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Practical implication of *Chiuta chinyetenyete*: a Tumbuka concept of the efficacious omnipresence of God

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Abstract

This article explores the deeper and richer meaning of the Tumbuka attribute *Chiuta chinyetenyete*, translated as the omnipresent God. It encourages exploration of the wealth underlying reflections on attributes of God in African languages for the purpose of forming a more contextual Christian faith. The attribute *Chiuta chinyetenyete* communicates God's omnipresence with a unique concept of effectual and gentle, life-giving, and supporting flow of God's presence. The church is discussed as a product of and an ingraft in the efficacious flow of the indiscriminate presence of God. The article also deliberates on the implications of believing in *Chiuta chinyetenyete* for the church, its formation, and the practice of faith. With data gathered through a qualitative literature review and observations, this article emphasises the need for the church to understand the flow of God and to flow in and with God's presence so that its formation and exercise of faith vivify his efficacious omnipresence in all contexts.

Introduction

Migliore (1991:74) describes the triune God as a living unity with dynamic constancy. He presents God not as static but as constantly on the move, transforming a world suffering under effects of sin. Arcadi (2016:631) states that "God's omnipresence is God's acting at all locations", even beyond the visibility of the most advanced human technology. Meanwhile, Gasser

(2018:43) speaks of God's constant activity in the cosmos that he created and sustains.

In this article, the word "flow" refers to the transforming, constant, and dynamic presence of God among his creation as witnessed from creation to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ to the final consummation. The Tumbuka attribute *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* evinces the efficacious, gentle, continuous, indiscriminate, and effectual flow of God's omnipresence in time and cosmological space. Although the flow of deadly liquids has devastating effects on life, *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* signifies the gentle life-giving, supporting, and enhancing flow of God's presence. The flow of God's presence in the concept of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* is comparative to a capillary system in soils or osmosis in plants, leaving trails of life transformation by its dynamic nature (Bentley 2020:186).

The church is one of the evident trails of God's transforming presence in the world and a privileged ingraft into the flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. As the product of the flow of God's presence, the church is the outcome of God's gracious salvific work. As an ingraft, the church, through the filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit, is incorporated into God's life transforming presence. The church is co-opted so that it vivifies the efficacious nature of God in communities grappling with a host of challenges. The ingrafting of the church depicts a God whose presence does not only flow among but also flows through and with his creation.

Scholars have discussed how God vivifies his efficacious presence in the church by describing it as the display window of his grace (Breed 2017:69), a provisional manifestation of his reign (Migliore 1991:189, 195), infused with *theosis* for sanctification (Biriukov 2019:143), and empowered for service in the world (Sproul 2015:2449). This portrays the church as a sign of the continued existence of God's sovereign grace and a means through which he vivifies his transforming omnipresence.

The question discussed in this article is: What does it imply that the church is a product and ingrafted into the flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* for its formation and practice of faith in African contexts? The article proposes the need for the church to know the flow of God and to flow in God and flow with God so that

its formation and its exercise of faith vivify his efficacious omnipresence in African contexts (Breed 2017:69).

Understanding the omnipresence of God

Gasser (2018:43) discusses the omnipresence of God from his divine activity to and in the world that he created, is immanently interrelated with, and continues to actively sustain. The cosmos is in God as it is constantly within the sphere of his divine activity in time, referring to God's omnipresence permeating from eternity to eternity, and space, denoting planets, galaxies, and all the atmospheric contents that humans have and will ever perceive either by natural sense or through cosmological, astrophysical, and astronomical studies and beyond. This implies that God's omnipresence is and will remain as unfathomable as God himself both in time and space.

The idea of the cosmos being within the sphere of God's divine activity signifies that even if God's omnipresence is transcendent, he is actually fully active among his creation. In short, it underlines that God's divine activity is far beyond yet inclusive of the earth. It also affirms the contradictory yet complimentary attribute of God recorded in Jeremiah 23:23 that he is a nearby and a far away God (Hoek 2014:1). The same concept of God being near and far is traceable in Solomon's prayer during dedication of the temple, built to be God's dwelling place. Solomon struggled with the idea of the temple being the Lord's dwelling place (2 Chronicles 6:1-2) and God's transcendent omnipresence (2 Chronicles 2:6, 1 Kings 8:12-13). In describing the transcendence of the Lord's presence, Solomon stated that even the highest heavens cannot contain him (1Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicle 2:6, 6:18). Put the other way, the presence of God in terms of space is limitless because it goes beyond the perceived highest heavens (Hoek 2014:2).

