

Missionalia

Southern African Journal of Missiology

Missionalia is the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society (SAMS). It is published three times a year (April, August and November). Articles and book reviews published in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Executive, or the Editorial Board, or of SAMS. Manuscripts submitted for publication are assessed by a panel of referees, and the decision to publish is dependent on their reports. As a SAPSE-accredited journal *Missionalia* publishes research articles that contribute new knowledge to the field of Missiology.

Editorial Committee

Editor: Dr GL James
Copy editor: Ms S Raaff
Subscriptions: Mrs J Kilian

Editorial Board

Prof AH Anderson, Birmingham, UK
 Prof S Arles, Bangalore, India
 Prof NA Botha, Pretoria, South Africa
 Prof E Chitando, Harare, Zimbabwe
 Prof M Frederiks, Utrecht, Netherlands
 Dr GL James, Pretoria, South Africa
 Prof JL Jongeneel, Utrecht, Netherlands
 Dr A Karamaga, Kigali, Rwanda
 Prof JNJ Kritzinger, Pretoria, South Africa

Prof TS Maluleke, Pretoria, South Africa
 Dr M Melanchthon, Chennai, India
 Prof JNK Mugambi, Nairobi, Kenya
 Prof J Reimer, Bergneustadt, Germany
 Prof D Robert, Boston, USA
 Prof R von Sinner, Sao Leopoldo, Brazil
 Prof I Swart, Stellenbosch, South Africa
 Dr U van der Heyden, Berlin, Germany
 Prof KL Yan, Hong Kong, China

Indexing

Articles published in **Missionalia** are indexed:

(a) with abstracts, by

- (1) **Religion Index One: Periodicals** This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion DATbase, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atla@atla.com, WWW: <http://www.atla.com/>.
- (2) **Religious and Theological Abstracts** 121 South College St., Myerstown, Pa. 17067.
- (3) **Centre de Documentation et d'Information Missionnaire**, 5, rue Monsieur, F-75007, Paris.

(b) without abstracts, by

- (1) **Bibliografia Missionaria** (Rome)
- (2) **International Review of Mission** (Geneva)
- (3) **Mission Dokumentation und Information** (Aachen, Germany)

2011 and 2012 (Volumes 39 and 40) Annual Subscription VAT and Airmail postage included. February 2012			
	TYPE OF SUBSCRIBER	SURFACE MAIL PER ANNUM	AIRMAIL PER ANNUM
SOUTH AFRICA	INDIVIDUALS	R250	
	INSTITUTIONS	R300	
	PENSIONERS & STUDENTS	R200	
SAMS MEMBERS	INCLUDES MISSIONALIA	R250	
REST OF AFRICA	INDIVIDUALS		US\$30.00
	INSTITUTIONS		US\$35.00
REST OF THE WORLD	INDIVIDUALS		US\$65.00
	INSTITUTIONS		US\$75.00

Subscriptions may be sent to:

The Editor, *Missionalia*, P.O. Box 35704
 Menlo Park 0102 SOUTH AFRICA

Telephone: 012-429-8821
(International) +27-12-429-8821

Fax: 012-429-4619
(International) +27-12-429-4619

e-mail (editorial):
 editor@missionalia.org.za

e-mail (administrative):
 secretary@missionalia.org.za

SAMS web page:
www.missionalia.org.za

Missionalia

Southern African Journal of Missiology

Volume 39, Number 3, November 2011

ISSN 0256-9507

Contents

Guest Editorial 191

Articles

- The early Brethren in Christ Church missions and the formation of new identities among the Ndebele in Zimbabwe
Lovemore Ndlovu 193
- “Be therefore reconciled to one another”: The church’s role in justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe
Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando 210
- The quest for God’s irregulars: The legacy of Arthur Shearly Cripps and the role of the Anglican Church in nation building in Zimbabwe today
Gift M. Makwasha 228
- African Theology and identity: Reflections on Zion Christian Church experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis, 2000–2010
Richard Shadreck Maposa, Fortune Sibanda and Tompson Makahamadze 248
- Post-election violence in Zimbabwe (2008–2010): The agency of the Roman Catholic Church in national healing and democracy
Francisca H. Chimhanda and Aletha Dube 268
- Christians’ participation in politics in Zimbabwe: A privilege or right?
Molly Manyonganise and Chipso Chirimuuta 287
- Shifting contexts and identities: Encounters between religions and the Zimbabwean state (from the pre-colonial to the end of the colonial era)
Paul Gundani 306

Guest Editorial

Zimbabwe. Eight letters that stir deep, conflicting emotions depending on who one is interacting with. Zimbabwe. A reality and an idea. Zimbabwe. Home and exile. Zimbabwe. Unity and division. Due to the global media's persistent interest in Zimbabwe, many people have very strong opinions about the country. Zimbabwe therefore conjures a myriad of images in the minds of different people.

If "Zimbabwe" has become such a deeply polarising concept, it follows with necessity that this "Zimbabwe" merits closer scrutiny and analysis. This special issue on Zimbabwe brings together articles by researchers from diverse contexts. What unites them is their commitment to explicating various themes relating to Zimbabwe. Whereas "outsiders" have provided some useful perspectives on Zimbabwe, the voices of the "insiders" have not received the prominence that they deserve. Articles by Zimbabweans who are currently resident in Zimbabwe and those by Zimbabweans outside its borders contribute towards understanding the complexity of its recent history.

As theological reflections on HIV and AIDS in Africa have confirmed, sensitivity to the lived realities of individuals, communities and nations leads to richer and more grounded material. As they grapple with the issues of religion and politics, healing and reconciliation, violence and memory and others, contributors to this volume have provided insights into the recent past. Simultaneously, they have also sought to reflect on how Zimbabwe can build on its experiences in order to "win the future." The contributors to this volume survey the past in order to build the future on a more secure foundation.

As conferences and workshops in Africa and beyond have demonstrated, Zimbabwe has significance way beyond itself. Zimbabwe's experiences within the last decade have ramifications beyond the country. Some of the notable themes relate to postcolonialism, ownership of resources, versions of nationalism as well as the interface between religion and politics in contexts of crisis. Articles in this volume interact with these themes, giving them resonance beyond Zimbabwe. Furthermore, they provide insights into the character of theology and religious studies in contentious contexts.

If one of the abiding questions has been, “Where are Zimbabwean scholars of theology and religious studies while the Zimbabwean situation is being explained by practitioners from other disciplines?” this special issue of *Missionalia* goes some way in answering it. Zimbabwean theologians have not suffered from a paralysis of analysis, although there is clearly room for greater engagement with the Zimbabwean situation.

Zimbabwe. The House of Stones. Zimbabwe. The enigma.

Paul H. Gundani and Ezra Chitando

The early Brethren in Christ Church missions and the formation of new identities among the Ndebele in Zimbabwe

Lovemore Ndlovu¹

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the Brethren in Christ Church Christian missions on the spirituality and identity of the Ndebele during the colonial period. Firstly, the paper discusses African religious consciousness prior to the arrival of the Christian missions and then outlines some of the strategies that were employed by the Christian missions, which were geared to transform the image and identity of Africans. Secondly, the paper discusses the aims of the Christian missions in changing the ideology and perceptions of Africans. Consequently, the paper reports on an empirical study conducted in order to determine whether the activities of the Brethren in Christ Church Christian missions led to the formation of new identities. The data obtained from the empirical study demonstrates that the Brethren in Christ Church missionary activities in Zimbabwe greatly transformed the consciousness of the Ndebele - the indigenous modes of perception and practice - resulting in the creation of an early twentieth-century Christian identity.

Keywords: Brethren in Christ Church, Christianity, Christian missions, religious consciousness, identity.

Introduction

Scholars such as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:1), Ranger (1986:1-69) and Erlank (2003:1) comment on the historiography of the early Christian missions and note that there is a tendency by researchers in this discipline to emphasise the political and economic factors at the expense of the cultural and religious. As confirmed by Ranger (1986:1-69):

[A]n oddity of most recent historiography of early mission Christianity is that it has greatly overlaid the manifest political and economic factors in its expansion and greatly underplayed the cultural and religious ... (Even formal church historians have) hardly discussed the impact of missionaries and their catechists on the cultural imagination of Africa.

Erlank (2003:10) corroborates the above argument of Ranger (1986:1-69) and she states that Christianity as a factor influencing people's lives and identities has not been adequately investigated in contemporary research. Ranger (1986:385) examined the impact of the Christian missions on the African indigenous modes of perception and practice. He (1986:385)

¹ Dr Lovemore Ndlovu is a lecturer at the Theology and Religious Studies Department at the Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. He can be contacted at lodizah@yahoo.co.uk.

emphasised the need to focus on and understand religious idioms and practices as powerful forms of everyday consciousness, permeating people's negotiations of their lives across a range of contexts (Erlank 2003:7). Ranger (2005:8) thus identified the following as religious idioms: healing, witchcraft eradication, spirit possession, etc. These religious idioms are important in understanding the identity and spirituality of Africans or what Ranger (2005:8) prefers to call everyday consciousness.

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:10) produced an impeccable and stimulating account of the impact of the Christian missions in African society. Their study was based on mission encounters among the Sotho-Tswana people in South Africa: *The Comaroffs' Of Revelation and Revolution* critiques colonial missionaries and their effects on colonial cultures and imperial policies. The aforementioned book focuses on the period 1820 – 1920 and examines the interaction between the missionaries and the southern Tswana. The research findings of Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:10) are used in the study to examine the impact of the Brethren in Christ missions on the Ndebele.

Against the backdrop of the above remarks, the following research questions were formulated:

- What was the impact of the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) Christian missions on Ndebele society?
- What role did the BICC missions play in changing the spirituality or religious traditions of the Ndebele?
- Did the BICC missions succeed in changing the indigenous modes of perception of the Ndebele?

Purpose of the study

With the above research questions in mind, the purpose of the study was, firstly, to examine the impact of the BICC missions on Ndebele society. Secondly, the study was aimed at analysing the role of the BICC missions in changing the identity of the Ndebele and, therefore, ushering in new forms of identity. Thirdly, the study sought to determine whether the BICC missions changed the religion and spirituality of the Ndebele.

In order to achieve these objectives, a review of literature pertaining to Christian missions was done and an empirical study focused on the BICC missions was undertaken. The literature review and empirical study will be reviewed in this article and conclusions from these put forward.

Brethren in Christ Church

The BICC has sectarian roots, influenced by Anabaptism,² Pietism³ and Wesleyanism. It is historically a peace church, emphasising separation from the world and non-conformity to it. As an Anabaptist group, it is neither Protestant nor Catholic but part of the radical reformation that encouraged a “third way” theologically and in ecclesiology. It was the early Christian American missionaries in 1890s who were closely linked to the Mennonites. The church is concentrated in the southern parts of Zimbabwe and its headquarters are in Bulawayo. The church has three main rural stations in Matopo, Mtshabezi and Wanezi. The main emphasis of the BICC missionaries was on “bringing Christ to the Africans as Lord and Saviour” (BICC 1948:10). The life and teaching of Christ formed the core of the missionary teachings.

The BICC was one of the earliest missionary endeavours in Zimbabwe and the aim of the Christian movement in Africa was to bring and enforce European cultural norms of religious, social, moral and economic behaviour and mould African individuals and societies (Spear 1999:3). The BICC missionaries in Zimbabwe were confronted by what they called “heathenism”, as Africans were deeply influenced by African indigenous beliefs and practices.

The BICC rural stations in Matopo, Wanezi and Mtshabezi focused mainly on preaching, healing and teaching. Consequently, the church, hospital and school formed the epicentre of Christian missionary work and were complementary in moulding and Europeanising Africans. Without educating Africans, missionary activities would not have been effective in African society and according to the missionaries, “in order to be able to read the word of God the African must need to be taught to read” (BICC 1948:10). The hospital also played an important role in African society because denouncing traditional healing methods without offering a more viable alternative would have been a futile exercise.

Research methodology

Literature review

Africans before the impact of the Christian mission teachings

Prior to the advent of the missions, Africans had a high degree of religious consciousness and were deeply religious (Magesa 1997:32; Mbiti 1969:1).

² Anabaptism is a Christian theological tradition that was a response of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The Anabaptists were not satisfied with the Protestant Reformation and advocated for further reforms such as adult baptism, voluntary church membership and separation of church and state (Redekop 2012:1).

³ The Pietist movement advocated for a truly reformed church, individual devotional lives and a “new birth”.

As Mbiti (1969:1) remarks: "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it." The identity of Africans is expressed in their religion, culture, moral and value systems, art and music. A brief analysis of African religiosity in this study is essential. Firstly, African religion prior to the advent of the missions was a way of life and involved reciprocal rights and obligations between the material world and the immaterial world of the spirits, the objective being to maintain harmony between both worlds, ensure peace and prosperity for the people and survival of their lineages through time (Nyamiti 2006; Ubah 1988:71).

Scholars such as Thorpe (1991:54–57) and Ubah (1988:71) assert that African religion is founded on three pillars, namely, the Supreme Being, divinities and ancestors. A pervasive feature of the religious scene was the peaceful co-existence of the above and none of them claimed absolute authority. The divinities and the ancestors played an important position in African life, for example, all calamities that fell on the society, such as outbreak of epidemics and diseases, were thought to be due to anger of the divinities for improper conduct or for acts of omission on the part of the community (Nyamiti 2006; Ubah 1988:72). However, the divinity was given due credit for everything good that happened in the community, such as good health, economic prosperity and victory in war.

The third pillar of ancestors, according to Thorpe (1991:57) and Ubah (1988:74), was built around the belief that the spirits of departed ancestors were still interested and able to intervene in the day-to-day affairs of their descendants. Consequently, ancestors would show interest if the dead were given full and proper burial ceremonies. If family members defaulted on these ceremonies, then the wrath of the ancestors would inflict appropriate punishment such as ill health or even death (Ubah 1988:75; Nyamiti 2006).

The identity of Africans was thus expressed in their religiosity or what Ranger (2005:8) calls the religious consciousness of Africans. Hastings (1967:64) notes that the deepest beliefs of Africans seem to have been good and right, and when purified a real foundation for a supernatural edifice. He advocates in this regard:

Certainly the great goods of African religion - the belief in one high god, the close family solidarity, the co-ordination of spirit and matter, the basic moral values, education seen as the acceptance of the accumulated wisdom of the elders, and finally, in many societies, the deeply democratic recognition of the rights of each individual within the tribal community, so long as he fulfils his duties - these goods seem to outweigh the bad things - an exaggerated faith in the powers (often malevolent) of the ancestors, belief in sorcery and witchcraft, the dictatorial monarchies, the lack of a

developed moral attitude to those beyond the tribal group (Hastings 1967:64).

Since African identity was embedded in African religiosity, culture, moral and value systems, the mission approach was bound to focus on the aforementioned aspects and aimed to destroy the very foundations of African life. As Kapenzi (1979:18) puts it:

The whole enterprise was mainly directed at destroying African 'heathenism', 'superstition' and 'barbarism'. It was a destructive syndrome that aimed at instituting Victorianism in Africa... Consequently, the most distinguishing characteristic of missionary operations in Africa was their almost unanimous refusal to incorporate elements of African religions, rituals, music and ceremonies in any shape or form within the Christian system of religious thought and practice.

Techniques used in spreading Christian mission ideology

Various techniques were employed by the missions to spread their ideology, and the school and the hospital were important tools in their strategy (Oliver and Atmore 1994:146; Hastings 1967:119; Ubah 1988:81). As Hastings (1967:119) remarks:

[T]he missionary has made use of everything that he could bring with him from the West to draw men into the Church, but the school and the hospital have been his two most widely effective instruments of conversion. Both medicine and books provided an almost incontestable authority to those who brought them, once Africans began to appreciate them.

Ubah (1988:81) corroborates Hastings' (1967:119) remarks and argues that the school was used as a lure to trap Africans into the religion and way of life of the missionaries. Chiefs and elders went to the extent of sending delegations to the missionaries requesting the need for a school, unaware of the serious implications of the school as a religious indoctrination centre. To the missionaries, there was no difference between a school and a church, as the same building was used for both purposes (BICC 1948:10). Within the schools, the curricula were designed in such a way that children would receive large doses of denominational propaganda and dogma. Ubah (1988:82) explains in this regard:

Up to date of independence... the school curricula of the various missions were deliberately worked out in a way which ensured that religious instruction occupied a prominent place. From the point of view of the missionaries, religious knowledge was the major aspect of educational training. Religious instruction exposed children to elements of the Christian doctrine, daily prayers, Bible stories and so on. At the same time fierce attacks were mounted on traditional religious beliefs, and efforts were made to subject them systematically to criticism and ridicule.

Oliver and Atmore (1994:146) further elucidate the use of the school as an important tool in evangelism as follows:

The main means used by all the Christian missions in their evangelism was to found networks of village schools in which children of all ages could be given a very simple education in reading, writing and arithmetic alongside the religious instruction leading to baptism and church membership.

Another factor mentioned by Hastings (1967:119), which assisted in conversion to Christianity, was the authority and sense of superiority of the missionary as a white man and even the use of sheer force. As Hastings (1967:119) remarks: "Often he seemed to be in open league with the new colonial government, and at times acted as if he shared in some general authority for the running of African society." Iliffe (1995:226) explains the confrontational nature of the Christian missionaries as follows:

This rapid evangelisation was generally confrontational. Early twentieth-century missionaries had little sympathy for the gradual Christianisation of African customs. They might appropriate indigenous symbols, as the White Fathers used the god Mukasa's drum-call to summon people to church, but the crucial test for Christian converts was to 'throw away their idols'. Yet Africa was no *tabula rasa*.

House-to-house campaigning was another effective way of penetrating African society. According to Ubah (1988:82), small quantities of materials such as clothes, singlets, pants and towels were given away freely to enthusiasts and potential adherents to lure them to the new faith. During house-to-house campaigns, they also tried to recruit children for the schools, having outlined the advantages of schooling to parents.

Aims of the early Christian missions

According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:235), colonialism was essentially concerned with the establishment and consolidation of control over subject populations through their transformation. Hence, the aims of evangelical mission were similar and consistent with the above notion of colonialism. Africans needed to be converted from a flawed system of belief to another perfect one if they were to achieve "salvation". The evangelical notion of "salvation" encompassed not only the non-Christian person but also the society in which he or she lived (Green 2003:2). Salvation was not only a matter of saving "heathen" souls but amounted to a totalising endeavour in the name of civilisation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:2). As noted by Green (2003:2), for most European missions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conversion to Christianity was viewed as "an essential part of a global project of modernisation premised on a particular notion of civilisation as the culmination of an evolutionary progression away from barbarism and savagery."

Commenting on the attitude of the Christian missions in West Africa, Kirby (1994:60–61), a Catholic priest and anthropologist states that:

Throughout its history, Christian missionary work in West Africa has displayed little cultural sensitivity toward African society. Catholic missionaries, like their protestant brothers, were appallingly ignorant of African institutions and did not care to investigate them. Indeed, they were too busy suppressing traditional rituals and beliefs, thereby preventing an objective, balanced view of African traditional religions. With few exceptions, missionaries saw African traditional religions as a ‘morass of bizarre beliefs and practices’... As a general principle we can say that before 1960 all mission-founded churches insisted that their converts abandon all contact with African traditional religions and cultures. These churches were poorly prepared theologically and culturally to accept any alternatives to their own way of praying, thinking and behaving.

A negative approach to Africans was hence adopted by the missions (Magesa 1997:20). Hastings (1967:60) describes the approach and attitude of the missions when they first came to Africa as follows:

What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent: its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible the better to encourage missionary zeal at home.

Boulaga (1984:32) corroborates Hastings’ (1967:60) contestation and asserts that the Christian mission approach in Africa was characterised by the language of refutation, as the missionaries refuted all that the “pagans” believed and venerated. Hence, missionaries argued that:

Pagan beliefs are an outgrowth of unbridled silliness. They are the turning of one’s back on the basic evidences of good sense and the first principles of reason. The veneration of idols is pure foolishness. The mind reels in the face of obtuse materialism and anthropomorphism. Side by side with the foolishness of the motley herd, of course is the canny swindle of the few: the wizards, the witchdoctors.

Such a negative approach remained very strong in practice. As Hastings (1967:60) puts it:

The tendency continues to treat everything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best valueless and to consider the African, once converted from paganism, as a sort of tabula rasa on which a wholly new religious psychology has somehow to be imprinted. That there was plenty to horrify one in the pre-Christian state of Africa is only too clear. Quite apart from the extra enormities of the slave trade, superimposed on African society, it is clear that cruelty and fear were strikingly evident: cruelty especially in great kingdoms like those of Ashanti, Dahomey and Buganda with their frequent

blood-baths; fear elsewhere - above all, fear of sorcery, or of being bewitched by others.

Early Christian missions and the formation of new identities

According to Iliffe (1995:153), Portugal despatched its first missionaries to West Africa in 1458 and retained control until 1622 when the Papacy created its own mission agency, Propaganda Fide, and began to send non-Iberian clergy. However, mission work declined during the eighteenth century but was revived in the nineteenth century, when it first involved Protestants as well as Roman Catholics.

Initially (1840–1900), Christianity appealed more to children, as well as to young men and women in their teens and early twenties (Ubah 1988:83). These were people who could be most easily attracted by novelties and whose initiation into the life of the community was in several ways still incomplete. According to Hastings (1967:92):

In many parts of Africa Christianity has come only through the schools and therefore to the children, and its coming has meant a rupture between young and old, between the traditional tribal hierarchy and a new Christian society, and it has left both weak and unsure of themselves.

In the 1960s, with the advent of the educated African populace, the situation changed as the more educated Africans formed the bulk of the congregations at any given time (Hastings 1967:61). However, in the current dispensation (2000–2009), although African religion, culture and values have not been completely obliterated by the wave of Christianisation and Westernisation, their influence, particularly on the urban and the educated, is weakened, resulting in a new form of African identity.

Scholars such as Ubah⁴ (1988:71) argue that there was no intensive Christianisation in Africa and what happened was a process of adaptation and accommodation, as traditional religion still rules the minds of Africans. The Catholic Church made an attempt to Africanise its institutions. Africanisation in the Catholic Church, according to Hastings (1967:251), was focused on church structures, liturgy, art, music and leadership. Hastings (1967:251) defines “Africanisation” as the adaptation of institutions and shaping of church life to the society and needs of today’s Africa. According to Iliffe (1995:226):

In practice, adaptation took place, but it was done by the converts themselves in the process of accepting the new religion and reconciling it with inherited beliefs and practices. As, at best, newly literate people, they did this in an eclectic manner, but eclecticism could point in two directions, as at earlier periods of African Christian history. Some Christians continued

⁴ Ubah (1988:71) specifically looks at religious change among the Igbo during colonial rule in Nigeria. However, in Africa as a whole, all protestant churches launched a direct attack on African religion and traditions.

to believe fervently in the reality of their old gods but saw them now as evil forces.

Ranger (2005:8) asserts that researchers concerned with the impact of mission Christianity on the lives or consciousness of Africans should focus on religious idioms. As noted previously, he identifies the following idioms as pertinent in this discourse: healing, witchcraft eradication, spirit possession, etc. The above-mentioned idioms, as Ranger (2005:8) notes, were important in the ideological transformation of Africans - thus ushering in a new identity or a religious consciousness.

Schoffeleers (1994:73) has looked at the proposition that Africans find it difficult to integrate Jesus Christ into their belief system, either because he is associated with the West and the colonial past or because he is incompatible with indigenous religious perceptions or conceptions. Schoffeleers (1994:73), therefore, proposes an African model for Christ. He writes in this manner: "In the catechesis and liturgy of African churches, Christ is often referred to as the one true nganga... an image that the audience intuitively understands and at the same time is seen as rooted in scripture."

Consequently, the theology of the Christian missionaries influenced Africans to re-conceptualise healing in African indigenous society and through adaptation the nganga paradigm emerged as part of the new ideology of Africans.

The second idiom identified by Ranger (2005:9), is the idiom of witchcraft eradication. As Ranger (2005:9) notes, the nineteenth-century crisis⁵ produced two new types within African religion, the prophet and the spiritual nganga, and both were concerned with dealing with witches and sorcerers. In Zimbabwe, as in other African countries during the pre-colonial era, there emerged a strong witchcraft eradication movement. According to Ranger (2005:10):

The pre-colonial eradication movement was an attempt to bring to an end for good the whole business of detecting and punishing witches. It aimed to eradicate witchcraft altogether. People were summoned to surrender all their charms to be burnt; everyone shared a ritual and took a medicine; there after the innocent were safe and the guilty doomed to die if they tried to revert to their evil ways.

The arrival of the Christian missions, with their announcement of a new age, was taken as the most powerful eradication movement of all.

⁵ The period 1900–1919 was characterised by crisis, as there were great epidemics of cattle and human disease, climaxing with the influenza pandemic of 1918. There was also intensified violence, climaxing with the First World War, which resulted in many more African deaths than any previous conflicts (Ranger 2005:4).

Christianity was viewed as a new and more effective movement of cleansing and of witchcraft eradication.

Concerning the third idiom of spirit possession, Africans believed that spirits could possess human beings - both good and bad spirits, for example, rainmaking spirits, ancestor spirits, spirits of strangers, etc. Mediums of nature spirits or of important ancestors had great influence and were guardians of the moral values of the community (Magesa 1997:32; Ranger 2005:12). However, mission churches argued that all spirits were evil and the rite of exorcism could be used to drive out evil spirits. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was thus viewed as transforming spiritual power. Hence, the African concept of good and bad spirits was transformed in line with the Christian view that all spirits are evil.

With the information obtained from the above international literature, an empirical study, particular to the Zimbabwe situation, and which produced descriptive statistical data, was undertaken.

Empirical study

The research design employed ethnographic research methods, namely, participant observation and questionnaires.

Participant observation

In order to penetrate to the core of the BICC, the researcher used participation observation as a method of data collection. This enabled the researcher to learn about the theology of the church, its practices and values as a sectarian movement.

Questionnaire

In order to obtain data on the impact of the BICC missions on the Ndebele spirituality and identity, a questionnaire was compiled. The findings by Ranger (1994:275; 1999:178) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:3) were used in planning the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. The purpose of Section 1, firstly, was to establish the sex of the respondents in order to determine how the respondents deal with issues of gender, from the Christian missionary perspective. Secondly, the aim of Section 1 was to determine each respondent's length of membership of the church. This was intended to determine when respondents had joined the church and to establish the impact of the missionary teachings during that period. Thirdly, the aim of Section 1 was to determine whether the respondents held a special position within the church.

The purpose of Section 2 of the questionnaire, firstly, was to identify the specific role of the early BICC missions at a time when the Ndebele were deeply rooted in traditional religion and beliefs. Secondly, the aim of Section 2 was to determine whether the missions had affected Ndebele society positively, at least from the missionary perspective. Thirdly, the aim

of Section 2 was to establish the respondents' opinions regarding whether the missionaries had succeeded in constructing new identity patterns among the Ndebele. Fourthly, the aim of Section 2 was to determine the core teachings and value systems that were imparted to the Ndebele by the missionaries as a strategy to convert them from the "savage life" to Christianity. Fifthly, the aim of Section 2 was to ascertain whether the missionaries had succeeded in constructing new gender roles among the Ndebele. Finally, the aim of Section 2 was to determine the core value systems that created a modern man and woman, an early twentieth-century Christian identity.

Respondents

This paper relies on empirical evidence gathered from the BICC. This church is based in the southern part of Zimbabwe and its headquarters are in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city. During the colonial era, it operated three major mission stations at Matopo, Wanezi and Mtshabezi (BICC 1948:10). These three BICC mission stations produced African converts who were also educated in the Western mould in mission schools.

Sixty respondents (six groups of ten) from the BICC participated in the research project. These were church members who were familiar with missionary activities and teachings and once lived close to mission stations in Matopo, Wanezi and Mtshabezi. Fifty of the sixty respondents comprised of ordinary church members and ten respondents held positions of leadership in the church. Among the respondents, there were thirty-five women and twenty-five men and their length of membership at the church ranged from seven to fifty years.

Data collection

A month prior to the administration of the questionnaire, permission was obtained from the authorities and all respondents. The questionnaire was administered in five sessions at the following churches: Lobengula, Central, Matopo, Mtshabezi and Wanezi. The Lobengula and Central churches are urban churches and the remainder are rural. The respondents from each of the five churches completed the questionnaire together in the respective session, supervised by the researcher.

Results

Table 1 Responses on the types of gender roles introduced by the early Christian missionaries.

Roles	n	%
Women participation in family decision-making	25	41.6
Women making family choices	10	16.6
Women taking up leadership roles	30	50
Women not confined to kitchen	35	58.3
Women becoming bread-winners	28	46.6
Women and men sharing roles	30	50

In response to the question on the types of gender roles introduced by the early Christian missionaries, the respondents identified the following gender roles introduced by the BICC early Christian missions: (a) women participation in family decision-making (41.6%); (b) women making family choices (16.6%); (c) women taking up leadership roles (50%); (d) women not confined to the kitchen (58.3%); and (e) women becoming bread-winners (46.6) and (f) women and men sharing roles (50%). Respondents noted that the activities of the BICC missionaries changed the role of the family in Ndebele society and consequently the gender roles. Women were thus given prominence as equal partners both within the family and in mission work. Ndebele traditional society was generally patriarchal in character and the coming of the missionaries changed the patriarchal-based traditional system. The position of women was no longer a position of servitude but an active role within the family. Men were now seen as equal partners in maintaining and supporting the family. On the same note, the Ndebele started to recognise the value of the girl-child and thus began considering sending girls to school. The formerly male-dominated society started to involve women in key areas of the society such as leadership roles in church and in family activities.

Table 2 Responses on the specific changes in Ndebele society that followed Christian missionary intervention.

Changes	n	%
Monogamous marriages	36	60
Equality between men and women	30	50
Moral society	20	33.3
Decline in "heathenism"	40	66.6
Respect (for life, self, others, etc.)	18	30

In response to the question on the specific changes in Ndebele society that followed Christian missionary intervention, the respondents noted the

following changes in Ndebele society: (a) monogamous marriages (60%); (b) equality between men and women (50%); (c) moral society (33.3%); (d) decline in “heathenism” (66.6%); and (e) respect (30%). Emphasis was placed on a monogamous Christian marriage rendering the extended family to a slow decline as Africans began to embrace and practise the new Gospel.

Table 3 Responses on whether the missionaries had succeeded in creating new forms of identity.

	n	%
Yes	48	80
No	12	20

In response to the question of whether the missionaries had succeeded in creating new forms of identity, 80% of the respondents replied in the affirmative. This category of respondents noted that the BICC missionaries had succeeded in making inroads among the Ndebele and therefore changed the indigenous perceptions and practice of the Ndebele. However, 20% felt that Ndebele society is still clinging to its traditional modes of perception and practice despite missionary presence.

Discussion

The results of this study are reviewed in terms of the research findings of international scholars such as Ranger (1994:275; 1999:178) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:3). Ranger (1994:275) reviews the history of one mission church - the American Methodist Episcopal Church in eastern Zimbabwe (now called the United Methodist Church of Zimbabwe) - and notes the following results of adaptation of the ideology of the Christian missions:

We are beginning to realise that during the missionary period the foundations of a vigorous African Christianity were laid. We are beginning to realize that these foundations were laid in a concealed and mysterious manner. Very little developed as the missionaries planned or hoped or feared ... the emergence of an African Christianity was a dialectical process, an interaction between missionary and African consciousness... The result is a constantly shifting and negotiated synthesis. At any one time, and even today, popular Methodism is the result of an interaction between missionary and convert.

Ranger (1999:178) provides a critique of the impact of the American Methodist Episcopal Church missionary activities on African spirituality in Manicaland, in eastern Zimbabwe, in the 1930s. He (1999:178) concludes that the work of the three mission bodies (Methodist, Anglican and the Catholic Church) together with the creativity of African Christians had

social and ideological effects. The three churches worked on producing a written vernacular, particularly the American Methodist putting emphasis on literacy and literature as a key aspect of the richness that Christianity would bring to an impoverished people. The American Methodist station at Old Umtali, the Anglican college of St Augustine at the Trappist mission at Triashill were the three power-houses of ChiManyika, the Shona dialect of the literate progressives of eastern Zimbabwe (Ranger 1999:178). As Ranger (1999:178) puts it: “[T]he investment in the new language by African teachers and catechists did more than anything else to produce a sense of distinct Manyika identity.”

Another dimension that arises from Ranger’s critique (1999:178) is the emergence of the Manyika peasantry. The American Methodists, who traded Bibles and tracts for grain at their rural stations, did most to propagate the Gospel of the Plough. This, according to Ranger (1999:178), helped to create not only a new socio-economic class but also a new landscape.

The three churches that operated in Manicaland began as communities of young men and ended up as congregations of girls and women controlled by a few resident elders. Ranger (1999:178) further notes that Christian mission teachings also affected gender relations in Zimbabwe although this is considered a complex and contested area. As Ranger (1999:178) confirms:

[T]he emergence of uniformed Christian women’s organisations - the Anglican Mother’s union, the Methodist Rukwadzano, the Catholic sororities devoted to the Virgin Mary - were only partly a means of instilling restrictive and inappropriate doctrines of sexual and female subordination. They were also about women’s power. Rukwadzano women had their own pentecost; their own prophetic foundress rising from the dead; and took an aggressive line in challenging male domination of the church. Catholic women were the guardians of the shrines of rural folk Christianity. Anglican women were credited with saving their church between the wars when it was suffering from fiscal crisis and the challenge of the prophets.

In support of the research findings of Ranger (1999:178) on gender relations, the BICC report (1948:6) notes the following:

There are abundant indications about us that the leaven of the Gospel is working. Christianity is a revolutionary doctrine and its effect on a nation or an individual is sure to be great. For example, we have seen during the past fifty years womankind emerge from a position of downtrodden servitude to one of true importance in the life of the people. She no longer accepts in humble subjection the dictates of the man. That she misuses her freedom at times cannot be denied, but as this freedom is bound up with a life in Christ it blossoms forth into something beautiful and of enduring value.

Ranger (1999:178) concludes that “Africans became deeply and enthusiastically involved in a number of ‘new’ identities - the ethnic identity

of being Manyika; the social identity of being a peasant; the gendered identity of being a monogamous Christian wife”.

Elsewhere, scholars such as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:3) have examined the role that was played by the missionaries in the nineteenth-century political life of the Sotho-Tswana people in South Africa - the Barolong boo Ratshidi (Tshidi). In the case of the Tshidi, the seeds sown in the humble soil of every Tshidi practice were to mature and to change local horizons irreversibly; “God’s gardeners” - as they liked to call themselves - did more than just prepare the ground for colonial penetration (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:12).

