the RCZ: How should they share the Gospel and plant a church in a context and culture so radically different from their own? First, some background.

For many years, the Tonga people have lived in the north-western part of Zimbabwe bordering Zambia, along the Zambezi River (Reynolds & Cousins 1989:24, Colson 1971:3). They are mostly subsistence farmers, with a communal lifestyle, who live below the poverty level and constitute approximately 8% of Zimbabwe's population (<http://www.mapsofworld.com/zimbabwe/culture/tonga.html>. 2010/03/3). The African way of life is described as *ubuntu*; in Shona the term is *hunhu*. The essence of *ubuntu/hunhu* is being human, characterized by communality, interdependence and values, such as compassion and hospitality, believing in harmonious existence and friendship.

In our country, the Tonga people are a community that others mostly misunderstand and look down upon (Munikwa 2011:124). The researcher confesses that he also had misconceptions about the Tonga people while growing up and before the RCZ embarked on the Binga outreach.

The work was called the **Binga Outreach**, because its purpose was to evangelise the Tonga people who live along the Zambezi River in the Binga district. The situation in Zimbabwe, as well as in the outside world, influences the Binga situation. Globalisation profoundly restructures the way people live (Giddens 2000:22). To a certain extent, it has had an impact even on the most remote rural communities, including the Tonga society (Hendriks 2004:15, Giddens

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2000:22). The Tonga people were displaced in the 1950s – this initiated their great suffering. The colonial government resettled them, without their consent, for the purpose of a major technical development: the building of the Kariba Dam (Tremmel 1994:42). Now, this development generates electricity and promotes tourism, but has dislodged the Tonga society (Munikwa 2011:127-128).

The RCZ's youth fellowship at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) started an evangelising ministry to reach out to un-evangelized areas and, eventually in 1995, to the Tonga people in the Binga district. The RCZ supported this outreach and evangelism teams visited the area, proclaimed the Gospel, and started prayer houses and other ministries. The growth of the ministry among the Tonga people led to the establishment of a new congregation in 2008. The congregation, under the Bulawayo presbytery, was named Binga RCZ. The RCZ sent Rev R Manhongo to the new congregation as a missionary pastor. The RCZ Synod office supports him financially. The researcher played a leading role in all of this (Munikwa 2011:173-182).

2. THE BINGA OUTREACH WAS A CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION²

During the Binga Outreach, it was realised that the RCZ is still defaulting to the DRC's traditional missionary model (Munikwa 2011:182). The Enlightenment had influenced the DRC's expression of Christian mission. Then, and also today, this has had great bearing on the RCZ's identity, particularly her attitude and way of doing mission. In this regard and in our context, the argument is that the traditional missionary model is inadequate to allow the Gospel to become human within the Tonga community. Thus, the main question is: How must the RCZ express God's missional praxis appropriately, meaningfully and relevantly within the context of the Tonga people?

An analysis of the Binga outreach revealed the following issues that confirm the hypothesis that the outreach was cross-cultural and defaulting to the DRC missionary model of a century ago (Munikwa 2011:173-182):

- The RCZ translated its own liturgy, songs and hymns into Chitonga and did not allow the new Tonga members to develop a liturgy that is relevant and appropriate for their cultural context. It should be a liturgy that allows them to express themselves as Tonga people, not as Shona people. This illustrates that the RCZ applies the model used by the DRC missionaries in planting churches in Zimbabwe.
- The Tonga people was not really involved in their people's evangelisation. The researcher agrees with Hedlund (1991:274) who says that mission is not the monopoly of any one person, group, or structure; it is the obligation of every church and believer. The Tonga people were involved in the outreaches, but how, and in what capacity, should be reconsidered.
- The new Tonga Church was not allowed to participate in preparing the plans for their church and the other building. Just like the DRC missionaries, the RCZ does everything for the Tonga people.
- The other issues relate to the development of the new Tonga Church's structure. How does the new Church, planted as a result of the Binga outreach, relate to the RCZ? The RCZ should grant space for the Tonga Church to develop. The RCZ must allow the outreach to

2 In this article, a "cross-cultural perspective" means a one-sided approach to the presentation of the Gospel from one culture to another. Zwana (2007:75) refers to a cross-cultural process as an invasion of one cultural context by another that takes place with a superior attitude. Saayman (1990:308) contends that "cross-cultural" implies too strongly that only two cultures are involved in mission and it also bears the implication that one of these cultures is Christian and superior.

the Tonga people to grow in line with their cultural context. In the process of developing the community's own leadership, the RCZ should take care not to create a paternalistic relationship between the RCZ Synod and the Tonga people.

