

Ecumenical Christianity + Politics in Zimbabwe

1980 2023

EDITED BY:

David Kaulemu, David Maxwell, Munetsi Ruzivo

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DAVID KAULEMU, DAVID MAXWELL
and MUNETSI RUZIVO



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CONTENTS

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Glossary</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	
Ranga. M.Zinyemba	xix
<i>Introduction</i>	
David Maxwell, David Kaulemu and Munetsi Ruzivo	xxi
SETTING THE SCENE	
<i>Chapter 1: The Churches and the Challenges of Independence, 1980-1990</i>	
David Maxwell, University of Cambridge, UK	1
<i>Chapter 2: The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe and Political Transitions during the First Republic (1980-2017)</i>	
Paul Gundani, Zimbabwe Open University	25
ECUMENICAL RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS	
<i>Chapter 3: Evangelicals and ‘The Zimbabwe We Want’, 2006</i>	
Roy Musasiwa, Domboshawa Theological College / Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe	49
<i>Chapter 4: The Historical Role of the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance in the Ecumenical Response to the Governance Crisis in Zimbabwe (2005-2020)</i>	
Useni Sibanda, Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and Travor Murai, Institute of Development Sciences, NUST, Zimbabwe	68
<i>Chapter 5: Navigating the Transition: Zimbabwean Churches and the Global Political Agreement, 2008-2013</i>	
Michael Aeby, University of Basel, Switzerland, and Sara Rich Dorman, University of Edinburgh, (UK)	91

THE CHURCHES, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Chapter 6: Evangelicals and the Public Sphere. The Shifting Stance of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

Never Muparutsa, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and Tichaona Chiwashira, Pan-African Christian College 117

Chapter 7: What is a Christian Citizen? Learning about the Possibilities of Political Action from Apolitical Actors

Leanne Williams Green, University of Cambridge, UK 137

Chapter 8: 'That they may be one': The Zimbabwe Council of Churches' Contribution to Church and National Unity from 2013 to 2023.

Kenneth Mtata, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland 152

THE CHURCH, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND MARGINALITY

Chapter 9: The Roman Catholic Church and the Struggle for Social Justice

Lawrence Daka, St Ignatius College, Zimbabwe 176

Chapter 10: Catholic Social Thought as a Driver of Political Transition

David Kaulemu, Arrupe Jesuit University, Zimbabwe 201

Chapter 11: The Absence of Women's Voices in Ecumenical Responses to Political Transitions in Zimbabwe

Molly Manyonganise, Zimbabwe Open University 226

Chapter 12 African Independent Churches: From Marginality to Political Influence

Francis Machingura University of Zimbabwe and Samuel Kalizi, Scripture Union 245

A NEW DISPENSATION? '2017' AND ITS AFTERMATH

Chapter 13: The Churches and the 2017 Coup

Munetsi Ruzivo, University of Zimbabwe 261

Chapter 14: The Church on the crossroads: Between Mugabe's shadow and the new dispensation

Tryvis Moyo Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and Mpumeleo Moyo, Arrupe Jesuit University 277

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GLOSSARY

ACCZ	Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe
AEA	Association of Evangelicals in Africa
AIC	African Independent / Initiated / Instituted / Church
ATR	African Traditional Religion
AU	African Union
BCI	Beyond Cyclone Idai
BMATT	British Military and Advisory Team
BUZ	Baptist Union of Zimbabwe
CADEC	Catholic Development Commission
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
CCDD	Commission of Churches on Diakonia and Development
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CCSF	Church and Civil Society Forum
CCZ	Catholic Church in Zimbabwe
CEWS	Conflict Early Warning System
CFAN	Christ for All Nations
CIB	Churches in Bulawayo
CIG	Churches in Gweru
CIH	Churches in Harare
CIM	Churches in Manicaland
CIP	Churches in Plumtree
CIIR	Catholic Institute for International Relations
CIV	Churches in Victoria Falls
CJP	Christians Together for Justice and Peace
CMM	Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannhill
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreements
COPs	Conference of Parties
COPAC	Constitution Parliamentary Committee (COPAC)
CPLO	Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Officer
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSSD	Commission for Social Services and Development
CUZ	Catholic University in Zimbabwe

EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
ELCZ	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe
EPIZ	Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe
EPOIZ	Ecumenical Peace Observation Initiative in Zimbabwe
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
ESS	Ecumenical Support Service
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
GTH	Grace to Heal
HOCD	Heads of Christian Denominations
ICN	Independent Catholic News
IHD	Integral Human Development
ILT	Integral Liberation Theory
IMBISA	Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa
IYDP	Integral Youth Development Programme
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
JOMIC	Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee
LibThe	Liberation Theology
LOP	Lausanne Occasional Papers
LRF	Legal Resources Foundation
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change of Morgan Tsvangirai
MDC-N	Movement for Democratic Change of Welshman Ncube
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NANGO	National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
NCP	National Convergence Platform
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NDS	National Development Strategy
NMCS	National Movement of Catholic Students
NPRC	National Peace and Reconciliation Commission
NVP	National Visioning Process
NVDD	National Vision Discussion Document
NWPC	National Working People's Convention
OGs	Old Georgians
ONHRI	Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration
PF-ZAPU	Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union
PVO	Private Voluntary Organisation

RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles
RNA	Rhodesian National Army
RCBC	Rhodesian Catholic Bishops Conference
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SECAM	Symposium of Ecumenical Churches in Africa and Madagascar
SHGs	Self Help Groups
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SRCC	Southern Rhodesia Christian Conference
SRMC	Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference
SSW	School of Social Work
SZC	Save Zimbabwe Campaign
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UANC	United African National Council
UDACIZA	Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UMC	United Methodist Church
UDACIZA	Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa
UZA	United Zimbabwe Alliance
WaSH	Water and Sanitation Hygiene
WCC	World Council of Churches
YPO	Young People for Others
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Unity – Patriotic Front
ZAOGA	Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa
ZAPU-PF	Zimbabwe African People's Union – Patriot Front
ZCA	Zimbabwe Christian Alliance
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference of Zimbabwe
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
ZCC	Zion Christian Church
ZCPD	Zimbabwe Coalition for Peace and Development
ZCSM	Zimbabwe Christian Students Movement
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

ZHOCD	Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations
ZHRC	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZHRNGOF	Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum
ZHOCD	Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations
ZIICC	Zimbabwe Indigenous InterDenominational Council of Churches
ZIRC	Zimbabwe Interreligious Council
ZNPC	Zimbabwe National Pastors' Conference
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe National Union – Patriotic Front,
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZWW	Zimbabwe We Want

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PREFACE

In fourteen chapters, *Ecumenical Christianity and Politics in Zimbabwe 1980 – 2023*, edited by David Kaulemu, David Maxwell and Munetsi Ruzivo, presents a rich tapestry of the most up to date rendition of Church and State relations in Zimbabwe in the last four decades. It is rich not only in the breath of the sub-themes covered, but also in the broad range of perspectives arising from the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the authors, whose affiliate organisations represent about 80% of Zimbabwe's population that claims to be Christian in one way or another.

The book is the product of a conference on 'Ecumenical Christianity and Political Transitions in Zimbabwe, 1980-2023', held in September 2023. Religion and politics are pivotal to determining the social experience of communities. It is fair to say that for the most part Zimbabwe's experience has been traumatic. From the harsh discrimination of settler minority rule to post independence struggles at nation building and uniting the population during the Gukurahundi 'moment of madness' so aptly captured in Robert Mugabe's remark, to the creation of a de facto one party system, to the economic turmoil of the late 1990s, the rushed land reform programme, the punitive economic measures imposed by the West, and the serial disputed elections, Zimbabwe has suffered shocks and trauma that have scarred the character of its people. The church could not remain a spectator on the sidelines.

The Church played peacemaker, reconciler, advisor, and healer through direct and indirect engagements with the ZANU-PF government, the only governing political party since 1980. There was a brief respite during the unity government with the opposition MDC formed on 13 February 2009, but it was short-lived. While this text focuses on reactions to three key political transitions – Independence in 1980, the Government of National Unity 2009-13, and the new dispensation beginning in November 2017 – there were other milestones in between, such as the interventions of the Church through its prophetic pronouncements. The government listened, even amidst denials, but still went ahead to make monumental changes such as drafting a new constitution following a consultative process. Thus, political opinion was shaped. Documents such as 'Breaking the Silence', 'The Zimbabwe We Want' and 'The March is not Ended' are key texts that influenced the political processes in the country, setting new if

limited trajectories. The conference was therefore timely; it provided an opportunity to reflect on the Christian mandate in the context of the social experience of living in the Second Republic, and of the ongoing challenges facing the ordinary Zimbabwean.

Apart from being representative, the chapters, written by scholars, researchers, pastors and administrators of ecumenical bodies, cover key areas that ride on the advantage of hindsight to deliver a deeper understanding of both why the country is where it is today and the singular contribution of ecumenical Christianity to impact the trajectory of national development.

As I write the Preface to this publication, I cannot help but reflect on these events in which I, together with many others, played a part, starting from my days of activism as president of the Students' Union at the University of Rhodesia in the 1970s, and my active participation in the history-changing work of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia, both leading to the issuance of a restriction order against me and my getting banned from Salisbury, the capital city, by the colonial government of Rhodesia. I was also privileged to work with a team of dedicated men and women in the nation-wide research, community-engagement, compilation and publication of the discussion document, 'The Zimbabwe We Want', a product of the ecumenical collaboration of the umbrella bodies of 80% of Christians in Zimbabwe, namely the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. Many provisions of this seminal document were incorporated into Zimbabwe's new national Constitution in 2013.

The varied writing styles and accessible language make this book a good read for anyone who seeks to understand the intersection of Christianity and politics in Zimbabwe today. The currency of the events and utterances covered give the book a refreshing appeal that contextualizes those events in the longer story of the Zimbabwean state. The book is therefore a timely resource and a must read for leaders, policy makers, academics and students, and indeed for the ordinary curious reader.

Professor Ranga M. Zinyemba

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January 2025

Introduction

DAVID KAULEMU, DAVID MAXWELL AND MUNETSI RUZIVO

Setting the terms of the debate

The chapters in this collection emerged out of a conference on Ecumenical Christianity and Political Transitions in Zimbabwe 1980-2023, hosted by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches in September 2023. The conference was organised to investigate the role of the three major church councils and their umbrella body in advocacy, peace-making and reconciliation; in constitution writing; and in creating a political culture built upon accountability and uncorrupt transparency. The three bodies in question, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Council (ZCBC) and their co-ordinating organisation, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), speak for most of the denominations in the country where surveys consistently point to around 80-85% of society claiming adherence to the Church.¹ Combined with their vast constituency, these councils' role in the delivery of healthcare, education and development makes them some of the most dynamic and significant players in Zimbabwean civil society.²

Conference participants were a mix of academics from Zimbabwe and the northern hemisphere along with leaders representing the ecumenical

- 1 In the 2012 Census, the figures for Christian adherence break down as follows: 33% Catholic; 42% Evangelical or Pentecostal; 17% historic missions churches, in particular, Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran; 8% Apostolic (African Independent). The overall figures for adherence across religions remain stable, though more recent surveys record a shift in Christian adherence away from Catholic and historic mission churches towards Pentecostal and so-called Apostolic Churches. US State Department 2013, taken from Tarusarira, 2016: 1
- 2 The editors tried without success to find representatives of the fourth ecumenical body within the ZHOCD, the Union for the Development of Apostolic and Zionist churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) founded in 1993. Nevertheless, African Independent Churches are discussed in several chapters and specifically addressed in the chapter by Machingura and Kalizi.

bodies or other Christian organisations within civil society. It was deemed important that church leaders should speak for themselves and their organisations rather than be represented by others. As such, the papers by so-called ‘stakeholders’ serve as a useful foil, or counterbalance, to academic discourse, reminding us that the Church’s mission is far broader than simply its interface with the state.

To focus discussion, conference participants were encouraged to consider how the main ecumenical bodies had responded to three key political transitions or crises that caused them to reflect on their mission. The first was the challenge of Independence. At the birth of Zimbabwe in 1980, the historic mission churches, excepting the Catholic Church, were in a weak moral position relative to the new African regime, compromised by their colonial associations. Relations were animated by a concern on the part of church leaders to give the state the benefit of the doubt and irritability on the part of the state if church leaders did say anything even vaguely political. To prove their loyalty, the churches threw themselves behind the state’s development programme and muted their prophetic voice. The second transition came with the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009-13. The GNU followed a long and profound period of turmoil which commenced in 2000 and was known as ‘the Crisis’. During the Crisis years, 2000-08, Christian leaders and church councils published a plethora of pastorals, press releases and human rights reports on political violence and the growing immiseration of the people while calling for a new political settlement. The final transition was the coup of November 2017 in which President Robert Mugabe was overthrown by his former Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, with the help of the military. For the most part the churches lent the coup their tacit approval hoping that President Mnangagwa’s ‘new dispensation’ would bring forth a renewed era of democratisation, human rights and economic growth.