The men and women in the BICC embraced modernity and, consequently, moved away from older, more traditional practices and allegiances, including African traditional beliefs and superstitions. The BICC thus made inroads in so far as creating a new African identity in a contested space - Christianity and African religion posing different beliefs to Africans. One area where the church challenged African traditional practices was on the issue of marriage. The concept of *umtshado ongewele* (holy marriage), also discussed by Erlank (2003:9) in her Eastern Cape research project, challenged the very foundations of African traditional practices. Hence, polygamy was outlawed by the church, although difficulties were experienced in accepting members who were already in a polygamous relationship. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:13), in their study of the Tshidi, remark as follows regarding the ideology of the Christian missions on polygamy:

In terms of the categories of mission culture - the nuclear family, the private estate, and marriage as a sacred contract between individuals - the natives lived in sloth and moral chaos. The point has been made repeatedly in accounts of missions in Africa. Protestant ideology presupposed the monogamous household as the elemental unit of production and consumption. Thus, at the same time as they introduced the plow, with all its social and material corollaries, the evangelists took pains to denounce such practices as polygamy and the ‘collective’ ownership of resources. If civilisation was to flourish, the ‘holy family’ of the Christian cosmos, and its conventional, gender-based divisions of labour, had to triumph over ‘communitistic’ interdependence.

The results of this study indicate that the identity of Africans was significantly altered particularly with regard to gender. The church deployed the concept of egalitarianism among its members. Consequently, there was equality between man and women in terms of decision-making and roles within the family. Women are no longer confined to the kitchen but participate in all activities that support the family. The BICC, therefore, acted as a “trade union” for women on issues of women emancipation.

Conclusion

The BICC mission denounced what it called “heathen” beliefs and practices (BICC 1948:23). Initially, Africans were reluctant to accept the new gospel and its ideology. As the church began to train and establish a corps of indigenous workers, its impact on society was immense (BICC 1948:24). There was an urgent need for the new converts to accept Jesus Christ as their healer and saviour, thereby replacing the role of the cult of the ancestors in this regard.

This study asserts that the BICC missions had adverse effects in Zimbabwe, particularly on the identity of the Ndebele - who they were and what they valued. Identity entails everything that makes one an African. It refers to Africanness expressed in religion, belief and value systems, culture, traditions, art, music, etc. Christian mission teachings were geared at Christianising Africans so that they would think and act like Christians. Schools were used as indoctrination centres, where the curricula were specially designed to suit the interests of the missions. Consequently, Africans were taught to despise their own identity, religion and culture or what Ranger (2005:8) calls “religious consciousness”. The arrival of Christian missions in Zimbabwe, therefore, changed the ideology and perceptions of the Ndebele, ushering in new forms of religious consciousness.

References

- BICC (Brethren in Christ Church). 1948. *Sowing and reaping: The story of a work of God in Rhodesia 1898–1948*. Bulawayo: Rhodesia Printing and Publishing.
- Boulaga, E. 1984. *Christianity without fetishes: An African critique and recapture of Christianity*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 1991. *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa, Vol. 1*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Erlank, N. 2003. Missions and Christianity in the historiography of the Eastern Cape. (Paper read at the Eastern Cape: Historical Legacies and New Challenges Conference in East London, South Africa, 27–30 August 2003). (Unpublished study material).
- Green, M. 2003. *Priests, witches and power: Popular Christianity after mission in Southern Tanzania*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hastings, A. 1967. *Church and mission in modern Africa*. London: Burns and Oates.
- Iliife, J. 1995. *Africans: The history of a continent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kapenzi, G.Z. 1979. *The clash of cultures: Christian missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia*. Washington: University Press of America.

- Kirby, J.P. 1994. Cultural change and religious conversion in West Africa, in *Religion in Africa: Experience and expression*, edited by T.D. Blakeley, W.E.A. van Beek and D.L. Thompson. London: James Currey:51–71.
- Magesa, L. 1997. *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Mbiti, J. 1969. *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Nyamiti, C. 2006. Ancestor veneration in Africa.
<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/nyamiti.htm> [accessed 15 Aug. 2012].
- Oliver, R. and Atmore, A. 1994. *Africa since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ranger, T. 1986. Religious movements and politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Studies Review* 29(2), June.
- Ranger, T. 1994. Protestant missions in Africa: The dialectic of conversion in the American Methodist Episcopal Church in Eastern Zimbabwe, 1900–1950, in *Religion in Africa: Experience and expression*, edited by T.D. Blakeley, W.E.A. van Beek and D.L. Thompson. London: James Currey:275–313.
- Ranger, T. 1999. “Taking on the missionary’s task”: African spirituality and the mission churches of Manicaland in the 1930s. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29(2):175–201.
- Ranger, T. 2005. Mission Christianity. (Lecture at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in Oxford, UK, 4 October 2005).
http://www.ocms.ac.uk/docs/20051004_Ranger.pdf (accessed 16/08/12).
- Redekop, C. 2012. Anabaptist/Mennonite Traditions.
www.clas.ufl.edu/users/bron/PDF/Redekop.Anabaptism.pdf (accessed 05/09/12).
- Schoffeleers, M. 1994. Christ in African folk theology: The nganga paradigm, in *Religion in Africa: Experience and expression*, edited by T.D. Blakeley, W.E.A. van Beek and D.L. Thompson. London: James Currey:73–88.
- Spear, T. 1999. Toward the history of African Christianity, in *East African expressions of Christianity*, edited by T. Spear and I.N. Kimambo. London: James Currey:3–24.
- Thorpe, S.A. 1991. *African traditional religions*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Ubah, C.N. 1988. Religious change among the Igbo during the colonial period. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18(1):76–82.

“Be therefore reconciled to one another”: The church’s role in justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe

Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando¹

Abstract

The crisis in Zimbabwe has precipitated division in society. There is division across the political divide, within families and, sadly, within churches. This article explores the role of the church in healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. It argues that the era of the inclusive government provides a window of opportunity for the church to play a leading role in promoting healing and reconciliation. The article examines factors that have generated animosity and strife in Zimbabwe. It maintains that President Robert Mugabe’s tenure has created violence and tension. Unfortunately, the church has been caught up in the paralysis that has characterised the national body politic. The article examines the biblical mandate that the church has to promote justice, healing and reconciliation. It draws attention to some of the efforts that have been undertaken and suggests areas for further engagement. Overall, the article contends that justice should receive emphasis, even as the church promotes healing and reconciliation.

Keywords: Justice, healing, reconciliation, mission, politics, church, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

The recent Zimbabwean crisis, leading to the formation of a government of national unity in 2009, has had a deep impact on the society. The crisis has essentially divided communities into two: those who support President Robert Mugabe and his party on the one hand, and those opposed to him on the other. While there are some who have sought to be neutral, such has been the level of polarisation that these have been claimed by either side of the political divide. In the period of March to June 2008, the tension boiled over into open confrontation, with Mugabe and his supporters embarking on violence following his electoral defeat by Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the first round of elections (Chitando and Togarasei 2010). The violence was meant to secure Mugabe’s continued tenure as the leader of the country by any means necessary. The violence has left families and communities deeply divided. When one adds the impact of Gukurahundi from the early 1980s when up to 20 000

¹ Professor Lovemore Togarasei is Associate Professor at the Department of Theology and Religious studies at the University of Botswana. He can be contacted at togaraseil@mopipi.ub.bw. Professor Ezra Chitando is Theology Consultant on HIV at the World Council of Churches and Professor of History and Phenomenology of Religion in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe. He can be contacted at chitsa21@yahoo.com.

civilians in the Matabeleland and Midlands region were killed by government troops (CCJP 1997), the need for national healing and reconciliation becomes even clearer. The formation of the inclusive government in February 2009 ushered in a new era of optimism and a call for healing and reconciliation. It is our argument in this article that the church is strategically placed to contribute to this process.

This article will explore the role of the church in the quest for justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe and recognise the church’s place in the search for justice, peace and development. In the first section, the article will outline the social dislocation and strife that characterise the country in the contemporary period, justifying the need for justice, healing and reconciliation. In the second section, the article will explore the biblical underpinnings of the church’s participation in programmes on justice, healing and reconciliation. In the third section, the article will focus on factors that enable the church to undertake the task of justice, healing and reconciliation effectively. In the fourth section, the article will probe factors that undermine the church’s mission in pursuing justice, healing and reconciliation. These have to be known if the church is to be effective in its pursuit of justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. In conclusion, the article will challenge the church in Zimbabwe to adopt creative strategies to ensure the success of the exercise.

Strife in the promised land: Post-colonial experiences of violence in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was born from the barrel of the gun. Despite the suffering caused by the war, the majority of the indigenous people believed the suffering was worth it. They looked forward to the birth of a “promised land” after independence. It was widely believed that post-colonial Zimbabwe would be a land of peace, justice, prosperity and equality. Events following the achievement of independence unfortunately speak otherwise. From the dawn of independence from British colonial rule in 1980, Zimbabwe has experienced several crises that have torn the nation asunder. Mlambo et al. (2010) are right that there is now in Zimbabwe a culture of crisis, with the crisis formalised by leaders who normalise it, thriving on it and holding people at ransom. It is because of these crises that a call for national healing and reconciliation is justified. In this section, we will highlight some of the crises that have brought about divisions among the citizens of the nation.

Racial tensions

Zimbabwe was born out of a bitter war of liberation that lasted more than ten years, from the 1960s to the end of the 1970s. The war was racial, as it was fought between the black majority and the ruling white minority. This means when the war ended, there was need for racial reconciliation.

Although Mugabe, the then Prime Minister of the new nation extended a hand of reconciliation to the whites, the feeling among the majority of black Zimbabweans was that the whites did not accept this hand of reconciliation. Musicians like Simon Chimbetu expressed this frustration in songs:

KuBudiro kwatinogara, hauvaone: In the townships where we stay, they are not found.

KuKuwadzana, havanikwe: In Kuwadzana [one of the townships], they are not there.

Pamitambo mikuru yenyika, havasvikepo: At national gatherings they do not come.

The feeling was that the whites had continued with their supremacist attitude towards the blacks. This created tension between the two racial groups. Further, the white minority continued holding economic power through control of land, making many black Zimbabweans feel that the objectives of the war of liberation had not been achieved. It is these feelings and other political developments that finally led to the violent land invasions that characterised the country from 2000. We are going to discuss this land question as another cause of the need for reconciliation below. But before 2000, the strife and tension between the two races did not turn violent. What turned violent was the attempt to promote unity among all people in post-colonial Zimbabwe, which resulted in the Gukurahundi atrocities.

Gukurahundi atrocities

The Gukurahundi atrocities are one among the many reasons for the need for national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Details of these atrocities are given in the only document that has publicly addressed them, the 1997 report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) entitled, “Breaking the silence, building true peace”. There are also several references to the atrocities in other published and unpublished works. Several reasons are given by the perpetrators and the victims of the atrocities that took place in the Matebeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987. For the perpetrators, the violence was a result of the government’s attempt to bring about peace and unity in the country following the dissident uprisings thought to have been supported by the apartheid government of South Africa. However, the victims thought it was a result of the ethnic tensions between the Shona and the Ndebele and the political differences between PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF. Whatever the reasons were, justified or unjustified, the attempt to bring about peace got out of hand and resulted in the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians. According to the CCJP and LRF report, several people were killed by the North Korean-trained Fifth

Brigade. Some people disappeared without trace; some were maimed while the survivors suffered torture and shock, resulting in psychological disturbances. The atrocities resulted in many widows and orphans, who are suffering the effects up to this day. The atrocities also strained Shona–Ndebele relations, as some Ndebele believe that the Shona were responsible for the atrocities. There is therefore need for reconciliation of the people of Zimbabwe on this subject. The truth of what happened needs to be known and, where possible, victims compensated by the state and perpetrators punished.

Land crisis

More than any other issue, the land issue has divided the people of Zimbabwe. The unequal distribution of land between the blacks and the whites was at the centre of the war of liberation. The war of liberation was therefore fought on racial terms. After independence, attempts were made to correct the colonial land imbalance by buying land from white owners and settling in the indigenous people. This peaceful process was, however, overturned when land was acquired violently from the white farmers following ZANU-PF's defeat in the constitutional referendum of 2000 (Togarasei 2008). The land acquisition process was so violent that it has been termed a war (Mugabe 2001). Over forty-five white farmers were killed, with thousands of them losing their land to the land invaders (Togarasei 2008). Many black people were also killed and others displaced. In addition to causing further racial tensions between the white and the black people in Zimbabwe, the land crisis caused tensions among the black people themselves. The land invasions destroyed the livelihoods of many people who were employed in the once vibrant Zimbabwe agriculture sector. Chikuhwa (2006:36) has it that only 10% of the more than 300 000 farm workers were beneficiaries of the land reform programme. The rest were displaced by the farm invasions and their source of livelihood destroyed. These people have not forgiven the perpetrators of the land invasions, except for those few who benefitted from the invasions. There are also tensions between those who acquired and those who did not acquire land during the invasions. There is a strong belief among Zimbabweans that most of the people who acquired land were members of ZANU-PF. There is even fear that were the MDC to one day be voted into power, it would revisit the land issue to distribute it more equitably. The issue of multiple farm ownership by ZANU-PF heavy-weights and those close to them is a matter of concern and continues to divide the nation. In short, the land issue remains a potential time bomb for Zimbabweans. Being an agriculture-based economy, Zimbabwe's hopes of economic recovery are strongly based on the land. There is need for justice in its distribution and use.

Political violence during elections

The history of politics in Zimbabwe is marred by violence. From the time of colonialism, the political arena has been a site of violence. So deeply engraved in the country's politics is violence that it is celebrated in political rhetoric. Political slogans from almost all parties are punctuated by a series of calls for violence. Those of a different political persuasion are to be destroyed as slogans like "Pasi na..." (Down with ...) testify. Election times are almost war times, as they have been characterised by deaths. This is particularly true of all elections following the formation of the MDC in 1999. Both the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections were characterised by violence. On the eve of the 2005 election, in an open acceptance that previous elections were marred by violence, Mugabe called for non-violence in the coming elections. Unfortunately, these elections were also characterised by violence. Not only have lives been lost during these elections, there has also been wanton destruction of the property of those believed to belong to a different political persuasion. The 2008 elections were the worst in terms of violence. Over three hundred people are said to have died before and after the elections (Chitando and Togarasei 2010). It is for this reason that the government of national unity decided to establish the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration. Zimbabwean politics has resulted in a deeply divided nation.

Operation Murambatsvina

In May 2005, the government of Zimbabwe engaged in yet another event that has left a number of Zimbabweans hurting and in need of healing. This was an urban clean-up operation code-named Murambatsvina, a Shona name that means getting rid of the filth. According to official explanations, this operation was aimed at cleaning the cities of filth, illegal housing, criminals and illegal businesses. Although these objectives sounded noble, critics think that these were not the real objectives. They believe the operation was meant to punish urban voters for supporting the MDC in the then recently ended elections. Others blamed the methods and timing of this operation (UN 2005). Be that as it may, the operation saw many people losing their homes and livelihoods. The actual figure of those affected has been disputed but the United Nations has estimated that over 700 000 were directly affected and 2.4 million others indirectly affected (UN 2005). The "Zimbabwe we want", a national vision document penned by the church in Zimbabwe, underlines that the operation left many scars of bitterness, calling for healing (ZCBC et al. 2006).

Biblical basis for the church's quest for justice, healing and reconciliation

Justice, healing and reconciliation are key themes in Christian Scriptures. In this section, we examine the biblical basis for the church's engagement in the ministry of justice, healing and reconciliation. The biblical teaching on justice, healing and reconciliation need not be overemphasised though. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible emphasises the need for unity between God and humanity, among human beings and between humanity and the whole of creation. Whereas Genesis tells us of how the good relationship between God and the created order was strained by human sin, the rest of the Bible is full of accounts of how God has called people back to reconciliation with him. The New Testament shows that Jesus' role was to reconcile people and the whole created order back to God (Rom. 5:10). Colossians 1:19–20 says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." This role, initiated by Christ, continues to be played by Christians today. Paul emphasises the role of Christians in reconciliation: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18–19).

Biblical texts emphasise the need for justice if reconciliation is to be realised. Hebrew Bible prophets, for example, called for justice to the widow, the orphan and the poor:

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream (Amos 5:24).

...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (Mic. 6:8).

It is only when there is justice that reconciliation is realisable. As the prophets showed, justice is practical and realisable through practical actions. Thus, as the prophetic voice today, the church has to call for justice. It is mandated by the Scriptures to call for justice, to protect the downtrodden and the underprivileged. The call for justice and reconciliation implies that some parties to a relationship have been hurt. Reconciliation therefore requires healing first. Feelings of animosity need to be healed before one can extend a hand of reconciliation to those who have hurt them. The Bible gives this role of social healing to the church. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus teaches, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God." Peacemaking is therefore an essential role of the church.

The central ethical teaching of the Bible, especially the New Testament, is love. The whole salvation mission of Jesus was God's

demonstration of his love for humanity, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). This love is not only for believers, but for the whole creation. The followers of Jesus are taught to love one another (John 13:34) and Paul reminds Christians that if they do not have love, even if they prophesy, perform miracles, speak in tongues and do all wonders, they are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–3). If the church is to promote this ethic of love, it is compelled to work for justice, healing and reconciliation. The church cannot carry out its mission successfully in a nation or society torn by racial, ethnic, gender, class, and other differences. The Bible describes believers and the whole of humanity as a family (as all come from God and were created in God’s image), as a community and a single nation (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 2:11; 1 Pet. 4:17). It is then the responsibility of the church to see to it that there is harmony and unity in this household of God.

The Bible also, however, acknowledges that in the family of God, among humanity, there always arise tensions and wrong-doings. For this, the Bible teaches the need for forgiveness. Several times believers are reminded of the need to forgive those who have wronged them (Matt. 6:15; Matt. 18:21–22; Col. 3:13). This teaching places the church at the centre of the process of reconciliation. Forgiveness is what the church teaches and this alone is enough basis for the church to engage in reconciliation work.

Waging peace: The church and the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation

The foregoing section has examined the biblical basis for the church’s engagement in the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation. It has emerged that there are biblical passages that call upon the church to be a channel for justice, healing and reconciliation. These concepts lie at the very heart of what it means to be church. The church in Zimbabwe is therefore challenged to pursue the goal of justice, healing and reconciliation. According to Hazel Ayanga, a Christian is expected to play the important role of peacemaker. She says:

Christians are thus called to be reconcilers. They are expected to participate in the reconciliation process between God and humanity. But they are also expected to try and bring peace between warring groups of human beings. Christians are expected to help reconcile individuals who may differ and create conflict between themselves. Matthew 5:23 suggests that Christians should initiate the reconciliation processes in which they are involved both at the personal and interpersonal levels. The context of this text implies the importance of peaceful co-existence between Christians (Ayanga 2008:119).

The peacemaking role of the church should not be isolated from the church’s mission to work for justice. Without justice, there can be no sustainable peace; neither can healing and reconciliation be attained without

justice. In Zimbabwe, the political authorities have been keen to downplay the need for justice. The Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration, the inclusive government’s vehicle for healing and reconciliation, has made little or no reference to justice. How can healing and reconciliation be achieved when paintings of the Gukurahundi atrocities are confiscated by the police and the artist is hounded? How can healing and reconciliation be attained when perpetrators of human rights abuses have not acknowledged their actions? Indeed, how can there be healing and reconciliation when women who were raped remain in hiding? We will return to these concerns below in our discussion on truth telling as a prerequisite for lasting peace and healing in Zimbabwe.

It is our contention that the church in Zimbabwe must actively contribute towards the attainment of justice, healing and reconciliation on the basis of its commitment to these ideals. By insisting on having justice “roll down like waters” (Amos 5:24), the church will contribute towards a more sustainable model of healing and reconciliation. Current efforts to side-step the need for justice must be challenged vigorously through prophetic action on the part of the church. The church must actively challenge the political leadership in the country to invest heavily in the pursuit of justice. Without justice, only a shaky foundation for healing and reconciliation can be built. Justice offers a viable basis for social transformation. Thus:

Justice, especially distributive and social justice, is about internalizing and practicalizing the categorical imperative in our public and private life. It is about the exercise of economic and political power, in ways that will reduce conflict, engender cooperation and the spirit of community. It is about taking action to (a) vigorously reduce poverty and inequality, as instances of structural violence in society, (b) render impunity, reflected in the gross abuse and violation of human rights and related forms of physical violence unacceptable, and (c) treat human beings as ends in themselves, with dignity and respect, and not subjecting them to psychological violence (Jinadu 2007:198–199).

Zimbabwean society will not experience peace, healing and reconciliation when there are gross economic inequalities. Peace will remain elusive when the privileged few accumulate mansions while millions wallow in poverty. Healing is a mirage when perpetrators of human rights violations continue to strike terror in the hearts of survivors. Reconciliation is impossible when citizens continue to be threatened with violence from the state that has the obligation to protect them. As Jinadu clarifies in the citation above, justice provides a sound basis for social transformation. When a society works for justice, the prospects for healing and reconciliation are enhanced. It is incumbent upon the church in Zimbabwe to strive for justice, as this will

facilitate the emergence of a robust and prosperous society. In this process, truth telling is very important.

Truth telling as mandatory

It is vital for the church to play a leading role in facilitating truth telling in Zimbabwe. There are far too many mysterious deaths that need to be explained. There will be no lasting justice and reconciliation before the truth has been unravelled. Politicians may not be trusted to tell the truth: their profession appears to have made a covenant to ensure the suppression of truth. Both the ZANU-PF and MDC politicians cannot be trusted with truth telling, as they wish to gloss over the truth for political expedience. There is need to establish who did what and where in order to enable reconciliation to take place.

In reiterating the need for truth telling, we are mindful of the reality that some activists have cautioned against becoming engrossed in truth. In a recent publication, Charles Villa-Vicencio, who was actively involved in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has suggested that the quest for truth should not be allowed to sabotage the quest for stability, peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, the preoccupation with peace should not lose sight of the greater aim. According to him:

Trials are important and have a crucial role to play in dealing with the past, but additional means must be found to achieve the level of reconciliation that Africa needs to restore itself. I am suggesting that a broad-based, both formal and informal national conversation is one way. The quest for truth can be endless. It can also be unrelated to the immediate needs of those seeking to put a terrible past behind them. Truth seeking can become esoteric, academic and unrelated to the immediate needs of those directly affected by past events. The concern of victims and those related to them is primarily at the level of clarification of events affecting their lives and those around them. They often do not want to know the kind of detail that scholars and others are demanding (Villa-Vicencio 2009:110; italics original).

We acknowledge Villa-Vicencio's experience in facilitating political reconciliation across various parts of Africa and especially in South Africa. His achievements as a theologian and activist are noteworthy. His impatience with academic niceties is understandable, as he has become acquainted with the harsh realities of the real world (assuming that academics inhabit a different world). While we appreciate his concern with cessation of hostilities and the creation of enabling environments in formerly troubled spaces, we do not share his downplaying of truth telling as a critical aspect of laying the foundations for sustainable peace. We are convinced that the church has a theological mandate to seek the truth, as the truth sets people free. In the pastoral letter on national healing and

reconciliation entitled, “God can heal the wounds of the afflicted”, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (2009:10) says:

We appeal to perpetrators of these atrocities, accomplices, and instigators of violence to acknowledge the evil deeds and in conscience own up and make restitution as Zacchaeus did (Luke 19:8). You need to be justified before God to find peace.

While we agree with Villa-Vicencio that the quest for truth must not be recondite and an academic pastime, we are persuaded that truth telling is at the heart of healing and reconciliation. Whom can the survivor of rape forgive if the perpetrator does not confess to the rape? Whom can a woman whose tongue was cut up, allegedly for being a “sell-out”, forgive when no one claims responsibility? We believe that it is only when the perpetrators of violence, especially those who held positions of power and authority, confess that foundations for lasting peace can be laid. When perpetrators of violence continue to hide behind anonymity, the danger is real that they will engage in atrocities in the future.

Truth telling at least gives survivors of violence the chance to know their tormentors and to understand their motivations. This possibility does not arise when there is no emphasis on truth telling in the search for healing and reconciliation. When real human beings come out in the open to acknowledge their wrong-doing and ask for forgiveness, fertile grounds are being laid for integration. This is not possible when all acts of violence are attributed to some abstract and impersonal system. We know that systems do not set people’s houses on fire: flesh and blood humans do! We know that systems do not engage in ethnic cleansing: men and women do! It is therefore necessary that those who were involved in perpetrating violence against their fellow citizens, particularly those using state resources, come out and acknowledge their actions. This is not only good for the victims, but equally so for the perpetrators of violence themselves.

The church as an agent of justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe

Why have we placed so much confidence in the church in Zimbabwe’s quest for justice, healing and reconciliation? This is a fair question to ask, as in most cases it is clear that the church has not lived up to expectations. Musa W. Dube of Botswana has observed that African women theologians criticise the church for letting women down, while continuing to ask the church to do more. She writes:

The church, amongst African women’s theology, can be described as ‘the beloved problem child.’ Circle women largely seem orphaned children who have no one else to turn to than their ‘adoptive’ and abusive parent, the church. They speak very critically of the church, its policies and its

leadership; and they call for radical changes, but at the end of the day, it seems the only place for them to run and seek solace and comfort is in the arms of the church. ‘The church must...The church should...The church is called to...The church needs to...The church can...’ are endless calls and recommendations from Circle authors (Dube 2009:190).

From the citation above, one can infer that many activists are aware of the potential of the church to become a significant force in transforming society. However, they are also painfully aware of its limitations. In this section, we would like to explore some of the factors that enable the church to play a leading role in the quest for justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. We are convinced that the church is strategically placed to facilitate social cohesion in the country. According to Specioza Kabahuma (2009:38–39), the church has the potential to become an effective agent of reconciliation because of the various roles that it plays in society. These include the church as prophet; the church as God’s watch-tower; the church as a teacher and civic educator; the church as defender and promoter of gospel values and human rights; the church as a guide to the people, and the church as a reconciler. While each one of the factors raised below could constitute a separate narrative in its own right, space considerations have led us to summarise these themes below.

Biblical, theological and historical factors

In an earlier section, we outlined the biblical factors that compel the church to be actively involved in the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation. We highlighted how Christians are called upon to become activists for peace and harmony. The church has been mandated to become a peace-seeking and peace-enabling institution. If the church is to be faithful to its biblical calling, it has to prioritise its peace-seeking mission in Zimbabwe. Christian sacred texts constantly remind the church to renew and transform society so that justice and peace reign. The church’s participation in the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe is therefore not an incidental undertaking: it belongs to the very heart of what it means to be church.

There are also strong theological factors that prompt the church to become a participant in the search for healing and reconciliation. In a context in which many individuals, families and communities are traumatised, the church has the theological obligation of providing pastoral counselling and care. In order for the church to become contextually sensitive and relevant, it must develop a ministry with large ears and quick feet. Such a ministry is necessarily compassionate (Chitando 2007:53). A compassionate church works for justice and confronts human rights abuses. The church in Zimbabwe has a theological obligation to journey with individuals and communities as they strive for justice, healing and

reconciliation. A church that watches from the sidelines constitutes a theological contradiction. The church’s role in promoting justice, healing and reconciliation can be deduced from the theme of the Catholic Church’s Second African Synod (2009): “The church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace” (AFCAST 2009).

Alongside the biblical and theological reasons outlined above, the church also has a long history in peace building and conflict resolution in Zimbabwe. During the colonial period, the church sought to bring the nationalists and the colonial government to the negotiating table. Since independence, the church has played an important role in efforts to resolve the Zimbabwean crisis. Leaders from various denominations, including Bishops Patrick Mutume of the Catholic Church, Trevor Manhanga of the umbrella body the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, and Sebastian Bakare of the Anglican Church have undertaken peacemaking initiatives at both the local and national levels (Muchena 2004). Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe of the Family of God Church and others have also been involved in initiatives to promote dialogue between ZANU-PF and the MDC. Various ecumenical bodies have also participated in the struggle for a democratic and peaceful Zimbabwe (Gokova 2010).

In addition to high-level engagement with political leaders, various ecumenical bodies and churches have promoted healing and reconciliation at local levels. In our view, this is more effective than national initiatives that appear remote and far removed from the daily experiences of ordinary citizens. That Mugabe and Tsvangirai share tea and cakes at their Munhumutapa offices does not immediately translate to healing and reconciliation in remote villages. Initiatives such as Churches in Manicaland have sought to effect healing and reconciliation at the local level. They have invited local politicians and activists from the various political parties to forums, thereby facilitating openness and tolerance among them. They have questioned the role of senior politicians in facilitating healing and reconciliation. Thus:

For example, informed by the South African and Rwandan experiences, arguments by some church alliances are that because issues of national healing and reconciliation are embedded in moral obligations, the church or church-based independent organisations can claim ‘moral authority’ and ‘legitimacy’ to lead the National Healing and Reconciliation process, as politicians are viewed as not having the moral integrity to remain neutral and/or separate national issues from party political agendas. Some of the church alliances interpret this as a process of bringing victims and perpetrators together, culminating in acts of forgiveness (Muchakanja 2010:8).

Structural factors

Alongside the factors mentioned above, we are also convinced that there are structural factors that make the church a strategic participant in the search for justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. To begin with, the church has a longer reach than all the political parties collectively. The church enjoys the membership of activists from various political parties. It houses survivors and perpetrators of violence. It administers sacraments to senior political leaders, as well their foot soldiers. The church therefore has the rare opportunity of bringing together people with diverse political opinions. It needs to capitalise on this privilege to inculcate cultures of peace among its members.

The church also possesses the human resource base required to facilitate justice, healing and reconciliation in the country. The majority of Zimbabwean citizens identify themselves with the church. Logically, this suggests that civic organisations that focus on peace building are manned by Christians. This suggests that the church needs to be more proactive in inviting such activists to assist in programmes that seek to promote healing and integration. As we will argue below, the church has not always sought to engage the expertise among its lay members.

In an essay assessing the church's engagement with the Zimbabwean crisis, David Kaulemu argues that the churches have significant institutional capacities and social resources that enable them to have a stronger political voice. He argues that the church needs to capitalise on these in order to effect healing and reconciliation. He writes:

Not only have many Zimbabwean Christians been credible agents of justice and peace, they have expressed human solidarity in their contributions to education, health, culture, relief, and social and economic development within Zimbabwe. As such, Zimbabwean churches possess structures, institutions, organizations, systems, and personnel that can contribute to national transformation and development. This enhances their credibility for engaging government and state structures (Kaulemu 2010:51).

Credibility

Although below we will argue that the church has lost some of its credibility, we are convinced that, generally, the majority of Zimbabweans still regard the church as a credible participant in the quest for justice, healing and reconciliation. This credibility is a result of the factors outlined above. Many Zimbabweans have seen the church attending to survivors of political violence regardless of their political affiliation. They have heard many church leaders proclaiming messages of healing and tolerance. They have also witnessed many church leaders taking grave risks by challenging serious human rights abuses in the country. In general, many Zimbabweans

retain the idea of the church as a credible institution that has worked towards peace, healing and reconciliation.

The credibility that the church retains is a valuable resource in peace building. The church is better placed to mobilise communities to work towards justice, healing and reconciliation than political parties. Political parties have been directly implicated in acts of violence and this has diminished their standing as credible agents of peace and healing. Since the church has been actively involved in mediation, it is well placed to promote reconciliation. Communities are more likely to regard the church as a sincere and neutral role-player than political parties. There is need for the political parties to enter into serious dialogue with the church in order to ensure that the process of promoting national healing becomes more effective and enduring. The current situation in which the church has been marginalised is not satisfactory.

The factors raised in this section draw attention to the church’s relevance to the struggle to defuse, contain and eventually overcome the Zimbabwean crisis. While some critics might charge that the mission of the church is to get people to heaven, our interpretation of the church’s engagement is informed by the conviction that it is by engaging with the felt needs of the community that the church ensures its relevance. It is by challenging abuses of power, promoting justice and reconciliation that the church fulfils its calling as a transformative force. In a book examining Zimbabwean realities and Christian responses, Frans J. Verstraelen (1998:65) makes the following pertinent observation:

Involvement of churches in the democratization process does not mean that they wish to take over politics from government. What urges them to support, or even initiate, a process towards full democracy is the ferment of the Gospel which they have to keep alive and to defend, and which does challenge not only society and its leaders but also the churches themselves. The core of the Gospel is its radical orientation towards the poor, the marginalized and dispossessed. This implies that the Christians and their churches have to strive for social justice in places where policies are formulated and decisions are taken in politics.

Challenges facing the church

In the paragraphs above, we have explored the biblical approaches to justice, healing and reconciliation, the church’s engagement with these themes, as well as factors that promote the church’s engagement with these themes. In this section, we highlight some of the challenges that the church needs to overcome in its struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation in the country. We raise these challenges in order to assist the church in furthering its role in resolving the Zimbabwean crisis, and not to discount its centrality to peace building and reconciliation in the country.

Limited investment in peace-building and reconciliation initiatives

Although some church leaders have played important roles in the struggle for peace and healing in Zimbabwe, the majority have not regarded this as an integral part of their duties. It is sad to note that many church leaders continue to regard the political arena as dirty. As a result, they do not consider political engagement to be a critical aspect of their duties as leaders. Their non-engagement has created a vacuum that has allowed ZANU-PF in particular to sacralise Mugabe's tenure. One of African Christianity's greatest challenges is to de-sacralise political power. This point is reiterated by Martin O. Egbuogu, a Nigerian Catholic priest who argues that when state power is sacralised, tyrannical and totalitarian regimes emerge. He writes:

As we have seen earlier, it is quite certain that whenever rulers turn into less humans, (through auto-divinization), those ruled also turn into less humans through alienating and exploitative processes and/or procedures. Here the ruled often are made to become quasi or even literal discardable instruments that are at the service of those who rule. All these radically contradict all that Christ, his life and mission stood for (Egbuogu 2006:285).

The limited investment in peace-building and reconciliation initiatives by church leaders in Zimbabwe has meant that the government-sponsored initiative is the most visible one. Church leaders have not built on the potential that they have to influence change and bring lasting peace to the country. There is an urgent need for most church leaders to recognise their role in promoting peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Ecumenical bodies such as the Zimbabwe National Pastors' Conference must play a more prominent role in equipping church leaders, including those in remote communities, to become agents of peace and reconciliation.

Inadequate engagement with lay professionals

The current ecclesiology in Zimbabwe tends to privilege ordained men (and a few women). Unfortunately, this leaves the church ill-equipped to respond to the fast-changing political terrain. This is regrettable and avoidable, as the church has many lay professionals who are willing to assist if their expertise is required and acknowledged. The church needs to call upon its members who are specialists in promoting dialogue and healing to lead in the formulation and implementation of programmes that seek to achieve these goals. Insisting on the leadership of the ordained ministers who may not have the necessary knowledge and skills is retrogressive.

