

# The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana



The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana:  
Responses and Challenges

Edited by

Lovemore Togarasei with Sana K. Mmolai  
and Fidelis Nkomazana

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P U B L I S H I N G

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations .....	vii
List of Abbreviations .....	ix
Introduction .....	xi
<i>Lovemore Togarasei</i>	
<b>Part I: Background</b>	
Chapter One .....	2
The Botswana Religious Landscape <i>Fidelis Nkomazana</i>	
Chapter Two .....	22
“We Pray, We Give Hope”: The Faith Sector Response to HIV and AIDS in Botswana <i>Musa W. Dube</i>	
Chapter Three .....	44
The Politics of Faith-based HIV Prevention and Policies in Botswana <i>Kipton E. Jensen</i>	
<b>Part II: Christianity</b>	
Chapter Four .....	70
Some Mainline Churches’ Involvement in Strategies to Fight HIV and AIDS in Botswana <i>Sana K. Mmolai and Joseph Gaie</i>	
Chapter Five .....	91
Healing in the African Independent Churches in the Era of HIV and AIDS <i>Obed Kealotswe</i>	

Chapter Six .....	104
Pentecostal Churches and HIV and AIDS in Botswana	
<i>Lovemore Togarasei and Fidelis Nkomazana</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	117
The Use of the Bible in HIV and AIDS Contexts: Case Study of Some Botswana Pentecostal Churches	
<i>Lovemore Togarasei</i>	
<b>Part III: Other Religions</b>	
Chapter Eight.....	138
Religious NGOs and their Jihad against HIV and AIDS: The Muslim Factor in Southern Africa	
<i>Muhammed Haron</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	158
The Faith of our Fathers: Collaborating with Traditional Leaders in HIV and AIDS Response	
<i>Kipton E. Jensen and Leila Katirayi</i>	
Chapter Ten .....	180
Faith Based Organizations' Approaches in the Fight against HIV and AIDS in Botswana: 1985-2009	
<i>James N. Amanze</i>	
<b>Part IV: Religion and Culture</b>	
Chapter Eleven .....	208
<i>Ntwa E Bolotse: Botswana Women, Men and HIV/AIDS</i>	
<i>Musa W. Dube</i>	
Chapter Twelve .....	231
The Missing Link: Minority Languages of Botswana in the Fight against HIV and AIDS	
<i>Joyce T. Mathangwane</i>	
Contributors .....	245

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Historical Phases of religious responses to HIV and AIDS .....	142
Figure 2: FBOs Responses .....	143
Figure 3: Select religio-ethical principles .....	146
Figure 4: Muslim NGOs: their projects and programmes.....	150
Figure 5: Google Earth Map of Mogoditshane.....	162



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AICs	African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches
ARHAP	African Religious Health Assets Program
ART	Anti-retroviral Therapy
ARV	Anti-retroviral drugs
ATR	African Traditional Religion
BAIS II	Botswana AIDS Impact Survey II
BCC	Botswana Christian Council
BHP	Botswana-Harvard Partnership
BNSF	Botswana National Strategic Framework
BOCAIP	Botswana Christian AIDS Intervention Programme
BOTUSA	Botswana-United States Partnership
BTR	Botswana Traditional Religion
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
DMSAC	District Multi-Sectoral AIDS Committee
DRM	Dutch Reformed Mission
EFB	Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana
FBO	Faith Based Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCT	HIV and AIDS Counseling and Testing
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
LMS	London Missionary Society
MF	Ministers' Fraternal
MOH	Ministry of Health
MTP	Medium Term Plan
NAC	National AIDS Council
NACA	National AIDS Coordination Agency
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PLWHA	People Living with HIV and AIDS
PMCT/ PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
OAICs	Organization of African Independent Churches
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
TRS	Theology and Religious Studies
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community

SHC	Spiritual Healing Church
SLR	Second Literature Review
STP	Short Term Plan
TB	Tuberculosis
UB	University of Botswana
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
USA	United States of America
VCT	Voluntary Counseling and Testing
WCC	World Council of Churches
WHO	World Health Organization
ZCC	Zion Christian Church

# INTRODUCTION

## LOVEMORE TOGARASEI

Botswana is home to an array of religions. Over 80% of the country's people belong to one religion or the other. Religions, therefore, are better positioned to deal with HIV and AIDS. As Togarasei et al (2008:51) noted, "(religions in Botswana).....cover and extend to all segments of the population.... are well placed to influence the mass of the people at grassroots level to change their behaviour and adopt safer sex practices, ...culturally sensitive HIV prevention information and care services." The strategic position of faith organizations has been noted by many (see, for example, Parry (2003) and Chitando (2007). Even with the roll out of ARVs, faith organizations have remained strategic partners (Burchardt, Hardon and de Klerk, 2009). The government of Botswana has called for a multi-sectoral approach to HIV and AIDS response. This is in light of the devastating consequences of the pandemic in a country of less than two million people. According to UNAIDS 2010 report, in 2009 there were an estimated 300,000 adults living with HIV - or one quarter of the population aged 15 and over (UNAIDS 2010). The same report had an estimated adult HIV prevalence among 15-49 year olds of 24.8%, the second highest in the world after Swaziland. The faith sector has been a key player, positively or sometimes negatively, in HIV and AIDS response from the outbreak of the pandemic in the country in 1985. As chapter 2 of the book shall demonstrate, the government of Botswana from the outbreak of HIV and AIDS made efforts to include the faith sector in the national response. There are therefore several references to the role of FBOs in different government policies and intervention documents. Unfortunately no publication has tried to take stock of this faith sector response. This book is meant to close this lacuna.

