

**Deciphering aspects of Azaria Mbatha's worldview located in
specific religious themes and images employed in his work**

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Declaration

This dissertation is based on my original research unless otherwise stated and acknowledged, and has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.



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Abstract

Azaria Mbatha's (1941 -) work incorporates the many and various influences he has experienced throughout his life. Writers have tended towards essentialist readings of his work emphasizing proselytizing, resistance or traditional Zulu aspects of his work discretely. This is not sufficient to gain an accurate representation of his work which exhibits a spontaneous response to Biblical narratives as he critically appropriates and modifies texts at will. He utilizes narrative to express and explore his own circumstances creating works which are able, in turn, to express the plight of anyone who identifies with his experiences. His work functions both autobiographically and didactically and aspires to be applicable and encouraging to both the individual and the general public, regardless of one's culture of origin.

This dissertation aims to present a holistic reading of Mbatha's *oeuvre* taking into account, amongst others, his Lutheran *kholwa* upbringing, the situation in South Africa (especially in the years under Apartheid), his familial ties to the Zionist church, his training at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre and in Sweden, his foundation within traditional Zulu cosmology, the influence of members of the Lutheran Theological College on his theological views, his position as an artist of the diaspora as a result of his self-imposed exile in Sweden and his own interpretation of the Bible, influenced most profoundly by his father. Such a reading of his work is necessary to decipher aspects of Mbatha's idiosyncratic approach to the various influences he applied to his work in order to outline his personal worldview.

His work encompasses many themes, of which three are covered here. Firstly, his depictions of scenes from the book of Revelation are examined, as are his various portrayals of the figure of Jesus Christ. Finally, his images of reconciliation in its various forms are considered.

Interpretations of these works are informed by a consideration of the various influences already mentioned combined with a visual analysis of each work. It is hoped that this dissertation will aid in understanding the idiosyncrasies and complexities present in Mbatha's work and thus aid in preventing further essentialist readings of comparable artists. For the purposes of this study I have limited my interpretations to his linocuts only.

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Notes on Bible translations

The Modern King James Version has been used for all Biblical quotes unless otherwise indicated. It is a more literal translation than the widely used New International Version but more easily readable than the original King James Version. Italicized text within Biblical quotes indicates words which are not found in the original manuscripts but are included in the Modern King James Version for ease of reading.

I have capitalized the word ‘Bible’ and its derivatives throughout this dissertation, except when quoting other writers who have chosen not to capitalize it. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven I have included the Biblical text for the scriptures referred to as endnotes, collected at the end of each chapter. I have utilised the standard method of referring to particular verses throughout and have used Arabic numerals rather than writing the numbers out in full. For example, John 3:16 refers to the 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of the book of John in the Bible. The reference Genesis 26-30 would require the reader to read from the beginning of the 26th chapter of Genesis, to the end of the 30th chapter.

Abbreviations

AICs	African Independent Churches
ELCACC	Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre (commonly known as Rorke’s Drift)
LTC	Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo (also known as Umphumulo)

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Introduction

Preamble

Azaria Mbatha's work reveals a critical response to influences he encountered in his lifetime, related to the various religious and cultural ideologies and paradigms present throughout his time in South Africa and later in Sweden. These include the influence of family and friends and the ways in which they read and interpreted the Bible and the influence of the Bible itself subject to Mbatha's own active interpretation. It is the proposition of this dissertation that these influences, incorporated into Mbatha's personal worldview, are expressed through his use of Biblical texts and themes in his work, and can thus be deciphered. Towards this end, various approaches to meaning making are necessary and Henry Drewal provides some helpful insights on the interpretation of meaning in art as he writes that:

...meaning is continually emergent, elusive, and constructed from available evidence, namely oral and written literature, the discourse of local specialists, the close examination of the historical and cultural milieu of the work, its morphology, imagery, uses, and its relationship to other arts in performance contexts (cited in Hackett 1996: 15).

Most of these factors will be taken into consideration in this dissertation as I consider Azaria Mbatha's graphic work, focusing particularly on his use of Biblical themes as a central aspect of his iconography. The political, Africanist and proselytizing aspects of his work emphasized by other writers will be examined here (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 207), as well as the manner in which he utilizes these influences in his construction of his own identity as a black Zulu *kholwa* male in South Africa, and later as an artist of the diaspora in Sweden. The South African context in which he grew up is therefore also crucial to an understanding of his work and a purely aesthetic inquiry is therefore insufficient as any art object is not isolated within a purely coincidental social setting (Mitchells cited in Chalmers 1973: 251). An examination of this context in the former half of the twentieth century is therefore especially important, as is a study of Black Theology and various other relevant political factors.

Protest and Identity

There are various reasons for the choice of this subject as a dissertation topic. Firstly, the role of art production as a means of protest and expression of identity during the Apartheid

era has been relatively neglected as an area of study, even though the results of such studies could be valuable to many areas within the humanities. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre (ELCACC) at Rorke's Drift (1962-1982), popularly known as Rorke's Drift, played a significant role as one of the few centres of training for black artists in South Africa during the Apartheid era (1913-1994). Rorke's Drift was in fact one of only three fine art training centres for black South Africans at the time, the other two being the Ndoleni Specialist Art Teachers' Course (1949-1981) affiliated to the Ndoleni Teacher's Training College (popularly known as the Ndoleni Art Centre/School), and the Polly Street Art Centre (1945-1960) in Johannesburg. Rorke's Drift has acquired a high profile in the South African art world as local and international interest in the emergence of black pioneer art has intensified. Because these centres played such a crucial role in the development of the artists who trained there, many of whom have gained national and international renown, it is important to investigate the factors that led to this development.

This increased interest in black pioneer art could be due to an international attraction to the products of non-western cultures, a trend which began during the Enlightenment when African and Oceanic Art (referred to as 'Primitive' art) grew in popularity and availability and inspired many of the artists at that time. It was seen as exotic and its perceived naivety and static nature provided a longed-for alternative to the instability caused by rapid social, political and economic changes taking place in Europe at the time.

The art object

In discussing African art, Hackett suggests that because the term 'primitive' is problematic. It belies the assumption that all societies progress through fixed stages of development, from primitive to sophisticated, uncivilised to civilised and implies that western values are somehow inherently superior to any others (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 9). This is a questionable assumption as there are many 'primitive' societies which provide a 'perfectly viable 'design for living'' (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 9). The questioning of if this widely held view of western superiority contributed to an understanding of cultural relativism and increased the realization of cultural borrowing (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 9). Bearing this in mind, Susan Vogel argues that African art can still be described as traditional, not in the sense of being static, but rather as 'drawing on inherited cultural

patterns and responding gradually to change' (Vogel 1991 cited in Hackett 1996: 4), a definition utilized throughout this dissertation.

This study also aims to move away from interpreting African art on a purely formal basis towards considering the relevant facets of African thought systems as recommended by Hackett in her work *Art and Religion in Africa* (1996) as religious beliefs play a central role in the creation of artefacts and art in Africa exhibits various functions possibly unfamiliar to the western mind and diverse interpretations and applications are thus possible. For example, in Africa, many everyday items are considered as art; their functional use does not detract from their artistic value. Furthermore, their affective or transformative power contributes to the perception of these objects as 'art' as they represent more than what can be seen or heard or thought at any given time (Hackett 1996: viii).

However, Prown (1984: 313) argues that art can be a means as well as an end. An investigation of these art objects (art history as opposed to history of art) can help researchers to understand the individuals and societies that created the works (Prown 1984: 313). A researcher can choose to 'focus on the object to understand culture' or to 'use culture to understand the object'; this study aims to do both (Fryd 1994: 4).

African identity

Considering the issue of identity, to what extent can Mbatha's work be defined as 'African' art considering that he has lived longer in Sweden than in South Africa? A number of writers have offered opinions varying from describing him as completely and essentially African, to portraying him as a completely acculturated artist who continues to use an African idiom for financial reasons, a strategy of which Mbatha (2005: 289) was most certainly aware. Rhoda Rosen suggests that stressing Mbatha's ethnicity may serve to reinforce a tradition of art history which '[reduces] art to no more than an expression of culture rather than the product of an individual' (1993: 9) and thus perpetuate 'racist and essentialist myths about exotic, black, rural tribalism' (1993: 10). She admits that some black artists 'Otherise' themselves in order to be more acceptable to the white market, but also acknowledges that art historians are apt to 'Otherise' black artists, forcing them to be 'representative' of black creative production in general. Many writers ignore the fact that although much of Mbatha's childhood did contain elements of the rural Zulu context,

many of his 'essentially African' works were produced after he had commenced tertiary education in Sweden (Rosen 1993: 13). Moreover, he depicts human figures and was raised a Christian, factors which would directly prevent his work from being described as 'authentically Zulu' (Rosen 1993: 15). At times Mbatha deliberately chose to use Zulu traditional symbolism, even while in Sweden, because he felt that aspects of Zulu culture were common to all cultures and could thus allow his work to communicate to a wide audience (cited in Eichel 1986: 6). Mbatha's work also exhibits a degree of Pan-Africanism as he sometimes depicts figures in his works wearing masks, a practice never practiced by the Zulu. Nevertheless, he has stated that he does not consider himself just an African artist (cited in Eichel: 1986: 7). Therefore, I aim to follow Rosen's suggestion to allow conflicting aspects of his personal story to inform his work (1993: 15).

Artist as Subject

In his Inaugural Lecture at the College de France, Roland Barthes stated that art production facilitates the artist's enunciation of himself as a subject rather than an object and allows him to establish his authority over both his own creativity and himself (cited in Oguibe 1999: 19, 20). Albert Elsen broadens this idea as he states that art, which he defines as 'the aesthetic, imaginative and skilful interpretation of experience,' has played a significant role in 'man's attempt to master and enjoy his environment and to liberate himself' (cited in Chalmers 1973: 252). This is in turn linked to Marx' earlier association of art with forms of production and ownership as 'men use art in the struggle for power among classes' (cited in Chalmers 1973: 250). I aim to ensure that I do not deny Mbatha 'the right to language and self-articulation', without which he would become 'incarcerated ... in the policed colonies of Western desire' (Oguibe 1999: 19).

Mbatha as an artist of the diaspora

Concerning the use of the term 'diaspora', it comes from the Greek word meaning 'to disperse'. It was originally used exclusively with reference to the Jews who were forced to leave their homeland but has come to refer to anyone who has settled outside of their country of origin, including those who have been forcibly removed, refugees and those in exile, self-imposed or otherwise (Kelley & Patterson 2000: 14). The various constituent elements of a diasporic consciousness include: a dispersal from the homeland, often by violent forces, the creation of a memory and a vision of that homeland, a sense of real or

imagined relationship to the homeland, marginalisation in the new location, a commitment to the maintenance and restoration of the homeland and a desire for return to and continuing relationship with the homeland (Edwards 2001: 52; William Safran cited in Kelley & Patterson 2000: 15). Many of these aspects are present in Mbatha's work to the extent that he could be identified as an artist of the African diaspora. A question which might aid in establishing an understanding of the Pan-African view, as it relates to a diasporic consciousness is: 'When did black people stop being African and when did Africans stop being black?' According to Nathan, the Pan-African legacy and Black Theology insist that the answer to this question is 'never' (2000: 19).

Expressing dissent

Secondly, this study will also be valuable in conveying ways in which art can provide a way for an artist to express views that are contrary to those of the prevailing hegemonies, responses that would be forbidden if made explicit. Robin Collingwood, an English philosopher and historian, has emphasized the fact that art can be used to motivate people to act according to what is 'necessary for group survival' (cited in Chalmers 1973: 251) and can therefore be effective in questioning and perhaps even changing the *status quo*. Mbatha's links to various religious institutions and ideologies are significant here as churches played a vital role in the counter-hegemonic struggle during the Apartheid regime. Some churches gave the disempowered a voice to protest, others denied that there was any reason for protest, whilst others provided a religious diversion. These ideas will be expanded upon in later chapters. The manner in which Mbatha combines the abovementioned aspects in his work through selecting and combining various Biblical and political themes is of particular interest in this study. In keeping with Herbert Dhlomo's advice to reject the idea of 'art as a luxury and pastime of the well-to-do and the economically secure' Mbatha adopts the view that the role of the artist is vital in any ideological struggle as he 'can touch the mind, heart and spirit of the people' and furthermore that he can 'speak on the universal level denied him in politics' (cited in Couzens 1985: 316).

Biblical themes

Thirdly, many artists in South Africa before and since Mbatha have used Biblical themes extensively, if not exclusively; in this aspect Mbatha's work is not unique. What is of

interest is his motivation for utilizing this particular subject matter, especially as he claims to no longer embrace Christianity as one might expect from an artist producing Biblically based work as prolifically as he has done. He states that he prefers a ‘universal religion’ instead (Mbatha 1996). This aspect will be investigated in chapter one where the degree to which Mbatha and his upbringing and context can be described as *kholwa* (Christianized or westernized) will be discussed. A number of studies have been conducted on the production of Biblically based art at Rorke’s Drift (see below), but to date, little emphasis has been placed on an exegetical deciphering of Mbatha’s use of Biblical texts in his work. Mbatha aimed to ‘Africanise’ scripture through his images and desired for it to be ‘read’ and interpreted just as the Bible has been read and interpreted thus reversing the persistent privileging of word over image in much contemporary scholarship. Towards this end, I will attempt to decipher Mbatha’s work exegetically as one would exegete a written text, taking into account the inherent differences between these two forms of communication. I use the term exegesis to refer to an exposition or interpretation of the text at hand rather in the strictly academic or theological sense.

Scope of work

In order to gain an accurate impression of his work this study will include work from Mbatha’s time at Rorke’s Drift, as well as work produced in Sweden where he still lives thus providing greater insight into Mbatha’s retention of Biblical themes. The fact that Mbatha still used Biblical texts even in his later work is worthy of study and this fact alone sets this research apart from much other research which tends to focus primarily on the work he produced at Rorke’s Drift and in the years soon after it closed. Achieving this aim is somewhat problematic as many of his works are undated, dated incorrectly or untitled altogether (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 71). The catalogue for Mbatha’s 1998 *Retrospective Exhibition* will be used as the decisive standard for dating and titling the works pictured therein, and every effort will be made to date his remaining works accurately.

Another aspect to be considered is Mbatha’s use of moralizing and autobiographical narratives which he garners and adapts from Biblical text. This is possible because of the universal nature of Biblical text and the wide assortment of narratives contained therein which allow it to be applied to differing personal and collective situations with relative ease. This and further reasons for Mbatha’s use of Biblical text and imagery in his art will be explored in chapter four.

Previous studies

As mentioned earlier, some work has been done in terms of ascertaining the theological significance of Mbatha's work but more study is needed in exploring the pictorial details of Mbatha's use of Biblical texts and how they reflected his views. Work that has been done includes various exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues, including Mbatha's first *Retrospective Exhibition* organized by James Thorpe in 1965 (Thorpe 1994: 22), various *Art – South Africa – Today* exhibitions (1967, 1969 and 1973), various graphic art exhibitions in South Africa and abroad, the *Spiritual Art of Natal* exhibition held at the Tatham Art Gallery in 1993, and a second *Retrospective Exhibition* at the Durban Art Gallery in 1998. The catalogue for this exhibition includes a comprehensive list of Mbatha's exhibitions, awards, commissions and the collections in which his work is to be found (Addleson 1998:15-24). Two publications focusing on Mbatha himself are Theo Sundermeier's *Südafrikanische Passion: Linoschnitte von Azaria Mbatha* (1979) and Werner Eichel's *Azaria Mbatha: in the Heart of the Tiger* (1986). Other relevant publications including references to his work include *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa* (1997) and *Rorke's Drift: Empowering Prints - Twenty years of Printmaking in South Africa* (2003), both by Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin. Publications centering on Mbatha include the abovementioned exhibition catalogue from the *Azaria Mbatha: Retrospective Exhibition* (1998), incorporating theological readings of his work by Juliette Leeb-du Toit and Gerald West, as well as Leeb-du Toit's doctoral thesis *Contextualizing the use of Biblically derived and metaphysical imagery in the work of Black artists from KwaZulu-Natal : c1930-2002* (2003). Another work published recently is Mbatha's autobiography *Within loving memory of the century* (2005).

Despite the availability of the publications mentioned, more study is necessary in exploring, amongst other things, what the pictorial details of Mbatha's work express, based on recent research conducted in the context in which he worked. Much of the writing on Mbatha's work tends to oversimplify his rather complex context, partly because much of the emphasis is placed on his years at Rorke's Drift which formed only a small (albeit significant) part of his artistic career. Jill Addleson (1998: 9) writes in the preface to his *Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue* that, especially during the sixties, Mbatha received attention almost exclusively from art historians who, for the main part, glossed over the theological readings of his work and skimmed over the rich African historical symbolism

contained in his narratives. It is the intention of this study to proceed beyond such oversimplified readings of his work by including information gleaned from more recent texts, such as Mbatha's autobiography and Leeb-du Toit's doctoral thesis. The process I think will demonstrate that the meanings of Mbatha's works are often ambiguous, thus attesting that 'ambiguity has been the price of survival' for many Africans subjected to the contradictions of Postcolonial Africa (Marks 1986: 14).

Thematic framework

In an effort to expand on previous studies I have examined Mbatha's work in terms of a thematic framework rather than looking at individual works only. In the first four chapters, I will lay the foundation for the investigation of these themes. Firstly, I will investigate Mbatha's context as *kholwa*, a term used to denote a Christian and/or westernized Zulu. Every artist is influenced by the context within which he or she works. It is thus necessary to consider the context that shaped Mbatha as a person and as an artist. This includes a review of his upbringing and family life, his years spent studying and teaching, and the years spent in self-imposed exile in Sweden. Mbatha was not a passive receiver at the mercy of these various influences though and in many instances, he challenged and critically grappled with the various pressures he faced. In the second chapter, I will consider the development of contemporary belief systems and African Independent Churches (AICs) in the context of the political situation in South Africa to ascertain their role in the visual and conceptual development of Mbatha's work. In the third chapter, I have included an examination of Liberation Theology, Black Theology and African Theology in relation to Mbatha's work. In the fourth chapter I have considered the degree to which scripture can be and has been used by Mbatha as both inspiration and autobiography. At times, his work is didactic in that he not only expresses his own situation but also aims to bring about change that is more widespread. For Mbatha Biblical texts clearly functioned as an inspiration for his work and gave him a means for autobiographical expression as he applied Biblical texts to his own situation as well as to the universal human condition.

The thematic studies that follow will include further consideration of individual works but essentially I shall be looking at how they interrelate in terms of the Mbatha's development as an artist and a thinker by investigating consistencies and contrasts in the individual

works. In particular, I hope to decipher the particular iconography he employs and lay the groundwork for further studies on other themes not included in this study.

There are a number of reasons for studying Mbatha's work thematically. Firstly, many of his works exhibit recurring themes as he attempts to integrate and understand the various influences he experiences. Each repetition of a particular theme offers another opportunity to gain deeper insight into the issues at hand. This functions similarly to the oral narrative in which repetition has a mnemonic function. As a result, to study each work discretely would prevent a full appreciation of Mbatha's work precisely because much of the meaning of the work is gained by comparing it to his other works both synchronically and diachronically. Themes provide a versatile framework for this comparison. Secondly, interpretation of each theme requires some understanding of the influences that inspired the illustration of that theme, and it is therefore practically more expedient to arrange works according to themes in order to place them in context and read them in light of additional information.

Themes

The first theme to consider is that of the apocalyptic book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, as interpretations and adaptations of the extraordinary visions of St John the Evangelist recur in Mbatha's work in various forms. Some of his most well known pieces have been illustrations of passages of the book of Revelation. The second theme under scrutiny is the depiction of Christ as a heroic figure. Many facets of Jesus' character and person are depicted in the Bible but one that appears throughout is that of Jesus as heroic martyr, a theme emphasized in the book of Revelation as well. In this case, Biblical text takes on a somewhat subversive role and considerations of martyrdom and Black Theology become essential. The third and last theme under discussion in this dissertation is the focus on reconciliation and healing and particularly Mbatha's use of Biblical text as affirming the human condition.

Methods and Paradigms

Discourses from within the fields of Postmodern and Postcolonial study will provide a theoretical framework for this study. These discourses are particularly helpful in that they provide a starting point from which to investigate issues such as African artists'

assimilation of predominantly (although not originally) European vocabularies and belief systems in their work.

The capacity to express resistance to colonial forces within the artistic idiom was greatly resisted by various factors present in Africa in the early 20th century. Attempts were made to destroy the material culture of colonised groups and these same groups were disallowed access to formal art training (Oguiibe 2002: 245). This left only two forms of resistance. Artists could continue working in the material culture tradition that the colonial authorities aimed to eradicate or they could contest western artistic expression by mastering its forms and techniques in order to nullify its exclusivity (Oguiibe 2002: 245). Mbatha's work seems to incorporate the second option in terms of both his technique and his inspiration.

'Colonialism' in South Africa

In the South African context the use of the term 'colonialism' and its derivatives requires some qualification. South Africa has never been 'colonised' as those who arrived as settlers did not originally come with the aim of expanding the territories of nor remaining subject to the jurisdiction of their home countries. However, settlers often attempted to perpetuate the laws and norms of their own culture and frequently attempted to compel the native inhabitants to comply with those norms in various forms. Despite this discrepancy, the effects of the various groups of settlers have been similar to the effects of 'official' colonization and the use of Postcolonial theory is thus still relevant.

Viewing Mbatha's work from a Postcolonial perspective makes the critical dimension in his imagery more apparent as he seems to denounce the destruction that the importation of a foreign religion like Christianity can cause (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 37). A good example of this is his work *The Tower of Babel* (1979) (Figure 1) based on Genesis 11:1-11¹. Here Mbatha aims to show the results of Zulu communities aspiring to western culture at the expense of their own. The tower they had built in their unsanctioned aspirations collapses making ascension impossible. The doors of the huts in the picture are closed indicating that access to the familiar and a return to the past in the form of traditional culture and ancestor veneration is restricted (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 40). Here Mbatha uses Biblical themes and imagery to present a personal view on the effects of westernization on Zulu culture and in Postcolonial terms he uses the methods and images of the centre to uphold the cause of the 'other' and thus indict the centre. As I understand it, the term 'centre' is usually considered

to refer to Europe and the United States of America, whilst the term 'peripheral' generally refers to the Third World.

Postcolonial paradigms

In Postcolonial terms the assimilated culture is deconstructed, altered, and in the process, decentred, as those who are marginalised use the language of the centre to speak back to and indict the centre. Hackett (1996: viii) asserts that art and artefacts in pre-colonial societies function as 'mnemonic devices' in that they aid the memory, facilitate material-spiritual communication (assuming a duality between the two) and give 'insight into metaphysical systems' and are thus used as 'pedagogical tools'. These functions persist in Mbatha's work and show how the colonized can use a pre-colonial discourse to speak back to the colonizer as well as to his fellow colonized about contemporary (Postcolonial) issues. Because of this interplay, combined with factors of modernization, de-colonization and urban development, the border between centre and periphery is blurring.

It is on this theoretical basis that I will be examining the work of Azaria Mbatha looking particularly at the interplay between the conceptually central and peripheral themes through his use of Biblical imagery.

Postmodernism

The link to Postmodernism emerges in the syncretistic nature of many of Mbatha's ideas concerning issues of faith and culture. He seems to adhere to the Postmodern practice of dissolving meta- and master narratives by allowing and encouraging inter-textual interpretation. For example, many of his works hold both personal and universal significance depending on the interpretation of the work. Mbatha does not seem to have a uniform approach to incorporating political and religious ideas into his works, and therefore one particular device, such as the depiction of a figure as white or black, can have specific significance in one work, whilst being purely coincidental in another. This is similar to the utilization of *pastiche* and double coding in Postmodernism where one image or symbol can represent various things on various levels. The inconsistency of his symbolism opens his work to varied interpretation in a manner that seems both intentional and desired as it allows both individual and universal interpretations of his work. The reader can determine the meaning of the work and its significance is gained from how it is

read and interpreted as well as from the meaning is intended. Such use is largely possible because Biblical text has elements of both general and specific applicability.

This layering of meaning is also evident in his recently published autobiography and shows how well the Postmodern paradigm is suited to this study. Mbatha emphasizes the manner in which the historical text affects the present, and his work has a strong narrative element, both of which are trends within Postmodernism, in contrast to Modernity's emphasis on the autonomous artwork and pre-occupation with the future. Furthermore, he utilizes the same Bible that has been used to support patriarchal authority to overturn the notion of authority itself.

A particular example of how Mbatha's works can be read using a combination of Postcolonial and Postmodern paradigms can be seen in Gerald West's essay 'Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37-50) with Azaria Mbatha and Others' published in Mbatha's *Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue* (1998). West documents the re-reading and re-contextualising of the story of *Joseph* (1964-1965) (Figure 2), a young boy called by God to accomplish great things. After speaking about the dreams God had given him to his brothers they sold him into slavery and he later found himself living alone in a foreign culture, unjustly accused and unfairly jailed and eventually restored and reconciled with his family, a story with which many people in a Postcolonial context can identify. He connects each of the events and situations in Joseph's life to areas of Postcolonial and Postmodern discourse without detracting from or distorting any one of the contributing discourses and in doing so shows how much of Biblical text can be read in this way, deliberately or naively. Other aspects of Mbatha's work which exhibit Postmodern tendencies will be more exhaustively explored in due course.

Theologies

Elements of Black Theology and Liberation Theology will also be explored in the course of this dissertation as Mbatha was influenced by time spent in debate with students from the nearby LTC at Mapumulo at a time when Black Theology was in its embryonic stages in South Africa. The importance of this College at the time is evidenced by the fact that in 1972, a few years after Mbatha boarded there, a significant theological conference entitled *A Relevant Theology for Africa* was held there and the proceedings, edited by Hans-Jurgen Becken were published the subsequent year. The students at the college may have

influenced Mbatha as he speaks of how he had discussions concerning religious issues with them even when he wasn't boarding there. Some theologians, including Bengt Sundkler and Theo Sundermeier, believe that Mbatha may also have had a reciprocal influence as his work extolled 'African values and their discourse of protest' (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39).

The young Mbatha was influenced by his 'very religious' *kholwa* father, a Zulu convert to Christianity, who, together with his mother, still adhered to many traditionalist practices (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). Mbatha's uncle, Alphaeus Zulu, studied at the LTC in Mapumulo and later became a bishop in the Lutheran church (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). In addition to this Mbatha was acquainted with the ideas of Laduma Madela, a famed heaven-herd (see chapter two) and a proponent of indigenous neo-Christian churches. Because of these varied influences, it is essential to study the different belief systems and worldviews employed by these groups in order to understand the context in which Mbatha worked.

Again, the aim is not to repeat earlier research, but to link previous areas of research in a new way, and to make new discoveries and add some insight in the process. In Chalmers' article on 'The Study of Art in a Cultural Context' he references Alphons Silbermann when he writes that the 'study of what the artist has to 'say,' of how he says it, and of how his message is received' can enhance our awareness of 'the broader process of social communication which makes society possible' (1973: 254).

Methods

The various methods used in this study are adapted from the work of two researchers quoted in Chalmers' article, namely R. Mukerjee and H. Haselberger, as they have offered various methods of considering an artist's context when interpreting his work. Both agree that the artist's 'social and ideological background' and biographical information as well as the position and role of that artist within the general art tradition must be taken into account as this would necessitate an understanding of the artist and his work within the structure of his own culture. The researcher must obviously do a detailed study of the art objects themselves and trace the various connections and reciprocal relations between the art object, the artist and his context (1973: 252).

An important factor to be explored is the interaction between Zulu cosmology and the worldview of the western Church, and how the two were amalgamated practically and theologically both in reality and in Mbatha's work. This will be discussed in chapter two.

In this study, I have primarily used qualitative methods in that I have aimed to contextualize Mbatha's work, thus enabling a more accurate interpretation of his work. I did not start with a fixed hypothesis to prove but rather allowed exploration to take place, allowing questions and issues to emerge as my knowledge increased (Krauss 2005: 760). Because much of what I write is based on my interpretation of the work, I am aware that a degree of bias and idiosyncrasy is inevitable, but I have aimed to keep this bias to the minimum. One could even state that a realist (or critical realist, or postpositivist) approach has been used because 'while positivism concerns a single concrete reality and interpretivism multiple realities, realism concerns multiple perceptions about a single, mind-independent reality' (Krauss 2005: 761). Rather than being value-free, or value-laden, as in positivist or interpretive research respectively, realism is value cognizant and thus comprehends that reality and perceptions of reality will always differ, because although that reality may be independent of one's own perceptions thereof, one's knowledge of that reality will always depend on one's own perceptions (Krauss 2005: 761). Obviously, the researcher does aim to avoid the act of ventriloquy, and sets aside his or her own preconceptions on the subject at hand in order to elucidate more fully the intended meaning of the artist. There will always be a degree of 'speaking for' the artist because from a constructivist viewpoint interpretation is essential to meaning making (Krauss 2005: 765).

In conclusion, a diverse array of influences coalesces in Mbatha's graphic works and a study of these influences is essential in any attempt at meaning making. The next four chapters will examine these various influence and the following three chapters will apply these influences in deciphering Mbatha's actual work according to the three themes chosen. This should clarify the manner in which Mbatha employs the themes studied here, whilst affording greater insight into various other themes present in his work and similar themes present in the work of other artists.

¹ **Genesis 11:1-9:** ¹And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. ²And it happened, as they traveled from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar. And they lived there. ³And they said to one another, Come, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴And they said, Come, let us build us a city and a tower, and its top in the heavens. And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth. ⁵And Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of Adam had built. ⁶And Jehovah said, Behold! The people *is* one and they all have one language. And this they begin to do. And now nothing which they have imagined to do will be restrained from them. ⁷Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they cannot understand one another's speech. ⁸So Jehovah scattered them abroad from that place upon the face of all the earth. And they quit building the city. ⁹Therefore the name of it is called Babel; because Jehovah confused the language of all the earth there. And from there Jehovah scattered them abroad on the face of all the earth.

Chapter 1: Mbatha's context as *kholwa*

A brief history of the church in Africa

The history of European (and American) mission work in Africa is multifaceted. There are the official maps describing the work of official missionaries but an informal progression of the gospel through Africa has also taken place, largely because of the work of Africans themselves (Gray 1978: 89; Sundkler & Steed 2000: 81). Many writers on the history of the church in Africa have tended to emphasize the efforts of the American or European missionaries. In contrast, Sundkler and Steed (amongst others) contend that the role of the African agent in the spread of the gospel has been overlooked and they claim that frequently, when missionaries arrived in an area, there was a group of young men there who already knew the stories and the songs they intended to share. Returning slaves were also pivotal in this process as they were often a mixed people in need of a new community which was provided by the group of believers (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 81-84). The vast migrations that occurred in Africa as a result of slavery and warring between factions and groups led to a large number of 'detribalised' people who were attracted by the security offered at the mission stations (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 323). This was especially the case in South East Africa, and more specifically in Zululand and Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal), obviously predominantly due to warring factions rather than returning slaves. This in turn created an ambitious black bourgeoisie, which would later become the seedbed for African Nationalism as they understood the effects of colonialism and because of their leadership training in the church they were able to liaise with the white authorities (Etherington 1971: 294, 341, 342). Richard Gray writes that African Christians were not only involved in propagating an alien religion on African soil, but in transforming the 'purely Western, parochial understanding of Christianity itself' (1978: 90).

***Kholwa*: In search of a definition**

The factors mentioned above, and others that I will mention later, all influence the development of what would become known as the *amakholwa*. The word *kholwa* refers to a Zulu convert to Christianity, literally a 'believer' (Doke et al. 1990) but the word has also come to refer to the westernised Zulu who is not necessarily a believer. Already the ambiguities surrounding the term, and those consequently classified as *kholwa*, are

apparent. Shula Marks discusses these ambiguities in her book *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* (1986), noting that the existence of ambiguity disallows us from saying one thing at a time, but forces and enables us to ‘operate at several levels simultaneously’, or in other words to ‘write in chords’ (viii). It is due to this ambiguity that Mbatha’s work is able to contain multiple levels of meaning and thus function at several levels simultaneously.

Applying such an inconsistently translated and defined word as *kholwa* to a person, especially a person such as Azaria Mbatha, can be problematic. In this chapter, I aim to consider the extent to which we can refer to Mbatha and his upbringing as ‘*kholwa*’, keeping in mind the diverse meanings and various ambiguities associated with this word.

Account of the *amaKholwa*

Shaka became king of the amaZulu in 1816 and aimed to amalgamate all the chiefdoms of South East Africa under his rule. Those who tried to resist were either destroyed, or absorbed into the Zulu nations, or forced to flee. It was into this milieu that the first missionaries arrived in 1835 (Etherington 1971: 7). The Voortrekkers arrived from the Cape in 1839, complicating matters further as they gained control of Dingane’s land renaming the portion of it they occupied the Republic of Natalia (Etherington 1971: 9).

In the 1860s, Theophilus Shepstone, the secretary of Native Affairs in Natal, encouraged missionaries to act as surrogate chiefs and magistrates in the rural areas where they had already settled (Etherington 1971: 48), and this contributed to the belief on the part of the African people that having a missionary on one’s side could be very advantageous when dealing with the colonial administration as well as neighbouring tribes (Etherington 1971: 140). In the same decade, under Shepstone’s direction, a law was passed which exempted some Africans, particularly westernized Christian Africans, from Native Law (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 367; Marks 1986: 26).

Despite the material benefits of becoming a convert, very few Nguni became Christians as the missionaries required them to refrain from participating in *lobola*, polygyny, drinking beer or consulting ‘witchdoctors’ (Etherington 1971: 83, 84). In a relatively recent conversation with Mbatha in Lund, Sweden, Danilowitz records Mbatha as saying: ‘They didn’t want to be converted...Cetshwayo didn’t want Christianity. A Christian Zulu was a spoilt Zulu. And most of the conflict was through this Christianity. That the Zulu shouldn’t

be Christianized' (Danilowitz 1998: 26). The heathen Zulu often ridiculed African Christians and excluded them from both the benefits and penalties of Zulu society. Those who were baptized were treated as dead or as strangers and 'ceased for all practical purposes to be Zulus' (Etherington 1971: 190) In short: 'Until the Zulu War [in 1879,] Christianity and Zulu citizenship were mutually exclusive' (Etherington 1971: 190, 191).