The foregoing observation leads us to recommend that theological training for both the ministers and lay members of the church be diversified to include the attainment of skills in peace building. These skills will be relevant to the resolution of diverse conflicts that will invariably emerge in

communities. The church needs to take its role as an agent of reconciliation seriously and invest towards this cause. By recognising and utilising the peace-building competence among certain of its lay members, the church in Zimbabwe will be better equipped to play a leading role in the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation.

Absence of long-term strategies for peace building

The church’s role in the struggle for peace and integration in Zimbabwe has tended to focus on the ongoing crisis. While this is helpful, the church needs to adopt a more long-term view in terms of conflict prevention. In this article, we have illustrated how various historical periods have been characterised by conflict and violence. What is required is a more strategic approach to violence. The church needs to invest in ensuring that today’s young people are exposed to, and uphold, cultures of peace. Programmes targeting homes, schools, media and other sites of struggle must be designed to promote cultures of peace.

In particular, the church in Zimbabwe must challenge aggressive masculinities that celebrate violence as the mark of manhood. The indoctrination of young people to prove their manhood and patriotism by destroying human lives must be critiqued. Party slogans that promote hatred and destruction of political opponents must be exposed and rejected. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches’ promise to speak and preach against violence in all its forms without fear or favour (ZCC 2009:4) must be actualised. By adopting long-term strategies to promote peace, the church would contribute immensely towards the emergence of a healthy and successful Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

Following years of conflict and violence, the era of the inclusive government in Zimbabwe offers some respite and a valuable opportunity to effect healing and reconciliation. In this article, we have argued that the quest for healing and reconciliation should be premised on the search for justice. We have examined the biblical understanding of key concepts and have argued that the church in Zimbabwe must appreciate that the struggle for justice, healing and reconciliation is integral to its calling. We have maintained that truth telling must be built into all efforts that seek to take the nation forward. Although the task of bringing about justice, healing and reconciliation is daunting, herein lie the promise and the hope: “Indeed, God can and will heal the wounds of the afflicted” (ZCBC 2009:12).

References

- AFCAST (African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching). 2009. *The church in service to reconciliation, peace, and justice: Preparing for the Second African Synod*. Harare: AFCAST.
- Ayanga, H. 2008. Waging peace: The role of religion in reconciliation processes, in *Religion and politics in Africa: Theological reflections for the 21st century*, edited by P.I. Gichure and Diane B. Stinton. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa:112–123.
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation. 1997. *Breaking the silence, building true peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988*. Harare: CCJP and LRF.
- Chikuhwa, J.W. 2006. *Zimbabwe at the crossroads*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse.
- Chitando, E. 2007. *Living with hope: African churches and HIV/AIDS*, Vol. 1. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Chitando, E. and Togarasei, L. 2010. “June 2008, verse 27”: The church and the 2008 Zimbabwean political crisis. *African Identities* 8(2), May:151–162.
- Dube, M.W. 2009. HIV and AIDS research and writing in the Circle of African Women Theologians, 2002–2006, in *Compassionate circles: African women theologians facing HIV*, edited by E. Chitando and N.M. Hadebe. Geneva: World Council of Churches:173–196.
- Egbuogu, M.O. 2006. *Christianity and the de-sacralization of state power: An insight into the theological basis of democracy*. Enugu: SNAAP Press.
- Gokova, J. 2010. *Political participation: An ecumenical perspective, in Political participation in Zimbabwe*, edited by D. Kaulemu. Harare: AFCAST:104–111.
- Jinadu, L.A. 2007. Justice, peace and reconciliation. *Journal of Inculturation Theology* 9(2):196–218.
- Kabahuma, S. 2009. The church’s potential as an effective agent of reconciliation and peace-building, in *The church in service to reconciliation, justice, and peace: Preparing for the Second African Synod*, edited by AFCAST. Harare: AFCAST:38–42.
- Kaulemu, D. 2010. Church responses to the crisis in Zimbabwe. *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 8(1), April:47–54.
- Mlambo, A., Vambe, M.T. and Zegeye, A. 2010. The culture of crisis and crisis of culture in Zimbabwe. *African Identities* 8(2), May:89–91.
- Muchakanja, P. 2010. *National healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities*. Wynberg: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.
- Muchena, D.T. 2004. The church and reconciliation: A mission impossible? in *Zimbabwe: Injustice and political reconciliation*, edited by B. Raftopolous and T. Savage. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation:257–270.
- Mugabe, R.G. 2001. *Inside the Third Chimurenga*. Harare: Department of Information and Publicity, Office of the President and Cabinet.

- Togarasei, L. 2008. Reading and interpreting the Bible during Zimbabwe’s 2000 Fast Track Land Reform Programme, in *Changing relations between churches in Europe and Africa: The internationalization of Christianity and politics in the 20th century*, edited by K. Kunter and J.H. Schjørring. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag:183–190.
- United Nations (UN). 2005. Report of the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka. New York: UN.
- Verstraelen, F.J. 1998. *Zimbabwean realities and Christian responses: Contemporary aspects of Christianity in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Villa-Vicencio, C. 2009. *Walk with us and listen: Political reconciliation in Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference). 2009. God can heal the wounds of the afflicted: A pastoral letter on national healing and reconciliation. Harare: ZCBC.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference), EFZ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches). 2006. The Zimbabwe we want: Towards a national vision for Zimbabwe. Harare: ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC.
- ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches). 2009. Pastoral letter to the nation. Harare: ZCC.

The quest for God's irregulars: The legacy of Arthur Shearly Cripps and the role of the Anglican Church in nation building in Zimbabwe today

Gift M. Makwasha¹

Abstract

The paper argues that Arthur Shearly Cripps was an "irregular" missionary whose legacy can today help the Anglican Church, and indeed all churches in Zimbabwe, to discern what their role is in nation building. At a time when most missionaries would not dare stand against the colonial government, Shearly Cripps stood up as a human rights activist who diligently defended the rights of the oppressed, poor Africans. The paper focuses on how Shearly Cripps dealt with the issues of the poor; ecumenism and national cooperation; justice, cheap labour, unjust wages and taxation; the land question; as well as racial equality and the franchise question. The paper calls for more of God's irregulars like Shearly Cripps. It argues that Zimbabwe needs Christian leaders who have the spiritual and political tenacity to address these socio-political and economic ills that continue to bedevil the masses today. Shearly Cripps left us a legacy. If we learn from it, our efforts in nation building will create a post-independence country with a truly democratic culture.

Keywords: Shearly Cripps, Anglican Church, Zimbabwe, ecumenism, justice, cheap labour, racial equality.

Introduction

"My immediate object is that of informing you that the Rev. Shearly Cripps has arrived from Rhodesia ...Shearly Cripps has cared nothing for social ostracism, ridicule, and censure... with a single eye to the loyal adherence to the Christian faith, he has made himself not merely the defender of the natives, but their wise counselor and friend. In short those of us who have been privileged to go through the fire with him, owe him debt we can never repay (Steere 1973:92)."²

John White remarked: "When the annals of Rhodesia are faithfully recorded, and the personalities who have influenced the country most potently and beneficially are written, the Rev. Arthur Shearly Cripps will

¹ Dr Gift M. Makwasha is author of *The repression, resistance, and revival of the ancestor cult in the Shona churches of Zimbabwe* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). Currently, he is Rector of St John's, St James's Episcopal Church in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. His interests are in Mission Studies and World Christianity. He can be contacted at mgift1972@gmail.com.

² John Harris said these words in 1918 in a letter to G.K.A. Bell (later bishop of Chichester).

occupy a very high place.” (Andrews 1935:120). “He is a great and fearless fighter. Nothing will turn him aside from what he considers the path of duty.” (Steere 1973:98).³ He also described him as “our modern St. Francis of Assisi - in many respects a worthy successor of that great Saint” (Andrews 1935:123–124).⁴ His followers saw him as “a holy man, a man of prayer”.⁵ God’s irregular is the title that Douglas V. Steere chose for his 1973 Rhodesian epic biography of Arthur Shearly Cripps.

This paper will explore the heroics that earned Shearly Cripps that title of “*God’s irregular*”. It will also explore how his legacy as a human rights activist in Mashonaland can inform the role of the Anglican Church in nation building in Zimbabwe today. The paper calls for more of God’s irregulars like Shearly Cripps who are needed to address the socio-political and economic ills bedeviling Zimbabwe today. The focus will be on the manner in which Arthur Shearly Cripps dealt with the following issues: (a) the commitment to serve the poor; (b) ecumenism and national cooperation; and (c) justice for the natives, which include (i) cheap labour, unjust wages and taxes; (ii) the land question; (iii) racial equality and the franchise question.⁶

Southern Rhodesia: The land of struggle

In 1888/1889, Cecil John Rhodes’s British South Africa Company (BSAC) received a “Royal Charter” to carry out trade and commerce, and to provide “civilization” and “good governance in the referred territories” (Farrant 1966:68).⁷ In 1890, Frank Johnson led the Pioneer Column and raised the British flag at Fort Salisbury, thereby marking the official European settlement in Mashonaland (Farrant 1966:68).⁸ The next twenty years after

³ John White also said that Shearly Cripps loved Mashonaland “with a rare and deep affection” (Andrews 1935:117).

⁴ Edward Chipunza also regarded Shearly Cripps as a saint. Bp. Francis Paget thought the same: “I think I know a saint when I see one, and I just let him alone.” (Steere 1973:125, 138).

⁵ Mavura said that of all Europeans in Southern Rhodesia, Shearly Cripps was “the nearest to Jesus Christ in the witness and example of his life” (Steele 1975:155).

⁶ In his later years, Shearly Cripps worked with venereal disease patients, and was involved in the destocking controversy. However, the limitation of space does not allow these issues to be included in this paper.

⁷ Rhodes and Charles Rudd understood the concession to have given them “the full power to do all things ... necessary” and that it was like giving a man the whole of Africa. However, Lobengula argued that he had simply granted Rudd “the right to dig in one hole” (Wesseling 1996:295).

⁸ Rhodes, whose greatest passion was the expansion of the British Empire, welcomed Europeans and gave them generous grants of land for agriculture, cattle ranching, and mining. In 1904, the European population numbered 12 596; in 1911, 23 606; in 1921, 33 621; and in 1926, 39 174. “During the first nine months of 1927, 3,574 migrants entered the country, 1,522 of who were born in the United Kingdom, 1,168 were British born in

the Rudd Concession saw twenty different missionary groups establishing themselves in Southern Rhodesia.⁹ With the Anglican Church came Arthur Shearly Cripps.

The legacy of Arthur Shearly Cripps

Shearly Cripps was born on 10 June 1869 to William Cripps and Catherine Charlotte Shearly. An Oxford-educated poet and missionary, he arrived in Southern Rhodesia on 6 January 1901. He had been preparing to be an attorney, as his family had a law firm in Tunbridge Wells, Kent (Doyle 1975:17,19). This academic background is important to note for two reasons. First, the legal background helped him to understand the various laws of Southern Rhodesia.¹⁰ Second, it was from Oxford that he learned the Franciscan way, which influenced his missionary method (Steere 1973:13).

There were several influences behind his choice of a missionary career. First was the long poem “The death of St. Francis” quoted in the *Oxford book of English mystical verse* (Nicholson and Lee 1916). Steere (1973:13) believes that the poem, which talks about St Francis’s experience of the five wounds of Christ on his own body, the stigmata, and his longing to serve the poor of Christ, must have influenced Shearly Cripps, who was himself a poet. Second was his Trinity College friend Frank Weston (who later became bishop of Zanzibar). Weston and Shearly Cripps both subscribed to the view of Christ in solidarity with the poor. Steer (1973:15) thinks that Weston’s decision to take a post near the equator in Zanzibar and East Africa also steered Shearly Cripps’s decision to go to Rhodesia. Third, Shearly Cripps had also read Oliver Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, which exposed the bad activities of the enterprise of Rhodes’s chartered company in Southern Rhodesia. The book depicted Rhodes as the Rhodesian Ahab seizing the vineyard of the poor Naboth. At the end of the book, Tpr. Halket, ordered by his ruthless captain to shoot a captive, liberates the captive and is himself executed. Steere argues that this story moved Shearly Cripps to go to Mashonaland to show the Africans that there were white men like him who were dedicated to their cause.¹¹

South Africa, 483 were Dutch South Africans, and 237 were European aliens.” (Smith 1928:25–26).

⁹ Among the major denominations were the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Dutch Reformed Church and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

¹⁰ Shearly Cripps was also educated in classical languages, literature and English history. With this vast knowledge, few equalled him in putting facts together (Doyle 1975:178).

¹¹ “The frontispiece of the book consisted of a gruesome reproduction of a photograph of the swinging bodies of three African captives who had been strung up to the branches of a mimosa tree, as an example of what would happen to traitorous leaders, by a small band of white Rhodesians who are shown lounging about complacently as though they were satisfied with a good morning’s work.” In general, the natives in both South Africa and

The bishop of Mashonaland named him *missioner pro tem* to the newly established Wreningham station, in the Manyeni Reserve of the Charter District near Enkeldoorn (Steele 1975:152). There he built the famous Maronda Mashanu mission, which became his home for fifty-one years (Doyle 1975:23). It was from that Maronda Mashanu mission base that Shearly Cripps built his legacy as a human rights activist and defender of the poor. To that I now turn.

The commitment to serve the poor

The period in which Shearly Cripps arrived in the Charter District was very critical for the Shona. They had suffered more than half a century of persecution from the ruthless Ndebele on the one side and the Gaza on the other (Knight-Bruce 1895:18, 30, 36, 39–40). Then colonialism came with its own problems:

[T]he Mashona found themselves with a new set of masters who, they noted, did not in the first instance raid and slaughter. Instead they tried to harness them to dig in their mines, to work on their farms, and build their roads and railways. Where the Matebele, with their fire and spears, came and went away again, the whites stayed on, and there were continuous intrusions into their lives. With the new masters, too, came rinderpest and other diseases which devastated their herds of cattle; tampering with their women; expulsion from the land that housed the bones of their ancestors; and the imprisonment for offences which violated no code of their own (Steere 1973:39).

It was to these demoralised natives that Shearly Cripps came. On arriving in the Charter District, he undertook twenty-four mile round trips between the African Mission he served at Wreningham and the little white settlement of Enkeldoorn without tiring (Andrews 1935:124).

There was no proper road to travel; nothing but a small African foot-path some eighteen inches wide with almost as many twists as the trail of a snake, and there were two small 'drifts' or fords to get through in the wet season in order to reach it. Later he was to get some real jogging in weekly trips from Enkeldoorn to Umvuma, thirty-two miles away, where he took services for the Africans in the morning and then by swift walking and jogging managed to get to Enkeldoorn for the evening service (Steere 1973:31–32).

Cullen Gouldsbury (1907), in his book *God's outpost*, described Enkeldoorn as "a village that had been 'forgotten by God and the Government.'" ¹² Shearly Cripps committed himself to serving the forgotten people there. To

Rhodesia were left distressed in the aftermath of the failed Jameson Raid on Paul Kruger in 1895 in South Africa, and the Matebele–Mashona rebellion of 1896 (Steer 1973:15–16).

¹² Gouldsbury visited Enkeldoorn in 1903 and lived there for a few years (Steere 1973:31).

the natives, he was “an irregular white man” who belonged to them. They knew he was one of them and that he loved them. He baptised them and conducted their services. He ate their food, sat before their fires and lived their simple life.¹³

Shearly Cripps practised the Franciscan rule of sharing, which said that the friar must try to satisfy the beggar’s needs “at whatever cost” (Moorman 1950:32). The natives thus soon realised that “Baba Cripps” was a man who lived for others, one who never denied anyone in need (Andrews 1935:135, 145). Many times, he gave away “his own clothing, his blankets, and his shoes, as well as impoverishing himself in the times of famine and want in order to keep the immediate African community in at least a meager supply of grain for flour”. “Baba Cripps carried us through”, the natives would say (Andrews 1935:34, 65, 68).¹⁴

Africans called him Baba Mupandi, “the man who went about as a poor man”, and Baba Chapepa, “the man who helps the sick and feeds hungry people”.¹⁵ They also called him Kambandokoto, “the man who went about as a poor man - another St. Francis” (Jenkins and Stebbing 1966:40). Using personal money, he sent native teachers to colleges. He provided for their elementary needs and met whatever emergencies they had “to his last shilling”.¹⁶ It is actually said that at the end of his life Shearly Cripps was

¹³ According to Andrews, Shearly Cripps’s house was a simple pole-mud hut and his furniture mere “rough home-made chairs and a table, and an iron bedstead covered with a few shabby blankets”. Shearly Cripps drew close to the poor on the basis that Jesus Christ himself left his divine glory and dwelt among human beings like one of them (Andrews 1935:119, 122). Shearly Cripps subscribed to the Franciscan ideal of “living in simple dwellings”. St Francis insisted that the friars should rejoice in living among the poor, weak and sick, and among lepers and beggars. The friars’ dwellings “must be of the humblest, just a rough hut made of a few branches” and their clothing be of “the simplest kind of covering”. This was a way of serving what St Francis called “Lady Poverty”. See Moorman (1950:36, 52, 63, 96). For some examples of Shearly Cripps’s humble acts, see Steere (1973:44, 99–101, 109).

¹⁴ According to Jenkins and Stebbing (1966:39–40.), Shearly Cripps despised those who bore much while others had little. His friend John White practised the same ethic. See Andrews (1935:186).

¹⁵ Many stories of generosity are told about Shearly Cripps. Two examples will suffice here. On one occasion, he appeared in the evening Anglican service in Enkeldoorn wearing his surplice not over his cassock but over his torn khaki clothes. His friend, Mrs Diana Schultz, discovered that one afternoon while walking to Enkeldoorn he had come across a stricken African who had no blanket and had stripped his cassock and given it to the man. On another occasion, his cassock was used as a grave pillow for a poor African man whose family could not afford a blanket. He then proceeded to do the service in his shirtsleeves (Steere 1973:35, 65, 68, 73). John White said that if Shearly Cripps heard about a sick Mashona twenty miles away, he would “take his blanket on his shoulders and march off to see him, sometimes doing the journey in a single day” (Andrews 1935:122). See also Doyle (1975:61).

very impoverished “by his ceaseless assistance to the Africans with whom he was surrounded” (Steere 1973:150).¹⁷

Asked about the greatest religious lesson he received from Baba Cripps, Rev. Cyprian Tambo replied: “He handed me books but he didn’t teach much. It was from his life that we learned.” (Steere 1973:101). Shearly Cripps even refused opportunities for personal luxuries for the sake of the poor he served.¹⁸ His family found his willingness to part with material things “irregular”. His sister called it “madness”. He subscribed to a way of life in which one “voluntarily” joins the poor in their poverty. It is solidarity with the needy and a gospel ethic (Steere 1973:36). Also, Shearly Cripps was a Franciscan. St Francis taught that the poverty of any man brings shame on those who are unwilling to share, and that it is theft if we do not give to the one who is needier (Moorman 1950:7, 19).¹⁹

Since independence, corruption has ravaged Zimbabwe.²⁰ Today it is a country of the haves and have-nots. Politicians and business bureaucrats are enjoying excessive luxuries while the poor masses are struggling. Shearly Cripps left a legacy of what it means to serve the people. It teaches that life is not about personal gain but giving to the community. Our politicians today seek material gains but do little to improve the lives of their constituencies.²¹ Zimbabwe can be a better country if the leaders absorb themselves with the question of poverty and the distribution of national

¹⁶ For example, as early as 1902, when his poem titled “Jonathan” won the Oxford University Prize Poem contest of about £90, which then was a considerable sum, even before he had received it “he had plans for spending the money to help with a teaching program for the natives in the Enkeldoorn area”. In the poem, David is told in his dire situation that Jonathan loves him as his own soul. David here represented the Shona while Shearly Cripps was Jonathan (Doyle 1975:36, 57).

¹⁷ Even when he was in England after 1926, he “regularly assigned £15 out of his £16 13s. 4d. monthly stipend to the work at Maronda Mashanu, continued in his absence by Cyprian Tambo” (Steele 1975:153).

¹⁸ For example, it is said that on his way to Europe, Shearly Cripps walked ninety miles from Enkeldoorn to Gwelo, and then travelled third class to Cape Town in order to save money for his poor church. Asked why he travelled in so much discomfort, he replied, “Because there is no fourth class.” When the use of motor vehicles became the norm decades later, he voiced his concern to the bishop over missionaries who were addicted to the use of motor cars. He argued that he wanted to be at the same level with the people he served. He walked because Africans walked and Jesus himself walked (Steere 1973:35, 49).

¹⁹ See also Steere (1973:36).

²⁰ In his book, *Against the grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean newsman*, Geoffrey Nyarota (2006) devotes two chapters to, narrating in great detail, the Willowvale/Willowgate motor and War Victims’ Compensation Fund scandals. He describes how several politicians were here involved in corrupt motor vehicle deals that cost the government several millions. Nyarota (p. 149–228) also narrates how since independence politicians and their relatives have corruptly acquired land, farms, transport companies, hotels, supermarkets and other businesses. See also Ncube (1989:309–320).

resources across the board. There is the need for the harmonising of living conditions, which refers to the correcting of discrepancies between the haves and the have-nots, without necessarily converting the haves into the new have-nots (Sithole 1959:192–193). No one must be left without. All must share equally. One can here criticise Robert Mugabe’s land redistribution programme, in which *all* is taken away from white people and *all* given to black people.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu used the Bantu concept of *ubuntu* - the essence of being human. According to this, one is a person because of others. Muendanyi Mahamba said *ubuntu* causes one to be concerned about others. There is a social obligation to meet the deepest needs of others. From a Christian point of view, one is compelled to care for others because they are children of God - they share the image of God (the *imago Dei*; Battle 1997:39–40). The equivalent Shona term is *unhu*. We say, “*Munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu.*” The Xhosa say, “*Ungamntu ngabanye abantu.*” In English, it translates roughly as “[E]ach individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others.” (Battle 1997:39). Stanlake Samkange says *unhu* means that the humanity of others must matter to us, since we are what we are because of them (Wikipedia 2012).

Sharing with others is partly an expression of *unhu*. When one does well, it is for the whole of community. Generosity is a Zimbabwean ethic just as it is among other Bantu cultures. However, *unhu* has been eclipsed by the selfish “blood is thicker than water” tribal mentality. People have reduced it to mean sharing only with one’s relatives and close friends.

Ndabaningi Sithole used the fundamental principle of “people centeredness”. He drew on Julius Nyerere’s *ujamaa* African philosophy of “family-hood”. He argued that Nyerere’s socialism was equivalent to the African concept of extended family. Everyone is brethren. In “people centeredness”, everyone is our brethren; and we are all part of the extended human family (Sithole 1959:189–190). With this philosophy comes equality of persons and opportunities, a sense of togetherness and universal hospitality, all of which are part of African socialism.²²

²¹ The city councils of Harare, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo have been known to purchase several vehicles for mayors while neglecting to improve basic services for their constituencies, such as refuse removal, fixing roads, improving the sewer systems and ensuring adequate water and electricity supplies. This year (2010), the Bulawayo city council profligately spent US\$65,000 on a luxury vehicle for the executive mayor (New Zimbabwe 2010). In 2009, the mayor of Harare, Muchadeyi Masunda, proposed the purchase of a US\$152,000 Mercedes-Benz M-Class mayoral car while residents were struggling economically (The Birmingham News 2009).

²² Sithole (1959:191) also pointed to Tom Mboya who argued that we must take care of each other, since as Africans “we are all sons and daughters of the soil”. We treat each other as equals and share things equally, as we are all brothers and sisters. Even the communal ownership of land in Africa flows from this principle, he argued.

Ecumenism and national cooperation

“All the denominations are his friends”, remarked John White (Andrews 1935:122). Shearly Cripps was a master of what we today call ecumenism. He cooperated with ministers of other denominations. Wherever opportunity was offered him, he preached the gospel. He worshipped with Rev. John White in the Methodist Church, and together they formed a united Christian front against the unjust colonial system. He also worshipped with Rev. A.J. Liebenberg, a Dutch Reformed minister. The latter generously shared his church building and invited him to his evening worship services.²³ Shearly Cripps, though a devout Anglican, argued that he was an evangelical as well as a Quaker at heart. He was also close to members of the Roman Catholic Church and spoke admirably of their deep spirituality (Steere 1973:111).

Doyle argues that much of Shearly Cripps's ecumenical success was due to his ability to “separate the fundamental from the superficial”. For example, the Eucharist was fundamental, but as to where one celebrated, it was “a superficial aspect of the occasion”. A person must be ready to adapt to the environment while understanding that God is the same (Doyle 1975:76).

Shearly Cripps did not confine his ecumenical activities to the Charter District. He was a national Christian leader. Even though never elected to the Executive Committee of the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference, he played an important part in the establishment of the powerful body. According to Ranger, in the 1920s, the missionary conference was a political power in Southern Rhodesia. Its deliberations were attended by “large numbers of officials and politicians and copiously reported in the local press” (Ranger 1962:15). Shearly Cripps and John White were key participants in this:

At the 1922 Conference, for instance, when the White-Cripps alliance went into really effective action, resolutions were passed welcoming Government action against excessive judicial sentences; recommending the creation of Native Purchase Areas; recommending the establishment of native advisory councils with power to elect parliamentary representatives: and urging that Imperial guarantees be built into the new Constitution (Ranger 1962:15).

Through the ecumenical efforts of Shearly Cripps and his Christian allies, the church was a powerful institution that influenced socio-political change. Shearly Cripps's view was that unity would make churches powerful. It was a great achievement that Catholics and Anglicans cooperated with

²³ When General Jan Smuts visited Enkeldoorn, he was impressed to see a Dutch Reformed minister cooperating with an Anglican priest. “Until 1914 when the white Anglican community was strong enough to have its own building, these evening services continued to be held, with Mrs Liebenberg playing the organ and with a good sprinkling of Dutch Reformed adherents, as well as Anglicans coming to enjoy Arthur Cripp's ministrations.” (Andrews 1935:32).

Protestant missions within the framework of a conference. Shearly Cripps played a part in the creation of this unity.²⁴ From this Christian base, he drew allies for the fight on the political front. He had strong allies within both Protestant and Catholic churches, such as Fr. Burbridge, the Catholic representative on the Mission Council for many years.²⁵

Shearly Cripps challenges us today to take ecumenism seriously. The church needs to regain the influential position it had during his times - to be the brave “mouth-piece of Jehovah” (Ranger 1962:15). Because of the lack of strong ecumenical cooperation, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Evangelical Alliance and other church bodies have not really been influential in the formulation of government policy. Since 2000, the political scene in Zimbabwe has been so turbulent. There has not been serious ecumenical effort to address the chaos.²⁶ The Anglican Church can lead in the initiative to revive serious ecumenical cooperation today. Christians of all denominations need to unite and stand against corruption, violence, and the other evils that characterise life in Zimbabwe. The churches should be wary of committing what Rev. Canaan Banana pointed out as the sins of the churches of the 1970s - toeing the line of neutrality instead of standing for justice, equality, equity and oneness (Banana 1989:203).

Justice for the natives

Shearly Cripps once argued that Rhodesia needed most not medical but legal missionaries. He said: “If I had any time over again... I think I would try to qualify in law.” (Steere 1973:99). John White once said about Shearly Cripps’ love for the Shona: “He watches their cases in the Law Courts. If there is a miscarriage of justice, he is the man to point this out. If there is ill-treatment by the white man of his black servants, Cripps takes an interest in stopping this” (Andrews 1935:122).²⁷

²⁴ In the 1930s, he prayed with native Catholics, and Catholic authorities such as Fr. Daignault spoke of him as the guardian of the “historic Christian Creed and the Tradition of Christian Morals” (Ranger 1962:13).

²⁵ In 1926, he told Bp. Paget that Fr. Burbridge had thrown himself sacrificially into the “Native’s Up-Hill cause in a very exemplary manner”, and he urged Bp. Paget to participate in the Inter-Denominational Council (Ranger 1962:13).

²⁶ For example, in 2009, Sebastian Bakare, then acting bishop of the diocese of Harare, bemoaned the lack of support from other Christian denominations needed to defend the powerless Anglican Christians who were (and still are) being persecuted by the sacked Bp. Norbert Kunonga and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. Other denominations have stood aloof from the Anglican crisis. Churches in Zimbabwe should be concerned that it is politicians and not the ZCC that is trying to solve the crisis in the Anglican Church.

²⁷ At Enkeldoom, Shearly Cripps was known for his “readiness to appear in court cases and speak up with his impressive presence and voice for an accused African or to press for justice when a native police officer or farm employer had exceeded his authority and maltreated a black man” (Steere 1973:83). According to Jenkins and Stebbing (1966:40),

Shearly Cripps stood for the natives on several controversial issues:

(i) Cheap labour, unjust wages and taxes

One of the problems that white men faced in Mashonaland was the lack of a cheap labour supply for their mines, farms and factories. Most natives preferred to pursue their traditional life of agriculture and herding than work for the white men (Doyle 1975:179). However, when famine severely hit the country in 1903, the BSAC proposed lifting the hut tax from 10s. to £2 (Steere 1973:46). This forced the native males to look for jobs, the pay of which was not decent. Once more, it was Shearly Cripps who challenged the company. He and Edgar Lloyd walked ninety miles to an Anglican synod, where he challenged the BSAC's proposal to quadruple the cash hut tax on male Africans and advocated for Africans to pay the tax in kind rather than cash. He urged the church to take to task the white employers and to point out "the need of rendering labor dignified and attractive". Native employees, he argued, needed sanitary housing and proper medical attendance (Steere 1973:46).²⁸

When the synod rejected his proposal, he appealed to Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner in Cape Town. He also published at his own expense, the controversial "An ode in celebration of the proposed quadrupling of the hut-tax", in which he criticised the quadrupling of taxes on Africans. His own bishop, William Gaul, thought that he (Shearly Cripps) had gone too far with the matter and asked him to withdraw the pamphlet from circulation (Welch 2008:46). That is how "irregular" Shearly Cripps was. He stood for justice regardless of who was with him or against him. However, it is worth noting that Shearly Cripps had received training as a social activist in his days at Oxford, where he was a member of the Christian Social Union.²⁹

Student members of the CSU at Oxford organized and published lists of local employers who paid their workers sub-union wages; hunted out acts of neglect of proper safeguards of workers exposed to lead poisoning or to

Shearly Cripps "thought nothing of walking to Salisbury to fight the case of a poor African with the Chief Native Commissioner". His commitment to justice made him a legend even before he died.

²⁸ He also argued that paying taxes in cash could force the men to leave their families at the reserves and seek extremely low wage employment on farms and mines (Steere 1973:46). A graduate from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge College for lay assistants in London, Edgar Lloyd was Shearly Cripps's young companion stationed at St Faith's Mission. He was his cohort in the fight for the rights of the natives (Welch 2008:172).

²⁹ In 1889, Henry Scott Holland founded the Christian Social Union in London. Shearly Cripps joined the Oxford chapter established at Pusey House under Charles Gore's encouragement. The organisation "sought to reach the man in the pew and from within the Church of England to convince its members of their unlimited liability for social conditions all about them" (Steere 1973:6).

unguarded machines; campaigned against sweated conditions in industries employing female labor; and urged programmes of public works in forests and of public lands in order to give gainful work to the unemployed (Steele 1973:6).

Farmers of the Charter District were the first ones to feel the sting of Shearly Cripps's campaign for just wages. For example, in December 1919, an Enkeldoorn farmer complained to Sir Drummond Chaplain that Shearly Cripps's native policy had gone beyond the limit:

His policy has given the death-blow to the prospects and possibility of farming in the Charter District. There is a world-wide outcry for food today. Thousands are dying for want of it; and we could produce thousands upon thousands of bags more; but no labor available (Ranger 1962:10).

To buttress his case, the farmer gave two examples:

(i) Mr. Hoffman - a wheat grower, employed some natives to assist him in harvesting. They openly declared: Mr. Cripps told us not to work for less than 1s.6d. a day. Eventually Hoffman had to pay 5s. a day. (ii) Mr. Prinsloo - wheat grower, on Mr. Schultz's farm with something like 20 to 30 acres of ripe wheat, reported the other day that he could not get a single boy to assist him, although he offered them 5s. per boy per day. Your honour, what hope has the farmer under such circumstances? (Ranger 1962:11).

The reply from Sir Drummond Chaplain reveals that Shearly Cripps was a conundrum to the settler regime: "I am disposed to agree with your view that Mr. Cripp's zeal on behalf of natives leads sometimes to undesirable results." (Ranger 1962:11). He comforted the farmer saying: "I gather that he has now gone to England for some time so perhaps things may go more smoothly." (Ranger 1962:11).

Shearly Cripps was also a fierce critic of forced labour, which had become a norm after World War I. Settlers desperate for a cheap labour supply looked to the Native Affairs Department to secure the services of natives. Those who had economic self-interest emphasised the dignity of labour, "a concept rooted in the Victorian philosophy of the 'gospel of work.'" By 1911, the Resident Commissioner in Makoni District was using force to make the natives work, and taking hostage women whose men had disappeared. Chiefs such as Chiduku were told that their reserves would be reduced in size if they did not cooperate. Shearly Cripps once again took it upon himself to expose these evils in his novel *Bay-tree country: A story of Mashonaland* (1913) (Steele 1975:165).

In 1926, the colonial government passed the Southern Rhodesia Native Juveniles Employment Act. It empowered the Native Commissioner to make contracts with juveniles without parental or guardian consent, "and prescribed summary whipping for any youth 'who fail or refuse to obey any order of a Native Commissioner given in pursuance of the provisions of this

Act (Clause 10).’ ” Shearly Cripps, who was in England at the time, heavily criticised the act. It was he who coined the expression “child slavery”. The liberal press took over that hyperbole and came up with expressions such as “Africa’s child slaves”, “boy and girl babies in the mines” and “whip for piccaninis”.³⁰

Since 2 000 civil services, hospitals, schools and other tertiary institutions have been paralysed by industrial strikes. Civil servants have hopelessly been demanding decent salaries and basic benefits such as medical insurance. The Anglican Church has the legacy of Shearly Cripps to build on. The church is there to advocate for the working class. It has to play a leading role in the people’s struggle for better salaries, decent working and living conditions. Churches in post-independence Zimbabwe have been deaf and mute on such issues. Commercial farm and mineworkers have lived on what Banana (1989:209) called “pitiful-slave wages”. The masses continue to struggle with what Ncube pointed out twenty years ago: “The crippling, ever increasing prices of basic commodities, growing unemployment, depressed wages, a severe shortage of public transport and housing and general poverty” (Ncube 1989:313). These underpaid workers have turned to secular unions such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions for rescue. The ZCC needs God’s irregulars like Shearly Cripps, who can fearlessly advocate for the rights of the oppressed workers.