The book covers the various religions at home in Botswana and the role they play in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. A brief history behind the production of this book is necessary for the reader. Most of the contributors in this book are members of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Botswana. This department has taken HIV and AIDS seriously in its research strategies from the outbreak

of HIV and AIDS. Rosinah Gabaitse (2008:33-46) takes stock of the various research projects that have been undertaken by members of this department individually and in teams. This book is a direct result of one of the research projects some members of the department undertook between 2006 and 2008. The project was conducted under the Ditumelo Research Project initiated by Kipton Jensen in 2005. Led by this author, the 2006 to 2008 project was commissioned by BOTUSA and funded through PEPFAR. It was meant to assess the capacity of FBOs in Botswana to prevent HIV. The results of this study are contained in Togarasei et al (2008). A number of articles in this book are based on the findings of this study.

The book is envisaged to serve both the academic and research community at national and international levels. There are now several attempts to mainstream HIV and AIDS in education both in schools and in tertiary institutions. This book therefore does not serve only those studying religion, but all who address issues of HIV and AIDS from whatever field of study.

The book comprises of twelve chapters that are divided into four parts. The first part, comprising of three chapters, provides a background of the faith sector in Botswana. In Chapter 1 Fidelis Nkomazana makes a panoramic view of the faith sector in Botswana. Looking at it from a historical perspective, he shows that various religious groups are at home in Botswana. He finds this to be partly due to the country's constitution that deliberately allows for freedom of worship and association of various religious and cultural traditions. This chapter shows the various religions that have come to operate in Botswana. The chapter provides insight into the characteristics of religion in Botswana today. It spells out the key players in the Botswana faith sector, how they came into being, how they are distributed and how they operate. Nkomazana concludes his chapter pointing out the need for such a mosaic of religions to be involved in the social, economic and political issues that affect the members of the different religions. Chapter 2 takes stock of what FBOs in Botswana have so far done in HIV response in the country. Here, Musa W. Dube first looks at the history of FBOs involvement in HIV response by revisiting government of Botswana policy documents to find out the roles assigned to FBOs. She then discusses the various activities undertaken by FBOs in areas of HIV prevention, care and support, treatment, stigma and discrimination and capacity building, as they are reflected in various national literatures. The chapter ends with an analysis of the level of success and suggestions for better FBOs involvement. The third chapter in this section, which is chapter 3 of the book, focuses on challenges that

FBOs face in responding to HIV and AIDS. Here Kipton E. Jensen explores the political circumstances that have haunted HIV prevention programs. He points out hindrances to religious collaboration such as the “identity politics” of HIV Prevention programs and policies, including “international versus Indigenous systems of knowledge and discourse of power;” the politics of religious identity, both theoretically and practically, the “faith politics” of HIV prevention programs (Government Organizations and Non Governmental Organizations), as well as theoretical and practical inducements against “inter-sectoral” and “intra-sectoral” collaboration. The chapter ends with a call for all those involved in HIV and AIDS response to collaborate with each other.

Part II of the book focuses on the Christian religion and comprises of four chapters. As the first and second chapters of the book present, Botswana Christian churches are divided along denominational lines giving rise to three different categories: mainline churches, African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches. The first three chapters address responses by three categories of churches. Chapter 4 by Sana Mmolai and Joseph Gaie discusses the response of some mainline churches to HIV and AIDS. The chapter discusses strategies employed by the selected churches to address HIV and AIDS looking at what strategies the churches consider good and bad; who approves and disapproves the different strategies and what challenges are faced in promoting the strategies. In chapter 5 Obed Kealotswe examines the healing methods and the concepts of healing in the AICs in the era of HIV and AIDS. He starts by defining the AICs with special reference to Botswana, then discusses their healing methods. Kealotswe points out healing practices that have been blamed for the spread of HIV and AIDS in Botswana before showing the changes that have taken place in the healing activities of the AICs since the outbreak of the pandemic. The chapter concludes that Botswana AICs are reversing some opportunistic infections and are now using safe methods in their practice of healing. Chapter 5, by Lovemore Togarasei and Fidelis Nkomazana, addresses the following: Pentecostal churches views of HIV and AIDS, their divine message in the light of the suffering caused by the disease, their sex education and their attitude towards condom use and issues of gender. The chapter also critiques Pentecostal doctrines and practices that hinder Pentecostal effective response to HIV and AIDS. Chapter 6 is the last one in Part II of the book. It continues discussing Pentecostal churches. In view of the centrality of the Bible in these churches, here Lovemore Togarasei focuses on how the Bible is used by the Pentecostal churches to respond to HIV and AIDS. The chapter highlights that despite the fact that the Bible was written many years ago

