

The Spirit Dimension In African Christianity: A Pastoral Study Among the Tumbuka of Northern Malawi by Silas S. Ncozana. Christian Literature Association of Malawi: Malawi, 2002; 207pp.
Reviewed by Felix Chimera Nyika.

Dr. Ncozana's 1985 PhD thesis from Aberdeen University is the basis of this book which explores the phenomenon of possession amongst the Tumbuka from 1881 to 1950, the Livingstonia Mission's response, and what shape and form a pastoral response should take. The first chapter, "Spirit Possession as an African Phenomenon", delves into African and Tumbuka cosmology, examines various facets and explanations of possession, and notes the anti-supernatural bias of the pioneer Livingstonia missionaries who, the author argues, were influenced by the anti-Irvingite polemics of the Church of Scotland.

The second chapter, "Tumbuka History 1780 – 1904", paints a picture of Tumbuka origins: their settlement between the Dwangwa and Songwe rivers in northern Malawi (c. 1400), their loose political organization of independent chiefdoms, economy, social structure, and the ascendancy of the coastal trader Mlowoka and his dynasty in 1780 to its defeat by Zwangendaba's Ngoni in 1840. The author also notes the nature of Tumbuka relations with surrounding tribes (Yao, Tonga, Nkhonde, Maravi, and the Ngoni) and ends the chapter with the entry of European interest in the form of the Livingstonia missionaries in 1881 and the extension of the British Protectorate to the northern region in 1904.

The following chapter, "A Religious History of the Tumbuka Since 1780", surveys the theology of the Tumbuka by examining their notions of God, worship practices, the Chikhangombe Cult based on Nkhamanga Hill, and general and personal eschatology. Influences from the surrounding ethnicities are also examined as a background to what the author delineates as the new forms of possession arising out of such interactions: *vimbuzi*, *virombo*, and *vyanusu*. This is the heart of the book where the author shows that *vimbuzi* and *virombo* are similar as they both involve dancing to manifest the spirit, drinking a herbal concoction, and a sacrificial ceremony where an initiate sucks blood from a live goat until it is dead (*chilopa*). After being healed from the initial sickness through which the ancestral spirits (*vimbuzi*)/animal spirits (*virombo*) have manifested, the initiate himself/herself may become a healer/prophet, a *nchimi*. A *vyanusu*-medium played the role of interpreting events for the community and was regarded as a prophet. Common to all these types of possession is that all these healers are also herbalists.

The next chapter, "Mission and Conversion: 1881 – 1910," shows that spirit possession was foundational to the Tumbuka worldview so that when they finally embraced Christianity it was along such lines. This was contrary to the Livingstonia Mission's rationalistic project which placed a premium on education as a way of combating the Tumbuka spirit-beliefs and thereby evangelizing them. The resulting "Gospel" preached to the Tumbuka was not properly contextualized so that areas of concern to Tumbuka religion, like the role of the ancestors and the continuation of life after death, were not addressed. The mission experienced a breakthrough in evangelization through the power-encounter ministries of W.A. Elmslie's rainmaking in 1886, the sacrificial ministry of William Koyi, and Donald Fraser's conventions (1896-1910) which culminated in a mass revival during the Keswick Convention of 1910 when Rev. Charles Inwood was the guest speaker. However, the author notes that the contemporary Ethiopianist churches of John Chilembwe, Elliot Kamwana, and Charles Domingo, did not concern themselves with such contextualization issues regarding spirit possession as they emulated or aspired to be like their European counterparts. Possession cases presented before the Ekwendeni Kirk Session had