Even though the Cape Nguni and Sotho chiefs had adopted a 'court chaplain' in order to gain prestige and the extra defense offered by the presence of a missionary, the Zulu royalty considered themselves invulnerable and therefore felt that they had no need of this form of protection (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 362). Zulus who became Christians were not allowed to serve in the Zulu army and it was therefore disadvantageous for the monarchy to allow Zulus even the possibility of conversion.

It was consequently the 'tribeless', the homeless, people of mixed origin and those fleeing from awkward or dangerous situations who flocked to the mission stations seeking the security and community they offered. These 'refugees' were often in disgrace for having rebelled against the customs of their own groups, or were disenfranchised by these traditions and norms and were therefore more open to adopting the ways insisted upon by the white missionaries. The Christian offer of eternal life was made more attractive considering the continuous threat of death many of these refugees and drifters experienced (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 95, 96). The heathen Zulus observed the characteristics of those settling at the mission stations and this further intensified their distaste for Christianity.

Nonetheless, missionaries were seen as having influence with the Almighty and many were called upon to demonstrate their rainmaking powers and control over disease when they forbade their converts to consult traditional rainmakers and healers (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 326).

Most missionaries encouraged Victorian ideals of progress and improvement and accordingly introduced the African people to the plow, thus overturning the traditional division of labour in which men tended the animals and women tended the fields, and allowing the people to produce more than they needed, in turn enabling them to sell their surplus and create monetary wealth. This led to an increased aspiration for accumulation and many *kholwa* eventually became wealthy landowners (Marks 1987: 46). No Zulu was permitted to own land as such under Shaka's rule – land was merely allocated for use.

The mission stations usually included a chapel, a catechismal class, a school, a printing press and a dormitory for the schoolchildren (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 327) and as a result acted as the centres of education for their respective areas. Opinions of these schools varied as parents understood that attendance at the school opened the child to possibly undesirable religious teaching (Etherington 1971: 149). Furthermore, the youth spent less time in agricultural work because they were at school where they gained an outlook foreign to that of their parents which allowed them to usurp the place of their elders as the mediators between their community and the outside world (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 644). Children at mission schools and inhabitants of mission stations were required to adopt western habits and through the education received, they grew to espouse western ideals which missionaries interpreted and encouraged as indications of conversion. It was felt that the western missionaries represented western values and norms (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 121) and therefore, as Leeb-du Toit writes, 'Christianity and Western culture were seen as synonymous with civilization' (1993: 7) and the degree to which an individual adhered to western Christian norms became the method of separating the 'sheep' from the 'goats' (Makhathini 1973a: 11). Consequently, anyone who desired to be educated and thereby gain access to better employment opportunities had to accept the religious instruction that accompanied the academic training and in turn endeavoured to educate their children as well. It is no coincidence that the Xhosa term for Christians was and is *School* (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 358). As a result, a relatively small but highly educated, elite class of prosperous landowners, clergy, teachers, clerks and interpreters was created (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 358; Marks 1986: 45) and it was this class who became the new leaders in urban African communities (Wilson 1971:111).

This is not to say that those who did adopt mission station life were unaware of the tensions inherent in their situation. As they were encouraged to adopt Victorian notions of progress and improvement, the laws passed by the colonial administration, such as the 1913 Land Act, increasingly restricted their prospects of fulfilling their bourgeois ambitions. It was this conflict that led to what Marks describes as 'the complex interplay between the poles of rejection and co-operation' (1986: 57). Paradoxically, even though the distinctions between the Christian and heathen Africans grew ever more distinct (Etherington 1971:169), it was this Christian African intelligentsia that would become some of the most ardent supporters of the Zulu monarchy (Marks 1986: 45).

There were great upheavals in the church between the years 1920 and 1960, the period during which many African states gained independence from colonial powers (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 608). Schools and missions began to part ways as colonial governments assumed responsibility for schooling. The British in Southern Africa further developed their system of Indirect Rule in which the various chiefs ruled on their behalf and the British even attempted to make use of the Zulu royal family to achieve their own ends (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 609; Marks 1986: 48).

All of the factors mentioned above played a part in forming the circumstances into which Azaria Mbatha was born in 1941 at Mabeka in the Mahlabathini district in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Mbatha describes his family as a 'very religious *kholwa* family' (Leeb du Toit 1998: 38). There is no doubt he was aware of the tensions inherent in his situation as he recalls as a child hearing 'the old people...very traditionalist' constantly debating the differences between traditional beliefs and those of Christianity (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). He was proud of his grandfather's legacy as a combatant of Cetshwayo's army but was simultaneously a product of his *kholwa* father's ambitions (Danilowitz 1998:26).

Mbatha's mother was a renowned interpreter of dreams, and encouraged her children to recount their dreams, a practise not permitted in the Lutheran church (Mbatha 2005: 31). As a result of a dream, his eldest brother, Vela, later became a Zionist priest and Mbatha recounts that Vela drew a hard line between Zionist and Lutheran ideology whilst his father practised hybrid beliefs like other black Lutherans around them (Mbatha 2005: 32, 78). It was this inherent paradox between being a Zulu and being a Christian that informed much of Mbatha's early work (Danilowitz 1998: 28).

In his book *The New African* (1985) in which he examines the influences on the writing of H.I.E. Dhlomo, Tim Couzens describes a work edited by T. D. Mweliso Skota, published in 1930, called *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa* (7). This work is valuable in that it shows the perceptions and ideals of the African bourgeoisie coincident with Mbatha's birth. The book includes biographies of men and women already dead, as well as a 'who's who' of the living. In both sections of the book, Couzens recognizes that certain phrases and words are repeated often enough to promote the view that these terms represent principles and values that were important to the black intelligentsia of the time. He summarizes that the word 'progressive' is the touchstone of the book and states that

Skota's ideal man would be a chief's son who is progressive and has a keen interest in the welfare of his people. This kindhearted Christian gentleman works hard, ploughing fields (preferably his own) and perhaps works as a teacher or interpreter to later become a clergyman or lawyer. Europeans and Africans alike respect him and he is a good speaker and does not drink (1985: 7). These notions of hard work and education, along with a strong progressive element that formed the backbone of African bourgeois society at the time, obviously influenced Mbatha's father and his peers and therefore Mbatha himself.

Mbatha's father was a farmer and as a child, Mbatha helped him with the work in the fields, further evidence of the fact that this was a *kholwa* family as traditional gender roles had been done away with. As mentioned before, one of the major priorities for any *kholwa* family was education and so at the age of 7 Mbatha began his schooling at Mabeka School. The school could only cater for learners until Standard Four (Grade Six) and so he was sent to Mahlabathini to do Standards Five and Six (Addleson 1998: 12). While there, he boarded with the Rev. A. P. Xakaza who was a teacher before becoming a Lutheran priest (Addleson 1998: 12). He was referred to as an *Umphathisifunda*, a Senior Pastor, and was an influential man in the district of Mahlabathini (Mbatha 1998b: 63). Mbatha describes him as 'a real Lutheran - work - work for God like people work hard and very hard. No hour was wasted doing nothing' (Addleson 1998: 12). 'To be a good Christian for him was through work, work, and work hard' (in Danilowitz 1998: 26). While Mbatha was boarding with Rev. Xakaza he was obliged to memorise and retell Biblical stories as part of living out his *kholwa* identity (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). This Protestant / Lutheran / bourgeois work ethic, which originated in the notion of individualism in Victorian times, which Mbatha gained by his father's influence, stayed with him. He describes himself at Rorke's Drift as 'working and reading, always working and reading' while others were at play (Danilowitz 1998: 26).

Mbatha relates that he clearly remembers his father discussing issues of belief in the evenings (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). But although his family appeared to embrace Lutheran Christianity wholeheartedly, his father and mother adhered to many traditionalist practices – a typical occurrence in that context (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38; Makhathini 1973a: 10). This practice could be an example of a distinction between conversion and adhesion recognized by A. D. Nock in his work *Conversion* (1933). He asserts that conversion is a purposeful about-turn away from the old, seen as wrong, toward the new, seen as right; whereas

adhesion is the 'understanding of the new as a useful supplement to traditional religion' (cited in Sundkler & Steed 2000: 96). African Christians began to see that 'much of what missionaries condemned as sinful in Nguni society was not incompatible with economic and educational advancement' and so justified many of the traditionalist practices which had previously been banned (Etherington 1971: 278).

On completion of his primary schooling, Mbatha returned home in order to attend Ceza Secondary School. During this time, he boarded with the Rev. M. Dlamini (Addleson 1998: 13). It was during this time that his religious education and his knowledge of Zulu history were expanded through James Stuart's vernacular histories of the Zulu, which were widely used in Natal schools from 1930 onwards (Danilowitz 1998: 26). It was also during this period that the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 which severely limited the options available to Africans wanting to gain a quality education. The notions of progress and advancement which had been instilled in the mission schools and through various other avenues were frustrated as education became a 'tool of enforcing docility' (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 823).

In 1961, having finished school, he managed to find employment as a pay clerk in a coalmine in the Vryheid district in KwaZulu-Natal. It was at this time that he collapsed during a particularly strenuous boxing training session. This was the first indication of heart disorder that would affect him for much of the rest of his life and he was sent to Ceza Mission Hospital (Addleson 1998: 13).

During his time of convalescence his father told him that he was being punished for disobeying him and working on the mine when he had wanted Azaria to continue his education. Disobeying a parent was tantamount to disobeying God as 'parents for him stood for God as one could not love God if one disobeyed parents' (Addleson 1998: 13). Consequently, Mbatha senior likened Azaria's story to that of Jonah, the Biblical figure who was swallowed by a large aquatic beast, as he attempted to run from what God had told him to do.

Once again, against his father's wishes, he obtained a position at a gold mine on the Witwatersrand. Through routine x-rays for employees he was diagnosed with heart disease and was sent back to Ceza Mission Hospital. It was there that he received his first art instruction from Swedish art teacher Peder Gowenius and his wife Ulla who taught art and

craft to men and women at the hospital as a form of therapy from January to July of 1962. It was at Ceza Mission Hospital that he discovered his ability to create compelling images and one of his first images depicts the story of Jonah (Figure 4), a subject his father was very pleased about as it showed an ‘unspoken resolve not to act counter to his father’s wishes again’ (Danilowitz 1998: 27).

Danilowitz notes that it was convenient for early art history writers to place Mbatha’s use of Biblical themes as a direct result of his contact with mission education. But, as has been the case with other artists in similar situations, those who were writing about these artists were often those who had facilitated their recognition – missionaries, priests, art centres, schoolteachers and various other benefactors (1998: 25). The understanding of Mbatha’s Biblical themes as a direct consequence of mission education is a typical example of the oversimplification that results when the ‘centre’ writes for the cultural ‘other’. Just as Etherington writes that ‘many ... African sermons ... showed originality of thought which could not be attributed to missionary tutelage’ (1971: 295), so the richness and vibrancy of Mbatha’s depictions of Biblical narrative illustrate that mission education was certainly not the only factor. This oversimplification is similar to the idea that the spread of the gospel in Africa was primarily due to the hard work of the European missionaries, whilst it was often the African Christians themselves who were most effective in their evangelism.

Mbatha’s own family, as well as his various guardians and peers, would all have played a part in his prolific and consistent use of Biblical themes. Of his motivation he writes: ‘the great motivation as an Artist was through my father ... His religious teachings and [those of] Rev. Xakaza but mostly my father who was clever in telling stories made me to do what I did’ (in Addleson 1998: 13). Mbatha comments that he intended to ‘Africanise’ the Bible because he had found many similarities between stories from the Bible and Nguni culture and because he was fascinated by the stories his father told him as a boy which included a ‘synthesis of standard Christian accounts and African beliefs’ (Mbatha 1996; Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 48).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre

At this point, it would be helpful to give a short description of the development and workings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre (ELCACC) at Rorke’s Drift. Peder and Ulla Gowenius established it in order to empower the surrounding rural

community by helping them to make an income using already established craft abilities whilst developing and fostering new creative skills (Gowenius 2003: xi; Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). Peder and Ulla, began in 1962 by teaching art as part of a rehabilitation or occupational therapy program at Ceza Mission Hospital. Mbatha was a patient there at the time and was one of Peder's first students. It was Mbatha's print *David and Goliath* (1963) (Figure 3) which truly impressed Gowenius as he began to see that art could have an important social function by 'convey[ing] messages forbidden in South Africa at the time' (Gowenius 2003: xii; Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 174). He states that this restored his faith in art and formed a significant cornerstone in the eventual development of the ELCACC (Gowenius 2003: xii, xiv).

It was at this time (1962) that Peder and Ulla were asked by the Evangelical Lutheran Church to start an art school for African people at Umpumulo. Mbatha attended the school and during this time he developed his linocut technique and learnt weaving as well. It was also at that this time that he boarded with the students at the LTC at Umpumulo. Even when he wasn't boarding at the LTC the students from the two institutions visited each other (Mbatha 1995 in Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). Mbatha states that he was influenced by discussions with them, that 'their arguments on theological questions deepened [his] artistic vision by giving [him] new ideas and a deeper insight' (1969: 30) and he would certainly have encountered the debate concerning African theology. Students at the LTC, especially Manas Buthelezi, a relative of Mbatha's, objected to the lack of consideration shown by the church for African worldviews (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 48). For example, in 1961 a document was drawn up by the recently merged Lutheran missions banning traditional Zulu practices such as polygamy, ancestor veneration and healing practices. These restrictions were reviewed in 1965 by the Lutheran World Federation and subsequently relaxed (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 48).

Early works

It was around this time that Mbatha contemplated becoming a priest, a decision based on the influence of his father and Rev. Xakaza (Danilowitz 1998: 28). The Mbatha family believed that despite colonial ties, the Christian teachings of humility and charity could bring about social harmony. But despite the attractions and advantages of being a *kholwa* mentioned previously, Mbatha's father 'had many question marks about Christianity' and his scepticism concerning the reconciliation of Zulu and Christian demands was passed on

to his son (Danilowitz 1998: 28). Mbatha himself writes: 'It was confusing for me...Christianity and African history...to combine these things. I was always thinking about this' (Danilowitz 1998: 28).

Mbatha's father was understandably very pleased with his son's work as it was closer to his ambitions for his son than his previous employment. Mbatha also states that his father was pleased that the pictures were from stories and because they confirmed that Azaria had understood his teaching (Addleson 1998:13). Mbatha senior organised an exhibition at the family home in 1962 including all ten works Azaria had completed to date (including *Mapumulo College, Jesus carrying the Cross, Nativity/No room at the Inn, Jonah and The Creation*) and invited friends and relatives to view them (Addleson 1998:13). Mbatha states: 'The pictures were my father's great pride. I could use them to teach people. He kept my first pictures in his room until he died in 1972' (Danilowitz 1998: 27).

It was at this stage that Mbatha saw the potential of communicating through pictures and he began to understand his role as an artist as more or less didactic – an aspect which is fundamental to his work (Danilowitz 1998: 27). His rapid assimilation of the linocut technique may be due to its similarity to the technique used to carve *amabhaxa* or sleeping mat racks. The surface of the wood was burnt until it was dark and was then carved in relief to reveal the lighter wood underneath (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 20, 35).

As previously mentioned, Mbatha's contact with the LTC continued even after he no longer boarded there as Mbatha's father was considered 'highly intelligent' regarding religious issues by staff and students there and was asked to address students in the mid 60s (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). The interaction between Mbatha and members of the theological college was so substantial that theologians such as Bengt Sundkler and Theo Sundermeier have suggested that his work pre-empted and anticipated Black Theology, one of the main topics of discussion at a theological consultation at the LTC at Mapumulo in 1972 (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). This assertion is supported by the fact that Fay Goldie wrote in an article in 1973 that a number of theologians had taken great interest in the symbolism of Mbatha's work. These consultations will be explored in further detail in chapter three.

In the second half of 1962, Peder Gowenius moved the school to Rorke's Drift to establish the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre where he remained until 1967.

Peder conducted the graphic art section whilst his wife Ulla taught tapestry to the women. Although their intentions were not originally to start an art school, their new awareness of the segregationist policies in place in South Africa at the time led to an increased social and political awareness (Gowenius 2003: xii). In 1962, it was one of the few places where black artists could receive training and so the centre attracted students from the surrounding areas as well as students from a broader urban and ethnic context (Gowenius 2003: xi; Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39).

Having been invited by Gowenius to join the school, Mbatha gave up his idea of being an office worker and decided to be an artist instead (Danilowitz 1998: 28). He gained his father's approval in this decision partly because the school was close to the LTC at Mapumulo (Danilowitz 1998: 28). Having the two schools in close proximity meant that Mbatha could continue to gain from the intellectual and theological stimulation available at the college and could practice as an artist attached to the school at Rorke's Drift (Danilowitz 1998: 28). It was also the ideal place to work out the conflict he experienced through his interaction with the staff and students there. During his time at Rorke's Drift, he produced many linocuts as well as some screenprints but no etchings yet. Tapestry weaving was also taught at the centre and although Mbatha did not do dedicated tapestry designs at that stage, many of the tapestries produced at the time resemble his designs (Addleson 1998: 13, 14).

Religion at the ELCACC

The perceived religious ethos of the school has been the subject of much discussion. While the centre was at Umpumulo the Evangelical Lutheran Church provided them with some protection from the authorities and was able to assist the couple in various ways. Peder Gowenius did receive a 'missionary's' salary from the Church of Sweden Mission, a fact which has led to the false assumption that the ELCACC was run by missionaries (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 8, 19). Quite the opposite, there was no deliberate intention to create a liturgical bias of any sort. Students of all religious affiliations were accepted and no Christian affiliation was necessary. Despite this there was free religious access and students were invited, if not obliged to attend church services and participate in religious activities at the Lutheran Church. Any underlying religious ethos was sustained by the individual teachers, clergy, or students themselves and was practiced on an individual level (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). Gowenius states that the teachers chose not to engage the

students in discussions concerning political issues but encouraged storytelling instead, interfering only when the ‘suffering African’ theme surfaced (Gowenius 2003: xv), although Rankin and Hobbs state that Gowenius remembers enjoying lengthy discussions about political, social and religious topics with Mbatha. This discrepancy could be because the relationship between Mbatha and Gowenius was more than merely that of a teacher and his student (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 41). A later student Dan Rakgoathe remarks on the ‘intransigence and conservatism of several clergy associated with the Centre, who were also unreceptive of any challenges regarding ideological or religious issues’ (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39) and Mbatha corroborates this in his 1996 catalogue for the African Art Centre exhibition: ‘No one was interested in Biblical things in my surroundings - not even a single teacher ever told me or discussed anything. The pictures are a result of story-telling from my childhood, which came to me when I started using linocuts’. In fact, Mbatha claims that he spearheaded the religious ethos in the 1970s, a fact corroborated by Gowenius when he states that ‘the influence of Azaria Mbatha must not be underestimated’ (Gowenius 2003: xv; Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). Gowenius was not very enthusiastic about Mbatha’s persistent use of Biblical themes but became less reluctant when he saw that these works could be endowed with ‘contemporary significance’ (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 46).

As mentioned before, Mbatha carried some doubts as to the current practice of the Christian church in terms of its focus on western rather than Biblical mores. These doubts were strengthened by the fact much of what he experienced as daily life in South Africa countered his faith. His doubts were similar to those experienced by Africans who had previously endured the paternalistic attitude of the missionaries, often a result of the social Darwinism of the late eighteenth century (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 99, 100). By the middle of the twentieth century segregation, although not legislated, had become the norm in English speaking churches, which reflected the segregationalist attitudes prevalent in society at the time (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 819). Marks writes that the African intelligentsia were ‘both the most ardent believers in the new colonial order and its most vociferous critics’ again illustrating the conflict they experienced (Marks 1986: 13).

Others in his position experienced this conflict too and some mission churches tried to ‘Africanise’ the gospel to increase its relevance to indigenous communities with some success. Mbatha (2005: 301) contends that as legal restrictions on the *amaKholwa*

increased, so the Zulu intelligentsia sought pride in its African heritage and many black priests started churches of their own based on African traditions. As a result, African Independent Churches grew in strength and popularity. Sundkler and Steed (2000: 3) propose that the term 'African Independent Church' is somewhat problematic as all churches are in a sense independent. They go on to state that what would usually be described as African Independent Churches they would rather describe as 'one charismatic movement with local and personal variations' determined by the degree to which people absorbed and adapted western Christianity. African churches responded more freely to Biblical teachings and 'drew selectively on those that found the greatest proximity to their own cultural values, practice and belief systems' (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). This topic is explored further in the next chapter.

In 1964, the Head of the Art Department at the Konstfackskolan based at the University College in Stockholm, Åke Huldt, visited Rorke's Drift to inform Mbatha that he had been awarded a two-year scholarship at the College. This award was based on an exhibition of his work held at the Konstfackskolan earlier in 1964. In 1965, shortly after marrying, Mbatha and his wife Muriel left South Africa and Mbatha enrolled at the Konstfackskolan in 1966 having spent the intervening months learning Swedish. There he specialised in textile design, textile printing, decorative painting and printmaking and was introduced to etching for the first time (Addleson 1998: 14).

He returned to South Africa and towards the end of 1967 and began teaching the newly established Fine Arts Course at the ELCACC. His major teaching subject was textile printing which he introduced to the centre in 1968. During this time, he was able to do etchings on a press purchased from Stockholm in 1967. It was also at this time that John Muafangejo, a Namibian printmaker, was also a student there. Despite these developments he was unhappy and Rankin and Hobbs (2003: 87) write that Helge Fosseus and Ola Granath, directors at Rorke's Drift at the time, 'argued that it had been a mistake to expose him to the freedom of Swedish life and then expect him to return to the exigencies that had to be endured by black people in South Africa'.

In 1969, Mbatha returned to Sweden to settle permanently and gained his matriculation while working for Katja of Sweden as an artist and an assistant textile designer (Addleson 1998: 14; Mbatha 1998a: 54). He began studying for his degree in Art History and Social Science at the University of Lund in Sweden in 1977 and after he gained his degree, he

studied subjects that could be taught to secondary school students such as Psychology and Civics. Between the years 1982 and 1992 he worked as an assistant secretary at the County Council Office in Skåne, Sweden and was able to finish his studies at the Teacher's College at the University of Lund in Malmö, Sweden. It was only in 1993 that he became a full time artist but he continued to conduct research in African historical symbolism as a candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy through the University of Lund. He did the fieldwork for his thesis while visiting South Africa in 1992 and 1995. In 1993 and 1994, he worked as a consultant for the Development Education Department in Aachen in Germany, focussing particularly on development and education in Africa (Addleson 1998:14).

In many ways, the views and ideologies Mbatha holds today are a result of reconciling his traditional influences with his *kholwa* upbringing and his time in Europe. He sees himself as part of two worlds, the present and the past. The latter is remembered by its history and values whereas the former is characterized by contact and fusion between different cultures (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39).

Leeb-du Toit writes that Mbatha acts as a purveyor of a syncretic worldview as he 'embraces a fusion of neo-Biblical morality with values gained from his recollections of his cultural context and other sources' (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39). He does not claim to adhere to any particular belief system but prefers a 'universal religion' and notes that, 'One need not have faith or be religious to be inspired by these stories. It is there for You to choose some parts that encourage you to live and think positively' (Mbatha 1996).

He is presently living in Lund in the southern part of Sweden and describes his relationship to his original home in Zululand as complicated. 'After having lived in Sweden for 22 years, I returned to South Africa but I found that I no longer felt a natural sense of belonging. In spite of these feelings I would still like to return to my original home in Zululand' (Mbatha 1998a: 54).

Going into self-imposed exile in Sweden obviously affected Mbatha's ideologies and perspectives in many ways; some were strengthened while others were changed. The process of collecting, arranging and revising thoughts and memories is an ongoing one (Mbatha 1998a: 54). The distance in time and space between himself and his original home

and childhood gave him the opportunity to process earlier experience from a different perspective and this manifested itself in his work (Mbatha 1998a: 54).

Mbatha writes that these changes can be discerned by the positions taken by himself in his work using his fundamental cultural identity as a sounding board, which in turn reinforced this identity (Mbatha 1998a:54). He writes:

Identity is not a question of geography. I am close to the culture of the village in which I was born, in contrast to the forces that present every change in the shape of cultural assimilation or modernisation as being good in itself. (Mbatha 1998a: 54)

He had feared that when he left the country of his birth, he would lose his creative power (Mbatha 1998a: 55). It is obvious that this has not been the case. He writes that the past is part of one's present identity and even after decades in Europe, he still feels close to his culture, partly because he consciously focuses on various aspects of it – such as the ancestors. This is not fully satisfying though as he goes on to say:

I do have visions of living in my old village or somewhere in South Africa. It would be nice to be close to my people once more; to be near them. (Mbatha 1998a: 55)

Conclusions

H. Dhlomo, a playwright in South Africa, wrote an article in a magazine called *The Democrat* (1945) entitled 'African Attitudes to the European', quoted in *The New African* by Tim Couzens (1985: 32-34). In the article, he describes three categories of Africans: the Tribal African, the Neither-Nor African and the New African. The Tribal African he describes as 'patriotic, buoyant and proud' who lives a Jekyll-and-Hyde existence in his dealings with Europeans. Dhlomo scornfully describes the Neither-Nor African as confused, lost and disillusioned, neither wholly African nor fully European, a violent extremists intent on driving all non-Africans out of South Africa. The New African emerges as the hero, 'free to express himself and his personality fully'. This class is composed of organized urban workers who understand the contradictions and dangers of their situation and are willing to do something constructive and play a part in 'shaping the destiny of [their] country' in which 'race, colour and creed will be a badge neither of privilege nor of discrimination'.

The degree to which Mbatha can be referred to as *kholwa* seems unclear if we consider that the New African Dhlomo describes could also be referred to as the *amakholwa* of the day. Mbatha is certainly not what Dhlomo would describe as a Tribal African, and even though the option of an urban lifestyle was open to him while in South Africa he chose instead to remain in a rural setting, unlike the Neither-Nor African who uncritically accepts and strives for everything ‘capitalistic and Christian, cultured and progressive’ (in Couzens 1985: 33). He shows characteristics of a ‘Christianised’ (as opposed to a converted) Zulu, whilst still retaining a degree of ‘Zuluness’ and in addition to this has adopted many western ideologies, although this could be largely due to his relocation to Sweden. It would seem that Mbatha falls loosely into the category of the New African, excepting the fact that he was not an urban worker, although this had been his original intention. He does embody the notions of progress, defined for him as movement towards an ideal society free of the conflicts he experiences.

Leeb-du Toit writes that Mbatha’s ‘idealist philosophy, steeped in syncretic ideologies, remembered traditional socio-cultural values and an amalgam of Biblically derived ideals, has resulted in a unique yet complex vocabulary’ (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 45) and it is this vocabulary that I will in part decipher in order to gain greater understanding of Mbatha’s work.

Chapter 2: Mbatha within the context of contemporary belief systems and theologies

Introduction

As a *kholwa* son, Azaria Mbatha encountered and experienced various and often conflicting worldviews, which would later be manifested in his artistic production. These included Zulu belief systems, the accepted norms of the mission churches, his father's syncretic practices and the influence of colonialism. In addition, the African Independent Churches, Laduma Madela, the LTC near Rorke's Drift, and ideas associated Liberation Theology which were circulating at the time were all part of his milieu while living in South Africa. These influences will be discussed in the course of this chapter, with the exception of the last two, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Zulu Cosmology

Firstly, a consideration of beliefs that are generally accepted as the foundation of African (and specifically Zulu) cosmology is necessary. Above all, African cosmologies are 'intensely and pervasively religious' (Busia cited in Pobee 1979: 26) and it is virtually impossible to separate the sacred and the secular in study or in practice. In many African cultures reality is seen as 'a unity with visible and invisible aspects' (Ukpong 2000: 24), in contrast to western dualism which draws sharp distinctions between the sacred and secular, matter and spirit. This in turn affects the nature of many African beliefs and practices.

Primary elements in Zulu cosmology include the belief in a Supreme Being, belief in the efficacy of the shades, the employment of medicines in various forms of healing and the fear of witchcraft as the cause of sickness or misfortune (Berglund 1976).

The Supreme Being

The belief in God as the Supreme Being who acts as Creator, Ruler and Preserver, who is both omnipresent and immanent, was and is prevalent in Zulu cosmology and corresponds closely to the Old Testament view of God introduced by the missionaries (Pobee 1979: 74-76; Tutu 1973: 43). For example, prior to missionary contact the name *uZivelele* – the uncaused, self-existent one – was used (Tutu 1973: 43). There are however some

significant distinctions. Zulu groups also used the name *uNkulunkulu* to denote God as the great, great one or the old, old one, as one would refer to a great-great-grandparent (Callaway 1970: 40; Sundkler 1961: 19). He was the first man created; he sprang up out of a bed of reeds, followed by the first woman (Callaway 1970: 40). He was not worshipped by the Zulu and nor did he have prayer addressed to him (Callaway 1970: 17). Callaway states that to appropriate this name for the Christian God would be misleading to the young convert because of the associations attached to it. The name would be more apt for Adam than it would be for God (Callaway 1970: 17).

Accordingly, Callaway (1970: 1-25) asserts that prior to missionary contact God as creator 'was not consistently distinguished from a first ancestor who dwelt beneath' while peoples in eastern Africa distinguished God from the ancestors more easily due to trade with the Arab world and consequent interaction with Islamic beliefs, although coincident with Berglund's writing the distinction was already very clear. The name *iNkosi yeZulu* (Lord of Heaven) was also used by the Zulu to denote the Supreme Creator God and this notion of God was linked with the sky, including thunder, lightning, rain and clouds (Berglund 1976: 37; Sundkler 1961: 20). In contrast to notions of God introduced by missionaries, this Supreme God is seen as withdrawn even though he is omnipresent. He is also not traditionally worshipped as such and prayer is seldom addressed to him directly as it is considered impertinent to speak of him or regard him as a mere acquaintance (Berglund 1976: 42; Bosch 1973: 74; Callaway 1970: 17). He is also seen as having an unpredictable and capricious nature and is thus feared (Berglund 1976: 42).

The Shades

In Zulu cosmology, a person's existence is validated by the fact that he or she is part of a family or community, and this family 'consists of the living, the dead, and the yet-to-be-born' (Pobee 1979: 49; Tutu 1973: 44). The term 'cult of the shades' refers to the veneration of and belief in the efficacy of those already dead, the ancestors, commonly known in Zulu as *idlozi* (pl. *amadlozi*), or 'those who are below' (*abaphansi*). In her 1950 work, Krige (283) stated that 'The real, vital religion of the Zulus is their ancestor worship', although Berglund states that the term 'shade' is preferable to the term 'ancestor' as the latter evokes western ideas of long departed relatives, whereas the former refers to one with whom close and intimate association is possible (Berglund 1976: 29). Tutu writes that this echoes the Israelite belief that death was not a final termination, but

rather the passing from one phase of life to another (Tutu 1973: 44; du Toit 1960: 137). Berglund (1976: 28) also prefers not to use the term veneration or worship when referring to the shades as no prayer is addressed to them directly although one of Callaway's informants states that the *amadlozi* are worshipped. This is because unlike the Supreme God they have been seen and are known by their descendants, just as their descendants are known to them (Callaway 1970: 17) and furthermore, the praise names for the Creator God are very few compared to the praise names given to the *amadlozi* (Callaway 1970: 23). Interaction with the shades would be more rightly termed dialogue or communion in the sense that the descendant communicates his situation to the shades requesting that they 'express themselves' in the situation, on the basis of the understanding that they provide for the material and spiritual needs of the family, as well as for protection from illness and other adversity (Mafico 2000: 485). The intimacy of the relationship with the shades directly contrasts with the remoteness of the Creator and thus part of the intervention of the shades consists of them acting as intermediaries between their descendants and God through intercession (Berglund 1976: 43; du Toit 1960: 139). The relationship is not one-sided, but rather interdependent, as Tutu writes that the shades needed to be remembered by their descendants in order to be assured of immortality (Tutu 1973: 43; du Toit 1960: 136). Food and beer is not offered in the sense of a religious offering, but rather in the sense of a child sharing a meal with its father (Berglund 1976: 28). Furthermore, the king of the Zulus at any given time was able and expected to intercede with the ancestors on behalf of his people and this in turn reinforced his own powers (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 23).

If the shades were neglected, illness, misfortune and death would follow but they could be appeased through animal sacrifices. (Sundkler 1961: 21; Bryant 1917: 141) It must be noted that even in this context of animal sacrifice, the Judaeo-Christian idea of the animal taking suffering and guilt upon itself did not exist (Berglund 1976: 247). Shades could also be displeased if there is not harmony within the family due to individual wrongdoing or troubled relationships. Confession of wrongdoing is necessary, as individual and communal obedience is a requirement for favourable dealings with the shades (Mafico 2000: 485).

Not everyone who died became a shade; 'To qualify to be a [shade] one must have lived to a ripe old age, conducted himself in an exemplary manner and done much to enhance the

standing and prestige of the family, clan, or tribe' (Pobee 1979: 46). Despite other differences concerning the nature of the Supreme God, because shades were senior kinsmen themselves, the concept of God as Father was more easily accepted by connecting the idea with the shades rather than with the existing ideas of the supreme God who was seen as distant (Wilson 1971: 47). This has been reiterated by Temba Mafico (2000: 481) who has drawn comparisons between African ancestors and the Biblical 'gods of the fathers' claiming that their roles in shaping African and Semitic societies respectively are quite similar. This is ironic considering that the veneration of the shades was condemned by many missionaries.

The *inyanga*, the *isangoma*, the *abathakathi* and the *abelusi bezulu*

Other important elements in traditional African belief are the belief in the efficacy of 'medicines' to bring about evil or good, and the fear of witchcraft, both of which have been misunderstood by academics and laymen alike. For Berglund witchcraft is defined as incarnate power geared toward harm and destruction, in other words, 'criminality personified' (Berglund 1976: 266) and therefore worthy of fear.

