



Pastoral challenges and responses to fear of avenging spirits (*ngozi*) in Africa: a biblical evaluation and response – a case of the Shona people

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Abstract

Pastoral challenges and responses to fear of avenging spirits (*ngozi*) in Africa: a biblical evaluation and response – a case of the Shona people

Avenging spirits, commonly known as “ngozi”, are one of the most feared and mysterious spiritual manifestations among African people – particularly the Shona people of Zimbabwe. To address the fears of Christians in such contexts, a contextually relevant pastoral ministry should first of all be designed. Such a ministerial design should proceed from a thorough understanding of the contextual reality of the spiritual world (of “ngozi”). Secondly, it should formulate a biblical response to the phenomenon in order to be informed by a sound biblical premise. Thirdly, its design should utilise the natural potential of community church people. Cognisant of these realities and challenges in African churches, this article grapples with the subject of the fear of avenging spirits in congregations, using the case study of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, and how a pastoral ministry could be designed to address the situation. In doing so, the article discusses the phenomenon of avenging spirits, it provides a systematic biblical response and evaluation of “ngozi” and it proposes a contextually relevant and biblically-informed pastoral ministry to people under consideration.

Opsomming

Pastorale uitdagings en reaksies ten opsigte van vrees vir bonatuurlike verskynsels (*ngozi*) in Afrika: bybelse evaluering en reaksie – in besonder onder die Shonabevolking

Bonatuurlike verskynsels, algemeen bekend as “ngozi” is van die mees gevreesde en raaiselagtigste verskynsels onder die inwoners van Afrika, in besonder onder die Shonasprekende gemeenskap in Zimbabwe. Eerstens word ’n relevante, kontekstuele, pastorale bediening voorgestel om die vrese van gelowiges in hierdie tipe omstandighede te hanteer. Sodanige bedieningsontwerp behoort voort te spruit uit ’n goeie begrip van die kontekstuele realiteit van die spirituele wêreld (van “ngozi”). Tweedens moet ’n bybelsgefundeerde antwoord vir hierdie verskynsel gegee word. Derdens moet die plaaslike gemeenskap bemagtig word. Met inagneming van die uitdagings in Afrikagemeentes, word in hierdie artikel geworstel met die gelowiges se vrese vir bose geeste. Die Shonasprekende gemeenskap in Zimbabwe word as voorbeeld gebruik van hoe ’n geskikte pastorale model toegepas kan word. Die artikel handel oor die bose geesteverkynsel, verskaf ’n sistematiese, bybelse evaluering van “ngozi” en stel ’n kontekstueel-relevante en bybelsgefundeerde, pastorale model vir die Shonagemeenskap in Zimbabwe voor.

1. Introduction and problem identification

Ngozi is a spirit of a dead person who was mistreated during his/her lifetime. This spirit seeks revenge on individuals or on it’s family, until compensation for the mistreatment is made (Gelfand, 1962:69). It is believed that if the spirit is neglected, it can cause calamities (Nyirongo, 1997:80). In many instances among the Shona people, misfortune is attributed to the *ngozi* spirit (Gelfand, 1973:61). For this reason, there exists an immense fear whenever *ngozi* is perceived to be operating in a family. It is believed that only an experienced witchdoctor is capable of solving the *ngozi* crisis (Thorpe, 1991:57). The Shona people believe that the dead still have influence in the lives of the living (Gelfand, 1964:32; Idowu, 1973:173). This belief is also argued by many African scholars such as Mbiti (1969), Mwaura (2000) and Magezi (2007).

In the event that *ngozi* strikes, each member of the affected family is expected to participate in appeasing the angered spirit in order to avoid further attacks. The process of addressing the *ngozi* problem entails payment of compensation to the spirit and exorcism of the vengeful spirit, which is performed by a *n’anga* (Shona name for

witchdoctor). Moreover, preventative measures are taken to protect all the blood relatives of the afflicted persons against any future attacks (Nakah, 2006:31). In this situation, Christians experience a tension when they refuse to participate in these traditional ways of appeasing the *ngozi* spirit. Their family members may accuse them of being directly or indirectly responsible for the misfortunes happening in the family, which in this case, is associated with the angered *ngozi* spirit.

In the aftermath of democracy and advent of European missionaries, however, the issue of *ngozi* was not fully engaged in a biblically sound, culturally effective and responsive manner. The upbringing of the Shona people in African Traditional Religion (ATR) challenges the church leaders to guide believers to depend on the Lord Jesus and detach themselves from all the practices of the African traditions (like appeasing of the *ngozi* spirit), which are incompatible with biblical teachings. The Shona people believe that illnesses, that are not easily treated at hospitals, are due to the active intervention of an agent, like a witch, a ghost, an ancestor or an evil spirit (Magezi, 2005:35). The causes of these illnesses are believed to be of a direct consequence to the breaking of taboos and offences against God or ancestral spirits (Mwaura, 2000:79). Whenever death occurs, people seek to know its cause (Mbiti, 1969:155). Hence, it is common for the Shona people to say, *Izvi zvoda zvechivanhu* ("this particular sickness requires an African approach to treatment"). Remarks of this nature suggest that Christian healing and western medicine are limited, particularly in addressing the spiritual issues.

In the light of the situation sketched above, it is imperative for churches and pastors ministering to people in such challenges to provide a sound and contextually relevant response. Failure to do so will inevitably lead church members to seek traditional African solutions, which Magezi (2006) calls "oscillating between two worlds", namely Christianity and African traditional beliefs. The authors are contend that an appropriate and relevant pastoral intervention should start from the following premise. Firstly, there should be a realisation that a church is a sub-community within the larger community where people experience the realities of life. Hence, the Shona Christians are affected by the fears of *ngozi* like all other Shona people. Secondly, in order for a pastoral intervention to be contextually relevant, it should draw, be informed and integrate people's natural potentials and existing Christian models (Magezi, 2007).