Delegates were also asked to engage with a series of interrelated questions:

1. Is there a Christian council elite committed to theological and developmental ideas that find little purchase amongst members of their denominations?
2. Have Christian councils become so secularised (or NGOised) that they primarily function as service providers to the state?
3. Are church councils too institutionalised and fixated with

consensus that they cannot respond to crises with practical aid and prophetic denunciation?

4. Are church councils suited to mobilising the grassroots and creating the local autonomy necessary for the creation of an active citizenry and a participatory democracy?
5. Is ecumenical consensus fatally flawed by the politics of patronage and ethnicity? Has the ruling party been successful in dividing the Church by, for instance, courting of members within the Union for the Development of Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA); or securing high-profile Christian leaders to act as its apologists (Dube 2020)?
6. Have ordinary Christians sought alternative models of spiritual liberation offered by the burgeoning Pentecostal movement: a) a sectarian apolitical quietist faith; b) a this-worldly gospel of prosperity propounded by high-profile 'white-collar prophets'; c) the assertion of a conservative Christian constitution and the moralisation of politics; d) the potential for the revision of social relations, values and norms towards a greater egalitarianism within the church assembly that eventually impact on the wider public sphere (Maxwell 2006).

Histories of Zimbabwean Ecumenism

Despite their enormous convening power, the ecumenical bodies have not been sufficiently interrogated as agents of socio-political transformation. Carl Hallencreutz and Ambrose Moyo's, important volume *Church and State in Zimbabwe* (1988) provides great insight into how the churches and ecumenical bodies responded to the exigencies of the war in the 1970s and the challenges of independence in the following decade. Key themes of ecumenism and church-state relations raised by chapters in *Church and State* are extended by Frans Verstraelen's short, but useful, collection of essays (1998). But there was a considerable lacuna before Ezra Chitando's extensive edited collection, *The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Development* (2020a) which ranges well beyond issues of development to consider church-state relations, gender, health and theology. Chitando's collection makes a considerable advance but there are noteworthy gaps in the literature when it comes to the EFZ and ZCBC.

Since the 1990s there has been a significant scholarly industry on the

rise and social and political significance of Zimbabwean Born-Again Christianity, a movement which comprises Evangelicals, Charismatics and Pentecostals (Gifford 1991; Maxwell 2006; Ranger and Mukonyora 2007). Recently, much of this important work has been done by a group of scholars led by Ezra Chitando, who have investigated a range of pressing matters from prophetism and the prosperity gospel, to the use of Christian ideas and idioms in both legitimate religious leaders and shaping human rights (Chitando et al 2013; 2013; 2020(b); 2021a; 2021b; Machingura, Tongaresei and Chitando, 2018). Yet with one or two exceptions (Ruzivo 2018) surprisingly little has been published on their ecumenical body the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe which now claims to speak for over 900 member bodies and 4.5 million Christians.³

Similarly, except for a brief study on the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (D. Auret 1992), there have been few longitudinal studies of the Catholic Church since Independence, save for a fascinating set of memoirs and histories two of which focus on the Jesuits (M. Auret 2011; Harald-Barry 2022; McLaughlin 2021; Mukonori 2017). David Kaulemu's edited collection (2010) contains insightful studies of community-based Catholic organisations that have engaged in political participation. But Paul Gundani's published inaugural lecture (2008) comes closest to a study of long-term shifts in relations between the ZCBC and the state. Much remains to be done given that the Catholic Church is by far the largest church in Zimbabwe with significant social and institutional presence. Its vast infrastructure of schools, hospitals and development bodies, coupled with its tradition of advocacy for human rights, makes it a sheet-anchor in society.

But this collection does not simply seek to fill gaps in knowledge. It considers how the ecumenical bodies have related to each other in a broader assertion of ecumenism and examines their shifting relations with the state over the last four decades. One of the most important recent interventions in the scholarship on Zimbabwean ecumenism examines Christian movements that run counter the major ecumenical bodies. Joram Tarusarira's book *Reconciliation and Religio-Political Non-Conformism* in Zimbabwe examines civil society organisations with religious goals that pursue of social justice, healing, peace and reconciliation but are separate from the Church. Operating at a local or regional level, their decentralised and non-hierarchical structures better protect their leaders

3 <https://www.efzimbabwe.org/who-we-are> [consulted 3 September 2024].

from prosecution and allow them to react quickly and flexibly to violence and injustice. Emerging in the 2000s, in direct response to the Crisis, these movements of grassroots ecumenism have deployed a variety of strategies, including peaceful demonstrations, advocacy programmes, press statements, publications, conventions, training workshops and the counselling victims of violence. Two prominent examples have been the Churches in Manicaland (CiM) founded in 2000 from around fifteen organisations including the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, United Methodist and Elim Pentecostal Churches, and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) formed in 2005 as nationwide network of local hubs of churches. According to Tarusarira, movements of religio-political non-conformism stand in distinction to the ecumenical councils. While the councils see their role as finding consensus amongst the churches and keeping channels open with the government for negotiation, organisations such as the ZCA see them as compromised and sluggish, too slow to respond to crises (Tarusarira 2016). Tarusarira's research informed our discussions, most specifically in the paper by Useni Sibanda and Travor Murai on the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance. Another trenchant criticism of the ecumenical bodies comes from Molly Mayonganise who argues that their leaderships are distinctively male, providing little room for female expression or agency. Her argument is powerfully illustrated by Musaswira's chapter where he lists the dozen or so all male members of the steering committee for *The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Towards A National Vision For Zimbabwe': A Discussion Document* (2006), herein shortened, to the *Zimbabwe We Want* (ZWW).

There is a literature on ecumenical bodies in colonial Zimbabwe which reconstructs the challenging environment of theological disunity and racial discrimination inherited by Church leaders as they sought consensus in the post-colonial era. Competition between missionary societies was institutionalised with the founding of the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (SRMC) in 1903. The body sought to promote Protestant missions to the colonial state and stimulate a fraternal spirit amongst missionaries. It also did important work in African labour and education and attempted to establish a common consensus on dealing with African customs and affairs, indicating that collaboration was at least possible between the historic Protestant missionary bodies. However, the SMRC was also an agent of division given that it served the practical purpose of delimiting missionary / denominational boundaries across

colonial territory. Significantly the Roman Catholic Church did not join the Conference until 1920, preferring to view Protestantism as a heresy that needed to be extirpated. Even then, the Catholics only collaborated until 1942 when they withdrew for unspecified reasons. (Ruzivo 2017: 150-51, 162). Excluded from the SRMC by a combination of racism and missionary paternalism, 'Native' clergy met in a separate organisation. Founded by the great Wesleyan Methodist, Reverend Thompson Samkange, the Southern Rhodesia Native Missionary Conference first met in Salisbury in 1928 (Ranger 1995). Only in 1954 were the Southern Rhodesia African and European Missionary Conferences merged into the Southern Rhodesia Christian Conference (SRCC). Even then, dominated by white missionaries, the SRCC appeared tone-deaf towards issues of African poverty, racial inequality and denial of political rights until the early 1970s.

On its foundation in 1962, the Evangelical Fellow of Rhodesia (EFR) cast itself as a distinctively *anti-ecumenical* body. As Maxwell reminds us, one of its founding tenets was: 'To take common action with a view to awakening Christian people to the danger of modernism, false cults, and from ecumenicity that is achieved at the expense of vital Christian faith' (Maxwell taken from Bhebhe, 1988: 321). It was deeply suspicious of the SRCC, and even more so, the World Council of Churches, especially after the WCC launched its Programme to Combat Racism in 1969. Strongly influenced by Euro-American conservative evangelicalism, EFR members understood the Liberation War as the advance of Communism and Soviet influence rather than a struggle for freedom against colonialism. Given its strongly sectarian antecedents, it would take two decades before the EFR's successor, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe would engage with issues of socio-political change.

Key findings

Several themes emerge from the chapters that follow: the Church's mission; developments within Born-again Christianity, African Independent Churches, and Catholicism; and moments of broad ecumenical consensus.

First, the chapters remind us of the breadth of the Church's vision and conversely the constraints it operates under as a human institution. Although much criticised for its muted response to the corruption and political violence of the ruling party, the ZWW document (ZCBC et al 2006), published by the ecumenical bodies in 2006 did envision a set of values that underpin an alternative just society (see Musasiwa). These

included the freedoms of speech, association and expression necessary for the functioning of democracy. But alongside them there was also an assertion of values that make moral citizens such as sincerity, integrity and respect for human life and dignity. More broadly still, the document asserted unity in diversity, God's stewardship of creation, and the protection and promotion of the family as the bedrock of society (see also Moyo and Moyo's paper). It is this holistic view of mission that causes Lawrence Daka to contend that Catholic charity and development produces better social justice than hastily produced and ill-considered pastoral statements. Daka and Kenneth Mtata also remind us of the material realities that church councils must contend with. Ecumenical bodies are reliant on international funding and donors can suffer fatigue and lose interest. Mtata highlights a particularly challenging period for the ZCC, 2014-15, when it lacked sufficient funds to employ a substantive General Secretary or carry out its programmes, leading to demoralisation throughout the organisation. Muparutsa and Chiwashira's chapter on the EFZ remind us of Evangelicals' abiding concern with 'soul winning' pursued through programmes of evangelism, discipleship, church planting and prayer.

Secondly, Born-Again Christianity has elicited a variety of responses to Zimbabwe's ongoing Crisis. White collar prophets such as Passion Java or Emmanuel Makandiwa draw huge crowds in search of a spiritual path to liberation via miraculous wealth and healing. Other Pentecostals such as Ubert Angel or Andrew Wutuwanashe serve as what Bekithemba Dube describes as 'Regime Enablers'. They have provided spiritual sanction to President Mnangagwa and President Mugabe before him, or actively supported organisations such as Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) (2020) a pro-government organisation created with the specific intention of breaking the ecumenical consensus. Nevertheless, Muparutsa and Chiwashira's chapter reveals that Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders associated with the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe have shifted from a political quietism that characterised their position in the 1980s and 90s to a commitment to social justice. While retaining its enduring commitment to evangelism and discipleship the EFZ has founded a series of commissions on gender, relief and development, and peace and social justice. The Fellowship has moved a long way since their first prominent foray into the public sphere in 1999, when under the leadership of Andrew Wutuwanashe, it campaigned for the Declaration of Zimbabwe as a Christian nation (Ruzivo 2018).

What brought about the EFZ's entrance into a more socially engaged expression of mission after 2000 is key question for debate. Doubtless the horrors of political violence, especially around elections, the collapsing economy in part caused by corruption, and the immiseration of the people moved some Born-again leaders. But as Musasiwa explains, the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 and subsequent deliberations were important in shaping Evangelical social action in southern Africa. Never Muparutsa, presiding Bishop of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe and President of the EFZ cites the influence of evangelical thinkers such as John Stott and Miroslav Volf, alongside Lausanne Theology. Sibanda and Murai reveal that more radical Evangelicals associated with the ZCA have been influenced by Liberation Theology. Whether individual Christians within the EFZ follow their leaders into social action is a moot point. In her chapter on evangelicals within the Baptist Union, Williams Green observes that the emphasis on local church autonomy within Baptist settings militates against collective ecumenical action. Moreover, the nurturing of a deeply individualistic faith in which each believer is called to test teachings according to the Bible and the Holy Spirit rather than the authority of the Church, further atomises the evangelical Christian community. Evangelical belief in God's divine sovereignty that overrules corrupt human institutions could certainly form a basis for evangelical collative action, but we are yet to see its manifestation politics. Williams Green's discussion of Pastor Evan Mawarire's #This Flag Movement usefully extends discussion of the range of religious interactions with politics. Mawarire did not lead a religious movement but was religious actor participating in the socio-political arena. His mission was national unity, accountability, and social justice, rather than a specific religious agenda or an attempt to use religion to settle the grievances. The ephemerality of his campaign underscores the utility of institutions, whether centralised or decentralised, in sustaining political action. As Tarusarira and Chitando observe: 'had the Mawarire wave synergised with other non-conformist religio-political organisations, it probably could have sustained its currency' (2019: 235).