Misunderstandings are common when discussing the role of medicine and magic in Zulu culture as often the diviner or witch-finder (*isangoma*) and the witch (*umthakathi*) are referred to by the same ubiquitous term – witchdoctor (Makhaye 1973: 159). In addition to these orders of doctors there are also *izinyanga* (herbalists), to whom the diviners may send their patients once the nature of their disorder has been established through various forms of divination, and heaven herds or lightning magicians (*abelusi bezulu*) such as Laduma Madela (Berglund 1976; Sundkler 1961: 20, 23).

The corollary of the belief in witchcraft is that there is no concept of chance, luck or fortune in Zulu cosmology. Any form of suffering has a cause, be it internal or external, and can be treated as such. Traditionally human wrongdoing was thought to bring about universal disorder (Ott 2000: 501). This principle is demonstrated in one of Mbatha's first works, *Jonah* (1962) (Figure 4), which he based on his belief that his heart problems were a result of his disobedience towards his father as mentioned in earlier chapters. This principle is further expressed in his works around the theme of reconciliation which will be discussed in chapter seven.

For Azaria Mbatha as a Zulu man raised in rural Zululand, even though he can be described as a *kholwa* (see chapter one), the foundations of his worldview would have been shaped and moulded by many of the factors mentioned above. His father was a *kholwa* who did not practice traditional religion or Christianity mutually exclusively, but combined the two to form his own mode of worship.

Even though my father was a converted Christian he strove not to accept the whole of western civilisation. I heard him praying first to our ancestors and then to God. Perhaps he recognised that our ancestors were close to the Christian symbols that he remembered from childhood. (Mbatha 2005: 30)

Colonialism and Missionization

Another major factor that would have informed Mbatha's worldview was the two-pronged advance of colonialism and mission activity, institutions that often went hand in hand. In his autobiography Mbatha writes that Christianity took root in Africa not 'because it came with the conquering whites, or because it produced good men, or because its evaluation of the human personality accorded largely with *ubuntu* as a way of life' but rather because 'it imparted valid meaning to blacks in the fabric of white society' (Mbatha 2005: 35-36).

The influence of mission work in Africa has been such that John Mbiti contends that 'Christianity in Africa is so old that it can rightly be described as an indigenous, traditional and African religion' (cited in Ndung'u 2000: 261-62).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, colonialism in Southern Africa introduced many European ideologies and prejudices. In many ways, missionisation and colonialism reinforced one another in a symbiotic relationship. Missionaries took advantage of the infrastructure and security offered by colonizers, settlers, traders and merchants who in turn appreciated the degree of control that the missionaries gave them over the people.

Missionaries frequently insisted that converts renounce all traditional modes of worship, including animal sacrifice and interaction with the ancestors, as well as all cultural customs such as singing and dancing (Anum 2000: 457). But it must be added that the parties being colonized were not 'passive victims of European aggression' but 'purposive participants in events' (Draper 2000: 415); it was a relationship of negotiation rather than simply one of aggression and resistance and is thus far more complicated than is usually acknowledged.

Even though missionaries may not have aimed to undermine Zulu culture, they brought the gospel 'garbed in the gowns of their piety and their denomination' (Becken 1973: 5) and hence one of their biggest difficulties was finding a balance between demanding complete renunciation of everything African from converts, and allowing converts to maintain traditions which were not generally concomitant with Christian beliefs such as polygyny or veneration of the shades. Even without the motivation of the missionaries, traditional life erodes as urbanization occurs:

Rituals must be modified, and detached from a pastoral or agricultural economy as men move to town. Occasions of celebration continue, but imperceptibly the ritual of bringing back the shade of a father merges into a commemoration dinner; or the sacrifice of a white goat after the birth of a child into a baptism feast. Reverence for the dead continues; fear of their power over the living diminishes. (Wilson 1971: 42)

Mission workers aimed to find ways to make the gospel intelligible to the African worldview. However, this was problematic as it involved deciding which aspects of the Christianity being preached are generally accepted as Biblical and representative and which are idiosyncratic to the missionizing culture and thus negotiable. In addition, idiosyncratic practises of one believer could consequently be considered by unbelievers or new believers as authentically Christian (Pobee 1979: 53). The problem of translation of the gospel message continues: 'How can the Gospels be interpreted intelligibly without loss of the essential message?' (Wilson 1971: 74) This is the space Mbatha wished to fill. He believed that the message of Christianity could bring about concord between the peoples of South Africa and aimed to interpret and disseminate the gospel in a way that could be understood by all people, especially the Zulu.

Having considered Zulu social structure and modes of demonstrating respect, it is understandable that the Zulus would be perturbed at the way they were required to worship the God presented to them by the missionaries who preached that they did not require the ancestors as mediators as they could approach God directly (Mafico 2000: 488). Mbatha's father was a highly respected man but was nonetheless patient and engaged with his children. Even so, Mbatha (2005: 17) remarks that 'he was like the sun. You loved him for his warmth, but you never touched him'. 'If it was improper to approach the king or chief without going through the elders, it was confusing to the Africans that God, the most revered among all living beings, could be easily accessible' (Mafico 2000: 488; cf

Callaway 1970). This phenomenon violated social protocol and thus wreaked havoc on the structure and cohesion of the family and the community (Mafico 2000: 488).

Mbatha aimed to provide a vehicle for communication of the Bible message that was relevant to all people. Just as the translation of the Bible into Zulu in the late nineteenth century had irrevocably changed the way Zulu believers negotiated their faith, so Mbatha aimed to create an even more accessible 'translation' of the Bible through his images.

Possible strategies

Pobee writes that there are three possible strategies when different cultures come together, which can also be applied to the introduction of Christianity into a culture. The first is referred to as *tabula rasa*, literally 'a clean slate', which describes a situation where it is believed that there is nothing of religious value in the existing culture and that all existing cultural signs must be destroyed before imposing the new culture. (Pobee 1979: 58, 59) The second option is *accommodation*, also referred to as *adaptation*, *localization* or *indigenization* in which the heritage and value of the original culture is recognised and valued and consequently accommodated and adapted (Pobee 1979: 59). This could be particularly effective amongst the Zulus as Sidney Mendelssohn writes that Judaic traces are evident in Nguni culture more than in any other Sub-Saharan African people group (Mendelssohn 1914: 28). He quotes Rev. T. B. Jenkinson who remarks that:

certain practices such as circumcision, the dowry of virgins, fines for seductions, the taking to wife of a brother's widow, the feast of first fruits, &c., seem to indicate that at some remote period the Zulus or their ancestors had some intercourse with the sons of Israel and Ishmael. (Mendelssohn 1914: 30)

In his work *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, Rev. Callaway points out other parallels that can be drawn between Nguni and Judaic practices (Callaway 1970: 66, 393). In addition, Ott points out that, like the Jews, the Zulus recognise clan or lineage groups as significant, they share similar notions of pollution and taboo and invoke the Supreme God through the names of the founding ancestors of their faith (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) (Ott 2000: 45).

There is a third position which is between *tabula rasa* and *adaptation* which is referred to as *working misunderstanding* in which the Bible is preached in terms foreign to the missionized culture and thus accepted only superficially as the supposed converts appear

to receive the gospel but are without understanding and end up ‘going through the motions’ (Pobee 1979: 59). In his instructions to the missionaries of Bremen Mission Johann Hartwig Brauer writes that dismissing traditional beliefs out of hand is unhelpful in winning the trust of ‘heathen’ Zulus as it can only result in increasing resistance to the gospel. He goes on to say that it would be much more useful ‘to find, in the faith and heart of the heathen, points of contact for Christian truth and from there begin the work of conviction’ (cited in Pobee 1979: 71). Colenso would have agreed as he believed in the tenet of *theologia naturalis*: pre-Christian revelation is the foundation stone for evangelism in Africa (Guy 1983: 42; Ott 2000: 41). Another possibility is proposed by Bosch (1973: 74) in his contribution to the *Relevant Theology for Africa* conference where he states that Jehovah claims and transforms the traditional religions rather than passively allowing traditional ideas to be adapted towards his ideal.

In a sense, Mbatha was fulfilling these roles through his artwork. He fulfilled the aims of Black Theology as described by Makhathini in 1973 (1973a: 11) as he sought to make Christianity relevant to twentieth century black South Africans. By reinterpreting Biblical stories in an African context, he was finding points of contact, which would help people in his context to understand scripture, and concurrently forced orthodox theologies to reconsider Zulu cosmology as was done at the *Relevant Theology for Africa* consultation.

In small-scale societies the sacred and the secular are far more integrated than in large scale societies. When increase in scale occurs and political and religious leaders are no longer one and the same, artistic expression becomes secularized (Wilson 1971: 53). One could say that Mbatha’s use of Biblical themes reintroduced a sacred element into art production that had become largely tourist oriented. This act in itself was one of protest against the secularization and misuse of the sacred apparent at the time as ‘the government was ruling South Africa unjustly with the Bible in its hands’ (Mbatha 2005: 300).

Another difference between these two kinds of societies is that in smaller-scale societies faith and religion are largely practice based without much by way of formal theologies, whereas in larger societies theological colleges abound but practice is not emphasized as strongly (Wilson 1971: 53). An exception to this can be seen in the ideas that emerged at the conferences held at the LTC in 1972 and 1973, which will be discussed later. By way of clarification, the term ‘small-scale society’ does not refer to numerical size but to the type of society. Marks of a large-scale include a higher degree of specialization, especially

within religious roles, where previously one person might have fulfilled a few roles; each person develops their own specialization. In addition, the notion of the church as 'organization' or association gains popularity over the idea of the church as a community of the faithful (Wilson 1971: 12).

Concerning the role of tradition in a changing society, Monica Wilson writes: 'I think, though it is difficult to prove this, that the stress on tradition is greatest when a remnant is standing against the tide of change, struggling to maintain what to them are the sacred customs of the ancestors' (Wilson 1971: 32). Berglund agrees that in times of struggle traditional beliefs are often reinforced (Berglund 1976: 18). For example, as African nationalism grew, belief in the efficacy of the ancestors is linked to a new cause – that of resistance (Wilson 1971: 41). This negotiation between the past and the future is evident in the difference in the conception of time between large- and small-scale societies and this in turn affects the prevailing view of history. In small isolated societies the past is seen as something desirable and change is resisted resulting in conservatism (Wilson 1971: 8). In larger, more urban society, and especially in Christianised society, the future is valued more than the past, seen also in the obsession with 'progress'. 'The Kingdom of Heaven, or a secular Utopia, lies in the future. Heaven is something towards which men strive. A messiah is awaited' (Wilson 1971: 9). Interestingly, the African Independent Churches demonstrated both of these tendencies in their desire to uphold and restore some Zulu traditions as well as their continuing apocalyptic impulses.

Apartheid

The methods of the Apartheid regime were unique and therefore do not fit neatly into any one Pobee's three options mentioned above. In many cases, the settler colonies in South Africa did not aim to eradicate all traces of traditional culture in order to impose their own, and neither was indigenous culture merely 'accommodated'. The missionaries may have wanted to improve the plight of the people whom they evangelized but the settlers wanted a consistent supply of unskilled labour and customers for the goods they imported and thus did not provide any means by which the indigenous inhabitants could truly improve their situations. It was the ideas of separate development and indirect rule that formed the foundation for what would eventually become Apartheid – the legislated enforcement of separate development – calculated to benefit white South Africans to the detriment of all

non-white South Africans under the guise of conserving and preserving traditional cultures.

In 1913 the Land Act was passed and this and later acts aimed to restrict land ownership to white South Africans only and people of other races were therefore relocated to areas set aside for them, often vastly inferior in quality to the land set aside for whites. Towards the mid-twentieth century all South Africans were officially classified according to race, a first step towards job reservation and travel restrictions all designed to decrease the mobility of non-whites. The Group Areas Act of 1950 required people to live in areas according to their race. Mbatha would have been about 9 years old at this time. This act again restricted residence, opportunities to own land, movement and citizenship (Berglund 1991: 44).

One of the hallmarks of the Apartheid government was the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This was around the time when Mbatha was finishing his Grade 6 at Mabeka School and was moving to Mahlabathini to do Grades 7 and 8. This act was sanctioned by Hendrik Verwoerd and was based on the assumption the black people did not have the capacity to benefit from scientific schooling. In effect Bantu Education trained them to be good servants and was 'set at a level decided upon by authorities who knew what they were capable of achieving 'in accordance with their own culture'' (Berglund 1991: 44, 45).

Betrayed

Mbatha was right to see hypocrisy in the believers around him and many black South Africans, especially the *kholwa* with their bourgeois ambitions, felt that they had been betrayed. Just as many people had become believers because the economic and social benefits outweighed the cultural and personal disadvantages (see chapter one), towards the end of the nineteenth century these *amakholwa* began to see that the situation had changed. They began to feel that the disadvantages of belonging to a mission church were not worth the advantages. Many had abandoned their traditional beliefs and practices in favour of the promise of wealth, education and land. Systematically the government eroded the possibilities of these promises being fulfilled. Many churches were segregated, some under the premise of 'separate development' (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 231). Furthermore, black church members were often dismayed by the double life lived by some white Christians as they felt that God must 'capture and overrule in every activity of life' (Lediga 1973: 32; Makhathini 1973b: 15). In many churches, black clergy could only advance to certain

point beyond which there were no further opportunities. They were also subject to the paternalistic attitudes of their superiors and were paid less than white clergy were. Initially the missionaries had aimed to build churches that would eventually be self-sustaining and self-governing and officially many churches aimed to make their churches more relevant to the African situation, although this was not to materialize to the satisfaction of their black congregants. Beyond this, many Zulu people aimed to find a synthesis between Christianity and their own tribal religion (Brookes cites in Sundkler 1961: 3).

To add insult to injury the Apartheid government was presented as a Christian government and used scripture to justify its policies. For a long time the church in South Africa was silent about Apartheid. This grew into an internal conflict as some portions of the church helped to maintain the *status quo* whilst others did what they could to oppose the government. South African Methodist Z. R. Mahabane is quoted as saying: 'The black man still believes the Christianity comes from God, so he still clings to it although his mind is in a state of revolt against Western Christianity' (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 634).

African Independent Churches

Lediga (1973: 32) writes that in Africa, worship is always 'the act of atonement with man and God', but because this factor was missing in so many mission churches they became irrelevant. As chiefs were exploited by the government in their system of indirect rule they lost legitimacy with their people and the prophets and others filled this vacuum by imitating traditional hierarchical systems of leadership, in contrast to the often democratic systems encouraged at the mission churches. At the outset, it must be said that the term African Independent Church is problematic (Sundkler 1961: 181, 296). Sundkler and Steed contend that all churches are to an extent independent, the term African can be rather ambiguous, as discussed in chapter one, as can the term 'church'. In fact, in his foreword to Sundkler's second edition of *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* Edgar Brookes writes that there were some elements in the AICs which were 'not Christian in any normally accepted sense of the word' (Brookes 1961: 3).

I use the term here to refer to African-initiated churches that are separatist by nature. The term African Independent Churches includes both Ethiopian and Zionist churches, as defined by Bengt Sundkler. The expression is often used synonymously with the term 'healing churches'. It is necessary to discuss these churches here as they formed a

significant portion of the group of South Africans who refer to themselves as Christian and would thus have been known to Mbatha. Furthermore, it seems that many of their aims resonated with his .

In 1960 there were an estimated 2400 AICs in South Africa with a total membership of 2 million, amounting to about one fifth of African Christians. In a 1980 census, it was found that 29.3% of the African population in South Africa belonged to Independent Churches, an estimated 3000 churches throughout the country (Oosthuizen 1985: 1). Most of these churches were part of the Zionist Church, the fastest growing healing church in South Africa (Schoffeleers 1991: 91).

Each of the churches classified as an AIC exhibits a degree of syncretism, a term which Peel defines as the replacing of non-religious aspects of Christianity (the purely European additives) with the non-religious aspects of the traditional culture (Peel 1968: 128). This is an awkward distinction to draw though considering that we have already established that African culture is wholly and pervasively religious, and it is therefore difficult to draw distinctions between its religious and non-religious aspects. It has described it as the absence of dialogue between African and Christian beliefs (Isichei 1995: 4). Some writers suggest that the term 'syncretic' is obsolete as it assumes that there is a pure form 'which is devalued by accommodation to other values' and the term thus perpetuates colonial ideas (Wright 1971: 443). Moreover, some of the AICs made use of various elements of mission Christianity and often emphasized what could be considered the non-religious aspects, such as the specifics of the liturgy and dress, whilst putting substantial emphasis on the role of ritual, a practice the mission churches had aimed to resist (Sundkler 1961: 181, 295). These rituals give a sense of control – necessary when the political circumstances seem out of control. Elements of Zulu religion and culture were also promoted more than they had been in the mission churches (Sundkler 1961: 19).

Characteristic of the AICs include a strong emphasis on the African worldview when reading and interpreting the Bible, as well as a strong emphasis on divine healing, a devotion to prayer, the high prominence of evangelism and revival services, flexible worship services and the incorporation of African modes of worship, the elaborate role of women and on the power of words, especially the words contained in the Bible and those spoken by the prophets and apostles (Adamo 2001: 37-40).

Ethiopian and Zionist Churches

Sundkler distinguishes two main categories of AICs: The Ethiopians and the Charismatics or Zionists, and mentions a third type – the Messianic church. Mayatula, in his contribution to the *Relevant Theology for Africa* conference proceedings categorises the AICs differently and states that there are two groups of AICs: the ‘prophets of physical liberation’ including Ethiopianism and Messianism and the ‘prophets of psychological liberation,’ namely Zionism (Sundkler 1973: 175).

The first Ethiopian church in South Africa was founded in the Witwatersrand in 1892 with the words of Psalm 68:31 as its foundation: ‘Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God’ (Sundkler 1961: 39). Here the term Ethiopia is taken to refer to Africa as a whole, exhibiting a Pan-African consciousness. The Ethiopians felt that the mission churches lacked relevance to the lives of African people and thus broke away from them whilst retaining much of the liturgy and many of the values of the European churches, showing a degree of ambivalence that would characterize much of their practice. Many Ethiopian churches opposed traditional Zulu practices more vigorously than any European church. The Ethiopian church tended to produce leaders similar to Zulu chiefs whereas Zionist leaders were mostly ‘prophet-type’ leaders (Sundkler 1961: 104). Ethiopian leaders were chosen for their ‘good character’ and leadership skills (Sundkler 1961: 125) and would often emulate the style of a Zulu chief in that they were generally quite reticent and aimed to be perceived as brave (Sundkler 1961: 107).

The Zionists aimed to withdraw from the domination they experienced in the world of the whites and often gather around a prophet or prophetess where they would build their cultural identity (Sundkler 1991: 87). This act of withdrawal often included pilgrimages to particular holy mountains echoing the ideas of the Biblical Exodus and thus subtly and symbolically enacting their own exodus out of oppression (Sundkler 1991: 88). They interpreted the ‘Christian message in terms of the Zulu religious heritage’ and this resulted in syncretistic tendencies (Sundkler 1961: 238). Ironically, this could explain the phenomenal growth of AICs during the Apartheid years in that as violence increased, so did a desire to withdraw. Zionists were essentially pacifist in nature and physical violence was not condoned. This pacifism came to be criticised as passivity when Zionist churches did not even join non-violent demonstrations arranged by other churches (Schoffeleers 1991: 97). In addition, two pillars of Zulu religion, the cult of the ancestors and the belief

in the supernatural prevail and Zionist understandings of lightning magic are near identical to Zulu beliefs (Sundkler 1961: 260).

The shades continue to be communicated with because even though there is no specific injunction concerning them in the Bible, the Old Testament acknowledges life after death and spiritual beings and the command to honour one's parents (Mbiti 2004: 226). Ngada and Mofokeng, quoted in Mbiti (2004: 226) state that the ancestors are not angels, and nor are they to be compared with the saints; they are merely the spirits of those who have gone before who still have influence in the present. Conversely, West states that the Zionists believe that ancestors act as angelic mediators (cited in Leeb-du Toit 2003: 48).

Furthermore, the Zionists use the term *ingelosi* to describe a spirit that appears in prayer or in dreams and thus functions similarly to the shades (Sundkler 1961: 249, 250).

Often these Zionist groups would assemble around a visionary – usually a prophet or prophetess – who was considered to be semi-divine having experienced a patently supernatural summons to leadership (Sundkler 1961: 114). In contrast to the physically bulky chief-like leaders of Ethiopian churches, Zionists prophets were often 'thin, nervous and highly strung' – like a traditional Zulu diviner – and often concentrated on supernatural healing as a primary aspect of their leadership (Sundkler 1961: 115).

Zionist prophets such as Isaiah Shembe were often considered to be the black incarnation of Christ, following the traditional leadership pattern where the Zulu king was seen as the saviour of the people (Sundkler 1961: 248). Shembe was referred to by his followers as 'the new Jehovah' and 'God of our forefathers' (Papini 2002: 34) and thus provided an alternative to the seemingly mute white man's God (Sundkler 1961: 279).

The group would build an identity and culture of its own, often including various taboos and uniform dress, and thus achieve a close-knit group in which exclusivity is the key to security and unity (Wilson 1971: 121; Sundkler 1961: 161; Sundkler 1991: 87).

Conversely, both Zionist and Ethiopian groups are characterized by change, especially concerning a continual flux in terms of leadership due to recurrent fissions as a result of disputes over power, prestige, money, property and various tribal differences (Sundkler 1961: 167-169). Wilson (1971: 120) asserts that this proves that race was not the only influential issue at stake.

Land and Protest

Until the late sixties, it was popularly assumed that AICs were primarily vehicles of protest and resistance against colonial forms of control and governmental restriction but there is evidence that some of these churches have been progressively depoliticized since then while others continued to put themselves at the forefront of the struggle (Schoffeleers 1991: 92; Duncan 1991: 28). Some say that it was a disappointment with results of political activity which in turn resulted in a 'retreat into a pietist, other-worldly attitude' (Mills 1978 in Schoffeleers 1991: 93). This does not necessarily mean that the churches were not critical of the political order, but rather that they were not active in their protest (Schoffeleers 1991: 90). Fernandez quotes Isaiah Shembe's son, current leader of the *Ibandla lama Nazaretha*: 'But we don't talk politics here. That was my father's rule. ... So we cooperate in every way with the government' (1973: 45).

There are some who contest that these churches expressed their protest implicitly rather than explicitly through their various 'Exodus' journeys linked to their theology of land. 'Here the political protest is expressed by the most subtle linguistic means referring to an exodus from Egypt and Babylon in terms which no ordinary political organiser could understand' (Sundkler 1991: 88). The notion of land was an important one in the AICs, influenced primarily by government legislation restricting land ownership on the basis of race, and influenced also by Biblical notions of land. The Israelites had their Promised Land; Moses received the Ten Commandments on a mountain; Jesus healed and baptized in river water. For the Zionist Church 'the Reserve is the Canaan with Bethesdas and Jordans, the pools and rivers where the sick are healed, and the Hills of Zion, the holy hilltops where prayers and sacrifices are presented to Jehovah' (Mbiti 2004: 228, 235; Sundkler 1961: 93). Independent churches could not afford to be seen as political revolutionaries when they longed to acquire land (Sundkler 1961: 125). These notions of land and of 'Exodus' confirm the theory that the Old Testament was seen as the foundation of the beliefs of the AICs with Moses as the central figure – leader, liberator and law giver who prevailed over the Red Sea and drew water from a rock. The fundamental role of the Old Testament is verified further by the fact that sermon texts were most often from the Old Testament (Mbiti 2004: 220) and whenever there was a difference perceived between the Old and New Testaments, the Old Testament took preference (Sundkler 1961: 277). This use of the Bible would have been affected by the availability of translations in the

vernacular (Mbiti 2004: 219), and Zulu translations of the Bible were available as early as the nineteenth century. Zulu readers of the Bible could form their own interpretations and merge them with their own traditions and culture without the mediation of the missionary (LeMarquand 2000: 75). Despite this the role of ritual was considered even more essential than that of scripture which had been the fundamental element of mission teaching and preaching (Sundkler 1961: 181). The prolific use of the Old Testament could be because in it the African people found that to a large extent the stories of the Jewish people mirrored their own and contradicted what they had been told about themselves by the missionaries (Mbiti 2004: 221). Those who were once 'no people' become 'the people of the Bible' (Mbiti 2004: 222). Traditional African taboos and customs are often quite similar to those recorded in the Old Testament. These taboos applied to food, fasting, sexual matters, menstruation, medicine, death and burial and played an important role in society but were belittled and ridiculed by colonizing or missionising forces. They have subsequently been 'discovered' by AICs in the Old Testament and have been reinstated in their original form or with some adjustments (Mbiti 2004: 223). Elizabeth Isichei (1995: 10) has suggested the 'the creation of an alternative community and framework of discourse *is* a form of protest'. An element of New Testament practice which is emphasised in the Zionist church is the ritual of water baptism. This could be due to their similarity to traditional African purification practices (Sundkler 1961: 201, 202) but it is more likely because baptism is seen parallel with African and Zulu notions of rebirth which are in turn associated with the various *rites de passage* undertaken by individuals at the appropriate times (Oosthuizen 1985: 3, 7). Oosthuizen goes on to suggest that the strong rebirth emphasis associated with baptism overtly refers to the triumph of life over forces of evil and destruction but covertly refers to a desired triumph over the physical forces which govern the circumstances of these believers (1985: 7).

Zionist and Ethiopian groups also emphasized the importance of dreams as a means of revelation, utilizing an often stereotyped approach to interpretation, a Zulu practice which the mission churches had avoided (Sundkler 1961: 267-271). Zionist churches especially emphasized healing in their services, influenced firstly by the fact that many felt that this was an aspect neglected by the mission churches who had banned traditional healing practices in the first place, and secondly because it had played such a pivotal role in traditional Zulu practice, and thirdly because they felt that it was emphasized in scripture. The interpretations of sickness in Zulu thought patterns and those of the Old Testament are

quite similar in that they include ‘social, physical, psychological, spiritual and cosmic dimensions’ (Mbiti 2004: 232). This emphasis on healing is interpreted by Jean Comaroff (1985: 9) as another aspect of their implicit resistance to Apartheid policies as restoration of health in the body was linked to the restoration of harmony in society. In short: ‘Drum, dance, and vestment modify the austere traditions of Protestant Europe’ (Wilson 1971: 73).

Laduma Madela

A significant figure within the AICs was Laduma Madela, a heaven herd (*abelusi bezulu*) known for his illustrations, visions and views on Zulu cosmology. He wished to record a comprehensive Zulu cosmology as it was known to him and this desire was reinforced when directives were given to him by the godhead, *uMvelinqangi*, who appeared to him under a tree in a grove near his home. Primarily he reinstates current concepts of godhead and, in this, attempts to counter the invasiveness of Christianity among traditionalists by writing a Bible for Black South Africans as a brother to the Christian Bible (Schlosser 1997: 2, 46-50). Considering that their aims were quite similar it is not surprising that Mbatha visited him twice, in 1992 and 1995 where Madela presented him with drawings and wrote an *izibongo* (praise song) for him called *Izibong zi ka Azaria Mbatha* (Mbatha in Leeb-du Toit 1998: 38). He also spoke to Mbatha of the *abantu abamhlophe*, (white Bantu) claiming that white people were also ‘Bantu’ – the name used by the Apartheid government for black people, corroborating his belief that black and white ancestors came from the same source, even though he described God as the great, black ancestor (Mbatha 1998: 60, 61). Mbatha recalls an episode which was to influence his own worldview:

I remember asking Laduma about the life when he was born and the secret of being a Zulu starting from Shaka’s time. ... What he said was that the present values were here, right now and one cannot suddenly change them and live like ancient man. If one tries doing that, the ancient man will not recognise one and people today won’t accept changing living like an ancient man. ... We are here but it is important looking backwards as it is our foundation (Mbatha 1998: 38, 39).

This counters the AIC predilection to restore the glorious history of the Zulu people, whilst still affirming the value of a glorious past in fostering a better future.

Conclusions

The factors discussed are all significant in any discussion of Mbatha's work. As a black man, there can be no doubt that Apartheid laws and principles affected him. His brother became a Zionist priest and accordingly he would have been intimately aware of their beliefs and practices. He visited Laduma Madela twice and aspects of Madela's imagery are evident in Mbatha's works. Therefore, each of the factors mentioned above, colonialism and missionization, Apartheid, African Independent Churches and the person of Laduma Madela influenced Mbatha somehow. An examination of the degree and impact of this influence will be seen in chapters five to seven.

Chapter 3: Mbatha within the context of contemporary beliefs systems and theologies: Liberation Theology

Introduction

The notion of Liberation Theology and the figure of Jesus Christ are central to many of Mbatha's works and thus deserve some exposition here. Understandably, many of the dispossessed people of South Africa and other oppressed groups identified with the figure of Jesus as depicted in the gospels. Allan Boesak writes: 'The historical Jesus of the New testament [*sic*] has a special significance for those who share the black experience. He was poor, the son of poor people who could not bring the prescribed sacrifice at his birth... He belonged to a poor downtrodden people, oppressed and destitute of rights in their own country and subjugated to countless daily humiliations under foreign rulers. He lived and worked among the poor ... He was one of them' (Boesak 1976 cited in LeMarquand 2000: 82).

Black Theology, Liberation Theology, African Theology and others

Distinctions and definitions

It is this identification with Jesus, or rather, Jesus' identification with the poor, combined with various other scriptural incidences in which the poor and oppressed are apparently preferred that developed into what is known today as Black Theology. Black Theology, which initially emerged in the United States as part of the Black Consciousness Movement, links in turn to Liberation Theology, which also includes Feminist Theology, Environment Theology and others. Black Theology is a more recent phenomenon than African Theology and is described by Becken as taking a situational approach to theology in that it takes the situation of 'non-whites' in South Africa as its point of departure (Becken 1973: 7). Nolan confirms that Black Theology is a form of Liberation Theology as it answers the faith questions of believers concerning suffering, human dignity, poverty and liberation from oppression (Nolan 1987: 18). The aim of Black Theology is not to institute a racial theology, but rather to stir up the 'self-consciousness and solidarity of the Black people' (including Coloured and Indian populations) to work towards a 'human race' (Ukpong 2000: 20). It is referred to as Black Theology merely because its

practitioners are aware that their theology grows out of their context, in contrast to the fact the 'European' or 'White' theology is not generally referred to as such because its practitioners are often not aware that their context defines their theology to any perceptible extent (Nolan 1987: 18). The terms Black Theology and Liberation Theology are often used interchangeably, and the term African Theology usually includes aspects of Liberation Theology. Pobee writes:

African theology, though interested in liberation, is not preoccupied with liberation from racial oppression as much as black theology is. The concern of African theology is to attempt to use African concepts and African ethos as vehicles for the communication of the gospel in an African context. (Pobee 1979: 39)

African Theology

In addition, an African Theology should not be an 'adapted' or 'indigenised' western theology but one which is originally and essentially African and equally valid (Becken 1973: 6, Nolan 1987: 19). It must also be added that because of the risk of being seen as insurrectionist, the term Black Theology was preferable to the term Liberation Theology during the Apartheid regime. The development of an African Theology (or African Theologies) was so crucial because scripture was used to justify Apartheid. African Theology is an attempt to 'couch essential Christianity into African categories and thought forms' rather than an exercise in 'couching traditional African worldview in Christian form' which involves ensuring that the non-negotiable aspects of Christianity such as the cross of Christ are not lost (Pobee 1979: 18). It is probably more accurate to speak of African Theologies, as it is unlikely that we would find one uniform theology emerging from the diverse backgrounds and experiences of African academics and lay-theologians that would be equally valuable to all Africans (Pobee 1979: 19). Pobee certainly does not suggest a complete African Theology himself but gives guidelines as to the development of African Theologies. The Bible is the foundation and the starting point and modes of reading and interpreting the Bible become important considerations. The tradition of the Church is another factor to be considered; distinctions must be drawn as to what is compliant with scripture and what is not – hence the importance of Biblical interpretation. Pobee believes that African theology should be ecumenical, rather than denominational, and that existing revelation in African religion should be taken into account. Differences should not necessarily be reconciled but should definitely be confronted and similarities

should be noticed. Within this, he also states that attacking the work of earlier missionaries is neither useful nor beneficial (Pobee 1979: 20-22).

Because language is so important in accurately conveying the values and ideals of the society that uses it, constructing an African Theology in English is far from ideal (Pobee 1979: 22). A vernacular is necessary; but the number of languages within Africa would make this an impossibly colossal task. Once again Mbatha's work finds relevance. His work acts as a visual vernacular instead of an oral or textual one and thus his work becomes a vehicle for communicating an African Theology.

Theology and Praxis

In his book *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez defines theology in general as 'critical reflection on historical praxis,' in other words, theology is 'discovered' through living in a given set of circumstances, and then later formed and formalized (cited in Rhodes 1991a: 8). In short, Liberation Theology originates from praxis, not praxis from theology. Gutierrez goes on to say that even this 'formalised' theology is not a static declaration of timeless truths (culture transcending), but rather a 'dynamic, ongoing exercise involving contemporary insights into knowledge (epistemology), man (anthropology), and history (social analysis)' (cited in Rhodes 1991a: 8). Where western theology utilises the deductive method, Liberation Theology initially utilises inductive techniques but also combines them with deductive methods to form what Nolan refers to as a circular method, also referred to as the hermeneutical circle, in which practice and theology are continually illuminating each other (Nolan 1987: 21-28).

Concerning Black Theology specifically it would be incorrect to say that this theology as it is known today was initially 'discovered' in scripture, cultivated into a formal theology and then applied in praxis; rather, it originated from praxis and was later developed into a formal theology. Obviously Biblical translations in the vernacular would have aided this process of ascertaining exactly which aspects of mission Christianity were scriptural and which were merely cultural. Believers and potential believers were given access to sources outside of the missionary and ironically, this greatly increased the spread of Christianity more than any other factor (LeMarquand 2000: 75). People could interpret the text for themselves as happened in the Reformation when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German where it had previously only been available in Latin and therefore only accessible

to a very small minority who wished to maintain the *status quo*. As mentioned previously, the availability of translations also encouraged the development of AICs.

Considering Pobee's statement about the centrality of scripture within developing theologies, it is necessary to look at various hermeneutical methods used in Africa. These will be covered briefly here and in more detail in the next chapter.

