

Preface

This book is about ancestry, spirituality, and culture among African Christians in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe—and about the surprising role the figure of the apostle Paul played in the colonial and postcolonial periods. The experiences of the colonized, the processes they reinvented or coped with, and how they identified themselves in relation to colonial forces are first on the agenda of postcolonial biblical interpretation. The claim is not that colonialism brought a new religion, but that the two, African traditional religion and colonialism, transformed each other. Beginning with the history of the identity of Shona people and their encounter with British colonialism and Euro-American missionaries, this study focuses on Shona Christianity as a deliberate, evolving, and constructed response born from an encounter with those forces. To say that Shona Christianity evolved invites a theological debate. I wish to center that debate on a comparison with the apostle Paul's creative construction of Abraham in the midst of the *Aeneadae*, by which I mean the Romans of the Augustan era whose identity was both politically and religiously grounded in the ancestry of Aeneas. Paul's Letter to the Romans is arguably the most influential Pauline epistle in the history of Christianity, yet its influence among cultures has not yet been fully explored. In this project, I will examine Paul's legacy within the context of colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe.

The reading and interpretation of the Bible, especially Paul's Epistle to the Romans (3:27—4:25), awakened among the colonized Shona people a renewed sense of the role, function, and place of ancestors in religious worldviews. While precolonial Africans were aware of God prior to the introduction of Christianity, their reading and interpretation of Paul was formative and transformative in two ways. First, they discovered Paul to be a theological dialogue partner in matters of culture, ancestry, ethnicity, and spirituality. The gospel of Jesus Christ—which, Paul argues in Rom. 1:16 and 3:31, invites "all" into a right relationship with God through faith—was formative for the African religious worldview. As a religious people, African Christians saw their appropriation of "Father Abraham" not as a *universal* ancestor, but rather as the ancestor of a remnant. In this case, Abraham's entry into faith (Gen. 15:6) does not transcend and abolish differences, but rather confirms the diversity of Christian faith. Thus the concept of Abraham's people as a remnant drawn

from Jews and non-Jews brings into sharp relief the evolution of Christianity among the Shona people. What is called out in Abraham is not universality, but a remnant. African Christianity is a new appropriation of Christian faith on the basis of the Messiah.

Next, the book will contextualize Paul within the worldview of African Christians. As a constructed response, Shona Christianity, which is multiethnic in nature, actively picked and chose what it received from missionaries. This intentional approach transformed colonial African Christianity to what Shona postcolonial critics now call postcolonial Christian faith. Thus encounter between colonialism and African religious systems cannot be separated from the arrival of the Bible. The Bible in Africa has always played a double-edged function: as a tool for colonizing and as an agent of transformation. The latter is what will be discovered as the book progresses. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is indeed a major theological resource in the development of Christianity in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Postcolonial analysis is interested in the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Thus, with regard to the first century, I will juxtapose Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Augustus is presented as an advocate of cultural renewal through ancestral veneration, with Paul's presentation of Abraham as a competing ancestor of the Roman Empire. The story of Aeneas as told under the Julian-Claudian family resonates with the experiences of the African worldview. It is an experience of power, culture, and identity; realities that cultural practitioners will evolve into a new mode of religious existence. Seeing power through the prism of colonialism and missionary efforts provides a vivid means for looking at culture and cultural engagement with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The study will in part engage the historical, literary, and ideological milieu of the Augustan era in the Roman Empire. The elements of prejudice and power toward inferior people seem to be a concern at the center of Paul's language in Romans. A postcolonial analysis of the legacy of Paul's Letter to the Romans in Zimbabwe is in order because it assists twenty-first-century Christian readers in southern Africa, especially Zimbabwe, who were once under the imperial claims of European colonialism, to appreciate the import of Romans as a missionary document. As a practitioner of postcolonial analysis, I will seek to address in this book the construction of the identity of the colonized and the processes of such constructions whose goal leads to the birth of a new phenomenon. The exposure of the colonized to the ideals of the colonizers leads to a shifting of identities. In this book, the new expression of Christianity that

was born from the engagement of the colonizers with the colonized will be labeled postcolonial Christianity.

Beginning with chapter 1, the study will offer a historical account of the arrival of colonial and missionary groups in Zimbabwe. The perception of Africans on the part of both colonizers and missionaries was complex and dehumanizing. European colonialists and missionaries projected themselves as champions of Christian virtues and educators of human values. Their aim was to educate, evangelize, and produce an African who would be subordinate to the teachings of Western culture. In this case, this first chapter focuses on the arrival of British missionaries and their perception of African culture, which resulted in a period of encounter, engagement, confrontation, and transformation for all three parties: namely, the indigenous Shona people, colonial officials, and missionaries.

Chapter 2 will focus on religious cultural configurations and the intense engagement between African religion and missionary teachings. Colonial and missionary education, especially so-called moral and religious education, whether in public or missionary schools, was the incubator of African Christianity.

Chapter 3 will focus on identifying postcolonial Christianity in relation to its engagement with Paul as a theological figure in the colonial encounter. Paul's theological argument in Rom. 4:1–25 and the way Africans appropriated and engaged with his message of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be explored as a period not only of synthesis but also antisynthesis, leading to the birth of an authentic African Christianity. The new theology that Africans appropriated from Paul's gospel was a new understanding of Jesus, of which Paul is the first witness.

The fourth chapter will focus on the nature of postcolonial Christianity as a multiethnic African Christianity, both African and Christian, with a renewed understanding of the role, place, and function of ancestors. It will demonstrate the process and nature of African Shona Christianity's adaptation, faith, and spirituality. The chapter also describes the function of the cult of Aeneas in the Greco-Roman world and the ways in which Paul advanced his gospel using the language and culture of the day.

The fifth chapter presents the ways in which Hellenistic Judaism depicted the ancestral greatness of Abraham—ways similar to the Augustan use of the Aeneas legend. The Shona people, in their process of adaptation, already felt an affinity with Paul's idea of ancestry. Here the study will focus on Aeneas and Abraham. Shona people creatively appropriated selected aspects of Euro-American Christianity in their religion just as Paul had creatively interacted

with his Greco-Roman context. Heretofore, Western New Testament scholarship has not seen this adequately because its practitioners have been at home in the dominant colonial culture. Indeed, the experience of colonization helped Shona Christians to recognize that Paul's appropriation of Abraham in the context of the Roman Empire was to counter the ideology of the Julian-Claudian family. A juxtaposition of Aeneas and Abraham will conclude the book with some theological and spiritual implications on the part of Shona postcolonial Christians of Zimbabwe.