In the light of her mission among the Tonga people, the RCZ must critically and constructively assess the theory and practice of mission that the European missionaries transmitted to herself, in order to develop a communal-contextual³ and missional framework. If the RCZ fails in analytically evaluating and transforming herself in a communal and contextual way, she will be irrelevant and not transform the lives of the Tonga people. The argument is that, if a framework encounters challenges that it cannot address, another framework should replace the one that fails to address the people's contextual realities (Mouton 1996:15). As the surrounding culture changes, the need to reorganise the theological system and interpretive practices arise in order to communicate the message more effectively to the people within the culture, but without compromising it (Poythress 1988:160, Cray 2004:13).

In this article, the researcher proposes that the RCZ shifts from a cross-cultural perspective to an intercultural perspective in her mission calling and vocation. The discussion on intercultural mission will provide the strategies that the RCZ can follow. It invites the RCZ to discern the next stages of her missional journey by once again listening to the Bible in a hermeneutically sensitive way in the light of contextual realities that confront her. The Bible and the Holy Spirit must guide us on this journey in a context that has changed dramatically and still is continuously changing.

3. INTERCULTURAL MISSION

A new missional framework for the RCZ based on the principles of a *Christian* intercultural mission is necessary. Hiebert (1999:383) states that intercultural mission is a very complex process and, if we fail to understand it, we shall fail to express the Gospel effectively. The premise of this article is that Christian intercultural mission is rooted in the very being and character of the Triune God who is a missional God and the origin and author of Christian mission (Bosch 1991:390, Bowen 1996:1). "Mission" means sending (Guder 1998:4). This means that the Church has an apostolic ministry that stems from Jesus' apostolic ministry. An intercultural mission is an apostolic ministry. The Church of Jesus Christ must be on the move and reach out beyond herself if she wants to succeed in being missional (Bowen 1996:1).

In the history of the church, Christian intercultural mission has been viewed, defined and understood differently. Some scholars viewed it as a cross-cultural mission. The researcher does not view intercultural mission synonymous to cross-cultural mission. As noted before, a cross-cultural perspective is understood to be a one-sided approach of the presentation of the Gospel from one culture to another. An intercultural mission assumes no sense of superiority over others (Asamoah-Gyadu 2002:16). It witnesses the Gospel of Jesus Christ with love, boldness and humility to people who differ culturally. Intercultural mission is deeply rooted in communities and people's contextual realities with active communal dialogue, reciprocity and transformation and is a reciprocal process where the presenter and the recipient of the Gospel

3 The emphasis of a communal-contextual framework is on communal theology, meaning a theology as holistically reflected and practised in the socio-cultural context of a community of faith. Ukpong (1999:112) points out that community is one of the fundamental characteristics of an African worldview. In the Zimbabwean context, a person's identity is communal and is expressed in relation to others. The communal perspective of life must be treasured and affirmed as the only basis on which constructive human relationships can be built in Christian faith (Kritzinger 2002:149,152,156). That which is communal is holistic or integral; it is collective and interdependent, not individualistic. In Africa, there is a strong awareness of interdependence, as opposed to the individualism of the European culture. Moyo (1996:17) states that life can be meaningful only if it is life in communion with, and among, others.

message exchange roles in a dynamic way (Kgatla 2002:53).

Saayman (1990:316) defines interculturalisation as a process of partnership and mutuality through which the cultures of both the evangelist and the evangelised are affected essentially by communication of the Gospel. In this research, the intercultural encounter is understood as the mutual participatory process that transforms both the RCZ and the Tonga people through active communal and contextual dialogue. They are to shape and transform one another. The presenter and the recipient both communicate and receive in a dialogical process (Kgatla 2002:53). This is the faith community who actively participates in expressing the Mission of God within different cultures. The Gospel is enriched through intercultural active dialogue and reciprocity within the faith community (Saayman 1990:318).