Liberation hermeneutics

The practice of applying Biblical text to specific situations has led to the development of liberation hermeneutics which 'uses the bible as a resource for struggle against oppression of any kind based on biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather always stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them' (Ukpong 2000: 19). Liberation hermeneutics uses the story of Exodus as its primary text in terms of political liberation and the *passim* injunctions to care for the poor as the basis for economic liberation (Ukpong 2000: 19).

As liberation hermeneutics has become increasingly popular it is necessary to mention some reservation at the sometimes hasty conclusions drawn by Bible scholars. Robert Carroll, a British citizen who last visited South Africa in 1995 to deliver a series of lectures, writes about his observations and experiences in an article called '(South) Africa, Bible, Criticism: Rhetorics of a Visitor' published in *The Bible in Africa* in 2000. In short, Carroll states that 'at its starkest level the Bible is a book of slaves for slaves' (Carroll 2000: 194). Referring to attempts to support or refute Apartheid Biblically he goes on to say that

...the Bible was itself part of the problem and not just part of the solution. [It] is an unsafe text when it comes to liberation or liberatory readings [or] for doing any practical readings about how modern cultures should be constructed. ... Taken by itself the Bible is as much an instrument of oppression as ever it was a book of liberation. (Carroll 2000: 193-195)

Shortly after the Ten Commandments recounted in Exodus 20 come the regulations for buying and selling slaves. Carroll maintains that the Bible is by no means a liberatory text in itself and the degree to which it can be used as such depends on the attitudes of those interpreting the scriptures. 'Only when it is read in conjunction with an ideology of freedom and a critique of all oppressive measures can the book justifiably be used for liberatory readings by free peoples' (Carroll 2000: 195). He also observes that because the

Bible has been used as an oppressive text for so long and by so many, the possibility of its use as a liberatory text is severely reduced. He recommends that the Bible be used 'with extreme caution' and that it should not be casually imposed on modernity.

Cultures change, values change, circumstances change. So, to read the Bible without making the proper, major changes, serious allowances and radical adjustments for such changes, is to produce fundamentally defective readings and misapplications at best. (Carroll 2000: 197)

Mbatha as Liberation Theologian

Although Mbatha often utilises scripture which he 'applies in praxis' in his linocuts, he does sometimes depict a situation not originally found in scripture. Rather, he moulds a scriptural text to his praxis – he adapts the text to fit what he aims to communicate. This can be seen in the choices he makes when deciding which race to depict the various characters portrayed (see chapters four and six). This is not to say that he ignores the intended meaning of the text but allows the interplay between the two meanings to add depth to his work. Mbatha is also connected to various religious communities through his family. His father was asked to speak at the LTC, his mother encouraged Zulu custom, his uncle became a bishop in the Lutheran church, his brother became a Zionist priest and he boarded at the LTC.

To test the proposition that Mbatha can be described as a Liberation Theologian I will consider a summary of the key ideas of Liberation Theology provided by Simon Valentine (2001). These tenets can then be applied to Black Theology in general and can thus be applied to gauge Mbatha's role as a 'theologian' in particular.

Criteria

First in the minds of Liberation Theologians is a commitment to the poor, stemming from God's apparent 'preferential option for the poor'. Secondly, a structural analysis of the factors causing societal injustice is often involved which, thirdly, results in an effort to raise consciousness and remove the psychology of dependence experienced by the oppressed peoples. Fourthly, eschatology and the kingdom of God form a major part of Liberation Theology, as does the fifth key point, soteriology, which includes how salvation, conversion and sin are defined. The concept of 'ortho-praxis': action based on reflection, forms the sixth point. Considerations of the use of violence in revolution as well

as an understanding of Marxism and the Bible form the seventh and eighth points respectively (Valentine 2001).

Commitment to the poor

In order to discuss whether Mbatha shows a commitment to the poor or not, the term must first be clarified. At the LTC consultation in 1972, Mosothoane discussed, amongst other things, the term 'the poor' as it is used in the gospels, and applied to the current situation. He states that Jesus referred to the 'detestable and disreputable' as the poor which his context included Africans generally (as they were treated with contempt by white people), *abathakathi* (witches), sexual offenders, sinners generally, and the uneducated (Mosothoane 1973: 64, 65). They are the object of the gospel; the poor who need the good news, just as it is the sick that need the doctor, not the healthy. When we apply the idea of a commitment to the poor in the South African context that Mbatha inhabited, the term further includes those oppressed by the sins of others and those treated with contempt by whites, in essence anyone who needed pity, mercy and sympathy (Mosothoane 1973: 62). These were usually materially poor because of the many and various laws restricting their education, mobility and employment options. As a Zulu himself, experiencing this oppression, Mbatha chose to identify with those of his own culture and expressed the manner in which they experienced the religion originally brought to them by those who would later become their oppressors. Largely, Mbatha depicts predominantly black skinned figures in his linocuts, with white skinned figures finding their place in his works focused on reconciliation. It would therefore be accurate to say that Mbatha also expresses a 'preferential option for the poor' in his work.

Theologians such as Lediga (1973: 26) drew a distinction between the 'white man's God' and the God of the Bible, describing the 'God of the white man' as 'sectarian and selfish', 'loving to whites only', and allowing them to perpetrate injustice in black South Africans. It was partly this perception that led to the development of AICs as mentioned above. Conferences such as those held at LTC in Mapumulo in 1972 and 1973 aimed to counter such attitudes by trying to find a relevant theology for Africa. Liberation Theology, and consequently Black Theology, 'forced the Church to look critically at its beliefs; to reassess the basic assumptions behind those beliefs and to recognise the necessity to identify itself with those who suffer' (Valentine 2001). Mbatha certainly showed a

commitment to the 'poor' of his time by highlighting their plight in his work and by highlighting the hope he believed existed within the Christian worldview.

Understanding of social injustice

One can see an understanding of societal injustice quite vividly in Mbatha's 1963 work *David and Goliath* (1963) (Figure 3) in which the Philistines cower at the sight of David (depicted as black) holding the severed head of Goliath (depicted as white). The placement of the two nations in opposing corners underlines the cross-cultural antagonism present in the Biblical narrative and in the situation in South Africa at the time. It was this image that motivated Peder Gowenius (2003: xii) to continue his work at Ceza Mission Hospital as he saw the power that images could have in conveying the 'forbidden message' (Hobbs & Rankin 2003: 174). Although Mbatha does claim that occasionally his choice of skin colour for figures in his works is purely compositional necessity, the colours here are deliberate. He states:

Whether one was ignorant or kind, apartheid was sharp on all sides. Nor was my art a neutral issue. It could cause me a lot of trouble. Goliath was white and David black. I, Azaria, the youngest boy, still believe this was an excellent way of learning the Bible in my earlier years (Mbatha 2005: 42).

Here the work has a dual meaning. It portrays the overthrown oppressor, a relevant theme at the time of its production, and includes a more personal dimension as Mbatha, the youngest son as David was, reflects on the struggle between the powerful and the powerless (Leeb-du Toit 2005: xxii). The figure of David also plays a dual role. In a general sense, he is a symbol of resistance against all odds (with supernatural help) and acts as a personal analogy for Mbatha as he represents the success of the youngest son. Here Mbatha also reverses the usual visual cliché of white as good and pure and black as evil (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 69; 2003: 174; Tutu 1973: 40) and in doing so he shows God's preferential option for the 'poor'. In this case, the black nation is the preferred nation, which is no longer oppressed, but celebrates as the divinely sanctioned victors. This notion resonates with a quote by Albert Luthuli in 1953: 'I trust that the consciousness of the justice of our cause and a belief in the divine approval of our struggle will give us strength and courage to bear it [suppression] until victory is won' (Brown 1973: 113).

Marina Gržinić (2007: 199) writes that, ‘The linking of theory, politics and art is the only position that one can adopt in a world of structural inequality’. In this regard Mbatha shows a clear understanding of the factors which caused and exacerbated social injustice in his autobiography. He mentions how social Darwinism, the idea that black people were lower on the evolutionary scale than white people were and therefore somehow less human, played a large part in colonial initiatives. The black races needed to be ‘cultivated’ by the inherently more advanced white races to be able to evolve in order to be of use to the white races. He explains how structural strictures, such as the system of indirect rule, were put in place, which in turn affected the psyche of the black nation, and when these strictures were removed, the psyche remained damaged:

These Blues [blacks] are at a low stage of evolution, the despots said. ... Is it surprising, then, that the Blues were beset by physical and psychological problems? How would they extricate themselves from the bind of colonialism and apartheid? They managed their physical liberation all right, but their psychological deliverance was fraught with problems. (Mbatha 2005: 237)

The passage of time has tempered Mbatha’s previously expressed optimism somewhat when we compare his views expressed here to the view he seems to express in his work *David and Goliath* (1963) (Figure 3). He goes on to say that even though his experience of Sandlwane (his name for the ELCACC) was very good initially, he felt that it became yet another instrument of oppression as there was no suggestion of allowing the Africans to take over leadership of the centre: ‘Old teachers went and new ones came from abroad.’ When teachers weren’t (originally) European they were white South Africans (Mbatha 2005: 291-292). He goes on to say that

No Blues [blacks] were given any responsibility. ... Soon the Blues saw the centre as a place where Greens [whites] taught them as subordinates and passed down their own privileges in rigid succession. That was the reason why a conflict originated that was not there before (Mbatha 2005: 292).

This was precisely what had happened in the churches as well. Although lay preachers and evangelists were trained and ordained in the denominational churches, they remained subordinate to their white counterparts, expressed in the level of authority granted to them as well as in terms of financial remuneration.

Efforts to raise consciousness

A structural analysis of the causes of social injustice also includes an obligation to attempt to expose and remove the causes of social injustice (Valentine 2001). Valentine states that one of the critical tools in this process is Contextual Theology in that it explores the dialogue between social context and scripture. This Contextual Theology gives Liberation Theology a degree of tangibility. This will be covered in further detail in the next chapter.

Valentine quotes Rowland and Corner in saying that Liberation Theology is ‘above all a new way of doing theology rather than being itself a new theology’ (Rowland & Corner 1990 cited in Valentine 2001). He goes on to say that Liberation Theologians point out that the Church had previously taught either a State theology, one which presented ‘the theological justification of the *status quo*’ and that ‘blesses injustice, canonizes the will of the powerful, and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy’ or a Church theology which, although it objected to the oppressive regime, offered only ‘limited, guarded and cautious’ criticism (Valentine 2001). Both were seen in South Africa throughout the Apartheid era and in keeping with Liberation Theology, Mbatha offers us a prophetic theology which calls for the church to recognize the ‘social dimension of our faith’ and ‘[calls] the whole community to repentance and to a new form of existence as a society’ freed from ‘class roots and bourgeois interests’ (Valentine 2001).

Mbatha aimed to Africanise the gospel, to translate what was perceived as a European gospel into a graphic African vernacular. Mbatha’s initial impulse to Africanise the gospel was partly inspired by the view that ‘if all the people in my country were Christians then there would be peace’ although he states that ‘[It] did not take too long before my thinking changed as I soon discovered I was wrong. In the 1960s there were many Christians in South Africa and yet there was still unrest’ (Mbatha 1998b: 61). Additionally, he was also simply curious to see what would happen if Bible stories were ‘rewritten’ in an African context. Furthermore, he states, ‘Colonialism was not simply an isolated phenomenon, but was interwoven with Christianity, civilisation and commerce. Government, church and factory were inextricably linked’ (Mbatha 2005: 300).

Mbatha (2005: 289-290) states that competition was unknown in the village life of his childhood, and that ‘competition in itself is good, but it formed no part of our upbringing. Our elders taught us to co-operate and to help each other. Those who struggled were given

assistance. Competition is a new aspect of Zulu society'. This shows an understanding of the ills of free-market capitalism, introduced by settlers, favoured by orthodox theology and encouraged by many missionaries, in which competition is a primary motivating factor. The every-man-for-himself attitude of capitalism is linked to Greek notions of a static and remote God, not one who is personally involved in the everyday struggles of the common man, and this can lead people to become 'passive in the face of injustice and superstitious in their religiosity' (Webster 1984).

Mbatha again exhibits an acute understanding of the problems caused by the Apartheid mindset: 'Postcolonial Africans saw themselves through the eyes of others who imagined that their own views on Africa were the whole truth. Many of us still understand ourselves in this light today' (Mbatha 2005: 231) as '...people imagine that everything European denotes progress' (Mbatha 2005: 309).

The consciousness-raising which Valentine (2001) speaks of includes freeing people from 'every vestige of a cultural and racial inferiority complex and removing the psychology of dependency' by providing tools for them to eradicate these inhibitions. This removal of dependency also entails a removal of the causes of poverty, and evangelism becomes synonymous with social analysis and social change in which even the forgotten entities, the weak and the insignificant, are treated and esteemed as children of God (Valentine 2001).

Liberation Theology is 'the articulated cry of the oppressed, of the new barbarians beating at the gates of empire of plenty, of the nations of the centre demanding humanity, solidarity, and the opportunity to live in dignity and peace' (Boff & Boff cited in Valentine 2001).

Eschatology and the Kingdom of God

Mbatha's interest in the eschatological aspect of Christianity can be seen vividly in his works depicting scenes from the book of Revelation (see chapter five). Eschatology, the theology of the 'last days', was a theme that captured his thoughts and imagination, as it did with his elders and later, his peers. He describes how as a schoolboy he enjoyed enacting the drama of the Zulu kings. He states:

I used their history as a vehicle to convey African beliefs. This activity sometimes reflected our search for a new home – the New Jerusalem, the city of love and peace, envisioned in my brother’s dreams – and it included an exodus from our harsh life under apartheid. This was a theme frequently discussed by my elders as a significant aspect of their religious thought. (Mbatha 2005: 52)

Liberation Theology has a distinct eschatological bias but is also monistic in that it denies the duality of matter and mind. It therefore does not focus on the spiritual realm or the Second Coming of Christ, but rather on the modes through which a Christian fraternal society can be attained here and now, namely through socio-economic and political liberation (Valentine 2001). Consequently, the incarnation of Christ into a particular socio-political context is stressed above other aspects of his being.

Valentine (2001) also mentions that Liberation Theology’s soteriology, or theology of salvation, is concerned with both individual and social salvation but rejects the ‘evangelical shibboleth’ of ‘new birth’ and in its place maintains that ‘salvation, rather than [being] seen in the traditional sense of a personal relationship with God, is to be understood in terms of political, economic and social liberation’.

Soteriology

This brings us to another aspect of Liberation or Black Theology: its particular form of soteriology, a treatise that requires a definition of both sin and conversion. A concept within Liberation Theology, which finds resonance in African Theology, is the thought that the matter of sin is not individual or private as its consequences have social and cosmic effects (Rhodes 1991a: 8). Because it was believed that every person inhabited both the spiritual and the physical world, ‘death’ referred merely to the discarding of the physical body to join the ancestors or shades. Mbatha writes that each person was a future spirit or *idlozi*, each person was the essence of *uMvelingqangi* - a name for the Supreme God, usually used by non-Christian Zulus and Zionists (Sundkler 1961: 286) - and thus possessed an ‘immutable sacredness’ (Mbatha 2005: 34). Thus we can see how the monism of Liberation Theology appealed to Africans and was also incorporated into Black Theology. Because of this monism ‘sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality. Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood and love in relationships among men’ (Gutierrez cited in Rhodes 1991a: 8). It exists in any circumstance in which there is poverty, or where one group oppresses

another, including the structures that enable this oppression as well as any party which fails to act upon unjust circumstances, a point supported by Makhathini (1973b: 16) who puts forward that anything that prevents men from becoming who God intended them to be is sin. Buthelezi states that the gospel of Christ liberates men not only from their own individual sin, but also from the evil consequences of the philosophies of other men (1973b: 23). Furthermore, according to 'traditional' Latin American Liberation Theology, the oppressed party also sins by passively accepting their oppression (Gonzalez & Gonzalez 1980 cited in Rhodes 1991a: 8). Salvation therefore occurs when the opposite of 'sin' as defined by Liberation Theologians comes about. Love for one's neighbour is perceived as being equal to one's love for God; one cannot love God without loving people and expressing that love through dismantling social injustice.

Liberation Theologians generally do not outright deny the deity of Jesus, but don't unambiguously confirm it either (Rhodes 1991a: 8). His significance is a result of his identification with and sympathy towards the poor and the outcast (Rhodes 1991a: 8) (see chapter six). Therefore Jesus' death gains its significance not because it was redemptive in the sense of redemption from the consequences of sin (in the classical sense of the word), but rather because he identifies himself with the poor and the oppressed and dies heroically as a martyr for their cause. Webster writes:

It claims he is different from us by degree, not by kind, and that his cross is the climax of his vicarious identification with suffering mankind rather than a substitutionary death offered on our behalf to turn away the wrath of God and triumph over sin, death, and the devil (Webster 1984).

Salvation is therefore obtained through 'actively pursuing the liberation of the oppressed' (Rhodes 1991a: 8) and does not exist in a context of social injustice. Jesus' resurrection is acknowledged by Liberation Theologians, but its significance is unclear (Rhodes 1991a: 8). Jesus is seen as a liberator but the practical outworking of that liberation is effected by people on earth, not by supernatural means. At the *Salvation Today for Africa* consultation at the LTC in 1973 it was stated that salvation for the black man is similar to the liberation realized in the Exodus in which the people of Israel gained independence and identity (Becken 1974: 118).

In describing how people are viewed in Nguni society Mbatha states that people are assessed by their good deeds, their humaneness. He continues:

There is not much room for individualism here, at least in the western sense. The emphasis is placed on the group and the individual's role within it. The outcome is not, however, oppressive or stifling. Indeed, traditional African societies place a high value on personal worth; but this finds expression communally rather than in western-style individualism. Hence the Nguni saying, *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: people are people through other people. (Mbatha 2005: 10)

He later states, 'Let me be careful, then, in describing myself. The first person – I and me – is a modern sickness that never existed in Africa. The ancients saw things from a communal perspective' (Mbatha 2005: 319-320).

Because Jesus' death is not seen as primarily redemptive, salvation is not seen as the provision of life after death for an individual. Rather it is primarily the process of bringing about the kingdom of God on earth as described in what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer – 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. It would be an error to say that Liberation Theology denies the eternal aspect of salvation completely, but rather Liberation Theology allows the eternal and temporal to 'intersect' (Erickson cited in Rhodes 1991a).

Ortho-praxis

On the point of ortho-praxis – right action based on right thinking rather than only right thinking (orthodoxy) – some questions need to be raised. In Liberation Theology, theologians are compelled to be practitioners, not only theoreticians. To what extent is Mbatha a practitioner or theoretician? Do Mbatha's works count as records of reflection or as a form of action based on reflection? Is art making regarded as praxis? Alternatively, is it an excuse to reflect rather than to act?

The whole concept of ortho-praxis finds its roots in Kant's arguments for the autonomy of human reason. 'Theology is no longer worked out in response to God's self-disclosure through the divine-human authorship of the Bible. This revelation from 'outside' is replaced by the revelation of God found in the matrix of human interaction with history' (Kant in Webster 1984).

It would seem that Mbatha's works acted as a form of action evidently based on much reflection. Art can be utilized as a subversive yet powerful tool. In the context of Apartheid

where many books, articles, newspapers, songs and others were banned, art retained some latitude, especially where the message was subtle or ambiguous.

Use of Violence

Concerning our penultimate point of consideration, Mbatha's view on violence and revolution seems somewhat ambiguous. His images show a preoccupation with oppressive themes and the depicted response to that oppression is often flight. Violence itself is not depicted but the threat of violence is evident in the form of weapons. The debate concerning the use of violence in combating social injustice has raged for many years and space limits a full discussion of it here. Some Liberationists believed that violence is not sinful if used by the oppressed to remove 'sin' (i.e. poverty or injustice) but that it was sinful if used by the oppressor. God is believed to be dynamically involved, not passive as Liberationists claim traditional theologians represent him. Because God himself stands against oppression and exploitation, it is believed that his followers should do the same. Some theologians, like James Cone, do not directly advocate violence but deem that violence is, in some cases, unavoidable. He refers to this as choosing the lesser evil of revolutionary violence over the greater evil of structural sin and social injustice (Cone cited in Rhodes 1991b: 27).

Mbatha (2005: 350) recalls a singular occasion on which his father advocated armed resistance but states that he never advocated hatred or warlike opposition but rather that 'he simply ascribed [their] misfortune to *ubandlululo*, or apartheid'.

Marxism and the Bible

Liberation Theology was often accused of being a Trojan horse for Marxism (Valentine 2001). All Liberation Theologians agree that an alternative to capitalism is necessary and some theologians saw Marxism as a political and economic theory which could provide a viable alternative. Some see Liberation Theology and Marxism as inseparable. Valentine (2001) writes that Liberation Theology is merely a synthesis of Jesus Christ's teaching about the poor and the dialectical materialism of Marxism. Other theologians contend that Marxism does not provide a plan of action, but rather provides a set of categories for social analysis through which theologians can be more effective (Rhodes 1991a: 8). Marxism gives a means of analyzing class systems through which we can divide society into the oppressors and the oppressed and thus identify where injustice and exploitation is

occurring. The idea espoused by many Liberation Theologians is that most, if not all, of man's problems are the direct result of exploitation, specifically economic exploitation brought about by various forms of oppression, political and otherwise. Capitalism is seen as one of the worst economic systems regarding economic oppression as any advantage gained by one is usually at another's expense.

Immanuel Kant's argument for the autonomy of human reason corresponds to Karl Marx's postulation that 'man's wholeness can be realized only through overcoming the alienating political and economic structures of society' (Marx cited in Webster 1984). On the other hand, Liberation Theologians agree that although liberation begins with changing the economic systems, it does not end there. Marx also embraced the idea of ortho-praxis as seen in his statement that while philosophers had previously sought to explain the world, their current task is to change it (Marx cited in Webster 1984). Furthermore, while Marxism seeks a secular remedy to the problem of oppression and accuses religion of supporting the status quo, Liberation Theology challenges the Church to participate in halting and preventing injustice by acting as an emotive, symbolic and sociological force.

Liberation Theology has also been attacked as communism in disguise (Walshe 1991: 52) but Nolan responds by explaining that the South African Apartheid government accused any dissidents of being Communists, an accusation that carried serious penalties. He goes on to say that Liberation Theologians merely draw some conclusions similar to those of the Marxists and Communists and that the fear of such accusations should not result in self-censorship (Nolan 1987: 7, 8), and neither should the fear of being accused of mixing religion and politics. In fact, he proposes that all theology is contextual and cultural and therefore political (Nolan 1987: 15) and because the area of politics is one in which great sins of social injustice are committed (Nolan 1987: 5) it is most necessary that religion addresses this arena. Walshe (1991: 519) states further that Christianity in South Africa specifically has always been politicised.

The verdict

So in answering the question: could Mbatha be defined as a Liberation Theologian? the answer is in the affirmative. If we are to take Clodovis Boff's definition, it seems even more certain: 'Liberation Theologians are not armchair intellectuals', they are 'organic

intellectuals, militant intellectuals working with the pilgrim people of God' (Boff cited in Valentine 2001).

Mapumulo Consultations

Linked to the discussion of Mbatha's role as Liberation Theologian are the conferences held at the LTC at Mapumulo where Mbatha had boarded in the early sixties. Even afterwards, when he was accommodated at the ELCACC he still maintained contact with the staff and students there and states that his discussions with them broadened his own view, although this was certainly reciprocal. The two conferences held there with the aim of addressing socio-political issues and their bearing on church structure, were *Relevant Theology for Africa* in 1972 and *Salvation Today for Africa* in 1973, the proceedings of which were edited by Hans-Jurgen Becken. These are significant in that it has been suggested the Mbatha's work pre-empted the findings of these consultations on various points and there is evidence to suggest that members of the LTC were acquainted with his work (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 39; 2003: 195). Both were inter-denominational, including academic theologians and leaders from the AICs, but it was agreed that Black Theology was the preferred ideal (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 196). In Becken's contribution at the first conference, he writes that any theology should not be exclusively specific to one culture or group but should have meaning for fellow Christians of other cultures or groups. A theology proves its relevance by 'presenting Christ in a meaningful way to the people on our situation', a way that translates easily into 'all languages and thought structures' including 'fine art, dance and music' (Becken 1973: 4, 5).

Conclusion

Mbatha can be defined as a Liberation Theologian according to the criteria listed by Simon Valentine (2001) and as an African Theologian because he aimed to use African concepts to communicate the gospel in an African context. He functions as a Black Theologian as well because at times he takes a situational approach to theology with the situation of 'non-whites' in South Africa as his point of departure (Becken 1973: 7). More importantly, his work is not restricted to these three idioms and exhibits various other characteristics not mentioned here. It will become evident in the following chapters how Mbatha's work shows evidence of these three forms of theology as well as the influence of the Bible itself.

Chapter 4: Biblical text as inspiration and autobiography

Introduction

In exploring Mbatha's use of Biblical themes and imagery it is essential to examine the reasons for his use of the Bible as a primary source of subject matter, bearing in mind that the narratives used often functioned autobiographically. His works illustrate not only his own *idiosyncratic context, that of a kholwa son growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and that of an artist of the African diaspora*, but also represent the greater context in which he worked including his South Africa context, marked by the atrocities of the Apartheid regime as well as the Swedish context which was comparatively more protected and egalitarian.

In this chapter, I will be considering various modes of reading the Bible, as well as the inspirational and autobiographical role of scripture in Mbatha's own work. Concerning Mbatha's own work I would like to take into account the following questions: What themes did he incorporate into his work and why? Why did he use particular texts rather than others?

Modes of Bible Interpretation in Africa

Originally, South African and African theologians made use of western Biblical hermeneutics but have since developed their own modes of exegesis in which their own specific context plays a central role. The three main approaches used in modern Biblical interpretation generally are, firstly, the historical critical approach where the meaning of the text is derived from the history of the author and his original audience and the author's intended meaning is considered as paramount. It is used predominantly by English speaking scholars in South Africa. The literary approach is also used where the meaning is derived by decoding the text itself, a method used by Afrikaans scholars, and thirdly there is the contextual approach in which it is the context of the reader that forms the point of departure and the destination (Ukpong 2000: 11; West 2000: 38). In short, the focus shifts from the context and intent of the original writer of the text to the context of the current receiver (Ukpong 2000: 11). West (1993: 12) notes that all readers of the Bible employ their own context in their interpretation of the text and states that this is only wrong if it is

not acknowledged. Justin Ukpong (2000) identifies three general phases of Biblical interpretation in Africa. The first phase, described as reactive and apologetic, lasted from the 1930s to the 1970s, the time during which Mbatha was born, raised and educated. It 'focused on legitimizing African religion and culture' in accordance with philosophies of negritude circulating at the time and the comparative method of studying religion dominated, especially in West, East and Central Africa (Ukpong 2000: 12-14). Phase two, a more proactive mode of interpretation, lasted from the 1970s to the 1990s. The African context became a '*resource* for Biblical interpretation, dominated by inculturation-evaluative methods and liberation hermeneutics' showing that a need for theology to be applicable to secular issues such as poverty, oppression and marginalisation had been realised (Ukpong 2000: 12, 14). The conferences held at the LTC discussed in the previous chapter are examples of this. No longer is the African merely a passive receiver of the Bible but the African context begins to play an active role in Biblical understanding. The two thrusts of liberation hermeneutics and inculturation developed further into the proactive third phase in the 1990s when the recognition of the ordinary reader became paramount, leading to the African context becoming the subject (rather than the object) of Biblical interpretation (Ukpong 2000: 23; West 2000: 29). An example of this is Gerald West's work on the contextual Bible study method, which incorporates the perspectives of the ordinary African reader (Ukpong 2000: 23). West writes:

The Bible as a subject, it would seem, is static and has an essential and self-evident message which has had a series of effects upon Africa. But, what if we make Africa the subject and the Bible the object? We would then have the following formulation: *Further developments in African Christianity will test the depth of impact that Africa has made upon the Bible* (West 2000: 29) (emphasis in the original).

Inculturation as a method of Biblical interpretation is utilized by Bible scholars in South Africa because of a desire to make scripture relevant to its recipients. Martin Ott (2000) distinguishes between enculturation, acculturation and interculturalization, which are sociological terms, and inculturation, which is a theological term. He defines inculturation as the 'the dynamic relations between Christian faith and culture... It is a process of critical reciprocal effort resulting in mutual adaptation of Christian life to the culture encountered by it' (Ott 2000: 24, 25). There are two models within the inculturation method – the 'Africa-in-the-Bible' studies and evaluative studies (Ukpong 2000:14). Evaluative studies in turn 'go beyond studying similarities and dissimilarities between

African religion and the bible to interpreting the biblical text on the basis of these similarities and differences' with the aim of developing an understanding of Christianity which is simultaneously African and Biblical (Ukpong 2000: 16). The evaluative method aims to find the original intended meaning of the text through exegesis and then applies it to the contemporary context (Ukpong 2000: 19). This model is possibly that which is most used in Africa today although it does fall short in the area of applicability to secular (social, political and economic) issues such as poverty or oppression although this can be corrected by utilizing an 'holistic approach to culture' (Ukpong 2000: 24). Ukpong (2000: 24) goes on to state that 'The goal of interpretation is the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation'.

Approaches within the evaluative model

Ukpong describes several approaches within the evaluative model in which the historical critical method of text analysis predominates. The first 'seeks to evaluate elements of African culture, religion, beliefs, concepts or practices in the light of the biblical witness, to arrive at a Christian understanding of them and bring out their value for Christian witness.' The second is the similar to the first but makes use of the Bible to critique and rectify issues in society and in the church. The third approach is based on the belief that all interpretation is affected by the perspective of the interpreter and therefore is merely a self-consciously contextual approach in which African culture, religion and life experience are brought to bear on the text itself. In the fourth approach an attempt is made to facilitate communication of the Biblical message by erecting 'bridgeheads' which involves locating concepts within the Bible or African culture which illustrate the continuity between the two. The fifth approach requires a 'study of the biblical text to discover biblical models or biblical foundations for aspects of contemporary church life and practice in Africa' (Ukpong 2000: 17, 18). The third approach, the contextual approach, can be seen as quite subversive in that it requires a 'critical consciousness' which entails asking questions of the text, especially 'why?', as well as a healthy suspicion of the *status quo* (West 1993: 17). Azaria Mbatha has been described by West as one who exhibits this 'critical consciousness' even though he is not a 'trained reader' (West 1993: 54).

African approaches to the Bible are essential because of various instances where western Biblical interpretation has been to the detriment of Africa. A prime example here is the

Apartheid system, which was ostensibly justified by western interpretations of what it meant to be a 'son of Ham'. Some African scholars have categorically rejected the Bible as an inherently oppressive book, or in Carroll's case as an unsafe book from which to draw any conclusions concerning political issues (Carroll 2000: 198), whilst some scholars feel that it is an inherently liberatory text (Ukpong 2000: 20; West 2000: 33).

On his own views of the Bible Mbatha writes that he could read the Bible and interpret it as he wished and even though it could be read purely for the truths within. He believed that the Bible could be used 'like cement with which to bind societies together' and also that 'the Bible should occupy a prominent place in every society' (Mbatha 1998: 59). These ideas are likely to have inspired Mbatha's wish to 'Africanise' the Bible.

Religion in Art

General Uses

Religious beliefs manifest themselves in an artist's work in various ways. There are times when an artisan is employed to manufacture an item for the adornment of a cathedral for instance. In this case, his own religious beliefs are inconsequential, he is required to communicate his patron's beliefs. There are times when artists possess particular religious convictions but their work remains indistinguishable from that of a non-believer in the sense that any religious inclinations in the work are not evident. Some artists consider their art as a vehicle for evangelism and thus tend toward explicit religious connotation. Others use religious motifs in art to express beliefs hostile to that religion and yet others use religious motifs as a vocabulary to express secular ideas.

Religious art can be an aid to meditation, or it can represent an object of worship. Some religious art objects are believed to have inherent numinous power and are utilised as such. Religious art has been used in a didactic manner to aid both literate and illiterate neophytes.

In Africa and South Africa

Much study on the role of religion in art of Africa has focussed on traditional and indigenous art in the sense that they give attention to 'essential' or 'typical' items. However, some authors such as Eichel (1986), Thiel & Helf (1984) and Hackett (1996)

have considered more recent examples of creative production, particularly those that manifest the effects of colonial and missionary intervention in Africa. Biblical imagery relating to art was initially wholly western as western culture and Christianity were often presented as, and thus perceived as, synonymous.

The use of Biblical imagery in art is certainly not something new and neither is it specific to Southern Africa. The production of liturgical and devotional art in areas such as Southern Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon and Zaire has occurred since the 1940s and 1950s (Hackett 1996: 196). At times this was problematic as Protestant denominations were wary of the 'syncretism' and 'adoration' that Christian images could incite (Hackett 1996: 196). This reservation is based on the second commandment of the Ten Commandments given in the Biblical book of Exodus:

You shall not make to yourselves any graven image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in the heavens above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth. You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them. (Exodus 20: 4-6).

Hackett writes that the lack of research in the area of Biblical imagery in art can be attributed to a 'reluctance to focus on visuals symbols' due to the Protestant upbringing of many scholars of religion in Africa. Often religious symbols have been relegated to the function of education only and this has perpetuated and encouraged the privileging of written texts (Hackett 1996: 15). Despite initial reservations, some of the more conservative Christian groups in Africa began to see how art could be used as an evangelistic tool and pentecostal churches in Nigeria and Zaire and other areas began to do just that (Hackett 1996: 196). In Ethiopia, artists still create work for the church. They receive their training through the church and are employed as artists on a full-time basis (Hackett 1996: 197). Some artists include political commentary along with their religious convictions. A local example of this is John Ndevasia Muajangejo (1943-87), a Namibian printmaker trained under Mbatha at the ELCACC.

In South Africa, and particularly in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Biblical imagery has been used since the 1920s by black artists who were influenced by the western aesthetic and culture and made use of western techniques and media (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 36). At first, this form of art was conceptually one-dimensional in that it was generally quite literal and had no additional agenda beyond proselytizing, because it was primarily patronised by the church and was not a spontaneous response to Biblical text (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 36, 38).