Meanwhile, in Psalm 139:8 the omnipresence of God goes down to *sheol*, a Hebrew word translated in Tumbuka as *malo gha wakufwa* (the world of the dead). This connotes that God is present among the worlds of living and the dead. In English versions *sheol* denotes a grave, depth, pit, or realm of the dead with a huge insatiable appetite (Bentley 2020:191). Therefore, the omnipresence of God does not only go above the highest heavens (2 Chronicles 2:6), it also includes the insatiable *sheol*. So, God's presence in

cosmological space is without limits or boundaries, ranging from higher than the highest heights to the insatiable depth. Meanwhile in time, the omnipresence of God is eternal.

The concept of omnipresence also encompasses aspects of being near, alluding to the active immanence of God in the cosmos (Gasser 2018:44). This understanding of the active immanence of God contrasts the concept that God is too transcendent, too external, too separated to be concerned with what is happening in the world (Gasser 2018:44). Though God is transcendent, even beyond the highest heavens, he is, at the same time, present and actively involved among and within his creation. Therefore, in as much as it is impossible for the entire transcendent, ineffable, and unfathomable God to dwell in a temple built with human hands the way that people live in houses, he can be present in it by the immanent aspect of his omnipresence.

The Tumbuka People

Tumbuka people are dominantly located in the northern part of Malawi and north-eastern part of Zambia, particularly in Lundazi district and Miyombe. They are also found in the southern part of Tanzania, especially along the border with Malawi (Musonda et al 2019:110). Tumbuka people speak Chitumbuka. Like other African ethnic groups, in the pre-missionary era Tumbuka people solely practiced African Traditional Religion (ATR). In Tumbuka ATR, the spiritual world had a threefold hierarchy of spirits comprised of *Chiuta* (the Supreme being or spirit); territorial spirits, especially those of the dead chiefs or chieftom heroes; and ancestral spirits which had a mediatory role that varied from clan to clan (Musonda et al 2019:110). Missionary work among the Tumbuka people, especially on the northern part of Malawi and north-eastern part of Zambia, was dominantly initiated by the Free Church of Scotland.

Missionaries preached the gospel of God's salvation in Jesus Christ and taught concepts of the Christian faith, but did not bring a new vocabulary to African ethnic groups. Christianity borrowed words for God's names and attributes from Africa's pre-missionary religious language. *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* is one of the attributes of God Christians borrowed from pre-missionary Tumbuka religion. In Chitumbuka *chinyeteneyete* is used to describe God's omnipresence.

Understanding the attribute of *Chiuta chinyetenyete*

The simple Chitumbuka expression of *Chiuta chinyetenyete* is *Chiuta wali pose pose pa nyengo imoza munyengo zose*, meaning God is present everywhere at the same time, and at all times. However, the attribute *Chiuta chinyetenyete* conveys a richer and deeper meaning with practical inferences worth exploring than merely *Chiuta wali pose pose pa nyengo imoza munyengo zose*. Though bearing the same basic idea, the two vary in their underlying meanings. Therefore, *Chiuta chinyetenyete* is not used for linguistic complexity but to bear and relay the depth of the underlying reflections on God which *Chiuta wali pose pose panyengo imoza munyengo zose* may not put across. The concept of *Chiuta chinyetenyete* signifies the active and perceivable presence of God with traceable life-transforming effects in all places in the past, present, and future. This shows that Tumbuka ATR had reflective and practical aspects. These two influenced each other, as all practices were informed by reflections and vice versa.