This intercultural process is a *Christian* mission. This aspect is important because it implies that the ministry is centred on God's reconciliation of the world in Christ Jesus. The researcher acknowledges that other religions may be, and are, involved in intercultural dialogue. The intercultural perspective alluded to in this study is viewed in the light of Jesus Christ's message. What God meant to his people was incarnated in Jesus Christ's life (Saayman 2007:138). Paul says, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

Christian faith is not synonymous with knowledge of the Gospel. It is about appropriate living, about being, about people's relationship with God who spoke through Jesus Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit (Shaw & Van Engen 2003:4). What is the Gospel? Moyo (1996:1) defines the Gospel as the message that calls people to faith in Jesus Christ. The aim of the Gospel is to transform people and their culture through the Holy Spirit. The researcher believes that the Gospel is God's redeeming and reconciling love for the world through the transforming power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16, 1 Cor 1:17-18). It proclaims the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ to all cultures by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is the Good News of God's transformative love for the world. How it is communicated becomes critical.

The art of communicating must relate to the message communicated. Intercultural mission requires inspiration from within the social context for it to become possible and a reality. It must be rooted in culture and in the way in which religion is interpreted and experienced in the Tonga people's daily lives. One must take care not to impose on the people (Acts 17:3, 18:4). An intercultural perspective rejects conventional interpretations that regard what took place in the course of European Christendom as universally normative for Christian history. Interculturality values cultural locality and ethnic diversity. Cultural identification with the community in the church is viewed as a necessary aspect of Christian intercultural mission. Paul became what the people were, in order for them to experience the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 9:19ff). In each new context the church must die in order to live, that is, sacrifice herself and her cultural form in order to be re-formed (Cray 2004:89).

The purpose is to communicate the Gospel message faithfully and effectively in a way that makes sense to the Tonga people. The fundamental questions are: What is to be communicated and appropriated? How must the Gospel of Jesus Christ be presented to people of a different culture? The research argues that these questions are essential in developing faithful, appropriate and meaningful strategies for the faith community that desires to be involved in Christian intercultural mission in a communal and contextual way.

4. THE ACTS 15 AGENDA AND THE EPHESIAN MODEL

The world's cultural diversity is becoming more pronounced and complex. The minority ethnicities are rightly demanding recognition of the validity of, and respect for, their cultures

(Munikwa 2011:203). The situation in Zimbabwe is no exception. Within such a context, the RCZ is taking part in the Mission of God. The argument is that the RCZ must develop creative and appropriate strategies to minister to people of other cultures and she should have coherent, effective strategies for this intercultural mission. The strategies must reflect the social reality of the society and thus provide an opportunity for mission.

In the light of our context, the article discusses the Acts 15 Agenda⁴ and the Ephesians model as the basis for working towards an intercultural missional framework in the RCZ. The story of Acts 15 indicates the importance of making the Gospel relevant and appropriate to believers in their own socio-cultural context. Hendriks (2002:1) argues that in Acts 15 the guidelines that lead the process of the movement and growth of the Christian faith from one place to another is more prominent than in any other biblical story. Walls (2002:29,32) states that, to remain alive, the Christian faith must always be translated into human culture. This perspective illustrates that a cross-cultural approach makes proselytes of a denomination and foreign culture, while the biblical way helps people to become Christ's followers in their own context and culture. From the letter to the Ephesians, one deduces how important it is that, because people are culturally different, this should not detract from the unity of Christ's body. All people are reconciled in Christ who is our Lord. Thus, the balance between diversity and unity should be kept (Walls 2002:72-81).

Jesus entered into, and interacted with, Jewish culture to transform people. Bosch (1991:21) argues that the Word must become flesh in every new context. The church, sent by Jesus Christ, must express the Gospel but remain human in order to impact the God-loved world. The Christian faith was planted in Israel among the Jewish people and culture. When this faith first encountered the Gentile culture, the question regarding the relevance and meaningfulness of a Jewish Christian faith in a Gentile cultural context was inevitable. Ukpong (1999:105) explains that addressing this problem caused misunderstandings, confrontation and conflicts in the early New Testament church (Gal 1:6-9, 2:11-14, 1 Cor 8:1-13, 2 Cor 11:1-15). This question led to the Jerusalem assembly of Acts 15.

From the Acts 15 meeting, several guiding principles can be deduced, which the RCZ may follow.