It would therefore be incorrect to assume that the use of Biblical imagery reflected a homogenous assimilation of western belief systems at the expense of indigenous beliefs and culture. Those who used Biblical themes and imagery were not necessarily adherents to the Christian faith but rather reflected the absorption of Biblically derived principles propagated through colonization and missionisation, particularly through mission schools that catered for the black community.

Christian imagery became more prevalent in the 1960s with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement because it served as a guide for political and cultural ideas and provided a vocabulary of protest for Black Nationalist aspirants (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 36). Biblically derived imagery was no longer used in a solely religious context expressing purely western ideals but 'came to be associated with complex cross-cultural and socio-political dimensions, often assuming a critical, instructive, or even subversive role in the context of southern Africa' (Leeb-du Toit 1993a: 16-17).

Azaria Mbatha and the Bible

Influences

In Mbatha's life, the influence of Christianity took many forms, as seen in the first and second chapters, which show the extent to which the context he occupied was pervasively religious. These various 'versions' of Christianity delineated how he viewed the world around him. It is not surprising that he uses the Biblical narratives he is so familiar with to portray his particular worldview.

His art was unique in that it was not produced as a result of church patronage and he was under no obligation to depict Biblical texts. He was not coerced into using religious subject matter as previous artists had been; in fact, Peder Gowenius discouraged him from doing so. Many other artists have used scripture as inspiration for their works, but comparatively few have used it as a means of autobiographical expression as well, and so the use of Biblical texts in Mbatha's work requires close attention in this area. Mbatha's art emerges as a spontaneous response to the religious and racial conflicts he faces, as 'an agent of reflection, critique, and transformation in its own right' (Hackett 1996: 203).

In the catalogue to Mbatha's *Retrospective Exhibition* in 1998 Leeb-du Toit (37) writes on the various discourses present in his work. She mentions how he expresses the Bible's

relevance to the poor and oppressed, linked to a Postcolonial discourse in which he explores and expresses the impact, significance and the invasiveness of the importation of foreign religion. He also used Biblical themes as personal allegory, as in his use of the story of Jonah, as well as universal allegory when he uses texts like the Sermon on the Mount and the story of Noah to communicate the plight of human existence. Du Preez (1974: 23) echoes this notion in his contribution to the *Salvation today for Africa* consultation where he states that the story of Abraham was one of 'unique particularism in the interest of a unique universalism'. At the same time, Mbatha also aligns Biblical themes to Zulu cultural values in order to reinforce and sometimes critique Zulu cultural values and traditions and in doing so his works act as an equivalent to the oral narratives which express and direct much of Zulu cultural practice (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 37). Suzanne Human argues that the influence of the oral narrative in his work can also be seen in figures such as Moses who seems to address the audience frontally in Mbatha's work *The Story of Moses* (1963). The fact that the verbal subtitles are not direct Bible quotations substantiates this (Human 2007: 3). She has also suggested that Mbatha utilizes the story of Moses to invert and transform sacred Zulu symbols in order to re-orientate people toward Christianity. Two symbols that are inverted are: water, which is used to quench thirst and to destroy the Egyptian armies, and the snake, which devours the snakes of Pharaoh's diviners, but brings healing when elevated on Moses' staff (Human 2007: 5). However, it could be argued that such use of these symbols enriches rather than subverts their significance.

It must also be noted that the influences on Mbatha's thoughts on Christianity were not homogeneous, his work must be seen in the context of inveterate contention between three main groups: Zulu traditionalists, the *kholwa* and the indigenous neo-Christian churches (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 37). He was raised in a Lutheran family, learnt about art in the context of a Protestant Christian mission, had familial ties within the AICs and was intellectually and artistically challenged and extended by the staff and students at the nearby Mapumulo Theological College.

Jonah

Despite having produced other works by this time, Mbatha considers his linocut entitled *With Jonah* (1962) (Figure 4) as his first significant work as it was through this piece that he discovered that he could depict his experiences in a visual language (Mbatha 1998b:

57). It was also his first explicit identification with Biblical text. He produced this while he was convalescing at Ceza Mission Hospital after having struggled with heart disease which had prevented him from continuing his work as a clerk at the mines. Peder Gowenius had been teaching male patients at the hospital the printing technique of linocut as a last resort after trying a number of other media in attempts to provide a form of occupational therapy for the male patients.

Mbatha's father had always disapproved of him working on the mines as he had intended for his son to become a teacher or a priest. When Mbatha was diagnosed with heart disease his father likened his situation to the story of Jonah. Mbatha states: 'I remembered the words from my father who had recently mentioned Jonah as a parallel to what happened to me and I was then Jonah' (in Danilowitz 1998: 26). He had disobeyed his father's wishes and his father had convinced him that his sickness was God's punishment for disobedience. He thus identified himself with Jonah 'who had disobeyed the rules' as he saw disobeying one's parents as equivalent to disobeying God (Danilowitz 1998: 27). In the work, Mbatha depicted himself as Jonah returning home to face the consequences of his actions, including facing his elders. This was one of the first pieces in which Mbatha used his knowledge of Biblical text and printing techniques in both an autobiographical and didactic manner – a concept that would later become a fundamental aspect of his work.

Didactic functions

He continued to 'make pictures' even after he left Ceza Mission Hospital as he was inspired by how he could tell stories through pictures. He writes, 'For me Biblical stories not only represented stories from the past; they became meaningful comments about the country in which I lived' (Mbatha 1998b: 57). As mentioned before, the attitude shown toward his work by family and friends was positive and this inspired him further.

Mbatha continued to use the Biblical narratives that were so familiar to him to express his own ideas and to comment on his context. The fact that he uses Biblical texts ensures that his viewers are likely to have an understanding or at least a prior knowledge of the story being depicted, thus making it easier for the viewer to appreciate and understand the thought being conveyed. In terms of form, Mbatha was able to vitalise the narrative through his brilliant use of patterned detailing and mature sense of composition and form –

Mbatha himself affirms that, 'Seeing the pictures that I did at the hospital with those forms and balance, I today wonder how I could have this excellent composition...' (Danilowitz 1998: 27).

Despite the fact that working on the mine had been against his father's wishes, Mbatha writes that it was still beneficial for him as he was able to meet two worlds, the 'European' and African worlds kept separate by Apartheid (Mbatha 1998b: 57). It was these encounters between 'Europeans' and Africans that would later become the subject matter for much of his work (Mbatha 1998b: 59).

Depiction of Race

The depiction of race in Mbatha's work requires some introduction here. Due to the nature of the technique Mbatha used, his linocut images are only ever black and white. This raises some interesting ideological challenges, as everything portrayed, including people, must be depicted as either black or white. Here the technique reflects the situation in South Africa during the sixties and seventies where much hinged on whether you were black or white, or more accurately, white or non-white. In Mbatha's work the choice to depict people as one or the other was sometimes arbitrary and sometimes deliberate. He writes that

... in those areas of my prints in which there was a black background I had to make the figures white. And so figures were not always representative of black or white people: so clearly aesthetics are sometimes a priority in my art.
(Mbatha 1998b: 59)

Initially Mbatha had depicted the church as foreign, and felt justified in doing so as the church had not originated in South Africa (Mbatha 1998b: 57). An example of this is his work *At 11 o'clock* (1962) (Figure 5) in which the churchgoers are depicted as white and the angels are depicted as black – in the AICs angels are likened to ancestors. However, at this stage Mbatha was not deliberately attempting to touch on racial issues. He states, 'I sometimes broke this rule. Why? I do not know. We must remember, however, that my art was not the art of revolution' (Mbatha 1998b: 57).

A piece in which God is depicted as white is *Creation* (1963) where he is surrounded by black angels. Mbatha did not have in mind to replace Him with a black leader (Mbatha 1998b: 57). Nevertheless, it did lead him to the conclusion that Bible stories could have taken place in South Africa. It was this idea that would become one the pivotal aspirations

of his work: The Africanisation of the gospel. He maintains that his image of *Herod and the Wisemen* (1965) (Figure 6) became a symbol of Dr Verwoerd and the words of Moses to Pharaoh are as applicable in his context as they were in Egypt : ‘Let my people go!’ (Mbatha 1998b: 57) Again we see the universal applicability of scripture in that instances in both the Old and New Testaments are applied to Mbatha’s experience in the form of Herod and Pharaoh respectively. Mbatha writes of his ideas on race:

It was at this point [the early 1960s] that I started to accept the image of a Biblical black God who originated in Africa and who was going to save black and white people, alike. It seemed as if I had in mind both a black God as well as a white God. When I forged them together it was as a sign of being the product of a multicultural society, or as evidence of acceptance. (Mbatha 1998b: 58)

These instances of racial conflict in his work, as well as instances of conflict not based on race, are in all probability a manifestation of the conflict experienced by Mbatha whilst growing up and throughout his adult life.

Mbatha writes that solving his theories on depicting race was a challenge and that he had a choice between two possible paths. He could either choose to adopt the African past as it had been described to him and as shown in his work *Coming Home* (1963) or he could adopt the foreign past that had been related to him at school (Mbatha 1998b: 59). He eventually chose the first path of adopting the past as told by his elders and from this decision his ambition to Africanise the Bible grew. This was an important decision as it set the course for much of his art production from that time onwards.

He believes that his father and the Rev. Xakasa shaped his thinking even before he started producing art. He writes that his work of the sixties would not have been any different in the 70s, 80s or 90s, not unless he had been another person with another history, one who had not been raised by his father, or sent to stay with the Rev Xakasa at an early age where he had learnt to work with both black and white people (Mbatha 1998b: 62, 63). This is linked to the didactic purpose of much of Mbatha’s work, as he believes that each person has a unique history and he writes that

When we tell our life history we hope that others are able to learn something from it. ... Even before I started to make linocuts almost everything in my art related to my past. I do not think that I have developed much from the way I drew in the early 60s to how I do now, but I have developed as a better theorist than I was before now. (Mbatha 1998b: 63)

‘Africanising’ scripture

It is necessary at this point to explore Mbatha’s desire to Africanise scripture and reconcile his African heritage with the values of Christianity. He describes it as his ‘red line’ of original thinking and although he had deviated along different lines of thought at times, this was a major concern throughout much of his work (Mbatha 1998b: 61). Combined with this he also attempts to make his work as universally accessible as possible by utilising those parts of Zulu culture which he believes are common to all cultures who try ‘to live a humane and social life’ (Mbatha cited in Eichel 1986: 6). His intention is to reach individuals as well, ‘those who, like me, suffer in this modern world from isolation, alienation and anxiety’ (Mbatha cited in Eichel 1986:6). What Mbatha aimed to do was provide a vehicle for communication of the Bible message, in a manner that was relevant to people in his context. He also writes that he had begun to think of linocuts as works of art, and did not always see them as particularly black or African or European but wished to explore the individual experiences of humans at the time, for example the interaction between Jesus and Pontius Pilate in *Jesus in front of Pilate* (1964) (Figure 13) (Mbatha 1998b: 61).

His context affected the manner in which he fulfilled this desire to make scripture relevant to all people. The fact that the ELCACC was based on the land of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Protestant ethos there may explain the ‘strongly episodic, narrative’ style of his work as it related to the didactic use of the Bible in Protestant teaching (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 66). Mbatha also preferred the ‘allegorical interpretation’ of Biblical narratives which D. D. L. Makhathini, a lecturer at the LTC at Mapumulo had been partial to (Leeb-du Toit 1993: 15, 16). In fulfilment of his aim to Africanise scripture Mbatha aimed to travel to churches throughout South Africa to transform all of scripture and began with the painting of murals in a number of churches in KwaZulu-Natal (Mbatha 1998b: 61).

One must exercise caution when applying the concept of Africanisation in its most emphatic form to every single one of Mbatha’s works as this was often conceptual rather than concrete. Often figures are dressed in robes that resemble ecclesiastical vestments or medieval tunics, very different from traditionally African garb (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 68). In works like *Greeting-Nativity* (1964) (Figure 15) the foliage is not easily recognisable as indigenous and although Mbatha often includes African animals to

corroborate the African context, at times he includes tigers as well (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 68).

Intaglio versus Linocut

An interesting aspect of Mbatha's work which should be taken note of at this point is the distinction he draws between his etchings and his linoprints. When he went to Sweden Mbatha learnt an assortment of printing techniques and began screenprinting. He also produced intaglio prints under the guidance of various teachers at the Konstfackskolan in Stockholm. At first Mbatha worked in style similar to those of his linocuts but he soon began to take advantage of the opportunities for finer patterning and greater tonal sensitivity offered by the etching technique.

His linocuts are predominantly narrative and it is through this narrative style that he expresses his desire to communicate with his viewer and thereby encourage communication. His etchings on the other hand are seldom shown in public and therefore have a different purpose to the linocuts (Danilowitz 1998: 29, 31). Danilowitz writes that 'Mbatha makes this purpose explicit by comparing the linocuts with a smaller and deliberately lesser known group of works, all etchings, in which he puts aside his didactic purpose and indulges in experimentation with the medium' (1998: 29). This is significant because of how it pertains to the autobiographical aspect of Mbatha's work. The etchings are not obviously Biblically derived but in terms of expression they are his most explicitly autobiographic work..

In an interview with Brenda Danilowitz, Mbatha described his etchings as his 'hidden' work which he compares to his linocuts that he 'sends out' to 'talk their own language' and 'stand with their own feet just like human beings grown up' (Danilowitz 1998: 31). He presents his linocuts for the audience to use and assimilate as they see fit whilst the etchings 'have no obligation to communicate with outside world except in most oblique way' (Danilowitz 1998: 31). For Mbatha they represent an 'art for art's sake', 'whose significance is enhanced precisely because it departs from his deeply internalised understanding of his own artistic endeavour' (Danilowitz 1998: 31).

Even in the 1990s, Mbatha reiterated ideas and themes that he had used in the 1960s. Although the context is somewhat different, the 'symbolic significance' is retained (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 45). Mbatha also continues to find a balance in his work between the

individual, the communal, and the national and international contexts in the sense that while his work 'is particularly pertinent to South Africa in the 1990s it has equal relevance to global strategies and conflicts that have simultaneously dominated the international political sphere' (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 45).

Conclusions

Unlike other artists who have been appropriated by representatives of the church to further their own ends, Mbatha appropriates Biblical narratives to attain *his* own objectives. He utilises scripture as allegorically autobiographical in that he depicts stories that apply directly to his own experience and at other times he utilises Biblical narratives to portray and comment on the wider context he inhabits. His work also expresses both a didactic and an encouraging message. Throughout his *oeuvre*, his work often exhibits conflicting binaries: hope and despair, community and alienation, redemption and judgement, segregation and integration. It is this aspect that gives his work its vitality beyond mere illustration of Biblical passages.

Chapter 5: Thematic Focus: Revelation

Interpreting the Revelation of St John

Numerically the number of linocuts which depict scenes from the apocalyptic book of Revelation are few, but these are amongst the most substantial and well known of Mbatha's works. The beasts mentioned in the Biblical book of Revelation seem to be a favourite theme of Mbatha's and other than the linocuts to be discussed here Mbatha produced a number of screen prints depicting images taken from the book of Revelation. These include *The Beast of Revelation* (1960s) and a seemingly more mature version called *Revelation* (1964-65), depicting a man (probably the false prophet) sitting on the twelve-headed beast while John looks on, followed by *Understanding the Beast* (1970s).

Considering the state of affairs in South Africa when these works were produced, one can see why the themes outlined in the book of Revelation would be pertinent. Mbatha's linocut, *The Revelation of St John* (1964) (Figure 7), and the first two screen prints mentioned above were produced in the early sixties in the years immediately after the formation of the Republic of South Africa and the Sharpeville riots in 1961. The theme of liberation from oppression and the conflict between good and evil would therefore have been appropriate.

In the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Orr 2000) and the *Africa Bible Commentary* (Ngundu 2006) entries on the book of Revelation, three general methods of interpreting the book of Revelation are described. There are the *praeterists* who believe that prophecies contained in the book have already been fulfilled, the *futurists* who believe that fulfilment is wholly in the future, and *historicists* who believe that fulfilment of the prophecies has occurred since John's days and will continue indefinitely (Ngundu 2006: 1543, 1556-57). These schemes of interpretation each have their own strengths and weaknesses but what concerns us here is which scheme of interpretation Mbatha was exposed to and which he himself used, if any at all.

That Mbatha would adopt the futurist view seems unlikely as he consistently relates his work to present circumstances. Mbatha could be described as an historical praeterist as he aims to find scripture's applicability to the present. To maintain that everything mentioned

in the book of Revelation had already taken place, Judgment Day included, would not only be illogical but would be cause for hopelessness as there would be no future judgment and the oppression suffered by many under the Apartheid regime would go unjudged and unpunished. Furthermore, the historical view seems closest to Mbatha's own as he connects the symbols of Revelation with particular occurrences.

Considering that the book of Revelation does not feature as a prominent theme in the western art tradition, why does it feature so significantly in the work of African artists? This could be because the book of Revelation, like other apocalyptic literature (for example the book of Daniel), has a dramatic or narrative structure and uses symbolic language as well as pictures and images to present the message. Ngundu (2006: 1543) writes that this style is more familiar to inhabitants of Near Eastern and African countries as they are more accustomed to expressing concepts in concrete, proverbial language rather than in abstract terms as western people generally do. Furthermore, religious belief itself is frequently received and conveyed as a system of narratives rather than as abstract concepts (Beit-Hallahmi 1983: 237). This style of expressing the deliberately encoded messages of apocalyptic literature lends itself impeccably to Mbatha's own style of representation and his aim of making the Bible more accessible to the ordinary believer. Furthermore, the book of Revelation is written to encourage first century believers (Ngundu 2006: 1543), and has served as encouragement to all Christians suffering oppression and persecution through the centuries, especially political oppression as represented by the various beasts. Tokunboh Adeyemo (2006: 1002) writes in his commentary on the book of Daniel that in the African context when a ruler abuses his power he is called a beast, but when he rules wisely, he is called an angel. The portrayal of a ruler as a beast is thus directly relevant to the South African situation.

Discussion of specific works

The Revelation of St. John

The first work to be discussed in this chapter is *The Revelation of St John* (1964) (Figure 7). This work was produced in 1964, about thirty years earlier than the other works discussed here. Here we see the original versions of many of the motifs that appear in his later works. This piece illustrates what was thought to be Mbatha's quintessential style at that time in that the work is divided into panels, which are to be read in a particular order,

and surface detailing is similar throughout the work. This is distinct from his later works discussed here where surface is more varied.

The horizontal bands are divided by trees, and in order to read the panels chronologically, they must be read from the top row from right to left. This first panel, in the top right hand corner, is the only panel where John himself is the central character, recognized as such by his curiously shaped hat. John Foxe, the author of the *Book of Martyrs* (1844), writes that John was the only apostle who did not die violently. Domitian attempted to have him killed by having him thrown in a cauldron of boiling oil as depicted here but he survived miraculously and was subsequently banished to the Island of Patmos where he received the revelation we know today as the book of Revelation (Foxe 1844: 18).

The second panel illustrates text found in Revelation 1, 2, and 19. In the first chapter, Jesus is described as having a sharp two-edged sword emerging from his mouth and as mentioned before this correlates with the description of God's word as sharper than a two-edged sword¹ and in the first few verses of the gospel of John where Jesus is described as the Word of God². The seven pronged construction in front of him is a motif repeated in Mbatha's *Vision of the Twelve Stars* (1990s) (Figure 9) except that here the item is decorated in triangular designs often found on relief-carved wooden mat racks (*amabhaxa*) produced by Zulu men. The seven prongs could indicate that the seven churches are being referred to here as suggested in the Revelation 1:20³ where Jesus states that the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches and in Revelation 1:13⁴ where John states that he saw one like the Son of man 'in the midst of the seven lampstands'. The seven stars in his right hand are the angels of the seven churches.⁵ There are eight stars in this figure but they are possibly arranged thus for the purposes of symmetry. In this panel, John assumes a posture that becomes familiar throughout this particular work. His back is turned towards what is occurring in the panel and he twists his body around to see what is happening in order to write it down as instructed in Revelation 1:19³.

The panel on the far left depicts the four living creatures described in Revelation chapters 4 and 5. One can distinctly see the four different creatures here: a lion, a young ox calf, a man and an eagle⁶ similar to those described in Ezekiel's vision⁷. Each of these beings represents a different aspect of Jesus' character as expressed in the four Gospels. John's gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus and is thus associated with the eagle whereas the gospel of Luke highlights his role as a servant, hence the ox. Mark emphasizes his royalty

and Matthew emphasizes his humanity, hence the depictions of the lion and the man respectively. The six wings belonging to each creature, described in Revelation 4:8, are also obvious in this work.

The book in this panel represents the book in Revelation 5. It is sealed with seven seals and an angel proclaims, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to loosen its seals?' No one is found to be worthy to open the book or look at it until one of the elders informs John that Jesus can and will open the book⁸. This explanation accounts for the presence of John, the four living creatures and the angel and the book on the left but not for the nine central figures and the enigmatic face in the bottom right hand corner of this panel. Perhaps the central figures are those who are considered as being able to open and look at the book but are discovered to be unworthy or unable to do so.

The next panel, at the far right of the middle band, depicts the scene from Revelation 6:1-8 in which one of the four living creatures tells John to 'Come and see!' as the four riders are released as the Lamb begins to open the seals of the book⁹. These four riders on white, red, black and pale horses represent war and destruction, slaughter, oppression and disease respectively (Ndungu 2006: 1557-8). They are relevant to people in the African context who have had to suffer under all four of these hardships. Two of the living creatures, the book, and three of the riders are visible in this work and their identity as the riders of the apocalypse is reinforced by the fact that they look as though they are heading out of the image to implement the 'authority [which] was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword and with hunger and with death and by the beasts of the earth' (Revelation 6:8). Although this image would be 'sobering for first century believers,' they could still be encouraged in knowing that Jesus had permitted their suffering himself and that he was in total control (Ngundu 2006: 1557).

The central panel seems to refer to chapters 7 and 9 in the book of Revelation in which four angels, holding the four winds of the earth at the four corners of the earth are told to delay until the servants of God have been sealed¹⁰. In chapter 9, the four angels are released in order to implement the second woe in which a third of all men are to be killed¹¹. The quadruped on the left of the panel could represent one of their mounts as their tails are said to be 'like serpents with heads, with [which] they do harm'¹².

In the next panel, at the far left of the middle horizontal band, the text referred to is Revelation 10:1-11¹³ in which an angel, clothed with a cloud, having a rainbow on his head with a face as the sun and feet like pillars of fire, has a little book in his hand which he gives to John to eat. John describes it as sweet to eat, but bitter once eaten and states that the angels instructs him that he must ‘prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’¹³, a message of hope to one in captivity!

The panel depicting the dragon at the bottom right-hand corner could refer to the dragon and the pregnant woman described early in chapter 12, but although the figure looks pregnant, it does not follow Mbatha’s usual manner of depicting women. It could therefore represent the archangel Michael who led his angels in a war against the dragon and his angels¹⁴. The crown would reinforce this as Michael is described by the angel Gabriel in the book of Daniel as one of the chief rulers and Gabriel continues to say that:

And at that time [the end time] Michael shall stand up, the great ruler who stands for the sons of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation; until that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. ... And those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the sky; and those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:1, 3).

This would also account for the sun and stars on his robe.

The order of the panels in the lower band is adjusted here as the right hand panel is chronologically first, the left hand panel second, and the central panel last. The left hand panel shows the beast and the false prophet mentioned in Revelation 16:13 and 19:20¹⁵, just as they are about to be cast into the lake of fire. The pointed hat he wears indicates that he is a prophet. The lower central panel thus shows how the devil is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet have already met their end. The figure of Jesus is only depicted once here, and his salvific triumph over death on the cross only alluded to by the daggers with crucifix shaped hilts used by the angels in the lower central panel. Far more emphasis is put on the roles of the angels as mediators of God’s work and workers of his purpose. Even though I have already stated that many theologians do not support the view that angels correspond to the shades, their role in this work would seem to correspond to that of the shades as described in chapter two above.

Crossing the Red Sea

A work of Mbatha's which alludes to the imagery contained in the book of Revelation is *Crossing the Red Sea* (1990s) (Figure 8). Perhaps the most direct reference to the book of Revelation is in the panel in the lower left hand corner. Here the image corresponds almost directly to Revelation 12:1-4¹⁶, which describes a pregnant woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars as well as a red dragon with seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns standing in front of the woman waiting to devour her child.

Although the exact number of heads and crowns on this dragon is indiscernible, his position in front of the pregnant woman with the crescent moon at her feet certifies the link between the text mentioned above and the image here. The twelve stars are not around her head, but are nonetheless present in the panel serving a dual role as the stars the dragon will cast to the earth with his tail. In this scripture the woman is about to bear a male child who will 'rule all nations with a rod of iron' (Revelation 12:5), obviously the Christ child, and the dragon here represents the Devil¹⁷. The significance of the faceless rider of the dragon is unclear; the bird also seems out of place. However, clues as to the significance of these figures will be found later on in the same passage. John goes on to describe the escape of the woman and her son and the ensuing war between the dragon and the archangel Michael and his angels, which the dragon loses and he and his angels are cast out into the earth. The writer then describes an earlier time when the dragon was first cast to the earth – when Satan first fell from heaven¹⁸.

Perhaps the bird is a link to the wings of the eagle given to the woman in the text mentioned above. The river in the central panel could be the river cast out of the dragon's mouth – the beasts in the water certainly support this idea. And the small figure to the right of the central panel could be the man-child she had borne, also testified to by the woman's now tiny waist. The beasts in the water might also refer to the companion text to Revelation: the book of Daniel, which includes similar apocalyptic visions and is considered to aid in the interpretation of Revelation. In Daniel's vision he sees the 'four winds of the heavens stirring up the Great Sea' out of which four different 'great beasts' emerge¹⁹. Later on Daniel writes that the four beasts are four kings²⁰ and thus represent kingdoms or bases of power.

The woman who appears in the two lower panels and the central panel seems to be the same woman. She and the woman in the middle panel on the left are all depicted as being married – shown by the Zulu *isicolo* headdress worn, although the fact that her breasts are uncovered in the central and lower left panel could contradict this.

Evidently a pivotal theme here is flight. The Israelites who crossed the Red Sea of the title in the Exodus account were fleeing from captivity in Egypt having been allowed to leave only after the Egyptians had experienced many plagues due to Pharaoh's pride and obstinacy (Exodus 5-12). This crossing could be what Mbatha is referring to in the top left hand panel of the work. As the Israelites reached the opposite shore God instructed Moses to raise his staff again and the waters closed in over the Egyptians who had attempted to pursue the Israelites through the sea. Although the name of this image refers to the Exodus event, the central image of turbulent water being crossed in a boat could refer to the passage in Revelation already mentioned. It could also refer to the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt after hearing of the threat of Herod's desire to have all Hebrew boys under the age of two killed in order to prevent a potential contender for supremacy. This would account for the male figure in the boat (Joseph) and would link to the scripture in Revelation describing how the woman who bore the future ruler would be taken to the wilderness and protected. The figure in the lower right hand panel would support this view as she looks as though she could represent Rachel weeping for her children as described by the prophet Jeremiah²¹, quoted in the gospel of Matthew²², referring to the slaughter of Hebrew boys under Herod. Three stories are conflated here – the text referred to in Revelation, the Exodus account and the flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt.

Moreover, the life of Moses parallels that of Jesus in that he was born as an Israelite boy at a time when Pharaoh had ordered the death of all Israelite boys as the people had been gaining in number and were becoming a potential force to be reckoned with²³. In an attempt to save her son, Moses' mother made a basket of bulrushes, placed him in it and placed the basket amongst the reeds at the riverbank where it was found by Pharaoh's daughter who raised the child as her own. The Hebrew word used for this basket is the same as that used for the ark that Noah built which was also as a vehicle of deliverance. Again the motif of using a boat to cross a body of water to avoid danger appears.

The six men standing on the bridge introduce a cynical tone to the piece, as they seem to indicate that the figures struggling amid the turbulent waters could just as easily have used

the bridge. It could be that the beast blocks their way to the bridge, forcing them to cross by boat.

Vision of the Twelve Stars

Another work similar in form and content is *Vision of the Twelve Stars* (1990s) (Figure 9), also produced in the 1990s. The arrangement of the panels is similar to that of the *Crossing the Red Sea* with one large central panel flanked by smaller irregular panels on either side. The content is similar in that this work also depicts scenes from the book of Revelation, more explicitly so than in the *Crossing the Red Sea*.

The twelve stars of the title are clearly visible in the central panel surrounding the lighter circular area. Above this in the centre are the living creatures described in the book of Ezekiel and again in the book of Revelation. In Ezekiel they are described as each simultaneously having the likeness of a man, an ox, a lion and an eagle⁷. Ezekiel describes them as having two hands and four wings. In the book of Revelation they are described as being ‘full of eyes in front and behind’ (Revelation 4:6) and are described as four separate creatures, one with likeness of a man, one with the likeness of an ox and so on. They no longer have two hands and four wings, but have six wings, depicted as spike-like shapes in both works which depict these creatures. The primary occupation of these creatures is unceasing praise²⁴ and they play a central role in the proceedings related in the book of Revelation from then onwards. The number four indicates that these creatures are primarily earthly in nature – there are four winds and four cardinal points (Ngundu 2006: 1543). The white robes of the seven figures in front of the four living creatures could represent the seven eyes and horns of the Lamb mentioned in Revelation 5:6²⁵ or the sevenfold spirit of God, or they could merely represent completeness (Ngundu 2006: 1543). Because there is often an onlooker who appears in each panel in this work and in *The Revelation of St John* and it is thus logical to assume that this is John himself as he observes and transcribes the vision he is receiving. The panels are arranged as snapshots of the event and do not appear to have particular order in their arrangement. The panel in the top left hand corner most probably represents the second beast that emerges from the earth; the first one had emerged from the sea, as described in Revelation 13:11-18²⁶.

This beast, with two horns like a lamb, was assigned to cause all those dwelling on earth to make an image of and worship the first beast. The seeming intelligence of its face testifies

to its ability to talk. The remaining figures in this panel are not riding their mounts, and are thus disqualified as the four riders of the apocalypse. They are carrying animal-like figures similar to the two-horned beast in their hands and can thus be interpreted as the worshipers who have made their images of the first beast. Once again, John is the onlooker on the right hand side of the panel.

In the panel below, we see the representation of the fifth chapter of the book. Identification of the book is somewhat problematic as there are a number of different books mentioned in the book of Revelation. There is the *Book of Life* in which the names of believers are listed and those who are listed therein are clothed in white²⁷. There are the books mentioned in Revelation 20 in which the deeds of men are listed and those whose names are not in the *Book of Life* are judged according to the works listed in these books²⁸. There is also the book in the process of being written, the book we now call the book of Revelation, which John is instructed to disseminate to the seven churches in Asia. There is also the book that is found to be at the right hand side of the throne and finally another book mentioned in chapter 10. Described as a small book, it is held by an angel with one foot on the shore and one in the sea and John is instructed to eat it¹³.

Of the books mentioned, this one represents either the *Book of Life* or the book found at the right hand side of the throne on which God is seated. If it is the *Book of Life* then the picture represents the final judgment described in Revelation 20. It is most probable that the latter of the two options is depicted here as the opening of the each of the seven seals initiates the new series of events in the narrative^{8,29}. The twelve figures to the right of this panel could represent half of the twenty four elders gathered around the throne. The other twelve are presumably on the other side of the throne.

In the bottom panel on the left, we see the false prophet atop the beast. This panel corresponds to the passage in Revelation 16, which mentions frogs coming out of its mouth¹⁵. The frog like figures at the very bottom figures correspond to these 'spirits like frogs' mentioned in the passage and they look as though they could have emerged from the mouth of the beast and the prophet riding the beast wears the garb Mbatha normally assigns to prophets: the slightly pointed hat. The inclusion of the figures standing watching is possibly merely to fill space or to indicate a much larger crowd present.

In the top right hand corner, we see a naked couple facing each other, joined by arms that seem not to belong to either of them alone. The dragon is present here, as is John, observing as usual. The woman here is known as the harlot or the whore of Babylon mentioned in Revelation chapters 17 and 18 with whom ‘the kings of the earth committed fornication, and became drunk with the wine of her fornication’³⁰. The joining of the arms of the man and woman could represent the process of becoming ‘one flesh’ through the act of fornication. The man certainly looks somewhat inebriated. For some the whore of Babylon represents the sections of the established church in South Africa that unite with the government in its oppression. However, the harlot is not as dominant as it would seem as she will be made ‘desolate and naked’ and later devoured by the horns (kingdoms) of the beast³¹. Chapter 18 of the book of Revelation therefore describes how Babylon, the symbol of oppression and ungodliness, is demolished and would thus offer great hope to any people group suffering persecution and also gives a warning message not to partake in her sin of oppression and ungodliness³².

The panel below this on the right is obviously a representation of Jesus who is described as having ‘seven stars in His right hand and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. And His face *was* like the sun shining in its strength’ (Revelation 1:16). The stars are absent in this panel, but the two-edged sword is there, as is the shining face. The seven-pronged object he stands behind is echoed in the corresponding panel on the left side and appears in *The Revelation of St John* (Figure 7) as well. Again it could possibly refer to the seven golden lamp stands which Jesus is described as being ‘in the midst of’ (Revelation 1:13). These represent the seven churches and figures at his feet correspond with the seven angels or messengers for the churches. The image here refers to the book of Hebrews where God’s word is described as being sharper than any two-edged sword and as able to ‘[pierce] even to *the* dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [as] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart’ (Hebrews 4:12). This is exactly the nature of sword suitable for executing God’s judgment (Ngundu 2006: 1548). The writer of Psalm 149 also mentions this double-edged sword:

Let the high praises of God *be* in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to carry out vengeance on the nations *and* punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with iron-bands, to carry out on them the judgment written; this *is an* honour for all His saints. Praise Jehovah! (Psalm 149:6-9)

The primary wielder of this sword is clearly identified as Jesus though, as indicated by Revelation 2:12: 'And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write: He who has the sharp sword with two edges says these things' and again by verse 16: 'Repent! But if not I will come to you quickly, and will fight with them by the sword of My mouth.' Revelation 19:15 settles it: 'And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, so that with it He should strike the nations. And He will shepherd them with a rod of iron. And He treads the winepress of the wine of the anger and of the wrath of Almighty God.' The rod of iron mentioned here again links to the child born to the woman in Revelation 12:5 where it was said that the child would rule the nations with a rod of iron.