If Evangelicals and Pentecostals have been cautious about moving into the political realm African Independent Church (AIC) leaders and members have embraced the opportunities for political influence extended to them by the ruling party. Disparaged by many missionary organisations during the colonial era for their pneumatic practices, their so-called syncretistic beliefs, and their transgression of missionary boundaries,

Apostolic and Zionist Churches remained socially and politically marginal during the first two decades of independence. Chapters by Maxwell, Machingura and Kalizi illustrate how AICs were resented by the ruling party for undermining its programme of development via their rejection of schooling and biomedicine and by their highly authoritarian, patriarchal leadership structures. However, to some extent, the ecclesiastical dynamics that animated the first two decades of independence were inverted in the period 2000-2020. As the church councils and major denominations distanced themselves from an increasingly authoritarian state, so the AICs and some Pentecostals filled the vacuum, providing the regime with much needed legitimacy. Chapters by Machingura and Kalizi, Moyo and Moyo, and Ruzivo outline the parameters of this rapprochement.

In the new alliance between AICs and the ruling party, the spurning of development has been overlooked by the government in favour of supposed markers of ideological convergence. Worshipping outdoors, African Independent Churches, have always had a particularly close relationship to the landscape which aligns with ZANU-PF's nativistic nationalism. Cast in the language of autochthony, this exclusive definition of nationhood has focussed upon narrow definitions of belonging. Repudiating the policy of reconciliation, white commercial farmers have been re-cast as *amabhunu* (Boers, a reference to white settlers in South Africa) rather than citizens. Similarly, Malawian labour migrants who often voted for the opposition have been depicted as totemless foreigners and even MDC voters have been redefined as non-citizens (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2009: 68 -71). Another apparent marker of convergence is the AICs' somewhat spurious claim to have Africanised Christianity and resisted colonialism.⁴ There were signs of convergence in the early 2000s when Vapostori [Apostles] sang ZANU-PF liberation war songs and held up party placards during a vigil at Juranifiri Shrine (Engelke 2007: 249; Dube 2018: 2). The relationship was formalised in 2010 when the state created the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), overseen by then vice president, Joyce Mujuru, who became the movement's 'mother'. (Tarursarira 2019: 111-12). Representing a vast constituency, the ACCZ drew political favour in the promises made by its hierarchical leaders to deliver votes for the ruling party during elections (Dube 2018: 3). Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, the leader of a large AIC, the Zion Christian Church, has been a key

4 On the origins of AICs in missionary Pentecostalism and revivalism and on their repudiation of traditional religious possession cults and sacred sites see Ranger 1987:31-36 and Maxwell 2006: 38-59.

regime enabler. A vehement critic of the opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), he deployed well-rehearsed state propaganda that the party was a western puppet, serving the interests of white Zimbabweans. More recently, he has been a major force on ZIICC, actively undermining the ecumenical consensus that councils such as the ZCC had worked so hard to construct.

The chapters by Daka, Gunduni, Kaulemu, Maxwell, and Moyo and Moyo that discuss Catholicism, point to a very different story. There was a slow realisation by Catholics that ZANU-PF no longer constituted the poor and the marginalised but had rather been corrupted by an extensive network of politicians, military, secret service personnel, high civil servants and business people. This recognition was a hard and painful one to make and took two decades to materialise, given the strength of historical legacies and personal connections between church leaders and politicians.

As Gundani, Maxwell and Moyo and Moyo make clear, ZANU-PF came to power with a great deal of moral authority, reflected in Robert Mugabe's confident assertion of his party's role. His view, taken from communist ideology, was that ZANU-PF was a vanguard party which had gained freedom through a revolution and had won elections. It possessed the mandate to lead and to give direction. No other institution, organisation or individual had that authority, including the army or international powers. For Mugabe, no one could teach him and ZANU-PF about freedom, democracy and good governance. It was this view that obfuscated the distinctions between party, government and the state and informed his opinion that the church must stay out of politics – even though he had approved the church's role during the armed struggle and expected it to contribute towards development.

For the most part the Catholic Church initially accepted Mugabe's stance. With some exceptions, Catholic clergy and faithful had aligned with the marginalised during the colonial era and seen the armed struggle as a fight for justice. Catholic institutions – schools, parishes, missions, hospitals and development centres – had been working with ZANU-PF and ZANLA cadres during the war. Robert Mugabe and Edgar Tekere hid at the Catholic School of Social Work, Silveira House, before going to Mozambique. Mugabe's sister, Sabina, had also taken refuge there.

Given its long prior commitment to the education, healthcare and community development the Catholic hierarchy happily threw itself

behind the ruling party's development programme, supporting land reform, human rights, and social welfare, as an outworking of the 'option for the poor'. Relations with the ruling party were helped by strong personal connections. Editions of the *Jesuit Newsletter* published shortly after independence show Robert Mugabe and his first wife, Sally, enjoying regular visits to Catholic institutions, often accompanied by Archbishop Chakaipa. Chakaipa consistently defended government, advocating 'tea diplomacy' with the then Prime Minister rather than publishing statements. When the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) confronted Mugabe about the political violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands, known as Gukurahundi (1982-87), he told them to bring the evidence. When confronted with the *Breaking the Silence* report, he suppressed it. The report was only published in 1997 when Mike Auret, the Chairman of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, turned to the Legal Resources Foundation for support. As Maxwell shows, Auret, a devout Catholic, had initially been enormously impressed with Mugabe, before growing disillusioned with growing corruption, political violence and suppression of human rights. The ZCBC did not initially endorse *Breaking the Silence*. Only subsequently did it begin to associate with the report. In a similar manner, when faced with the ambivalence of the ZCBC, Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pious Ncube, took to publishing his own statements. Only when confronted by the depredations visited upon the Zimbabwean society following the onset of the Crisis in 2000 did the Catholic leaders grasp that they must speak for the poor and marginalised causing the Catholic Church to finally renounce solidarity with the party it had worked alongside during the Liberation War. However, while the ZCBC attempted to withdraw its full support from ZANU-PF, it still cannot afford to fully disengage because its institutions need state approval to function. Government support is also for instance needed for import licences and visa applications for missionary priests, several of whom have been denied entrance. Like other ecumenical bodies and churches, the ZCBC is currently walking a tight rope.

Lastly, a synthesis of papers by Aeby and Rich Dorman, Kaulemu, Mtata, Musasiwa, Ruzivo, Sibanda and Murai, suggests that significant concerted moments of broad-based ecumenism have occurred, even if fleeting. The first occurrence which drew in movements of so-called religio-political Non-Conformism in Zimbabwe happened in the period 2005-08. Thrown together by the Crisis, the Ecumenical Councils, the

ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC, reconfigured the overarching co-ordinating body, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) in 2003. They became increasingly outspoken in 2005 when confronted with the horror of Operation Murambatsvina. Faced with church buildings filled with the homeless and needy and the shocking brutality that the state meted out on its own citizens they issued a Call to Conscience: ‘Today the achievements of the 1980s look deeply flawed and the lofty sentiments of our time tawdry. The reality in our homes and schools and public buildings is one of bleak decay’ (1983 in ZCBC 2015: 208). Leaders of the church councils, Anglican Bishop Sebastian Bakare, of the ZCC, Catholic Bishop, Patrick Matume of the ZCBC, and Pentecostal Bishop Trevor Manhanga of the EFZ increasingly worked in concert to try and bring an end to the Crisis. The following year their organisations released *The Zimbabwe We Want* (2006). As Musasiwa’s chapter explains, this statement was penned by theologians from across the church councils. It celebrated the nation’s successes, identified its failings in corruption, poverty and political violence, made economic and political policy recommendations, asserted a more inclusive vision of the nation, and exalted democracy, justice and sovereignty. The consensus behind the document quickly fell apart under accusations that the authors were too close to the regime and had withdrawn more radical portions of the first draft under state pressure. Committed to Catholic social teaching, the Jesuit Social Communications Office withdrew its support following the removal of key sections on freedom of association, speech and expression. Nevertheless, the ZWW document provided the impetus and some of the theology that animated the Save Zimbabwe Campaign (SZC).

As outlined in Sibanda’s paper, the SZC commenced in 2005 and was co-ordinated by the ZCA, as an alliance of churches and several hundred civil society organisations comprising civics and labour. It had two priorities: first, free and fair elections in 2008, and secondly, an end to political violence. The campaign gained global prominence on 11 March 2007 when the state attacked an SZC-organised prayer rally. Over 1,000 state security personnel halted the event, killing two participants. Fifty opposition members, including Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the MDC, were arrested and beaten up, and when the gruesome images of bloodied faces and broken bodies were beamed around the world, it triggered a formal intervention by leaders of the Southern African Development Community to address the Crisis. This intervention began

the negotiations that would eventually lead to Global Political Agreement and the founding of the Government of National Unity following the complete breakdown of politics in the wake of the electoral violence of 2008. Although the ecumenical consensus of the period 2005-08 soon evaporated, the ZWW document did become a foundational text for revisioning the nation, influencing the content of the 2013 Constitution. It continues to be consulted.

A second more questionable ecumenical moment occurred in November 2017 when the ecumenical bodies and the ZHOCD seemed to endorse the military coup that led to the overthrow of President Robert Mugabe and his replacement by Emmerson Mnangagwa. Ruzivo criticises the ecumenical councils' rather hasty decision to embrace the take-over, which was spurred on by their relief to see Mugabe go, and their misplaced belief that he was the source of all the nation's problems. He also castigates church leaders for their lack of serious engagement with the security forces over guarantees for human rights and economic recovery and notes their lack of engagement with key players in civil society and with ordinary citizens. One could interpret the church councils' more recent expression of solidarity with the Catholic Archbishop of Harare, Robert Ndlovu, as an attempt to reestablish their credibility (see Moyo and Moyo). On 14 August 2020, the seven Zimbabwean Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter calling for an urgent resolution to the country's economic and political situation: 'The struggle in Zimbabwe, has resulted on a multi-layered crisis of convergence of economic collapse, deepening poverty, food insecurity and human rights abuses.' 'Corruption in the country has reached alarming levels.' Singled out for criticism, the Information Minister, Monica Mutsvanga, described Ndlovu as 'evil minded', deploying his Ndebele ethnicity against him with the accusation that he was fanning ethnic division, as the Church had done in the Rwandan Genocide. The pastoral was appropriately titled: *The March is Not Ended*.⁵

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The Churches in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Independence, 1980-1990

DAVID MAXWELL

There is a danger when writing the history of the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence of reading back into the 1980s the malaise of political violence and socio-economic decline that has plagued the nation-state since the outset of the Crisis in the 2000s. It is easy to forget the circumstances in which the new regime was born. Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) came to power after a momentous electoral victory in 1980. A contemporary report by a delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) observed: 'It is a unique situation where a revolutionary armed struggle has been given the stamp of overwhelming popular appeal'. But this seemed to be the case. There was a general mood of euphoria that Africans had gained their freedom from the shackles of a racist settler state and optimism that a new society was possible. The WCC report went on to observe that even many whites had been 'pleasantly surprised by the moderation shown by the new government'.¹ A new agenda was quickly established. While ZANU-PF drew great moral authority from its role as the dominant movement of liberation, it increasingly derived legitimacy from its delivery of *modernising development* for all via its commitment to justice and equality. Guerrilla armies, and the local party committees that had supported them, were demobilised and power was centralised via the office of the party's political commissar. Directives now came from the

1 JSTOR, 'Report of a WCC Visit to Zimbabwe', 15-22 March 1980.

political centre and guerrillas were corralled into a government controlled ex-Combatants Association. Fearing that narratives of liberation would revive the factionalism of the armed struggle, the ruling party made unity, development, and nationalism the key interconnecting themes of its public discourse. At the same time, it seized the mantle of guarantor of the nation's progress and stability (Alexander 1995; Rich Dorman 2016: 68-70).

The church councils and denominations' relations with the new ZANU-PF government were mostly determined by their wartime record, particularly their stance towards the liberation movements (Maxwell 1995; Rich Dorman 2016: 63). But they would come to be judged on how they responded to the imperative of development. Like many African nationalist movements, Zimbabwe's ruling party sought to subsume civil society, particularly rival parties, and independent concentrations of power such as the churches and trade unions, into a unified programme of modernisation, development and redistribution. In this endeavour ZANU-PF was greatly helped, as Jocelyn Alexander reminds us, by its inheritance from the Rhodesian Front of a 'sophisticated and powerful bureaucratic state' with a 'diversified economy' and an 'enviable infrastructure' (Alexander 2009: 188). Nevertheless, the new state was jealous of its authority and nervous of challenges to its power. It was quick to single out those who did not share in its collective ideals of unity and development, or who sought to undermine them. Its list of villains included the rival parties, Zimbabwe African Political Union (ZAPU) and the United African National Council (UNAC) but also, African Independent Churches (AICs), organisations associated with the American Religious Right, and what appeared to be a sluggish church council, namely the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. This process of vilification had profound implications for ecumenism and church-state relations.