4.1 "Intercultural" implies a self-critical evaluating faith community

The early church did a self-critical evaluation in relation to the challenges that they encountered (Munikwa 2011:235). In Acts 15, the church examined how they were doing mission. Bosch (1991:366) states that repentance must begin with a bold recognition of the fact that, today, the church in mission faces a world fundamentally different from anything she has faced before. This, in itself, calls for a new understanding of mission.

In this present period, the way to respond effectively to the RCZ's challenges is to understand and undertake mission in a creative and imaginatively new manner (Bosch 1991:366, Kritzingler 2002:145). Discernment becomes critical, as it is the essence of doing theology (Hendriks 2002:8).

In the light of the present contextual realities, the RCZ needs to start from her current situation. *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*: a Reformed church must keep on reforming. The researcher agrees with Rutoro and Hendriks (2008:40) when they state that being reformed implies a continuous process of reforming, of doing theology as a correlational hermeneutical activity in which the Bible is brought into dialogue with the phenomena of ever-changing contextual realities.

4 In a keynote address at the 2002 Gospel and Our Culture meeting in Chicago, USA, Jurgens Hendriks presented the Acts 15 Agenda.

For the evaluation to be meaningful, the church in the story of Acts 15 had to listen to the Antioch people who had a different cultural context. As in Acts 15, the RCZ should also deconstruct their own tradition and not make it binding on new believers with another culture.

4.2 “Intercultural” implies an actively listening faith community

The early New Testament church took into account the needs and challenges that the new believers, with a different culture, encountered. The church created space for non-Jewish believers to ask questions and contribute to the church’s agenda (Munikwa 2011:235). The RCZ should train herself to be an active listener for relevance and effectiveness to become a reality. Onwunta (2006:266) contends that active listening opens the church up and empowers her to witness beyond her present experiences. For the RCZ to be a missional church, she should practise active listening. Onwunta (2006:266) argues that the church has to listen to, and for, God. He explains that, without listening to God and also the people, a church may never discern God’s intent. It will be impossible to hear the people’s cries and pains. The missional faith community must have open ears and a sensitive heart. The argument is that, if the RCZ actively listens to God and to the Tonga people, the latter will be guided on a journey that will empower them to address the issues of their culture and context, and experience a deep conversion that will create the opportunity for the RZC to be likewise transformed by the power of the Spirit.

4.3 “Intercultural” implies being a biblical faith community

In Acts 15, the church critically evaluated herself in relation to God’s intent for new believers of other cultures. Their discussion in Jerusalem was about Scripture. God speaks to us through the Scriptures (Bavinck 1960:199). In the process of discernment, the Bible plays an essential role (Hendriks 2004:29). The proposal to the RCZ is to develop a framework in its intercultural mission that begins and ends with Scripture - to discern the *missio Dei*.

The Church should be willing to change and should not feel secure while preserving old traditions, or be overzealously proud of conservative theology (Rutoro & Hendriks 2008:43,47). In intercultural mission we should seek to communicate the Gospel effectively by remaining faithful to the intent of God’s Word (Shaw & Van Engen 2003:xvi). The RCZ should embrace communal-contextual theology together with its members in order to experience transformation. In reading Scripture with “the other” one gains a new perspective on God and on one’s own situation and views.

4.4 “Intercultural” implies a communal faith community

An intercultural framework should be communal. The Acts 15 Agenda demonstrated how important the participation of the whole faith community is for effectively addressing the needs and challenges that believers encounter. In the Acts 15 story, the believers from the new church in Antioch participated in the church’s discussions. The argument is that the African way of life of *ubunthu/hunhu*, or communality, should be reinstated in the RCZ’s intercultural mission. Walls (2002:78) calls this the “Ephesian moment.”

Edwin Zulu (2001:6,7) states that most African societies recognise life as life in the community, thus to “be” or to “belong” is to participate in one’s community. This means that every person is responsible to work towards harmony in the community. The communal perspective of life must be treasured and affirmed as the only basis on which constructive human relationships can be built in Christian faith (Kritzinger 2002:149,152,156).

The RCZ should assist the Tonga to restore the spirit of interdependence and unity. A Tonga proverb: *Simwenda alike kakamulya kalonga*, says: “The one who walks alone by the river gets eaten.” The Shona proverb with the same notion says: *Chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda*.