Chiuta was originally a Tumbuka traditional religion name for the supreme being. It is now used in the church for the Christian God. The name *Chiuta* is a construct of *uta*, the Chitumbuka word for a bow, and the prefix *chi*, which expresses a big size or greatness. Literally, then, the name *Chiuta* means the big or great bow. The Chitumbuka name for the supreme being, *Chiuta*, is a confession of inner convictions arising from deep reflections on the divine being. The name obviously bears Tumbuka people's rich underlying beliefs about the divine being, though it is not clear why the Chitumbuka name for the supreme being is *Chiuta* i.e. the big or great bow. It is assumed that since a bow was used by hunters and warriors among the Tumbuka and Chewa people it is possible that *Chiuta* in Chitumbuka (and its comparable *Chauta* in Chichewa) refer to God as "the great Provider and Defender" (Wendland 1992:436). The name *Chiuta*, with its associated meanings and attributes like *chinyetenyete*, demonstrates the depth of the Tumbuka people's reflection on their religion.

Meanwhile, *chinyetenyete* is derived from the word *nyete*, an expression for the gentle flow of fluids or liquids on a surface or material. A *nyete* kind of flow

is similar to osmosis in plants or a capillary system in soils. It is different from other words like *kuthika* that refer to spilling or pouring liquids or other substances. *Nyete* is closely related to the expression *pese* which equally expresses the flow of spilled liquid. However, *pese* is used to express a more forceful flow of liquids or describe the spillage of substances in a spreading manner, while *nyete* denotes a gentle flow and is used exclusively for fluids or liquids.

The repetition of *nyete* in the attribute *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* can mean a continuous, effectual flow of God's presence in the world. The nature of the flow is not destructive, violent, or forceful, but gentle, life-giving, enhancing, or supporting. The omnipresence of God is reflected upon as transformative, life-giving, supporting, and enhancing in nature. Just like capillary action and osmosis have positive effects on nature, *chinyeteneyete* provides a unique interpretation with practical aspect of believing in the omnipresent God. Notably, *nyeteneyete* in *chinyeteneyete* may also mean the flow of liquids everywhere or all over.

This rich depth of the underlying concept of a divine attribute in African local languages like *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* is worth exploring for the purpose of forming contextual Christian faith.

***Chiuta chinyeteneyete*, a sign of a deep contemplation on the supreme being**

As already alluded to, the attribute *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* did not come from nowhere. It reveals the Tumbuka people's deep reflection on and the quality of their belief in the supreme being, even in the pre-missionary era. The underlying reflection of the attribute accepts the active presence of God and goes a step further by including the idea of the effectual nature of his omnipresence. Since God is life, as Karl Barth put it (Titus 2010:216), the attribute *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* depicts God as having a flowing divine presence which give, preserves, transforms, and invigorates the lives of his creation. Within this concept, God's omnipresence is not a passive presence or a fruitless involvement but active and effectual with traceable life transforming impacts (Lindland 2005:128).

The concept of flow in *Chiuta chinyetenyete* gives the impression of what Migliore (1991:74) terms dynamic constancy. Therefore, *Chiuta chinyetenyete* presents God as one who is dynamic because he moves towards and with his creation to his full, final, and eternal domain. The attribute *Chiuta chinyetenyete* upholds the immutability of God in his love and purposes, while embracing the idea of God's movement towards his creation in Christ and the Holy Spirit to redeem, perfect, and lead it to final consummation.

Chinyetenyete, the indiscriminate flow of God's presence

Nyetenyete in *chinyetenyete* also refers to the flow of liquids everywhere, connoting an indiscriminate or non-selective flow. *Chiuta chinyetenyete* entails that God's gentle flowing presence is indiscriminate or non-selective in time and cosmological space. This view of the indiscriminate presence of God counters all human-induced tendencies toward social, racial, and gender discrimination. God is equally present in and among people of different cultures, genders, and races, thereby condemning all hegemonic enforcing attitudes and assumptions displayed in habits of either lower self-ranking or self-exaltation in comparison to others. The non-selective presence of God in *Chiuta chinyetenyete* challenges humanity to co-exist in its racial, cultural, gender, and economic diversities. In turn, this unified humanity should corporately strive to appreciate and co-exist with nature. This will protect creatures like snakes, cats, owls, hyenas, etc. from alienation or victimisation, especially in African societies where such animals cause spiritual insecurity because they are considered a bad omen or an embodiment of evil witchcraft powers (Moyo and Pali 2025:5). Co-existence with creation is essential because the God who created is present with and among all of creation in its diversity, including animals and places assumed to be spiritual threats.