The question that could be posed, therefore, is: How can *ngozi* be understood from a biblical perspective in a way that would enable pastoral ministry to address the issue appropriately, in a context where Christians are gripped by fear of the spiritual forces of *ngozi*, like it is the case in Zimbabwe? Following from the main question are the following related questions. How do Shona people understand *ngozi*? What is the biblical teaching on spirits that manifest as those of the dead (*ngozi*)? What pastoral and strategic guidelines can the church in Zimbabwe employ to guide Christians not to fear *ngozi*? The assumption of the article is that the spirits are real and they influence people, but that these spirits are caused by neither the dead nor by God. The aim of the article is to provide a biblical evaluation to shed light on the identity of these spirits and to help assisting people affected by such spirits.

2. Towards understanding *ngozi* (avenging spirits): a meta-theoretical overview

The subject of *ngozi* among the Shona people has been widely researched, and Gelfand stands out as a key contributor to the discussion. In his works, he scientifically describes the different types and causes of *ngozi* and the Shona method of addressing the crisis. To underscore the objectivity in Gelfand’s work, Hannan (Gelfand, 1962) rightly states, “the readers of Dr Gelfand’s studies of Shona ritual and beliefs cannot help noting his avoidance of value judgments expressed or implied”. Gelfand’s extensive studies on Shona beliefs and practices, particularly on *ngozi*, are published in his multiple works (Gelfand, 1959; 1962; 1964; 1973). Gelfand’s works are our primary source in studying *ngozi*, but they are complemented by interviews conducted with advisors of Shona chiefs and people with firsthand experiences of *ngozi*.

The Shona people comprise of seven major tribes that include Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Ndau and Korekore. These groups speak one language, called Chishona. However, some historians argue that Mbire rather than Shona is the correct name for these tribes. *Mbire* is derived from the presumed great ancestor of the Shona known as Mambire, who is believed to have migrated from North Africa (Mutsvairo & Chiwore, 1996:17). The origin of the name *Shona* has been much debated without any clear solution. In this article, however, the name Shona will be used in preference to Mbire, because it is more commonly used.

As indicated above, *ngozi*, according to Shona people, is an aggrieved or angered spirit of a deceased person who was either murdered or mistreated during his/her lifetime. The Shona people believe that spirits of dead relatives hover around their village on the housetops, in the forests, on the hills, in trees, in the pools or in the depth of the earth. In the Shona people's view of the spirit world, the spirits eat, drink and require snuff. These spirits are in harmony with living beings and with other groups of spirits (Gelfand, 1964:32). If one is murdered, the Shona believe that this person's spirit becomes restless and angry and returns to seek revenge on the murderer (Thorpe, 1991:57).

According to Shona beliefs, when evil occurrences persist, they are probably caused by spirits. For instance, if a husband constantly abuses his wife physically, the Shona will suspect that the husband is harbouring an avenging spirit (Gelfand, 1973:99). Other signs of the presence of *ngozi* can be an illness that is resistant to treatment, or mysterious deaths in a family. Thus, any misfortune in many respects is associated with possession by an aggrieved spirit that wishes to take revenge on the individual or family that wronged the person during his/her lifetime (Gelfand, 1973:61).

The Shona people argue that the *ngozi* spirit should not be viewed negatively since it is a spirit that has been wronged (Mpfungu & Harley, 2002). If the person wasn't mistreated or murdered in the first place, *ngozi* wouldn't be an issue. This view of *ngozi* is summed up by the following Shona proverb: *Zingizi warikanganisira saka rakuruma* ("You have wronged a wasp, therefore it has bitten you") (Gelfand, 1977:114).

There are various types of *ngozi* spirits and each one is addressed differently. However, five types of *ngozi* spirits could clearly be identified, namely a victim of murder, a servant or slave who was mistreated and deprived of his/her rightful recompense, a parent who was deeply hurt by his/her child, a spouse who was neglected by the other, and one arising from goods that were stolen or borrowed and never returned (Bucher, 1980:68). Each one of these *ngozi* spirits manifests differently from the others and they vary in degree of gravity. These various types of *ngozi* deserve a detailed discussion in order to clearly understand their dynamics, but since our focus is to provide a pastoral response, a brief overview should suffice.

The following observations could cursory be made, particularly from Gelfand's works and fieldwork interviews conducted. Firstly, *ngozi* is a spirit of a mistreated or murdered person, which returns to take

vengeance on the offender. Secondly, *ngozi* spirits vary in the way they manifest and in the extent of their demands. Thirdly, *ngozi* of a murdered person cannot be exorcised. Fourthly, only an experienced *n’anga* with special powers is capable of solving a *ngozi* crisis. Fifthly, the only way to address a *ngozi* spirit is through paying compensation.

If *ngozi* is viewed as spirits of offended dead people that seek revenge on the living and this belief affects Christians, then it is imperative to evaluate such beliefs based on the Scriptures in order for pastors to respond appropriately in a biblically informed manner. Therefore, the basic question to pose is what the biblical teaching is on spirits that manifest as those of the dead (*ngozi*).

3. A biblical assessment of *ngozi* (avenging spirits)

To respond to the above question, it is important to biblically determine whether the spirits of the dead can return to seek revenge on the living. However, since there are no passages in Scripture that directly speaks to the subject of avenging spirits, Hays’ (1996) suggestion of a paradigm approach provides a useful framework. This approach entails studying passages that are related to the subject in question and then drawing a paradigm and conclusion. Accordingly, relevant passages from Scripture on *ngozi* will be discussed, and then insights, inferences and a conclusion will be drawn. In doing so, one should examine the identity of the spirits that appear as those of the dead, particularly passages relating to communication with the dead, curses of blood guilt, vengeance for the dead and spirits as taught in Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, passages on necromancy arguably shed the most light on the subject of *ngozi* regarding communicating with the dead. Wikipedia (2009) describes necromancy as a form of divination in which the practitioner seeks to summon “operative spirits” or “spirits of divination” for multiple reasons, from spiritual protection to wisdom. The word *necromancy* derives from the Greek νεκρός (*nekrós*), “dead”, and μαντεία (*manteía*), “divination”.

Fleenor (2007) rightly observed that people who practise necromancy believe that the spirits of the dead are free to roam wherever and whenever they wish, meaning that they can travel into the future or the past. Necromancy has been used for many reasons, such as finding out the true cause of death of people who have died, and finding treasure. Thus *ngozi* is addressed through necromantic practices among the Shona people.