Before considering the central panel the trees in the two top corners of the work bear mentioning. The total number of stars on the two trees is ten, which does not immediately link to any particular passage, but there are a number of possibilities relating to where these trees fit in. There is a scripture in Revelation 11:3-4 that mentions two olive trees and two lamp stands also mentioned in Zechariah 4:11-14. These olive trees are representative of the two witnesses who are sent to proclaim the gospel³³. They could also be the fig trees mentioned in Revelation 6:13: 'And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs when she is shaken by a mighty wind.' This would account for the stars. Considering Mbatha's comments on his own work, they could also be included purely for the purposes of ornamentation.

The central panel is occupied by a many headed best and two women. This could allude to the two women mentioned in Ezekiel 23:1. Ezekiel is also considered one of the apocalyptic prophets so it would not be out of place to depict a passage from his writings. Chapter 23 in the book of Ezekiel describes two sisters who represent the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria³⁴ who evidently 'fornicated in Egypt; they whored in their youth, their breasts were handled, and there their virgin nipples were worked' (Ezekiel 1:3). This is apparently what is taking place in the central panel of this print. To associate the dragon with Egypt does not require any substantial stretch of imagination. The dragon and Egypt represent the oppression and deception of the faithful in who are taken as slaves and compelled to worship the gods of these nations and in so doing, worship the dragon himself. Later in the passage, Assyria is included in the list of lovers, as is Chaldea (Babylon). God's comment on this is, 'And My soul was alienated from her just as My soul was alienated from her sister' (Ezekiel 23:18). The image depicted here could come

from the passages described in verses 22 to 26 and 28 to 30³⁵. This would account for the nakedness of the women, the fact that they do seem to be resisted and attacked from all sides. The plants that are being fed to them could be bitter herbs that they are forced to consume.

At the bottom right area of this panel the events of Revelation 12 are depicted. The red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads is attempting to devour the child born to the woman. Essentially, the dragon is cast down to earth and attempts to persecute the woman who bore the child and towards this aim he

[casts] out of his mouth water like a flood after the woman, so that he might cause her to be carried away by the river. And the earth helped the woman. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged over the woman, and went to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 12:15-17)

This is evident here as the whole earth opens to swallow the water cast out by the dragon. The emblem in the bottom right hand corner is clearly a likeness of the emblem of the United Nations. This emblem is somewhat ambiguous though as there are many who believe that the United Nations will have a part to play in supporting the dragon. I think that in Mbatha's context and in the context of this work, the emblem represents a peaceful unity and a satisfactory resolution. The nations become truly united as described in Revelation 7:9: 'After these things I looked, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palms in their hands,' and these nations are ruled by the one of whom it was said would 'rule all nations with a rod of iron'.

Conclusions

Throughout these works God delivers his people in various ways. Some he rescues by boat, others by supernatural intervention, and yet others by divine guidance. The theme of the narrow escape runs through all of the works discussed above. John narrowly escapes death, only to be used by God as an instrument for his revelation and the pregnant woman narrowly escapes losing her child to the beast who wishes to devour him.

These images, like the book of Revelation, are rich in symbolism and surely contain far more meaning than I have been able to elucidate here. This rich symbolism lends itself

well to Mbatha's approach and I think that he intended for these images function similarly to how the book of Revelation functioned originally. They encourage all those who currently experience the effects of sin in its various forms with the knowledge that one day the beast, the false prophet, the devil, death and hell will all be cast into the lake of fire. No form of evil or wrongdoing is excluded from God's judgement. What is most encouraging to those suffering the effects of sin is the totality and finality of God's judgement. This in turn links to the AIC emphasis on the hereafter, the heavenly realm, the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem. Mbatha (2005: 52) writes in his autobiography that it was this 'city of love and peace' which his brother experienced in his dreams, that was frequently discussed by the elders as a significant aspect of their religious thought. The book of Revelation documents the series of events leading towards this New Jerusalem which John sees 'coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband' (Revelation 21:2) along with a voice which says:

Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying out, nor will there be any more pain; for the first things passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

God himself says to him:

Behold, I make all things new. ... It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who thirsts I will give of the fountain of the Water of Life freely. He who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son. (Revelation 21:5-7)

What greater encouragement can there be for a people who daily experience sorrow, alienation, death, mourning and pain?

¹ **Hebrews 4:12:** For the Word of God *is* living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to *the* dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

² **John 1:14:** And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of *the* Father, full of grace and of truth.

³ **Revelation 1:19-20:** ¹⁹Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be after this, ²⁰the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

⁴ **Revelation 1:13:** And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands I saw *One* like *the* Son of man, clothed with a garment down to *the* feet, and tied around the breast with a golden band.

⁵ **Revelation 1:16:** And He had seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. And His face *was* like the sun shining in its strength.

⁶ **Revelation 4:7:** And the first living creature *was* like a lion, and the second living creature like a calf, and the third living creature had the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.

⁷ **Ezekiel 1:10:** And the likeness of their faces: the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right *side* to the four of them; and the face of an ox on the left side to the four of them; and the face of an eagle to the four of them.

⁸ **Revelation 5:1-5:** ¹And I saw a book on the right of Him sitting on the throne, written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book and to loosen its seals? ³And no one in Heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth, was able to open the book or to look at it. ⁴And I wept very much, because no one was found worthy to open and to read the book, nor to look at it. ⁵And one of the elders said to me, Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals of it.

⁹ **Revelation 6:1-8:** ¹And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures like a sound of thunder, saying, Come and see. ²And I saw. And behold a white horse! And he sitting on it had a bow. And a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer. ³And when He had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come and see. ⁴And another, a red horse, went out. And power was given to him sitting on it, to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another. And there was given to him a great sword. ⁵And when He had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come and see. And I looked, and lo, a black horse. And he sitting on it had a balance in his hand. ⁶And I heard a voice in *the* midst of the four living creatures say, A choenix of wheat *for* a denarius, and three choenixes of barley *for* a denarius. And do not hurt the oil and the wine. ⁷And when He had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come and see. ⁸And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him sitting on it *was* Death, and Hell followed with him. And authority was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword and with hunger and with death and by the beasts of the earth.

¹⁰ **Revelation 7:1-3:** ¹And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth so that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. ²And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, ³saying, Do not hurt the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

¹¹ **Revelation 9:13-17:** ¹³And the sixth angel sounded his trumpet. And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Loose the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. ¹⁵And the four angels were loosed, who were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, in order to slay the third *part* of men. ¹⁶And the number of the armies of the horsemen *was* two myriads of myriads. And I heard their number. ¹⁷And so I saw the horses in the vision,

and those sitting on them, having breastplates of fire, even dusky red and brimstone. And the heads of the horses *were* like the heads of lions. And out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

¹² **Revelation 9:19:** For their authority is in their mouth and in their tails. For their tails *were* like serpents with heads, and with them they do harm.

¹³ **Revelation 10:1-11:** ¹And I saw another mighty angel coming down out of the heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow *was* on his head, and his face *was* as the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. ²And he had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and *his* left *foot* on the earth. ³And he cried with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. And when he had cried, seven thunders spoke their sounds. ⁴And when the seven thunders spoke their sounds, I was about to write. And I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me, Seal up what things the seven thunders spoke, and do not write these things. ⁵And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the earth lifted his hand to the heaven, ⁶and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there should no longer be time. ⁷But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he will begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He has declared to His servants the prophets. ⁸And the voice which I heard from Heaven spoke to me again, and said, Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth. ⁹And I went to the angel and said to him, Give me the little book. And he said to me, Take *it* and eat it up, and it will make your belly bitter, but it will be sweet as honey in your mouth. ¹⁰And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it up. And it was sweet as honey in my mouth, and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. ¹¹And he said to me, You must prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.

¹⁴ **Revelation 12:7-9:** ⁷And there was war in Heaven. Michael and his angels warring against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels warred, ⁸but did not prevail. Nor was place found for them in Heaven any more. ⁹And the great dragon was cast out, the old serpent called Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

¹⁵ **Revelation 16:13-14:** ¹³And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *come* out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴For they are spirits of demons, working miracles, *which* go forth to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that day, the great day of God Almighty.

Revelation 19:20: And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet doing signs before it, (by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast), and those who had worshiped his image. The two were thrown alive into the Lake of Fire burning with brimstone.

¹⁶ **Revelation 12:1-4:** And there appeared a great sign in the heavens, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head, and having *a babe* in womb, she cries, being in travail, having been distressed to bear. And another sign was seen in the heavens. And behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads! And his tail drew the third *part* of the stars of heaven, and cast them onto the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman being about to bear, so that when she bears he might devour her child.

¹⁷ **Revelation 12:9:** And the great dragon was cast out, the old serpent called Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

¹⁸ **Revelation 12:13-17:** ¹³And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who bore the man *child*. ¹⁴And two wings of a great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the serpent's face. ¹⁵And the serpent cast out of his mouth water like a flood after the woman, so that he might cause her to be carried away by the river. ¹⁶And the earth helped the woman. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. ¹⁷And the dragon was enraged over the woman, and went to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

¹⁹ **Daniel 7:2-3:** ²Daniel spoke and said, In my vision by night I was looking: and behold, the four winds of the heavens were stirring up the Great Sea. ³And four great beasts came up from the sea, different from one another.

²⁰ **Daniel 7:17:** These four great beasts *are* four kings; they shall arise out of the earth.

²¹ **Jeremiah 31:15:** So says Jehovah: A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her sons; she refuses to be comforted for her sons, because they *are* not.

²² **Matthew 2:18:** A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they *are* not.

²³ **Exodus 1:8-12:** ⁸And there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹And he said to his people, Behold, the people of the sons of Israel *are* many and mightier than we. ¹⁰Come, let us deal slyly with them, lest they multiply, and it will be when there comes a war, they join also to our enemies, and fight against us, and get out of the land. ¹¹And they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built treasure cities for Pharaoh, Pithon and Raamses. ¹²But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the sons of Israel.

²⁴ **Revelation 4:8:** And each one of the four living creatures had six wings about *him*, and within being full of eyes. And they had no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was and is and *is* to come.

²⁵ **Revelation 5:6:** And I looked, and lo, in *the* midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, amidst the elders, a Lamb stood, as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

²⁶ **Revelation 13:11-18:** ¹¹And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. And it had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a dragon. ¹²And it exercises all the authority of the first beast before him, and causes the earth and those dwelling in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. ¹³And it does great wonders, so that it makes fire come down from the heaven onto the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴And it deceives those dwelling on the earth, because of the miracles which were given to it to do before the beast, saying to those dwelling on the earth that they should make an image to the beast who had the wound by a sword and lived. ¹⁵And there was given to it to give a spirit to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might both speak, and might cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶And it causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or in their foreheads, ¹⁷even that not any might buy or sell except those having the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of its name. ¹⁸Here is the wisdom. Let him having reason count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. And its number *is* six hundred *and* sixty-six.

²⁷ **Revelation 3:5:** The one who overcomes, this one will be clothed in white clothing. And I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

²⁸ **Revelation 20:12:** And I saw the dead, the small and the great, stand before God. And books were opened, and another book was opened, *which is* the Book of Life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

²⁹ **Revelation 5:7-9:** ⁷And He came and took the book out of the right *hand* of Him sitting on the throne. ⁸And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having harps and golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.

³⁰ **Revelation 17:1-2:** ¹And one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and talked with me, saying to me, Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot sitting on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and became drunk with the wine of her fornication, those inhabiting the earth.

³¹ **Revelation 17:15-16:** ¹⁵And he says to me, The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues, ¹⁶and the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked. And they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

³² **Revelation 18:4-8:** ⁴And I heard another voice from Heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that

you may not be partakers of her sins, and that you may not receive of her plagues. ⁵For her sins joined together, even up to Heaven, and God has remembered her unjust deeds. ⁶Reward her as she has rewarded you, and double to her double, according to her works. In the cup which she mixed, mix double to her. ⁷As much as she has glorified herself and has lived in luxury, so much torment and sorrow give her. For she says in her heart, I sit as a queen, and I am not a widow; and I do not see mourning at all. ⁸Therefore her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine. And she will be consumed with fire, for the Lord God who judges her *is* strong.

³³ **Revelation 11:3-4:** ³And I will give *power* to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy a thousand, two hundred and sixty days, clothed *in* sackcloth. ⁴These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

Zechariah 4:11-14: ¹¹And I answered and said to him, What *are* these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left? ¹²And I answered again and said to him, What *are* the two olive clusters beside the two golden pipes, emptying the golden *oil* from themselves? ¹³And he answered me and said, Do you not know what these *are*? And I said, No, my lord. ¹⁴And he said, These *are* the two sons of fresh oil who stand by Jehovah of the whole earth.

³⁴ **Ezekiel 23:4:** And their names *were* Oholah, the oldest, and Oholibah, her sister. And they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And their names: Samaria *is* Oholah, and Jerusalem *is* Oholibah.

³⁵ **Ezekiel 23:22-26:** ²²So, O Oholibah, the Lord Jehovah says this: Behold, I will raise up against you your lovers, from whom your soul is alienated; and I will bring them against you from all around; ²³the Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, *and* all the Assyrians with them; all of them desirable young men, governors and rulers, all of them, third heads and called ones; all of them riding on horses. ²⁴And they shall come against you *with* weapons, chariots, and wheels, and with an assembly of peoples; buckler and shield and helmet shall set against you all around. And I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge you by their judgments. ²⁵And I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury. They shall take away your nose and your ears, and the rest of you shall fall by the sword. They shall take away your sons and your daughters, and the rest of you shall be devoured by the fire. ²⁶They shall also strip you *of* your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels.

Ezekiel 23:28-30: ²⁸For so says the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will give you into the hand of *those* whom you hate, into the hand of whom your soul was alienated from them. ²⁹And they shall deal with you in hatred, and shall take away all your labor, and shall leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your fornications shall be uncovered, both your wickedness and your fornications. ³⁰These *things* will be done to you because you have whored after the nations, and because you are defiled with their idols.

Chapter 6: Thematic Focus: Christ as heroic

Introduction

The paradox of Jesus

The figure of Jesus Christ features in many of Mbatha's works and thus warrants discussion here. As discussed in chapter three, many of the oppressed in South Africa identified with Jesus as he was depicted in the gospels. He identified with the materially poor and was a member of an oppressed group, namely the Jews under Roman jurisdiction. This identification of Jesus with the poor, amongst other things, developed into what is known today as Liberation Theology (see chapter three).

For those who were able to connect the distant, unapproachable God of traditional African religion with the God of the Old Testament, Jesus is something of an anomaly. He identifies himself as the Son of God *and* the Son of Man, he declares that all believers are brothers and sisters in him, that he will be with his believers and will never forsake them. Africans could identify with the imagery and characters of the Old Testament as they found various parallels between the values expressed there and their own standards. But Jesus: God incarnate, fully man and fully God, the servant leader, coming to gain victory through a humiliating death on the cross and subsequent rising again, seemed quite incongruous with what one would expect from the Messiah, the long awaited king and saviour prophesied about in the Old Testament. Conversely, David Bosch (1973: 75) suggests that it was Jehovah who was foreign to the people of Africa and Jesus who was not a stranger because 'in the incarnation he had also taken their humanity on himself'. LeMarquand (2000: 73) acknowledges this paradox as he states that Jesus 'seems at once at home in and alien to every culture'.

Jesus' disciples expected him to come in power and splendour, declare his authority as king, and conquer any who resisted him, but instead they encountered a man who lived a life of humility, who rode on a donkey rather than a charger, was born in a stable and not a palace. In the same way, Jesus may sidestep the expectations of many African believers. Perhaps this is why Jesus is so very central to Mbatha's work. He was completely radical in his teachings and his way of life was so far removed from his Mbatha's own culture and

experience (just as they are from every culture), that the gospels seem the perfect place to start the process of 'Africanising' the Bible.

Jesus Christ and issues of race

Various examples of depiction of race

The four issues which demand the most attention in African New Testament exegesis are missionisation and colonialism, suffering, faith and African traditional religion and culture (LeMarquand 2000: 86) and it is therefore reasonable that these would appear as prominent themes in African Biblically-inspired art such as the work of Mbatha.

In one of his first linocut prints, *Jesus carrying the Cross* (1962) (Figure 10), Jesus and the people are depicted as white. This was by no means an acceptance of the situation in South Africa, where many 'white' churches had attempted to justify Apartheid Biblically, but rather represented Mbatha's confusion at the contradictions he saw in his daily life (Mbatha 1998b: 57). In a letter to Rankin and Hobbs from Peder Gowenius, it seems that even at that early stage Mbatha discussed with Gowenius the practicability of depicting the figures as black or white (Gowenius cited in Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 67).

Of particular interest is the manner in which Jesus is depicted in Mbatha's works. In Mbatha's early works Jesus was predominantly depicted as white, and later on he was pictured as black and at times he was shown as both white and black to symbolise that he was sent for the benefit of all people (Mbatha 1998b: 58).

In *Sermon on the Mount* (1967) (Figure 11), Mbatha utilizes an approach to the figures that appears throughout the works discussed in this chapter. The similarity of the robes unites the figures, implying that these are the faithful who should ideally be united regardless of skin colour, a point emphasized by Jesus' white and black face and hands. This could refer to the description of the church as the body of Christ with Christ as the head¹. If the head of the body incorporates both black and white then the rest of the body should follow likewise and segregation in the church is therefore not acceptable. The uniformity and non-specificity of the figures or the setting also emphasizes the universal applicability of the work.

In an interview with Rankin and Hobbs, Mbatha recalled that this was the first time he had depicted Christ as both black and white. 'If this memory is accurate, it challenges the earlier dates given to other works with this motif, as well as suggesting an increasing politicisation post-dating his arrival in Sweden' (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 67). An example of one of these earlier works is *Flight into Egypt* (1965) (Figure 12) in which the Christ child is depicted as both black and white. Initially Mbatha had perceived the church as a predominantly white institution but later came to alternative conclusions. Quoted in an article by Danilowitz he states:

I used to think how it would be if Christ was black... What I was trying to get nearer was that Jesus should be ... a unifying factor between these two groups [of blacks and whites]. To be accepted he was to be black *and* white so the black people could see there was something in him that was theirs...also...and that the one who crucified him was both black and white...Pilate has got a black hand and a white hand (Danilowitz 1998: 29).

In stating this he implies that it is not only the white man at fault; the one who condemns Jesus to death is not only white, but black and white, 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). This sensitivity toward the oppressor as oppressed by sin himself adds a dimension of authenticity and tenderness to Mbatha's work and prohibits any simplistic reading of his *oeuvre*.

The notion that by their sin both black and white people condemn Jesus to death, and both black and white people are equally in need of salvation is reiterated in the image of *Jesus in front of Pilatu* (1964) (Figure 13), and this 'equality' is emphasized by the symmetry of the work. Here Christ also functions as a 'model for suffering and injustice' (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 202). Before the arrival of the missionaries, suffering had always been perceived as a consequence of wrongdoing. Subsequently, it was taught that Jesus, the sinless one, had suffered greatly and that 'suffering somehow may be creative: that men participate in God's activity through the acceptance of suffering' (Wilson 1971: 47). This notion was used in proselytising and many black Christians grew to accept hardship as they believed they would receive their reward in heaven. This was especially evident amongst the AICs who were accused of being 'heavenly-minded' in the sense that present suffering was accepted on the basis that future bliss would more than compensate for it. Furthermore, some church leaders taught that present suffering would increase the joy and comfort to be expected in heaven and so very little effort was made to effect political change. It was this same view that existed amongst the black slaves in America in the 1700s – they believed

that they would receive justice and liberation in the hereafter and were thus temporarily and superficially pacified. God was seen as a loving father who would one day deliver his people as he had delivered the slaves out of Egypt whilst Jesus was seen as Saviour, elder brother and fellow sufferer (Rhodes 1991b: 27). James Cone adds another perspective as he proposes that the resurrection was a real event which symbolised universal freedom which can be brought about in the present and thus encourages the oppressed not to accept their current circumstances (cited in Rhodes 1991b: 27).

There are also earlier examples where Mbatha deliberately depicted figures as either black or white as an ideological device. An example of this is his first version of *David and Goliath* (1963) (Figure 3) where David and the Israelites are depicted as black and Goliath and the Philistines are white. Mbatha writes even though it would seem that the work has a political message he was exploring the theoretical consequences of Biblical stories being reversed and taking place in South Africa (Mbatha 1998b: 59). Nevertheless, the piece could easily be seen as politically motivated, as there are significant parallels between the Israelites and the Zulu nation: they were dispossessed of their land and even though they were the numerical majority, they were the minority in terms of the wielding of power. Another example of this is *Herod and the Wisemen* (1965) (Figure 6) where Herod, present oppressor and potential destroyer of Israel's future king, is depicted as white. Depicting the antagonist in the narrative as white violates the typically European tradition of seeing white as good and black as evil (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 67). After *David and Goliath* Mbatha went through a period where almost all his figures were depicted as black as he wanted to Africanise the Bible and challenge the uncontroversial idea held by many black Christians that Jesus of Jerusalem was white (Mbatha 1998b: 59).

But it must be considered that throughout Mbatha's body of work, most of the characters, whether good or evil, have at some point been depicted as black silhouettes with white linear detailing, including Christ, both David and Goliath in *Nebuchadnezzar* (1965) as well as Herod in *The Life of Jesus* (1963-1964). Christ is depicted as white in the panel depicting his resurrection in *The Passion of Christ* (1963-1964) (Figure 14). This could be indicative of his spiritual state (Rankin and Hobs 1998: 68) as shades were described as being white and Christ's resurrected state was linked to that of a shade, but there are also examples of a living Christ being depicted as white. Clearly, the race distinction that Mbatha employs is not consistent and therefore one needs to be wary of indiscriminately

applying racial ideologies to every one of Mbatha's works (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 67). As often as not, the portrayal of figures as black or white was purely a matter of aesthetics, and a response to the need to organise positive and negative shapes in a believable way on the linoleum tile.

Although Mbatha says that the issue of race in his works is not as significant as one would think, I disagree. For Mbatha to continue to use a medium which invites the kind of racial distinction seen in his work there must be more than a little significance in the issue of race. Even though almost every character has been depicted as black at some stage, there is no piece where the antagonist is only black and the oppressed party only white, but the opposite is seen in works like *David and Goliath* (1963) and others.

Mbatha's aim to Africanise scripture and subsequent choices of depicting figures as one race or the other is influenced by his father who often emphasized the role played by black people in the Bible, such as Simon of Cyrene who helped carry Jesus' cross (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 40). This was also an emphasis observed by the Ethiopian churches. Later Mbatha abandoned the allegory of race altogether as he felt that character rather than skin colour was the significant determinant (Eichel 1986: 17).

Jesus Christ as heroic martyr

Heroic Beginnings

Even at his birth, as depicted in works like *Birth of Jesus / Greetings – Nativity* (1964) (Figure 15) Christ's role as a hero for Africa is emphasized in that the context is depicted as African and by implication Christ's death (and resurrection) would also be significant for the African context. All the figures are black and the animals and dense foliage contribute to the 'Africanness' of the context, a deliberate positioning according to Leeb-du Toit (2003: 201). For a moment, all conflict is arrested and Leeb-du Toit cites Sundermeier as stating that the birth of Christ could represent the redemption of the whole natural world as referred to in Romans 8:20-22² (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 201).

Similarly, in the events following his birth, Christ's heroic function continues to be emphasized as again he is depicted as both black and white in the work *Flight into Egypt* (1965) (Figure 12). This work depicts the flight of Mary, Joseph and the Christ child into Egypt after being warned by an angel that Herod would order the death of all Hebrew boys

less than two years of age. They are represented as Zulus as Mary wears an *isicolo* headdress indicating that she is married and implying legitimacy for her child, and Joseph sports western garb. This notion of displacement is applicable to the South Africa context especially in light of the various forced removals of black South Africans in the 1960s and Mbatha's own self-imposed exile. Again, Jesus is identified with the plight of the oppressed in South Africa as one who experiences their hardship but still declares victory and thus presents a picture of hope, reaffirmed here by the contrast between the thorny and the flowering plants (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 40, 41). In his commentary on works for the *Memorial Exhibition to Honour Jo Thorpe* in 1996, Mbatha states writes that he depicted the Christ child as 'half black and half white, as he represents all people' (Mbatha 1996: 5). Mbatha (1998b: 58) also states that he depicted Jesus as born of a Zulu woman as he speculated that if the same story were to occur in South Africa, white soldiers would come to kill the child because he would be expected to rule one day.

Sermon on the Mount

Mbatha's notion and hope that there would be peace if all people, black and white, were united as Christians, is reiterated in *The Sermon on the Mount* (1967) (Figure 11) and echoes the words of Zacheus Mahabane, a politically engaged Methodist Minister in the late 1920s and early 1930s who believed that 'the universal acknowledgement of Christ as common lord and King [would] break down the social, spiritual and intellectual barriers between the races' (cited in Walshe 1991: 31). At the 1973 LTC consultation Odendaal (1974: 76, 77), amongst others, confirmed this attitude by stating that 'oneness', regardless of race, is only attainable through God's intervention.

Not all of the figures in this work this face towards Jesus and some seem to be going astray. This group could indicate the view that the AICs were close to Biblical and Christian sources but were proceeding in another direction. The palm tree to the left could indicate a secondary 'tree of life' and thus an alternative source. Perhaps the former suggestion that the figures are turning away shows a development that Mbatha recognized on his return from Sweden. Some are living according to the injunctions given at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and others are not. The Sermon on the Mount contains various injunctions directly pertaining to the issues of the day including the Beatitudes³, a pivotal text in Liberation Theology as Jesus describes his assurance to the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who desire righteousness, the merciful, the

pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who have been persecuted. The central importance of this text lies in the fact that it portrays the first time that Christ is declared as ‘irrevocably partisan’ (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 40; 2003: 202). The fact that the sermon ostensibly takes place on a mountain is particularly relevant and significant to the Zulu and the Zionist contexts as mountains were recognised as holy places, a meeting place between heaven and earth, between transcendence and the ordinary (Oosthuizen 1985: 2).

The sermon includes encouragements to live as the salt and light of the earth, to be reconciled with those who have sinned against you⁴, to bear injuries and persecution without retaliation and to love your enemies⁵. In Matthew chapter 6, the sermon continues with the Lord’s Prayer⁶, instructions regarding forgiving each other⁷ and an affirmation of divine providence⁸. Matthew 7 encourages believers to persevere in prayer⁹, to do to others as they would have done to themselves¹⁰, to beware of false teachers¹¹, to ensure that their lives are built on a solid foundation¹², all matters that would have been significant for oppressed groups in South Africa. By entitling the piece *Sermon on the Mount* Mbatha evokes all of these instructions and warnings and encourages his viewers, no matter what their own ethnic group, to adhere to them.

In discussing the role of the sermon in church life, David Bosch quotes to Rev D. D. L. Makhathini as saying that a sermon should ‘comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.’ Bosch (1973: 78) concurs and states that both should be present in any sermon; comfort may even be an affliction, or affliction may even lead to a sense of comfortableness (the martyr complex) and Mbatha exposes and challenges those for whom this is true. Bosch (1973: 78) goes on to say that, ‘Prophetic and relevant preaching has to expose all this, triumph over it and lead even our affliction and comfortableness off in Christ’s triumphal procession’. The *Sermon on the Mount*, and hence Mbatha’s depiction thereof, could be taken as the prime example of this.

For these and other contributors to the LTC consultation, Christ acts as ‘a political and religious martyr’ (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 201), and Mbatha’s work takes on an almost secular role as Jesus’ function as spiritual and political leader is emphasized far above his redemptive role as he becomes ‘emblematic of opposition in the face of oppression ... a leader [who] declares that justice will ultimately prevail’ (Leeb-du Toit 2003: 201).

The Promise / The Tree

A work of Mbatha's which conflates Old and New Testament narratives is *The Promise / The Tree* (1964) (Figure 16). It depicts the Old Testament account of God's calling of Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Exodus 3:2 states that the Angel of Jehovah appeared to Moses 'in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a thorn bush.' When Moses approached the bush to investigate why it was not consumed by the flames God called to him from within the bush and instructed him to take off his sandals (illustrated here in the bottom right corner) as he was standing on holy ground. On realizing that it is God before him Moses hides his face.

The image in the top left corner shows how Moses will later bring about the deliverance that the Angel of Jehovah promises. The promise of the title could refer to the promise given to Abraham that he would bless his descendants with a land flowing with milk and honey, or it could refer to the renewed promise of deliverance and assurance made in the passage depicted here. The fact that Pharaoh and his attendants are depicted as white introduces racial overtones and could account for the tear stained face of the Christ figure as he desires that all be liberated from sin, oppressors and oppressed, no matter what race. This work also illustrates how God wills that people be saved not only from their own sin, but also from the sin of oppression committed by others. He is as concerned with the consequences of sin as he is with sin itself (Nolan 1987: 37).

The term 'Angel of the LORD' has been interpreted as denoting Jesus himself, an idea Mbatha was no doubt familiar with as he depicts the figure here in a similar manner to his depictions of Jesus in works such as *Jesus in front of Pilate*, *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* and *Sermon on the Mount*. The New Testament narrative is included here in the figure of Christ and the all-encompassing nature of his deliverance is re-iterated by the mass of faces attached to the branches of the tree. The image of the tree has various connotations in scripture. It could refer to the fact that Jesus is described as being hung on a tree, indicating that he was cursed by God¹³ so that all those who accept salvation could experience blessing. It could refer to the notion of the tree of life, which is likened to a desire fulfilled and contrasted with deferred hope, which is said to make the heart sick¹⁴. Perhaps the tree motif indicates that the time has come for the hope of the Israelites, or that of any oppressed people groups, to be fulfilled.

Stations of the Cross for Africa

A set of images also relevant to this theme is *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995) (Figure 17). Mbatha was attempting to solve present-day problems with help from the past (Mbatha 1998b: 62). Here 'Biblical typology is overlaid with the politics of contemporary Africa' with the aim of 'reconciling Christian values with the myths and realities of his African heritage' (Danilowitz 1998: 25). However, the associations are not restricted to the African context as the soldiers in these works resemble contemporary helmeted western troops and could indicate other areas of conflict (Leeb-du Toit 1998: 45). What is striking here is that Mbatha uses the Stations of the Cross, originally from Roman church tradition, with some additions, to convey a somewhat subversive message, again an example of the perceived periphery using the vocabulary of the centre to indict the centre. Nonetheless, Jesus emerges as triumphant despite the various atrocities he experiences and not only does he rise again as pictured in *Station XV*, he brings reconciliation for the whole world, as depicted in *Station XVI*. The embracing figures in *Station XV* resemble those in his works on reconciliation (see chapter seven), and in turn represent the eventual ideal which is the reconciliation of the whole world in *Station XVI*. Just as through one man, Christ, reconciliation is possible for all, so through the actions of individuals, reconciliation is effected throughout the world, represented by the joined hands amidst what looks very much like a United Nations emblem in the final image. The circular motif is significant here as throughout the various stations the background consists of a swirling vortex of lines, except in *Station VI* and *Station XIII*. This motif could represent the desire for or working towards wholeness and unity represented by the circle, which finds its completion in the final two panels where Jesus is raised again and the world is restored to unity.

Jesus the healer

Another expression of Christ's heroic role is his function as healer as exhibited in works like *Healing of the Paralysed Man* (1963) (Figure 18) and *The Raising of Lazarus* (1963) (Figure 19). The emphasis on Christ as healer corresponds with views of sickness and healing found in traditional Zulu beliefs and AICs as referred to earlier in chapter 2. Wrongdoing is linked to illness, sickness and hardship is never the result of chance alone. Sickness refers to discord not only within the individual's own body, but in the whole person, extending to that person's family, community and even the entire nation.

Therefore, writes Jean Comaroff (1985: 9), healing is symbolic of the harmonizing of whole societies and is by implication an act of protest, or at least dissent.

The Healing of the Paralysed Man

The work *The Healing of the Paralysed Man* (Figure 18) refers to a story in Luke 5¹⁵ in which a man's friends lower him through the roof of the room Jesus is teaching in, in order for him to be healed. Jesus states that it is because of the faith of his friends that he is forgiven and thus healed. Jesus wears a priest's vestment and the women closest to him look as though they are wearing a uniform resembling those of the AICs as do the figures behind Jesus in their identical scarves. For the Zulu viewer this re-enforces the communal significance of healing, as aspect especially emphasised in the AICs. This event illustrates that Jesus himself shares their view of health as 'total physical, mental [and] social well-being as a result of the maintenance of good relationships and harmony with nature, divinities, spirits and fellow beings' (Sundkler & Steed, 2000: 677).

The Raising of Lazarus

The Raising of Lazarus (Figure 19) takes John 11: 1-45 as its source. The figure of Jesus here looks almost identical to the one in *Healing the Paralysed Man* and is surrounded by three sets of tiered figures. The text relates that Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, takes ill and his sisters, Mary and Martha contact Jesus to ask him to come and pray for Lazarus to be healed. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has already been entombed for four days. The narrative relates that on hearing of Lazarus' death, Jesus wept, as illustrated in Mbatha's work. With the words, 'Lazarus, Here! Outside!' (translated into Zulu above the tomb in the work) Jesus raises him from the dead and asks bystanders to remove the grave clothes from him. This image would have been inspired hope in many disheartened South Africans as it relates that even when it seems as though there is no possibility of restoration, and that Jesus withholds his power unnecessarily, even in the midst of despair, there is still place for hope.

Conclusions

In Mbatha's work, Jesus experiences rejection, forced exile, false accusation, sorrow, physical abuse and humiliation, but he also represents liberation, reconciliation, healing, vitality, unity, and righteousness. Mbatha portrays various aspects of the character and

attributes of Jesus Christ and depicts him in both his human and his divine capacities emphasising the paradox of his power: he came to conquer through suffering. Mbatha also links Jesus with Old Testament narratives, as in *The Promise / The Tree*. Throughout he emphasises that although God is the liberator and the healer and the redeemer, human agency is not excluded, 'it is Moses and Aaron and the people who have to take up the struggle and follow God's lead' (Nolan 1987: 37). Mbatha encourages his viewers to participate in the appropriation of these blessings which are as applicable to the African context as they are to any other.