Time-related indiscriminate flow of God's presence

Reflections on the supreme being among the Tumbuka people were coordinated and interrelated where his names and attributes complimented each other. In relation to time, *Chiuta chinyetenyete* is linked to another Chitumbuka attribute *Chiuta wa muyirayira* (Genesis 21:33, Isaiah 40:28), which translates as the forever or everlasting/eternal God. Combining the two attributes evinces that the life-giving, enhancing, and supporting omnipresence of God has been and will always flow, eternally. Put another

way, the combination of *Chiuta chinyetenyete* and *Chiuta wa myirayira* suggests a ceaseless and eternal flow of God's presence even in historical moments classified as dark such as the slave trade, apartheid, colonialism, the Covid 19 pandemic. Considering the devastating effects associated with such events, explaining the efficacious presence of God is contentious. However, the assurance of God's presence gives hope that he will continue working ways out of such challenges. The time-related indiscriminate flow of God's presence embraces the idea that the efficacious flow of God's presence is from eternity and flows through the process of creating a good creation, to redeeming all of creation after the Fall, and finally leading it to the final and eternal consummation.

Cosmological space indiscriminate flow of God's presence

The answer to the rhetorical question "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" asked in Jeremiah 23:23 is obvious: Indeed, God fills the heavens and the earth. Therefore, it can be deduced that God is present in the cosmological space of the heavens, the earth, and even the dreaded *sheol*.

The cosmological indiscriminate flow of *Chiuta Chinyetenyete* is verifiable in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament God is the creator of all things, the whole universe (Genesis 1 and 2). In the New Testament, the first indiscriminate flow of God's presence is seen in Jesus' newly-formed spiritual family (Mark 3:31-36, Joubert 2020:64-65). This family is drawn from various biological backgrounds, built around him, based on hearing his word and doing the will of his heavenly Father, and linked to God's kingdom (Joubert 2020:64-65). Under this new family, in addition to the synagogue system of worship, ordinary homes become gathering spaces for believers from various biological families to receive spiritual information, formation, transformation, and reformation from God (Joubert 2020:64-65). Jesus visits, eats, and provides spiritual guidance even in homes of detestable tax collectors like Levi (Mark 2:13-17) and Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10).

The second cosmological indiscriminate flow of God's presence in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit empowering apostles for the concentric mission of testifying to God's salvific act in Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The concentric mission confirms that God is God of, with, for, and among all nations, even those thought to be a no-go

area. This indiscriminate Christ-instructed and Holy Spirit-empowered concentric mission pushed apostles outside their spiritual comfort zones towards discriminated people and places. For example, Peter said “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean” (Act 10:28). God repeated the same vision three times to reorient Peter’s view of his efficacious presence among the Gentiles. Even then, Peter and the circumcised believers were astonished when the Holy Spirit came on Gentiles who heard and accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:45).

Unfortunately, the inclusion of Gentiles in the church was a controversial issue in the newly-born church. Peter was criticised for going to the house of and eating with the uncircumcised (Acts 11:2). A council was convened to resolve the dispute over the process of accepting the uncircumcised in the church (Act 15). The bone of contention was how these Gentile should be incorporated into the church. Must they be circumcised to seal their incorporation or not? The resolution to accept Gentiles as part of the church without circumcision was based on God confirming his indiscriminate and unconditional acceptance of them by filling them with the Holy Spirit (Act 15:8).

Throughout the book of Acts, God’s indiscriminate filling with the Holy Spirit occurs in unlikely people in unlikely places. For example, the Holy Spirit fills Samaritans and Gentiles in their own land and homes (Acts 8:14-17, 10:44, 19:6). The Holy Spirit actively leads Phillip into the desert to share the gospel of salvation in Christ to an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).