in a completely different world from the present one, the Bible remains very influential in the lives of Christians, particularly those of Pentecostal churches. It is the first port of call particularly on questions to do with moral values and social responsibilities. Thus the Bible is used by Pentecostal churches for HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. From an analysis of this use of the Bible, Togarasei concludes that for effective involvement of Pentecostal Christians and indeed other Christians for HIV and AIDS response, the place and function of the Bible in their lives should be taken seriously.

Part III comprises of three chapters discussing other religious groups apart from Christianity. It opens with Muhammed Haron's chapter 8 which looks at the Muslim response to HIV and AIDS. The chapter looks at the role of Muslim NGOs in their struggle against HIV and AIDS in South(ern) Africa. Haron opens his chapter by defining FBOs. He brings into view the religio-ethical principles that underpin the World Religious Systems as a whole before giving particular attention to Islam and Muslims. The chapter's second part studies the struggle undertaken by certain Southern African Muslim NGOs in fighting the pandemic. It demonstrates the extent to which these organizations have adopted a participatory approach rather than an observatory approach in dealing with HIV and AIDS. The chapter concludes that FBOs have and will continue to play a positive and dynamic role in the prevention of HIV and AIDS especially when they collaborate with the health sector. Chapter 9 presents and discusses research findings by Kipton Jensen and Leila Katirayi in African traditional healers' collaboration with the health sector. The two authors discuss traditional healers' understanding of HIV and AIDS in light of their traditional worldviews, their current contribution in collaborating with the health sector, their challenges in working with the health sector and their perception of ARVs. They conclude that traditional healers have tried to understand HIV and AIDS with its similarities to other sexual diseases and have sought to identify it with diseases they already know. Although they may lack a "comprehensive understanding of HIV and AIDS," at least from a biomedical if not also distinctively Western point of view, the chapter suggests that there is a sincere interest among Batswana traditional healers in gaining more knowledge about the virus and collaborating with biomedical practitioners. The last chapter in this part, chapter 10, is by James Amanze on some approaches that have been used by FBOs in Botswana to respond to HIV and AIDS from the outbreak of the pandemic in the country in 1985. The chapter discusses various strategies that Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) have adopted in the fight against the pandemic. It argues that the Christian churches'

understanding of the nature of human sexuality has limited, to a certain extent, their choices of the means and ways of combating the scourge. Some of the strategies discussed are prayer, counseling, the establishment of day care centers, hospices, education of the masses by means of workshops, seminars and conferences and insistence on abstinence and behavior change in general. The chapter concludes that FBOs have indeed a major role to play in the prevention, care, and treatment of people living with HIV and AIDS in Botswana today.

HIV and AIDS breeds in socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices throughout the world. Part IV of this book therefore addresses the role of culture and religion in HIV and AIDS response in Botswana. In chapter 10 Musa Dube focuses on gender inequalities. She begins by defining gender looking at what sustains it. The chapter also looks at how religion and culture construct and maintain gender. Having established this Dube then discusses how gender has become a major factor in the spread of HIV and AIDS and how it can be shot down. Chapter 12 concludes this book. In it Joyce Mathangwane argues for the need to use other indigenous languages of Botswana in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Based on selected AIDS messages from billboards, clinic notice boards and newspapers that were collected over a period of several years within the country, she observes that the use of two languages only, Setswana and English limits the effective spread of HIV and AIDS messages to Botswana. The author is of the view that even where people use a second or third language, there are certain semantic values that only a first language makes the hearer or reader relate to the message and own it personally. Mathangwane is therefore of the view that minority languages are the missing link which could allow HIV and AIDS information to effectively reach out to speakers of these languages. The chapter suggests different other social fields where these other languages could be utilised to reach out to the people, given the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic set-up of the country.

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**PART I:**  
**BACKGROUND**

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE BOTSWANA RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

FIDELIS NKOMAZANA

### **Introduction**

Various religious groups are at home in Botswana. This is partly due to the country's constitution that deliberately allows for freedom of worship and association of various religious and cultural traditions. This chapter briefly shows the various religions that have come to operate in Botswana and gives a panoramic view of the country's religious landscape. What are the characteristics of religion in Botswana today? Who are the religious players? How are the religious players distributed? How do they operate? These are some of the questions that this chapter addresses. The chapter opens by spelling out the plural character of religion in Botswana. This is followed by brief accounts of how the different religions, from ATR to new charismatic movements have come into being. The chapter concludes pointing out the need for such a mosaic of religions to be involved in the social, economic and political issues that affect the members of the different religions.