The Tonga people appreciate the importance of walking with another for companionship and protection. The Bible says that two are better than one because they have a reward for their labour (Eccles 4:9,12).

Cultural domination should be avoided at all costs. Paul addressed this in the letter to the Ephesians (2:11-13), namely that the uncircumcised and the circumcised now are one in Jesus Christ through his blood. The consequence of the Acts 15 story was a multiracial and multicultural faith community. Hendriks (2002:4) explains that the Acts 15 Agenda may well lead to diversity and pluralism on an unprecedented scale, but that it is balanced by the Ephesians' call to unity.

The methodology that the RCZ now needs is that of participatory action (De Vos 1998:406-10). The community of believers should be a primary bearer of mission as they are the operational basis from which the *missio Dei* proceeds (Bosch 1991:472). The RCZ must work to empower faith communities to discern God's will for their own contextual realities (Hendriks 2004:29-30).

4.5 "Intercultural" implies doing contextual theology

Any effort to develop a relevant missional church in the local context needs to regard that context seriously (Guder 1998:46). The RCZ should inductively develop a missional framework that guides her outreach to be both integral and contextual. From such a theoretical and biblically orientated framework, appropriate contextual strategies and actions may develop (Guder 1998:4, Ukpong 1999:101, Hendriks 2004:20). The story of Acts 15 indicates the importance of making the Gospel relevant and appropriate to believers. The question of circumcision and observance of the Jewish dietary laws that the believers of Antioch raised concerned the relationship between the Gospel and a culture (Hendriks 2002:1, Ukpong 1999:104). The question was whether the Gospel could be expressed within the Greek culture. The Gospel was to be expressed in ways that were familiar to the people in their contextual realities.

The Acts 15 story indicates that the Gospel should not call for uniformity, but should be flexible and allow the faith communities to participate in answering their own contextual and cultural questions. The argument is that the question of the relationship between the Gospel and culture will always face the RCZ as she participates in the Mission of God. In any culture worldwide, good, as well as wicked, customs and practices are present. How should the RCZ address the issue of retention or rejection of the Tonga people's cultural systems? The researcher believes that, by means of active communal dialogue and through the Holy Spirit, the Word of God should guide the RCZ and the Tonga believers in deciding what customs and practices should be retained or rejected. Usually a newly planted church is better placed to judge in such issues than the "mother church." The Tonga believers should seek to have their own form of church in line with their context (Bavinck 1960:177,178). The RCZ must not be inflexible and paternalistic.

Our theologising should not be fragmented but integrated to be relevant to the people among whom we live and to whom we minister as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that the African worldview regards all in this world from a holistic perspective (Moyo 1996:20). The Tonga people should receive the space to participate in constructing their own local theologies. In intercultural mission, the RCZ must be prepared to allow the church, planted among the Tonga people, to be structured and formed according to their cultural context. "Contextualising" must mean expressing the Gospel in ways that the people comprehend, and that challenge them personally and communally (Hiebert 1999:382). Hendriks (2002:4) points out that the Biblical challenge is not to continue making proselytes of our own denominational traditions, but to give new believers the freedom to use the Gospel in addressing their cultures.

The Acts 15 story resulted in the Christian faith being rooted in the lives of Greek believers. Hendriks (2002:2) points out that the new believers could identify with Christianity because it was translated into their own cultural world. They did not produce two versions of the Christian

faith, but two standards of living representing two cultural settings. This indicates how two communities express Jesus Christ in their different cultures but remain united in faith. Everyone should be able to live the Gospel in their own culture, not in an imposed alien culture.

4.6 “Intercultural” implies a multi-dimensional mission

As argued in this article, the Christian intercultural mission should be perceived as multi-dimensional. The RCZ must preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to other ethnicities in a holistic way. Through displacement, because of the construction of the Kariba Dam,⁵ the Tonga people's former sense of identity was profoundly shaken (Tremmel 1994:60). Their marginalized plight is reflected in nearly every dimension of their lives. The RCZ can play an important role to help the Tonga to rediscover the important values that they appear to have lost.