The church’s struggle to share the gospel beyond the bounds of Jewish society proves that it was not apostles taking God to the Gentiles, but God unveiling his limitless and indiscriminate transforming presence among the Gentiles. The more the apostles and circumcised believers followed the lead of the Holy Spirit in the process of unveiling God’s efficacious omnipresence among unexpected people and in unanticipated places the more they learnt the extent of his inclusiveness.

Sociological indiscriminate flow of God’s presence

In the New Testament, the sociological indiscriminate flow of God’s presence is evident as God in Jesus indiscriminately reaches out to people even by going

to where they are found. Jesus not only welcomes, but also visits and eats with sinners and condemned tax collectors in their homes (Luke 15:1-2, 19:1-10). Jesus goes to places that the Jews avoid for religious reasons, such as Samaria (John 4:4-6). While in Samaria Jesus has a conversation with a woman at a well who for unknown reasons came to draw water at a traditionally unusual time (John 4:1-24).

The indiscriminate life-empowering presence of God is also seen in the courage, wisdom, and miracle-working of unschooled and ordinary people, such as Peter and John (Acts 4:13). The flow of God's presence humbled members of Sanhedrin when these men responded to them with amazing courage. The astonished Sanhedrin concluded that Peter and John derived their courage from Jesus their Master (Act 4:13). Though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, this incident fulfilled Jesus' promise in Luke 12:11-12: "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say".

In short, the indiscriminate flow of *Chiuta chinyetyete* stands against an imperialistic approach to the Christian faith (Bosch 2011:4). Instead, it lifts those regarded as least in the perceived strata of human hierarchy by demolishing social barriers. The common, the unschooled, sinners, Gentiles, and Samaritans who receive the gospel of God's salvation in Christ are incorporated into his covenant by indiscriminately filling them with the Holy Spirit.

The account of John and Peter before the Sanhedrin is especially important for our own times, especially in light of increasing claims to God's revelation, power, and anointing by some church leaders. Regrettably, such claim induces competition and domineering attitudes over members and fellow leaders. Church leaders and members are categorised into classes of grace, power, and anointing, while others are reduced to listeners not be listened to (Moyo 2023:162, 163, 221). Reflection on *Chiuta chinyetyete* who fills believers in Christ with the Holy Spirit indiscriminately consolidates an all-inclusive unified diversity of the body of Christ. It counters the use of God-given gifts and services as a cause for discrimination. Rather, it reinforces the embrace of others, treating apparently weaker members of the body of Christ as

indispensable and showing them honour rather than contempt (1 Cor 12:22-26).

The implication of believing *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* on forming practical Christian faith

Gorman (2022:16) states: “Divine description is simultaneously human prescription”. Attributes of God are not static expressions but descriptions of his self-revealed divine character, life, quality, and action. Believing in a God with indiscriminate and efficacious transforming characteristics, qualities, and actions obliges believers in him to exhibit a corresponding quality of spirituality. This should not insinuate a comparative equity between God and human beings, because God remains ineffable even in his communicable attributes. Believers share communicable qualities with the transcendent God as learners of his nature. God’s incommunicable attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, eternal, also have a bearing on believers’ life of faith. In other words, the self-revealed divine qualities in (in)communicable attributes importune a quality of spirituality that arises from faith in God. Therefore, the church should understand the implications of believing in a God with the attribute of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* for its formation and practice of faith.

This article suggests two practical implications of believing in *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. The first is that the confidence of Christians’ faith and its formation should be drawn from the fact that the church is a product of the limitless and efficacious flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. The second is that the church is an honoured ingraft in the *missio-Dei* where *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* tasks it to attest and vivify the limitless and efficacious flow of God’s presence in its respective contexts.