3.1 Old Testament teaching on the communication with the dead

Necromancy is forbidden in both deuteronomic and priestly law (Deut. 18:9-14; Lev. 19:31; 20:27), because it is detestable to the Lord (Gordon, 1986:194; Evans, 2004:152). However, the consultation with the dead remained a problem for the Israelites throughout the centuries (2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; Isa. 8:19; Jer. 27:9; cf. Evans, 2004:152). In Israelite history, necromancy flourished under Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6), but was suppressed by Josiah (2 Kings 23:24; cf. Gordon, 1986:194). Foreseeing this problem in Israel, Yahweh gave Israel the law of which necromancy is one of the forbidden practices. The law warned against participating in the traditions of the nations whose land would be possessed.

In the Pentateuch, two passages on necromancy stand out. These are Leviticus 19:31 and Deuteronomy 18:11. In the prophetic books, Isaiah 8:19 provides further insight regarding necromancy. The law prohibited/forbade the Israelites to turn to mediums, for they would be defiled by them. The Hebrew word used for medium in Isaiah 8:19 is האבות. It is translated as "a pit", referring to a place from which the spirit is called (Rooker, 2000:263). Consulting these spirits was like calling them up from a pit. However, for the Israelites, contacting mediums and spiritists implied an appeal to other spiritual forces than Yahweh and, therefore, a departure from wholehearted trust (Cairns, 1992:17). For this reason, there was no tolerance of those who resorted to mediums and wizards, as Yahweh would set his face against anyone who engaged in such practices. An analysis of the Old Testament teaching on communication between the living and the dead reveals firstly that the Israelites were obliged to live holy lives and were prohibited from practising necromancy. Secondly, if they were disobedient to this command, the Lord was going to set his face against them or any individual who practised necromancy. Thirdly, those who practised necromancy were regarded as adulterers.

While necromancy was a common practice in the Ancient Near East, the passages highlighted above uniformly condemn necromancy. One could argue that the prohibition of the consultation of spirits of the dead implies that it was possible to communicate with such spirits through mediums. However, God forbade them to do so, because this practice shifted their focus from worshipping God to mediums (Gehman, 2005:277). The passage that is commonly employed to argue for the possibility of communication between the

living and the dead is 1 Samuel 28:1-20. It is therefore important to discuss this passage in detail.

1 Samuel 28:1-20 records the story of Saul in a critical dilemma. When Saul saw the Philistine army assembling at Shunem in preparation for war, he became frightened and "terror filled his heart" (1 Sam. 28:4; Gordon, 1986:194). He enquired from the Lord a strategy that would assure his success in battle, but the Lord did not answer him, not even in dreams, with the Urim or by prophets (1 Sam. 28:6). Earlier in the narrative, it was mentioned that the Spirit had departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) and that God was now with David (1 Sam. 18:12). Saul's earlier use of Urim and Thummim is recorded in 1 Samuel 14:36-42, but since the prophet Gad had already defected to David (1 Sam. 22:5), it is likely that there was no accredited or authentic prophet of Yahweh in Saul's court. The available prophets could not provide satisfactory answers from God (Gordon, 1986:195). Moreover, Saul had slaughtered the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:11-19) and this minimised his chances of getting help from any of the sacred people (Mauchline, 1971:182). In desperation and fear, Saul decided to seek guidance from a medium. He sent his attendants to find a woman who was a medium (1 Sam. 22:7).

Earlier, Saul had the mediums expelled from the land. He might have done so in obedience to biblical instruction (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:11; cf. Klein, 1983:270). It is also possible that he intended to eliminate potential confusion, which the mediums could have caused in Israel. In a similar case, King Sudea of the Sumerian city of Lagash had expelled sorcerers and witches from his kingdom a thousand years before Saul (Gordon, 1986:194). King Sudea obviously did not do so in compliance with biblical teaching for it was not known to him. Without denying that Saul might have expelled the mediums from the land in obedience to God's word, it is also possible that he did so for other reasons. It seems clear that in the face of impending battle and the fact of Samuel's death, Saul was challenged to reconsider visiting the mediums, especially when God had remained deaf to his prayers.

Even though necromancy had been forbidden in Israel, its practitioners were still there (Klein, 1983:270). The divination Saul requested was the kind of activity that the Philistines engaged in (1 Sam. 6:2), and that was considered to be sinful (1 Sam. 15:23; cf. Klein, 1983:270). Saul asked for the medium to summon Samuel (1 Sam.

28:8). However, the woman did not immediately respond to Saul's request. Instead, she reminded her client (Saul) that Saul¹ had forbidden this practise. Her reaction shows the strictness of the law, which abolished necromancy. It further highlights the inconsistency of Saul's character. He had forbidden the practice so sternly that the mediums, who still practised it, did so secretly. Saul however, assured the medium of security. Ironically, he swore by the Lord on a practice which he knew the Lord had forbidden (Evans, 2004:154).

There has been much debate on whether or not this was the real spirit of Samuel. And there are at least three interpretations of this passage. Firstly, that the spirit was a mere deception of Saul by the woman of Endor. Secondly, that Satan spoke through the woman of Endor and thirdly, that the spirit of Samuel spoke through the medium of Endor.

Firstly, let us consider the view that it was a mere deception. It has been argued that the medium of Endor deceived Saul and was in fact a lawbreaker, who had been removed from the land of Israel. Proponents of this view argue that Samuel did not speak through the medium, but that it was a mere deception. More so, they note that only the medium, and not Saul, claimed to have seen Samuel. It is further argued that what the woman claimed to have seen, could have been any old person and not necessarily Samuel (Gehman, 1999:144).

However, Saul was convinced that he was speaking to Samuel. The spirit reiterated the words that Samuel had once spoken to Saul (1 Sam. 15:17-25). The medium could not have known these words. Also, the accuracy of the prediction of the events of the next day makes it likely that it was Samuel who spoke through the medium. As Archer (1982:181) affirms:

The shade or apparition sounded like an authentic message from God, with its announcement of doom on the guilty unthankful king.

In similar vein, Gordon (1986:196) remarks that Samuel spoke as a prophet and not as a ghost. He adds that

1 She did not yet know that she was speaking to Saul. Hence, she referred to Saul in the third person rather than in the second person.