The mission of the RCZ should bring wholeness and dignity to the Tonga community. The RCZ's evangelising messages should be contextual and integral, being relevant and appropriate to the needs of the Tonga people. One feature in Jesus' preaching is that his Kingdom ministry launched an all-out attack on evil in all its manifestation. Healing the sick, exorcism, restoring broken relationships and granting forgiveness of sin were signs of God's Kingdom in Jesus' ministry (Munikwa 2011:237). This should be the same in the RCZ as, for the Tonga people, these signs will provide a taste of the future in the Kingdom of God under Christ's rule and authority.

The socio-economic conditions within the Tonga area breed social ills, such as alcoholism, jealousy, theft, witchcraft, prostitution and a poor self-image. One of the problems that the church needs to address is the issue of witchcraft practices and fear of the dead. These practices are being related to all kinds of illness in the community. Some wrongly believe that witchcraft and angry ancestors cause HIV/AIDS (Munikwa 2011:153-168).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a national crisis. According to the government, there are at least 2500 Aids-related deaths per week. In 2001, the country had a 0% population growth. The RCZ should be involved in an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign and home-based care programmes. The church's policy statement declares that sex should take place within a marriage. Thus, the use of condoms outside marriage promotes promiscuity. Witchcraft remains a very deep-seated and harmful practice within the Tonga community and should be addressed by confronting it with the Gospel (Munikwa 2011:146-148).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ can serve as a valuable means to reflect on traditional practices, such as witchcraft, fear of the dead and magic, which foster darkness and evil, rather than light and hope. Jesus' healing ministry involved the casting out of demons. Likewise, in our day, healing is one of the characteristics of the missional church (Guder 1998:134). The RCZ is sceptical about faith healing, a tradition she inherited from the DRC. Such healing is not always observable, repeatable, and verifiable by scientific methods (Guder 1998:134). The RCZ is to revisit this theology and tradition.

The research argues that, in the RCZ's context, an effective way to counter magical powers is by anointing with oil and laying on of hands (Mk 6:13, Jas 5:14). Because of tradition, this viable Christian custom is disregarded. This is one of the reasons why people leave the RCZ to join Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (AICs), which are more relevant to their culture. People need to experience the demonstration of God's power and be delivered from demons. The RCZ should do mission, while acknowledging the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were bestowed upon God's church (1 Cor 12:6-7,27).

Through teaching and exorcism, the Tonga people need to experience deliverance from

5 A better understanding of the plight of the Tonga people is provided in the doctoral dissertation of Munikwa (2011:123-172).

witchcraft and their fear of the spirits of the dead. The research argues that, although healing is good, it is not the ultimate goal in the Christian faith. There is need for cultural sensitivity, which means that we must listen to, and be willing to learn from, the Tonga cultural understanding of sickness and health (Saayman 1992:40). This should reflect an active intercultural dialogue that transforms both the Tonga people as well as the RCZ. The research proposes the development of a communal-contextual missional framework in the RCZ's healing ministry. As a missional church, the RCZ's mission should bring wholeness to humanity, and all the dimensions of mission must be present in our intercultural mission. In mission, there should be spiritual and physical unity.

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF AN INTERCULTURAL MINISTRY

In the RCZ's effort to bring total transformation to the Tonga people, she must network with other organisations in the area, such as the Binga Development Association, Zimbabwe Farmers Union, Kulima Mbobumi Training Centre, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the Methodists, and others groups, to sensitize the people towards being responsible citizens. This can be done by training them in leadership, project management, civic education, resource management and better farming methods. The Church can also provide the community with farming implements and other necessary items.

The RCZ should stand up with, and for, the Tonga people when petitioning the government to provide potable water and also for irrigation. Because of the low water table in many areas of Binga, the sinking of boreholes is not viable. The construction of small dams and drawing water from the Zambezi River is the only alternative. The Tonga people must not be overlooked in the planned massive Zambezi Water Project, which is intended to supply water to Bulawayo. The government also has a rural electrification programme, which does not benefit the Tonga people, who need to play a role in solving problems in their community. According to Tremmel (1994:58) the Tonga people believe that local government leaders look down on them and assume that they are ignorant and not intelligent enough to solve problems. Thus, in partnership with others, the RCZ needs to address and challenge the authorities concerning these matters.