¹ **1 Corinthians 12:12:** For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, *are* one body; so also *is* Christ.

² **Romans 8:20-22:** ²⁰For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but because of Him who subjected it on hope ²¹that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²And we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.

³ **Matthew 5:3-11:** ³Blessed *are* the poor in spirit! For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. ⁴Blessed *are* they that mourn! For they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed *are* the meek! For they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed *are* they who hunger and thirst after righteousness! For they shall be filled. ⁷Blessed *are* the merciful! For they shall obtain mercy. ⁸Blessed *are* the pure in heart! For they shall see God. ⁹Blessed *are* the peacemakers! For they shall be called the sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed *are* they who have been persecuted for righteousness sake! For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when *men* shall revile you and persecute *you*, and shall say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for My sake.

⁴ **Matthew 5:22-26:** ²²But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be liable to the judgment. And whoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; but whoever shall say, Fool! shall be liable *to be thrown* into the fire of hell. ²³Therefore if you offer your gift on the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; that the opponent not deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I say to you, You shall by no means come out from there until you have paid the last kodrantes.

⁵ **Matthew 5:38-48:** ³⁸You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist evil. But whoever shall strike you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰And to him desiring to sue you, and to take away your tunic, let him have *your* coat also. ⁴¹And whoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks of you, and you shall not turn away from him who would borrow from you. ⁴³You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on *the* evil and on *the* good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax-collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

⁶ **Matthew 6:9-13:** ⁹Therefore pray in this way: Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as *it is* in Heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread; ¹²and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

⁷ **Matthew 6:14, 15:** ¹⁴For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

⁸ **Matthew 6:25-34:** ²⁵Therefore I say to you, Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Behold the birds of the air; for they sow not, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not much better than they are? ²⁷Which of you *by* being anxious can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not toil, nor do they spin, ²⁹but I say to you that even Solomon in his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Therefore if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much rather *clothe* you, little-faiths? ³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? ³²For the nations seek after all these things. For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall be anxious for its own things. Sufficient to the day *is* the evil of it.

⁹ **Matthew 7:7-11:** ⁷Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. ⁸For each one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. ⁹Or what man is there of you, if his son asks a loaf, will he give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a snake? ¹¹If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?

¹⁰ **Matthew 7:12:** Therefore all things, whatever you desire that men should do to you, do even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.

¹¹ **Matthew 7:15-20:** ¹⁵Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits, nor *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.

¹² **Matthew 7:24-27:** ²⁴Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. ²⁵And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on a rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them shall be compared to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on that house. And it fell, and great was its fall.

¹³ **Deuteronomy 21:22-23:** ²²And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and if he is put to death and you hang him on a tree, ²³his body shall not remain all night on the tree. But you shall surely bury him that day (for he that *is* hanged is accursed of God), so that your land may not be defiled, which Jehovah your God gives you *for* an inheritance.

Galatians 3:13-14: ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone having been hanged on a tree"); ¹⁴so that the blessing of Abraham might be to the nations in Jesus Christ, and that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹⁴ **Proverbs 13:12:** Hope put off makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

¹⁵ **Luke 5:17-26:** ¹⁷And it happened on one of the days, even He was teaching. And Pharisees and teachers of the Law were sitting by, who had come out of every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was there, for the curing of them. ¹⁸And behold, men carrying, on a cot, a man who was paralyzed. And they sought to bring him in and to lay him before Him. ¹⁹And not finding a way by which they might bring him in through the crowd, going up on the housetop, they let him down through the tiles with his cot into the midst, before Jesus. ²⁰And seeing their faith, He said to him, Man, your sins are forgiven you. ²¹And the scribes and Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, except God alone? ²²But knowing their thoughts, answering, Jesus said to them, Why do you reason in your hearts? ²³Which is easier, to say, Your sins are forgiven you; or to say, Rise up and walk? ²⁴But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, I say to you, Arise, and take up your cot and go to your house. ²⁵And immediately he rose up before them and took up that on which he lay. And he departed to his own house, glorifying God. ²⁶And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, We saw wonderful things today.

Chapter 7: Thematic Focus: Reconciliation and healing

Introduction

For reconciliation to be necessary, some form of conflict and separation must take place. At times, this separation may be because of conflict, but in South Africa it has also been the case that conflict has arisen because of separation, or more accurately, segregation. Once reconciliation and resolution have taken place, through a process of mutual forgiveness, then healing can begin to occur. Considering the milieu of conflict in which Azaria Mbatha was raised and educated, it is not surprising that the theme of reconciliation occurs frequently in his work, both implicitly and explicitly.

Various forms of reconciliation

The most obvious expression of reconciliation in Mbatha's work is that of reconciliation between different races in South Africa. Mbatha himself states that when he returned to South Africa in 1967 after studying in Sweden he found the racial situation unbearable. That year also marks a turning point in Mbatha's work as he starts deliberately addressing racial issues.

When I arrived in Johannesburg I saw black and white in a mood quite different from what I had become used to in Europe. [It] was like being at war. I tried to smile at it but it was useless, again I began to think about drawing black and white figures as I had done ... in the early 1960s. (Mbatha 1998b: 61)

In Europe, the racial tension that exists is not primarily a case of a majority being explicitly and brutally oppressed by a minority, but rather of two or more racial groups aiming to advance their own interests. The situation in South Africa, as discussed LTC consultations, and described in the *Kairos Document* (1985), was not simply a conflict between black and white, but rather a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, between two irreconcilable causes, one just and the other unjust. As Black Liberation Theologian DeOtis Roberts states, 'reconciliation can only take place between equals. It cannot co-exist with a situation of Whites over Blacks' (Roberts cited in Rhodes 1991b).

A second expression of reconciliation in Mbatha's work is represented by his attempts to reconcile European and Zulu ideas about religion, especially in terms of reconciling faith

and culture, a separation that resulted in many Zulus sacrificing elements of their culture for their faith. Furthermore, this links to attempts to combine the past, referring to the shades or ancestors or the Apartheid context for example, with the 'present' post-Apartheid context and the future. This is demonstrated in his works on the book of Revelation depicting the second coming of Christ. Evidence of the conflict experienced in the areas mentioned above is discussed in the first chapter.

Thirdly, Mbatha also aims to reconcile people with the Bible and Christianity, which had previously been a primary instrument of the oppression they experienced, evidenced in chapter four, in which the various oppressive and liberatory modes of reading and interpreting the Bible are described. These various expressions of reconciliation are apt considering that Mbatha sees himself as one who sits at a loom and joins, works, sews and weaves an assortment of loose ends into a garment (Mbatha 2006: 209), an image that he would have been familiar with due to his involvement with the tapestry weaving at Rorke's Drift.

Why is reconciliation necessary?

The concept of reconciliation has societal importance, bearing in mind that the notion of *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (people are people through other people) both encourages and relies on reconciliation and the restoration of relationships. In line with Zulu communalism, forgiveness restores social relations between individuals and groups in contrast to western forgiveness, which indicates the moral rectitude of the forgiver (Nolan 1987: 79). For Zulu people and Africans generally, Christian or not, sickness is closely connected to wrongdoing as misconduct is seen as expressing irreverence for the ancestors who consequently withhold their protection, resulting in physical and mental sickness. Healing is therefore a result of confession, repentance and a restored relationship. The concept of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-98) is based on this premise. Aspects of the prophetic and the therapeutic in Mbatha's work are evident as he anticipated the significant role that reconciliation would later play in South Africa's future (Mbatha 2006: 211).

Even in the latter decades of the twentieth century, there were various divisions in the church in South Africa. Firstly, worship was racially segregated even within denominations, as illustrated in *Crucifixion/reconciliation* (1967-68) (Figure 21) and

others. Secondly, within white churches there were those who condoned Apartheid wholeheartedly, some who could be called fence sitters in that they had no official position concerning Apartheid, and those who opposed it. Within the black churches, there were those who opposed Apartheid and those who chose not to engage in politics at all¹. The irony, or tragedy, of this is that all of these groups claimed loyalty to the same God and yet 'Christian policemen and soldiers [were] beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace' (Kairos 1985: 2).

Klaus Nürnberger describes a prophet as one from the ranks of the people of God who fearlessly confronts the ruler/s with the claim of God (1974: 105). Considering this and the general development of Mbatha's work, we see the degree to which his art was often prophetic in describing the attitudes of people in South Africa. Many of Mbatha's works on the theme of reconciliation were produced before the LTC consultations and many more were produced before the later publication of *The Kairos Document* in 1985. Mbatha intended for all groups to be reconciled into one Christian brotherhood in the belief that this would bring peace.

I thought that if all people were of the Christian religion there would be peace in South Africa. But later I discovered I was wrong...because I discovered that in South Africa there are many Christian people who are doing wrong things. I discovered this later, but first I had this strong feeling that religion was the way to be a bridge [later] I was disappointed. (Danilowitz 1998: 28)

Mbatha's work at this time exhibits Black Theological ideas that would later be confirmed by D. D. L. Makhathini (1973a: 9), 'He knows no institution, no ideology, no nation, no form of government, no society, that can heal the brokenness or prevail against the power of evil and death except the church of Christ'. In spite of this, it would be out of place to insist that Mbatha holds this view to this day.

The words of *The Kairos Document* echo the sentiments of *Crucifixion / reconciliation* and *Group inbetween* as it states that the church is divided because 'not all members have taken sides against oppression' and 'united themselves with God' who is 'always on the side of the oppressed'². Furthermore 'unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and oppressed' (Kairos 1985: 22). It was and is important that the church itself be unified,

primarily and more importantly to challenge oppression and realize a new communality and secondly in order to preach about reconciliation to those who are not yet believers.

The various forms of oppression and conflict combine to form a central theme throughout the Bible and an exposition thereof in any form thus addresses the needs and concerns of oppressed people directly. Words used in the English translations to describe the experience of being oppressed include: crushed, trampled, degraded, humiliated, exploited, impoverished, defrauded, deceived and enslaved and the oppressors are described as cruel, ruthless, arrogant, greedy, violent and tyrannical and as the enemy (Kairos 1985: 16; Nolan 1987: 34, 35). Although much of the development of the nation of Israel occurs in an environment of oppression in Egypt, the Israelites have a revelation of God revealed as Jehovah, the self-existent one who states in Exodus that he sees the oppression of his people and means to deliver them³. He does allow his people to experience oppression when they turn away from him, but his perfect will is that all live in the true liberty that comes from knowing and following him. He is inherently against oppression and is therefore on the side of the oppressed, expressed in both the Old and the New Testaments⁴. Jesus adopts the cause of the poor and the oppressed, identifying with them even in death. This is not to say he is indifferent to the rich and the oppressor as he calls them to repent (Kairos 1985: 17).

Throughout his work Mbatha does not seem to indict any group directly, neither the missionaries who originally introduced western Christianity, nor the government that further distorted it; but chooses to rather express the ideal state, which for him was and is reconciliation, articulated through integration. There is no sense of bitterness or vindictiveness in his work, but rather a deeply felt sense that things are not as they should be as well as a real sense of desire to communicate and encourage communication (Danilowitz 1998: 29)⁵. Rather than looking to the past with resentment, he looks to the future with hope. As he states in the catalogue for his 1998 *Retrospective Exhibition*, 'I think that South Africa can only be built through love and tolerance' (Mbatha 1998b: 63). On this point he seems to differ with the writers of *The Kairos Document* (1985: 14) who felt that resolution would come through political change which would then result in individual reconciliation. Specifically on the issue of reconciliation, *The Kairos Document* (1985: 8) states that reconciliation cannot be made into an absolute principle to be applied in any instance of conflict or dissension. If the situation was merely one of

misunderstanding then reconciliation can be applied, but when one side is ‘a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed’ and the struggle is between justice and injustice, good and evil, personified as God and the devil, then efforts at reconciliation are at best inappropriate and at worst non-Christian and destructive (Kairos 1985: 9)⁶. There can be no reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiation possible without repentance and justice. Only once repentance has happened will true peace, God’s peace be possible⁷. Christians are further encouraged not to accept a counterfeit peace but to continue striving for God’s peace, truth and justice, even if it means creating, as Jesus did, ‘conflict, disunity and dissension’ in the process (Kairos 1985: 10)⁸. While the Kairos Document goes on to recommend revolution rather than reformation, eventually leading to a democracy, Mbatha is sceptical of democracy as a system of government⁹.

Reconciliation in specific works

The explicit references to interracial reconciliation in Mbatha’s work, by his own admission (1998b: 61), are contained in his works *The Sermon on the Mount* (1967) (Figure 11) (see chapter five), *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* (1967-1968) (Figure 21), *Dream / struggle* (1968) (Figure 22), *Dialogue* (1969) (Figure 24), *Group inbetween* (1980s) (Figure 25), *Between Hope and Despair* (1980s) (Figure 26) and *The News* (1980/90) (Figure 27). These works were produced after he had returned from studying in Sweden in 1967 and also after he departed again in 1969 and provide evidence of his statement that he began to address racial issues at this time. Here he explores the notion of reconciliation between the races in South Africa, a theme for which the positive and negative intaglio contrasts peculiar to linocutting are well suited. Mbatha’s pictorial reconciliation of black and white is an inevitable result of inherent colours of his chosen medium.

Crucifixion / Reconciliation

His work *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* (1967-1968) (Figure 21) contains robed figures similar to those in *Sermon on the Mount* but now their faces, and hence their skin colour, are visible, and racial connotation is more explicit. The two main divisions seem to express the differing ideas of the two men, similar to the function of thought bubbles in comics. The white man desires segregation, the black man (Mbatha himself) (Mbatha 1998b: 61)

desires integration. Their ideas are completely irreconcilable, illustrated by the central bar that forms the fulcrum of the work. If the work is read from left to right it would seem that the area on the left, above the (evidently European) white man's head, refers to a time, past or present, when races are divided by a solid barrier, a wall which Mbatha (2006: 47, 48) claims was erected by the Apartheid government and is not representative of the wishes of the people. It is not clear whether the separation is desired or not. Neither group looks content with their situation. This could mean that they are forcibly separated and are thus unhappy, but could also illustrate Mbatha's view that even if they are separate by choice, there still cannot be happiness without reconciliation. If we continue to read left to right as indicating the chronological order, the white figure looks forward into the future and the black figure looks to the past. The fact that the black figure looks to the left could point to Mbatha's belief that the past is an integral element of the future and that it is a valuable resource when one learns from it (Mbatha 2005: 217; Eichel 1986: 7). Alternatively, it could be that Mbatha looks toward the white male as if to suggest that the way of peace is preferable, as Mbatha himself aims to be the peacemaker in this situation. Mbatha's gaze is slightly deferred whilst the white man looks past Mbatha, straight ahead at an as yet uncertain future.

In the top right hand we see a crucified Christ with arms upraised, surrounded by a mixed race group, also in the same uniting robes. The fact that Christ's face is depicted as half white and half black again shows Mbatha's view that Jesus Christ was a man for all people, evidenced by the fact that he did not allow racial or cultural differences to affect his contact with people during his time on earth. The face of Christ is echoed again at the lower end of the central bar, unifying the two men visually as well as suggesting that they need to be united in having 'the mind of Christ'¹⁰.

This work could also refer to the blessing given to peacemakers during the Sermon on the Mount: that they will be called sons of God. The work seems to imply that Jesus is the primary peacemaker; it is his presence in the right half of the work that brings the races together, but that people are the appropriators or enactors of that peace.

Dream / struggle

Dream / struggle (1968) (Figure 22) shows Mbatha's own personal struggle in coming to terms with the situation in South Africa. On his return to South Africa he had wanted to be

needed but later felt that what was required of him was far more than he could contribute (Mbatha 1998b: 61). He tried to set up a workshop in Swaziland but after an altercation with some police officers he abandoned the idea and on his return to South Africa he determined to leave for Europe again. He writes, 'I was convinced that disaster was shadowing me. I was dreaming bad dreams with no foundation. It became harder and harder to stay in South Africa' (Mbatha 2005: 43). Dreams are significant in Mbatha's context as they are seen as a means of gaining access to the shades (Botha cited in Mbatha 2005: xix; Berglund 1976: 79). They also form a major part of the practice of the Zionist church in that they were believed to direct the dress and behaviour of the dreamers and their congregations. As has already been mentioned, his mother interpreted dreams and Mbatha writes that he enjoyed making pictures of the dream stories he had heard (Mbatha 2005: xix, 32).

In this work, he identifies himself with Jacob, again the youngest son, as David was (see chapter three). In the Biblical account, Jacob had deceitfully obtained his brother's birthright and his brother's blessing which were both privileges of being the firstborn, and was thus despised by his brother (Genesis 27). When the family could not afford to send both Mbatha and his eldest brother Vela to school it was Mbatha who was permitted to continue with his education (Mbatha 2005: 76). There was some tension between Mbatha senior and Vela when he decided to become a Zionist as he rejected the Lutheran church outright (Mbatha 2005: 78) and this would have resulted in Mbatha enjoying a relationship with his father that should have been enjoyed by the first-born. Perhaps Mbatha had felt that the privileges and benefits he had received in going to Sweden were undeserved and had set him apart from his own people leading them to despise him. The work was certainly one of his most turbulent works and effectively depicts a sense of struggle, in contrast to the structured composition of *Jacob's Dream* (1960s) (Figure 23).

In Jacob's dream recorded in Genesis 28¹¹ the writer records that on his way to Haran, Jacob saw a ladder whose top reached to heaven and upon which angels ascended and descended. Jehovah himself stood at the top of it. The ladder has been interpreted by some commentators as representing Christ as the mediator between heaven and earth, the one who reconciles man and God, as Christ himself references this incident in John 1:51¹². This is in accord with the fact that Christ would be a descendant of Jacob's line and links in specifically with the concept of reconciliation. The land on which he was lying was

promised to him and his descendants, reiterating the promise given to Abraham and Isaac, and included the promise that he and his seed would spread to the north, south, east and west and be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God promises to be with Jacob always and to bring him back to his homeland. Having departed to Paddan Aram only to be tricked into marrying both of Laban's daughters and compelled to work for an unfair and inconsistent remuneration for a total of nineteen years, he nonetheless grows wealthy through shrewd dealings with Laban and decides to return to his homeland. Having sent his wives, children and servants ahead of him with gifts for his estranged brother Esau, Jacob waits on the other side of the river and there a man appears and wrestles (or struggles) with him until daybreak. He emerges with a disjointed hip, a changed name, and the blessing of God (Genesis 28-32).

There are parallels here between the life of Mbatha and that of Jacob. Mbatha had also left his homeland to travel to a foreign land; he gained relative wealth and education, and returned to his homeland, although in Mbatha's case only for a short time. Perhaps he too experienced a sense of betrayal and exploitation as Jacob did. Jacob's life was indeed one of struggle. In his notes on Genesis 28, Albert Barnes writes that one can discern a distinction between the lives of the three patriarchs: 'Abraham's is a life of authority and decision; Isaac's, of submission and acquiescence; and Jacob's, of trial and struggle' (Barnes 2000). This quite closely parallels the history of the Zulu nation as they enjoyed a degree of authority and power under Shaka, were coerced into submission and acquiescence through various military and legal enforcements and in the latter part of the twentieth century were engaged in a struggle to regain what had been lost. Considering the title of the work under discussion, it would seem that Mbatha himself identified with Jacob on this level, which in turn indicates various levels of meaning in his work, including both individual and collective references.

This concept of 'struggle' and the uneasy coexistence of hope and despair are illustrated in many of Mbatha's works and are demonstrated in this work through the use of stripes in contrasting directions as well as a strong diagonal element. Perhaps Mbatha also aims to tell his audience that blessing must be claimed through struggle, and thus hopes to encourage those in the Struggle for freedom from oppression. This work could also illustrate his personal struggle with his heart ailment which would continue to impinge on his health throughout his life. The repeated depiction of facial profiles could echo the fact

that Jacob called the place where he had wrestled with the man *Peniel* which means ‘face of God’ as he realizes that he had wrestled with God, and that he had seen God ‘face to face’¹³.

Dialogue

Chronologically following *Dream / struggle* is *Dialogue* (Figure 24), a linoprint produced a year later in 1969 once Mbatha had returned to Sweden. Here the two main figures are repeated, still seemingly joined to each other but although the black figure looks out to the viewer the white figure continues to look forward indicating the time has passed and the men are older but the situation has not changed (Mbatha 1998b: 61).

The background is simplified and the anthropomorphic figures that will later be seen in *Group Inbetween* (Figure 25) make their appearance. The black and white figures embracing in the lower right corner give an idea of what the aim of the dialogue is, but the dismayed and vacant expressions of the black and white figures respectively suggest that dialogue is not happening. Dialogue is a possibility due to their proximity, but the figures literally look past each other and lack the engagement necessary to bring about true dialogue. Their features seem more fatigued than before, a result of age and anxiety, as consternation and despair take the place of the hope offered in *Crucifixion / Reconciliation*.

Group inbetween

In Mbatha’s work *Group inbetween* (1980s) (Figure 25), the theme begun in *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* is developed further. Here a near copy of *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* is fragmented as the figures on the left are separated not only by the bar between them but also by the fragmentation of different areas of the print. It would seem that the dialogue that was hoped for has not occurred and reconciliation is even less likely. Both central figures are disjointed from their ‘contexts’ but are nonetheless still joined to each other. It is ambiguous as to whether the group in between is pushing the sides further apart or aiming to unite them. Mbatha (1998b: 61) states that the group is attempting to bring the two sides together, confirmed by the fact that the two topmost figures look as though they are stretching out to join hands, despite the fact that the other elements of the work seem to be moving away from each other. These figures could represent ancestral figures but this will be discussed later in the chapter. The two central figures look bound; both are

powerless. The black figure no longer looks to the white figure for assistance in his pursuit of peace, but seems to entreat the audience to intervene or to identify with him while the white figure maintains his forward stare. The view that the picture signifies that the white man's intention is separation whilst the black man's ideal (and hence Mbatha's ideal) is unity though the cross of Christ is supported by the last image in Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station XVI* entitled *Reconciliation* (1995) (Figure 20). The preceding panel depicts the resurrection and thus reconciliation, as shown by a black a white hand shaking hands enclosed in various concentric circles, follows as the natural consequence and the inevitable outcome. The connection between reconciliation and wholeness is expressed here with circles which symbolise life, harmony, perfection, togetherness and rhythm in Zulu and especially Zionist thought (Oosthuizen 1985: 6). The fact that the circles are concentric amplifies this unity. The circle also indicates the cyclical nature of life, as opposed to the western view of time as linear (Mafico 2000: 485), confirmed by the circular shape of the cattle byre, and the shape and arrangement of traditional huts and other elements of Zulu custom. James Jones comments that the imagery of the circle, as well as the notion of water as relating to rebirth, as experienced in the rite of baptism, function as archetypal images that recur across many different cultures (Jones 1991).

Between hope and despair

Between hope and despair (1980s) (Figure 26) includes many allusions to previous works although the elements are situated in different positions thus altering their significance. Ott (2000: 141, 509) links this practice of repetition with variety to techniques of oral transmission. It is significant in that it allows many interrelated layers of meaning to be discovered which allows it to transcend differences of human perception and be received outside of its culture of origin.

The separated group now has the white figures above the cross bar of the cross motif with the black figures below. This could illustrate that black Christians were seen as second-class members of the faith communities to which they belonged, as was the case in many churches (Sundkler & Steed 2000: 819), and illustrates the fact that worship was strictly separate. The white group is also separated from the mixed group, reinforcing the view that many, if not most, white Lutherans opposed mixed worship. The ideal of the mixed group united beneath the cross is now placed centrally above the main figures that face each other as weary boxers might do when too tired to continue exchanging blows. The

placement of this group in the centre implies that both figures have the same ideal in mind but have differing thoughts on how that ideal should be reached, an impasse that exacerbates the existing tension. They are no longer joined as before and the square and round shapes before them reinforce the contrast in outlook illustrated in *Crucifixion / Reconciliation* by possibly alluding to the expression ‘a square peg in a round hole’; what each has to offer is not suitable to the other. The work is balanced by the figure on the right which pulls the black figure upward into what seems to be heaven. If access to heaven cannot be gained via the cross on the left, which both supports the white figures and prevents the black figures from gaining access, then perhaps it will be gained by divine intervention of a black God.

Again the anthropomorphic black figures appear. If they are representative of the shades then it brings a new reading to *Dialogue* and especially *Group Inbetween*. The veneration of the shades has been a contentious issue in the expansion of the church in South Africa as missionaries interpreted it as worship and thus idolatry but Serote writes that worship in Africa without the ancestors was inconceivable (Buthelezi 1973: 20; Serote 1973: 149). Perhaps the ‘group inbetween’ shows that even the ancestors desired unity, even though they represent an aspect of Zulu culture which is said to be incompatible with western culture and western Christianity and in many cases precludes any possibility of meaningful dialogue. In *Between hope and despair*, the shades seem provoked in some way, but whether they are provoked to jubilation or frustration is not clear. What is clear is that they are above the horizontal centre of the work and are thus depicted as ‘heavenly’, spiritual beings, even though traditionally they are thought to dwell ‘below’ (Sundkler 1961: 21). They are also depicted as black when they are said to be white or transparent (Berglund 1976: 89, 104). This inversion could be due to the Zionist notion that the ancestors act as angelic mediators (West cited in Leeb-du Toit 2003: 48).

The News

Another work that explicitly deals with reconciliation is *The News* (1980/90) (Figure 27). The dating of this work is ambiguous as the catalogue for Mbatha’s *Retrospective Exhibition* states that this work was produced in 1980 whereas in an article in the *Sunday Times* in 1998, Diane Stewart, then the director of the African Arts Centre, states that the work depicts Mbatha’s response to a television programme he saw in Sweden in 1990. Considering the political situation in South Africa in 1980 and 1990, I think that 1990 is

the more likely date. Nevertheless, this work shows a sense of hope as Mbatha responds to witnessing the beginnings of true dialogue in South Africa following a tumultuous 1989¹⁴. The fact that the figures on the screen look remarkably like prominent figures in South African politics at the time, namely President F. W. de Klerk and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, testifies to Mbatha's dexterity with his medium. Rhoda Rosen refers to this work as *At Crossroads* and the work on the wall as *Brotherhood* (Rosen 1993: 20), again emphasising the theme of reconciliation.

The link with reconciliation is also seen in the image of the figures on the screen with a black and white flag in the background while the seated figure, Mbatha himself, is watched by the figures depicted in a reversed version of his *Crucifixion / reconciliation* print on the wall. Hobbs and Rankin (1998: 76, 77) write that this presents Mbatha both as passive spectator, and as participant and self-conscious prophet through his earlier works depicting interracial dialogue. Furthermore,

This theme, drawn from his South African experience, continued in exile, encapsulates Mbatha's double heritage in Africa and Europe, and the opportunities and tensions of this duality. It also evokes the artist's ongoing desire for a reconciliation that acknowledges the value of both traditions as much in his own art, as in our contemporary history (Hobbs & Rankin 1998: 76, 77).

This duality and the conflicts associated with it are evident throughout Mbatha's *oeuvre* his exploration of this tension adds to the vitality of his work.

Conclusions

The more implicit aspects of reconciliation in Mbatha's work include his aims to reconcile people with the Bible, even those for whom it may have been a primary instrument of oppression in their lives. To write an African Theology in the vernacular or in a manner accessible to Zulu speakers would be ideal. Considering illiteracy rates in South Africa, images are an ideal way to disseminate ideas and this is what Mbatha hoped to do, pre-empting Pobe who wrote in 1979 that

African Theology is concerned to interpret essential Christian faith in authentic African language in the flux and turmoil of our time so that there may be genuine dialogue between the Christian faith and African cultures. (Pobe 1979: 22)

By this definition, Mbatha is most certainly an 'African Theologian'. West writes that the Bible was implicated in oppression and imperialism not only because of those who had used it for their own ends, but also because of ideologies intrinsic to the text. Despite this, Africans had 'negotiated and transacted with' and appropriated the Bible by 'relativising it, resisting it, and modifying it with uncanny creativity' (West 2000: 29, 30). West describes Mbatha as one of the best examples of this appropriation in action and states that it is regrettable that most of Mbatha's works (and the works of others like him) have been relocated to galleries and private collections locally and abroad and consequently the work has not been given sufficient opportunity to have the impact that it could have had (West 2000: 39).

In his work, Mbatha also aimed to reconcile the seeming dichotomy between the sacred and secular, the spiritual and the physical. Because his upbringing had been so steeped in religious and spiritual stimuli, it is almost self-evident that this would appear in his work. It may be more accurate to say that Mbatha merely expressed the monism that already existed in Zulu culture, which to a dualistic western viewer might seem like reconciliation. For him, spirituality is not an individual, private matter, as it would be for a conventional dualist. Rather he holds that spirituality is inherently a communal matter and a spiritual solution therefore naturally involves both the social and the political. In fact, it seems almost impossible to make any clear distinction between the sacred and the secular in Africa as 'religion and daily life are inextricably intertwined' (Duncan 1991: 29). The writers of *The Kairos Document* state that the view that there was a non-political (and thus spiritual) solution to the problems facing South Africa stems from a dualistic 'individualistic otherworldly spirituality' (Boesak cited in Walshe 1991: 43). The dualism exhibited by white churches was perhaps one of the most glaring contradictions evident during Apartheid. Lediga writes:

Worship in Africa is always the act of atonement and reconciliation with man and God. But this is a factor missing in the established Church in our land. It is lack of this factor that renders the Christian church most irrelevant in Africa today. The sects are in search of it. To the African, God must capture and overrule in every activity of life with all people and with all things created (Lediga 1972: 32).

Therefore it appears that according to *The Kairos Document* (1985: 14) (and others), African spirituality is a truly Biblical spirituality as it is relevant to and thus penetrates every aspect of human existence.

Throughout this chapter, we can see how the Biblical text affirms Mbatha's aims, and affirms the plight of the people to whom his works are directed. Mbatha treads a fine line between hope and despair but ultimately conveys a message of optimism and affirmation. He affirms that people are made in the image and likeness of God and the enemies of God's people are the enemies of God. He goes on to affirm, through works like *Sermon on the Mount*, that we should love our enemies. The egalitarianism and non-racial values expressed in Mbatha's work are also supported by a New Testament Biblical worldview, as is Mbatha's promotion of reconciliation¹⁵ although opinions vary as to how that reconciliation is to be attained.

¹ English speaking white churches objected to various aspects of the apartheid policies and condemned it in word, but not in practice. The Dutch Reformed Church on the other hand supported segregation and aimed to legitimize apartheid (Walshe 1991: 32). Jean Comaroff writes that the Zion Christian Church implicitly protested apartheid through its segregationist tendencies, but posed no threat to the state as it generally avoided confrontation (1985: 254).

² **Psalms 103:6:** Jehovah works righteousness and judgment for all who are pressed down.

³ **Exodus 3:7-9:** ⁷And Jehovah said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows. ⁸And I am coming down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them up out of that land, to a good land, a large land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹And now behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me. And I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

He reiterates this aim in the New Testament when Jesus describes his mission by quoting Isaiah 61 in **Luke 4:18-19:** ¹⁸The Spirit of *the* Lord *is* on Me; because of this He has anointed Me to proclaim the Gospel to *the* poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and new sight to *the* blind, to set at liberty those having been crushed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the acceptable year of *the* Lord.

⁴ **Psalms 103:6:** Jehovah works righteousness and judgment for all who are pressed down.

⁵ 'Let us see apartheid, above all else, as a curse that must never visit us again; and let us always remember colonialism, the scourge of Africa, that made the continent what it is today' (Mbatha 2006: 210).

⁶ **2 Corinthians 6:14-17:** ¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together *with* unbelievers; for what fellowship does righteousness *have* with lawlessness? And what partnership does light *have* with darkness? ¹⁵ And what agreement does Christ *have* with Belial? Or what part does a believer *have* with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement does a temple of God *have* with idols? For you are the temple of *the* living God, as God has said, "I will dwell in them and walk among *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." ¹⁷ Therefore come out from among them and be separated, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean *thing*. And I will receive you

⁷ **John 14:27:** Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

⁸ **Luke 12:50:** But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am pressed down until it is accomplished!

⁹ 'If we can boil up a nation with all our resources, he said, it will surely succeed. I cannot accept the way America and Europe exalt democracy. Numbers rule instead of brains. In Africa where the population teems, that can be dangerous. In South Africa, however, the call is for the unity of the entire people. It is not simply a matter of black independence based on numerical superiority. That is a mask for agitators' (Mbatha 2006: 47).

¹⁰ **Philippians 1:27 - 30:** ²⁷Only let your conduct be as becomes the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or else am absent, I may hear of your *affairs*, that you stand fast in one spirit, striving together with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and terrified in nothing by your adversaries. *For this is* to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. ²⁹ For to you it is given on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

1 Corinthians 2:16: For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

¹¹ **Genesis 28:11-22:** ¹¹And he came on a certain place, and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took of the stones of that place, and placed them at his head. And he lay down in that place to sleep.

¹²And he dreamed. And behold! A ladder was set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven! And behold! The angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³And behold! Jehovah stood above it, and said, I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac! The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your seed. ¹⁴And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in you and in your Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you in every place where you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken of to you. ¹⁶And Jacob awakened from his sleep. And he said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know. ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, How fearful is this place! This is nothing but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven! ¹⁸And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone which he had put at his head, and set it as a memorial pillar, and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹And he called the name of that place The House of God. But the name of that city was Luz at first. ²⁰And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, ²¹and I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall Jehovah be my God. ²²And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house. And of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth to You.

¹² **John 1:51:** And He said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Hereafter you shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

¹³ **Genesis 32:30:** And Jacob called the name of the place Face of God; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

¹⁴ President F. W. de Klerk took over from Pik Botha in February of 1989 as a result of negotiations with the ANC some political prisoners were released and some organizations unbanned. Toward the end of 1989 there were extensive protests in all the major cities, 'individuals and organizations simply unbanned themselves, forcing the state into an ambivalent response – reluctant concessions and spasmodic repression' (Walshe 1991: 58). Nelson Mandela was finally released in February 1990.

¹⁵ **Galatians 3:28:** There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is no male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11: ... where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian, slave *or* freeman, but Christ *is* all things in all.