... it even sounded like something Samuel might have said had he remained alive after the massacre of Ahimelech and the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:11-19).

Even though some of the mediums might have been deceivers, they had been expelled from the land, not because of this, but because necromancy was an abomination to the Lord (Evans, 2004:152). Suggesting that they were expelled from Israel because they were liars or deceivers would mean that if they were not liars they could have remained in Israel even though they practised necromancy. Such an argument, however, is baseless. It is not mentioned in the Bible prior to this incident that the mediums should be expelled because they were liars.

Furthermore, it is not convincing to argue that the woman deceived Saul in this incident. If she intended to do so, she would have told him that he would not die in the battle. She could have told him something which would have pleased him – especially when she was caught practising what Saul had sternly forbidden. Her boldness in reminding Saul of his disobedience to the Lord, and that he and his son would die the next day, could not have been a mere deception, an intelligent guess or personal courage. It is more likely that a deceiver would make the deceived feel comfortable by telling him/her a lie. This is not the case in the story of the medium of Endor.

The second view that the spirit was Satan will be discussed next. The argument is that the spirit that appeared to the medium, was Satan. Gehman (1999:144) states that the Reformers as well as the early Church Fathers held this viewpoint. Tertullian (as cited in Gehman, 2005:280) called the appearance of the spirits a rivalry of truth by an unclean spirit. He believed that an evil spirit represented the soul of Samuel and appeared in the likeness of the prophet. Tertullian argued that God could not have allowed the soul of any saint, much less of a prophet, to be dragged out of its resting place in Hades, by a demon. He further argued that God does not surrender the soul of a just man to the power of demons; what happened in this incident is that a devil took Samuel’s figure and imitated his voice in order to drive Saul to despair.

In the sixteenth century, the protestant reformers and theologians followed the teaching of the Church Fathers that Satan himself appeared to Saul pretending to be Samuel. Martin Luther (cited in Gehman, 1999:144) called the appearance of Samuel a devil’s ghost, and Calvin called it a sceptre. This approach avoids basic

problems of interpretation on questions such as the following. If God refused to speak to Saul through Urim and prophets, why should He speak through Samuel in a manner He condemns? Moreover, if the rest of Scriptures teach that the dead do not communicate with the living, how can it be that God allowed the medium to communicate his message to Saul through the spirit of Samuel?

Even though this position avoids the above questions, the problem with Tertullian's argument is that it works from the assumption that the powers of a demon dragged the soul of Samuel out of its resting place. Why could a different force not make Samuel appear to the medium and give the message to Saul? Where did Tertullian get the clue from the passage that demons dragged Samuel from his rest? It appears exegetically weak and it cannot be substantiated from the passage that the devil pretended to be Samuel. The passage should have hinted on this. The narrator of the story takes it for granted that Samuel spoke to Saul through the medium. Tertullian's view excludes the possibility that God, in his sovereignty, might have allowed Samuel's spirit to appear to the medium.

The third view is that the spirit was actually Samuel. This view has two readings. On the one hand are those who argue that what happened in this incident can occur again and that, whenever people consult the dead, they can communicate with them just as in this incident. On the other hand are those who contend that the spirit that appeared to the medium was Samuel, but that the passage does not set a pattern of "what can always happen" whenever people consult the dead. The latter explanation interprets 1 Samuel 28 as a unique incident that shows a special working of the power of God in a particular situation (Gehman, 1999:145). The latter explanation seems consistent with the biblical teaching expressed in other passages.

Job 7:7-10 states that life is just a breath and that his eyes would never see life again. Job compares the human life to a cloud, which vanishes and does not return and that is what the remembrance of the dead is like. In similar vein, Ecclesiastes 9:4-6 states:

Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

The teaching in these passages seems to clearly suggest that the dead cease to have any association with, and/or influence on the living. Put simply, there can be no communication between the dead and the living. However, we should hasten to say that, if God wants to do anything, He can still do it. In the case of Bileam, He made a donkey speak (Num. 22:29), but that did not mean that whenever a man goes against the will of God and he is riding on a donkey, it will speak. It happened there and then to communicate a necessary message through a method and means that were unusual. Similarly, the case of 1 Samuel 28 could be considered in that light. 1 Samuel 28:1-20 should be understood as a special case in which God overrode the normal and obvious in order to show Saul that he would get comfort from nowhere if the Lord has denied him (1 Sam. 16:7).

Therefore, from the discussion above, it seems convincing that Saul’s incident was neither a mere deception that the medium spoke with Samuel, nor was it the devil that spoke through the medium – it was Samuel. As Boettner (1958:149) argues:

[I]t seems clear that, in this instance, God actually sent back the prophet Samuel; that he superseded the séance and used this as an occasion to pronounce judgment upon the wilfully disobedient King Saul.

The passage cannot be used as a basis for the formulation of a doctrine that the dead can communicate with the living. What ought to direct us in terms of the question of whether the dead can communicate with the living are other passages already mentioned in this discussion such as Leviticus 19:31, Deuteronomy 18:9-12 and Isaiah 8:19, which forbid necromancy.

What can be established from the above discussion, particularly 1 Samuel 28, is that the dead do not speak through mediums. The account of 1 Samuel 28:1-20 is also a unique incident and not a norm on the communication of the living with the dead and that the spirit of Samuel spoke through the medium of Endor. However, the above discussion prompts us to ask the question: what does the New Testament say on the communication of the living with the dead.

3.2 New Testament teaching on communication with the dead

Many passages in the New Testament speak about the dead. However, only Luke 16 seems to suggest communication between the living and the dead. Various scholars view the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a standard New Testament passage teaching on what happens after death. Based on this passage, Garret (1995: 677) argues that there is no change of destiny after death. John Bunyan (cited in Garret, 1995:792) used an exposition of the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) as the setting for an extended warning against distresses of eternal punishment. Erickson (1998) used this passage as the basis for refuting the Roman Catholic teaching on the second chance of salvation in his statement that, "The Roman Catholic idea of a second chance to accept the gospel message after death seems inconsistent with other teachings of Scriptures" (e.g. Luke 16:19-31; Erickson, 1998:793). However, the question one may ask is whether the parable of the rich man and Lazarus teach on the communication of the living with the dead.