### **Religion and the Constitution**

At independence in 1966 Botswana came with a new constitution that assisted different religions to come to the public fore and seek for ways of dialogue. The constitution of Botswana specifically stipulated and protected the rights of all citizens to have or adopt a religion of their choice. It underlined the necessity for religious freedom, expression and assembly. It also protected the right for everyone to adopt a religious belief of their choice. Individuals or groups were free to manifest their religious beliefs in worship, observance, practice or teaching as long it did not interfere with the rights of other people. Religious abuse, by restriction or discrimination by government or private actors is not tolerated. This is possibly the reason why there is no record of religious persecution or

hostility to minority or unapproved religions in Botswana. This is also why there are no discriminatory legislations or policies that give preferences to favourable religions, thus disadvantaging others. Often dangerous “sects or cults” operate without stigmatization. Due to this fundamental right and policy, the indigenous religion, which dominated the life of the nation for centuries, accommodated new faiths that offered serious challenges to the extent of almost destroying it. It was always in the nature of the religion to tolerate other religions, even before the constitution made it part of the Law of Botswana. The indigenous religions of Botswana, therefore, have always welcomed other religions, and, it have, in fact, always appreciated different styles of worship, especially those similar to theirs (Amanze 2000 and Nkomazana 2001: 341-344).

Botswana has no state religion. It also prohibits forced religious instruction and participation in religious ceremonies or taking oaths that run contrary to an individual’s religious beliefs. Although there are no laws against proselytizing, the proselytization that goes on cannot be termed as breaching human rights and religious freedom. From 1966, there are no reports of forced religious conversion or reports of religious prisoners or detainees or denial of migration rights on religious grounds. Although sustained interfaith committees and services have always failed, or were extremely weak before independence, the general amicable relations between the country’s religious communities have always contributed to religious freedom and practice.

Botswana’s policy on religious freedom can be better understood in the context of its history, culture and tradition. Although the Batswana Traditional Religion (BTR) dominated the life of the nation for centuries, it always accommodated and accepted new faiths that offered challenges in both cultural and theological terms. This was even at the extent of having the people’s culture and tradition destroyed by the new religions. Very little was done to protect public safety, order, morals at the interest of fundamental rights and freedom of others.

While the constitution promotes the spirit of tolerance, it is however an expectation that all religious organizations register with the Government. To register, a group submits its constitution to the Ministry of Home Affairs. After a generally simple but bureaucratic process, the organization is registered. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations. Unregistered groups potentially are liable to penalties including fines of up to P1000 or 7 years in jail, or both. Except for the case of the Unification Church, there is no indication that any religious organization has ever been denied registration (Society Act). The practice of requiring religious groups to register before they can engage in activities such as worship is

for purposes of protecting the interests, rights, safety, order and morals of the nation as a whole (Botswana Constitution, chapter 2: 3-19).

The Constitution also provides for the protection of the rights and freedoms of other persons, including the right to observe and practice any religion without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion. Every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community's expense, but prohibits forced religious instruction and participation in religious ceremonies, or taking oaths that run counter to an individual's religious beliefs. When the first Moslem members of parliament, Satar Dada, especially elected to represent the "minority groups" and Daisy Pholo, member of Parliament for Selibe Phikwe, were sworn in, they chose to use a Quran instead of a Bible. While this was the first time it happened in the history of Botswana, they were free to exercise their Constitutional right (Personal attendance, Swearing in of Parliamentarians, November, 2004).

Both government policy and the generally amicable relations among and between the country's religious communities contribute to religious freedom and practice. An independent effort to establish an interfaith committee between the Christian and Muslim communities in the early 1990's failed due to lack of identifiable mutual interests. But in matters of national interests, such as droughts and the celebration of the Botswana Day, there were efforts in the 1980s to conduct interfaith services, which only lasted for a brief period. Up to the present day, there are no reports of forced religious conversion, or refusal to allow citizen and non – citizen to return or enter the country or being forced out of the country on religious grounds. Again, there are no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in Botswana or associated with the country (Amanze, 1999).

The Constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interests of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health; however, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. When the Johane Church of God beliefs and practices seemed to deny its members and their children freedom to benefit from modern medical practice, the church met resistance from the Ministry of Health officials (Nkomazana 2009: 149). In the face of HIV and AIDS the government through the Ministry of Health has made it clear to churches like the Zion Christian Church, that they must not use healing methods that might facilitate the spread of HIV (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5573>). At times, however, the state takes for granted that the churches fall under its control and seeks to bring them to its hegemony, while in actual fact, the power of the state over the churches is far more

limited. On the other hand, it is evident that historic churches enjoy easy exemption, which may be an indication that the state, at times adopts an accommodating attitude on churches or religions in general. In fact, the situation of Guta RaMwari, shows that the state at times fails to confront suspected criminal acts that revolve around the notions of supernatural intervention and election, sorcery, secrecy and manipulation of humans for economic gain. Guta Ra Mwari stands as an example of an African Independent Church (AIC) which tends to inspire the majority of non members with a great deal of fear (Amanze, 1994:122-124). This is against the background of authoritarian attitude towards AICs dating back to the colonial era, when these churches were not allowed to operate. While in independent Botswana they have enjoyed more freedom, they are in comparable terms still subjected to far greater state interference, when they seek for registration with regard to their doctrine, organization and therapeutic practices, than the established churches.

