"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal1"

Zion Churches in Mozambique since the early 20th Century

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Currently Zionism is considered an important manifestation of African Christianity and a prominent form of African Pentecostalism. Zion churches are classified as one category of African Independent Churches (AIC) that are also referred to as African Indigenous or African Initiated Churches. The difference between the two designations is that independent churches were originally formed as secessions from mission churches, while the others were indigenously initiated, i.e. founded by Africans for Africans.3 The other two AIC categories are Ethiopian churches and Apostolic/Pentecostal type churches.4 Recently Anderson argued that these categories are of limited analytical value, because within each category there are exceptions to the general characteristics, but he fully agreed that they outline some of the common characteristics to make these churches more understandable to the outsider.5 For the same reason I use these categories throughout the text.

According to the census data of 1997 Zionism is the third religion in Mozambique, representing 17.5 per cent of the total population. In the

1 I Corinthians 12:7
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country as a whole Zionism is only surpassed by Catholicism (23.8%) and Islam (17.8%). In the southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane, as well as in the central provinces of Manica and Sofala the mazione, the Zion believers constitute the majority of the population, exceeding the Catholics. The uneven distribution of Zionism in Mozambique is associated with its introduction by returning migrant workers from South Africa and Zimbabwe (ex-Southern Rhodesia). As there was virtually no migrant labour to these countries from Northern Mozambique, Zionism did not take root as a major religion in this part of the country. Another reason for the insignificant number of Zion believers in the north might be the dominant position of Islam in that part of the country, since this religion likewise adapted to local culture.

The first part of this article traces the introduction of Zionism in Mozambique, where the Portuguese colonial regime and the Catholic Church viewed African churches as a political threat. Secondly, it describes how Zionism in Mozambique was affected by the anti-religious policies in the early post-colonial period and only could expand unhindered after the democratic transition in the 1990s. While the first part focuses on historical and political aspects that conditioned the comparatively belated free development of Zionism in Mozambique, the second part of the article concentrates on its ritual and social characteristics. It explores Zion faith and practice and discusses its relationship with both African traditional beliefs and other Christian churches in contemporary Mozambique. Particular attention is given to the ambiguous relationship between the traditional healer and the prophet healer, who constitutes a key concept of Zionism. The article is based on the author's fieldwork conducted in Chimoio during the period 1999 to 2005 as part of a research project on the emergence and development of AIC in Mozambique and on relevant literature with regard to the southern African region in general.

African churches in colonial Mozambique

The Zion church movement has its origin in 1896 in a place called Zion City, near Chicago, Illinois. Less than a decade later it was propagated in

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6 UNDP, Mozambique. National Human Development Report 1999, Maputo 2000, p. 20. These statistical data are not necessarily reliable; however, they can serve as indicators.

7 The term ‘Zionist churches’ is frequently used in the Anglophone literature; however, whenever possible I prefer the designation ‘Zion’ since the term ‘Zionist’ is closely associated with