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Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists

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1976 (English) Book (Other academic)

**Abstract [en]**

Bengt *Sundkler's-Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948, second ed. 1961) has become widely known as a pioneering work on the life and ideology of Independent African Churches. After him, a large number of scholars have devoted themselves to related studies in various parts of Africa.

After three decades Professor Sundkler has returned to the same Zulu and Swazi churches among whom he began his research about 1940. This time he interprets them from a different point of view. He has concentrated on the history and the leading personalities of some of these churches, including that of the famous Isaiah Shembe.

The difference in time and perspective between the earlier book and this new volume, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists*, leads to challenging questions with regards to the Southern Africa church movement as a whole. The present study is built on rich finds of original source material.

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"Zionists" *ama-Ziyoni* they call themselves. Wherever they live and move in Southern Africa, their white garments with the green or blue sash and the wooden crozier give them away as "the people of Zion". In South Africa and Rhodesia there are at least two million of them, and their numbers appear to be increasing all the time.

For linguistic reasons I have dwelt on Zulu and Swazi organizations alone, and of these, stuck to a very limited number, although faithfully, for as many as thirty-five years in some cases. How representative is this particular selection? They comprise chiefly such churches as for historical reasons-related to the beginnings of Zulu Zion-and because of ideological significance command attention. In the Swazi case it has been possible to be more inclusive; but here again, the historical links with the beginnings have determined the choice. We feel assured that the selection is as fair as one could hope for in the circumstances.

My limitations for the task are obvious. In spite of efforts at understanding, I may have missed some of the rich overtones which make a difference in interpretation. This study was thus written in anticipation of one to be made some day by an African scholar living much closer to the anguish and jubilation of the movement than I could ever be.

In an earlier study entitled *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948, 1961) the approach was largely sociological. This time I have followed the path of history and of biography. I am dealing with the same limited number of Zulu and Swazi churches to which was devoted that other book, but the material, the presentation, and the final evaluation are different.

Uppsala, Sweden, September 1975

*Bengt Sundkler*

**Place, publisher, year, edition, pages**

Lund: Gleerup , 1976. , p. 337

**Series**

Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia, ISSN 0585-5373 ; 29

**Keywords [en]**

Zionists, ama-Ziyoni, Zulu, Swazi, Charismatics

**National Category**

Religious Studies

**Identifiers**

URN: [urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-156404](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-156404) ISBN: 91-40-04064-X (print) OAI: oai:DiVA.org:uu-156404 DiVA, id: [diva2:431382](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-156404)

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Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists, machiavelli, as is commonly believed,

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