With the constitution allowing freedom of worship, Botswana is now home to various religious groups. But how have the various religions come to be in Botswana. Below I briefly give an overview of the history of the various religions in Botswana.

### **Batswana Traditional Religion (BTR)**

BTR is the oldest religion in Botswana. It is not possible to date its origins as it has always been part and parcel of the people's lives. According to John Mbiti (1975:30) "Africans are notoriously religious". This is very true of the Batswana Traditional religion which permeates every aspect of their life: ploughing, politics, funerals, crop harvest, education and even school examinations. Let us briefly look at some of the beliefs held in this religion. It is important for us to pay some attention to this religion since it influences Batswana's worldview whether they belong to it or to other religions.

#### **Belief in a Supreme Being**

The Supreme Being and Creator is known as *Modimo*. BTR constitutes the religious context in which a good number of people in Botswana live or have lived. It is believed that long before the colonial period, Batswana had a wide range of countless stories and myths explaining how the world began. *Modimo* is presented as Supreme, Creator, Source and Sustainer of life. The universe, which has its beginning in and through Him is believed to be governed and filled by Him, and without end. Their religiosity

acknowledges His reality but does not define Him. It confesses that *Modimo* is overall, unlimited and invisible. A contested aspect of indigenous religiosity is its monotheism (Nkomazana 2005:28).

The belief in *Modimo* is not complete without the role played by intermediaries, such as priests, kings, traditional healers, diviners, rainmakers, family elders and most important, *badimo*, who dominate the beliefs and practices of Botswana. Sacrifices and prayers are offered to them. The *badimo* are believed to be spirits of people, who lived upright lives here on earth, died “good” and natural death at a ripe, old age and received the acknowledged funerary rites. They could be men or women. But male *badimo* are prominent since patriarchy is the dominant system of the family and social integration. They are believed to be the closest link between the physical living and the spirit world. They are also believed to speak the language of the community with whom they lived as physical human beings and continue to be part of their human families, who hold them in their personal memories. In the case of a cordial relationship, they are believed to have an interest in what happens to their families, and thus return to visit them from time to time and symbolically sharing their meals. They are believed to have been created by *Modimo* and to be his subjects. People take for granted the continuation of life after death. The relation between the living and the departed is cultivated in different ways. This may include the use of libation (symbolic offerings), appearance of the departed in visions or dreams of the living, naming of children after the departed if they resemble them, and through divination. The living also ask *badimo* to assist in conveying their prayers, sacrifices and offerings to *Modimo*, since they are considered to be closer to Him than human beings. *Badimo* always assume the role of mediators, intermediaries, intercessors, and go – between *Modimo* and people. No one can approach *Modimo* except through the *badimo*. Belief in *badimo* is therefore an important aspect in understanding the role of the traditional religion in Botswana. It inculcates the ideal of harmonious living among community members (Amanze 2000:28-70).

Family elders make regular offerings of gifts, in the form of food and drinks to the *badimo* to reciprocate their favours. Hence, old people would not normally eat or drink *bojalwa* (traditional beer) without first offering some portions on the ground for them, because they are believed to be the custodians of the land on which their children live. They are also guardians of community affairs, customs, traditions and ethical norms. Offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the *badimo*, who act as invisible police of the families and communities. They are thought to severely punish those who disregard the hallowed traditions of the

community, or infringe taboos and norms of acceptable behaviour in society (Amanze 2000:28-70).

### Sacred Objects

Practitioners of the BTR often use sacred objects when they perform rituals. Some objects are used by individuals or families and others by the community, under the supervision of the ritual leader. Sacred objects that are considered to be very powerful are kept out of reach of ordinary people.

Communal sacred objects may be kept in the house/hut of a ritual leader, such as the rain-maker, priest or king. Much ceremony is observed when they are moved to a new place or a place where a public ritual is conducted. Ordinary people may not touch them under normal circumstances, as there are many taboos that protect them. It is believed that interfering with them brings misfortune or even death. Examples of sacred ritual objects include:

1. Divining bones called *ditaola*, used for examining and diagnosing the cause of disease, calamity or disaster that has occurred to a community, e.g. the cause of lightning that has struck a house, a person or any other object or why the rains have not come or why people are dying.
2. Drums, which are used for singing, drumming and dancing, inspire the spirit of *badimo* (ancestors) to act.