(ii) The land question

On 2 October 1919, Shearly Cripps wrote to his colleagues: “I hope to sail for England, Nov. 7th., if it may be and try to do something for the native Land Case there.” (Steele 1973:90). The controversial land question, which has caused so much socio-political and economic chaos in Zimbabwe, actually dates back to the founding of Rhodesia. According to Doyle, when the BSAC came to Southern Rhodesia it only had a single intention: the securing of minerals. However, as it soon turned out that there was little gold in Mashonaland, the settlers decided to use the country as the Mashona used it, which is for agricultural purposes. They realised that with improved agricultural methods and superior implements, with cheap labour the

³⁰ While some parents welcomed the act as a way of controlling their errant children, Shearly Cripps wanted the juveniles to obtain some education even on a part-time basis and the eventual discontinuance of their employment in urban and mining centres (Steele 1975:167). John White was an equally fierce critic of hard labour with low pay and the Southern Rhodesia Native Juveniles Employment Act. He challenged the church to defend the oppressed workers, the underpaid, ill-housed and unskilled workers who toiled to contribute so substantially to the prosperity of the country (Andrews 1935:246). He opposed the act, which earned him the resentment of white settlers (Ranger 1962:20, 22). In fact, his opposition to the act contributed to his being excluded from the conference executive in 1930 (Steele 1975:160).

venture would still be profitable after all. Land thus became immediately important to them (Doyle 1975:180).

Since the African population was still very small and scattered over a wide area in small villages and kraals, Rhodes did not regard it an issue when he gave land to Europeans (Hassing 1960:232).³¹ It is also interesting that even missionaries at that time did not think of it as injustice. For example, the Anglican bishop, George Knight-Bruce (1895:98) argued: "But the Mashona only occupy a very small part of the country, and land which they have never occupied may with justice be said not to belong to them." Nevertheless, this did not mean that Knight-Bruce cared less about the natives possessing land. He actually believed that land that the natives already occupied or were found occupying by the white settlers belonged to them. He argued: "We have no more right to take any land which they actually inhabit, and own by unknown length of tenure, than we should have to dispossess white men holding property in England on the same tenure." (Knight-Bruce 1895:98).

Knight-Bruce could have obviously criticised the settler government for seizing land from the native reserves had he lived to see it happen. It should be noted that it was Knight-Bruce who started the idea of buying land for the natives. Explaining why he bought farms, he said: "[We] intended them practically as native reserves, so that if the natives were ever crowded out of their lands they might have some place near at hand where they could grow their crops and keep their few cattle." (Knight-Bruce 1895:99). Shearly Cripps took over that idea of buying land for the natives a few years later.

However, as the native population continued to increase, the land issue became thorny. The colonial administration began to squeeze the larger native population into smaller and less productive areas. The illogicality was that the smaller white population grabbed the majority of the productive land (Doyle 1975:180). Shearly Cripps was among the earliest advocates of the land rights for the natives. "When the Land question was before the country, he was the leader and agitator for more ample provision of land on the Reserves for the Mashona." (Andrews 1935:122).³² He took it upon himself to raise money to buy land for the natives.³³ His 1910 publications, *Faerylands forlorn* and *The two of them together*, supplied

³¹ For the list of churches that were benefactors of generous land grants from Cecil Rhodes see Hassing (1960:234). See also Daneel (1974:187) and Goto (2006:8–10, 18).

³² Shearly Cripps pointed out the injustice of 40 000 whites possessing 31 000 000 acres of alienated land, while 900 000 Africans had only a little over 21 000 000 acres in the reserves. Therefore, he agitated for the remaining 43 000 000 acres of unsigned land to be reserved for native land purchase areas if Africans were to be asked to give up Article 43 of the constitution (Steere 1973:105). Article 43 of the new constitution for Southern Rhodesia's "responsible self-government", said that "Africans had the right, together with all others, to purchase land anywhere in the country." (Steere 1973:102).

him with a little bit of money (Doyle 1975:75). His own mother supplied most of the money. He also borrowed £160 from the diocesan treasury to cover part of the remaining £200 to pay the Amalgamated Properties of Rhodesia.³⁴

Steere adds that the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference had actually proposed an increase of the African reserves as early as 1908 (Steere 1973:81–82, 85–86). In 1914, the Imperial Commission on the Native Reserves of Southern Rhodesia was formed to look into the issue. Unfortunately in 1917, the commission reported that the reserves would be decreased by some million acres. This development angered Shearly Cripps, who argued that in fact the land of Southern Rhodesia belonged to the Africans, as they were the original occupants (Ranger 1962:17).³⁵ With the help of his few Rhodesian friends and British colleagues, he took his “land-for-Africans-question to the British public, the Privy Council, the British Parliament, the Colonial Office, and ultimately to the ‘Responsible Government authorities’ of the Rhodesian territory” (Steere 1973:81). He wrote pamphlets, interviewed government officials and did “everything possible to get an increase in the acreage” (Andrews 1935:123). “He furnished influential British papers; he supplied strategically placed and important persons in London with facts and questions which could be used in Parliament to shape official policy.” (Doyle 1975:184).

Eventually the parliament considered some of his recommendations as reform measures.³⁶ In 1922, the resolution for the establishment of some native land purchase areas, which he had jointly put forward with John White, passed in the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference. With the help of his colleague Native Commissioner J.W. Posselt, he was also able to see the imperial project to take native land on the Sabi Native Reserve dropped (Steere 1973:88, 101). Had the proposal to construct a twenty-five-mile railroad proceeded, the natives on the Sabi reserve would have lost 300 000 acres of their best land (Doyle 1975:180).

Also, in the early 1920s, the British government, with the help of Lord Cave’s Commission and some subsequent groups, reached a settlement with the BSAC requiring the latter to withdraw from the governing of the colony.

³³ For example, one of the reasons he went to England on a brief furlough was to raise funds to buy land for the natives (Steere 1973:72).

³⁴ Shearly Cripps’s mother covered the cost of two farms, one of which was Muckleneuk, which was about 3 000 acres. It is estimated that the interest of three per cent (£180) on the £6 000 left by his mother annually went to help Africans (Steere 1973:74, 78).

³⁵ Squeezing the reserves was another way of forcing the natives to work for the white men (Steere 1973:81).

³⁶ Shearly Cripps made use of some of the powerful British media such as *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Contemporary* and pamphlets that had wider circulation. His famous pamphlet “A million acres” had wider circulation in both Rhodesia and England (Steere 1973:83–84, 87).

Indeed, Article 43 of the new constitution (see footnote 32), which gave Africans the right to buy land anywhere in the country, was victory for Shearly Cripps and his allies. Unfortunately, the white settlers back in Southern Rhodesia did not receive his books well, in particular, *Africa for Africans*. Even the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference was hesitant about supporting his ambitious land proposals.³⁷

The farms that Shearly Cripps acquired became the famous Maronda Mashanu mission. Africans who settled there were able to herd their cattle and goats and cultivate their gardens and bees (Doyle 1975:75).³⁸ Shearly Cripps still bore the financial burden of running these farms. Besides owing huge debt on the land, he still had to find the money for building and fencing the farm, as well as for educational instruction and “the bottomless needs of his tenants”. He continued to write poems and books with hope that the income would supplement his financial needs. All of this was due to his commitment to uplifting the lives of the poor (Steere 1973:72–75).

What is interesting today is that some of the African Anglican bishops in Zimbabwe have acquired farms through Mugabe’s land reform programme. The sacked Bp. Norbert Kunonga and the retired Bp. Jonathan Siyachitema, both close friends of Mugabe, have farms grabbed from white people. However, unlike Shearly Cripps who bought farms for the benefit of the landless masses, the African bishops have seized these farms for personal use and gain. Politicians have also grabbed farms for themselves and not for the poor masses.

In nation building, the land issue must be redressed. The new black elites are just as guilty as the previous white farmers who owned several farms when the poor had none. Bishops and priests should not illegally possess farms since such actions distort the role of the church in conflict resolution and peace building. The land issue is controversial. For land, blood was spilled in the 1890s, 1970s and in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Clergy have an active role to study the land problem and educate both the local public and the international community about it. Church leaders have to diligently seek the solution and not be part of the problem.

(iii) Racial equality and the franchise question

Racial equality and the franchise question were serious issues in Southern Rhodesia. White settlers did not regard the natives as their equals. Shearly Cripps tackled racism first within his own Anglican Church. At the 1912 diocesan synod, he proposed the inclusion of African delegates.

³⁷ *Africa for Africans* was Shearly Cripps’s “message to the people of Britain about the land needs of Rhodesia’s Africans”. It was a defence of “a generously conceived division of the unassigned land in support of a Native Purchase Area programme” (Steere 1973:105–106, 119–120).

³⁸ Several headmen, including Mashonganyika and Pfumojena, with their people followed Shearly Cripps from Manyeni Reserve and settled there (Steele 1975:153).

Unfortunately, the synod did not adopt the proposal until 1921 (Steere 1973:76). However, one should note that several things were done to include natives in the affairs of the Anglican Church during the episcopacy of Bp. Beavan. For example, in 1914, he instituted a conference for missionaries and village teachers. In 1919, he ordained Samuel Mhlanga to the diaconate, the first native to serve in the diocese since Mtobi had left in 1901. From 1921, the Anglican synod was no longer an entirely white body. "Such a racially-mixed gathering was so unusual at the time" such that the inclusion of natives "aroused considerable settler-criticism".³⁹ Credit here goes to the relentless efforts of Shearly Cripps, who pushed for racial equality in the church.

A few years later, at the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference of 1924, the government presented a bill to limit the rights of African clergy. According to Ranger, the aim was to stop itinerant African preachers from gaining access to the native areas. Most missionaries were at this time resentful of the competition presented by itinerant African preachers. They accused them of preaching a corrupted form of Christianity (Ranger 1962:10). According to Steele (1975:160), the aim of the bill was to control the activities of those regarded as African "separatist" churches. Again, Shearly Cripps defended the African preachers. He denounced the bill as a breach of the British principle of "fair-play and Christian freedom" (Steele 1975:160). He also argued that no one could impose restrictions on any African whom God had called to preach the gospel.⁴⁰

Shearly Cripps also fought vigorously on the franchise question. Way before he came to Africa, the Southern Rhodesian Order-in-Council of 1898 totally excluded Africans from the political process of the country, including disenfranchising them for all practical purposes.⁴¹ With time, anomalously, the minority of 40 000 white people excluded the majority 900 000 black people from the governing of the country. Shearly Cripps together with John White continuously urged the British government to involve Africans in the

³⁹ In 1924, Samuel Mhlanga was priested, while Stephen Hatendi, Gibson Nyabako and Leonard Sagonda were ordained deacons. Peter Sekgoma, a nephew of Chief Khama of Bechuanaland, was ordained in Matabeleland. From 1924, native lay representatives attended synod. The stance against racism actually stiffened in the Anglican Church. For example, when Francis Paget was to be enthroned as the new bishop to replace Bp. Beavan, he threatened to have the service at St Michael's, the mission church in Salisbury, "unless indigenous representatives were invited to the ceremony at the cathedral" (Welch 2008:94-95, 114).

⁴⁰ Cripps actually mocked the government's proposal saying, "If a man was convinced of the truth, should he say not 'Lord! Send me,' but 'Lord I have no certificate from the native Department.'" He argued that Christ would suffer if such a proposal by the government was accepted (Ranger 1962:10).

⁴¹ The franchise question actually dominated the period between 1921 and 1970 (Banana 1989:199).

process of government. Between 1921 and 1923, he prepared a memorandum on “Native rights under a new government”. He was concerned that native reserves would have no access to roads, railways and government installations. He also criticised the government proposal to make income and property the qualification for the so-called non-racial franchise because that meant that only sixty of the 900 000 natives could qualify. Together with John White and others, he proposed some stop-gap measures such as the establishment of native councils. This, he argued, would get some native representation in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament even if through election or appointment of European representatives with African interests (Steere 1973:102).

Today the issues of race and franchise have re-emerged, albeit in a different way. The stand-off between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change about the swearing in of Roy Bennett, Movement for Democratic Change treasurer, as Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the inclusive government is an example. Churches in Zimbabwe need to reject all unjust discrimination. All citizens, no matter what colour, are indigenous and must all have equal rights (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2005:63–64). We can learn from the churches of South Africa who during the apartheid era were careful to show that attack of apartheid did not mean being anti-Afrikaner (:85). Churches in Zimbabwe should make it clear that being anti-racism does not mean being anti-white. They should maintain the position of the World Council of Churches at its Evanston assembly in 1954 that “any form of segregation based on race, color or ethnic origin is contrary to the gospel” (:124).

Conclusion

In 1925, Shearly Cripps engaged Sir John Chancellor, the British Governor of Rhodesia, the Attorney General and H.M. Jackson, the Assistant Chief Native Commissioner, in a serious debate about African land purchase. The latter congratulated him: “You know, don’t you, that you scored a distinct victory over this Commission business... You were right, I was not. You achieved a service and we look to you in recognition.” (Steere 1973:104–105). Indeed, Shearly Cripps left a legacy. He fought valiantly for the cause of Africans. He was their fearless advocate in both Rhodesia and Britain. In 1926, after serving for twenty-five years as Priest-in-charge of All Saints Mission, Wreningham, he resigned his post and returned to England (Jenkins and Stebbing 1966:41).⁴² He came back in 1930 and continued his

⁴² There were reasons for this abrupt decision to leave Southern Rhodesia. First, he had been frustrated by a lack of funding from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Anglican authorities and other sources that ignored him because he had continually refused to accept government grants for his mission schools. He refused government grants because they would give the government too much to say in the conduct of the

work with the natives at Maronda Mashanu as a self-styled "Christian Missionary in Mashonaland" (Steele 1975:153,159). The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 placed all of his farms, except the small Muwhonde, in the native areas. Financial difficulties forced him to sell Muckleneuk farm to the government in 1933 to settle his debts. Nevertheless, he continued to live on the farm unofficially for the rest of his life. The Chief Native Commissioner wanted to evict him. However, Godfrey Huggins, the new minister, did not want to steer trouble among the European and native communities by evicting Baba Cripps. He died on 1 August 1952 (Steere 1973:152). "Sturdily English by birth, but African by adoption, he chose to be buried among Africans. Having loved Africa - he loved her to the end" (Andrews 1935:126).⁴³

John White once described Shearly Cripps as a man with "the soul of a great prophet, an Amos, if you like, and the tenacity of a bull-dog" (Steere 1973:121). In 1940, Sir Herbert M. Stanley, the Governor of Rhodesia, sent him a poem with words of tribute: "Steadfast in your holy inspiration. Shield for the poor, scourge for the proud you carry; you shall shake oppression's unholy stronghold; with your song's battering." (Steere 1973:146). Shearly Cripps and his colleagues like John White were pioneers in the church's struggle for justice in Southern Rhodesia. Shearly Cripps spent nearly half a century vigorously defending the rights of the oppressed natives. Zimbabwe today needs men and women like Shearly Cripps who are God's irregulars, those who possess the soul of great prophets like Amos, and have the tenacity of a bull-dog, and will courageously fight for justice because they love God. Shearly Cripps left us a legacy. If we learn from it, our efforts towards national healing will create a country with "a truly democratic culture" (Ncube 1989:328).

References

- Andrews, C.F. 1935. *John White of Mashonaland*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Banana, C.S. 1989. *The role of the church in the struggle for liberation in Zimbabwe, in Turmoil and tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890–1990*, edited by C.S. Banana. Harare: College Press: 197–201.
- Battle, M. 1997. *Reconciliation: The ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press.

schools and compromise the role of the church in proclaiming social justice (Steere 1973:110, 112). See also Doyle (1975:185).

⁴³ Many times Shearly Cripps had said that money should not be wasted for his funeral. He had told Mamvura shortly before his death that "he would rather be buried in a sack and save his soul than have an expensive burial and lose it" (Steele 1975:153). Therefore, he was given the cheapest burial as he wished. His "coffin was made in a workshop of Daramombe Mission; the hearse was a motor van lent and driven by a member of the Mission congregation, Mudiwa Bill." (Jenkins and Stebbing 1966:43).

- Daneel, M.L. 1974. *Old and new in southern Shona independent churches*, Vol. 1. Paris: Mouton.
- De Gruchy, J. and De Gruchy, S. 2005. *The church struggle in South Africa*. 25th anniversary edition. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press.
- Doyle, J.R. 1975. *Arthur Shearly Cripps*. Boston, Mass.: Twayne Publishers.
- Farrant, J. 1966. *Mashonaland martyr: Bernard Mizeki and the pioneer church*. Oxford University Press.
- Goto, N. 2006. *African and Western missionary partnership in Christian mission: Rhodesia–Zimbabwe 1897–1968*. Kearney, Neb.: Morris Publishing.
- Gouldsbury, H.C. 1907. *God's outpost*. London: Eveleigh Nash.
- Hassing, P. 1960. *The Christian missions and the British expansion in Southern Rhodesia, 1888–1923*. Ph.D. dissertation, American University, Washington.
- Jenkins, D.E. and Stebbing, D. 1966. *They led the way: Christian pioneers of Central Africa*. Salisbury: Oxford University Press.
- Knight-Bruce, G.W.H. 1895. *Memories of Mashonaland*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Moorman, J.R.H. 1950. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. London: SCM Press.
- Ncube, W. 1989. *The post-unity period: Developments, benefits and problems, in Turmoil and tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890–1990*, edited by C.S. Banana. Harare: College Press.
- New Zimbabwe. 21 March 2010. *Chombo blasts Bulawayo over mayor's vehicle*. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-2077-Chombo+blasts+Byo+over+mayer+%E2%80%99s+car/news.aspx> [accessed 15 Sept. 2012].
- Nicholson, D.H.S. and Lee, A.H.E. 1916. *Oxford book of English mystical verse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nyarota, G. 2006. *Against the grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean newsman*. Cape Town: Zebra.
- Ranger, T.O. 1962. *State and church in Southern Rhodesia, 1919–1939*. Salisbury: Central Africa Historical Association.
- Sithole, N. 1959. *African nationalism*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, E.W. 1928. *The way of the white fields in Rhodesia: A survey of Christian enterprise in Northern and Southern Rhodesia*. London: World Dominion Press.
- Steele, M. 1975. "With hope unconquered and unconquerable...": Arthur Shearly Cripps, 1869–1952, in *Themes in the Christian history of Central Africa*, edited by T.O. Ranger and J. Weller. London: Heinemann Educational: 152–174.
- Steere, D.V. 1973. *God's irregular: Arthur Shearly Cripps, a Rhodesian epic*. London: SPCK Publishing.
- The Birmingham News. 31 August 2009. *Mayor under fire over \$152,000 M-Class*. http://blog.al.com/assembly-lines/2009/08/mayor_under_fire_over_152000_m.html [accessed 16 Oct. 2012].

- Welch, P. 2008. Church and settler in colonial Zimbabwe: A study in the history of the Anglican diocese of Mashonaland/Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1925. Boston, Mass.: Brill.
- Wesseling, H.L. 1996. Divide and rule: The partition of Africa 1880–1914. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Wikipedia. 2012. Ubuntu (philosophy). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_%28philosophy%29 [accessed 15 Sept. 2012].

African Theology and identity: Reflections on Zion Christian Church experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis, 2000–2010

Richard Shadreck Maposa, Fortune Sibanda and
Tompson Makahamadze¹

Abstract

The contemporary Christian church in Zimbabwe is at crossroads owing to the political, economic and social crises that have affected the country for the past decade. Using the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) as a case study, the study examines the experiences of the church and its role in the reconstruction of the country as part of its historical divine mandate. It studies the experiences and contributions of the ZCC in Masvingo Province. The study argues that Christian churches in general and the ZCC in particular can forge an African identity as a *sine qua non* for a vibrant and harmonious society. It is our conviction that churches, as key stakeholders in the search for a new dispensation, have the potential to brave the challenges bedevilling Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Zion Christian Church, African Theology, reconstruction theology, Zimbabwean crisis, identity.

Introduction and problem statement

Churches play a significant role in transforming society. Although the mainline Churches have been credited for most of the good work in this endeavour, the contributions of the African Instituted Churches (AICs) are equally tremendous. This study explores and examines the experiences and contributions of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Masvingo Province in transforming the Zimbabwean society amid the social, economic and political hardships that the country is experiencing. Masvingo Province was selected for the study because it is home to many ZCC members in Zimbabwe. The researchers undertook fieldwork and used in-depth interviews to collect data. This offered the advantage of interacting directly with ZCC members to establish their experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis. In this study, some interviewees wished to remain

¹ Richard S. Maposa lectures at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe. He can be contacted at mapoars@gmail.com. Fortune Sibanda lectures at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe. He can be contacted at sibanda35@gmail.com. Tompson Makahamadze lectures at Chatham University, Pittsburgh, USA. He can be contacted at tompsonmakah@gmail.com.

anonymous, whereas others wanted their names identified (for which consent was obtained). During the fieldwork, the researchers were also provided with secondary sources on the ZCC. In order to contextualise the activities of the ZCC, the article proceeds by highlighting the importance of African Theology in the quest for liberation and identity in societies suffering from internal malaise. Nevertheless, the liberationist motif that has guided the experiences of the ZCC has in fact paved the way for a new phase characterised by a surging reconstruction theology. This is a fresh theological discourse that suits battered economies, shattered societies and unstable political systems in Africa. In this study, reconstruction theology is used as a hermeneutical tool to re-read and re-conceive the Zimbabwean crisis. In the light of this, the problem can be stated in the form of questions: What is the role of the churches in solving the Zimbabwean crisis? How relevant is African Theology and identity in the mission of the ZCC? Against the backdrop of these questions, the study focused on the experiences and responses of the ZCC as an archetype of the role of churches in the regeneration of Zimbabwe.

Clarification of key concepts

Zion Christian Church

The ZCC is located within a religious landscape of AICs in Zimbabwe. These AICs have been *known* by different terms, such as *Separatist churches*, *African Independent Churches*, *African Indigenous Churches*, *indigenous cults* and *new religious movements*. Historically, the ZCC is related to the Zionist movement in South Africa. Daneel (1987:17) observes that in studying the ZCC “we are dealing with the very real and genuine heartbeat of indigenised Christianity and not merely, as has been popularly assumed, with a movement on the periphery of or ever outside the so-called mainline Christianity”. Furthermore, Daneel (1987) points out that the use of the term “church” when ascribed to the ZCC is justified in that the bishop, as the leader of the church, perceives the movement as the very church of Christ, the Lord. This same Jesus Christ remains the supreme object of devotion and the source of and resource for salvation for all its members. In terms of its typology, the ZCC is classified under the Zionist group of AICs. A Zionist church is characterised by spiritism, prophecy, revelations, visions, faith healing, speaking in tongues and enculturation. From all these attributes, the study detects elements of the ZCC’s identity within the context of the visions of African Theology.

African Theology

African Theology is a way of doing theology in order to appropriate the Christian gospel in the context of African particularistic realities. It is an

affirmation of local culture and traditional religion as expressed by Africans (Kalilombe 1999:149). Fiedler et al. (2000) describe African Theology as “theology cooked in an African pot” and as seeking to address the whole person in all his or her existentiality. It is on this basis that a critical issue of identity can be configured through enculturation, localisation or indigenisation in the light of ZCC experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis.

Identity

Identities are associated with particular times and places by particular individuals and groups through dynamic processes of negotiation (Kottak 2003:429). For Schipper (1999, cited in Chitando 2010:116), “Identity is related to the question of difference between us and others: a difference in culture, social class, sex, religion, age, nationality, living area, etc.” In this way, therefore, identities are multiple, fluid and not fixed. In the context of this study, the notion of identity is useful in streamlining the extent to which the experiences and responses of the ZCC to the Zimbabwean crisis were influenced by its beliefs, practices and context.

Zimbabwean crisis

The Zimbabwe crisis has been a conspicuous experience that manifested in the late 1990s. There was high unemployment, sky-rocketing prices of basic goods and critical shortages of food owing to the negative effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and drought. The crisis during this period culminated in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party in 1999. During the period 2000–2007, the crisis took a new twist when the government lost a referendum on a draft constitution in February 2000. ZANU-PF under Robert Mugabe radically restructured the terrain of the Zimbabwean politics towards a strategy of frontal assault in order to guarantee its security and supremacy in the ensuing June 2000 parliamentary and March 2002 presidential elections (Raftopoulos and Savage 2004). The MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai described his “narrow loss” in the 2002 presidential elections as the biggest electoral fraud ever witnessed anywhere in the world (Sibanda and Masaka 2010). Accordingly, after March 2002, the Zimbabwean crisis not only became a crisis of governance, but also deepened as a crisis of legitimacy. Moreover, land invasions targeting the white commercial farms through the Fast-track Land Reform programme worsened the crisis. Hence, the former colonial power Britain; local white population; opposition MDC; civic movement; teachers; farm workers and urban populations, among whom the opposition had developed its major support, became ZANU-PF’s major targets of assault. The country became isolated, the economy collapsed, and so did the education, health delivery and all other government systems. Thus, the net

effect was a precipitous decline in the living standards of Zimbabweans, which was exacerbated by the critical shortage of basic commodities, hyperinflation and break-down of rule of law. The Zimbabwean crisis reached in 2008 following a presidential election result dispute between Mugabe and Tsvangirai. The country was plunged into further violence as MDC and ZANU-PF wrestled for the support of the masses. The outcome was a political stalemate that saw the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) from which emerged the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009. This was a temporary respite, a “marriage of convenience” (Sibanda and Masaka 2010) because people continued to be “masked with uncertainty”. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the experiences and contributions of the ZCC to transforming Zimbabwe. One way of doing this is through engaging reconstruction theology.

Reconstruction theology

Reconstruction theology is a recent strand in the theological discourses in Africa. It seeks to confront post-colonial problems that prohibit people from living normal lives as children of God (Mugambi 1995). As the study envisions, this theology offers an ideal platform for relaunching the Zimbabwean society and basing its identity on a more promising foundation. In fact, reconstruction theology resonates with political, economic, social, religious and cultural programmes that intend to uplift society. This theology is urgent in the Zimbabwean context. As Villa-Vicencio (1992:14) has affirmed,

“[U]nless the church is able in these situations to translate the values of the gospel into practice and proclaim its beliefs in a language that makes sense even to those who are no longer interested in its views, it may well have no significant role at all to play in the period of reconstruction.”

This summons the ZCC to be proactive in making the gospel relevant to the crisis by making a judicious integration of reconstruction theology a hermeneutical tool and its mission. This is crucial in positing a critical theological reflection, something that marks the identity of the ZCC in contemporary Zimbabwe.

A review of African Theology: From crisis to reconstruction

The study of African Theology has passed the era in which scholars used to sharpen their daggers to defend or justify the existence of this movement since its emergence in the late 1950s. Some of the pioneers include Idowu (1965), Dickson (1973), Bediako (1992), Mbiti (1969), Nyamiti (1975), Amanze (1998), Banana (1989) and Muzorewa (1985). They grappled with the critical concerns of African Theology in complementary ways, despite

their different approaches. Notwithstanding the many debates concerning what African Theology is and is not, in general, the phenomenon refers to a theological reflection on the Christian faith through the use of African traditional thought-forms and categories. Maluleke (1996:14,15) asserts that African Theology is a style that seeks to fashion out notions of traditional identities that reflect the indigenous African setting. Thus, hermeneutical processes inclined towards identity have resulted in the incorporation of new concepts such as enculturation, indigenisation and adaptation (Shorter 1979; Parratt 1997). These issues are important for the current study that seeks to contextualise ZCC's experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis.

In general, African Theology is an umbrella term that includes Black Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology, Pentecostal Theology and Reconstruction Theology. These theologies are expressions of emancipation. The current study refers mainly to African Theology and reconstruction theology. These two strands are the repositories of the church's historical divine mandate to serve society and upon which the issue of identity is anchored. The study concedes that during its foundational phase in the 1960s and 1970s, African Theology developed in a political climate whose thrust was de-colonisation of the African continent. It was quite understandable that this theology was largely engrossed with the themes of liberation, particularly from the mainstream churches, which had strong ties with the colonial metropolis, and identity restoration on its agenda. African Theology was used as an essential part of cultural nationalism. Writers like Dickson (1984) and Nyamiti (1975) contributed to the growth of the movement from a culturalist perspective, in which they defended African particularistic traditions and culture as very important landmarks in the comprehension of the internal logos of the Christian faith. As Chitando (2009:15) has re-asserted, "Christianity had to find roots in the African soil. African culture could not simply be written off as evil and backward; Africa's religious past was not to be discounted so easily." Thus, understanding Christianity within the context of the African traditional religions is part of cultural liberation. This project of liberation was conceived in revolutionary terms and was inspired, in part, by Kwame Nkrumah's political insight, "[S]eek ye the political kingdom first, the rest will follow." The liberationist motif in African Theology was most apparent in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Southern Africa in particular because colonialism was very widespread. However, in the post-colonial Zimbabwe and in the wake of its crisis, the churches in general and the ZCC in particular should be in the vanguard of evoking the liberationist motif under the guise of African Theology. This makes Zimbabwe a new frontier from which the ZCC can wage a "new war". This is what the study seeks to establish.

It must be noted that there has been a lull in the exercise of African Theology of liberation in post-colonial Africa altogether. In a way, African Theology as a movement was “troubled but not destroyed” (Chitando 2009). African Theology faced a crisis of existence from the mid-1990s. The main reason for the dilemma is that the revolutionary rhetoric is no longer appropriate in post-colonial Africa. As Liberation Theology was greatly associated with nationalist politics, it is suffering from the same trenchant criticism alongside the politicians who have misled a number of failed African countries. This failure has led to a theological mutation that seeks the internal renewal of Christianity so that “a new heaven and new earth” can dawn (Chitando 2009:34). Nevertheless, Liberation Theology is still relevant for the emancipation of the masses. What is urgent is to identify the hopes and aspirations of the masses, and this should be the focus of Liberation Theology to correct the existential challenges of the day that have prevented people’s enjoyment of their rights as citizens. A multi-pronged approach is vital to enhance what Liberation Theology could attain. This has led to the emergence of reconstruction theology.

In the 1990s, however, reconstruction theology has emerged as a new paradigm to enhance African Theology. This paradigm is associated with the writings of Villa-Vicencio (1992), Mugambi (1995), Ka Mana (2002), and Chitando (2009). For Mugambi (1995:xv), reconstruction theology takes place at different levels: personal, cultural and ecclesial reconstruction. Murage (2007:115) observes that reconstruction theology seeks to respond to the renewal and transformation of communities. Villa-Vicencio (1992:14) states that reconstruction theology is a prophetic theology dealing with contemporary problems. For this reason, reconstruction theology for him is an essential part of kairois theology. Despite their different approaches, the thrust of reconstruction theology has been to challenge the contemporary Christian churches to work towards building new communities in Africa (Mugambi 1995:xv). From the ruins of the “failed” countries in Africa, the task of the Christian churches as guided by the new panorama of reconstruction theology is “to envision the future (Ka Mana 2002), paying particular attention to law, human rights and economic justice (Villa-Vicencio 1992) and reconciliation, confidence building and re-orientation (Mugambi 1995; Chitando 2009:35). Mugambi (cited in Chitando 2009:103) has particularly avowed that reconstruction theology

[s]hould be reconstructive rather than destructive, inclusive rather than exclusive, proactive rather than reactive, complementary rather than competitive, integrative rather than disintegrative, programme-driven rather than project-driven, people-centred rather than institution-centred, deed-oriented rather than word-oriented, participatory rather than autocratic, regenerative rather than degenerative, future-sensitive rather than past-

sensitive, co-operative rather than confrontational, consultative rather than impositional.

Reconstruction theology has had its critics. Nevertheless, it enables theologians to get to the foundations of society that are experiencing distress. Theologians would critique the challenges in society such as those emanating from the battered socio-economic and political systems in Zimbabwe. This challenges ZCC leadership to be a prophetic voice and act to restore justice in view of the woes that Zimbabwe has experienced in the last ten years. This call is urgent for churches. One such challenge that the ZCC has had to grapple with is that of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In response to this social and existential crisis, the ZCC developed an HIV/AIDS policy to guide the “theological endeavours to change attitudes and perceptions among church elders, women, men, and youth towards HIV and AIDS” (ZCC n.d.).

Zion Christian Church: Plodding in the valley of crisis

The ZCC was one of the first AICs in Zimbabwe. One of its founders was Samuel Mutendi who received the calling in 1913 in Chegutu whilst serving as a police officer in the British South African Police. Mutendi then moved to South Africa as a migrant labourer where he met Engenas Lekganyane. Together they co-founded the ZCC in 1924. Mutendi later returned to Zimbabwe to launch his evangelical crusade that eventually operated independently of its South African counterpart but retained the Zionist yearning for the holy city. Thus, the ZCC is indebted to the South African spiritual milieu. Against all odds, Mutendi established his first mission at Mutarara, situated 3 km from Nyika Growth Point. It was also referred to as Zion City Moriah named after the South African Zion City Moriah (Rukuni 2008). Mutendi died on 20 July 1976 and was buried at Defe Dopota in Gokwe.

Today, the ZCC has a large following that cuts across age, gender, political, ethnic, regional and national divisions. Most ZCC members in Zimbabwe reside in Masvingo Province, which is arguably its geographical stronghold. The headquarters of the church are located at Mbungo Estates, 50 km east of Masvingo city (Rukuni 2008). Currently, the ZCC is led by Nehemiah Mutendi, who is considered a model *Mutumwa wesangango rake* (messenger of his church), to be emulated as “a loving father, faith healer, rainmaker, wise counsellor, liberator, missionary, educator, spiritual leader and respected prophet of this millennium” (ZCC 2008a). In principle, these qualities are congruent with the type of a leader who blends the ethic of Christian leadership and certain values of the traditional African culture. On this basis, one can develop a hermeneutic of identity with the people one serves. This is an important consideration in the light of the experiences and responses of the ZCC to the Zimbabwean crisis politically, economically

and socially in the decade since the new millennium. A delineation and explication of different experiences and responses constitute the subsequent sections below.