Nevertheless, the excitement at Independence was shared by many in the church. As the former President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Goodwill Shana, has observed: 'Independence evoked a strong feeling of nationalism, patriotism, and party loyalty both in the laity and the clergy of the church. The ecclesiastical and national euphoria was further heightened by the morality of the policy of reconciliation, which resonated with the churches own biblical principles.'² Many Christians

2 Archives of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Goodwill Shana, 'The Role of the Church in Consensus Building and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe', Pretoria, South Africa, May 2007.

relished the opportunity to Africanise the leadership of their churches. Others had good party credentials deriving from their own participation in the armed struggle and many others were sympathetic to the new developmental agenda. Conservative missionaries had, mostly, left the country at Independence, or soon after, and those who remained or arrived thereafter were sympathetic to the government's objectives. Ordinary citizens looked to the new government to improve living standards, as those in neighbouring countries had done in the 1960s (Cooper 2010, 7 and 20-21).

Beyond its borders, Zimbabwe continued to be viewed favourably by the international community during its first decade as a new nation-state. The venue for the Eighth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1986, and a Papal Visit in 1988, Zimbabwe was seen as a beacon of hope in the continuing struggle for the liberation of southern Africa. Following a Harare-based meeting of the World Council of Churches in December 1985, its General Secretary, Emilo Castro declared: 'The success of Zimbabwe's arrival to independence, to liberation, to the building of a new nation, is for all of us a great encouragement looking to the future of South Africa and Southern Africa in general'.³ Moreover, in 1991, Zimbabwe was the site of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, where the celebrated Harare Declaration was issued, listing the fundamental values of the Commonwealth which included democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human rights. Within the country, there were storm clouds on the horizon as the authoritarian and narrowly defined notion of unity imposed by the government via its Unity Accord of 1987, was increasingly exposed by workers, students, journalists and critical elements within the ruling party (Ncube 1989). But, for the most part, Sara Rich Dorman's description of the first seven years of independence as a period of 'inclusion' of the church and other groups in civil society within the state's programme was correct, even if as she observed it was 'only to prevent the emergence of rival power bases' (Rich Dorman 2016: 69). The full extent of state sanctioned political violence in Matabeleland (1983-87) would not be made public until a decade later.

Constructing a developmental state

Faced with a racially based economy and society with profound inequalities in access to land, healthcare and education, ZANU-PF mobilised a strong

3 Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Harare, 'Meeting of the World Council of Churches, 4-6 December 1985.

centralised state to pursue its welfare agenda. Although it was not without problems, the swift expansion of schooling offered great hope to youth whose education had been disrupted by the war (Raftopolous and Pilosof 2021). For instance, on the 29 December 1984 a well-known Zimbabwean commentator hailed the educational expansion in Zimbabwe since 1980 as ‘one of the most rapid and astounding developments. achieving in four years what has taken other countries two decades or more’ describing it as ‘a social revolution of no mean dimension’. He pointed out that in 1984 there were three times as many graduating in years 4, 5 and 6 as in 1983. Several days later, *The Herald* celebrated Mugabe’s valiant defence of high investment in education against the pressures from the International Monetary Fund, citing his argument that it created a skills-base for an expanding industrial sector. When given the right resources, peasant agriculture flourished alongside commercial farming, leaving the British Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, impressed with the abundance of harvests when he visited in January 1985.⁴ By the end of the first decade of Independence the state had redistributed around 3 million hectares of what had been white-owned land to over 70,000 black households (Alexander 2009: 4; Moyo 1995). Nevertheless, popular expectations of state-led development were considerable. The visiting delegation of the WCC in 1980 reported that ‘Long queues can be seen on 88 Manica Road, Salisbury, the Headquarters of ZANU, every morning, of people in search of employment, information on missing persons or refugees, or seeking assistance to obtain land’.⁵

Thus, the state turned to the church for support, seeking to draw its extensive resources into its development programme. In an important speech to church leaders at the Catholic Centre, Harare in April 1982, Prime Minister Mugabe evoked a range of emotions. He first rebuked his audience, claiming that ‘many, if not most’ in the church had swallowed wartime propaganda that he was ‘a communist man-eater’, and that his party was ‘an inhuman terrorist organisation bent on destruction of society’. He reassured them that religious freedom was a fundamental right: ‘Accordingly, a ZANU Government will respect and promote the role of the church and avoid completely interfering with the spiritual work of the Church. The Church and State must thus, feature as partners in the

4 The Scrutator, in a piece seemingly from *The Herald*, 29 December 1984 and *The Herald*, 4 January 1985, *The Herald*, 11 January 1985 taken from Terence Ranger, ‘10th Review of the Zimbabwean Press (henceforth RZP).

5 JSTOR, ‘Report of a WCC Visit to Zimbabwe’ 15-22 March 1980.

promotion of the welfare of human beings.' Finally, he sought to rouse them via a sense of shared mission and resources:

... in short, the fauna and flora which God gave us, are ours together ... The Church should in these circumstances certainly find no objection to socialist philosophy. Indeed, the Church's Christian teaching can hardly be reconciled with the avaricious nature of capitalism. Join us, therefore, in our socialism and humanitarianism and you are perfectly free to bring God and what He stands for with you! AMEN.

The speech made clear that the state had the moral authority and the right to determine the parameters of the churches' actions: 'We shall be entitled to ask, therefore, what your plans, all of you, are for improving the educational and health facilities of the country, alongside the plans of Government?'⁶

Addressing the Zimbabwe Pastors' Conference in September 1984, Didymus Mutasa, Speaker of Parliament, proved more confrontational. Irrked by the church's sins of omission regarding its past commitment to liberation he declared:

In our colonial situation who between the Chinese and our British colonialists behaved in accordance with the Christian Gospels? Who gave us a stone when we asked for fish. In plain language, who led us out of bondage? Was it not the Chinese and other Communist friends? So, you see how annoying it is when some of our cleric friends denounce Communism. The Communists have done more for us [than] what Christians failed to do before Independence ... So be joyful with us in this challenging world, to thank the Communists who have been doers of the word that the bible and some of your predecessors taught.

He then proceeded to reinforce Prime Minister Mugabe's strictures on the future programme of the church: 'We expect the Church to move gradually away from its traditional role of a service institution. We want the Church to be a productive institution particularly in the field of manpower training. We expect the Church to teach its flock to be self-reliant.' In an early example of the beatification of the Robert Mugabe that would become more common after the 2000s, he observed: 'Was John the Baptist not executed by the Romans for very similar reasons that Cde. Mugabe our Prime Minister and other leaders were imprisoned

6 ZCC, Robert Mugabe, 'Church Co-operation', speech delivered at the Catholic Centre in Harare, 30 April 1982.

by the colonial regime?’⁷

President Canaan Banana was specifically tasked with coaxing the church into a more concerted programme of development. A Methodist Minister with strong connections to the liberation movement, he was a formative influence throughout the 1980s via his books, articles, lectures, and public interviews. It was speculated that Banana, as a high-profile Christian, had been appointed as President to reassure the church. But adopting the role of ‘High Priest’ to the new nation, his utterances unnerved clerics due to his adherence to the party-line and its secular discourse (Ruzivo 2020: 19). Moving beyond inciting the church to be a better service provider, he imagined a new type of Christian community. On May 6 1986, *The Herald* drew upon an article by Banana in *Zimbabwe News*, the official organ of ZANU-PF, in which the President called for a true indigenisation of the church via the adoption of socialism, and the creation of ‘a new breed of cadres, baptised through the healing flame of our revolution.’⁸ Preferring the revolutionary connotation of cadres over ‘believers’ or ‘Christians’, Banana advocated profound theological transformation. Influenced by the Latin American theologian, Juan Segundo, he argued that the Church should not simply be on the side of the poor, working for their liberation from poverty and injustice, but that Christians needed to reflect upon their relation to power. In a subsequent piece for *Zimbabwe News* Banana wrote: ‘Theology, ever since religion became an instrument in the hands of the state, has become corrupted, and alienated from the masses of the people. For centuries, theology has been the Theology of the Oppressor: it has provided a doctrinal basis to state oppression.’ His antidote was ‘The LIBERATION OF THEOLOGY’, ‘a revolutionary act in which the Church transforms itself IDEOLOGICALLY from serving the powers that be to serving the oppressed masses.’⁹ Banana would make the same argument in his book *The Church and the Struggle for Zimbabwe. From the Programme to Combat Racism to Combat Theology* (1996), this time drawing his framework from the South African Kairos Document (1985), and offering a threefold model of church-state relations:

7 ZCC, Didymus Mutasa, ‘Joyful in a challenging World’, Pastors Conference, University of Zimbabwe, September 1984, p.10. On beatification and deification see E. Chitando (ed.) 2020.

8 *The Herald*, 6 May 1986, taken from Ranger, 22nd RZP.

9 C. Banana, ‘The Role of the Church in Revolutionary Politics’, *Zimbabwe News*, September 1988, p.18.

- State theology: an alliance between church and state;
- Church theology: concerned with internal church matters and not with external political and social issues;
- Prophetic theology: which confronts social and economic injustice and sides with the oppressed (Banana 1996: 318-19).

The irony was that Banana failed to grasp one of the fundamental lessons of Liberation Theology, that the theologian should take account of their own standpoint in relation to power. As President of Zimbabwe, Banana was not, in fact, calling, for a prophetic or revolutionary theology but a new state theology to legitimate a new one-party regime. It is true that Banana liked to see himself as closer to the people than the regime. Indeed, he took up a more oppositional role once out of power. But in the 1980s he was compromised by his office.

Building a unified nation

The crux of the matter was that ZANU-PF demanded obedience to its exclusively defined notion of unity. Writing in Banana's 1989 edited collection, *Turmoil and Tenacity*, Mugabe (now Executive President), argued that the recent Unity Accord was the culmination of a century-long struggle against forces of division which had undermined African progress. Referring to struggles with political rivals in the early 1980s he wrote: 'the future peace and stability of Zimbabwe would thus depend on how far these parties would acquiesce to a ZANU-PF government' (Mugabe 1989: 342). ZANU-PF leaders and state media did not hold back on vilifying those who were deemed to undermine national unity. The primary threat was deemed to be the major opposition party, the Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union (ZAPU). Ruling Party members were frustrated by the consistent and high level of popular support for ZAPU throughout the early 1980s. Their irritation was manifest in the run-up to the 1985 parliamentary election when there were ZANU-led attacks on ZAPU offices and rallies, and the speeches of opposition leaders were not reported in state media.¹⁰ More significantly, ZAPU was equated with the so-called 'dissident' problem in the west of the country. The causes of the political violence which would see the dispatch of the Fifth Brigade into the Midlands and Matabeleland in January 1983, and the death of over 20,000 civilians, were complex. The failure of the integration of ZAPU ex-combatants into the Zimbabwe National Army, and their subsequent

¹⁰ *The Herald*, 21-31 January 1985, taken from Ranger, 11th RZP.

persecution, led them to flee into the bush, fearing for their lives. But the situation was complicated by the activities of bandits and the South African backed 5th Column, Super-ZAPU (Alexander 1998; Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace-Legal Resources Foundation 1997). Terrorised by the Fifth Brigade, ZAPU officials, politicians, and their supporters, eventually consented to the termination of their party which was subsumed in ZANU-PF via the Unity Accord of December 1987.

Beyond outright political opponents, the regime was exercised by more subtle forms of disloyalty, some of them unspoken. A recurring irritation was the so-called African Independent Churches (AICs) of Maranke and Masowe, and their offshoots, collectively known as the *Vapostori* (Apostles). At times, Watchtower was added to the mix. An editorial in *The Herald* of 11 November 1985 celebrated the supposed role of the *Vapostori* in anti-colonial resistance before condemning their current practice: 'The trouble is that many *Vapostori* seem to be unable to move with the times. They continue to flout authority although they are now acting against their own. *Vapostori* children remain uneducated or die because their parents shun immunisation and scorn modern medicine.' The column writer opined that their stance was a product of 'time-ingrained ignorance'.¹¹ The following year the Governor of Masvingo Province berated 500 delegates attending the annual conference of Independent Churches for discriminating against women. He advised them to assist the government with development and ensure that the leadership of their churches was literate.¹² Other politicians cast aspersions on the famed self-reliance of AICs. Enos Nkala branded the *Vapostori* of Johanna Marange as 'highly organised criminals' associated with illegal foreign currency transactions and car theft, while an editorial in *Zimbabwe News* (September 1988) criticised AIC Bishops who amassed large properties registered in their own names.¹³ *The Herald* rejoiced when *Vapostori* and Watchtower members 'saw the light', secretly presenting their children for vaccinations, or better still, inaugurating public schisms in favour of bio-medicine.¹⁴ From the state's perspective, AICs undermined the very foundations of its programme of development. For a regime anxious about its authority, there was nothing more irritating

11 Editorial, *The Herald*, 11 November 1985, taken from Ranger 18th RZP.

12 *The Herald*, 17 March 1986, taken from Ranger, 22nd RZP.