There are many other examples of such as stools used to seat a king at coronation, rain-making objects, ritual marks and dresses, herbs and charms, sacred pots reserved for ritual purposes (like those found at the Moremi sacred site), graveyards, shrines, such as those at *Lentswe – la – Baratani* in Otse and in Ramokgwebana in the North East of Botswana, which are in the form of hills and caves.

Certain animals can be regarded as sacred. The *Bakgatla*, for instance, highly respect the monkey (*kgabo*), which has now become their totem animal. When a leopard's skin is worn by a chief during coronation, it is regarded as a sign of authority and sacredness, thus treated as sacred.

Certain trees selected for ritual purposes; and beneath which sacrifices and prayers are conducted are also regarded as sacred. Such trees include the *nzeze* tree among the Kalanga of North East Botswana. The tree has great significance in the rain-making practices. There is a wide range of other sacred objects, such as strings and charms tied around the necks, arms, legs, waists of people by medical men or kept in pockets, bags, on

roof tops or in other strategic places such as gates, or corners of homesteads, gates, dug in fields, kraals, etc (Nkomazana, Sacred Sites).

### **Sacred Literature**

BTR has no sacred literature in the form of sacred scriptures or holy books. Their sacred teachings are written in the hearts, in the history and experiences of the people. All the tenets of the religion are handed on orally, sometimes with updates according to the period of time. They have religious traditions and laws governing how they worship and how they should live, which are passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. The followers of BTR are bound by the authority of their *badimo* who are believed to be very important divinities and intermediaries between *Modimo* and human beings. This knowledge or religious information is usually passed in the form of religious myths and proverbs. Some of it is associated with religious or sacred objects, and is easy to remember and pass to others, especially the young.

There are advantages with oral tradition. The lack of a written sacred literature means that there are no firm and standard doctrines and a single authority for a reference point thus allowing flexibility. One advantage, which also is a disadvantage, is that it does not have fixed sacred literature, because it provides room for flexibility. During the process of adaptation, some ideas and practices are forgotten or sometimes lost forever. The degree of sacredness of these scriptures can therefore be easily altered. The fact that most sacred scriptures were originally orally passed from one generation to another is at least also true for other religions. One of the reasons why BTR remained in this unwritten state might have resulted from the fact that its adherents were until recently an illiterate community (Nkomazana and Thompson 1998:22).

### **Politics, Social Justice and Religion**

The pre-colonial religious institutions of the Batswana were centralized. There was a close identity and interaction between the religious and political spheres and a strong sense of common purpose between the two. The religious authorities were often the political authorities, who attempted to control reverence for royal ancestors, rainmaking, *bogwera* and *bojale* (initiation ceremonies for boys and girls respectively) ceremonies, etc. (Nkomazana 2005:26-49).

In Botswana traditional society, social justice was intended to contribute to social stability and harmonious relationships within and between ethnic

groups. The expectation of the individual was largely dictated by existing religious, political and social structures, relationships, patterns and roles. The sacred and the secular were inseparable. There was no compartmentalization of life. What religion forbade or condemned, society also forbade and condemned. Society approved what religion approved and sanctioned. An offence against human beings was an offence against God and in like manner an offence against God was an offence against human beings. A code of behaviour was transmitted from generation to generation and constrained individuals to live in conformity with society.

All prohibited criminal actions and taboos such as adultery, theft, incest, unkindness to parents, lying, murder, rape, seduction, swearing falsely, were crimes and punishable. Social justice, therefore, implied conformity to these expectations. The status of women, children and men; marital laws and rules and political activities were defined by these expectations. Ritual occasions, priests, rulers, specialists, who were custodians of holy places, and ritual officers, also functioned under the same confines. Educational opportunities between the sexes were encouraged.

Both within the family and at the *Kgotla* (court or an assembly point for the discussion of communal issues), there were strict hierarchies of authority, whereby the males ruled and held responsibility for the females. Brothers ruled their sisters and sons, even their mothers, when they came to age or succeeded the inheritance. Women did not enjoy any ultimate authority or responsibility for the household. The husband was the head of the family. When women were permitted to become chiefs, it was largely a question of politico - religious symbolism; whereby a woman was treated as a man. In fact, right from childhood through adolescence and through the *bogwera* (initiation school for boys) and *bojale* (initiation school for girls), boys were trained to govern, while the training of young women concentrated on household work and the importance of submitting to the authority of men.

The traditional set-up welcomed strangers and poor people. A stranger was nearly always welcome in traditional Tswana culture because he was not an enemy. He was seen as a link with foreign parts. He brought news and information. Since his coming was a blessing he had to be shown hospitality. Whenever someone became a suspect and ran the risk of being regarded as a threat to the society as a whole, he became a social outcast. This was the worst fate to befall anyone.