Political experiences and responses

During the colonial era, Samuel Mutendi had a clash of interests with colonial administrators for his attempt to indigenise Christianity and expressing an African voice and soul in Zimbabwe. One senior member of the ZCC reported that Mutendi ardently fought for the equitable distribution of land. Mutendi was constantly jailed for his relentless conviction that he was doing the right thing for his people in spreading the gospel of Christ (Rukuni 2008). Even in the post-colonial period, the political landscape in Zimbabwe did not leave ZCC members unscathed. They were either victims or perpetrators of politically motivated violence that characterised the pre- and post-election periods. Some ZCC believers were caught in the cross-fire of political “terror masters” who perpetrated violence. In one incident in Mwenezi District, a 15-year-old boy murdered a ZANU-PF terror master at a ZCC meeting in revenge for his father, who was a victim of the politically motivated violence in the presidential run-off of June 2008. The incident occurred in Village 2 near Neshuro Growth Point, where the terror master identified as Machacha had wanted to further victimise worshippers at a ZCC service by demanding that the church service be halted. According to one witness, “That boy’s father Lameck Muripo was killed by ZANU (PF) thugs in 2008. Their home was burnt and they were left homeless but the children were still young. However, up to now the culprits... were walking free and this boy said he wanted to revenge” (VOP 2010). Thus, although the revenging spirit of the boy does not represent the position of the entire ZCC congregation, the incident shows that the members of AICs were not immune from politically motivated violence. Nevertheless, the involvement of ZCC members in perpetrating acts of political violence was not sanctioned by the Church. According to some interviewees in urban Masvingo, the official position of the ZCC was that of neutrality. The members of the ZCC were urged to stay away from political violence (Neganda 2009; Ziki 2009). From a theological perspective, the stance on neutrality in the realm of politics is inspired by the fact that the ZCC as a church believes in preaching peace and shunning violence. This is fundamental to the ZCC’s identity as a religious organisation.

However, the ZCC was not passive during the period after the presidential run-off. With regard to the deadlock in the post-presidential run-off, the church advocated peace, justice and reconciliation by all means necessary. The ZCC, like the other denominations under the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Zimbabwe Council of Churches, fervently prayed for the political unity that culminated in the signing of the historic GPA on 15 September 2008. The

GPA became the blueprint for the GNU that came into effect on 11 February 2009. Notably, some respondents said that Bp. Mutendi claimed that before the GPA, he saw a vision of two bulls fighting but eventually yoked together. Thus, ZCC members believe that this prophecy was fulfilled when the GPA was signed and the subsequent GNU was formed. With the outcome of the GNU, it is important to appraise the significance of prayer in national politics in Zimbabwe. Prayer saw the cooperation of various churches (the ZCC included) in praying for the political leadership to learn to dialogue together in the search for conflict management. The gist of the prayers was to calm down a volatile and divided electorate to minimise violence in the process of political electioneering. It must be added that the theology of prayer was meant to reconcile people. In order to demonstrate the importance of prayer sessions in Zimbabwe, churches conducted prayer crusades, beginning in the capital city Harare and then cascaded them throughout the country, at provincial and district levels. The ZCC was a key participant in all these prayer sessions. Therefore, there is a close relationship between the theology of prayer and national politics.

Notably, the ZCC is also part of the stakeholders who are participating in the consultations for the constitution-drafting process. As with the experiences of churches in the democratisation of Malawi (Nzunda and Ross 1995), the ZCC realised that genuine participatory democracy is a prerequisite for a fair political competition that ensures that justice and peace prevail in a country. As one ZCC member commented, the general participation of ZCC members in the constitution-drafting process in Zimbabwe is necessary and justified to enhance national healing, reconciliation and unity. This view resonates with Article VII of the GPA (2008:7), which advocates equality, national healing, cohesion and unity. This explains why the ZCC, like other churches, is in full support of the existence of the GNU: because it was founded on the desire to restore political, social and economic sanity in Zimbabwe.

Economic experiences and responses

The economic challenges experienced by most Zimbabweans did not spare the average member of the ZCC. In Zimbabwe's "casino economy" (Gono 2008), some ZCC members worked in the informal sector, including vendors, welders, basket-makers and cross-border traders at flea markets (Mandude 2010). Consequently, the majority of members residing in the urban centres and growth points did not escape the impact of the government-initiated Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order; Sibanda et al. 2008). Nevertheless, the negative effects of this operation, in addition to hyperinflation that further eroded the value of the moribund Zimbabwean dollar did not dampen the spirit of resilience and self-reliance among the ZCC members. One interviewee noted that some ZCC men and women improved their strategies for survival through intensifying cross-

border trading because there was a ready market of goods in this period (Mafukidze 2009). Many cross-borders made a fortune by selling their goods at black market rates. Additionally, it is believed that the success of some ZCC female cross-border traders from Zimbabwe in neighbouring countries was a result of the close cooperation between members of the ZCC from Zimbabwe and those in the host nations such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. One ZCC adherent remarked that “without some ‘connections’ one would not easily break even in a foreign territory. You would risk losing your goods or cash to robbers.” This resonates well with Chitando’s (2004:125) observation that the challenge of accommodation that Zimbabwean traders could face would be overcome through assistance from fellow believers in those countries. Thus, this cross-border survival strategy based on shared faith has been a basis for mutual support for ZCC believers in different countries.

The resilience of the ZCC members could be observed in their unwavering participation and contribution towards the construction of the Mbungu Conference Centre, a multi-purpose edifice measuring 5 000 square metres (ZCC 2008b). The construction started on 1 October 2005. The conference centre is meant to be used by thousands of ZCC followers for worship by people who used to pray in the open (ZCC 2008b). The construction of the Mbungu Conference Centre is a great feat. This is because the project was entirely funded by church followers. Furthermore, it was also initiated during the height of the political, social and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Adherents of the ZCC were greatly inspired by the teaching of their leader about the need to participate in this project. Bp. Nehemiah Mutendi “insisted that church members must fund the project if they were to receive blessings” (ZCC 2008b). Additionally, in spite of the economic meltdown in the country, Bp. Mutendi was fully convinced that this was the opportune time to build the mammoth centre, since the project was a clear demonstration that nothing is impossible with God. According to one member, the project was perceived as part of divine visitation. The study further established that some ZCC members felt obliged to do the work of God by playing their part in giving. One senior member remarked that “I am inspired by the biblical teaching that it is more blessed to give than to receive. *Kupa kuturika. Uchawana zvapaketwa pakupedzisira*. [To give is to invest. You will get more than double in the end.]” This is a common belief among ZCC members, given that a substantial number have generously contributed in cash and in kind towards the construction of the conference centre. The contributions are collected mainly during the ZCC anniversaries held for the founder at Defe every July and the Easter gatherings at Mbungu Estates (Mangiza 2009). The ZCC Brass Band also joined the rest of the members in canvassing for the completion of the project through fundraising events at which they sang popular songs like

“Ichapera chete imba [The Mbungo Conference Centre will be complete without doubt]”, *“Uya Uwone Samere* [Come and see Samuel Mutendi]” and *“Ndire Ndire*”. The last two songs are nostalgic in focus. They are sung to glorify Samuel Mutendi, the founder of the church. The way in which the ZCC conjures Mutendi to witness their achievements is reminiscent of the veneration of ancestors in the African tradition. Mbiti (1969:1) calls ancestor figures the “living dead”. Thus, the ZCC’s Christian identity is blended with some elements of African traditional religiosity. The brass band’s use of song, dance and drumming is evocative of African heritage in which Africans are regarded as a singing and dancing people utilising music, song, dance, the clapping of hands and drums, among other instruments (Makahamadze and Sibanda 2008 p.291). In the same vein, Kalilombe (1999:153) observes that “what is being lived in the independent churches in celebration, sermon, song, dance, prophecy, dreams, visions, and healing rituals constitutes authentic and original material for African theology.” Indeed, the ZCC is a church that evinces spiritualities of enthusiasm, featuring “singing and dancing souls” (Botha 2008:48), perhaps as conduits of escapism or blissful unawareness of continuation of economic woes. In line with the revival of the economy, one ZCC member remarked that “the conference centre is a tourist attraction alongside the renowned Great Zimbabwe Monuments also located in Masvingo Province. Its magnificence is great. You can even find food outlets and banks just like in the shopping mall you can find in Harare. I am proud to be ZCC because we now have the biggest church-cum-business structure in Masvingo.” Thus, consciously or unconsciously, the ZCC is making a great contribution towards reviving the shattered economy. As much as can be noted here, this is in accordance with the essence of reconstruction theology.

It is generally believed that the sanctions that were imposed on Zimbabwe on account of the controversial land reform programme crippled the economy of Zimbabwe. The study established that the ZCC supports the land reform programme and opposes the sanctions. Some ZCC members believe that the economic sanctions are the cause of misery manifested through unemployment, shortages of basic commodities, foreign currency shortage, to mention but a few. With reference to the land issue, one respondent stated, that:

Even if I refer you back to the history of the Israelites, after centuries they returned to Canaan and claimed their land from the Palestinians. So biblically, even God supports the land reform programme. So we are not unique. We too fought for this land and there won’t be a complete liberation without full recovery of our land. We as a church, also have to benefit from the land reform. What the government has done is a fulfilment of our hopes and expectations as the sons of the soil (Chikasha 2010).

However, it is important to note that the respondent above was not necessarily speaking for the church. During the interview, he revealed that he was an ex-combatant and had benefited from the land reform programme. Nonetheless, most of our interviewees concurred that the redistribution of the land was in accordance with biblical teachings. Furthermore, the interviewees were aware of and quick to refer to the story of Naboth, which depicts the value of land ownership, and condemns the King's abuse of power when he murdered Naboth so that he could take his land (1 Kings 21:1–26).

It can be accurately inferred that the ZCC agrees with ZANU-PF's claim that "the land is the economy and the economy is land" (Chitando 2005:223). It should be realised that the "theology of land" that ZANU-PF affirms emanated as a vital theme within the AICs in Zimbabwe. In part, AICs avowed that "Africans must be left to become masters of their own destiny" (Chitando 2004:128). This resonates with what one senior elder of the ZCC noted when he said: "*Hatichadi kuita masquatter munyika yedu. Saka tichiti ivhu kuvanhu sezvakataurwa navaMugabe.* [We no longer want to be squatters in our own country. That is why we say land to the people as what Mugabe said.]" In this way, there is no doubt that the ZCC believes "that the farm invasions by peasants and war veterans were a crusade meant to recover lost ancestral lands" (Chitando 2005:223). That the ZCC supports the land reform programme can be understood in terms of identity. Despite the shortcomings of the mechanics of land redistribution, in essence, land reform was meant to redress and address the historical imbalances in the patterns of land allocation traceable to the colonial era (Moyana 2002:1). The ZCC has supported land reform exercise because it is meant to answer the aspirations and interests of the landless majority of the people. It is a source of identity that is at the core of African Theology. This identity is for sustainable development and liberates people from situations that dehumanise. Paradoxically, it is interesting to note that some church leaders own multiple farms just like some top government officials. One of the informants reported that the bishop of the ZCC, in particular, has five wives and each one lives on a separate farm (Machingura 2010). This is a negative side of the land reform programme. Being part of the multiple-farm owners compromises the role of the church in preaching and doing justice.

Social experiences and responses

The teachings of Samuel Mutendi targeted the eradication of social challenges such as disease, poverty, immorality and illiteracy (Mutendi 2009). The members of the ZCC were not spared the social erosion that resulted from the economic meltdown experienced between 2000 and 2008. Some ZCC members could not send their children to school, as many families lived in abject poverty, following the destruction of the informal sector (Mudumi 2009). However, ZCC leadership urged its members:

“Ramba wakashinga mutendi. Pfavira ngoma rwendo rurefu. Tiri pajoini. [Believer, remain resilient. Take it easy, the journey is long. We are on a pilgrimage.]” From these sentiments, it can be argued that the ZCC’s identity is fluid. As Appiah (1979, cited in Kenzo 2002:332) writes: “African culture (and identity) is something which needs to be constructed in the present and future, and not something which can be retrieved from an invented past.” This is what the ZCC has done. For instance, *ramba wakashinga* [remain resilient], included in ZANU-PF’s political jargon, is meant to encourage endurance, patience and discipline despite the hardships people are facing in Zimbabwe. The ZCC has creatively appropriated this jargon and incorporated it into its theological discourses. Its adoption by the ZCC is meant to inculcate virtues like confidence, love and hope in order to contain the shocks of social ills and alienation. On another note, as some respondents testified, the ZCC’s leadership insist that worshippers fast regularly to fight temptation and avoid indulging in such things as corruption, prostitution and homosexuality. This demonstrates that the ZCC is deeply concerned about the social well-being of its membership. Along the same lines, but in a wider context, this assures the regeneration of a moral society in Zimbabwe.

The other critical challenge that confronts the ZCC is widespread disease among its members. The diseases currently plaguing society include HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, measles, and mental disorders. Notably, some ZCC members have not been spared these diseases. The majority of the members are either affected or infected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic (Mandude 2010). However, although ZCC members are permitted to seek medical attention at hospitals, it is vital to note that some people resort to faith healing in the church. This applies to ZCC members and non-members alike. This is due to prohibitive hospital charges and a lack of up-to-date facilities. Therefore, the ZCC as a church has become the people’s reliable surgery and pharmacy. As is the case with other AICs, ZCC members attribute the cause of disease to the spiritual realm. According to one participant in this study, members often battle with *mamhepo* (evil spirits), *ngozi* (avenging spirits), *mashave* (alien spirits) and other ailments. As a remedy, the ZCC resorts to exorcism of evil spirits and faith healing that uses *mvura inoera* (holy water) and *nariti* (special needles) meant to cure the sick. Such a needle is used by deacons and prophets, like a punch, to remove contaminated blood. The only danger that has militated against its use is the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as unsterilised needles may place people at risk. On the use of “holy water” for healing, each member brings a bottle of water to be blessed using the sacred stick, known as *Mapumhangozi*. The holy water ZCC members drink, bath in and sprinkle around their homes to chase away evil spirits and cleanse haunted homes (Mangiza 2010).

By far the most debilitating disease in society at large and in the ZCC in particular is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, the ZCC as a church has been forthcoming in its response to the pandemic. It has formulated a comprehensive HIV/AIDS policy document. This is a marked achievement, given that very few AICs in Zimbabwe have come up with a document that can be equated to that of the ZCC. In this document, the ZCC encourages behaviour change among its members. For instance, although polygamous marriages were permitted in the past, the HIV/AIDS policy document promotes monogamy through encouraging adherents to adopt the Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11). This act is enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. As the research established, Sanctions Mutendi, one of Bp. Nehemiah Mutendi's sons was married under the Marriage Act. He has become a new model in the family and for the ZCC at large, helping establish new foundations of monogamy (Mangiza 2010). This resonates with what the ZCC HIV/AIDS policy recommends (ZCC n.d.:12). In addition, the document encourages church members to attend voluntary counselling and testing prior to marriage. This is important for couples to establish their HIV status in order to build their relationship on an informed and sound basis. The whole exercise fosters the spirit of love, care and responsibility in society. These qualities smack of Christian ethics and the African philosophy of ubuntu/unhu (humanness). Therefore, the ZCC's identity in the social and moral spheres is based on firm values of Christianity and African traditional religion.

The HIV/AIDS policy document discourages African traditional practices that violate human rights in society such as *mukadzi wekuripa ngozi* (offering of a girl child to appease avenging spirits), *chimutsamapfihwa* (giving of a surrogate wife to a widower to replace the deceased one), *kugara nhaka* (inheriting of a wife due to death of her husband), *kuzvarira* (pledging of a child due to poverty) and *makunakuna* (having sex with one's child). Those who breach these principles of the church risk excommunication. These particularistic realities are pervasive in African culture. They are real among ZCC members because they are part of the sociological profile of the Zimbabwean society in which they are rooted. In part, this explains why the mission of the ZCC is informed by an African Theology and whose identity is influenced by existential situatedness. Thus, the ZCC's response to the social crisis is one of action. Members of the ZCC have not just put their hands on their heads in despair of the crisis; the ZCC's response to HIV/AIDS has been pragmatic.

Furthermore, the ZCC has responded similarly to other health challenges. The study established that the ZCC took heed of the government's call to have their children immunised against killer diseases like measles (Ngadzire 2010). In addition to faith healing, its embrace of Western medicine has placed the ZCC in a unique position among the AICs.

The church's treatment initiatives stress the role of the Holy Spirit and a respect for human rights to its membership. This is true in the ZCC especially where members appreciate the works of *Mapumhangozi Tsvimbo yaSamere Mutendi* (Muringami 2009; Mangiza 2010). In the African traditional context, *tsvimbo* (walking stick) is a symbol of power and authority but the unique sacred stick in the ZCC known as *Mapumhangozi* is associated with healing powers. There are interesting elements of reaffirmation of traditional culture and religion in the ZCC that have been intermingled with Christianity, given that *Mapumhangozi* literally implies that the sacred stick gets rid of *ngozi*. (It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the various miracles that members testify are facilitated through this stick that Bp. Nehemiah Mutendi utilises in the ZCC.)

Furthermore, the ZCC has made tremendous progress in the area of education. Since the foundation of this church, Samuel Mutendi sought to eradicate illiteracy. The first school was established in 1932. It was meant to competently combat poverty and disease. Bp. Nehemiah Mutendi, who is a trained teacher, upheld his father's vision of educating the people. This shows that he realised the importance of education for development in society. In the wake of the Zimbabwean crisis after 2000, the church has managed to establish ten community schools, four primary and six secondary schools. Schools that have been built since 2000 include Mutevhure Secondary School (ZCC 2008a: B7), Zaka District (2001); Mutarara Primary School, Bikita District (2002); NaFombo uri Magonde Secondary School (ZCC 2008a: B7), Makonde District (2002); and Tanda Saskare High School (ZCC 2008a: B7), Gokwe North District (ZCC 2008a; S. Mutendi 2009). More schools, especially primary schools are being established by the ZCC in newly resettled farming areas. Notably, some of these schools are administered by qualified members of the ZCC, particularly Mutendi family members. The schools are supported by the church through donations, such as groceries and money from ZCC members. These donations have helped to retain the teaching staff in these tough economic times. The ZCC assists some needy students in paying their tuition for high schools, colleges and universities in Zimbabwe (Mandude 2010). Thus, through education, the ZCC transforms the social and economic lives of its members and ordinary people.

Theological reflections

The above discussion demonstrates that the Christian church in Zimbabwe is experiencing a time of judgment and faith crisis in its pastoral and humanitarian responsibilities. In spite of the challenges, many churches are participating in the transformation of Zimbabwe in various ways. It is this ethic of shared responsibility that will improve the situation in Zimbabwe. The churches should be encouraged to continue their good work. That the

ZCC has not neglected those affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS, and has adopted an HIV/AIDS policy proves that it is a church “Living in hope” (Chitando 2007a) and “Acting in hope” (Chitando 2007b). The Christian churches in general and the ZCC in particular must continue to be artisans of the people’s hope and their regeneration (Jer. 22:13–26).

The position of the ZCC on education is commendable. In a way, education is a tool for fighting illiteracy, disease and poverty. All these social ills are theologically inadmissible and do not conform to God’s purpose for his creation.

Another critical issue is whether the Zimbabwean crisis represents growth or decline for the church. In our view, the crisis in Zimbabwe provides a *kairos*, that is, a moment of divine grace and opportunity in which God has provided a challenge that requires decisive action (Kairos Theologians 1985:4). The ZCC is therefore called upon to evoke the divine mandate because there is something wrong in Zimbabwe today. In our view, this is the quintessence of missio-theological directions that must govern pastoral activities of churches in Zimbabwe.

The Christian churches should realise that the ordinary people, though they may not openly say so, are enquiring: “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” (Isa. 21:11). In this case, the church represents the watchman or the watchdog and not the lapdog. Hence, the churches are called upon to address issues that hinder the fulfilment of people’s hopes as proclaimed by Jesus when he stated: “I came so that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). When churches take action on behalf of the poor, this becomes a demonstration of God’s concern for humanity. In the context of Zimbabwe, the implication for the churches is that, far from hiding behind a wall of theological silence, they must emerge as sources and resources for national regeneration. This is the reason that churches have to reflect upon their existential milieu and embrace a theology that transcends mere combat liberation. This explains why reconstruction theology is relevant. It is a paradigm that transforms society and sets free the poor who are dying “before their time” (Gutiérrez 1983:77). This reconstruction theology is patterned on the model of Isaiah’s command, thus: “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations” (Isa. 61:4). In addition, by following the call of St Luke in the New Testament, the churches in Zimbabwe must be determined to declare: “The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Luke 22:25–26). Accordingly, this is the reason that the ZCC and the rest of other churches should re-assess the implications of the gospel message and their pastoral actions in order to usher in a new

dispensation of life for the powerless and marginalised people of Zimbabwe. The discipline of service is what is ideal.

Summary and recommendations

The ZCC is a pragmatic religious movement in Zimbabwe. The study has shown that the experiences and responses of the ZCC to the Zimbabwean crisis stand as typical examples in which Christianity plays visible roles in averting existential crises. Socially, the ZCC is tackling evils such as hunger, poverty, disease and illiteracy. These evils constitute “social sin” because they render humanity powerless. The church believes that humankind must be liberated from this kind of sin. In order to eradicate sin, the ZCC is actively involved in social engineering through the development of education, health and other humanitarian assistance to the needy. This is reconstruction theology in action because it is part of practical action that goes beyond spiritual matters and mere rhetoric. Economically, in support of agricultural development, the ZCC embraced the land reform programme with open hands. The ZCC’s response is partly inspired by the Bible and local cultural values regarding the importance of land. This reflects the vitality of African Theology and identity. It supports the “biblical-land theology” that affirms Israelite nationhood and identity. Furthermore, it was also established that its membership is resilient in economic activities with an inclination towards vocational skills and cross-border trade. Politically, the ZCC is a significant player in conflict resolution and conflict management in events that affect Zimbabwe as a nation. The participation of the ZCC in this regard reinforces the conviction that reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel and, by virtue of the ZCC’s divine mandate, it has featured in many ecumenical forums to promote national healing and unity.

The study concludes by making the following recommendations. Firstly, churches must realise that they are key stakeholders in conflict management and conflict resolution. In this way, churches must forge an alliance through which they can meet the social, economic and political challenges facing Zimbabwe. Secondly, ecumenical forums need to be effectively organised to pursue meaningful cooperation in the reconstruction of society. Thirdly, the mission of the churches must take seriously African Theology as the core of their pastoral work. It is on this basis that an identity with the marginalised people can be forged in Zimbabwe.

References

- Amanze, J. 1998 African Christianity in Botswana, Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Banana, C.S. (ed.) 1989. Turmoil and tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890–1990. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Bediako, K. 1992 Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Botha, N. 2008. Mission in humility and hope: African perspectives on Edinburgh 2010. *Missionalia* 36(1), April:46–59.
- Chikasha, S. 2010. [personal interview]. 7 May, Zimuto. (aged 70).
- Chitando, E. 2004. African Instituted Churches in Southern Africa: Paragons of regional integration? *African Journal of International Affairs* 7(1 and 2):117–132.
- Chitando, E. 2005. “In the beginning was the land”: The appropriation of religious themes in political discourses in Zimbabwe. *Africa* 75(2):220–239.
- Chitando, E. 2007a. Living in hope: African churches and HIV/AIDS 1. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Chitando, E. 2007b. Acting in hope: African churches and HIV/AIDS 2. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Chitando, E. 2009. Troubled but not destroyed. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Chitando, E. 2010. African Jews: Expressing contested identities in tight spaces, in Faith in the city: The role and place of religion in Harare, edited by L. Togarasei and E. Chitando. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press:107–135.
- Daneel, M.L. 1987. Quest for belonging: Introduction to a study of African Independent Churches. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Dickson, K.A. 1973. The Old Testament and African Theology. *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 4, June:31.
- Dickson, K.A. 1984 Theology in Africa, New York: Orbis Books.
- Dickson, K.A. 1985. Religion and Nkrumah: A study in church and state relations in the first republic. Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.
- Fiedler, K., Gundani, P. and Mijoga, H. (eds.) 2000. Theology cooked in an African pot. Special Issue of the ATISCA Bulletin, Nos. 5 and 6, 1996/1997, Zomba: ATISCA.
- Gono, G. 2008. Zimbabwe’s casino economy: Extraordinary measures for extraordinary challenges. Harare: ZPH Publishers.
- GPA see Zimbabwe.
- Gutiérrez, G. 1983. The power of the poor in history: Selected writings. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Idowu, E.B. 1965. Towards an indigenous church. London: Oxford University Press.

- Kairos Theologians. 1985. *Challenge to the church: A theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa – The Kairos document and commentaries*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Kalilombe, P.A. 1999. *Doing theology at the grassroots: Theological essays from Malawi*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Ka Mana, 2002 *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a new African Society*, Yaonde: Editions Cle.
- Kenzo, M.J. 2002. Thinking otherwise about Africa: Post-colonialism, postmodernism, and the future of African Theology. *Exchange* 31(4):323–341.
- Kottak, 2003 *Cultural Anthropology*. New York: MacGraw-Hill.
- Machingura, E. 2010. [personal interview]. 12 Jun., Morningside. (aged 47).
- Mafukidze, G. 2009. [personal interview]. 10 Jul., Masvingo. (aged 31).
- Makahamadze, T. and Sibanda, F. “Melodies to God”: The place of music, instruments and dance in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. *Exchange* 37(3):290–309.
- Maluleke, T.S. 1996. Black and African theologies in the new world order: A time to drink from our own wells. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 96, November:3–19.
- Mandude, C. 2010. [personal interview]. 29 Jul., Masvingo. (aged 40).
- Mangiza, J. 2009. [personal interview]. 10 Jul., Masvingo. (aged 43).
- Mangiza, J. 2010. The role and place of symbolism in Zion Christian Church of Mutendi with special reference to Mapumhangozi Tsvimbo yaSamere Mutendi. Report submitted to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University. (Unpublished study material).
- Mbiti, J.S. 1969. *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Moyana, H.V. 2002. *The political economy of land in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Mudumi, L. 2009. [personal interview]. 13 Jun., Gutu. (aged 50).
- Mugambi, J.N.K. 1995. *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the Cold War*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Murage, J.K. 2009. Theology of reconstruction: The painful realities and practical options! *Exchange* 38(1):84–102.
- Muringami, R. 2009. [personal interview]. 5 Jun., Masvingo. (aged 51).
- Mutendi, N. 2009. [personal interview]. 23 Jul., Defe. (aged 70).
- Mutendi, S. 2009. [personal interview]. 22 Jul., Defe. (aged 55).
- Muzorewa, G.H. 1985. *The origins and development of African Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books.
- Neganda, P. 2009. [personal interview]. 5 Jun., Masvingo. (aged 23).
- Ngadziore, E.T.C. 2010. [personal interview]. 20 Jun, Masvingo. (aged 43).
- Nyamiti 1975 *Christ Our Ancestor*, Dar es Salaam, East African Publishing House.

- Nzunda, M.S. and Ross, K.R. 1995. Church, law, and political transition in Malawi, 1992–1994. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Parratt, J. (ed.) 1997. A reader in African Christian theology. London: SPCK Publishing.
- Raftopoulos, B. and Savage, T. 2004. Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation, Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.
- Rukuni, C. 20–26 July 2008. “Be there to get it”: ZCC marks 32nd anniversary. The Sunday Mail Pg No. B6.
- Shorter, A. 1979 African Christian Theology. London: Longman.
- Sibanda, F. and Masaka, D. 2010. Marriage of convenience: Theological and philosophical reflections on Zimbabwe’s Government of National Unity (GNU). (Unpublished study material).
- Sibanda, F., Makahamadze, T. and Maposa, R.S. 2008. “Hawks and doves”: The impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Exchange 37(1):68–85.
- Villa-Vicencio, C. 1992. A theology of reconstruction: Nation-building and human rights. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VOP (Radio Voice of the People). 2010. Boy (15) murders ZANU (PF) terror master in revenge for Dad. <http://www.radiovop.com/index.php/national-news/3719-boy-15-murders-zanu-pf-terror-master-in-revenge-for-dad.html> [accessed 11 Sept. 2012].
- ZCC (Zion Christian Church). n.d. Zion Christian Church HIV and AIDS policy. (Unpublished study material).
- ZCC (Zion Christian Church). 20–26 July 2008a. ZCC 32nd Anniversary: Promotes Education, Eliminates Poverty. The Sunday Mail, p. B7.
- ZCC (Zion Christian Church). 20–26 July 2008b. ZCC 32nd Anniversary: State of the Art Conference Centre. The Sunday Mail p.B9.
- Ziki, C. 2009. [personal interview]. 4 Jun., Masvingo. (aged 35).
- Zimbabwe. 2008. Global political agreement.

Post-election violence in Zimbabwe (2008–2010): The agency of the Roman Catholic Church in national healing and democracy

Francisca H. Chimhanda and Aletha Dube¹

Abstract

Zimbabweans are a deeply wounded people, particularly as a result of the unprecedented politically motivated violence in the period following the harmonised elections and leading up to the presidential run-off (29 March–27 June 2008). They hunger for good governance, national healing and prosperity. The church that shares in the mission of Christ, in bringing the good news of salvation to all people, is a key player in mediating peace and reconciliation. This article explores how the Roman Catholic Church exercises its role of prophetic witness. Its interventions are then evaluated for their authentic, proactive agency and their empowerment of the suffering masses as they seek peace, national healing, cohesion and development.

Keywords: Post-election violence, authentic reconciliation, the church's mission of salvation, prophetic witness, transition to democracy, Zimbabwe, Roman Catholic Church.

Introduction

For the people of Zimbabwe, the year 2008 stands out as having been particularly disastrous. During 2008, they experienced unprecedented post-election violence that was exacerbated by socio-economic and political meltdown, along with experiences of gross violations of fundamental human rights. The violence, occurring nearly three decades after Zimbabwe's independence from colonial rule, makes the quest for truth, reconciliation and healing a critical issue. The question commonly asked by the suffering Zimbabwean masses is: Where is God in all this? Since the church, by its very nature and mission, is an instrument of God's grace, a related question is: Where is the church in all this? This article explains the church's mission of salvation and seeks to expose and appraise the Roman Catholic Church's engagement with post-election violence in Zimbabwe in 2008 and thereafter, particularly its strategies for promoting national healing, reconciliation and capacity building in the country's transition to democracy. The article seeks to map the way forward for Zimbabwe. The authors offer both internal and external critique.

¹ Dr Francisca H Chimhanda is Associate Professor in Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. She can be contacted at chimhfh@unisa.ac.za.

Dr Aletha Dube Sisters of Jesus Infant (SJI) is a senior lecturer at St Augustine's Regional Major Seminary, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She can be contacted at andawana@hotmail.com.

The authors, who are Zimbabwean Roman Catholic Church religious sisters, position themselves as participant observers. Evidence concerning the Roman Catholic Church's agency for national healing, justice and peace were obtained from print media (pastoral letters, newsletters, reports), informal interviews with church leadership (heads of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference [ZCBC] commissions, particularly the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), and members of religious orders, and social communications Commission. A questionnaire was used to access information about concrete church action (interventions for national healing, justice and peace, and the constitution-making process) in various dioceses, deaneries and parishes of the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. Since various forms of violence in the period of study are not disputed and, in particular, to avoid partisanship and political reprisal, the questionnaire focused only on implementation of strategic interventions aimed at relief aid and social change (national healing and development). Respondents were Philosophy students (seminarians of St Augustine's Regional Major Seminary, Bulawayo) who were regarded as having strategic access to information from Zimbabwe's eight dioceses.

Post-election violence in Zimbabwe in the period 29 March–27 June 2008 and thereafter

Zimbabweans are a deeply wounded people, headed by a government (highly influenced by the ZANU-PF party) that sanctions violence with impunity. In Zimbabwe, 2008 saw the height of approximately three decades of post-colonial violence. The government under ZANU-PF's leadership has a history of rigging elections in an atmosphere of violence for the past decade at least. Following the harmonised elections of 29 March 2008, the government refused to concede an election defeat, and unleashed what could only be called a "reign of terror". Despicable atrocities were committed in a two-pronged attack on the electorate. Firstly, there were punitive measures for giving a majority vote to the opposition party. Secondly, voters were intimidated into retaining the incumbent (in the presidential run-off of 27 June 2008).

The civil strife of this period stopped short of being called the second Gukurahundi (the name is derived from the first rains that wash away chaff) - the first Gukurahundi refers to the Matabeleland and Midlands atrocities of 1980–1988 (CCJPZ and the Legal Resources Foundation document "Breaking the silence, building true peace" 1997) - possibly because this time the conflict landscape was centred mostly in Mashonaland rather than Matabeleland, and the victims were mainly the Shona rather than the Ndebele.

The violence can be categorised into verbal abuse, torture, maiming, killing, abduction and disappearance. In rural areas especially, ruling party youth militia (nicknamed “Green Bombers”) visited many homes and huts and forcefully drove people to “political re-orientation night rallies” at torture camps (Shona: *Pungwe*). The open hijacking and politicisation of the law enforcement agencies - the police, security forces and the military - under the direct command of the president and the Minister of Home Affairs (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum v Zimbabwe (2006) AHRLR 128 (ACHPR 2006), led to a complete breakdown of the rule of law in that the law was used selectively to systematically target, abduct, detain and torture beating, mutilation of limbs and killing) opposition-party members and those suspected of having voted for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Draconian laws, in particular the Public Order and Security Act and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, were enforced to deny people public space and their right to demonstrate and agitate for an end to corruption and violence. Given all this, the election campaign leading to the presidential run-off election lost its political character entirely and assumed the status of a military operation (ZCBC 2008a:27–38; 2008b:4–5).

Hundreds of innocent people were killed, maimed or impoverished when property was burnt or destroyed, and when they had to flee their homes for safety. In this wave of violence, advantage was taken of both the young and the old. Owing to these groups’ ignorance of political trickery, they were used and misused. For example, it is alleged that some youths were paid lump sums of money by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to torture, maim or kill innocent people and yet, in a situation of hyperinflation, they could not convert that money into anything of value. Parents were victimised for allegedly having sons/daughters who supported the opposition party. There were also those who took advantage of the civil strife to engage in various personal vendettas to settle old grievances.

All Zimbabweans were deeply wounded - because evil tarnishes both the oppressed and the oppressor. They were exposed to gross human rights violations because of bad governance and, in particular, the politically motivated violence that both dehumanised and demoralised them. Huge numbers of Zimbabweans were reduced to destitution through the complete breakdown of the education, health, and politico-economic system. The whole nation was totally disenfranchised and disoriented in the thick of the violence of the presidential run-off campaign (ZCBC 2008b). The wish of the electorate in the harmonised elections of 29 March was not respected and was eventually seriously compromised through the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU). Some Zimbabweans were forced to become political and economic refugees as they fled to neighbouring countries; there was a complete breakdown of family life.

The Global Political Agreement, which led to the formation of the power-sharing GNU (signed 15 September 2008, effective January 2009), makes it fair to say that the whole world, and the African Union and Southern African Development Community in particular, showed complicity in compromising the people's power (as shown in the 29 March election result) by reinstating the tyranny they knew "and cursed the day before" (Christie 2010:7). The idea of such "power-sharing" is skewed (flawed) and has resulted in the people of Zimbabwe being held to ransom - which in itself is prolonging the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe.