13 *The Herald*, 1 November 1985, taken from Ranger, 18th RZP; *Zimbabwe News*, September 1988

14 *The Herald*, 2 May 1985, taken from Ranger, 15th RZP.

than being ignored by alternative 'pneumatic' forms of liberation.¹⁵

The same 1988 editorial in *Zimbabwe News* also had in its sights 'Right Wing Revival Groups'. In part, these groups committed the same transgression as the AICs in their practice of faith healing. Journalists working for *The Herald* clearly enjoyed debunking US Evangelist Morris Cerullo's claim that he had healed the blind and the dumb during his 1985 Harare Crusade.¹⁶ But these missionary organisations made a more explicit challenge to the regime's official socialist ideology, and its assertions of unity, via their connections with apartheid South Africa, and the promotion of the prosperity gospel. A major turning point came with the German-American Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke's Christ for All Nations Pan-African Crusade of 1986. Following the Crusade's spell in Harare, Ralph Mahoney, one of the team's American associates, published a tirade against Zimbabwe in the US magazine, *Digest of World Missionary Alliance Plan*, depicting the crusade as an antidote to communist totalitarianism, while praising South Africa as the continent's 'one prosperous stable democracy':

The site for this FIRE CONFERENCE was a large complex which was constructed from contributions from East European Communist nations ...

I am sure that the communists never dreamed that the 'conference centre' would one day be a meeting place of Africa's largest ever church congress on evangelism on the African Continent ...

The nation became the object of communist interest some fifteen years ago, resulting in a 10 year civil war. The war ended tragically when the leaders of Rhodesia were betrayed by US Government State Department leaders.

Smith was replaced by a communist "president" dictator ...
.... Mercedes Benz were imported for all the 'dignitaries' of the new black government, right down to the level of village mayors.¹⁷

The 1988 editorial of *Zimbabwe News* observed:

They denigrate our leaders, attack our party, and try to subvert the population. They hold large meetings where they distribute subversive

15 Government ministers and state officials did of course meet with AIC prophets and traditional healers, often clandestinely. In their engagement with 'tradition' and pneumatic Christianity the government and individuals were interested in multiple and often contradictory forms of legitimation.

16 *The Herald*, 18 March 1985, taken from Ranger, 13th RZP.

17 R. Mahoney, 'Focus on Africa', *Digest of World Missionary Alliance Plan* (1987).

literature, clothes, food, free of charge. Some of these revivalists work mainly amongst the many refugees and displaced peoples whom they can easily subvert.¹⁸

A longer article in the same edition listed key US right-wing groups: Campus Crusade, Youth with a Mission, Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, World Vision International and Christ for All Nations (CFAN), before detailing Swaggart's promotion of South Africa as a 'godly country' valiantly fighting the Communist anti-Christ.

Mahoney's rant also created problems for home-grown Evangelicals and Pentecostals with deeper roots and African leadership. Southern African Christians, both evangelical and liberal Protestants had long looked to North America for funding and ministerial education. Where the former differed from liberal Protestant denominations was that during the 1960s and 1970s, they also welcomed campaigns led by US preachers such as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts to boost church growth. Since Independence, new evangelical organisations, relatively small in numbers but well-resourced and with strong links to the politics of the American Right, had entered the country. Their arrival coincided with the take-off of African Pentecostalism about which few academic studies then existed. Protestant church leaders associated with the ZCC, and Catholics, threatened by the great appeal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity especially amongst the youth, reached for what scholarship was available, drawing upon Paul Gifford's work, *The Religious Right in Southern Africa* (Gifford 1988).¹⁹ In the process, local Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were found guilty by association.

In early 1988, a collection of Zimbabwean Evangelical and Pentecostal churches sought to calm the waters. *The Zimbabwe News* reported that they had threatened to "close the door" to conservative Western missionaries who offer political propaganda in the guise of Christianity'. Representing the group of twelve denominations which included Baptists, the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Faith Mission, Noah Pashapa criticised *The Digest of World Missionary Alliance Plan* for trying to provoke 'conflict between church and state' while making 'false charges

18 *Zimbabwe News*, September 1988

19 Gifford was then lecturing in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Zimbabwe. He had worked with the All-Africa Council of Churches. ZCC members feared that Pentecostalism 'dazzled' the youth. ZCC, 'The ZCC Annual Report', 1985, p.54.

against the government'. Pashapa expressed his surprise that the magazine had published a piece that appeared more suited to a right-wing tabloid.²⁰ Nevertheless the damage had been done to the nation's largest Pentecostal church, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA) led by Ezekiel Guti. In February 1988, Nathan Shamuyarira, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, banned ZAOGA's rally at the National Sports Stadium, Harare, deporting the guests, black American speakers. Shamuyarira sent Guti the following rebuke:

TRANS-DENOMINATIONAL RALLIES OR ASSEMBLIES

When you hold trans-denominational public gatherings that go beyond usual church services in their scope and organisation, and when they involve preachers from other countries, especially from the United States of America, you should seek the permission of this ministry to do so. There may be international repercussions to such occasions, which go beyond preaching the word of God.²¹

Undaunted by the government banning, ZAOGA's leaders fasted, prayed and then took the Commissioner of Police to court, gaining an order to restrain him from banning the rally. The rally went ahead and Guti wrote to Shamuyarira demanding an apology. In a forceful rebuttal of state power he pointed out that his movement had gained approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs for the rally and complained about the 'confusion and misunderstanding' between that Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that he had been given little warning of the prohibition: 'After advertising through the radio, local paper and TV wasn't it the duty of the minister to let us know in time. If the minister was too busy doesn't he have secretaries or deputies to assist him?' Drawing together the rhetoric of black pride and cultural nationalism he threw them back at the Minister in a stinging rebuke: 'Are whites to be honoured more than blacks. We couldn't understand whether the move to deport blacks was in the interest of our Government ... We pray that God may not put into authority Zimbabweans with Rhodesian minds.'²²

In many respects the spectre of the US Religious Right proved a useful catalyst for the Zimbabwean church. The Mahoney Incident brought

20 *Zimbabwe News*, September 1988, p. 27

21 Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Waterfalls, Harare (ZAW), file, Relations with Government, N. Shamuyarira, Minister of Foreign Affairs to Archbishop E. H. Guti, 15 February 1988.

22 ZAW, file, Relations with Government, Ezekiel Guti to N.M. Shamuyarira, 14 March 1988.

home to the Evangelicals and Pentecostals that they needed a functioning collective body to represent their interests. It also gave liberal Protestants and Catholics a shared external foe to unite against, while making common cause with the government. In November 1985, Murombedzi Kuchera, General Secretary of the ZCC, condemned US evangelical organisations for creating confusion, branding them as ‘reactionary forces hell-bent against our socialist approach to life.’²³

However, ZAOGA’s clash with the state was not simply the product of a misunderstanding regarding black American evangelical speakers. Although the movement’s teachings on self-reliance, indigenous business, and African autonomy would reap a close alliance with the ruling party in the 1990s, it remained under a cloud during the 1980s due to its seeming associations with Ndabiningi Sithole and his ZANU Ndonga party. Sithole had signed the Internal Settlement in March 1978 and served on the Executive Council of the Interim Government alongside Ian Smith and Abel Muzorewa until the Lancaster House Agreement of December 1979. As Archbishop Gutti purged co-founders and rivals, such as Abel Sande and Joseph Choto, the upper echelons of ZAOGA were increasingly dominated by Ndau, an ethnic group which provided much of Sithole’s political base. This impression of close connections was reinforced by the fact that Gutti’s wife, Eunor, was a relation of Sithole.

Unfortunate associations with ZANU-PF’s political rivals were also the cause of the ZCC’s initial clash with the state. This episode has already been examined extensively by Carl Hallencreutz and Munetsi Ruzivo but it is useful to reflect upon how government ministers’ statements about the council reflected both their anxieties and the importance of their developmental agenda (Hallencreutz 1988; Ruzivo 2020). The problem for the ZCC was its close association with Bishop Abel Muzorewa, leader of the United African National Council (UNAC). Muzorewa had served as Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Rhodesia following the Internal Settlement (1979) but won only three of the 80 seats reserved for Africans in the elections of March 1980. Excluded from power, he became deeply critical of the ZANU-PF government and, in turn, the new regime viewed the UNAC as a corrosive force that undermined national unity. In 1983 Muzorewa was arrested and

23 *The Sunday Mail*, 17 November 1985 taken from Ranger 18th RZP. See also critiques made by Khotso Makulu, Co-President of the World Council of Churches, former President of the All-Africa Conference of Churches and Anglican Archbishop of the Province of Central Africa in his foreword to Gifford’s *The Religious Right*, vii-viii; & Beyers Naude, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, *The Sunday Mail*, 4 May 1986 taken from Ranger 22nd RZP.

briefly imprisoned for conspiring against Prime Minister Mugabe on behalf of the South African government. UNAC supporters were attacked during the run-up to the 1985 elections and five activists were murdered.²⁴ In Harare, the number of adherents attending Muzorewa's United Methodist Church (UMC) fell dramatically for fear of being associated with his party.²⁵ It was as a Bishop of the UMC that Muzorewa served as member of the Rhodesia Christian Council, the precursor of the ZCC, influencing it to accept the Internal Settlement rather than take the lead of the liberation movements and reject what amounted to a compromise with the white settler state (Rich Dorman 2016: 29).²⁶ At Independence, Muzorewa continued to be actively involved in the ZCC's executive committee while the General Secretary, C.D. Watyoka, was seen as his staunch ally. Moreover, the ZCC's President, Percy M'Kudu, backed Sithole's ZANU Ndonga. Rather than actively support the new government's project of development the ZCC's leadership appeared uncommitted. In the government's eyes, the ZCC had a far more regressive response to its socialist agenda of development than the more radical WCC with which President Banana retained strong links. The clash with the state came quickly in November 1981 when President Banana publicly accused the ZCC of adopting a 'wait and see' attitude towards the government rather than offering its full support. He concluded his excoriating piece in *The Herald*: 'Zimbabwe could not tolerate any single group which stood in the way of progress. If the Christian Council or any organisation can be used to subvert the Independence of our people which was hard won, then it is a criminal act against the masses.'²⁷ Banana met with the ZCC soon after his accusations against it. The meeting's agenda, dictated by the government, centred on a report by the Minister for Information, Dr Nathan Shamuyarira, which asserted that the General Secretary's political sympathies aggravated church-state relations because Muzorewa 'was working to destabilise Government'. In a subsequent meeting with the ZCC, the Minister for Information, Dr Herbert Ushewokunze, argued that 'an element of State security was at stake' making it plain that disagreement with government policy undermined national security. Ushewokunze gave the Council ten days to 'put its house in order'. Accepting that the government was determined

24 *The Herald*, 27 February 1985 taken from Ranger 12th RZP.

25 *Parade*, January 1986 taken from Ranger 20th RZP.

26 The Zimbabwe Council of Churches was known as the Zimbabwe Christian Council until 1987.

27 *The Herald*, 10 November 1981.

to define the parameters in which the council worked, the ZCC fired its General Secretary, Watyoka, in 'the hope of restoring relations with both the state and the WCC' (Hallencreutz 1988: 274).

According to Hallencreutz, a major outcome of the affair was that the ZCC transformed itself into 'a determined partner with the Government in its development effort' (Hallencreutz 1988: 294). Thus, in March 1983 the ZCC convened a conference at Ranch House College to 'sensitise the churches and church-related organisations to changes that have taken place in independent Zimbabwe and to recognise the need for the churches' commitment to Nation building' and to 'assist the churches and Christian organisations to intensify their participation and involvement in national development and Christian witness.' Henceforth the Council sought to 'co-ordinate, enable, and facilitate the development processes of the churches as a catalyst' proposing a long agenda for action from health, education and agriculture to women's rights and youth leadership.²⁸ A meeting in June 1983 formulated a 'Five Year Development Plan Towards a New Society and a Joyful Witness' which set out to conscientise church leaders so that they may in turn conscientise their members in development.²⁹ The ZCC had long engaged in relief work, charitable endeavour and development. Its agency, Christian Care, had played a vital role amongst displaced communities during the liberation war. And despite Banana's accusations, it had devoted considerable resources to reconstruction after Independence. But what was novel about ZCC's partnership with the regime was that it adopted the discourse and practice of secular development. Thus, the ZCC Annual Report for 1985 advised that: 'all projects must: foster self-reliance; be geared towards conscientisation; assist grass-root [sic] communities.'³⁰ While the minutes of a 1987 ZCC Roundtable reported that General Secretary Kuchera had instructed colleagues that the language of documents needed to shift from 'self-sufficiency' to 'self-reliance'.³¹ This new conformity with the government's programmes was manifest in the ZCC's project on the interaction of Christianity with African Traditional Religion (ATR) and culture in Independent Zimbabwe. Led by Ambrose Moyo, lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, the project resulted in an

28 ZCC. 'The Role of the Church in Development'. Report on the Conference Held at Ranch House College, 21-23 March 1983.

29 ZCC, 'Recommendations Arising from the Churches and Christian Organisations Conference', Bible House, 13-17 June 1983.