The relationship between religion, social justice and order are important aspects of the traditional religions. The *Kgosi* (chief) was the central religious authority responsible for national unity, harmony and peace. He

ensured that inhuman acts such as corruption, greed and theft did not exist in his society. His position was strengthened by the fact that he ruled through the *Kgotla* system, whose rules and laws were enshrined in the cultural and religious traditions of the people. As the supreme head of this institution, he was the centre of all political, social and economic activities of his town. The *Kgotla* debates promoted democratic procedures, which were characterized by political and social justice and order in their practices and conduct. It was an obligation of the *Kgotla* and the *Kgosi* to ensure that the community supported the poor, the old and strangers. After harvest some crops were kept in custody with the *Kgosi* for that purpose.

Traditional religion observed several taboos. The main purpose of these taboos as a social system was to bring social justice, order and harmony in the community. They regulated the social life and conduct of all the members of the society. Breaching the laid down laws was understood as directly offending the *badimo* and therefore creating a crisis for the rest of the community (Smith 1923:18).

Religion, social justice, morality and order are therefore inseparable in traditional Tswana beliefs and practices. They are not only believed to emanate from the *badimo*, but are to a considerable extent inherent in the social and cultural practices of the people. The people often speak of their laws as having always existed, or as having been created by God or *badimo* (Schapera 1937:197). As such the religion and cultural life of Botswana is based on sound and strong moral values. Writing about the Bakwena (a sub-tribe of Botswana), W.C. Willoughby (1928:382-3) pointed out that before the coming of Christianity the Ten Commandments were known to Botswana. He points out that reference was made to honouring the name of God, respecting parents and those in authority; punishing disobedience, cultivating self-control; hospitality, mercy and justice highly esteemed and praised; murder, stealing, adultery, witchcraft, hatred, arrogance, bearing false witness were condemned; a sense of family responsibility in meeting the social and economic needs of orphans and destitute was exercised.

In the traditional society, before the introduction of other religions, BTR provided strong moral base. It inculcated good behaviour in people. Divine wrath and punishment was believed to be a reality and the law of retribution was emphasized.

### **Rituals and Rites of Passage**

Rites of passage are a wide range of transition rituals that mark important stages of life that are observed starting with pregnancy and at birth,

initiation, engagement, marriage (wedding), procreation, status installation, and death. On the one hand the rites of passage emphasizes the role of the community, while on the other, the rites affirm the identity and importance of the individual (Nkomazana et. al 2008:40-156).

Rites of passage mark time of celebration of special events and milestones in life. They shape one's identity. They communicate meanings through participation. They take place within a religions environment. Rites are occasions for celebration and festivity marking the change of status of an individual. Rites of passage involve separation, ritual cleansing and entry to a new stage of life. Children, become adults, young women and men marry and have children, at death, the old become *badimo* and continue to assist family members.

Each rite of passage is accompanied by rituals, which are believed to be the source of protection and unity. Rituals bring order and meaning to life. It is a time when the community's collective memory is built. Religious rituals build personal and communal identity and faith. They anchor existence. Ritual experience creates, strengthens and recreates the community (Amanze 2002: 133-219).

Now that we have sketched the traditional religion of Batswana, let us consider how other religions came to be in Botswana.

## **The Growth of Christianity**

### **Mainline Churches**

Christianity was brought by European missionaries from South Africa. Most notable were the Scottish Congregationalist, Robert Moffat and his son-in-law, Dr David Livingstone, both agents of the London Missionary society. They were the first to preach among the Batswana. The expansion of Christianity among Batswana occurred in the 1820s when the first famous station was established at Kudumane by Robert and Mary Moffat, who headed the station for fifty years. They were joined in 1841 by the famous David Livingstone who, from there, opened up the territory to the north for missionary activity. Though also very much interested in exploration as part of missionary work, and later much more involved in the abolition of slave trade, Livingstone set up a mission station and Kolobeng amongst the Bakwena. The story of Livingstone's conversion of Kgosi Sechele I of the Bakwena is told in Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* (1857:chapter 1).

From Kudumane, Christianity gradually spread to the interior. Missionaries settled amongst the people, often at the invitation of the

chiefs, who wanted guns and knew that the presence of missionaries encouraged the traders. By 1880 every major village or tribe in Botswana had a resident missionary and their influence had become a permanent feature of life. The missionaries worked through the chief, recognizing that the chief's conversion was the key to the rest of the tribe. The responses of chiefs varied – from Khama's (of the Bangwato) wholehearted embrace of the faith, to Sekgoma Letsholathebe's (of the Batawana) outright rejection, which he claimed was in defense of his culture. And to Sechele I (of the Bakwena) whose acceptance of Christianity created a serious dilemma for him. He did not only find himself in between his Kwena cultural beliefs and practices and Christianity, but had a tough time pleasing the missionaries on the one hand and the Bakwena on the other.

When Moffat translated the Bible into Setswana, his piety was culturally and spiritually inappropriate and uncompromising. He advised people to abandon their previous lifestyles, to fear the Christian God and hell, and to strive relentlessly towards the fruits of repentance (Dickson, 1976; Briggs and Wing, 1970).

During the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity was established as the official religion of the five major Tswana states. Kwena, Ngwaketse, Ngwato, and Tawana states were served by the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Kgatla state by the Dutch Reformed Mission (DRM) and the Barolong by the Methodists.