1 Corinthians 12:13-14: ¹³ For also by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, even all were made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many.

John 17:20-21: ²⁰ And I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who shall believe on Me through their word, ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.

Ephesians 2:13: ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who were once afar off are made near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He is our peace, He making us both one, and He has broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity (the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances) so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, making peace *between them*; ¹⁶ and so that He might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity in Himself. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, ²⁰ and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being *the* chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom every building having been fitly framed together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together for a dwelling place of God through *the* Spirit.

Conclusion

Azaria Mbatha's work is unique in that it expresses an uncoerced response to Biblical narratives and utilizes them as a means of exploring his own identity and the predicament of society. Through his work he is able to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable' (Makhathini cited in Bosch 1973: 78), an illustration of the diverse dualities present throughout his work.

His upbringing as a *kholwa* son and the various aspirations, ambiguities and obligations that entailed, as well as his interaction with staff and students at the LTC and subsequent internal conflict experienced has profoundly affected his own beliefs and worldview. He utilises and reveals these conflicts and ambiguities in his work, even whilst in Sweden where he has had the luxury of reflection. Although his work includes references to the Zulu worldview and to Biblical texts, his work cannot be reduced to a naïve depiction of rural African life, or mere uncritical illustration of Bible texts. Neither does he concentrate solely on the 'suffering African' theme or the idiom of resistance art and in doing so exploit the Bible and art to purely political ends. He is not simply a sponge, passively absorbing the various influences he faced and reflexively regurgitating them when squeezed, but sees himself as a weaver, plucking the various threads from his environment and joining, sewing and weaving them into one garment.

The influence of the AICs and staff and students at the LTC, and that of family members associated with these groups, forms some of the various threads incorporated into Mbatha's work and the similarities he finds between Old Testament Jewish and Zulu practices are emphasised and drawn into his arras.

He interprets the Bible utilising the contextual method in which the perspectives and context of the ordinary reader are of paramount importance, above the intended meaning of the author. He posits Africa as the subject and the Bible as the object, thus overturning traditional modes of interpretation and resonating with the notion of the African as a subject of his own world, rather than the object. He applies Biblical narrative in both a didactic and autobiographical manner, again emphasising the double-coding present in his work.

His works depicting scenes from the book of Revelation are encouraging to any person suffering under oppression as it acts as a reminder to believers that Jesus is aware of the suffering of his people and intends to take action. The narrative structure of the books lends itself to Mbatha's sequential style and the symbolic language and visual descriptions are suited to African methods of expressing concepts. Mbatha's works illustrating scenes from Revelation are therefore an encouragement to the suffering, and a warning to those causing suffering. He also emphasizes a desire for unity, expressed in his work *Stations of the Cross for Africa*.

He represents the figures of Jesus Christ as a heroic martyr. Besides his role a king and judge in Revelation, Mbatha emphasises Jesus' human-ness and his identification with the poor and oppressed. He represents Jesus as black and white, and sometimes half-black and half-white indicating Mbatha's view that he is was sent for the benefit of all people. He also highlights Jesus' role as healer – a function that would have resonated with Zulu Christians and the significance they attributed to sickness and healing as symbolic of societal disorder and order respectively. Other works incorporating the figure of Jesus accent the unity of his followers showing how Mbatha desired for all people to be united, in contrast to the segregation he experienced in South Africa.

This relates to Mbatha's work illustrating the notion of reconciliation in which he explicitly shows his hope for unity through the application of Christian values as well as a sense of despair at times when it seems as though that unity is frustrated. He also examines the notion in a more abstract sense as he contends with reconciling the various beliefs systems he encountered.

Informed by many and various influences, examined in the course of this dissertation, Azaria Mbatha's work functions on various levels, in 'chords' as Shula Marks (1986: viii) describes it. Whilst some writers have reduced Mbatha's work to a simple melody by focusing on discrete aspects of his life and production (see Rosen 1992) I have attempted to reveal the various interweaving melodies, harmonies and occasional disharmonies that imbue Mbatha's work with vitality and authenticity.

His pieces are instilled with a sense of hope and of despair, of communion and alienation, triumph and sorrow, and are thus able to have impact on many levels. He utilizes narrative strategies familiar to him to address the individual as clearly as he addresses the institution.

He brings a fresh dynamic to familiar ways of reading the Bible by approaching the Bible as the subject of his work, rather than the object. In doing so he utilises what was previously a tool of oppression as a tool of liberation and furthermore, while he expresses a dissatisfaction with previous uses of the Bible, he feels that it is nonetheless a valuable text and aims to enrich his audience's understanding of it through his work. This was the motivation for his desire to 'Africanise' the Bible. As the translation of the Bible into Zulu had aided its dissemination, so the translation of the Biblical text into a visual vernacular could be even more accessible.

The focus of this thesis has been on laying a foundation for further study of Mbatha's work as well as a close investigation of the actual scriptures referenced in his work. It is hoped that this could aid future researchers who are far more conversant in the study of theology than I am in piecing together Mbatha's idiosyncratic theology in a manner that would be helpful and enriching to art historians, theologians, laypersons and any other interested parties.

Mbatha writes of his own creative ability:

Creative power gives life meaning. It is the active principle of human life. Creative power may be difficult to discuss, but its effects can always be discerned without knowing its source. Creativity for me is originality of thought and action. It must solve my problems, organise my daily life, past experience and future dreams. A creative person is thought to be independent, individualistic, inventive, determined, enthusiastic and emotional. A creative person relies greatly on his own experiences and dreams. (Mbatha 1998b: 54)

It is hoped that this dissertation has done justice to the creative power of Azaria Mbatha.

Illustrations

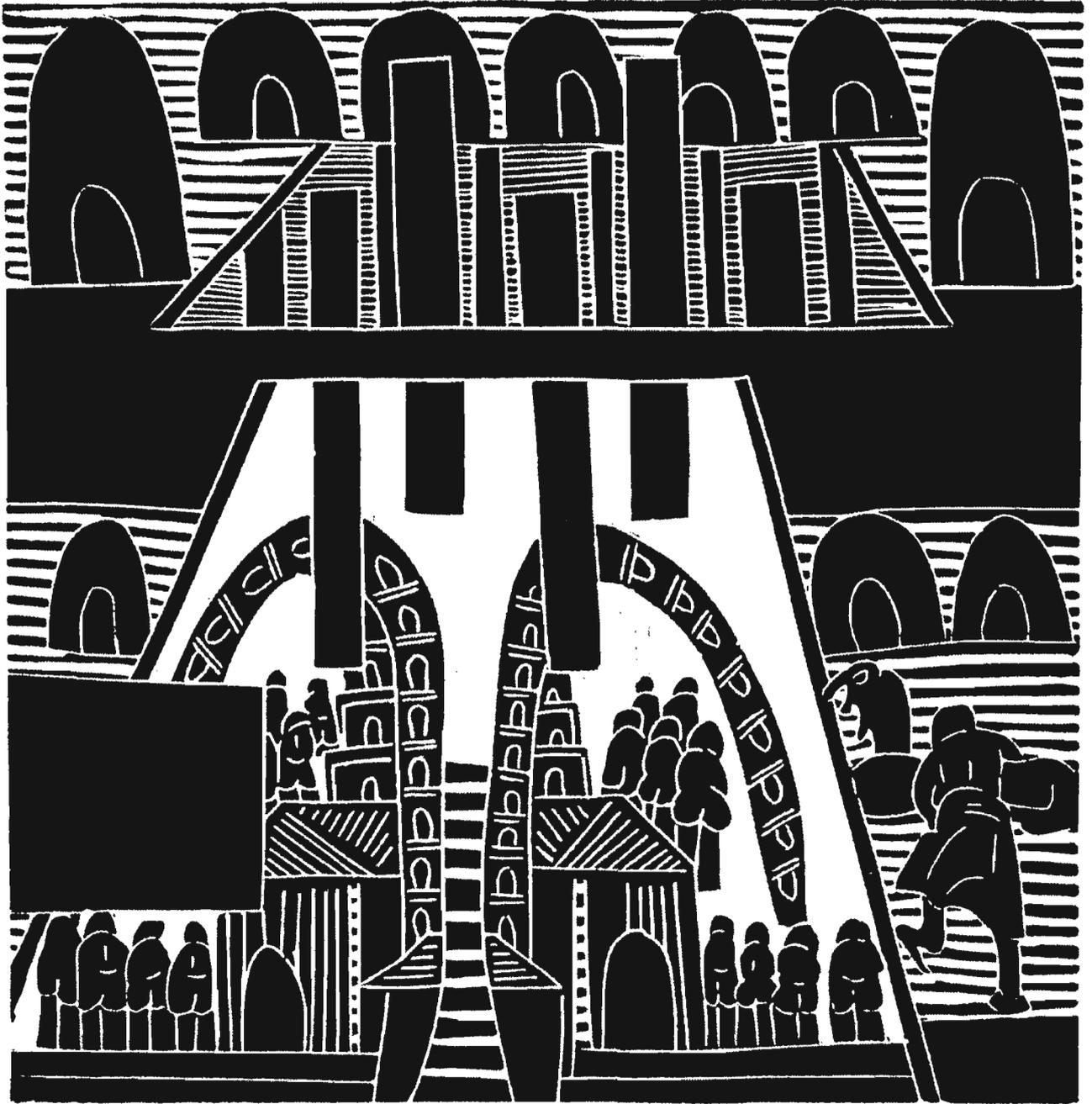


Figure 1: Azaria Mbatha. *Tower of Babel*, 1979. Linocut on paper, 40 x 40 cm. Collection not specified. In Eichel 1986: 63.

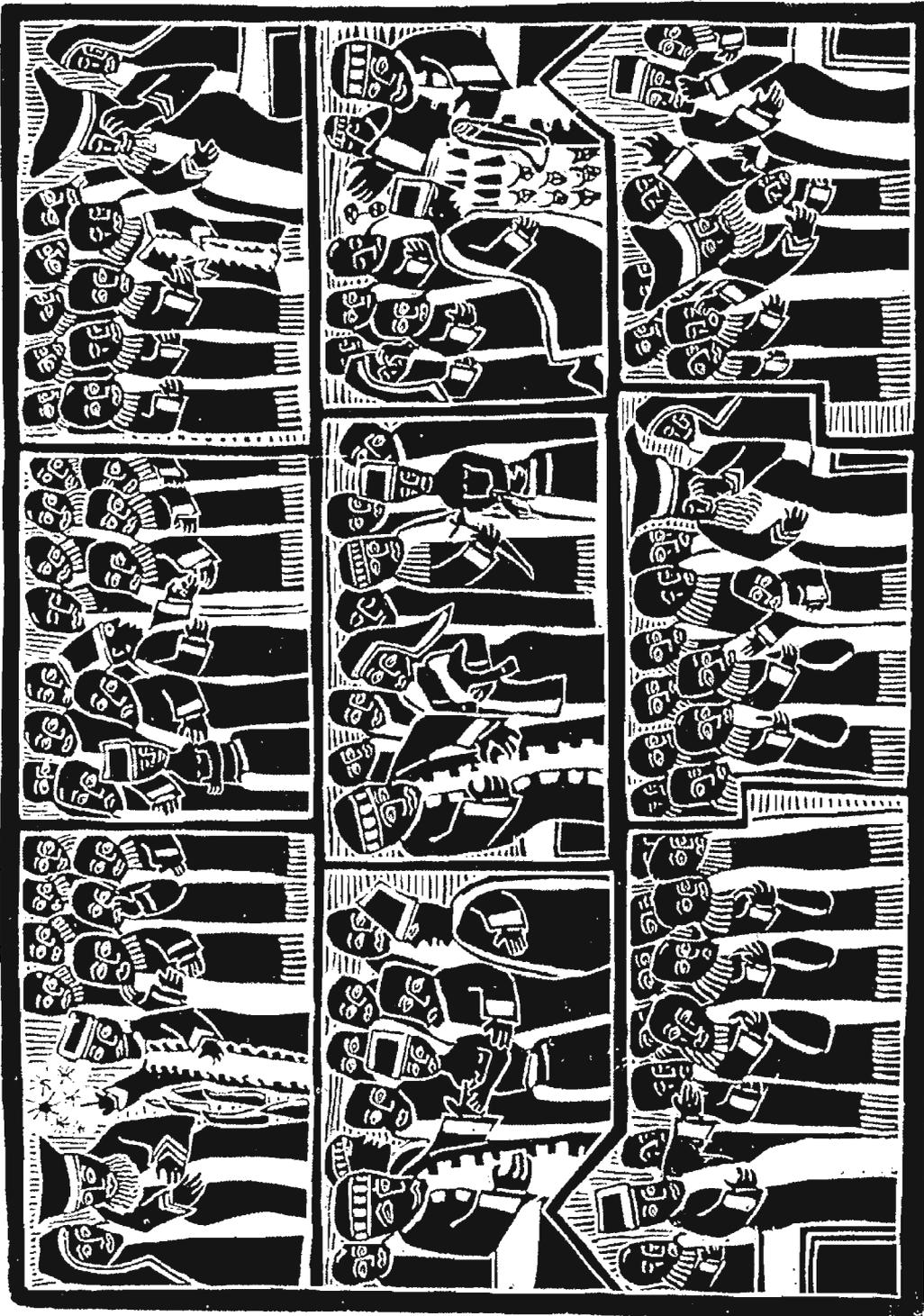


Figure 2: Azaria Mbatha. *Joseph*, 1964-1965. Linocut on paper, 31.4 x 44.4 cm. Collection: Durban Art Gallery, SA. In Azaria Mbatha: Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue 1998: 107, 108.



Figure 3: Azaria Mbatha. *David and Goliath*, 1963. Linocut on paper, 25 x 30 cm. University of Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, RSA. In Azaria Mbatha: Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue 1998:103,104

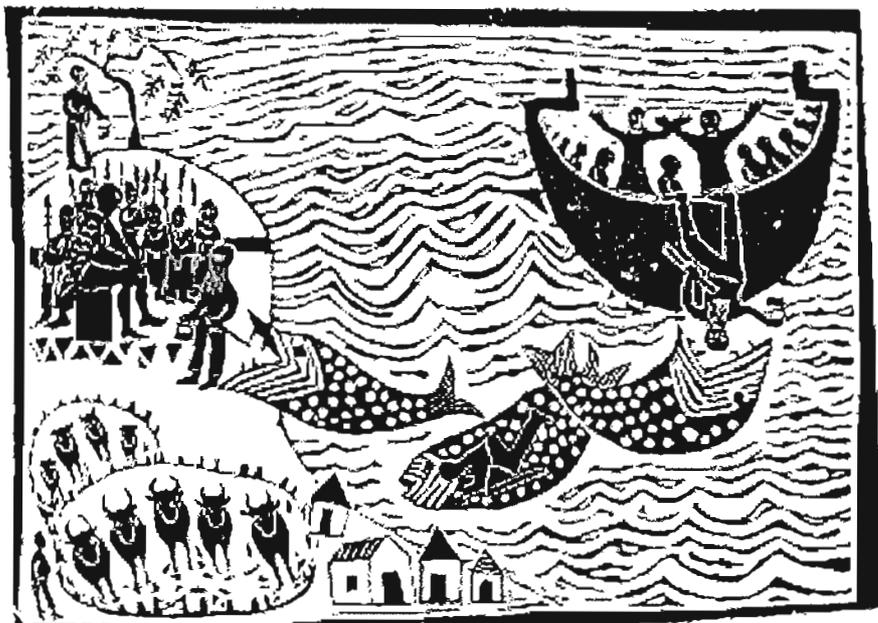


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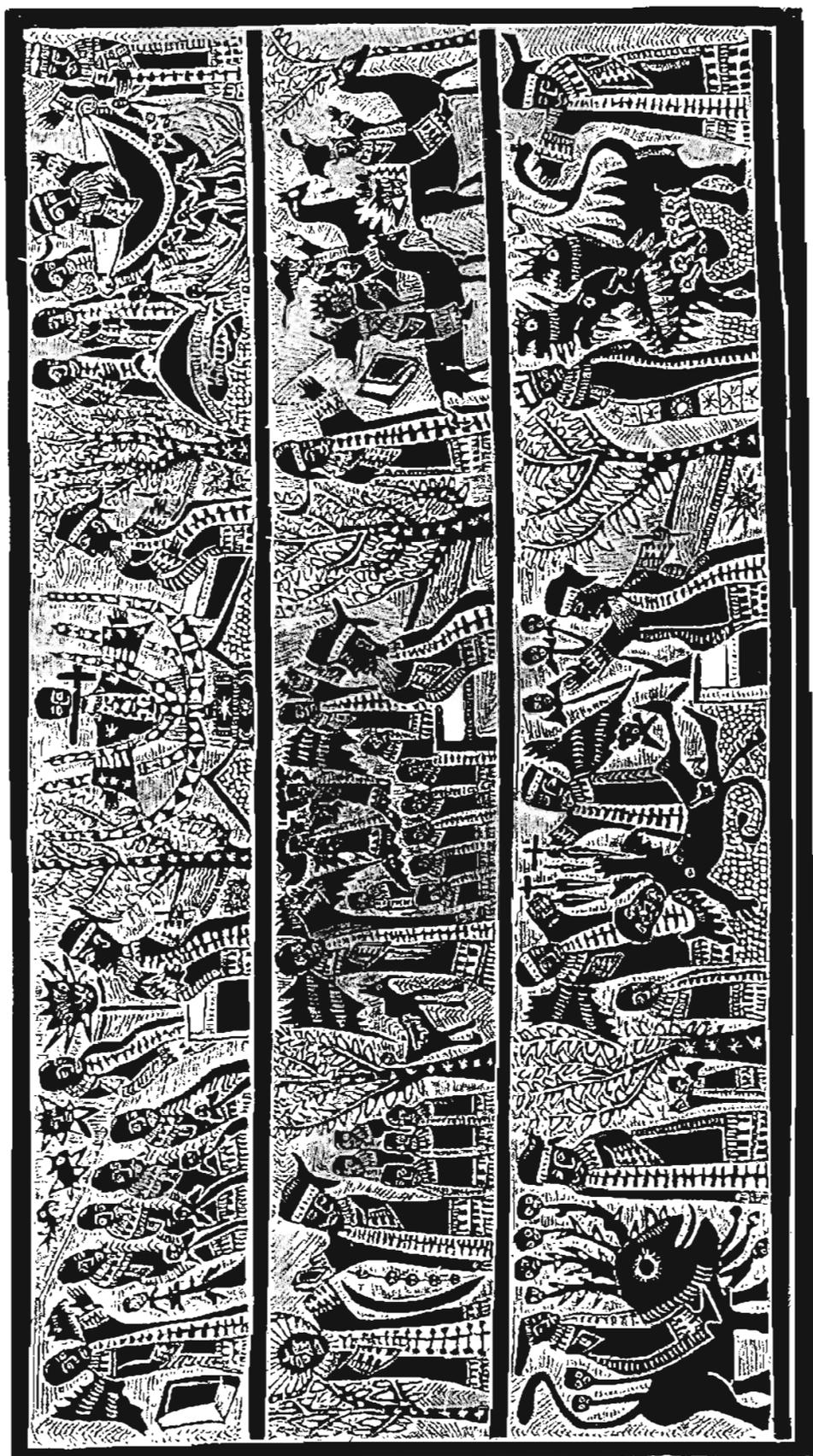


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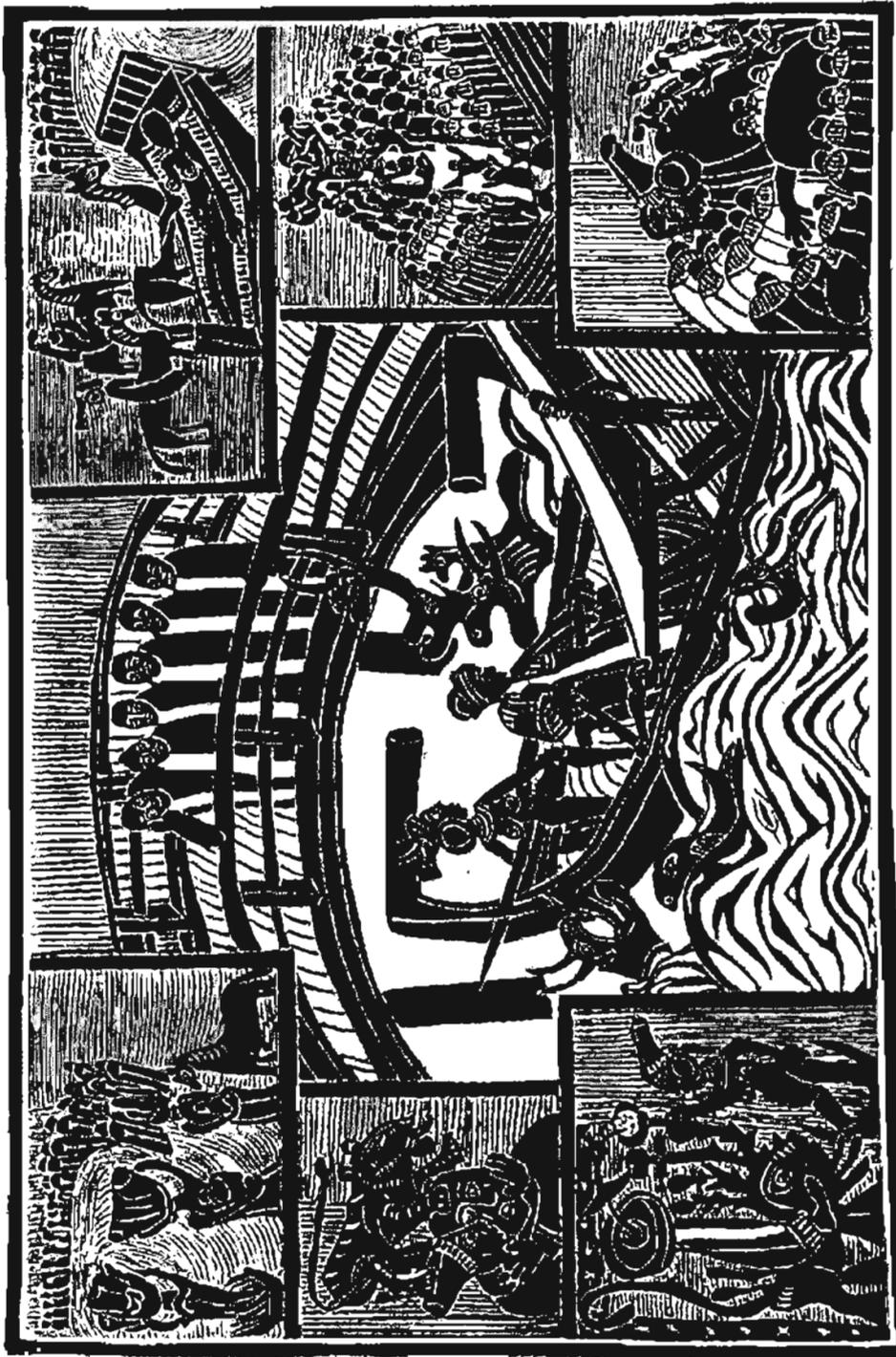


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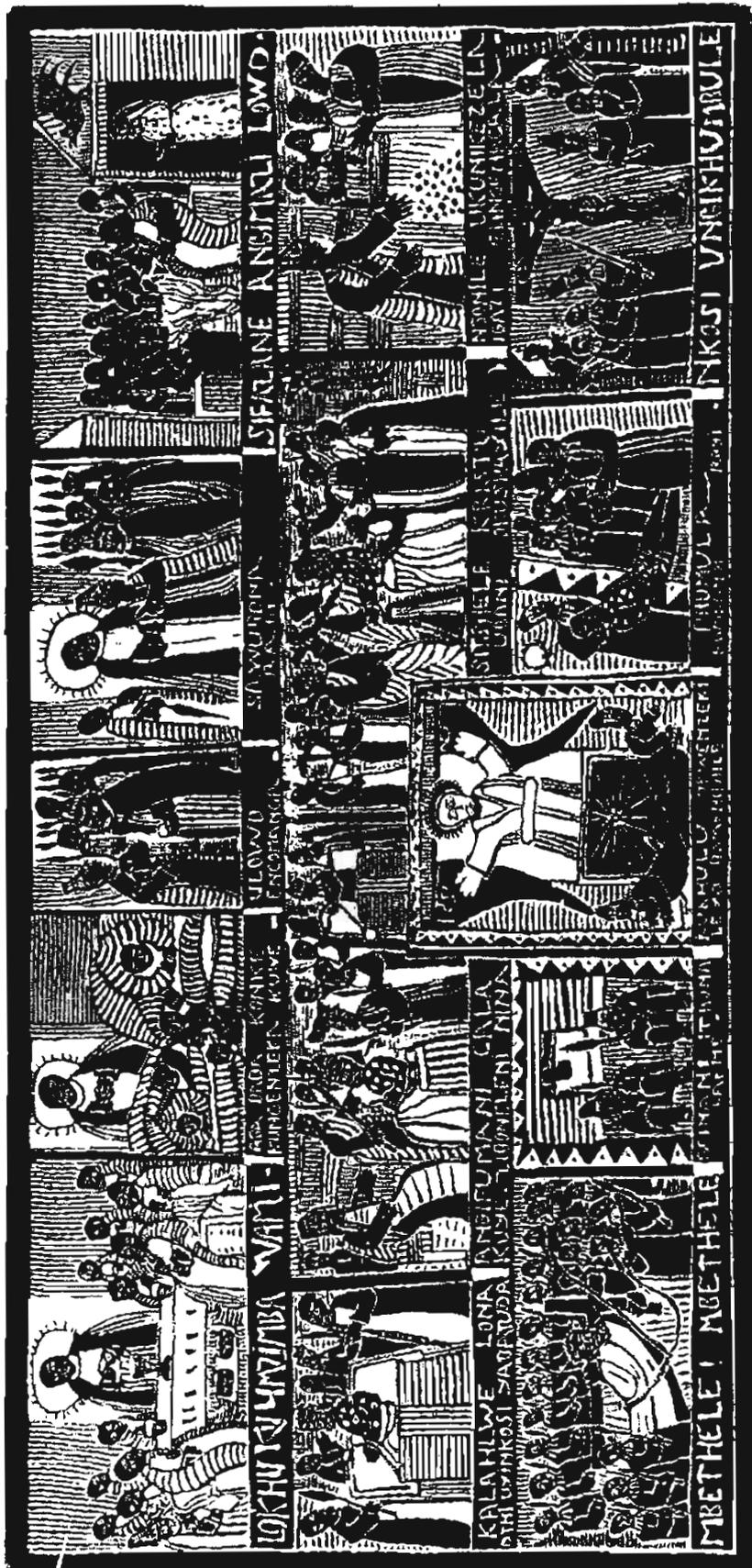


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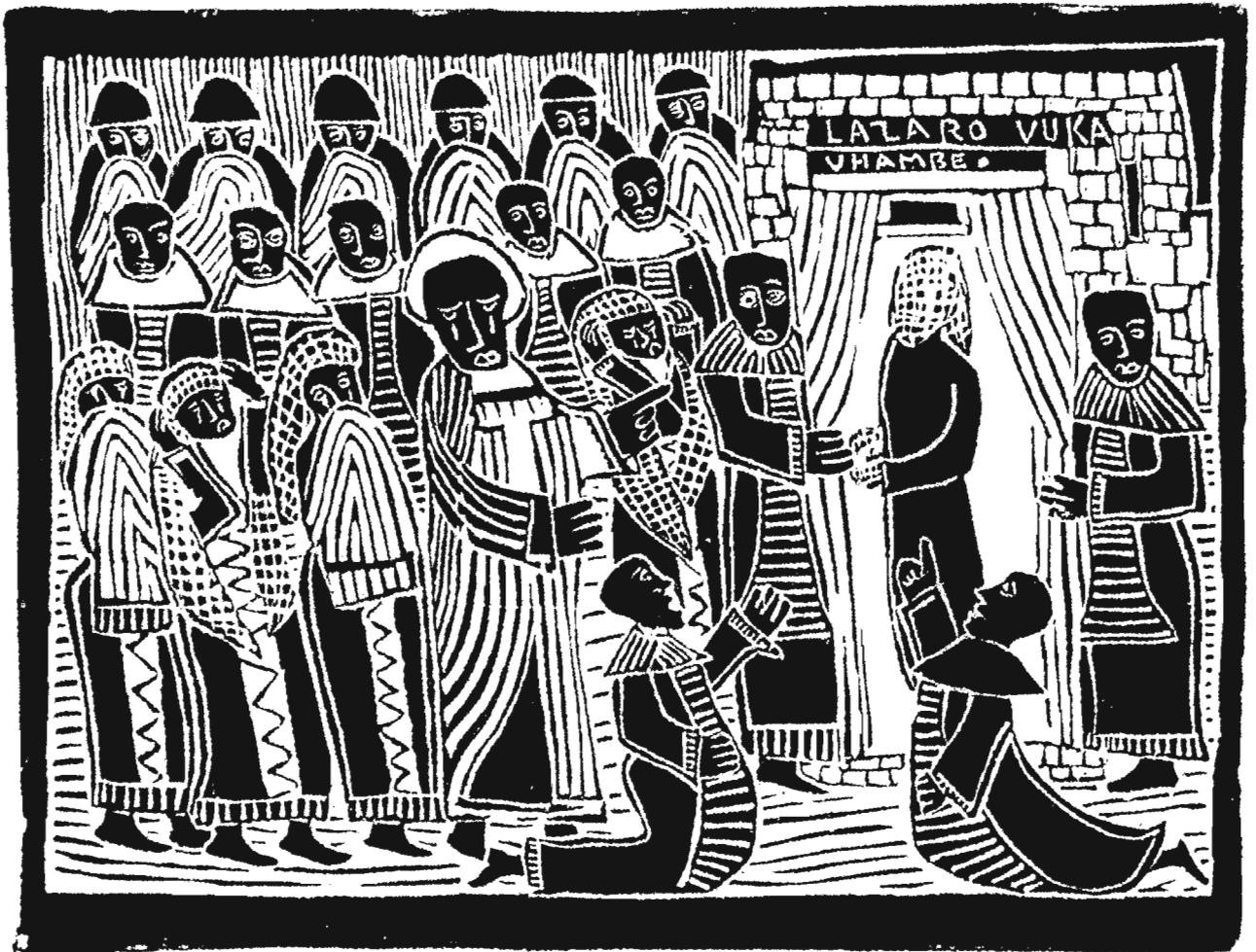


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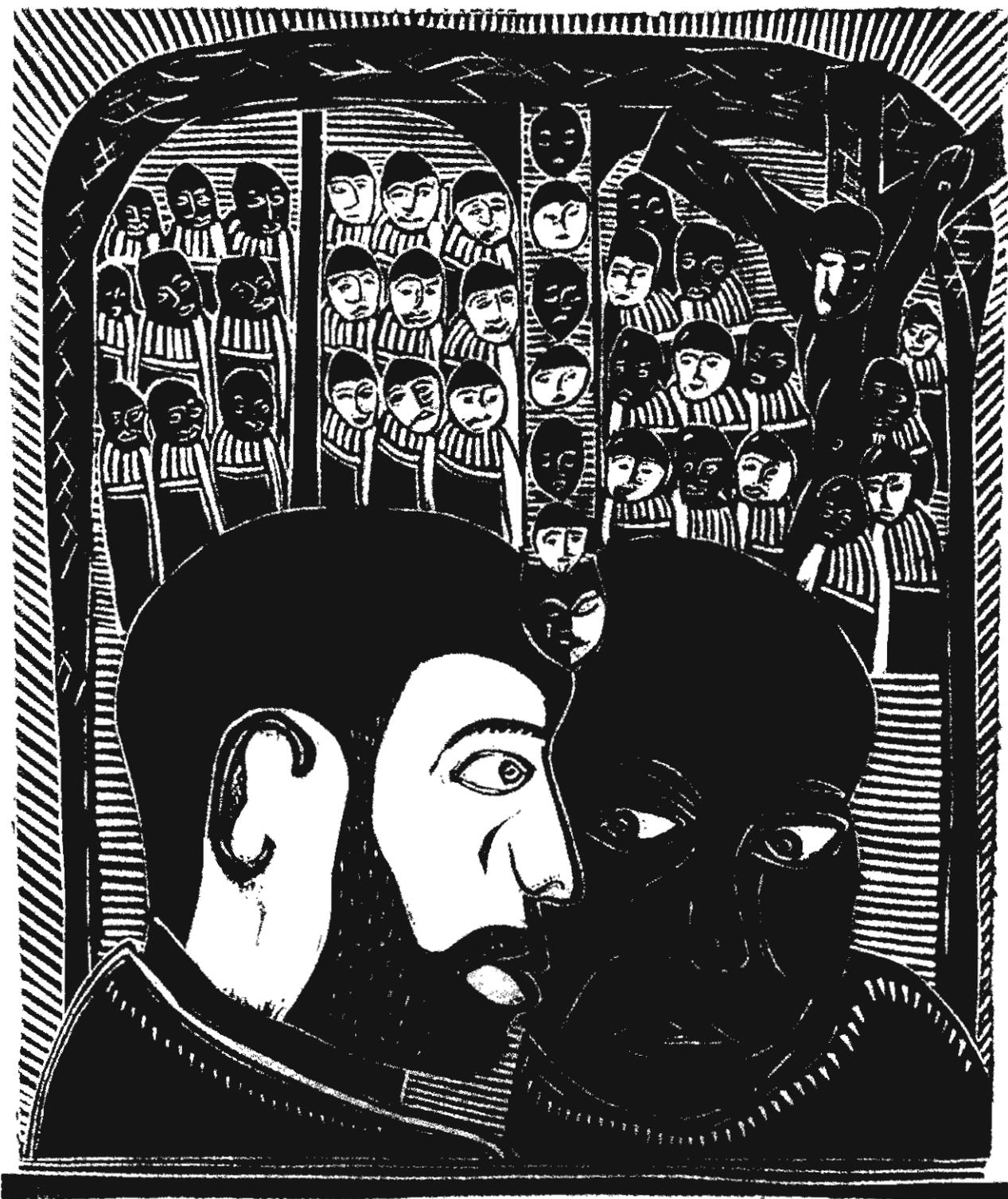


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