The church as a product of the limitless transformative flow of God’s presence

The church is one of the evident outcomes or trails of the limitless gentle, transformative, and gracious flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, Christ chooses, gathers, defends, and preserves the church, making it believe the true faith by Word and Spirit, implying that the church is God’s initiative, not vice versa (Sproul 2015:2400). To stress the point of God

being the initiator of the church's existence, Moyo (2023:50) states that no human being can know and believe in God unless God has graciously revealed himself. Moreover, even faith, by which Christians relate to God, does not proceed from human nature, effort, or intellectual analysis. It is a gracious gift of the God who inspires human will to transit from unbelief to belief (Ephesians 2:8-9; Moyo 2023:50).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states that God's Spirit effects an effectual calling by persuading and enabling believers to embrace the freely-offered Jesus Christ through convicting of sin and misery, enlightening minds, and renewing human wills (Sproul 2015:2475). It takes the conviction, enlightenment, renewal, and persuasion of the Holy Spirit for the church to embrace the freely-offered Jesus Christ. The idea of God being the initiator of the Christian spiritual journey provides a stable base for building Christian faith. The idea also implies forming a faith that culminates in ceaseless worship of God expressed through a life of humility, obedience, and service to him at all times and in all contexts. This warns leaders in the church to avoid falling into the traps of pride, authoritarianism, and domineering attitudes in their service to God.

The church as the means for the limitless transformative flow of God's presence

Understanding the church as the outcome of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* opposes stagnation, passivity, and the inactivity of believers. It also stands against dualistic, escapist, pietistic, and ecclesiastic approaches to Christian faith (Van der Watt 2003:53-54), because such approaches conflict with God's act of redeeming a world suffering under the effects of sin. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit thoroughly empowers the church for its existence and its calling, the *missio ecclesia* in fulfilling the *missio Dei*. God continues to flow in the church by the Holy Spirit, sanctifying it for continued growth in a renewed life under divine grace, and empowering it to proclaim God's holistic salvation in word and deed. This implies that the church joins God and assumes his nature of constant dynamism thereby becoming an institution for demonstrating what it means to have a relationship with the triune God.

Various images have been used to depict the church's role of being the means of the limitless transformative flow of God's presence. Breed (2017:69)

describes the church as the display window of God's grace. This suggests that through the church God vivifies his transforming love and grace to its respective social settings. It depicts the church as an institution where God exhibits his nature, quality and works of grace. From the Byzantine era, a cold iron rod placed in fire has been used to typify the *theosis* effected by the grace of God on the church (Biriukov 2019:143). Even as the rod on fire remains iron takes on properties of the fire, becoming red hot, capable of igniting other fires. In the same way *theosis* takes place when the church, likened to iron rod, is placed in the fire of God's grace, taking on qualities of his communicable attributes (Focus 2020:225) for the growth of itself and effective service in the world.

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the church plays its role of being the means of the limitless flow of the transforming grace of God by the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ not only provided ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints (Sproul 2015:2449), he is also present and actively involved with the church in its life and service. This opines that Christ and the Holy Spirit are actively involved in the church's service of gathering saints from the world and perfecting them for his kingdom. Thus, the church neither acts alone nor out of its own power, but acts in and with God from whom it draws the authenticity of its life and ministry.

John Calvin puts it in a stronger way, stating that the church is the mother of salvation (Migliore 1991:185). Just as a mother conceives, births, and nourishes her child, so does the church for believers. The church plays its role as *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* flows in it through its ministry of preaching and teaching the Word, its acts of service, and other means that communicate the deep message of God's sacrificial love.

Migliore (1991:195) describes the church as a sign of the continuing grace of God in Jesus Christ from history to posterity. Bosch (1991:9) states that the church is a pointer, symbol, example, model and foretaste of God's reign. These descriptions of the church should not be mistaken for fixed or immobile bearer of information about God's salvation. After experiencing the infusing, indiscriminate, and gracious flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*, the church becomes the dynamic and active means by which God reaches the world with the

goodness of his sacrificial salvific act in Christ. It is imperative, then, for the church, being the outcome of the limitless transforming flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*, to embody the life and *mission Dei* as modelled by Christ, so that through its members the Holy Spirit may perpetuate God's life-giving, supporting, enhancing, and transforming presence in the world.