As indicated above, Luke 16:19-31 is viewed as the standard passage from which one could draw inferences on communication between the living and the dead, therefore, it deserves a detailed consideration.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is meant to show the consequences of the neglect of the "Law and the Prophets". Seccombe (1982:179) rightly states that "... the parable deals with a flagrant outrage of 'the Law and the Prophets'". In the parable, the rich man is depicted in opulent attire. It appeared that prosperity was associated with blessings of obedience to God's law. The Old Testament teaches that obedience to the law results in prosperity (Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 1:1-3), and disobedience in curses. Lazarus is described as one covered with sores. This paints the picture of the sickness of Job. Lazarus could have been regarded as cursed and suffering from divine punishment (Green, 1997:605). The irony is that the rich man was in fact disobeying the "Law and the Prophets" (Deut. 15:16-19; Isa. 58:7).

Even though the parable is not primarily meant to teach on the communication between the living and the dead, some of its parts can be invoked on the subject. Like other New Testament passages teaching that when people die they go before the Lord (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8), this parable shows that when the rich man and Lazarus died, each went to the place they deserved. They did not roam

around the homestead as African traditional beliefs affirm (Nyirongo, 1997:81). Moreover, the fact that the dead have no share with the living on earth (Job 7:7-10; Eccl. 9:4-6) seems to be reinforced in this passage. There is no need for Lazarus to come back to the living, since the living human beings have enough resources to enable them to know the Lord’s teaching.

In a nutshell, the principles that could be derived from this parable are:

- When people die, they go to places they deserve.
- The dead cannot move from the place of their destiny to another.
- The dead do not return as spirits to the living.
- No communication between the living and the dead exists.

Thus, contrary to Shona people’s claim that mistreated dead people return to seek revenge and compensation from the living (Gelfand, 1964:32; Thorpe, 1991:57), both the Old Testament and New Testament passages discussed above show that the dead cannot communicate with the living. This observation prompts the following questions. Is it the dead that return to seek revenge?; and Is it God or some evil spirits? In an attempt to answer these questions, it is helpful to study the passages that speak of vengeance for murder.

The Bible speaks of vengeance for murder in many passages of the Old Testament. In some cases, the Shona description of a person affected by *ngozi* resembles that of a person cursed for murder in the Bible (Gen. 4:11-13). There are several passages in the Old Testament that describe the curse of murder in a way the Shona understands a person under *ngozi* punishment.

3.3 Biblical teaching on the curse of bloodguilt and vengeance for the dead

The first murder in the Bible is committed by Cain against his brother, Abel (Gen. 4). When God asked him where Abel, his brother, was, Cain replied that he was not his brother’s keeper. Cain was told that his brother’s blood was crying to God from the ground. In biblical times, blood was associated with life as in Leviticus 17:11 where blood is personified. It is expressed as “crying”. Wenham (1987:107) explains that the participle *crying* צֹעֲקִים used in Genesis 4:10 has been used of a desperate person who is calling for help. In some passages of the Bible it is used in the context of the desperate

cry of a man without food (Gen. 41:55), expecting to die (Exod. 14:10), or oppressed by the enemies (Judg. 4:3). Wenham (1987) adds that it is like the cry for help of a woman being raped (Deut. 22:24, 27), or a plea to God from victims of injustice (Exod. 22:22-23, 26-27). In this context, the shed blood of Abel was calling for justice to be done concerning the murder.

Cain was cursed. The curse resulted in the soil becoming ineffective to Cain and he became a vagrant or wanderer on the earth (Wenham, 1987:107). Gunkel (cited in Wenham, 1987:107) rightly explains that Cain had offered the fruit of the land, and had given the land his brother's blood to drink; but from the land, the blood cried out against him, the land refused him its fruit, and he was banned from the land.

Three issues can be observed in this passage, namely that Cain was cursed – the curse is for the individual and the effect of the curse was a separation or cutting off of an individual from his community (Westermann & Scullion, 1984:308). Cain would be a fugitive and a wanderer on earth. The unusual combination of a fugitive and a wanderer occurs only in Genesis 4:12 in the Old Testament. This combination shows that Cain would be a displaced wanderer (Westermann & Scullion, 1984:308). Westermann explains that the picture of a displaced wanderer does not describe the life of nomads. The ordinary *Bedouin* could not be described as a fugitive and a vagabond on earth (Westerman & Scullion, 1984:308).

Cain complained that his punishment was more than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). He realised that the curse meant that he had been driven from the face of the earth; God's face would be hidden from him and he would be a vagabond and a wanderer. What Cain expressed here was more of a cry than a request for forgiveness. It was an expression of his emotion over his punishment from the Lord (Westermann & Scullion, 1984:308). If the Lord turned his face from Cain, it meant he could face troubles. Westermann further explains the meaning of "being hidden from the face of the Lord" by comparing the statement with Psalm 139:7-12 and Amos 9:3-4. He observes that to hide oneself, or to cover oneself before God (before his face), refers to the anger of God. This can also mean the Lord's displeasure at a life of sin (Lev. 17:3; 20:3; 20:6; 26:17; Jer. 21:10; 44:11; Ezek. 14:8; 15:7).

When Cain complained about the burden of his curse, God mitigated the sentence without altering it substantially. The punishment remained the same, but no one could kill him (Westermann & Scullion,

1984:308). Cain was given a mark for his protection. Assohoto and Ngewa (2006:19) note that

... it may have been a sign which Cain could see to give him assurance of God’s protection, but the message of this sign was not really a comforting one for what it meant is ‘this is my man to punish, leave him alone!’.

In this narration, the spirit of Abel did not go to Cain for retribution. The blood of Abel cried to God. However, 1 Enoch 22:5-6 suggests that the spirit of Abel attacked Cain and his descendants when it says:

I saw the spirits of the children of the people who were dead, and their voices were reaching out unto heaven until this very moment. I asked Rufael, the angel who was with me, and said to him ‘the spirits, the voice which are reaching out (into heaven) like this is bringing a suit, whose (spirit) is this?’ And he answered me saying, ‘this is the spirit which had left Abel, who Cain his brother had killed; it continues to sue him until all of Cain’s seed is exterminated from the face of the earth, and his seed has disintegrated from among the spirits of the people’.