There is also an important issue relating to the "internalisation of violence" that affects every Zimbabwean and this is the Shona belief in *ngozi*, "vengeance spirits" (Chimhanda 2000:147). The Shona believe that the spirit of the dead person visits the offender, crying out for vengeance, and that *ngozi* can wipe out the whole family of the offender by causing psychological disorders and eventually, death. With the advent of post-election violence, some people often regarded mentally disordered people as "*ngozi* sufferers" and thus callously denied them the assistance they needed.

As far as internalised violence is concerned, there is also the issue of children born into this situation of moral chaos and decay. People express the fear that, since violence and moral decay have been allowed to persist for decades of post-colonial rule, the country will never revert to normal. The collapse of the market economy and a serious scarcity of commodities have, of course, led to the exploitation of the poor. People sell poor quality goods at exorbitant prices. The concept of helping one's neighbour no longer applies. People ask to be paid for even the smallest act of charity.

According to Wermter (2009:1), another aspect of internalised violence concerns the emergent culture of begging and dependency. It is frightening to observe that people who used to be hardworking and self-supportive are now reduced to begging (p. 1). Wermter (2009:1) adds that the collapse of our schools brings with it a generation who lacks the capacity to work and who will remain dependent on hand-outs. Long-term church interventions thus aim at reinstating the work ethic, especially by teaching the poor to fish rather than allowing them to rely totally on food hand-outs.

Today, more than a year after the establishment of the GNU, violence persists through the continued "manipulation and closure of democratic space" by the arbitrary application of the draconian Public Order and Security Act and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ZCC 2009), farm invasions and the looting of the nation's resources. There is also fear of another wave of political violence; there are reports of pockets of resistance to the constitution and efforts to strive for a people-driven constitution in the forthcoming election.

It is noteworthy that in 2008 the violence inflicted on the people was further exacerbated by what appeared to be natural causes, that is, severe drought and famine, and an outbreak of cholera (August 2008) that claimed over 4 000 lives (Mukandavire *et al.* 2011:8767 state cholera death estimates for the period 2008–2009 as 4 282 and 4 287, respectively).

The socio-economic and political issues, on further examination, are closely related to disease management and the people's general well-being. The violent fast-track acquisition of land from white commercial farmers (2000–2006) has seen the collapse of Zimbabwe's highly agrarian economy, reducing what was once the bread-basket of Southern Africa to a begging bowl. In 2008, many people in rural areas narrated how they were saved from starvation by eating wild fruits. By some kind of divine providence, the wild fruit (Shona: *chakata*) was abundant for a limited season and people could crack the nut for food and make porridge, drinks, fritters and jam.

However, one should not oversimplify the land issue. There was undoubtedly a critical need for land reform in order to redress the colonial violence perpetrated on black indigenous people in the past. What is questionable though is the sudden and violent land acquisition and resettlement in the post-colonial era. Indeed, the issue of access to or denial of land touches a raw nerve of every Zimbabwean national, not just the so-called war veterans. Every Zimbabwean was affected by the war, since stark war frontiers included the villages. Land is of prime value to black Zimbabweans because land and ancestors traditionally share a common link. The ancestors are "owners of the land" (Chimhanda 2000:68–70) and Zimbabweans are "sons and daughters of the land" (Shona: *vana vevhu*).

From this background of brokenness, dehumanisation and demoralisation, it can be said that the people of Zimbabwe are in transition from colonialism, post-colonial and post-election violence to a much sought after democracy.

The transition to democracy

Democracy is government by all the people for the people, that is, "a system of government in which all the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives" (Hornby 2010:388). A time of crisis is a time of opportunity and challenge, especially for the church in Zimbabwe, which must seize the opportunity and shoulder its responsibility of prophetic engagement towards national healing and reconciliation. The ZCBC (2009:8) sees this as "a moment of grace that can and should be turned into a new beginning", a historical moment in which "God has given us an opportunity to face and resolve our crises" (p. 2). The bishops define the role of the church as a commitment to work in collaboration and cooperation with the government for "reconciliation, healing, justice and

peace”. For the church, it is a commitment to be in the service of the kingdom or reign of God to bring about holistic healing (including the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of woundedness) and the development of humankind in relationship to creation (p. 8–9).

The church’s mission of salvation

The church, etymologically understood as *ekklesia* (Gr.), the congregation of believers (Deist 1984) and biblically referred to as the people of God (cf. Gen. 17:7 ff.; Exod. 19:2 ff.), has suffered and continues to suffer from the grassroots to the top of its hierarchy as a result of political violence in Zimbabwe. The Vatican II decree *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (AG; Vatican II 1975) affirms that “the whole Church is missionary by her very nature” in that the church shares in the mission of Christ (AG 2).

The Vatican II document “Pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world” (Paul VI. 1975) - *Gaudium et Spes* [joy and hope], GS - shows that working for truth, justice, peace and reconciliation is central to the salvific mission of Christ (GS 89). The decree specifies that the church is mandated to participate in *missio ad gentes* [mission to all people] “especially those who are poor or are in any way inflicted” (GS 1; see also Vatican II 1975). The evangelical mandate is to bring salvation to humankind - a salvation that is all encompassing in terms of promoting human life and human dignity. The mission thus touches on the heart of Christian belief.

The mission for salvation is all-embracing and ecumenical in that the church focuses on the whole of humankind and on all aspects of life in its quest to bring life, hope and fulfilment of human dignity and destiny in the *oikoumene*, “the whole inhabited world”, also understood as God’s *oikous* (household) or kingdom (GS 1–3). The church is thus challenged to be inclusive of all people, irrespective of race, sex, political, creedal and denominational affiliations. For Christians at all levels of church, working for social justice is a baptismal vocation (AG 11). The Second African Synod of Bishops (Rome, 4–25 October 2009) places great value on the baptismal vocation of the faithful at grassroots level as being “the Church of God out in the market places of society... ambassadors for Christ working for reconciliation among themselves” by allowing their Christian faith to permeate every facet of their lives (Wermter 2010:6). From the outset, it is noted that this denominational perspective contributes to interventions of the whole Christian (ecumenical) church, since the Roman Catholic Church does not work in isolation in such a comprehensive and difficult mission. In its Christian mandate to bring salvation to all people, the Roman Catholic Church is in dialogue with the efforts of the broader church. Thus, at times, it collaborates with, complements and engages ecumenical groups, for example the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Evangelical

Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and the Ecumenical Support Service, as well as various civic groups. At other times, it takes the lead in reconciliation and peace initiatives, particularly through its leadership, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop' Conference, and religious groups of men and women (Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Latin: Congregatio Jesu (CJ) that is, Congregation of Jesus; Sisters of Jesus Infant (SJI), etc.).

For an inclusive and all-embracing church, then, the challenge is to be "political but not partisan". In a situation of conflict and violence, it becomes critical for the church to acknowledge that "God cares for the oppressed, but God also has salvific concern for the oppressors" (Roberts 1987:18). Specifically, the salvific will of God is that all people should be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (AG 7). Consequently, the church has great potential for capacity building in its initiative of peace and national healing (GS 91–92).

The decree *Ad Gentes Divinitus* that emphasises that "the whole Church is missionary" also urges that in carrying out this basic duty of evangelisation "all members of the church" should cultivate "a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world" (AG 3, 5, 35–36). It recognises that "the Gospel is truly a beacon of liberty and progress in human history - a leaven of brotherhood, of unity and of peace" (AG 8).

In urging cooperation among the people of God in the salvific mission of God for all people, the decree further stipulates that there must be concrete structures in the church from the grassroots up, for social action to occur (GS 28–32). The Second African Synod of Bishops, whose theme was "The church in Africa in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace", consolidated this view. It further stipulated that "justice and peace commissions in the Roman Catholic Church are not optional. They must be visible in every parish and, where possible, in small Christian communities" (Chiromba 2010:2). Thus, at the apex of the Roman Catholic Church, there is the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, then there is the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern African - an organ of liaison and pastoral cooperation between the Episcopal conferences of Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa (Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland), and Zimbabwe. The Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern African has its offices in Harare, Zimbabwe, and has commissions that mirror those of the ZCBC. The ZCBC has many commissions and those that engage actively in the task of peace and reconciliation are the CCJPZ, Catholic Social Communications, and the Catholic Development Commission.

In Zimbabwe, and especially in response to political violence and the need for the participatory engagement of all Christians in promoting reconciliation, peace and justice, each diocese was encouraged to form a

local Justice and Peace Commission that stands in liaison with the national CCJPZ. In other words, there is a decentralisation process that filters through to dioceses, deaneries, parishes and small Christian communities.

In working for peace and justice in the world, and in situations of violence, there is great emphasis on the moral imperative to uphold human rights and dignity. It is noteworthy that the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is a secular document. Theologically, the affirmation of human rights and dignity is the flip side of divine love and justice. The greatest commandment for Christians is to love God and one's neighbour (Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27; cf. AG 12). This is the litmus test for true discipleship and Jesus says, "By this will all ... know that you are my disciples" (GS 92; cf. John 13:35). Vatican II is thus seen to challenge the church in the modern world to a prophetic stance that places it in the centre of socio-economic and political transformation. This was re-emphasised by the First African Synod of Bishops (John Paul II. 1995:105–113).

Democratic values are enshrined in Zimbabwe's constitution and include the dreams and visions of a people. According to Tamez (2001:57), these dreams and visions are in response to a deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs that the people desperately want to change. This was demonstrated in the dream for "The Zimbabwe we want" (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006) and continues to be expressed in the current urge for a "people-driven constitution" and authentic reconciliation.

The Roman Catholic Church working for authentic reconciliation in Zimbabwe

Truth, justice and reconciliation are basic ingredients for authentic national healing. The ZCBC acknowledges that in working for peace and reconciliation the past informs the present and the future. It regards truth, justice and reconciliation as being mutually intertwined and has a high stake in "restorative justice" (ZCBC 2009:9–10). In advocating for deeper and more lasting reconciliation, the bishops regret having been co-opted into spurious reconciliation (by offering blanket amnesty on Zimbabwe's independence from colonial rule in 1980). At the time, Mugabe offered a hand of reconciliation to colonial oppressors, a position that he has since renounced. They state that "in the euphoria of independence, we forgot to attend to the needs of those who were traumatised by the war ... ignored those who were physically and psychologically devastated by poverty, discrimination and oppression", and the whites who lost political power were not helped to heal from the trauma of loss (ZCBC 2009:4). Clearly, such reconciliation was cheap in that it missed out on building genuine peace, unity and national cohesion. As a result, the bishops claim that the

failure to deal with past hurts continues to haunt us. They are now cautious not to repeat the mistake and embrace a second chance.

Where justice is not done (for example, in offering blanket amnesty), victims are further hurt and angered because they see the perpetrators of violence walking the streets, having not been punished. Restorative justice is concerned with holding perpetrators to account. In a favourable environment, offenders are given a chance to confess their guilt and ask for forgiveness. And for the victims themselves, it has been shown that this process gives them an opportunity to narrate their harrowing stories in the presence of sympathetic and supportive listeners - something that is extremely cathartic (CCJPZ and LRF 1997:4–5).

Prophetic engagement with post-election violence, national healing and nation-building

To be a prophet is to speak the truth in the face of conflict and opposition. It is to be a martyr, that is, to be prepared to die in witnessing for Christ. Indeed, there are cases of Zimbabwean (Roman Catholic) church leaders who have been attacked, detained or harassed in this wave of political violence. For example, “Some Catholic Church congregations in Zimbabwe have been under pressure to abandon church services and attend party rallies instead... A number of priests have been assaulted. One priest’s house was destroyed. Some have been threatened and cannot operate freely” (Wermter 2008a:2). Many Christians, including church leaders, fear to speak out because of apparent reprisals from the Central Intelligence Organisation, which is heavily politicised (in favour of the ruling party and its president). A case in point is of a priest who after reading out part of the ZCBC’s pastoral letter on national healing and reconciliation (2009) to his congregation was interrogated by government agents for some hours (Wermter 2010:1). There is crippling fear and a silence that deprives people of their right to freedom of speech and access to information (ZCBC 2008b:33–34).

In this conflict-filled situation, the church is challenged to give a voice to the voiceless and to give preferential treatment to the inflicted and marginalised. From this perspective, the Roman Catholic Church’s interventions can be examined and its relevance and effectiveness appraised in being both proactive and timely.

The church in Zimbabwe understands itself as undertaking constructive engagement in affirming the mandate of the church, both theologically and historically, and in working for “genuine peace, unity and national cohesion” (ZCBC 2009:8). In this task, the church sees itself as (a) providing the nation with a conscience; (b) taking an ecumenical, inclusive approach to instilling hope in all the people of Zimbabwe; (c) interrogating a church divided along political lines; (d) acting in solidarity with the

people in promoting peace, justice, reconciliation and forgiveness; (e) resolving the sensitive issue of land and constitutional reform; (f) interrogating party politics and the vision of the government/nation; and (g) fighting for equity (WCC and AACC 2008:20).

The Second African Synod of Bishops boosted the task of the church in reconciliation and nation-building in a time of crisis by making several recommendations. These included (a) putting priority on educating the faithful on the social teaching of the church; (b) shaping consciences; (c) building capacities and confidence in addressing pertinent issues; (d) identifying and integrating cultural values into the work of justice and peace; (e) promoting just use of natural resources; (d) the church being more proactive than reactive in its approach to pertinent issues; (e) the church leading the way, since reconciliation is primarily a gift from God; (f) capturing the conglomerate of talents and experts who must be engaged at all levels of the church in the work of reconciliation and justice; (g) the local church collaborating with other church bodies (at regional and continental level) for the universal church to accomplish its mission effectively; (h) encouraging familial relationships (church in Africa as family) in diffusion of conflict; (i) engaging women who are understood to be central to peace building; and (j) engaging the youth only as agents of peace not violence (Chiromba 2010:2).

The interventions of the Roman Catholic Church can be categorised into short term, medium term and long term. Short-term interventions are concerned with the church providing social relief; in other words, acting to rescue drowning bodies and to manage conflict in a situation characterised by violence. For example, in the 2008 post-election violence, those who were victimised (particularly those whose homes were destroyed and who were threatened with torture and death) immediately sought refuge in the church. Questionnaire respondents attested to this fact in all eight administrative dioceses (Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare, Gokwe, Masvingo, Chinhoyi and Hwange) of the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. They confirmed that relief aid was given at the following churches: Silveira House in Chishawasha, Harare, St Francis Church in Chegutu, the church in Chinhoyi, St Theresa in Mutare, St Anthony's Musiso Mission, Mukaro Mission, St Mary's (Nyika) in Masvingo, St Mary's (Gwehava) in Gokwe and St Mary's Church (Dandana) in Hwange. They explained that such help was facilitated by church structures, which included religious establishments, in particular, the Jesuit Refugee Service and the ZCBC commission, the Catholic Development Commission.

Church leaders, in particular the ZCBC, spoke out against violence. The ZCBC and its special organ, the CCJPZ, issued press statements demanding a stop to politically motivated violence. For example, they expressed "deep concern" about the delay in releasing the harmonised

election result (CCJPZ 2008). The Roman Catholic Church played watch-dog over the election process - trained election monitors, and observed the election recount through representatives from the national CCJPZ and Social Communications Commission. They kept their eyes open for any attempt to tamper with the election results. The church also relocated displaced people, especially after the formation of the GNU.

When government hospitals closed because of a nationwide strike by doctors and nurses (for better pay and improved working conditions), the Roman Catholic Church kept its hospitals and clinics open so that clinics such as St Joseph's in Chishawasha found its catchment area extended to include patients from greater Harare. With the help of the global church, these hospitals and clinics managed to procure medicines, equipment and food.

Medium-term interventions entail the church providing space for both the perpetrators of violence and the victims to be heard, in spearheading national healing and reconciliation. The victims of post-election violence were physically, emotionally and spiritually traumatised. In a relationship characterised by mutual distortion, violence dehumanises and demoralises both the victim and the oppressor. Respondents to the questionnaire told of how the Roman Catholic Church sought to deal with the trauma of post-election violence through prayer, counselling, spiritual guidance and preaching the good news - exhortations for courage and hope, love, unity, reconciliation and forgiveness. They also told of attending organised healing seminars and workshops (Harare, Mutare and Gweru).

Examples of these healing workshops are those run by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) Archdiocese of Harare. This archdiocese has introduced healing workshops at the Rockwood Spiritual Centre, in which it uses tools such as the "tree of life" in combination with an appeal to Christian values. This is seen to be a holistic approach to healing in that the individual (both the victim and perpetrator of violence) is given a chance to see his or her own worth and value in the community. The tree of life healing and empowerment process (group psychotherapy) combines the concepts of story-telling, healing of the spirit, reconnecting with the body and re-establishing a sense of self-esteem and community (Nkunsane 2010:4-5; Kajawu 2010:2-3).

Some questionnaire respondents related how drama is the most effective way to diffuse tension. In drama, both victims and perpetrators are given an opportunity to put themselves in each other's shoes. This experience was highlighted by a respondent in the Mbare youth dance project called "Light"; this person was a perpetrator of violence in 2008. He expressed hope in the process of reconciliation he felt was taking place and, through drama, was able to communicate the joy he felt knowing that his peers now accepted him. Others claimed that the Roman Catholic Church

created a favourable environment that enabled both the victims and perpetrators of violence to talk openly about their hurts and wounds. Such healing sessions took place in the context of a penitential service and were sealed with the sacrament of confession; these sessions proved to be cathartic - offenders felt included and accepted. Respondents claimed that healing workshops and retreats had the effect of “unifying people - people were able to interact once more as friends, brothers and sisters. Peace became a daily bread” (a respondent from Mutare). They claimed that there was a “reduction of fear and suspicion”, “alleviation of anger”, and “conversation about not to revenge the maiming and death of loved ones” (CCJP Archdiocese of Harare 2009:7–8).

In long-term interventions, the church is challenged to move from mere provision of social aid to being an agent for meaningful and more lasting social change in terms of national healing and development. It is challenged to prophetic agency - to be proactive rather than merely reactive. Pertinent questions for strategic planning and implementation include: How did we get into this mess? Could it have been prevented? What are the lessons we can learn from our sins of omission and commission in order to work for authentic reconciliation and national healing? How do we get a free and fair election?

The bishops identify various sources of conflict that characterised different epochs of civil strife, that is, ethnocentrism (pre-colonial Ndebele raids on Shona groups), racism (colonial era), and socio-economic and political struggle (post-colonial era; ZCBC 2009:3–6). They say that because deep hurts and wounds from colonial and post-colonial oppression have not been dealt with sufficiently in the past the oppressed of yesterday are now the oppressors of today (p. 2–3).

In this article, the authors examine the Roman Catholic Church’s capacity building for education aimed at responsible citizenship, the restoration of human dignity and the building up of the country’s moral fibre. As guardian of the moral order and the nation’s educator, the church can initiate creative dialogue between contending parties and all stakeholders on the road to democracy. Indeed, the church, alongside the government, has played a key role in education. When the country’s education stopped altogether as a result of a prolonged teachers’ strike for better salaries, the church struggled to keep its schools open, yet continued to offer quality education against all odds. The experience of post-election violence, the urgency for national healing and the creation of a democratic space have made the church see the need to streamline peace education in schools. In peace dialogues, parishioners expressed the need for students to know how to resolve their differences peacefully and how to help others resolve their conflicts without using violence (CCJP Archdiocese of Harare 2009:8). Another important resource is the social teaching of the church,

which underpins the concept of human dignity, the importance of life and good stewardship of creation (using the nation's resources for the common good).

In the aftermath of the 2008 post-election violence and in preparation for the next elections as stipulated in the Global Political Agreement, the Roman Catholic Church placed a high value on voter education, particularly good citizenship, the importance of a people-driven national constitution, human rights in accordance with Roman Catholic social teaching on human dignity, truth, reconciliation, forgiveness, responsible stewardship of the country's resources, and good governance. The church designed an effective strategic plan to facilitate a people-driven constitution. Using *A people's guide to constitutional debate* (ACPD Bookteam 2009) the national CCJPZ, in conjunction with diocesan CCJPs, embarked on large-scale voter education. The book concentrates on seventeen thematic areas: (1) founding principles of the constitution; (2) women and gender; (3) executive organs of the government; (4) languages of the minorities; (5) war veterans and freedom fighters; (6) land, natural resources and empowerment; (7) media; (8) systems of governance; (9) youth; (10) labour; (11) the disabled; (12) elections, transitional provisions and independent commissions; (13) bill of rights and citizenship; (14) religion; (15) separation of powers; (16) public finance and management; and (17) traditional leaders and culture (Muchena 2009:4).

Respondents to the questionnaire gave testimony to church action on voter education as follows: "The church offers booklets or magazines (CCJPZ publications, *Mukai*, *Vukani* and *Catholic News*) giving knowledge (on social teaching of the church) about how people should conduct themselves in society when faced with different situations"; "The church explains divine laws and civil laws"; "The church under the banner of the CCJPZ has made great strides in going to different areas organising seminars for enlightening people about their rights" (a respondent from St Theresa in Mutare); "Workshops for justice and peace building are being provided"; "The church has embarked on seminars teaching people about human rights"; "The church has introduced a body called CCJP to educate people." (a respondent from Dandana, Hwange).

Concerning the church's teaching on good citizenship (nation-building), questionnaire respondents said the following: "A new constitution is the only tool for free and fair elections"; "The church encourages people to exercise their freedom of expression and say no to oppression"; "The church is saying a big NO to the issue of oppression in Zimbabwe - people should be free"; "The government should observe regulative rules/laws stipulated and observed internationally and nationally and guaranteed by the national constitution."; "People should accept the outcomes of elections that are free and fair"; "calls for transparency, respect of the rights of people -

respecting cultural diversity”; “guarantee the right to vote - no intimidation or coercion”; “maintaining peace through free and fair elections”.

On the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching about a good constitution, respondents testified emphatically that “The politician must observe, respect and follow the constitution and in so doing the majority obtain political and civil rights”; “A good constitution helps progress in the country - maintains order and quick development of people’s lives”; “encourages unity in that everyone has to be involved”; “A good constitution is that which promotes development of people and the environment”; “A good constitution guarantees respect for the dignity of the human person regardless of tribe and race”; “should be all ethical”; “should accommodate people’s needs and wants”; “A good constitution builds the nation socially, spiritually and economically”; “A good constitution brings about free and fair elections: brings morality to human beings”.

Respondents said that the church teaches the following on good governance: “provides good economic system”; “Tax levies are for the common good”; “has people at heart - is not selfish and grabbing”; “should promote unity, peace and development”; “avoids corruption and killing”; “helps the poor - provides good service delivery”; “does not torture, kill, rape people like what Mugabe’s government is doing in Zimbabwe”; “involves full participation of all people in developing the country”; “should promote justice and peace among citizens - promote the common good”; “facilitates people to exercise their rights to vote and have free and fair elections”; “involves every person to have a say in decision-making rather than subscribing to dictatorship”. They summarised their dream for good governance by stating that what they want most is lasting peace and prosperity in Zimbabwe.

Long-term interventions provided by the Roman Catholic Church include helping people to help themselves - giving people agricultural inputs (crop seeds and fertilisers) for increased agricultural productivity. This is important in a situation in which most poor people engage in subsistence farming as their chief food source.

Engaging the government

The Roman Catholic Church regards itself as a partner of government “in the service of reconciliation, healing, justice and peace” (ZCBC 2009:9). An important way to achieve this is through creative dialogue - in good faith. Prior to 2008, the Roman Catholic Church, in collaboration with other church groups (ZCC and EFZ) and civic society, and in dialogue with the government, had produced a document, “The Zimbabwe we want”, reflecting the dream and vision for a participatory democracy. The church advocated for a people-driven constitution that would enshrine people’s dreams, visions and values, and curtail the executive powers of the

president (term of office, sovereignty and legislation). Given the government's history of rigging elections, the ZCBC (2007) was proactive in its pastoral letter on the 2008 Zimbabwe elections 2008, in which it offered guidelines on how to hold free and fair elections. The letter specified correct behaviour for both the winners and the losers of the election. Both sides were to show magnanimity - losers must concede defeat; losers can offer a valuable and much-needed strong opposition; winners must work together with the opposition for the common good and to build unity, national healing, and democracy (p. 7–8).

The Roman Catholic Church has created a structure, the Parliamentary Liaison Office, with the task of participating in constitution-making debates. Parliamentary liaison officer Rev. E. Ndete (2009:4) explains that "several meetings with ministers, members of parliament, faith-based organisations and civic society... on the constitution making process were held between April and July 2009". The Parliamentary Liaison Office, in turn, works in each diocese with the respective CCJP (p. 4).

In a situation in which the majority of voters are ignorant about politicians' accountability and transparency to the people who vote for them (voters see their minister or councillor only when it comes to election campaigning), and to promote participation by the people, the Archdiocese of Harare organised a series of dialogues with members of parliament from different constituencies in Harare - the "meet your minister" dialogues (Averbeck 2009:6–7). What becomes clear from these dialogues is that people are empowered to see that only God has complete sovereignty over them because they are the people of God. As such, land and power belong to the people. Through the constitution and elections, the people delegate this power to the president, prime minister, members of parliament and councillors. All those elected to governance are therefore accountable to the electorate for service delivery - and this includes the responsible and transparent stewardship of the nation's resources for the common good.

Evaluation

The study demonstrated that the Roman Catholic Church was proactive in the ZCBC pastoral letter on Zimbabwe elections 2008 (2007), in setting up a viable structure for voter education, and in encouraging popular participation in constitution making. Wherever possible, the local church collaborated with the international church and with all denominations both locally and globally. However, the church confessed that it had at times failed the oppressed people of Zimbabwe, because there were times when the church was divided and thus "unable to meet satisfactorily the physical, moral and spiritual needs of the nation which is now in absolute crisis" (Wermter 2008b:6). Also, there have been times when the church has been afraid to speak the truth for fear of violent reprisals. Christian Aid advises

that “only when the church has thrown off its own cloak of fear will it be able to help the nation do the same” (Wermtter 2008b p. 6). Prophetic voices challenging the powers that be behind the violence are sometimes only faintly heard.

Respondents claim that some priests advocate spurious reconciliation in exhorting the oppressed to forgive and forget, whereas, as we have seen, reconciliation is a long and complex process. According to Schreiter (1992:6), “reconciliation as hasty peace tries to deal with a history of violence by suppressing its memory and ignoring its effects”. He adds that by advocating amnesia (forced forgetfulness), the would-be reconcilers in fact trivialise the suffering of the oppressed and are therefore complicit in continuing oppression.

A significant observation is that (on the basis of communication with people in the rural areas), it appears that the work of the CCJPs has not trickled down to some parishes and small Christian communities. This may reflect a lack of commitment to the process of peace and healing by individual priests and parish leaders.

It appears that the church needs to initiate a creative dialogue of the gospel and culture in a situation in which both perpetrators and victims are crippled by the fear of *ngozi*. As shown above, mentally disturbed people and their families continue to suffer stigmatisation after the orgy of violence the country experienced in 2008.

When one walks in the central business district of Harare, one notices a certain type of cognitive dissonance, in that there is an almost total absence of white people. A related issue is the plight of farm workers who have immigrant status (mainly Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia nationals) who are side-lined and continue to be exploited as cheap labour by new black farmers. The church therefore needs to engage in a dialectic that emphasises the new humanity in Christ (which removes race, ethnicity and gender barriers) with the Bantu ubuntu (Shona: *unhu*) ethic (that promotes friendship, unity and hospitality; Chimhanda 2002:97).²

Conclusion

The promotion of healing, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness is central to the church’s mission of salvation. In this, God wills the salvation of all people, the oppressed and the oppressors. In the wake of post-election violence that took place in 2008 in Zimbabwe and continues to take place today, a year after the establishment of the GNU, the Roman Catholic Church has been both prophetic and proactive in its interventions for peace,

² For example, in the promotion of a land redistribution programme that is inclusive of all Zimbabwe nationals irrespective of race, ethnicity or gender, and in the context of advances in technology that have turned the world into a global village.

national healing, cohesion and development. However, the Roman Catholic Church's agency for reconciliation and nation-building can be revamped by a creative dialogue of the gospel and culture to include those who are marginalised in terms of race, ethnicity and gender.

References

- ACPD (Africa Community Publishing and Development) Bookteam. 2009. A people's guide to constitutional debate. Harare: Bookteam, ACPD Trust.
- Averbeck, C. 2009. Constituency dialogue with Hon. Jesse Majome of Harare West (Mabelreign and Marlborough), 18th July 2009. *Pachivara* 4, October:6–8.
- CCJP (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace) Archdiocese of Harare. 2009. Touching the hearts of the people - Mbare youth performed at HIFA. *Pachivara* 3, July:7–8.
- CCJPZ (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe). 2008. Press statement 3/08, 7 April. Deep concern over inordinate delays in releasing results of presidential election. <http://www.swradioafrica.com/News080408/results080408.htm> [accessed 27 Sept. 2012].
- CCJPZ (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe) and LRF (Legal Resources Foundation). 1997. Breaking the silence, building true peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988. Harare: CCJPZ and LRF.
- Chimhanda, F.H. 2000. Christ the ancestor: Shona Christianity and the roots for feminist liberative praxis. Masters Dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Chimhanda, F.H. 2002. An incarnational Christology: Set in the context of narratives of Shona women in Zimbabwe. Doctoral Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Chiromba, F. 2010. 2nd Africa Synod - An abundant harvest for the church in Zimbabwe. *Pachivara* 6, April:1–3.
- Christie, R. 2010. Power sharing and scarcity: Determinative economic master narratives, in *Power sharing and African democracy*, edited by C. Du Toit. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Deist, F. 1984. A concise dictionary of theological terms: With an English–Afrikaans and an Afrikaans–English list. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Hornby, A.S. 2010. Oxford advanced learner's dictionary. 8th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- John Paul II. 1995. The church in Africa: Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, of the Holy Father John Paul II. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Kajawu, L. 2010. The psychologist's role in CCJP's tree of life. *Pachivara* 7, July:2–3.
- Muchena, P. 2009. Be patient and remain focused: Update on the Zimbabwe constitution making process. *Pachivara* 4, October:3–5.
- Mukandavire, Z., Liao, S., Wang, J., Gaff, H., Smith, D.L. and Morris, J.G. Jr. 2011. Estimating the reproductive numbers for the 2008–2009 cholera outbreaks in

- Zimbabwe. Proceedings of the Natural Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 108(21), May:8767–8772.
- Ndete, E. 2009. Zimbabwe constitution making process and the involvement of the Catholic Church. *Pachivara* 3, July:1–3.
- Nkunsane, J. 2010. Hope for a new political culture?! 4th dialogue on justice and peace with Hon. Marvellous Kumalo. *Pachivara* 6, April:1–3.
- Pope Paul VI. 1965. Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church – *Ad Gentes* http://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/ii_vaticancouncil/documents/vat-icons19651207-adgentes_en.html [accessed 28 Sept. 2012].
- Pope Paul VI. 1965. Pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world - *Gaudium et Spes*. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html [accessed 28 Sept. 2012].
- Roberts, J.D. 1987. *Black theology in dialogue*. Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster.
- Schreiter, R. 1992. Reconciliation as a missionary task. *Missiology* 20(1), January:3–10.
- Tamez, E. 2001. An ecclesial community: Women's visions and voices. *Ecumenical Review*, January 53(1):57–63.
- UN (United Nations). 1948. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948.
- WCC (World Council of Churches) and AACC (All Africa Conference of Churches). 2008. WCC/AACC observer mission report: The election in Zimbabwe, 29th March 2008. http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2008pdfs/Final_Zim_Report_MBARI.pdf [accessed 27 Sept. 2012].
- Wermter, O. 2008a. Comment: Only God can remove me from power. In *touch with church and faith* 119, June:1–2.
- Wermter, O. 2008b. Church leaders say they failed their suffering nation. In *touch with church and faith* 127, November:6.
- Wermter, O. 2009. The handcuffs must come off. In *touch with church and faith* 130, January:1–2.
- Wermter, O. 2010. Vatican: Africa synod final draft. In *touch with church and faith* 139, <Http://ww.jescom.co.zw> [Generated: 2 July, 2010, 05:50].
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference), EFZ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches). 2006. *The Zimbabwe we want: Towards a national vision for Zimbabwe*. Harare: ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). 2007. *Only when power stands under God's blessing can it be trusted: A pastoral letter on Zimbabwe elections 2008*. Harare: ZCBC.

- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). 2008a. A report on the harmonised elections in Zimbabwe: The effects of party-state on democracy and human rights. Harare: CCJPZ.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). 2008b. A call for an immediate stop to violence: Press statement by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference on the current crisis of our country.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). 2009. God can heal the wounds of the afflicted: A pastoral letter on national healing and reconciliation. Harare: ZCBC.
- ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches). 2009. Pastoral letter to the nation. Harare: ZCC.
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum. 2006. 245/02:Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum/Zimbabwe. <http://caselaw.ihrda.org/doc/245.02/pdf/>

Christians' participation in politics in Zimbabwe: A privilege or right?

Molly Manyonganise and Chipu Chirimuuta¹

Abstract

The Zimbabwean political landscape has been presented as a sphere in which only a privileged few are allowed to engage. More often, the church has been told to remain mute and be an onlooker of the political topography. With the political climate prevailing in Zimbabwe, can society continue to treat the church as a unique institution that is independent of socio-political and economic pressures? Is there any theological basis on which Christians can rightfully participate in politics? This paper attempts to establish whether Christians' participation in politics can contribute positively to the democratisation of Zimbabwean society. The paper established that in Zimbabwe, the participation of Christians in politics has not been easy. The political leadership in the country has for long resisted the church's participation in politics. It also became apparent from the research that at times Christians bar themselves from active participation in politics by hiding behind certain biblical scriptures. However, the paper concluded that Christians are a critical part of Zimbabwean society whose participation in politics may go a long way in ensuring the establishment of democracy in the country. As such, the researchers recommended that there is need for the church to come up with theologies that aid the political participation by Christians.

Keywords: Christians, church, democracy, democratization, political participation, violence, reconciliation.

Missiological significance

The paper is of great missiological importance, as it seeks to engage the church in Zimbabwe on its political mission. The paper seeks to reject the view that limits the mission of the church to the religious domain.

Introduction

For more than a decade now, Zimbabwe has experienced deep socio-political and economic crises, and most Zimbabweans across the board and socio-political critics at large have suggested various reasons for this state of affairs. In God hears the cry of the oppressed (2007:4), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) attributes these crises to the crisis of governance, among other things. Ndhlovu-Gatsheni (2003:100) concurs with this line of thought and states, "Zimbabwe is beset by a serious crisis of governance." This is also the line of argument that most opposition

¹ Molly Manyonganise is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy at the Zimbabwe Open University. She can be contacted at mollymanyonganise@yahoo.com. Chipu Chirimuuta is a lecturer in the Department of Languages and Media Studies at the Zimbabwe Open University. She can be contacted at chirimuutac@gmail.com.

political activists have adopted. The government of the day has blamed it all on the Western-imposed sanctions and economic sabotage. Owing to these socio-political and economic challenges, the majority of Zimbabweans witnessed a rapid decline in the quality of their lives. As a result of the suffering, Zimbabweans across the divide responded to these crises in various ways, one of which has been an active participation in the political arena.