The Tonga should benefit from income that tourism generates. At present, tourism available to the Tonga can best be described as exploitative tourism. Their education (building of schools, furniture, books and scholarships) and health facilities should benefit from their rich wildlife and Lake Kariba's fishing industries. The RCZ can help to improve the education of their children by administering carefully monitored scholarship programmes. Thus, the church should speak out for, and together with, the Tonga community.

The RCZ must be faithful to her calling to the Tonga people and should reveal the signs of the Kingdom in her deeds of mercy, as was the heartbeat of Jesus' action; He responded compassionately to human needs (Mark 1:38-42). He was both God and man. So, the RCZ should be both spiritual and physical, and should understand the social forces in the Tonga people. The cultural context frames the organisational setting in which the missional church must function, but the context itself does not define the mission and message of God's people (Guder 1998:76). In the midst of plenty, the hardships of their impoverished lives exhaust and frustrate the Tonga people. Though Christian values call for an ongoing response of compassion and charity to the Tonga community, years of relief and handouts, despite being inadequate, have fostered dependence. The concept of equitable distribution of resources in Zimbabwe should be encouraged. Sharing is an important aspect of the Christian faith (Acts 2:44-45). The biblical worldview of economic justice is built on each person receiving what he/she needs, so that right

relationships are restored or maintained (Guder 1998:121).

In an intercultural ministry, the RCZ, in partnership with others, must care for the creation and formulate a sound ecological policy. Problems of deforestation, soil erosion, pollution and other ecological problems exist. In partnership with others, the RCZ needs to teach people the importance of harmony between humankind and the environment. The Church should teach the society to “fish” without exhausting these resources. Even more important is to teach Zimbabweans not to pollute the rivers.

The members involved in intercultural mission should be trained in methods of ministering to other ethnicities. Reed (1985:1) contends that intercultural disciples must be trained and equipped for their work in order to serve in an effective and relevant way. The research argues that to build a missional church certainly is not easy and that there are no quick fixes - it is a process.

The strengths in the evangelising ministry should lie in the local congregation. The practice that the minister does almost everything should be addressed. The elders and deacons who head most of the preaching posts in Binga must be empowered. In the RCZ's intercultural mission, the Tonga people are to be equipped. Those who want to become citizens of God's Kingdom will know, through teaching, how to live under Christ's kingship.

While the RCZ works together with the Tonga people, the donor and dependency syndrome must not be allowed to develop - we are to work as equals and so enrich each other.

6. CONCLUSION

In reaching out to the Tonga people, who have a completely different culture and tongue, the RCZ was challenged. The research pointed out to what extent the church defaulted by implementing DRC strategies, which she so often had criticized. The research could indicate to what extent the RCZ outreach and church planting at Binga reveal many characteristics of a cross-cultural approach.

The missional God calls the RCZ to be a witness of the Gospel in the world. This will be the case only if we submit ourselves to Christ as Lord and the Holy Spirit. By the grace of God, the church's mission should transcend the diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It should unite us in seeking the Kingdom of God (Van der Merwe 1982:viii). In ministering to other ethnicities, the RCZ should be intercultural.

The article highlights the difference between cross-cultural and intercultural strategies and proposes ways of working interculturally.

Shifting gears will be quite a challenge for the RCZ. In essence, the article proposes that, in this Church, a theocentric reconceptualisation of Christian mission replaces an ecclesiocentric understanding of mission. She must move away from being a Church with a mission to become a missional Church. The Mission of God in the RCZ calls for the communal participation of all believers. The community of believers should be the primary bearers of mission; they are the operational basis from which the Mission of God proceeds (Bosch 1991:472).

This is easier said than done. A tension exists that neither this article nor the church in general has resolved. In an attempt to avoid planting an ethnic church and thus falling into the trap of each group of people having their own church, the RCZ incorporated the new Tonga congregation into its fold in such a way that their cultural diversity was disregarded. By not allowing diversity, unity is often paternalistic and leads to the making of proselytes. This, in turn, leads to culturally maimed members who do not know how to address what is wrong in their culture. The RCZ is all too familiar with this phenomenon. Addressing this challenge interculturally with the Tonga

Christians will help the Body of Christ to become a true light in the Zimbabwean world.

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KEY WORDS

Cross-cultural
Intercultural
Reformed Church in Zimbabwe
Acts 15
Mission
Tonga culture
Church planting