While this apocryphal passage has much in common with the Shona’s understanding of the life of a victim of *ngozi*, such as being a vagabond (Bourdillon, 1976:272), it fails to accurately represent the narration in Genesis 4:4-15. The study of Genesis 4:4-15 shows that the blood of Abel cried to God and not to Cain. God held Cain accountable for the murder of his brother, the spirit of Abel did not take vengeance on Cain and his family, the judgement was that Cain would be a vagabond and a wanderer, and that vengeance for Abel’s life was taken by God when he cursed Cain for the murder.

There are, however, other passages that seem to allude to a Shona understanding of *ngozi*. After Noah’s flood, the need to value human life was emphasised. Genesis 9:6 states that, “[w]hoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man”. The basis of this law was the need to respect human life, because man was made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). It became one of the laws stipulated by Moses to deter people from murder (Exod. 21:12; Num. 35:16, 24). Shedding human blood was the expression used for killing a person (Lev. 19:16; Deut. 27:25; Prov. 1:16; Acts 22:20; Rom. 3:15; cf. Scharbert, 1970:76). Israel and the neighbouring peoples regarded blood as the bearer of life (Lev. 17:11). In the Pentateuch, even the blood of animals was equated with their lives (Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23).

Scharbert (1970:76) shows that in some passages of the Bible, a murderer is referred to as a man of blood (2 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 5:6; 26:19; 55:23). The blood defiles him (Jer. 2:34; Lam. 4:14) and the defilement is permanent. He cannot thereafter remove the guilt (Isa. 1:15; 59:3; Ezek. 23:37, 45) and that gives him no rest (Gen. 4:12-16; Prov. 28:17; Lam. 4:14; cf. Scharbert, 1970:76). In Hebrew, such a person was described as *is dāmim* “a man who has burdened himself with blood-guilt on account of having committed a murder” or who is guilty of some other transgression punishable by death (Wenham, 1987:107).

The shedding of innocent blood represents a constant threat that came upon the murderer expressed by the phrase, “upon his head” (Deut. 19:10; Josh. 2:19; Judg. 9:24; 1 Sam. 25:26, 33; 2 Sam. 2:16; 1 Kings 2:33; Jer. 26:15; Ezek. 35:6; Hos. 12:14; cf. Scharbert, 1970:76). Scharbert (1970:76) explains that the blood of a murdered person cries for vengeance (Gen. 4:10; 2 Macc. 8:3; Rev. 6:10; Heb. 12:24) especially when not covered up with the earth (Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7; Job 16:8).

The cry for vengeance did not go to the murderer, but to God. The effect of the shed blood affected the murderer as a judgement from the Lord. On this, Brueggemann (2001:216) notes that the blood of the murdered threatens the murderer, his family (Deut. 22:8, 2 Sam. 21:1) and even the one who is responsible for the vengeance of the blood if he does not do his duty. “It can pollute a city and a whole land and bring him disaster.” (2 Sam. 21:2; Ps. 106:38; Jer. 26:15; Ezek. 7:23; 22:3; 24:6 ff.; Mic. 3:10; Nah. 3:1; Hab. 2:12.) There is need to atone for it. In the Old Testament, the crime of shedding blood was expiated only with the blood of the murderer (Gen. 9:5; Exod. 21:12; Lev. 24:17, 21; Num. 35:19 ff.; Deut. 19:11 ff.; cf. Scharbert, 1970:76).

In the early Israelite community, the one who avenged the shed blood was called an avenger of blood.

A Hebrew expression for the avenger of blood is *gō'el haddām* and is found in many Old Testament passages such as Numbers 35:19, 21, 24; Deuteronomy 19:6, 12; Joshua 20:3, 5, 9; 2 Samuel 14:11. (Scharbert, 1970:76.)

This kinsman redeemer was the *gō'el haddām*, the avenger of blood (Stob, 1976:422). Motyer (1984:107) explains that

... the avenger of blood was a member of the victim's family who had the responsibility of acting for society in avenging the

murder by taking the murderer's life (cf. Gen. 9:5-6; Deut. 19:6, 12).

If the murderer was not found, it was the duty of the community to exonerate itself of the guilt of murder. In Deuteronomy 21:1-7, a law on atonement for an unresolved murder was given. If a person was found slain and the killer was not known, the elders and judges were to go where the body was and measure the distance from the body to the neighbouring towns. The elders of the town nearest to the body would get a heifer that had never been worked with or that had never worn a yoke. They would lead it to a valley that had never been ploughed or planted and where there was a flowing stream. They would break its neck and all the elders of the town would wash their hands over the heifer declaring that their hands had not shed the blood, nor had they seen the murder. They had to pray to the Lord to remove the guilt of the blood of the innocent man. By performing the atonement rite, the Israelites dissociated themselves from the guilt of murder (Brueggemann, 2001:216).

If the murderer was found, vengeance for the murder had to be properly executed. Cities of refuge regulated the practice of vengeance for murder. As Motyer (1984:107) remarks,

... the avenger of the blood is mentioned only in passages that counter the possibility of an unlimited vendetta by providing cities of refuge (Num. 35:9-28; Deut. 19:1-13; Josh. 20:1-9).

A person who committed unintentional murder was to flee to any of these cities. The avenger was allowed to exact a life for a life only after public trial and if the accused was found guilty of premeditated murder (Motyer, 1984:107).

Even though the kinsman redeemer avenged the murder, the purpose of vengeance was not mere hatred of the murderer, but the purging of the land from sin. Since the soil that received the blood of a murdered person becomes sterile (Gen. 4:11), it had to be freed from this condition by the blood of the murderer (Num. 35:33; Deut. 19:13; cf. Herion, 1988:968). The avenger acted according to the directive of the Lord. In this sense, it was God who executed vengeance using a kinsman redeemer, for vengeance belongs to the Lord (Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Isa. 61:2; 63:4; Jer. 50:15; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). The same is true when the Israelites took vengeance over their enemies. In times of war, God assured them that He had put the enemies in their hands (Herion, 1988:968). Herion (1988:968) rightly comments that

... [t]he final intervention by God on the much anticipated day of vengeance (Isa. 34:8; Jer. 46:10) is synonymous with the day of the Lord.