It should be noted from the outset that 80 per cent of the Zimbabwean population are professed Christians. This, therefore, implies that in a normal political climate these same Christians are the same people who are expected to vote during election time. It would, therefore, be naive for anyone to expect Christians to participate in politics during elections and thereafter mind their own business. Divorcing Christians from participation in the mainstream politics would be anomalous since becoming a Christian does not in any way distance an individual from the daily activities of his community. In fact, it is worth noting that the church is an agent of God's mission in a community and the world at large. This mission involves the crossing of frontiers of any sort, be they cultural, geographical, linguistic, religious, ideological, social, ethnic (and of course political) in order to reach others for Christ (Bosch 1980:17). This then means that God's mission, through the church, is directed to humanity in its holistic context and provides inspiration for forging into the future. Hence, the argument by Watson (1978:46) that in a world marked by hopelessness, gloom and despair, the radiant joy of Christ in the lives of spirit-filled Christians is of special significance. Musasiwa (2010:10) concurs and argues that such joy acts as a magnet for the lonely and distressed, the hungry and confused, the strong and the weak (and this encompasses the politically oppressed peoples). As the church exercises its prophetic mandate in all these various spheres of life (the political included), it enables the above-mentioned groups of vulnerable people to rise above the gloom of the world into the light of Christ in the midst of not only the church but also the whole of society.

The term "church" is highly contested owing to various ambiguities. It implies different things to different people in different fields. According to Chitando and Manyonganise (2011:79):

It is tempting to talk about 'the Church' in Zimbabwe as theologically this suggests a homogenous body following the teachings of one leader, Jesus Christ. However, the reality on the ground is that it is more sociologically appropriate to refer to Christianities and churches. There is the Catholic Church taking its cue from the ZCBC, the mainline/mainstream Protestant churches under the ZCC and the Pentecostal/Evangelical churches under the EFZ. These come together under the HOCD.

In addition, there are also African Indigenous Churches that fall under the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa. In this paper, the term “church” refers to the “representative” church in Zimbabwe but not necessarily to a particular denomination or a particular union of churches. Some denominations are mentioned by name, but only as an emphasis of their role in the greater church of Jesus Christ in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, in this paper, the terms “Christian” and “church” are used interchangeably. Adopting the above-mentioned definition of “church”, this study will explore Christians’ participation in politics in Zimbabwe to ascertain whether it is legitimate for them to participate in the political field.

Documented evidence has shown that by its nature, the church deals with the welfare of its members on a daily basis. Owing to the social-oriented nature of the church, church leaders are bound to make political statements. It is against this social-oriented nature of the church that Rev. Solomon Zwana (2010) suggests that “as the church fulfils its prophetic role in society, it should be noted by those within or without the church that prophecy is full of political statements”. In concurrence with this opinion is Card. Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who argues that “Politics is a serious issue for Christians because it is an essential place and fundamental instrument to build a society worth of man.” (Zenit.org 2008).

Defining political participation

Political participation, according to Saki (2010:1), is a means to an end, a process through which democracy is conceived and given expression. It is the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his/her society and has the opportunity to take part in determining the common goals of that society and the best ways of achieving these goals (Ghai 2003). In Zimbabwe, political participation is expressed through the electoral process, through which people exercise their constitutional right to vote and to elect representatives of their choice, as well as to be elected into positions of political power. Political participation is one of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948). Article 21 of the declaration stipulates:

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through chosen representatives.

- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by a secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

It is this same right to political participation that finds expression in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN 1966). Article 25

declares that every citizen shall have the right and opportunity, without unreasonable restrictions

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs directly or through chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections...

The excerpts above serve to buttress the point raised by Chiware (2010:15) that political participation is the indispensable endoskeleton without which the body of the state is neither robust nor balanced. For Chiware (2010:18), political participation is the lifeline of democracy and a process of defining and demarcating the relationship between the state and its people. For Klein (2005:1), political participation accords citizens the platform for influencing public affairs responsibly and constructively for the development of the nation. In this vein, the implication, therefore, is that political participation is associated with social responsibility, an obligation, a civic duty rather than a privilege. In this regard, it is envisaged that the participation in politics by Zimbabwean citizens would enable them to influence the various processes of governance for the good of the silenced majority. Church leaders can do this by encouraging their members to vote, by educating Christians about their rights, by using the pulpit to condemn violence, corruption and many other moral evils. However, it has to be noted that this electoral system has unfortunately been manipulated to suit the whims of individuals and political entities.

The church and the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe

The attainment of independence in most if not all African nations was a product of armed struggle. In Zimbabwe, the whole struggle was hinged on the desire for freedom. According to the churches in Zimbabwe as postulated in the document “The Zimbabwe we want” (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006:5):

Freedom from oppression, freedom from racism, freedom from human indignity and violation, freedom from poverty and hunger, ignorance and disease coupled with the urgent and pressing need for the recovery and restoration of the land were the driving force behind the fight for independence.

During this period of the struggle, no one ever created demarcation lines to mark the operational boundaries of the church. If anything, the clergy in Zimbabwe actually actively participated in the struggle for independence by feeding and providing other necessities to sustain the freedom fighters. In fact, the liberation movement in Zimbabwe in particular facilitated the conception of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), which was formed by the Rhodesian Catholic Bishops’

Conference. This commission worked tirelessly to monitor and strongly condemn the injustices perpetrated by the Rhodesian government. Badza (2010:56) states, “[N]ot only did the Commission document the injustices and suffering in the circumstances, it also protested against the Rhodesian government and issued regular press statements and pastoral letters in which it categorically expressed its reservations.” From the 1960s, the church embraced a transformative agenda; it castigated and challenged the repressive government of the Rhodesian Front Bosch (1980:17) while providing the much-needed moral and spiritual support to the liberation freedom fighters. In a way, the church was regarded as part of the historical processes that culminated in the turning over of a new page in the history of Zimbabwe - the independence era.

Church–state relations in post-colonial Zimbabwe

At independence, Zimbabwe adopted a policy of freedom of religion and worship, a step that was cherished by many as guaranteeing the human freedoms of the people of this nation. The 1980 ZANU-PF election manifesto clearly stated that the right of every person to believe in a religion is a fundamental freedom. It also promised to respect and promote the role of the church in nation building. It was envisaged in this relationship that the church and the state would work as equal partners. However, the post-colonial era has witnessed various changes in the manner in which the church has appeared in the Zimbabwean political sphere. Raftopoulos (2006:30) states that the church’s involvement in post-colonial politics has been both complex and ambiguous. However, what is most conspicuous about the church’s activity regarding politics in the post-colonial era situation is that it slowly faded out and religious leaders, as well as their followers, retired into their religious shells, where they adopted a non-involvement-in-political affairs attitude. In short, the church in Zimbabwe adopted an exclusionary stance in terms of participation in the political field. It is at this point in the Zimbabwean history that one observes with concern the silence of the church even at critical times such as during the Matabeleland massacres (Gukurahundi crisis) from 1981 to 1987.

After Zimbabwe’s attainment of independence, the church in most instances became part of the state’s machinery to perpetuate its hegemony among the masses. It became part of what is termed the ideological state apparatus. It became a handy instrument used by the state to control the general populace. As a result of this assumed status, some church denominations found themselves helping perpetuate the state’s hegemony. In most instances, African Indigenous Churches have subsequently been regarded as rallying behind the party (ZANU-PF) in all its policies and programmes. It is this role that accounts for the general presence of their church members at national events such as the burial of heroes,

Independence Day celebrations, and Heroes' Day commemorations. The visit by the president to the Marange Apostolic Church in Manicaland during the week ending 18 July 2010 and the various visits made by senior political members should be understood as an expression of appreciation of the support from these various church denominations. Despite the violence, chaos and suffering that characterised the land reform programme in 2000, Nolbert Kunonga of the Anglican Church openly supported it and even likened Robert Mugabe to Jesus the Messiah. And again at 2006 ZANU-PF Goromonzi congress, the self-styled Pastor Obadiah Musindo, who was also the President of Destiny for Africa, joined ZANU-PF stalwarts in sloganeering and at one point reiterated the party's statement: Pasi naTsvangirai [Down with Tsvangirai]. These two are examples of the Christian section of the society that has benefited from the political set-up and in an attempt to retain their position they toe the regime's line.

The documentation of the Gukurahundi experiences in Matabeleland by the CCJPZ, published in 1997, broke the church's silence on the abuses of the rights of the masses by the state. The CCJPZ produced documented evidence of the atrocities that had taken place and the general suffering that the people went through as a result of the Gukurahundi incident. At this point in time, the church adopted a paradigm shift, began to reinvigorate itself and resume its position in society of safeguarding the individual rights and integrity of members of society. Through the CCJPZ report, the church gave a voice to the victims of the civil clashes that had erupted as a result of the misunderstandings between the two major former freedom-fighter political parties. The report gave the intimidated and silenced victims of the civil conflict a forum through which their fears, disgruntlement, general suffering, torture and psychological bruises were communicated. Thus, at this point in history, the church had re-asserted itself as a place of safety for the politically mutilated and thus became the voice of the muted. In a way, it had assumed another dimension, that of a civil society organisation. As Hegel (1973:201-206) argues, the church began to stand for the satisfaction of individual interests within society. In a way, the church as demonstrated by the CCJPZ's stance had resumed its active role of providing check and balance mechanisms for society, as a means of keeping the leaders under check and subsequently safeguarding the general populace from abuse by those with political and economic muscles.

When the church reaffirmed its position of being the mouthpiece and sanctuary of the subaltern members of the society, its relationship with the state reflected a new paradigm shift. The state, in turn, became very critical of the church and relentlessly sought to expose the weaknesses and double standards of the clergy and church leadership. Pius Ncube's case became one living example of the show-down that ensued as a result of the church-state relationship. As Ncube, now former Roman Catholic Archbishop,

became increasingly critical of the state, the state retaliated by exposing his alleged scandalous activities with married women from his congregation. There was extensive and intensive coverage of the scandal, leading to his ultimate resignation from his position as archbishop. While we do not condone the circumstances surrounding this alleged scandal, it provides us a window through which we can deduce the nature of the new relationship, the attitude, hostilities, acrimony and tensions mounting between the church and the state. The show-down ultimately resulted in Ncube being silenced. He can no longer speak on behalf of the church; neither can he speak for the people because he has been removed from the podium.

“I was hungry and you gave me meat.” (Matt. 25:35): The church’s response to the political crisis beyond 2000

The Fast-track Land Reform programme in 2000, Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 and the pre-and post-election violence in 2008, all of which left many people dead, internally displaced and vulnerable, spurred the church to raise its voice to condemn the violence, murders and general inhuman treatment of people culminating from these campaigns. The church made it clear that the land reform exercise was a necessary process, but raised concern over the manner in which it was implemented, particularly the ownership of multiple farms that ensued. In response to this, Churches in Manicaland, in conjunction with the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), decided to initiate a land audit. During the time of Operation Murambatsvina, the church did not quietly observe the unfolding of events, it intervened with humanitarian assistance, providing clothes, food, clean water and at some points shelter to the displaced families. Some Christian organisations condemned this operation in no uncertain terms. In Zimbabwe, the formation of faith-based organisations like the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance should be understood in this context. In fact, Rev. Levee Kadenge believes that the occurrence of Operation Murambatsvina forced the emergence of these faith-based organisations. He put it thus:

We were therefore responding to the silence of other church organisations because we wanted to work on behalf of the people and for the people (Kadenge 2010).

Even on the eve of the pre- and post-election violence, the church offered safety to the frustrated members of society fleeing from politically motivated, violent conflicts in their political constituencies.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor. 6:17): Some views on political participation in Zimbabwe

It is quite interesting that some people, even those in positions of political leadership hold the view that the church must confine itself to issues of spirituality and not worldly issues such as politics. For instance, at the consecration of Robert Ndlovu as Archbishop of Harare at the City Sports Centre, President Mugabe made a statement accusing the church of interfering in politics and advised it against doing so (Ndete 2010:43). This statement is an attempt to clearly separate politics from religion, in this case, politics and Christianity. The implication is that politics is a game of the privileged few; those who call themselves or are deemed to be politicians. It is, unfortunately, paradoxical that the very same politicians who demand that the church must hibernate in spiritual issues also tend to desire the influence of the same institution to mobilise large followings, particularly near or during election periods. Such double standards are absurd. Nonetheless, they are a manifestation of the unquestionable interrelatedness and interdependence of religion and politics. The political sphere in Zimbabwe is thus one in which politicians grant or withdraw the licence for political participation to Christians.

Is political participation for Christians in Zimbabwe a privilege or a right? If it is considered a privilege, do Christians have no political obligations to their country? Are Christians in Zimbabwe not affected by the social, political and economic problems facing the country? Do they not have the right to be heard or to act in the political field? As an answer to these and many other unanswered questions, Ganiel (2008) states that “outside of Mugabe’s party, ZANU PF, there are few opportunities for meaningful participation in the public sphere”. This portrayal of politics, it has been argued, has caused the generality of Christians and church leaders to shy away from it or to participate behind closed doors. However, it is also indisputable that any democracy should be envisaged within the context of values such as tolerance, pluralism, freedom of expression, participation, respect for individual differences, respect for human dignity and accountability to the society one has been chosen to represent (Ghai 2003). It is assumed that the church, by virtue of the principles that guide its operations, cherishes these values.

In cases in which the state has made an effort to give the church space, it has never implemented what the church has said. According to Fr. Edward Ndete (2010),

[w]here the state has agreed to meet and discuss national issues with the church, there is no point where the state has listened to the church. For a long time we have been accused of being silent but people need to

understand that the church does not have an army to enforce what we would have agreed. The church can only advise, it can never give orders.

Apart from politicians, some Christians in Zimbabwe also hold the view that participation in politics is unscriptural and immoral. Rev. Abel Waziweyi (2010) stated, "There is a lot of intimidation from members of the church who do not take political statements lightly and always report us to the political leadership." Wilson Wizalamu (2010), who is an evangelical Christian, stated, "It has never been good for Christians to participate in politics because it is not biblical and for most of those who have done so they were forced by circumstances to compromise their faith." For example, after the March 2008 elections in which Elias Musakwa (an evangelical Christian) had contested and lost, people made fun of him, replacing the lyrics of the song he sang with "Ndiri bofu ishe wangu. [I am blind my Lord.]", and go on to say "Handione kwandinoenda. [I can't see where I am going.]" For most of his critics, Musakwa is really blind because as a Christian, he should have known that politics is not for people like him but for those outside the church. In this case, is Musakwa different from all the other contestants who lost in the same election? Such a scenario calls for a theological response to Christian participation in politics.

Christian participation in politics: A theological response

In the current scenario in Zimbabwe, where the political entity determines whatever happens in other spheres of life, the church included, Christians need to have a theological basis on which to justify their participation in politics, especially given that ZANU-PF, which is now part of the Government of National Unity, does not want church leaders drifting away from the religious domain. Such a theology is based on the premise that throughout biblical history God has always sided with the oppressed, the vulnerable and the poor. Prophets of the Old Testament condemned the injustices of their time. In the New Testament, Jesus (in Luke 4:18 f) enunciated his mission as one that was meant to uplift the poor and the broken hearted and to deliver the captives. This is the case in Zimbabwe currently. The nation has become one of poor people because of the deteriorating economy; the hearts of many have been broken owing to the shattered aspirations and unfulfilled promises; many have become captives in their own country because they cannot speak or associate freely because of legislative instruments such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Public Order and Security Act that restrict their freedom of association. One church leader, who requested anonymity, said:

If the writing of the Bible was a continuous process, God would not have forgotten or turned a blind eye on Zimbabwe. Just like God said in Exodus 3:7, he should have said 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Zimbabwe. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and

I am concerned about their suffering.’ The church therefore needs to respond in a manner that makes itself relevant to the lives of these people (Anon. 2010).

Mugambi (1989) states the church’s mission is to liberate humankind socially, politically and economically. Niebuhr (1951:97) concurs with this view when he states:

Christians must serve Christ by participating in secular culture and in language that it understands. The command to love one’s neighbor necessitates work in the moral communities of family and economic, national and political life.

However, the polarisation of Zimbabwean society owing to the practice of partisan politics even by some church leaders has greatly compromised the mission of the church as a vehicle of peace, love and a place of refuge for those whose environment threatens them. There has been great fear at every level of church organisation to speak the truth, the truth about the Zimbabwean political terrain. The ZCBC, ZCC, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and Heads of Christian Denominations (2005:5) note this very well when they state that

we have built a house of fear. Some people do not feel free to speak their mind. Some no longer give their opinion without first checking if there is anyone listening, who could be a threat. Even the Preacher cannot preach the word of God contextually for fear of harassment and even deportation if expatriate (2005:5).

After the 2008 harmonised elections, Bp. Simon Madhibha (2008) stated there were instances in which church leaders were forced to change their sermons because they were not sure of to whom they were preaching and there were other times when preachers were arrested for preaching politically sensitive sermons. Owing to this fear, the church has often hidden behind Scripture as the basis for abstaining from active politics. John 17:16 in particular alludes to Christians as having dual citizenships, one earthly and the other one heavenly. The part where Jesus said, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” has been interpreted to mean that the church cannot entangle itself in worldly issues. This has often been supported by the citation of 2 Timothy 2:3–4, which encourages Christians not to “entangle themselves with the affairs of this world” but to endure hardness “as good soldiers of Jesus Christ”. Owing to the literal interpretation of these scriptures, some church leaders have even gone to the extent of discouraging their members from watching television and reading newspapers as a way of focusing them on their heavenly home. According to Chitando and Manyonganise (2011:100–101):

In a highly charged environment such as Zimbabwe’s, it is tempting to define the Christian narrowly. In this scheme, the role of the church and its

members is to 'preach the gospel' and to avoid challenging oppressive laws and systems. Indeed, this has been the avenue championed by some church leaders. They preach an 'other-worldly' message that seeks to prepare their followers for heaven. Tragically, such Christians are of very little earthly relevance!

Mattera (1994:36) disputes such an other-worldly view and argues that "[a]lthough Christians are citizens of the kingdom, they continue to live as members of nation-states whose fundamental principle of existence is violence." He goes further to pose this question: "How do Christians resolve the tensions inherent in their dual citizenships?" (p. 32). While we cannot provide a straight answer to this question, Musasiwa (2009:3) suggests that "Christians need biblical teachings which go beyond the 'proof text' method where one just quotes Bible verses to support preconceived ideas."

Romans 13, which commands Christians to respect those in authority, has been widely quoted by Christians in Zimbabwe as the basis for not challenging an oppressive regime. For them, such a government is put in place by God and the duty of every "true Christian" is to pray and submit to such a government. We have witnessed national prayer meetings being held across the country and in most cases these are hijacked by political heavyweights whose desire is to maintain the status quo. Some church leaders have even gone to the extent of visiting the leadership of the former ruling party and showering them with presents. One would expect church leaders at such moments to articulate the concerns of those who would not normally be granted such an opportunity. Unfortunately, national leadership almost always takes this opportunity to remind the church of its spiritual mandate. Thus, Romans 13 presents problems when Christians find themselves under an oppressive regime. Christians, therefore, need a reading of the Bible that empowers them to bring about positive change and this would enable the church to locate itself within the national political order. Togarasei (2004, cited in Chitando and Manyonganise 2011:101) calls for the promotion of liberating readings of the Bible. Chitando and Manyonganise (2011:101–102) reiterate:

When the Bible is read in liberating ways, it assists communities to confront injustices in the social, economic and political areas. Liberating readings of the Bible charge communities to prioritise life ahead of death. Communities that read the Bible in life-affirming ways reject violence and abuse of power.

This should enable the church to rightfully make a positive contribution to the democratisation of Zimbabwe.

The democratisation of Zimbabwe: The role of the church

The participation by Christians in the democratisation of Zimbabwe means that the church remains true to its mission. As has been alluded to earlier,

political participation is an indispensable ingredient in the formation and nurturing of any democracy. And, again, as has been clearly stated, through citations from international conventions, participation in politics is a duty, a responsibility that no one can afford to opt out of. The church therefore has a mission to deliver all people regardless of their sex, status, race, and so on, from all forms of suffering.

The Christian community, just like other communities in the Zimbabwean nation, must respect and respond positively to the terms of the social contract by participating actively in the development and the general good of the present generation and above all our posterity. The participation of Christians in the political sphere would go a long way towards the democratisation of the Zimbabwean political space. It is no doubt that the Christian community has a mammoth task to play in this process of democratising the nation. However, before Christians can take up their role in the democratisation of Zimbabwe, they need to determine their relevance to the epoch in which they are living. In other words, they need to interrogate their relevance to the processes of nation building and national healing. The church has to contextualise biblical teachings so that they address the burning political issues on the ground. Through the pulpit, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance of divergent political views and respect for alternative voices should be disseminated throughout the nation.

It is no doubt that from 1999 to 2009 many people were subjected to traumatic experiences as brother turned against brother, and violence was unleashed by those considered closest to the victims. It is against this violent state of affairs that the CCJPZ report (2008) titled *Graveyard governance* states that “social interactions remain depressed and normal life is not possible since the violence created hatred”. With such a scenario, it therefore became imperative for the church to engage the various conflicting social groups and assist them to map the way towards conflict resolution and social democracy.

Of course, the church, as alluded to earlier, has been encouraged to stay away from politics because of the perceived realities that are associated with political life, which include the scandals, the unfulfilled promises, the opportunism - the list is endless. However, it should be noted that politics has more to it than these negative traits. Of paramount importance with respect to politics is the fact that it is all about how a community or nation operates, expresses its values and has the power to change the world and determine its destiny. As the nation struggles to evolve new democratic systems, the church is expected to speak for the silent and subaltern majority. It is also the responsibility of the church to mobilise its membership, through biblical teachings, to participate in the political process to help create just social structures.

The boundary between politics and economics is very narrow, as the economic structures of any nation generally determine the political stance and action taken by the leadership. The structures determine alliances, the nature of a country's allies, as well as a country's attitudes towards the equally and less developed nations around it. That every human being is involved in the economic activities of his nation implies that any normal adult member of a nation is a political being in one way or the other. "The Zimbabwe we want" (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006:10) concurs with this point and suggests that politics and economics are serious activities that affect people's lives and can therefore not be left to secular authority alone. It goes on to say that "the Church's concern with issues of governance, justice and peace, is a demonstration of God's concern for humanity". If the church wishes to fulfil its prophetic mission here on earth, then it has to answer to Jesus' mission as summarised in John 10:10, which states: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." The reason for Jesus' coming was that human beings may have life in its fullness. In this regard, Rev. Zwana suggested that the role of the church in the democratisation of Zimbabwe is at two levels, the spiritual and the non-spiritual. He stated:

At the spiritual level, the churches have the mandate to teach their members to be responsible political participants. Church leaders have a right to intervene in political issues but should refrain from party politicking. The church should teach their members to be good ZANU-PF or MDC supporters.

At the non-spiritual level, the church should act as the critical voice of society. Despite its pastoral role to its members, the church also has a pastoral role to the nation. The church should influence the nation rather than the nation influencing the church. It is the duty of the church at this level to speak against violence, cheating and corruption (Zwana 2010).

This view was supported by Rev. Kadenge (2010) who said, "[C]hurch leaders in Zimbabwe need to mobilise individual Christians across denominations to act against injustice, corruption, persecution, etc." In this regard, the voice of the church should be heard clearly, as it condemns the evil that has become so apparent. It is not right for the church to remain silent or to allow its voice to be drowned in the face of such crises. The democratisation of Zimbabwe requires that all stakeholders play their part for the common good of all. Past experiences in Zimbabwe have taught people that even if Christians desist from political participation, their fundamental freedoms are not guaranteed. They are, like the generality of the people, affected when the education system crumbles, when prices of goods skyrocket, when their loved ones are murdered as a result of political violence. Of the hyperinflationary environment that characterised the Zimbabwean economy from 2007 to 2008, Rev. Kadenge (2010) said, "As

Christians in Zimbabwe, we suffered just like anybody else and this made everyone to realise that we were in it together.” It is not enough for Christians to look on mourn and sing Christian funeral songs, tell people to cry with hope and pretend they would have done everything within their power.

The Bible empowers Christians to speak out against injustice, corruption, unfaithfulness, murder - the list is endless - because God in the Bible does the same. Prophets in the Old Testament stood side by side with God in denouncing these negativities in society. Thus, Amos 5:24 calls on the rulers of Israel, including religious leaders, to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream.” In this case, if the church in Zimbabwe is to be true to its prophetic calling, it needs to stand up and be counted in its fight against the ills that are so glaring. It would, therefore, be naive for non-Christians and Christians alike to expect Christians to concentrate on spiritual issues and ignore that which is happening around them. Roberts (2005) put it thus:

If Christians were to confess that God created all things and that Jesus is Lord of all things and that the kingdom of God will ultimately embrace all things, and at the same time withdraw from civic life, this wouldn't make any sense. Christian involvement in society and in politics is at the core of biblical revelation.

The church needs to realise that it is a powerful entity within society. By their nature, churches have the advantage of having large crowds of people at any given time. Church leaders need to seize such opportunities to influence their members positively. As the word of God is preached in various churches, preachers need to be encouraged to make the Scriptures relevant to current realities. Ganiel (2008) suggests that there are a number of ways in which discourses that justify reconstruction could be identified and promoted, such as creating spaces where people can listen to each other's stories of exclusion and oppression, raising these issues in Bible studies, prayer meetings or worship services, and including training about these issues in Zimbabwean theological colleges. In this regard, Dube (cited in Ganiel 2008) advocates for the development of a contextual theology for Zimbabwe that will use social and spiritual resources to contribute to democratisation.

The church and national healing

Generally, the populace is agreed on the fact that national healing is a prerequisite in the restoration of economic and political sanity in Zimbabwe. Some discourses of the national healing agenda have argued that the first step towards national healing is the acknowledgement by the political parties involved that injustices were perpetrated from the late 1990s until the signing of the Global Political Agreement in September

2008. It is important therefore to acknowledge that this national healing agenda requires that the church be at the forefront of the peace-building, recovery, reconstruction and national healing initiatives for the benefit of societal development. The assumption is that national healing is fundamental to the nation's progression and thus the church must be a partner in this movement into the future.

It is envisaged that the church can participate actively in the national healing process by creating spaces that provide social sanctuaries and safe hospitals that offer free services. The church thus has to make provision for spaces for healing traumatic memories among the victims and create room for offering and receiving kindness and reconciliation. It is also incumbent on the church to assist people in restoring their broken trust. Above all, the church is expected to assist in facilitating the mending of broken relationships, as well as the discovery and building of new relationships. In all its endeavours, the church must constantly remind the reconciling social elements to be oriented towards peace in both their utterances and their actions. It is the role of church leadership to constantly remind the parties concerned to listen to their conscience.

Generally, it is expected that the process of national healing should involve:

- the guilty acknowledging responsibility;
- the guilty repenting;
- the guilty asking for forgiveness;
- the guilty paying compensation; and
- the guilty being reconciled with the victims and the victims' families.

Many analysts have argued that the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration that was instituted under the auspices of the Global Political Agreement in September 2008 is a toothless barking dog that has made no impression on the Government of National Unity era. Some have argued that national healing is just a rhetoric whose aim is to garner support and funding from the international community. For the victims of the politically motivated violence, the national healing programme is meaningless as long as it leaves the perpetrators free and fails to provide meaningful psychological remedy to their situation. The irony of it all is that in spite of the existence of the national healing task force there are some victims who have received death threats for trying to seek justice. Owing to the uncertainty surrounding the national healing organ, victims have lost faith in it. They strongly feel that allowing perpetrators to roam the streets freely after murdering and maiming people is a mockery of the spirit of national healing. Furthermore, victims of the violence are concerned that the perpetrators of the atrocities expect the national healing organ to protect them. There are fears that the perpetrators might expect the

granting of a blanket amnesty and the total concealment or erasure of any records of the ugly head of politically motivated violence from Zimbabwe's historical archives.

Against the background of such a reality, it is the role of the church to be the voice of the silenced and openly condemn intimidation of those seeking justice. In addition, church organisations can establish legal-aid projects to assist victims in their legal pursuit of justice. It is the church that should most understand the psychological bitterness in the minds of the victims of the conflict and in response offer interventions in the form of psychosocial therapy and education for peace. The church has a strong moral obligation to say "no" to violent ways of achieving and sustaining power. In fact, the framework within which the church operates lends it the capacity to form networks that cut across ethnic, racial and national boundaries or barriers, and thus should take advantage of that capacity to reconcile the various and seemingly irreconcilable groups. It is these perceived multi-ethnic, multiracial and even multi-party characteristics of the church that are expected to enhance its capacity in the pursuit for national healing, recovery and reconstruction.

It is worth noting that the background against which the national healing agenda is discussed presents the church with a dual role. It has to assist victims in picking up the broken pieces of their lives and continuing with their roles and responsibilities in a normal way. In this context, the church has the role of restoring the broken trust of the people and helping them regain their faith in their communities and society at large. To achieve this goal, the church has to assist victims in testifying in a bid to foster a spirit of forgiveness, as well as reconciliation, and avert the creation of social dissent that could possibly degenerate into fully fledged conflict as soon as fertile ground for such an explosion presents itself.

The same church also has to lobby civil society and government to adopt measures to ensure that perpetrators are brought to book and justice allowed to take its course. This same church also has to assist the perpetrators in coming to terms with the reality that they must acknowledge that they are guilty and work towards reconciliation with their victims. In the process, the perpetrators would learn to deplore violence and adopt a discourse of peace and tranquillity in society. The traditional healer Gordon Chavunduka concurs with this idea and adds that in a true Zimbabwean traditional set-up, perpetrators of violence must approach the families of the victims for compensation and rituals to appease the spirit of those who died during the political violence. Chitando and Manyonganise (2011:104) state: "[T]he church is well placed to guide the country on the road to truth, healing and reconciliation. It has consistently preached these values and has contact with the grass roots."

The national healing organ has to be given credibility for the involvement of church and church leaders should challenge the government not to force healing and reconciliation upon victims of violence. The reason that most people have no faith in the process is because it is led by politicians, the very same people whose supporters were involved in the violence and who are not empathetic at all. For them, Zimbabwe is not yet ready for the healing exercise.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for the active participation in politics by Christians. It has demonstrated that with the task at hand this participation is not only a right but also a responsibility. In this case, the paper has implored Christians in Zimbabwe to formulate a theology that would make them politically relevant to the Zimbabwean community, a theology that would empower them to contribute meaningfully to the opening up of democratic space in Zimbabwe. It has been shown that the church can do this by helping the Zimbabwean society demythologise politics. In this regard, the pulpit has been shown to be useful in inculcating values of tolerance, peace, love, unity, among others.

References

- Anon. 2010. [personal interview]. 11 Jul., Harare.
- Badza, B. 2010. The unique experience of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, in *Political participation in Zimbabwe*, edited by D. Kaulem. Harare: African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching:53–75.
- Bosch, D.J. 1980. *Witness to the world: The Christian mission in theological perspective*. Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox.
- CCJPZ (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe). 2008. *Graveyard governance: A report on political violence following the March harmonised 2008 elections*. Harare: CCJPZ.
- Chitando, E. and Manyonganise, M. 2011. Voices from faith-based communities, in *Zimbabwe in transition: A view from within*, edited by T. Murithi and A. Mawadza. Auckland Park: Fanele:77–111.
- Chiwere, T.A. 2010. Obstacles to political participation in Zimbabwe and recommendations for improvement, in *Political participation in Zimbabwe*, edited by D. Kaulem. Harare: African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching:15–28.
- Ganiel, G. 2008. *Beyond pietism and prosperity: Religious resources for reconstruction and reconciliation in Zimbabwe*. <http://www.africapeace.org/downloads/Ganiel.pdf> [accessed 20 Sept. 2012].
- Ghai, Y. 2003. *Public participation and minorities*. www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=112 [accessed 20 Sept. 2012].

- Hegel, G.W.F. 1973. *Hegel's philosophy of mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kadenge, L. 2010. [personal interview]. 13 Apr., Harare.
- Klein, H. 2005. The right to political participation and the information society. (Paper read at the Global Democracy Conference in Montreal, Canada, 29 May–1 June 2005). http://www.ip3.gatech.edu/research/Right_to_Political_Participation.pdf [accessed 20 Sept. 2012].
- Madhibha, S. 2010. [personal interview]. 8 Apr., Harare.
- Mattera, L. 1994. Evangelical approaches to Christian participation in war: An inquiry and a Proposal, Part 1. *Journal from the Radical Reformation* 3(3), Spring:32–46.
- Mugambi, J.N.K.1989. *African Christian theology: An introduction*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Musasiwa, R. 2009. Does God endorse particular rulers or systems of government? *The Christian Voice* 11, July–August:10
- Musasiwa, R. 2010. *Missiology*. (Unpublished study material).
- Ndete, E. 2010. [personal interview]. 10 May, Harare.
- Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2003. Dynamics of the Zimbabwe crisis in the 21st century. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 3(1):99–134.
- Niebuhr, H.R.1951. *Christ and culture*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Raftopoulos, B. 2006. Reflections on opposition politics in Zimbabwe: The politics of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in *Reflections on democratic politics in Zimbabwe*, edited by B. Raftopoulos and K. Alexander. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation:6–28.
- Roberts, M.D. 2005. Evangelical Christians and social activism: Will a new statement promote the health of the nation? <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/evangelicalactivism.htm> [accessed 21 Sept. 2012].
- Saki, O. 2010. Linking political participation, democracy and human rights, in *Political participation in Zimbabwe*, edited by D. Kaulem. Harare: African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching:1–14.
- UN (United Nations). 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948.
- UN (United Nations). 1966. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 16 December 1966.
- Watson, D. 1978. *I believe in the church*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Waziweyi, A. 2010. [personal interview]. 16 Apr., Harare.
- Wizalamu, W. 2010. [personal interview]. 8 May, Harare.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). 2007. *God hears the cry of the oppressed: Pastoral letter on the current crisis of our country*. Harare: ZCBC.
- ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference), EFZ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches). 2006. *The Zimbabwe*

we want: Towards a national vision for Zimbabwe. Harare: ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC.

ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference), ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches), EFZ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and HCD (Heads of Christian Denominations). 2005. A call to conscience: Zimbabwe Silver Jubilee, 1980–2005: Joint pastoral letter of the ZCBC, ZCC, EFZ and HCD. Harare: ZCBC.