Allegiance to the old "tribal" state churches was disrupted by incoming missions (Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist, Roman Catholic) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Attendance in mission churches in general has rapidly declined since the 1950's. This particularly became evident with the coming of the more vibrant and contextual African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches (Nkomazana 2007).

### **African Independent Churches**

Estimating the presence of AICs among the Botswana population, Wim Van Binsbergen ([http://www.shikanda.net/africa\\_religion/bot2a.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/africa_religion/bot2a.htm)), states that nearly one out of every three adults in Botswana could be counted as a member of an AIC. AICs started to flourish in the 1960s after they were brought to Botswana by migrant labourers and returning workers from South African mines and farms. Various types of these churches began to flourish among different tribes in Botswana. After 1960, several new bodies began to emerge mainly as healing sects of zionist type while others were Apostolic. Although in 1966, the year Botswana gained territorial independence, AICs in Botswana only numbered some thousands,

their size and influence have seen a most remarkable growth in the past centuries (Barret, 1968:24). In the 1960s there were 233 congregations of AICs with the average fewer than 800 members each out of the 262 total of registered churches in Botswana. The figure is obviously higher today. One very important factor is that Botswana state does not have a total grip on these churches. Dozens of them never registered yet functioning on a modest scale; a similar number saw their registration cancelled, yet some of these too, continue functioning outside the law ([http://www.shikanda.net/africa\\_religion/bot3a.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/africa_religion/bot3a.htm)).

The most active and popular AICs are the Zionist Christian Churches (ZCC), with headquarters in South Africa, and the Spiritual Healing Church (SHC), with headquarters in Matsiloje, outside Francistown. These churches were particularly popular among the working class, while the Roman Catholics and the United Congregational Churches of Southern Africa (mainline churches) were popular among the middle class and the Apostolic Faith Mission and Assemblies of God (Pentecostal) were also growing fast among both working and middle classes.

There are commonly three old divisions of AICs: Ethiopians, Apostolics and Zionists. Their emergence have been explained in cultural, political and economic terms, typically associated with the impact of a capitalist economy and a colonial political environment that existed at the time.

Most of the earlier theological judgments on the AICs are largely negative. Their practices and beliefs were blamed for bringing people back to the old heathenism from which they came (Sundkler, 1961:53). Some writers referred to them as Christians, while others termed them as either syncretic or to the extreme as non-Christians (Oosthuizen, 1979:3). The older generation of mission church officials both European and African, tended to see them as their opponets who misled their flock. The acceptance of polygamy by some of them contributed to them as being an inferior expression of Christianity or even as worse as non-Christians (Daneel, 1971:455).

Although not all AICs were political nor could their emergence be always seen as a form of direct opposition to colonialism and foreign influences generally, the origin of the fastest growing AICs in Botswana; the ZCC and SHC points to that. They engaged in activities that were regarded as “subversive” by the authorities. The SHC broke away from the Methodist church, due to its failure to incorporate Africans into the leadership role of the church and to recognize the need to contextualize its message, especially in the area of healing. The AICs contributed to African nationalism by emphasizing the idea that there was an African alternative to European values and control. They also made a significant

contribution to the indigenization of Christianity and also helped people to cope with rapid change. Some like the John Masowe churches discouraged their members from visiting hospitals for medical purposes. The other factors that led to the formation of these AICs (Amanze 1994: 166-167; Nkomazana and Tabalaka 2009:137-159) are:

1. The disappointment with mainline Christianity
2. The translation of the Bible into Setswana language which opened up new possibilities to them
3. The denominational divisions and failure of the mother churches to meet local needs
4. The desire for physical healing
5. The desire for community, that is, identity, belonging and harmony
6. A response of protest against white denomination and a desire for liberation
7. A response to western cultural systems

As evident, the growth of AICs is attributed to several factors, with the factor of healing, and vibrant singing and dancing, which are uniquely African, as the most leading factors.

### **Pentecostal Churches**

Pentecostals, who trace their denominational origins directly to the Pentecostal revival in the USA, were first introduced to Botswana via South Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s. From the 1980s to the present there was a wave of new Pentecostal churches, some charismatic and others preferring to be classified as revivalists coming to Botswana. At the beginning of 2003 there were more than 75 registered churches falling under this category (Pentecostal) according to the Registrar of Societies, and mainly formed by immigrants from other African countries who are primarily flocking into Botswana for economic and religious reasons. This has resulted in Pentecostal churches becoming the most vibrant and fastest growing group of churches in Botswana. They are poised to become the biggest group of churches in the near future.

Pentecostal churches are however criticized for lack of adequate theology in terms of belief and practice. As such they are said to make better missionaries, than theologians, thus concentrating in writing pamphlets rather than scholarly papers and books. Most of their writings reflect personal testimony and experience than theological arguments. They emphasize healing, repentance, baptism of the Holy Spirit with