This means that in the process of restoring humanity and all creation, God is present in the church and works through the church. God's work, however, is not limited to the church. Though the church has been ingrafted into Christ and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in the *missio Dei*, it does not thereby become a restrictive conduit pipe that God must pass through in the process of restoring his people and creation. After all, God's process of restoring creation precedes the existence of the church. Even so, the mandate for diaconal and missional service in the world, empowered by the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit, shows that the church occupies an important space and plays a key role in God's transforming mission among his creation. In this case, *missio Dei* takes the form of being God's transforming activity in, with, and through the church. The ingrafting of church into the *missio Dei* by *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* whose presence is effectual, transforming, life-giving, supporting, and enhancing has serious reflective implications for the church. It entails the need for the church in its formation and practice of faith to embody the effectual life-giving, supporting, invigorating, and transforming nature of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. With this reflective implication of the *missio Dei* under *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*, the church assumes more responsibilities than just being a display window of God's grace because it has to actually flow with and in the efficacious omnipresence of God.

In expressing its faith through missional, kerygmatic, prophetic and diaconal service the church reflects the effectual, sanctifying, and empowering presence of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*. This implies that the formation of practical faith in the rapidly growing and vibrant church in Africa should vivify the ongoing gentle and life transforming flow of God's presence. There are three vital tasks to be undertaken by the church in the process of forming a faith which fulfils the mandate of vivifying God's continued presence as an implication of believing in *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*.

The task of knowing the flow of God's presence in African contexts

Chiuta chinyeteneyete envisages a God who is well aware of the direction he is leading the church and all of creation. The European missionaries' movement to Africa, irrespective of its flaws, was initiated by God, not missionaries (Kaunda and Hinfelaar 2021:6). The God who was actively present among Africans invited and led the church in Europe to be part of what he was doing in Africa by sharing the gospel of his salvation in Christ through missionaries' human-to-human contact. As a way of owning God's vision for Africa, it is imperative for the African church, as a privileged ingraft into the flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* to know God and his ongoing mission within and without the continent so that it offers services in line with his direction.

The task of knowing the flow of the God who has, is, and will continue to gather, sustain, perfect, and send the church in Africa for his own glory presents three clues. The first clue is that *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* has been, is, and will eternally be efficaciously and indiscriminately present in Africa. God was present when Africa was classified a dark continent, is in Africa with all its strife and opportunities, and will forever be in Africa.

The second clue is that God has been, is, and will be actively involved in Africa and among Africans. The deep reflection evident in Tumbuka pre-missionary religious attributes of the supreme being such as *Chiuta chinyeteneyete*, *kamanyimanyi* (all knowing), *wamuyirayira* (eternal), *chiyamwaka* (ancient of days) which are used as attributes for the Christian God in churches, shows the quality of pre-missionary contemplations on the divine. It is possible that missionaries theologically assessed the underlying reflections behind local names and attributes of God and adopted them after perceiving that they would aid the contextualisation of Christian faith. Scholars such as Bediako argue that ATR was a primal religion that God used to prepare Africa for the preaching of the gospel of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, reflection leading to the attribute of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* seem to indicate that God was actively preparing Africa for the gospel of his saving, sacrificial love in Christ (Moyo 2023:20). The church needs to know God's continuing activity in Africa with his effectual flow leading Africans until final consummation. This highlights the need for the church to keenly see, know, pay attention to, and serve God's interest for African communities in the interim before the final consummation.

The third clue is that since God has been, is, and will always be active in Africa, it is important for the church in its exercise of faith to know the direction of God's active presence in Africa. Osmer (2005:242-243), in relation to knowing God's direction, talks about reading with the Spirit and reading the Spirit. The Spirit is the Godhead guiding the church to what God is already doing in all contexts and leading it towards the final consummation.

Reading with the Spirit stresses the need for church to rely on the instructive companionship of the Holy Spirit in its task of interpreting and applying the gospel in its context (Moyo 2023:196). Reading the Spirit refers to the church discerning what God is already doing in, among, to, and through its context. Additionally, it is by reading with the Holy Spirit and reading the Holy Spirit that the church discerns its place and role in God's salvific plan. Therefore, discerning God's active presence and the place and role of the church in its context through active listening is an integral part of the process of knowing God's flow, flowing in and with God in contexts (Moyo 2023:196).