Zenit.org. 2008. Cardinal calls politics a “serious issue”. <http://www.zenit.org/article-22998?l=English> [accessed 20 Sept. 2012].

Zwana, S. 2010. [personal interview]. 22 Apr., Harare.

Shifting contexts and identities: Encounters between religions and the Zimbabwean state (from the pre-colonial to the end of the colonial era)¹

Paul Gundani²

Abstract

From the pre-colonial times, Traditional African Religion and Christianity have survived various forms of the Zimbabwean state. Each epoch brought with it new challenges and demands that had direct bearing on the three institutions. Whilst both religions found ways of reciprocating the overtures and policies of the state, the latter, in turn had to find ways of accommodating the two religions. In this paper, we illustrate the extent to which the hegemonic power of the state shaped, influenced and indeed defined the form and flow of the two religions. In return, the beliefs and teachings of the two religions formed the basis of various forms of praxis that adherents brought to bear on the nature and form of the evolving state. The thesis of this paper is that a dynamic, two-way relationship developed between the state and either of the two religions under study.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, state, Traditional African Religion, Christianity.

Introduction

From its pre-colonial history, the Zimbabwean state has had to contend with various religions/faith traditions. In the long history of these interactions, Traditional African Religion has had the singular experience of surviving the ebb and flow of the Zimbabwean state from the pre-colonial to the colonial times. So did the Christian religion, in its own manner. This paper will focus particularly on these two religions. For ease of presentation and analysis, I will provide a chronological bird's-eye view of the relations between these two religions and the Zimbabwean state from the pre-colonial times to the end of the colonial period.

The pre-colonial Zimbabwe era (1450–1890)

Little is known about Zimbabwe before the 1450s, when the great kingdom of the Mwenemutapa (Mutapa) was founded. A special feature associated with this kingdom is the Zimbabwe monument, an architectural spectacle

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Third International Global Studies Conference on 23 June 2010, Bussan, South Korea.

² Professor Paul Gundani is Head of the Graduate Studies and Research (College of Human Sciences) at the University of South Africa, South Africa. He can be contacted at gundaph@unisa.ac.za.

that has, since the colonial times, become a tourist attraction. Many historians and archaeologists believe that the Great Zimbabwe was the epicentre of the Mwari cult, which shifted to the Mabwe-A-Dziva/Matonjeni in the Matombo (later anglicised to Matopo) Hills, western Zimbabwe, in the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century when the Mutapa Empire gave way to the Kingdom of the VaRozvi under Changamire Dombo (Mudenge SIG, *A political History of Munhumutapa c1400-1902*, Harare: Zimbabwe publishing House, 1988). The Rozvi kingdom was, however, not coterminous with the Mutapa kingdom. In fact, the Rozvi rulers carved a kingdom out of the southern, central and western parts of the Mutapa kingdom. Vestiges of the Mutapa rule remained in the north-eastern parts of contemporary Zimbabwe before developing into a constellation of independent Shona chiefdoms. Around 1840, the Ndebele, under Mzilikazi, conquered the Rozvi and established the Ndebele kingdom with its headquarters at Gubulawayo in western Zimbabwe. The Ndebele kingdom gave way to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1894, as did the loosely connected Shona chiefdoms in the southern, eastern and northern regions of the country after the 1896–1897 wars of resistance against the BSAC-imposed rule that was instituted in 1890.

Throughout the pre-colonial era, Shona traditional religion was by far the dominant religion. Fundamental among its set of beliefs was the cult of royal ancestors (*mhondoro*) and ritual consultation of territorial spirits. The royal *mhondoro* were key religious functionaries whose duty was to maintain shrines in the royal capitals and to serve as custodians and curators of the history of succession within the Mutapa dynasty.

Apart from the *mhondoro*, there were community and family mediums whose function was to tap into the spirit world for the benefit of their communities and families. The belief in the power of the ancestors, at both regional and family levels, was common among the Shona. Ancestors were believed to be the guardians of the land and the custodians of community and family morality (Bourdillon 1987). Death was believed to have endowed them with power over their descendants. Hence, they could bless their descendants with more children, and had the power to punish deviance in the family. Spiritual sanctions could be placed by the ancestors on their descendants through misfortune, illness, loss of fertility, etc. In order to be in favour with the ancestors, community and family members regularly carried out propitiatory rituals to their ancestors. They also carried out rituals to atone for their misdeeds, as well rituals of thanksgiving for blessings bequeathed upon them. Furthermore, as recognition of the positive role of the ancestors in family affairs, rites of passage were observed to mark and celebrate the important stages of each individual (Van Gennep 1960). These stages included birth, puberty, marriage, death and induction into the ancestral world.

Whilst the royal, territorial and family ancestors were believed to be largely benign, the Shona and later the Ndebele people also believed that there was a whole host of malevolent spirits that had the capacity to wreak havoc in the society. Such spirits were believed to cause misfortune, drought, and deficiencies in soil and human fertility, as well as disease and death in human beings and livestock. Apart from the evil spirits that hovered over families, the Shona also believed that there were beneficent alien spirits that could endow their hosts with special *charismata* (*homwe*). Among the most cherished *charismata* were healing, hunting, farming, as well as other skills of various sorts (blacksmithing, pottery, mat-making, fishing, dancing, singing, etc.).

Pivotal to the whole process of the attempt by the Shona to tap positive energies from the spiritual world was the role of the traditional diviner/healer (*n'anga/sangoma*). The *n'anga/sangoma* played the role of a spiritual broker and medical consultant. He/she was believed to have the power to communicate with the ancestors of his/her client. A positive response by the ancestors was believed to be a *conditio sine qua non* for successful healing and success in any form of ritual that required ancestral intervention.

At the top of the spiritual hierarchy was the god Mwari. The Shona people had many names for Mwari. Most of these names were anthropomorphic, such as *Chidzachepo/Mutangakugara* (the pre-existent one), *Muwanikwa* (the pre-existent one), *Muumbapasi* (the creator of the earth). Other names for Mwari were associated with lightning, such as *Runji-rusisunge-nguwo* (the thread that stretches far and beyond the breadth and length of the earth), *Zame* (the unreachable horizon; Van der Merwe 1957). Most importantly, Mwari was believed to be a fertility god. Requests for rain were therefore directed to Mwari, who originally resided at the Dzimbabwe but later moved to the Mabwe-a-dziva/Matonjeni in the Matombo/Matopo range in western Zimbabwe. Annually, a royal delegation was accompanied by a rain-making *mhondoro* spirit medium (*hosana/nyusa*) bearing gifts for Mwari. The gifts were presented to the resident priest/priestess at Dzimbabwe or later at Matonjeni, who in turn presented them to Mwari with the delegation's petitions. The delegation was not expected to go back before hearing the voice of Mwari from the caves. Stories about the providence of Mwari abound in Shona mythology in relation to the journeys to and from Matonjeni.

Throughout the pre-colonial period, the Mutapa, Rozvi and Ndebele rulers patronised the Mwari cult. The Mutapa and Rozvi rulers worked very closely with the *mhondoro*. The latter played an important role in validating and affirming the Mutapa dynasty. The *mhondoro* were materially dependent on the king; however, their spiritual prowess as intermediaries between the ruling dynasty and the royal ancestors made them exceedingly

powerful. Similarly, their intimate knowledge of the history of the dynasty, and the authority they wielded over the populace made the *mhondoro* a threat to the ruling class. They were indispensable to the ruling class because the state depended on them for rain and the fertility of the land. A priest/priestess was located at regional cultic centres such as Dzivaguru, Karuva, Rasa, Dula, Tabazikamambo, Vuhwa and Chirorodziva.

The decentralised system of the Mwari cult, combined with the powerful *mhondoro* cult, constituted a robust spiritual bulwark that the individual rulers found difficult to resist. An example to demonstrate the power of their combined authority was the ill-fated mission visit of the Jesuit priests to the Mutapa capital in December 1560. After only three months of mission work, the Jesuit priest baptised the emperor, his mother and top-ranking members of the aristocracy. This was their undoing as future events were to show. Within days, the leader of the delegation, Fr. Gonzalo da Silveira, was murdered. According to Schoffeleers (1992:21), Da Silveira was murdered in the manner in which a sorcerer would have been killed: "He was first thrown on the face, and then lifted up by his hands and feet. A rope was tied round his neck and pulled from both sides until he was strangled. His body was then dragged by a rope to a nearby stream and thrown into it". In Chirenje's view (1973:39), Da Silveira was

"a pawn in a dynamic encounter between two mutually intolerant patterns of belief. On the one hand Shona religion with all the manifestations of a popular institution the inherent socio-economic elements of which committed every member of the community to participate in its ritual, on the other a rather personalised Christian religion with arrogant pretensions bordering on moral casuistry which condemned all other religions as irrelevant to meaningful religious experience."

Although Muslim merchants had a hand in the murder of Da Silveira, it is not clear whether their allegation against the priest was motivated by religious or business interests or both. However, Sauerwein (cited in Mazambara 1996) interprets the decision of the Mwenemutapa to murder Da Silveira as a function of the conflict between Muslims and Christians.

The comment by Chirenje helps to situate the murder of Da Silveira in a historical context of religious contestation between two religions. The intolerance of the Shona religion of the time should be understood in terms of the ideological imperatives of the time. As already implied above, the Shona religion historically was inextricably interwoven with the politics and destiny of the Mutapa dynasty and indeed the empire. The Catholic religion that Da Silveira represented was not without its limitations either. Its assumptions and mission approaches were bound to create enemies in the African context where the missionaries had ventured. Commenting on Iberian Catholicism, Hastings (1994:74) notes that "The Christian spiritual world of the time had become a highly dualistic one in which the devil was

an almost omnipresent reality which non-Christian cults were seen as necessarily serving". This view is supported by the behaviour of the Portuguese battalion under the leadership of Francisco Barreto, dispatched by the Portuguese government to avenge the death of Da Silveira. The Portuguese expedition sent to Zimbabwe in 1569 left havoc and destruction in their wake as they desperately tried to reach the Mutapa headquarters. According to Fr. Francisco de Monclaro, chaplain of the expedition, "enemies of the Christian faith, primarily Arab traders, were executed, impaled alive, torn asunder, their backs open, blasted to bits by mortars, all done in a gruesome manner, deliberately calculated 'to strike terror into the natives'" (Hastings 1994:123). The future of Iberian Catholicism in the Mutapa was clearly predictable during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By identifying with an imperialist Portuguese state, it alienated itself from the Mutapa state. Hence, it was doomed to failure. Incidentally, the Mutapa dynasty collapsed at the end of the seventeenth century.

The Rozvi state that succeeded the Mutapa Empire occupied the south-western quarter of Zimbabwe known as Guruuswa. By virtue of its geography, it was spared the interference of Portuguese missionaries. The latter had curtailed their forays into the interior and had resorted to servicing Portuguese military bases at towns such as Quelimane, Sofala, Tete, and Sena. A few of them also serviced Portuguese traders at the feiras and bares located along Portuguese commercial routes in the Zambezia region (Denis 1998; Rea 1970). Its size and geographical position, compared with the Mutapa Empire, which had stretched far east, was a reflection of the geopolitical challenges of the time. The only religion that it had to contend with was the Shona religion. The shifting of the Mwari shrine from Dzimbabwe in the south to the west at Mabwe-a-dziva/Matonjeni reflects the need of the Rozvi rulers to ensure effective patronage and control of the Mwari cult. The change of guard that followed, in terms of the priesthood at the shrine, was a necessary function of the politics of patronage that existed between the Rozvi state and the Mwari cult.

By the mid-1830s, Mzilikazi's army defeated Changamire Chirisamhuru, then ruler of the Rozvi state situated in western Zimbabwe (Mudenge 1974a). The Ndebele state, under Mzilikazi and Lobengula, took over patronage of the Mwari cult from its Rozvi predecessor. Ironically, the Mwari cult became very influential in the Ndebele state politics especially during the reign of Lobengula (1870–1894). It is small wonder then that although the king had acted as the high priest and spiritual link with the ancestral world during drought he resorted to sending gifts to Mwari (Bhebe 1973:47). While this may well be true, it is worth noting that the Mwari cult at Matonjeni may have lost much of its influence on much of the eastern and northern regions of the former Mutapa state. The influence of Paspamire, medium of the spirit of Chaminuka, on Lobengula (Chingururu,

as the Shona called him), and Chaminuka's murder in 1883 by an Ndebele impi at Shangani river, under suspicious circumstances, demonstrates how diffuse and decentralised the Shona religion was a few decades before the penetration of colonial rule in Zimbabwe. This point was amplified by Beach (1979; 1980) in his response to Ranger's theory that religious leadership under the Mwari cult coordinated the 1896–1897 Shona uprisings. In his book *A hunter's wanderings in Africa*, F.C. Selous (cited in Ranger 1982:349), a famous hunter, states that Pasipamire was believed to be “a very powerful ‘Umlimo’ or god who lived at Chitungwiza... [He] was regarded as owner of the land; hunters had to seek permission to ‘kill the elephants nicely’ and to donate gifts of ivory and cloth. Shona supplicants came from ‘distant’ kraals; Lobengula, King of the Ndebele, sent Pasipamire presents of cattle, young girls, etc”.

During his reign, Lobengula was forced to placate a number of forces that posed a threat to the continued existence of the Ndebele kingdom. The Portuguese were making inroads among the Manyika in the east (Bhila 1980:141); the British, who had finally secured a foothold in Botswana through the establishment of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, were breathing down his neck; and, above all, the Afrikaners from the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek were seeking to extend their borders beyond the Limpopo in order to escape British rule. Internally, he was facing resistance from leading induna who supported his lost elder half-brother, Nkulumane, who was believed to be the legitimate successor to Mzilikazi's throne. Moreover, he faced opposition and embarrassment by Christian missionaries, that is, the London Missionary Society and the Jesuits, who were critical of his raids on the Shona and the Ngwato of Botswana. The missionaries were also critical of Ndebele religious practices, such as the inxwala. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:42), “Christian teachings emphasized individual accountability to God alone, thus undermining African ideologies of divine leadership that combined political juridical and religious powers; they promoted the idea of equality of all people, including captives of the Ndebele”. Considering the adversarial ideological relationship that existed between the London Missionary Society missionaries and the Ndebele state, it is no wonder that John Smith Moffat and Charles D. Helm “played a more significant role in the events leading to the colonization of Zimbabwe” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009:42). Under the circumstances, Lobengula found spiritual succour from the priesthood of the Mwari cult and other spiritual representatives of the Shona religion, such as Chaminuka. The murder of Chaminuka, on his way to Lobengula's capital at Lobengula's invitation (Ranger 1982:349), confirms the ideological contradictions within the Ndebele state as regards the role of Shona religion in the politics of the state.

The colonial era (1890–1980)

The teaching of the Christian gospel in Zimbabwe was part of the colonial master plan that was personally designed by Cecil John Rhodes, his strategist, L.S. Johnson, and leaders of missionary societies in South Africa and England. Promises were made before the colonial takeover of Mashonaland regarding the land on which mission stations were to be set up, as well as guarantees of monetary grants that the BSAC was to give towards the erection of mission stations and to meet the incidental costs of the missionaries. The Christian religion became the *religio officionis* of colonial Zimbabwe. No wonder therefore that, on 12 September 1890, Canon Balfour, the Anglican priest who accompanied the so-called Pioneer column, blessed the Union Jack, on arrival at Fort Salisbury. As Keppel-Jones (1987:354) avers, “The pioneers brought with them their religion; chaplains had been attached to the column. Of these the Roman Catholic Father Hartmann was, in the opinion of his Anglican confrere Canon Balfour, ‘without doubt the best man’ ”.

The agenda of the missionaries was determined for them: to evangelise and civilise (Keppel-Jones 1987:323). The significance of their partnership with the colonial administration was demonstrated in 1893 when Sir Leander Starr Jameson sought the opinion of Fr. Peter Prestage (SJ), at Fort Victoria, on going to war with the Ndebele. In a telegraph to Rhodes, Prestage wrote back, “I consider there is a most just cause for punishing the Amandebeles at once” (Linden 1980:110). The partnership between the colonial state and the missionaries was further strengthened when the latter provided military chaplains to the colonial soldiers fighting to overthrow the Ndebele state.

With a few exceptions, the sense of kith and kin between the missionaries and white settlers subsisted throughout the colonial period. Generally, and again with a few exceptions, the Christian religion was conservative and saw no contradictions between its express, if sometimes tacit, support for the oppressive policies of the colonial state and liberating gospel that the Christian Church purported to propagate.

The Christian religion basked in the sunshine of the hegemony of the colonial state. Colonial policies and legislation were used by missionaries to proscribe Shona/Ndebele traditional beliefs and practices that they considered “superstitious”. A few examples will suffice to support this point. First, in 1899, the BSAC administration introduced the Witchcraft Suppression Act (Chapter 73). In the act, witchcraft was defined as “the throwing of bones, the use of charms and any other means or devices in the practice of sorcery”. While a textual interpretation of the legislation would lead one to believe that it was meant to suppress witchcraft by criminalising accusing anyone of being a witch or wizard, a purposive interpretation

would show that it targeted practices such as divination and the use of charms to prevent misfortune and disease (Chavunduka 1980:131). Divination and the use of charms were central to the spirituality of the Shona and the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Hence, criminalising them was considered to be one of the many pillars of civilising the African people of Zimbabwe, apart from encouraging their children to attend Western schools that missionaries were busy setting up. Second, the Mbende dance, which had become part of fertility celebrations and festivals among the Zezuru Shona of northern Zimbabwe, was officially outlawed by Native Commissioners in 1910 at the instigation of missionaries who labelled the dance “lustful” (Welsh-Asante 1985:385). Third, mission practice in Christian villages based at missions such as Chishawasha, Epworth, Kutama, Empandeni, Driefontein, Triashill, St Faith, among others, aimed to bring about a clean break from “pagan” life for the converts who were accommodated there. Contact with members of the family back in the village was totally discouraged, and celebration of African ritual practices such as *kurova guva/umbuyiso* was punishable by expulsion (Gundani 1994). Ultimately, the downside of the process of Christianisation was that it “entailed the ‘colonisation’ of the Ndebele and Shona people’s consciousness with the axioms and aesthetics of western culture” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009:42). The challenge of colonialism left the traditional Shona/Ndebele religion in a state of disenfranchisement. The religion lost the power to influence the direction of the state but retained its authoritative role as a spiritual reservoir for the rank and file in the colony. Practices such as ancestor veneration, rain-making rituals, divination and healing continued to adapt to the social, economic and political demands of the times. Healing, as opposed to prophecy, became the flagship brand of the colonial period. Occasionally, however, the prophetic dimension gained ascendancy. During the uprisings of 1895–1897 (Chimurenga I/Umvukela I) and the 1963–1979 armed struggle (Chimurenga II/Umvukela II), traditional Shona/Ndebele religion rebounded into a prophetic and revolutionary force against colonial domination. The former was a quintessential example of the robust prophetic capacity of spiritual leaders like Mkwati, Kagubi and Nehanda to ignite resistance against the colonial settler administration in spite of the lack of a central cultic authority countrywide. The latter was characterised by the moral guidance bequeathed upon the young guerrilla fighters by regional and local spirit mediums. In his book, Lan (1985:xviii) captures “the remarkable act of ‘co-operation’ between ancestors and their descendants, the dead and the living, the present and the past.” The spirit mediums, in particular, provided a ready resource of political mobilisation up to the end of the colonial period.

Religion is a double-edged sword: like any other social and cultural instrument, it can be used to oppress or to liberate. It would be disingenuous

and simplistic, therefore, for us to ascribe to it a stereotypical conservative or progressive label. Just like traditional Shona/Ndebele religion, the Christian religion also had its moments of prophetic ascendance. Throughout the colonial period, outstanding missionaries defended the rights of the oppressed populace. As early as 1902, Francis Richartz (SJ) opposed the unfair hut tax that the BSAC imposed on the African people as a way to force them to join the capitalist labour market. Fr. S. Cripps (Anglican) and Rev. John White (Methodist Church) swam against the stream of support offered by the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Council to the egregious Land Apportionment Act (1931; Andrews 1935:233–234). From 1959 to 1977, Bp. Donal R. Lamont became a thorn in the side of the Rhodesian state, as he boldly and unapologetically challenged the colonial policy of racism. His arrest and trial in 1976 was a veritable kairós moment in the Zimbabwean history. In his speech from the dock, Lamont (1977) exposed the double standards of the Ian Smith regime, which claimed to represent “civilization and Christianity” in a benighted continent. Lamont also shocked Smith’s colonial government when he labelled it “terrorist”. Apart from Bp. Lamont, a number of missionaries, such as Bp. Ralph Dodge, Fr. Michael Traber (SMB), Sr. Janice McLaughlin (Maryknoll), Guy Cluttonbrock, Jack Grant, Dieter Scholtz (SJ), among others, were deported by the Smith regime for defending the cause of the oppressed Africans. Many others were sacrificial lambs in their call of duty. The liberation motif inherent in the Christian religion found expression and vindication through some church leaders and followers who laid their heads on the block for justice and African liberation.

Two statements from representatives of the colonial state summarise the shift that occurred during the ninety years of relations between the state and the Christian religion. Much was expected of the Christian religion in preparing the African people to accept the rule and benefits of the colonial state. On a visit to Morgenster Mission in the late 1890s, Rhodes expressed to Rev. A. A. Louw his appreciation of the good work that the church was doing in the following words: “One missionary is better than a hundred policemen.” In 1976, as the colonial fortunes of the colonial state were waning, a soldier pinned Fr. Patrick Mutume’s head against a tree, then a parish priest at Avila Mission in the Umtali diocese, and yelled, “You black bastard, speak up. One dead missionary is as good as one hundred dead terrorists” (Bhebe and Ranger 1996:96). Clearly, the relationship between the Christian religion and the state had gone full circle.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that the two religions under investigation defined and redefined their space vis-à-vis the state. At one time or another, each of them enjoyed times of ascendance in their moral

authority and influence in relation to the state. At other times, they lost their moral authority and credibility because of cultivating too close a relationship with the state and its power at the expense of their prophetic function. At some point, both religions acquiesced and colluded with the state. Both religions also had times when they challenged and clashed with the policies of the state. The investigation does show that an objective analysis of the two religions does not lend itself to a simplistic, often collapsed, conceptual opposition of the Christian religion as “modern and progressive” vis-à-vis a conservative and inward-looking Traditional African Religion. Such characterisation would be to obfuscate the rather dynamic, if chequered relations, that existed between the three subjects. My considered view is that both religions went through a process of evolution, though not necessarily in a linear fashion, in accordance with the challenges posed by historical conditions during the period under review. What I can say with little equivocation is that, from the pre-colonial to the colonial period, both the Traditional African Religion and Christianity went through some form of ‘conversion’. Whether that prepared them well enough for an effective engagement with the post-colonial state will be the subject of a sequel to this article.

References

- Andrews, C.F. 1935. *John White of Mashonaland*. New York: Negro Universities Press.
- Beach, D.N. 1979. “Chimurenga”: The Shona risings of 1896–97. *Journal of African History* 20(3), July:395–420.
- Beach, D.N. 1980. Revolt in Southern Rhodesia (review essay). *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13(1):103–108.
- Bhebe, N. 1973. *Missionary activity among the Ndebele and Kalanga: A survey, in Christianity south of the Zambezi*, edited by A.J. Dachs. Gwelo: Mambo Press:41–52.
- Bhebe, N. and Ranger, T.O. (eds.) 1996. *Society in Zimbabwe’s liberation war*. Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann.
- Bhila, H. 1980. The 1896–97 Southern Rhodesian war reconsidered. *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 2(1):139–162.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C. 1987. *The Shona peoples: Ethnography of the contemporary Shona, with special reference to their religion*. 3rd revised edition. Gwelo: Mambo Press.
- Chavunduka, G. 1980. Witchcraft and the law in Zimbabwe. *Zambezia* 8(2):129–148.
- Chirenje, J.M. 1973. Portuguese priests and soldiers in Zimbabwe, 1560–1572: The interplay between evangelism and trade. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6(1):36–48.
- Denis, P. 1998. *The Dominican friars in Southern Africa: A social history, 1577–1990*. Leiden: Brill Academic.

- Gundani, P. 1994. The Roman Catholic Church and the kurova guva ritual in Zimbabwe. *Zambezia* 21(2):123–144.
- Hastings, A. 1994. *The church in Africa, 1450–1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Keppel-Jones, A. 1987. *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The white conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884–1902*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Lamont, R.D. 1977. *Speech from the dock*. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.
- Lan, D. 1985. *Guns and rain: Guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe*. London: James Currey.
- Linden, I. 1980. *The Catholic Church and the struggle for Zimbabwe*. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.
- Mazambara, P. 1996. The churches, the preachers and the catechists as makers of history. (Paper read at the Orality and Literacy in African Societies Workshop in Hamburg, Germany, 4–5 July 1996). <http://www.zmo.de/personen/Ehemalige/Reinwald/Orality/9Mazamba.htm> [accessed 30 Aug. 2012].
- Mudenge, S.I.G. 1974a. An identification of the Rozvi and its implications for the history of the Karanga. *Rhodesian History* 5:19–32.
- Mudenge, S.I.G. 1974b. The role of foreign trade in the Rozvi Empire: A re-appraisal. *Journal of African History* 15(3):373–391.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2009. Mapping cultural and colonial encounters, 1880s–1930, in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008*, edited by B. Raftopoulos and A.S. Mlambo. Harare: Weaver Press:39–74.
- Ranger, T.O. 1982. The death of Chaminuka: Spirit mediums, nationalism and guerilla war in Zimbabwe. *African Affairs* 81(324):349–369.
- Rea, A. 1970. *Agony on the Zambezi: The first Christian mission to Southern Africa and its failure, 1580–1759*. *Zambezia* 1(2):46–53.
- Schoffeleers, M. 1992. *River of blood: The genesis of a martyr cult in southern Malawi, c. A.D. 1600*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Van der Merwe, W.J. 1957. *The Shona idea of God*. Fort Victoria: Morgenster Mission Press.
- Van Gennep, A. 1960. *The rites of passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Welsh-Asante, K. 1985. The Jerusarema dance of Zimbabwe. *Journal of Black Studies* 15(4), June:381–403.

Missionalia

Southern African Journal of Missiology

Journal of the Southern African Missiological Society

Index to editorials and articles

Volume 39 (2011)

Volume 39:1/2 (April/August)

Guest Editorial 3

Articles

Alternative community and antibody: A dimension of David Bosch
as public theologian
Willem Saayman 5

Transforming missiology: A dialogue with some reviewers of David Bosch's
Transforming mission
Nico Botha 18

"Mission as" must we choose?
Klippiess Kritzinger 32

"Blogging" David Bosch and *Transforming mission*
Cornelius JP Niemandt 60

Missiology and soteriology: The power and limits of a
multidimensional approach
Ernst M. Conradie 82

A European in Africa - An African in Europe
Johannes Reimer 99

Mixing African colours into the paradigm shifts in theology of mission
Reggie Nel 114

Transforming mission, twenty years later: Paradigm shift or cosmetic facelift?
Johann Meylahn..... 130

The public role of the Christian community in the work of David Bosch
Cobus van Wyngaard..... 151

Paul and the mission of the church
Christoph W. Stenschke..... 167

Volume 39:3 (November)

Guest Editorial 191

Articles

- The early Brethren in Christ Church missions and the formation of new identities among the Ndebele in Zimbabwe
Lovemore Ndlovu 193
- “Be therefore reconciled to one another”: The church’s role in justice, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe
Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando 210
- The quest for God’s irregulars: The legacy of Arthur Shearly Cripps and the role of the Anglican Church in nation building in Zimbabwe today
Gift M. Makwasha 228
- African Theology and identity: Reflections on Zion Christian Church experiences and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis, 2000–2010
Richard Shadreck Maposa, Fortune Sibanda and Tompson Makahamadze 248
- Post-election violence in Zimbabwe (2008–2010): The agency of the Roman Catholic Church in national healing and democracy
Francisca H. Chimhanda and Aletha Dube 268
- Christians’ participation in politics in Zimbabwe: A privilege or right?
Molly Manyonganise and Chipso Chirimuuta 287
- Shifting contexts and identities: Encounters between religions and the Zimbabwean state (from the pre-colonial to the end of the colonial era)
Paul Gundani 306

Instructions to contributors

All articles submitted for publication in *Missionalia* are expected to conform to the following requirements:

General information

1. Articles may be submitted in printed format or by e-mail to the Editor, Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, Unisa, PO Box 392, Unisa 0003. E-mail address: editor@missionalia.org.za
2. A statement confirming that the article is not being submitted or has not been submitted simultaneously to another journal must accompany the article.
3. Inclusive language should be used to designate individuals and groups.
4. The article will be sent to three independent referees. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial panel, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication.
5. Should the article be accepted for publication, the author will be expected to submit an electronic version of the article (by e-mail or diskette).
6. Include the following:
 - An abstract of no more than 100 words.
 - Between 3 and 10 keywords that express the key theological concepts used in the article.
 - Brief biographical details of the author indicating, among others, the institutional affiliation and e-mail address.
7. Contributors will be informed if their article is not accepted for publication, but the hard copy will not be returned to them.
8. Articles should be spell-checked before submission, by using the 'UK English' dictionary of the word processor.
9. Articles longer than 10 000 words are not normally accepted, but a submission of this length (or longer) may be published if, in the views of the referees, it makes an important contribution to missiology in Africa.

Style requirements

1. *Missionalia* follows the widely accepted 'name-date' (or Harvard system) method for citations in the text.
2. A publication is cited or referred to in the text by inserting the author's last name, year and page number(s) in parentheses, for example (Mbiti 1986:67 - 83).
3. Graphics (e.g. graphs, tables, photographs) will only be included in an article if they are essential to understanding the text. Graphics should not be included in the body of the article. Number graphics consecutively, save each in a separate file and indicate clearly in the text where each should be placed.
4. Footnotes should be reserved for content notes only. Bibliographical information is cited in the text according to the Harvard method (see 2 above). Full citations should appear in the References at the end of the article (see below).
5. References should be listed in alphabetical order of authors under the heading **References** at the end of the text. Do not include a complete bibliography of all works consulted, only a list of references actually used in the text.

References	Text
Book with one Author	
Barrett, D.B. 1986. <i>Schism and renewal in Africa: An analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements</i> . Nairobi: Oxford University Press.	(Barrett 1986:3)
Book - edition	
Billington, R. 1993. <i>Living philosophy: An introduction to moral thought</i> . 2nd edition. London: Routledge.	(Billington 1993:32 - 34)
Book - two or three authors - Initials only for author's names	
Welbourne, F.B. and Ogot, B.A. 1966. <i>A place to feel at home</i> . London: Oxford University Press.	(Welbourne and Ogot 1966:57)
Edited work (when referring to a collected work)	
Maimela, S.S. (ed.) 1994. <i>Culture, religion and liberation</i> . Pretoria: Unisa Press.	(Maimela 1994)
Book - two editors	
Fabella, V. and Oduyoye, M. (eds). 1996. <i>With passion and compassion: Third World women doing theology</i> . Maryknoll: Orbis Books.	(Fabella and Oduyoye 1996:98)
Book - sub title	
Hope, A. and Timmel, S. 1987. <i>Training for transformation: A handbook for community workers</i> . Gweru: Mambo Press.	(Hope and Timmel 1987:90)
Book in series	
Mazambara, P.D. 1999. <i>The self-understanding of African Instituted Churches: A study based on the Church of Apostles founded by John Marange in Zimbabwe</i> . Aachen: Verlag an der Lottbek (Perspektiven der Weltmission, Bd 29).	(Mazambara 1999:323)
Multi volume book	
Daneel, M.L. 1971. <i>Old and new in Southern Shona Independent churches, Vol 1: Background and rise of the major movements</i> . The Hague: Mouton.	(Daneel 1971:211)
Daneel, M.L. 1974. <i>Old and new in Southern Shona Independent churches, Vol 2: Church growth: Causative factors and recruitment techniques</i> . The Hague: Mouton.	(Daneel 1974:13)
Chapter in book	
Bosch, D.J. 1987. The problem of evil in Africa: A survey of African views on witchcraft and of the response of the Christian Church, in <i>Like a roaring lion: Essays on the Bible, the church and demonic powers</i> , edited by P.G.R. de Villiers. Pretoria: Unisa:413 - 416.	(Bosch 1987:414)
Journal - with month in date	
Ojo, M.A. 1997. The dynamics of indigenous charismatic missionary enterprises in West Africa. <i>Missionalia</i> 25(4),	(Ojo 1997:540)

References	Text
December:537 - 561.	

Study guide

Bosch, D.J. 1973. Onafhanklike kerklike bewegings: Studiegids vir Sending en Godsdienstwetenskap. Pretoria, Unisa.	(Bosch 1973:5 - 9)
--	--------------------

Periodical - daily or weekly with date

Lobe, J. 28 February 2001. Bush won't fight price break for AIDS treatment. <i>The Botswana Gazette</i> , Wednesday :B4.	(Lobe 2001:5 - 7)
--	-------------------

Unpublished material

Hope, A. 1979. Growing in the Grail. (Unpublished study material).	(Hope 1979:3)
--	---------------

Thesis

Kritzinger, J.N.J. 1988. Black theology: Challenge to mission. DTh. thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.	(Kritzinger 1988:55)
---	----------------------

Several works by same author in one year

Russell, L.M. 1974a. <i>Christian education in mission</i> . Philadelphia: Westminster Press.	(Russell 1974a:324)
Russell, L.M. 1974b. <i>Human liberation in a feminist perspective: A theology</i> . Philadelphia: Westminster Press.	(Russell 1974b:27)

Annual Subscription 2011 and 2012 (Volumes 39 and 40)

VAT and Airmail postage included. February 2012

	TYPE OF SUBSCRIBER	SURFACE MAIL PER ANNUM	AIRMAIL PER ANNUM
SOUTH AFRICA	INDIVIDUALS INSTITUTIONS PENSIONERS & STUDENTS	R250 R300 R200	
SAMS MEMBERS	INCLUDES MISSIONALIA	R250	
REST OF AFRICA	INDIVIDUALS INSTITUTIONS		US\$30.00 US\$35.00
REST OF THE WORLD	INDIVIDUALS INSTITUTIONS		US\$65.00 US\$75.00

Subscription Form

Name	
Address	
Postal/Zip Code	
Country	
Telephone	
Mobile	
Fax	
Email	

I wish to order *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology* for the year: _____ Volume: _____

Please tick the appropriate

This is a new subscription

This is a renewal

I enclose a cheque/postal order to the value of _____ made payable to ***Missionalia***

Return this form with your payment to

The Editor, Missionalia, PO Box 35704, Menlo Park, 0102, South Africa

Telephone enquiries re subscriptions: +27-12-429-8821

Email correspondence re subscriptions: secretary@missionalia.org.za