30 ZCC, 19th Annual Report, 4 July 1985 p.23

31 ZCC, Minutes and Reports of the Zimbabwe Christian Council Roundtable, 29-30 September 1987, p.5.

ahistorical, non-sociological unitary model of ATR to match a unitary one-party state, contrary to the historical reality of an African religion that was 'plural, multi-layered and often in opposition to political authority'.³²

None of this is to suggest that the ZCC was not genuine in its commitment to development. In 1985, the Council's President, J.C. Shiri, spoke movingly about its desire to reach those in most need: 'We have not yet penetrated to the marrow and reach where it itches most. That is the continuously suffering masses of Zimbabwe who go unnoticed day in, day out. The church must be true to its *diakonia* and be in solidarity with the poor'. Such aspirations were embodied in the work of the Urban and Rural Missions Department, chaired by Sebastian Bakare, whose own research foresaw the intense struggles over land that were to escalate in the 1990s and 2000s.³³

Shifting church-state relations and the beginnings of evangelical action

On the whole church councils and denominations gravitated towards collaboration with the political leadership and government in a shared desire to end the injustices of colonialism and racism. However, the churches' relations with the new ZANU-PF government were much determined by their wartime record, and it was inevitable that the new state would have a different order of preference regarding who it worked with. The big loser was the Anglican Church, which declined in influence relative to the Catholics, who to some extent became the *de facto* establishment church. The need to assert loyalty, attract development income, and speak with one voice also prompted Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches towards greater organisation at the end of our period.

While it is clear from the extensive scholarship on the church and the war that rural Anglican communities found common cause with the liberation armies, the urban-based Anglican hierarchy took a different line (Ranger 1982). Many of its leaders, deeply immersed in white society, proved hostile to the nationalist movement. Paul Burrough, Bishop of Mashonaland, was renowned for his letters to *The Times* of London, regarding the dangers of atheistic communism. Fr Arthur Lewis was so committed to the continuation of white minority rule that he became a

32 ZCC, 'Nineteenth Annual Report, 4 July 1985, pp.34-35. For a critique of the project see Ranger, 1987: 145-46.

33 ZCC, J.C. Shiri, Address, pp.1-5 & Urban and Rural Missions Reports 1984-85, pp.33-35, Nineteenth Annual Report, 4 July 1985.

Rhodesian Front Senator. John Da Costa, Dean of Salisbury Cathedral, preached neutrality but threw himself behind the Muzorewa Regime (Lapsley 1986; Cauter 1983). Janet Hatendi, wife of the incoming Bishop of Harare, Peter Hatendi, observed that Bishop Burroughs's 'Farewell' was attended by no government representatives nor heads of other churches, save a representative from the Orthodox Church.³⁴ A briefing document on Zimbabwe written for the Archbishop of Canterbury reported that: 'the Anglican Church's image still suffers from recent political history. It is associated with the UK, and with the UK's refusal to bring the UDI rebellion to a quick end. It also suffers from the overt support given to [Ian] Smith by white Anglicans, including to some extent Bishop Paul Burroughs. This image still weighs in government circles, such that Bishop Hatendi says he is 'tolerated' by government and relations are 'cool'. ... [It is] also thought that the Anglican church is not committed to development.'³⁵

Rural and township Anglicanism amongst black Zimbabweans seemed to be in good shape, animated by a committed core of believers who had taken on greater responsibility for leadership in the absence of their priest during the war, but there was much work to do to restore relations with the state.³⁶ Under Hatendi's leadership, the church pursued several strategies. First it sought to Africanise by adapting the cult of Bernard Mzeki, the Mozambican catechist who helped establish Anglican Christianity in Manicaland and was martyred in 1896. Seizing the opportunity provided by ninetieth anniversary of his death, the church encouraged the devotions of thousands of Christians, mainly women clad in the Anglican Church's colours, who converged on the Mzeki's shrine, near Marondera. One hundred priests served the long queues taking communion. In an explicit attempt to de-emphasize old imperial links with Lambeth Palace in London, the festivities provided an opportunity to assert different transnational connections across southern and central Africa. The event was attended by the guild of Bernard Mzeki in South Africa and sixteen pilgrims from Mozambique headed by the Bishop of Lebombo, the Right Revd Denis Sengulane. The Festival Eucharist

34 Lambeth Palace Archives (LPA), London, File MU-005-02-21CA Mashonaland General, 1980-8 Report from Mrs J. Hatendi, wife of Bishop of Mashonaland, 28 June 1981.

35 LPA, RUNCIE - ACV 1989 - 6 'The Church of the Province of Central Africa, 31 May -16 June 1989, Briefing Notes'.

36 LPA, File MU-005-02-21CA Mashonaland General, 1980-88, Bishop Paul Burroughs, 'Christmas letter' 26 November 1979.

was presided over by the Right Revd Khotso Makhulu of Botswana, Archbishop of Central Africa.³⁷

Hatendi himself appeared unfazed by the state's promotion of socialism, announcing in a public lecture that he was encouraged 'to note that the Zimbabwean type of Marxism has a place for God.'³⁸ Nevertheless, in its attempts to Africanise its clergy the Anglican hierarchy became unstuck when it sought to replace popular white clergy. Its decision to retire Father Keble Prosser, renowned Headmaster of St Augustine's Penhalonga, led to demonstrations by parents and demands for the removal of the Anglican Bishop of Manicaland, Elijah Masuko, who was subsequently given one week to leave the Province by its Governor, Edgar Tekere. When Khotso Makhulu, Archbishop of Central Africa defended his Bishop, his actions were branded as an unwanted foreign intrusion.³⁹ A similar train of events transpired at St Michael's Anglican Church, Mbare, where worshippers demonstrated against the dismissal of their priest, Fr Michael Lapsley. Lapsley had proved very popular with the Mbare community. However, he had unnerved the hierarchy by his membership of the African National Congress, and for appearing in a magazine photograph, raising his fist. He refused to be transferred to a new seminary in Mount Pleasant.⁴⁰ His excoriating critique of the Anglican Church leadership during the struggle for Independence, *Neutrality or Co-option* (1986) had been vigorously endorsed by President Banana, who wrote the foreword. Beside the support of the Provincial Governor, Prosser also had the ear of a powerful group of St Augustine's alumni, including Gordon Chavanduka and Aeneas Chigwedere. These local power struggles demonstrated that party loyalty and wartime record trumped all other considerations, and that in such contexts, Pan-African solidarities could be quickly recast as external interference in Zimbabwean sovereignty.

On the evening of the 17 April 1980, when the Catholic Archbishop, Patrick Chakaipa, blessed the new Zimbabwean flag to mark independence, a new era of church-state relations was inaugurated. For the previous ninety years of colonial rule the Anglican Church had officiated at state ceremonies. During the liberation war the work of the Commission

37 *The Herald*, 19 May 1986, *The Sunday Mail* 29 June taken from Ranger 23rd and 24th RZP.

38 ZCC, P. Hatendi, 'In search of Human Freedom and Social Justice', University of Zimbabwe, Opening Day, 24 March 1985.

39 *The Herald*, 16 March 1985; *Argus*, (Cape, South Africa), 26 March 1985 taken from Ranger 13th RZP.

40 *The Herald*, 21 and 22 July 1986, taken from Ranger, 24th RZP.

for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the pastoral statements issued by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) had done much to delegitimize the Rhodesian state's claims to 'Christian Civilisation' and build support for the liberation movements. Catholic mission stations and the School of Social Work, Siliviera House, had worked closely, ZANU-PF and ZANLA cadres during the war. Thus, the Catholic Church entered independence with greater moral authority than the Protestant denominations and was better placed to respond to the state's agenda. It had already considered its relation to the ruling party and its role in Zimbabwean society. To coincide with the blessing of the flag, the ZCBC issued a pastoral statement pledging its 'whole hearted co-operation and support in the difficult but rewarding task of nation building'.⁴¹ The same statement underlined the need for the government to safeguard the norms and values that were enshrined in the new constitution and called upon the new regime to exercise political authority 'within the moral order and according to God's laws and just laws of the state'.⁴²

The Bishops were careful to define their partnership with the state in terms of two institutions that were independent and autonomous yet both constituted to serve humanity: 'Their duty is to help man fulfil his personal vocation. The more they co-operate, the more effectively they will serve the good of all citizens ... The church is not identified with any political community, nor is she bound to any political system.'⁴³ As Paul Gundani, argues, the pastoral put on the agenda the issues that would be central to public debate for decades to come (Gundani 2008: 216-18). The Bishops also advanced a mature response to those in the government who advocated liberation via an atheistic scientific socialism stressing the importance of God-centred inner transformation alongside structural change: 'The State can provide external changes, in the structure of society. But these will not bring about the radical transformation we hope for unless they are accompanied by internal change, the conversion of hearts, your hearts! Here lies the greatest challenge for us as Christians'.⁴⁴ This maturity was also evident in its discussion of the idea of a one-party state. A CCJP newsletter of 1985 questioned whether a one-party state would help resolve the country's current problems and advised people

41 Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), 'A Statement from the Roman Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe', 17 April 1980, Harare, ZCBC, p.173.

42 ZCBC, 'Statement', p.174

43 ZCBC, 'Statement', p.173.

44 ZCBC, 'Socialism and the Gospel of Christ', Harare, ZCBC, 1984, p. 211.

to take seriously the 'experiences of other African countries.' A fruitful debate would 'strive to point out the weaknesses of the one-party state and suggest possible safeguards in the hope that those responsible for drafting the constitution would ensure as much freedom and democracy within that one party system.'⁴⁵

Regarding the state's priorities for development, the Catholic Church once again asserted more autonomy than the ZCC. Its Development Agency 'noted' government priorities but reserved the right to attend to Catholic needs (Hallencrutz 1988: 302). Nevertheless, it was clear that there was much sympathy for the state policies. Jesuit and journalist, Oscar Wermter, relished the opportunity of an article in the *Zimbabwe News* to mark Pope John Paul II's visit to Zimbabwe in September 1988. He used it to expound Catholic Social teaching on the human causes of inequality, the state's duty to eradicate it, and the need for ecological management. He denounced the global arms race, advocated common ownership of property, and promoted co-operatives and social services. Citing the encyclical letter, ("*Laborem excerns*" - "Work and Man", (1981) he observed that Pope John Paul had taught that 'capital should be at the service of labour and not labour at the service of capital'.⁴⁶ It is striking how critiques of Zimbabwe's Structural Adjustment Programme, published by Silveira House in the 1990s called the government to return to the golden age of programmes such as *Growth with Equity* (1981) and *Zimbabwe Health for All Action Plan* (1986). In the 1980s health and development had been human centred, representing the Catholic social teaching of 'option for the poor' (Renfrew 1982; Balleis 1992).

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church was more restrained when it came to the political violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands, known as Gukurahundi. When in January 1983, the 5th Brigade was deployed to the west of Zimbabwe, reports of disappearances, rape, torture and detention without trial poured into the CCJP's office in Harare from their diocesan committees as the programme of state-sponsored ethnic violence commenced. After the failure of low-key delegations to the government, the Catholic Bishops Conference went public, issuing a pastoral at Easter entitled *Reconciliation is Still Possible*: 'Violent reaction against dissident activity has, to our certain knowledge, brought about the maiming and death of hundreds and hundreds of innocent people who are neither

45 CCJP Newsletter, November 1985.

46 Oscar Wermter, 'Pope John Paul's Teaching on Development', *Zimbabwe News*, September 1988, pp.12-15.

dissidents nor collaborators.⁴⁷

Clearly angered by the Bishops' public reprimand, Prime Minister Mugabe dubbed them 'sanctimonious prelates', accusing them of sheer one-sidedness in their account of the 'dissident' issue.⁴⁸ Winded by the force of the state rebuttal, the CCJP's subsequent spate of press statements were both more detailed and defensive, asserting its credentials as a human rights watchdog.⁴⁹ Likewise the Bishops, particularly Archbishop Chakaipa who was close to Mugabe, pressed for more diplomacy rather than publications and reports.⁵⁰ A clear indication of the nature of Catholic-State relations came in May and June 1986. Believing that the CCJP's Acting Director, Nick Ndebele, and Chairman, Mike Auret, had supplied information to enemy countries, the Minister of Home Affairs, Enos Nkala, had had them arrested, threatening 'to hammer them [the churches]' (D. Auret 1992: 215). When Auret's wife, Diana, approached Robert Mugabe directly, the two men were immediately released. A subsequent report in *The Sunday Mail* clarified Mike Auret's view of the affair and the CCJP's approach to relations with the government. The Commission's Chairman was at pains to stress that arrests did not represent a conflict with the state but rather a difficulty with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since 1980 the CCJP had submitted five major confidential reports to the government via the ZCBC and in each case corrective action had been taken. Auret declared: 'The human rights situation in the country is much better than it has been for a very long time.'⁵¹ In longer article in *The Tablet* of 21 June, Auret reportedly told a crowded press conference that Robert Mugabe 'is a good man who overturns injustices'. He explained that despite angry confrontations, the lines of communication between the regime and its internal critics had remained extraordinarily open. Of Prime Minister Mugabe, Auret reported: 'After we shout at each other, he always says: "I need you, keep bringing me information."⁵² A few weeks before his arrest Auret had eulogised the Zimbabwean government to an American audience telling them that Zimbabwe was the greatest hope for stability in

47 ZCBC, 'Reconciliation is Still Possible', Easter, 1983, Harare, ZCBC, p.193.

48 *The Herald*, 6 April 1984. J. McLaughlin (2021: 183-86) notes Robert Mugabe's anger at the Bishops' pastoral and her own growing disillusionment with the Prime Minister, pp.183-86.