While the description of what *ngozi* does to its victim and its manifestation is clearly interlinked, Scripture indicates that it is God who takes vengeance on behalf of those wronged. This, therefore, prompts the question of what the spirits that manifest as those of the dead are then. Could it be God who manifests in the apparitions of the dead?

From the above discussion, it can be established that the spirits that appear as those of the dead to seek retribution cannot be identified as God bringing a curse on the murderer and his family. The passages discussed also indicate that there is no communication between the living people and the dead. From the first incidence of murder, the spirit of the murdered person never sought vengeance. Instead, the blood of the slain cried to the Lord. There was never communication between the dead and the living in atoning for the murder of Abel. Abel did not complain to his brother about his murder. He complained to the Lord and God mitigated the punishment even though He did not alter it completely. Further, the method for the atonement of guilt of the innocent blood was directed to God (Deut. 21:8) and not to the dead (Gelfand, 1977:30). Therefore, spirits which come to avenge murder, could not have been sent to man by God.

However, even though it has been established that the dead do not communicate with the living, the following critical questions should be posed: Who are the spirits that manifest as those of the dead then? Are these spirits from the devil or from God? To understand who these spirits are, it is helpful to consider what they do when they manifest among the living. This will enable us to compare them with the other spirits in the Bible.

3.4 The identity of spirits that manifest as those of the dead

Spirits that manifest as those of the dead can appear in different ways, as ancestral, ordinary or avenging spirits. Whichever way they appear, they demand attention and if their demands are not met, they cause trouble (Gehman, 1999:33). Most Africans attribute misfortunes to a spiritual cause (Gelfand, 1973:61). They believe spirits cause illnesses, disabilities, misfortunes and even death (Mpfung & Harley, 2002). Spirits possess people and/or animals and they can be exorcised from both people and animals.

The Bible speaks of two types of spirits that operate in the world. One is the Holy Spirit and the other is the evil spirit. The Holy Spirit does not cause death, illness, disability, or misfortunes. Instead, He (the Holy Spirit) gives life (John 6:63), heals and gives hope (Rom. 15:13). However, evil spirits cause illness (Matt. 9:32; 12:22) disabilities (Luk. 13:11-17) and personal injuries (Mark 9:18). They possess people (Matt. 17:8), sometimes incite men to commit suicide (Mark 9:22) and can enable those whom they possess to do superhuman acts (Luk. 8:29). They are sometimes called unclean spirits or demons. The leader of these evil spirits is Satan. Isaiah 14:12 speaks of how Satan, the once precious angel of God, fell and how he was brought down to the depth of the pit. Satan, whose name means adversary, is also called the devil. The name *Devil* means one prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely (Gehman, 1999:162). As a fallen angel he is more intelligent than men, but he is not all-knowing. He is more powerful than men, but not omniscient since he is not God. He is able to deceive men through his cunning ways (Gen. 3:1-6).

Jesus Christ spoke of Satan as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 16:11). Paul calls him "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:1-3). The Bible warns believers that Satan himself masquerades as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). He deceives people with all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9) and works with fallen angels, called demons. Satan and demons seek to thwart the purposes of God (Dan. 10:10-14; Rev. 16:13-16; cf. Ryrie, 1978:1945).

From the above study, it can be established that the spirits that manifest as those of the dead are demons. This conclusion is based on the observation that the dead do not communicate with the living and for that reason they cannot take vengeance on the people who are still living. Scriptures forbid communicating with the dead, because it can mislead believers into the worship of demonic forces.

4. Towards a pastoral ministry to people fearing *ngozi*

An appropriate and relevant pastoral intervention should start from the following premise:

- A realisation that a church is a sub-community within the larger community where people experience the realities of life, hence, the Shona Christians are affected by the fears of *ngozi* like any other Shona person.

- In order for a pastoral intervention to be contextually relevant, it should draw on, be informed about, and integrate people's natural potentials and existing Christian models (Magezi, 2007).

Natural potential implies the traditional approaches of care, while Christian models in this case refer to the approaches of missionary churches (i.e. churches started by missionaries) and the African Independent Churches (AICs).

On the one hand, the discussion above at a meta-theoretical level revealed that the Shona people perceive *ngozi* as a spiritual reality. The Shona people claim that these spirits are the offended dead that return to take vengeance on the living. Fear of these spirits is apparent among the Shona people. Despite their fears, the Shona people have a natural tendency to seek solutions for their spiritual and physical problems. They believe that the traditional remedy for a *ngozi* crises is very restricted, since it needs specially trained and experienced *n'angas* to address it.

On the other hand, at a basis-theoretical (biblical analysis) level, it has emerged that *ngozi* spirits are demons. Since the people of God are forbidden to consult demons, they should seek the will of God as demonstrated in Scriptures. Addressing a *ngozi* crises by consulting demons that manifest as spirits of the dead is an abomination to God. For that reason, the traditional method should not be employed by the Christians in addressing a *ngozi* crises.

However, the fear of *ngozi* has community and societal benefits. On the one hand, it restrains people from contemplating murder and mistreating their parents and other people in the community. *Ngozi* also holds the guilty person responsible for his/her wrongdoing. On the other hand, however, *ngozi* has negative effects on the community. Firstly, it promotes fear of the unknown and uncertainty about the future in the families under its attack. Secondly, it promotes child abuse especially on girls when a girl is required to be married to a family of the murdered person to appease the *ngozi* spirit's anger. Thirdly, it punishes innocent members of the murderer's family who also suffer attack, especially when the offender is already dead. Thirdly, it contradicts biblical teaching that vengeance belongs to God. Fourthly, it promotes fear of unknown spirits rather than of God, hence causing people to refrain from murder and wrongdoing for fear of *ngozi* and not fear of God. Fifthly, it potentially promotes hatred among family members especially when successive misfortunes occur in the family.