The task of flowing in God's presence

Since God has and will eternally be present and actively involved in Africa, the church is required to do more than just know the flow of his presence. The church has to actually flow in God's presence or direction. If it does not, knowing God and the flow of his presence are rendered irrelevant. Flowing in the presence of God means that the church follows God's direction, lead, and guidance, drawing the authenticity of its existence and service from him.

In John 15:4-5, Jesus said: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

The word abide refers to an inseparable relationship where the church permanently exists in Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus is ever-present in the church. The church, likened to branches, needs to remain ingrafted in Christ, the vine, for it to bear much fruit. Jesus Christ's statement that "apart from me you can do nothing" indicates that the life and fruitfulness of the church is dependent on its abiding in him. Therefore, it is imperative for the church to draw life, vision, and passion from Jesus Christ so that its existence and services

bear relevant fruit that reflect God's transforming grace within itself and its surrounding social settings. The church loses the essence of its existence and service if it departs from Christ.

The task of flowing with God's presence

Having faith in the God who is *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* is a prescription for the church to flow in and with God (Gorman 2022:16). The aim of interpreting the Bible and contemporary context with the Spirit and of reading the Spirit is to flow with God's presence (Osmer 2005:242-243). Flowing with God's presence means more than God being a companion. It also entails that the church should be where God is and do what he is doing with the love and passion he has.

Here the phrase flowing with God connotes two meanings. The first meaning is being predisposed toward God in life and service. The church is called to live and move as God leads it. God is not only leading the church (and all of creation) toward the final consummation but is also leading it in specific transformational directions in particular contexts, such as ending poverty, mine-related conflicts, growing authoritarianism traits among some of democratically elected political leaders. It is important for the church to discern and flow with the presence of God in these specific directions of his transformation. Since the transforming flow of *Chiuta chinyeteneyete* is intentionally non-segregative, the church in its quest to flow with God's presence should be prepared to be led to places, issues, and people outside its comfort zones.

The second meaning of flowing with God is that the church is called to emulate God's sacrificial love, especially as demonstrated in the birth, life, ministry, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. The church's sacrificial service of love is important, especially in communities where hegemonic power structures perpetrate ravaging social vices. In such situations the church should be the source of hope for societies deprived of a sense of the significance of life by oppressive cultural, political, and social systems or structures. However, despite knowing its obligations to stand with those suffering under human-induced oppression, the church may resort to false neutrality, silence, pacification, or worse, support the perpetrators of social injustice (Moyo 2025:157). This is common especially in situations where authoritarian power

structures promise rewards to supporters or threaten to inflict pain on opposers of their oppressive activities.

Flowing with God's presence in this case, implies that the church has to sacrificially offer liberating services to the people and creation that Christ sacrificed himself to set free. Therefore, in its flow with *Chiuta chinyetenyete*, the church has to actively oppose oppressive systems, structures, and practices causing social and environmental injuries (Moyo 2025:157). This challenges the church to have and form its faith in words and deeds that evince the dynamic, efficacious, gentle, continuous, indiscriminate, and efficacious presence of God in its contexts (Bentley 2020:186).

Conclusion

The richness of underlying concept behind attributes of God in African languages such as *Chiuta chinyetenyete* in Chitumbuka are worth exploring for the formation of a contextual Christian faith. Studying the underlying meaning of Chitumbuka attribute *Chiuta chinyetenyete* challenges the church as a product of and ingraft into God's mission to form a faith that practically exhibits his indiscriminate and efficacious presence with traceable transformational impacts. For the church to play its role in the *missio Dei* it needs to know what God is doing and where he is leading. The church should exist and serve in tandem with the activity and direction of God's dynamic presence. As the body of Christ, the church needs to actively discern and participate in what God is doing within and its surrounding community (Moyo 2023:190). This article challenges the church to reflect theologically on the underlying meaning of local names and attributes of God in order to deepen the roots of the Christian faith in Africans' hearts. Finally, it opines that the implication of believing in *Chiuta chinyetenyete* is embodying the life-giving, invigorating, supporting, and transforming nature of God's presence in the world.

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