49 CCJP Press Statements, 13 January 1984 and 27 March 1984.

50 Catholic Institute for International Relations, (CIIR), CCJP Minutes of A.G.M., March 1984, file, Zimbabwe General.

51 *The Sunday Mail*, 8 June 1986 taken from Ranger 23rd RZP.

52 Steve Askin, *The Tablet*, 21 June 1986 taken from Ranger 23rd RZP.

Africa: 'the new black leadership is carefully building a vibrant society and economy and a reconciliation process with whites. Zimbabwe is a positive example of what can happen in South Africa.'⁵³

In complete contrast to the ZCC and the ZCBC there is very little to report about the activities of the EFZ during the first decade of independence. Goodwill Shana's 2007 paper, 'The Role of the Church in consensus building and Reconciliation' was more accurately a description of Evangelical responses. After an early period of 'self-exclusion' or 'monasticism', it had only since around 2000 woken up to its 'role in the social, political and economic affairs of Zimbabwe in a more comprehensive way'.⁵⁴

Stanley Bhebhe's appraisal of evangelical church-state relations in Hallencreutz and Moyo's *Church and State in Zimbabwe* (1988) documents the EFZ's slow movement into the public sphere. Only in 1986 did its prospectus commit to a) the promotion of development and relief assistance in needy areas; and to b) providing member bodies with a representative voice in matters of church and national needs. And, when in the same year, the need to address socio-political issues was discussed, it was couched in terms of bringing righteousness to the nation via evangelism rather than through the direct involvement of ministries or departments within the EFZ. Indeed, by 1987 the Fellowship still had no fulltime executive secretary or permanent office. Its priorities were made clear when the first meeting of its Ethics, Society and Development Committee, scheduled for May 1987, was postponed indefinitely in favour of *A Discipling Zimbabwe Conference*. Both a deep-seated conservatism and suspicion of ecumenism was built into the Fellowship's DNA. When established in 1962, one of its founding tenets was: 'To take common action with a view to awakening Christian people to the danger of modernism, false cults, and from ecumenicity that is achieved at the expense of vital Christian faith' (Bhebhe 1988: 321). Thus, it was deeply suspicious of the ZCC, and even more so, the WCC. Evangelicals had viewed the Liberation War not as a struggle against colonialism but as the advance of Communism and Soviet influence. The murder of missionaries was viewed as persecution and guerrillas were terrorists. The government's commitment to socialism was understood as anti-Christian. Most evangelicals appeared unaware of

53 *The Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1986 taken from Ranger 23rd RZP. Mike Auret subsequently regretted his optimistic judgement of Robert Mugabe (Auret 2009).

54 EFZ, file, Peace and Justice, Goodwill Shana, 'The Role of the Church in Consensus Building and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe', Pretoria, South Africa, May 2007.

the state's official policy of religion which guaranteed religious freedom. Save for the activity of Bishop Jonathan Dube, head of the United Baptist Church, Governor of Manicaland and member of ZANU-PF Central Committee, Bhebhe could point to no other political activity by Evangelicals (Bhebhe 1988: 328). It would take the travails of Economic Structural Adjustment, and the onset of the Crisis in the 2000s to spur Evangelicals into concerted action.

Conclusion

The state's insistence that the churches adhere to its exclusive definition of unity and comply with its programme for development, restricted Christian leaders' prophetic calling to respond to crisis of Gukurahundi and to early signs of electoral violence. 'During this very intensive period from December 1982 to October 1983 and immediately after,' writes Carl Hallencreutz, the 'ZCC was not able to give equal attention to more acute crisis situations in Zimbabwe' (1988: 290). While the Catholics provided more effective opposition to the government they were still constrained in their criticisms. Indeed, in their study of contemporary clerical attitudes to the state-sanctioned genocide in the 1980s, Chitando and Taringa observed a general approach of 'forgiveness, healing and reconciliation', and a sense of unease when discussing the violence. They argue that this stance reflected the internalisation of ZANU-PF directives that the church should perceive its 'core business' as 'wholly spiritual' (Chitando and Taringa 2021: 191). Their assertions are well founded. In his 1982 speech to church leaders, cited at the beginning of this piece, Mugabe observed: 'a ZANU Government will respect and promote the role of the Church and avoid completely interfering with the spiritual work of the Church. The Church and State must thus feature as partners in the promotion of the welfare of human beings'.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the strictures placed upon churches and church councils by the government, had unintended consequences. Expanding their bureaucracies with ministries, departments, programmes to deliver aid, they formed new international connections with donors and global ecumenical bodies, leaving them in a stronger position to confront the state in the decades to come. Moreover, their clout as a major element in civil society was further enhanced by numerical growth. All the churches had valued the order that accompanied independence because it allowed

55 ZCC, Robert Mugabe, 'Church Co-operation', speech delivered at the Catholic Centre in Harare, 30 April 1982.

them to pursue what they considered to be their real 'core business', namely evangelism. In synchrony with churches across the global South, Zimbabwean Christianity expanded on an enormous scale, giving its leaders greater moral authority in matters of justice and peace.

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The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe and Political Transitions during the First Republic (1980-2017)

PAUL H. GUNDANI

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe (CCZ) is a member of the worldwide Catholic Communion; it has about 1.3 million members, more than a tenth of Zimbabweans (as of 2023 estimates of fourteen million people). Demographically, the CCZ is one of the largest Christian denominations in the country, arranged according to dioceses, and operating schools, colleges (and universities) and hospitals. This has allowed the CCZ to influence the cultures of certain ethnic groups on social justice in advocacy for human rights, peace and development. It has actively kept ecumenical dialogues with Protestant churches to promote interfaith unity and peace. It has also maintained a strong focus on youth engagement and catechesis to encourage youths to participate in the Catholic faith and its church activities. This justifies its significant role on political transitions, especially on reconciliation since 1980 when Zimbabwe achieved its independence, a role which it needs to play better regarding accountability.

This chapter examines the nuances of political transitions from independence in 1980 to 2017, when the ‘First Republic’ ended abruptly and rather tragically, which is the case in point. These nuances can be presented in six sub-periods as follows: (i) the season of euphoria (1980-

83), (ii) misalignment of CCZ and Mugabe's pragmatic motivations on national reconciliation (iii) state-sanctioned violence in Zimbabwe (1982-7), (iv) The Unity Accord in Zimbabwe and the role of the Roman Catholic Church (1988-99), and (v) democratic contestation in Zimbabwe (1999-2008), (vi) Catholicism, Christian unity, and joint efforts during the coalition government in Zimbabwe (2009-13), and (vii) The Roman Catholic Church and Citizen Participation in post-constitutional era (2013-7). The CCZ's role in, and impact on, the Zimbabwean society cannot be understood in isolation from the ecumenical formations created by the churches during the colonial era. This includes the CCZ's observer status in the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), formerly the Rhodesia Christian Council (RCC) (Maritz 1988). This has helped the CCZ in influencing the ZCC and other ecumenical councils to revive the Heads of Christian Denominations (HOCD) in confronting the state. The HOCD, now the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) helped in drafting and publishing *Kairos Zimbabwe (2006)*, published with the title: *The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Towards A National Vision For Zimbabwe': A Discussion Document*, herein shortened, the Zimbabwe we want (ZWW). The CCZ, which is a full member of the ZHOCD through the ZCBC, is a relevant player on politics in Zimbabwe. The CCZ is also involved in the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) and the Symposium of Ecumenical Churches in Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), among others. This background makes the CCZ a relevant player to influence political transitions in post-independent Zimbabwe.

To adequately deal with the complexity mentioned, a post-colonial theory will be utilised as an analytical framework. Post-colonialism deals with the changes that occur after colonised countries get freedom from their colonisers (Rana 2021). Post-colonialism critiques and resists any kind of colonising practices and opposes systems of domination by any power. It invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation, and democracy to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation (Rana 2021). For Zimbabwe, the CCZ has advocated for social justice, resisted oppressive legacies, and fostered democratic transitions amidst enduring post-colonial identities, structural inequalities and political dynamics.¹

1 During colonialism, the CCZ actively identified itself with the marginalised, a stance it maintained after independence with its support for land reform, human rights, and social welfare. It integrated local cultural practices into its religious framework

Secondly, to fully comprehend the role and contribution of the CCZ to the political transitions in Zimbabwe, it is imperative to contextualise this within local ecumenical developments. Since the convocation of Vatican II (1962-65), the Roman Catholic Church, herein the CCZ, has opened up itself for dialogue and collaboration with diverse Christian denominations and other religious traditions. This ecumenical focus has facilitated formation of Christian Councils such as the ZCC, and the ZHOCD, encompassing a multiplicity of groups, including Catholics, Protestants, (i.e. the historic mission churches such as Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Restorationists, Reformed Churches, and Lutherans, Evangelicals/ Pentecostals), and Apostolic churches. Despite inherent doctrinal divergencies, these bodies are united by shared Christian social teachings and a commitment to addressing socio-political issues. Consequently, an ecumenical approach (Kalu 1996; Verstraelen 2002) will underpin this study, elucidating how collaborative efforts among Christian factions contribute to the larger discourse on social justice, human rights advocacy, and democratic practices in a post-colonial context. Ecumenism becomes 'a highly prized treasure in public-prophetic theology due to its relevance in difficult political dispensations. It is in understanding internal (to foster unity and reconciliation among CCZ's diverse groups within the church itself) and external [CCZ's outreach to other Christian denominations and religions] ecumenisms in the context of the Catholic Church that a secular state becomes a viable option in building a democracy' (Chimhanda 2011a, b:42)² Ecumenism emerges as a pivotal construct within the context of the CCZ's role on

to respond to the spiritual needs of its congregants while rooted in colonial religious identities. It thus managed to mobilise communities to resist sociopolitical and economic exploitation in the midst of the moral dilemmas regarding governance, corruption and inequality. Its critique of governmental policies and practices in reflection to its alignment or resistance to oppressive structures has been seen in condemnation of global interactions of international organisations (or non-state NGOs) and foreign powers to influence post-colonial states. The study's use of post-colonial theory to analyse the CCZ's role in shaping, reflecting and resisting postcolonial identities reveals complexities and contradictions in both spiritual and temporal spheres.

- 2 Internal and external ecumenisms within the Catholic Church represent distinct yet interrelated modalities of engagement. Internal ecumenism prioritises intra-church unity and reconciliation amongst CCZ's diverse rites and movements, while external ecumenism encompasses interdenominational dialogue and collaboration to champion shared ethical imperatives, ultimately facilitating the advance of democratic principles within pluralistic societies, or unified action and a framework for a collective moral ethos vital for democratic consolidation in Zimbabwe's evolving landscape.

transitional dynamics in Zimbabwe. It facilitates a comprehensive analysis of communal identity amidst socio-political upheavals. The CCZ employs ecumenical principles to foster collaborative initiatives that transcend doctrinal divides to enhance civic engagement and promote social justice. With orthodoxy and orthopraxis, ecumenism serves as both a catalyst

The season of euphoria (1980-1983)

The CCZ is one of the churches that made a lasting contribution to the transition from settler colonialism to independence in 1980. Its advocacy and witness for justice became louder after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). It is no wonder that some of the church's primary advocates for justice were targeted by the Smith regime. Some were arrested and detained, while others were declared 'Prohibited Immigrants' and deported out of Rhodesia (Linden 1980). Tragically, a few priests, nuns and lay people paid the ultimate sacrifice for their unequivocal Christian witness (Linden 1980; Frederikse 1984).