The approaches of both mission churches and AICs have strengths and weaknesses. The strength of most mission churches is that they seek to address *ngozi* crises by raising awareness among believers that these are demons. While this theological position on *ngozi* is biblical, these churches have not yet engaged on a practical level in the *ngozi* crisis, or learned as much as the authors of this article have through enculturation.² In one of the mainline reformed churches in Zimbabwe where the authors fellowship, a family sought help from avenging spirits, but they were not assisted. Nothing was done to help the affected family to cope. Similarly, at a nearby congregation a similar incident occurred, but the church pastors did not intervene nor demonstrated an understanding of how to provide pastoral guidance.

It is critical for mission churches to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in overcoming the forces of evil spirits. There is a need for the mission churches to improve their approach to pastoral care by intensifying visits to families affected by *ngozi*, praying with the families and exorcising the *ngozi* spirits where necessary. This has not been the case in many mission churches and it is one of the reasons that account for the emergence of the AICs, which reckon that the church has to be more involved in the lives of its members (Daneel, 1988:150-151; Mwaura, 2000:82).

The strength of the AICs is that they seek to practically assist the affected people. For instance, the pastors of the Zion Christian Churches (ZCC) and Topia churches assist the *ngozi* affected families to eradicate the problem. The ZCC takes the whole family for a healing ritual involving drinking of hallowed water, burning of newspapers that have been prayed over and several other interventions. The affected individuals are informed that by these ritual performances, the spirits are eradicated.

While the eradication of *ngozi* spirits is not recorded in the Bible, it would be logical to expect to see these spirits exorcised in the manner Jesus, his disciples and the early church did. *Ngozi* spirits are demons and should therefore be exorcised as demons. The burning of newspapers and drinking of hallowed water was never a method of exorcising demons in biblical times. The methods of the AICs take the form of African traditional methods whereby the

2 Babbie and Mouton (2003) describe enculturation as acquiring knowledge in a programme for a long time rather than being involved for a short period.

witchdoctors burn some fats and vegetables to ward off sorcery (Semenya, 2006:27). As Daneel (1977:190) points out, every victim visiting the prophet is subjected to one or several diagnostic spells, and invariably the prophet, like the *n'anga* ascribes the malady to some stereotypical conflict patterns in the family, such as witchcraft. These practices are syncretistic. It is, therefore, inappropriate for the church to engage in them.

In the light of the above observation, it is imperative for an effective pastoral intervention in a *ngozi* crises to utilise and be informed by the strengths of both AICs and mission churches while the weaknesses are improved. The mission churches that rightly teach that *ngozi* spirits are demonic manifestations and that believers have power over such forces, should demonstrate their belief by being involved in the deliverance of those affected by *ngozi*. Furthermore, the AICs should adopt biblical ways of dealing with *ngozi* spirits rather than just be pragmatic (i.e. mixing Christian beliefs with unbiblical traditional practices).

The Shona people's natural tendency to face spiritual challenges can be utilised in pastoral care design. The biblical teaching on the reality of Satan is not a strange message to the Shona people. Unlike Bultmann's³ denial of the reality of evil spirits, the Shona people believe that these forces are real (Bultmann, 1964:5). Gehman (2005:273) concurs that belief in these spiritual powers is not mere superstition. However, the Shona people need to realise that these spirits are not the offended dead. The dead do not come and take vengeance. Vengeance for a murdered person is from the Lord. These spirits are demons.

Emerging from the above acknowledgement of the reality of evil spirits, there should be an exorcism ministry for those affected by a *ngozi* spirit. The Shona people recognise that evil spirits should be exorcised. Scriptures reveal the power that Jesus and his disciples had in exorcising demons (Luke 11:26; Acts 19:12). There is a need in the church to cast out demons. This should, however, be done

3 Bultmann (1964:5) argues that

... [i]t is impossible to use electric lights and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.

He considers belief in spirits and miracles as both unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world.

with an informed and sound theological understanding of demons and their influences. It should be emphasised that it is inadequate in addressing *ngozi* to merely teach the Bible to the affected people and then expect them to overcome their traditional beliefs. The church leadership has to cast out demons in a manner taught and shown in Scriptures.

Christians should be encouraged to confess their past sins. *Ngozi* spirits manifest mostly when a person refuses to be accountable for the evils committed.

Contextually relevant teaching of church members, such as youths, should be employed. *Ngozi* crises can be avoided by present and future Shona generations by teaching them to live a life that honours the Lord. People should be discouraged from negative influences that might result in murder or mistreatment of other human beings, which will deprive them of peace and happiness in the future due to *ngozi* attacks. The demons can take advantage of the situation and appear as the spirits of the dead who are offended. They are to learn from the mistakes of others who got entangled in the crisis and became victims of demonic forces.

Believers should be taught and encouraged to put their trust in God for protection. The church has to encourage believers who have been saved from *ngozi* threats to put their trust in God for their protection. The believer should not solely depend upon pastors and church members for protection from *ngozi* threats, since their absence could make him/her resort to traditional ways that are incompatible with biblical teaching. Bible passages that teach the omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience of God can help believers to realise that God is always with them, that He knows what they are going through and that He is able to save and protect them. The church leaders should demonstrate trust in God in their day-to-day lives to set an example for other believers also to put their trust in God.

5. Conclusion

In the context where Christians are gripped by fear of the spiritual forces such as avenging spirits (*ngozi*), believers should recognise that such spirits are demonic manifestations, which come in the form of apparitions of the dead. For this reason, a biblically-based pastoral ministry should be informed from a thorough understanding of such beliefs in order to provide care and guidance to affected Christians. The church has to equip believers not to submit to

demons, which come in whichever form. Only God can demand retribution, since vengeance belongs to Him alone. If the believer is guilty of murder or any wrongdoing he/she should confess the sin in order to be forgiven by God. The church should provide pastoral care to the guilty confessors by having fellowship with them. Where practically possible and necessary, the confessed believer has to make restitution to the offended family as an expression of remorse and a good testimony of the church to the world.

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Key concepts:

avenging spirits
ngozi, biblical evaluation
ngozi, fears
ngozi, pastoral intervention
ngozi, pastoral response to

Kernbegrippe:

bonatuurlike verskynsels
ngozi, bybelse evaluering,
ngozi, pastorale ingryping
ngozi, pastorale reaksie
ngozi, vrese