The attainment of independence in 1980 brought about a wave of hope across Zimbabwe and in the CCZ. Some former victims of the Smith regime, such as Sr Janice McLaughlin, Bishop Donal Raymond Lamont, Fr Paschal Slaven, Michael and Diana Auret, Fr Dieter Scholz, among others, returned to Zimbabwe to contribute to the new nation. While Sr Janice McLaughlin shaped the political transitions throughout the entire First Republic, it was not so for Bishop Lamont who decided to take early retirement after a short, quiet stint under Mugabe's rule. Bishop Lamont can be regarded as a moderate ecclesial authority who deliberately disengaged from complicity in a repressive governance framework by transferring ecclesiastical authority over the diocese of Mutare to a proponent of indigenous leadership, to the Right Revd, Bishop Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa. Lamont's actions resonated with the burgeoning exigency for authentic black Zimbabwean political and religious representation (see Dorman 2002: 85). This transition not only epitomised the Church's alignment with progressive socio-political aspirations but also reinforced the imperative for a transition toward inclusive governance, reflecting an emergent zeitgeist demanding empowerment and self-determination within both civic and ecclesiastical domains in Zimbabwe.

Historically, the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement in December 1979 was followed by a ceasefire and an election in February 1980. The Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) emerged the winner and former President Robert Mugabe, became its

first post-independence Prime Minister on 18 April 1980. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) issued its first post-independence pastoral letter on 17 April 1980 congratulating all Zimbabweans for democratically electing a new government. The CCZ pledged to cooperate in nation building (ZCBC 1980: 1). At midnight of the same day, Prince Charles lowered the Union Jack and hoisted the new Zimbabwe flag which Archbishop Patrick Fani Chakaipa blessed at Rufaro stadium (Weller and Linden 1984: 216 quoted in Gundani 2008: 5). This marked a departure from colonial practice where an Anglican religious leader presided over state ceremonies. On Independence Day, 18 April 1980, Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa proudly celebrated a thanksgiving mass in honour of the birth of a new nation at the Cathedral in Harare with the new Prime Minister, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, in attendance.

Mugabe's star seemed to shine brighter because of the way he managed the transition from a war-torn, to a peaceful country, through his policy of reconciliation. Naturally, there was euphoria among Catholics because this policy resonated well with the message of reconciliation that the bishops had emphasised during the war (c.f. ZCBC 1984). The CCZ urged the nascent government to wield its political authority with impartiality. It emphasised the imperative of safeguarding human rights and freedoms, including liberty, fraternity, and equality, in alignment with national laws and divine moral principles. This approach aimed to facilitate active citizen engagement in nation-building endeavours, thereby promoting the collective welfare of all demographic constituencies. The Lancaster House Constitution recognised the fundamentality of individual religious liberty, among many civil liberties (Section 19). In their pastoral letter, Catholic bishops called on the new government to work 'within the moral order and according to God's law and the just laws of the state' (ZCBC 1980: 2; Gundani 2008). Similarly, citizens were urged to engage in responsible, diligent participation, rather than instigating political leaders to seek excessive power in response to the inflated demands being advanced by complacent citizens seeking unearned benefits. In the pastoral letter, the bishops outlined the need for a clear view of the relationship between the state and the church, which are two 'independent and autonomous' institutions meant to serve humanity. 'Their duty is to help man [sic] fulfill his [sic] personal vocation. The more they co-operate, the more effectively they will serve the good of all citizens' (ZCBC 1980: 2 quoted in Gundani 2008: 6).

In the same pastoral letter, Catholic bishops in Zimbabwe warned the government against expecting the church to be bound to any political party or partisan ideologies. Instead, they argued that the Church would act as ‘the moral conscience of the nation, the sign and safeguard of the supreme value of the human person’ (Gundani 2008: 6). On behalf of the CCZ, the bishops were committed to being the salt of the earth and the light to the world in their alignment with the message of reconciliation. Bishops looked forward to an environment where the church would focus on teaching the gospel without state interference. According to the bishops, separation of church and state was the sure way of ensuring peace and reconciliation in the new nation. During this period, the CCZ successfully rehabilitated its mission work alongside government efforts. Schools, hospitals, and social services were restored in an environment characterised by peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, the CCZ availed its mission schools and pastoral centres to accommodate former refugees who had been forced by the war to seek refuge and protection in neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia. In the educational field, the CCZ was one of the churches that embarked on massive infrastructural expansion to implement the government’s ‘First Manpower Development Plan (1982)’ through enrolment expansion in schools. Co-operation between the CCZ and government also manifested in the health sector where the former upgraded some of its hospitals into District Hospitals.

Misalignment of CCZ and Mugabe’s pragmatic motivations on national reconciliation

President Mugabe, a devout Catholic, in ‘a masterly display of statesmanship’ (Martin and Johnson 1981: 330) and Catholic erudition, extended a hand of reconciliation and not recrimination at his swearing in ceremony. He ‘drew a line through the past’ warring factions (Eppel 2004: 44) to articulate the policy of reconciliation that was going to guide the new nation. He stated: ‘Our new mind must have a new vision, and our new heart must have a new love that spurns hate, and a new spirit that must unite and not divide. This is the human essence that must form the core of our political change and national independence’ (Auret 1992: 140). Further, he stated:

We are called to be constructive, progressive, and forever forward-looking, or we cannot afford to be men of yesterday, backward looking,

retrogressive and destructive.... If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you... The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten... (De Waal 1990: 48-49).

While it is feasible that the policy was informed by his Catholic faith and the lobbying by the Catholic team at the Lancaster House conference, a more compelling explanation is simply that it was a pragmatic and magnanimous response to the dictates of the situation on the ground as witnessed by the 1983 Gukurahundi war. Commentators abound on what exactly motivated Mugabe's speech. Gregory (1981: 31) and Weller and Linden (1984: 215) concur that the speech was influenced by the interests of neighbouring countries like Mozambique. Hence it could be interpreted as just a political compromise rather than a speech of moral conviction – especially in the light of what followed. Reconciliation would allow whites to work with blacks in a new government (Alexander 2006: 106) to sustain the 'existing production structures with policies to improve the conditions of the majority of the population neglected during the colonial years' (Raftopoulos 2004: 2). This, however, was a tactic designed to ensure safety and stability for the new government. Without this strategy, the efforts to establish a functional and effective government in the newly formed black state would be ineffective and ultimately unsuccessful. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2004: 21). In other words, sustaining economic productivity was essential for the government's survival and ability to govern effectively. A racial reconciliation policy was honoured by the appointment of former white Rhodesians in the new government to run industry and commerce (David Smith, former finance minister), agriculture (Dennis Norman, President of the Commercial Farmers' Union), and state security (General Peter Walls, former Rhodesia Security Services commander) (Gregory 1981: 30; Martin and Johnson 1981:3).

The CCZ found Mugabe's reconciliation speech and subsequent policy in sympathy with its theological understanding of reconciliation. In the Catholic bishops' view (ZCBC 1980: 2) reconciliation was an outward expression of 'change through love, justice and mercy' (Verstraelen-Gulhuis 1992: 28). It became the basis upon which mutual trust could be built for the future of Zimbabwe. The CCZ thus argued that: 'these thoroughly Christian virtues [like reconciliation] are the only way to heal the wounds of the past hatreds and rivalries, and to foster a spirit of peace, love and brotherhood in Zimbabwe' (ZCBC 1982:1).

State-sanctioned violence in Zimbabwe (1982-87)

There was a veneer of peace and security in Zimbabwe during the initial three years of post-independence, although palpable indications of insecurity and instability began to manifest as early as 1981. The complex re-integration process of erstwhile military factions, namely the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the Zimbabwe Peoples 'Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the Rhodesian National Army (RNA), and the Rhodesia African Rifles (RAR), into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) under the British Military and Advisory Team (BMATT) turned into a nightmare. (Young and Brown 1995). The Nkulumane I and II, as well as the Zengeza IV clashes between the ZIPRA and ZANLA forces pointed to 'unfinished business' between political figures, Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, along with their respective military contingents. These internecine conflicts were exacerbated by incendiary rhetoric, notably highlighted by Enos Nkala's disparaging remarks targeting the Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU), which incited fierce confrontations between ZIPRA and ZANLA forces. He stated:

We want to wipe out the [PF-]ZAPU leadership. You've only seen the warning lights. We haven't yet reached full blast...the murderous organisation and its murderous leadership must be hit so hard that it doesn't feel obliged to do the things it has been doing (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1986: 52).

A form of hegemonic control that had been emerging from 1963 at the birth of the breakaway ZANU-PF from PF-ZAPU would soon find consummation in the form of Gukurahundi. In this turbulent context, the CCZ, particularly the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP), emerged as a crucial intellectual and moral actor, championing unity and reconciliation amidst escalating divisive sentiments. Key ecclesiastical figures, such as Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa, were vocal in addressing the growing tensions, emphasising that Zimbabwe was strong when united, hence need for its leaders to seek unity rather than discord (ZCBC 1982), thus alluding to the necessity of overcoming sectarian divisions. The CCJP denounced violence and compelled both the government and opposition groups to engage in dialogue. In a 1982 statement, the CCJP is quoted to have re-asserted Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement: 'Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars' (King, 2010: 181), as

it argued against use of violence instead of dialogue to prevent Zimbabwe from entering a cycle of perpetual conflict. The nobility of the foundational principles of the CCZ and the CCJP on peace and unity were contrasted by the genetic predisposition of power struggles between the political leaders. Desire for power rendered calls for reconciliation increasingly difficult to actualise, illuminating the harrowing consequences of political fracturing that would culminate in the Gukurahundi atrocities. The CCZ's advocacy remained critical, representing a moral counter narrative to the emerging dynamics of state-sponsored violence and repression.

The Gukurahundi war in Zimbabwe and the CCZ response

\The two parties, especially their former armies, did not trust each other, even when integration was taking place (Eppel 2004: 44). ZANU-PF was largely in power, and hence it was its story that carried the day as it hyped an impending intrusion by western powers to justify its actions (Chan 2003: 23). The reported discovery of a significant cache of weapons on properties owned by PF-ZAPU, such as Nitram, as well as in the vicinity of ZIPRA Assembly Points, was interpreted as evidence that these weapons were stock-piled to support ZIPRA forces in a potential final conflict aimed at overthrowing a ZANU-PF government if it were to take power (Alexander, et al. 2000: 181). The military caches were found on both sides and so were defections and infiltrations. ZIPRA and ZANLA forces were fighting in assembly points at Connemara (Midlands), Entumbane, Ntabazintuna and Glenville (Bulawayo) resulting in deaths, arrests, and curfews (Eppel 2004: 44) as also found in the Dumbutshena Commission.

The government reported thousands as deserting the ZNA due to deteriorating relations within the army, targeting former ZIPRA cadres, especially with the deployment of the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland (Alexander, et al. 2000: 181). Of the 20,000 reported deaths in Matabeleland, dissidents are estimated to have murdered between 150 and 400 people (CCJP and LRF 1997: 167). In this way, 'violence largely shaped the spread and character of dissidence' (Alexander et al., 2000). The fall-out between the two liberation parties led ZANU-PF to deploy a ruthless Fifth Brigade army in Matabeleland North in January 1983. The army passed out, and were handed a 'brigade flag, emblazoned with "Gukurahundi"' with the instruction 'plough and reconstruct' (CCJP 1997: 47). 'Gukurahundi' refers to the first rain of summer that washes away the chaff left from the previous season; meaning Matabeleland civilians were seen as the chaff that had to be washed away. The formation of the North

Korean trained Fifth Brigade was a clear sign that Mugabe was committed to destroying the PF-ZAPU and ZIPRA and render any opposition from their base moribund.

However, greater burden of error fell on the lap of the government for failing to pacify rather than inflame the conflict, for increasing state brutality and atrocity, for engaging in wanton killings; for premeditated indemnity for errant soldiers, for starving innocent people, for the impunity of national leaders, and for deliberate misinformation of people in Mashonaland on what was happening during the five long years of Gukurahundi through public media (Mpofu 2023) as the Fifth Brigade was answerable, only to the prime minister (Eppel 2004: 44). As a result, the CCZ was forced to take a proactive stance by calling upon government to achieve a 'marked decline in atrocities', and 'appoint a judicial commission charged with the responsibility for establishing the truth, apportion blame and distributing compensation, so that justice may be seen to be done and honour served' (ZCBC 1983:2). Here, the CCZ through the CCJP stressed the need for transparency, accountability and justice, first to curtail rampant atrocities affecting civilians, and second, in the healing process through truth-telling and reparations in line with the broader Catholic theological tradition of justice and reconciliation. Thus, the judiciary inquiry would discourage further violence and restore trust among the populace. This position was indicative of a profound moral imperative to ensure that the dignity of victims was acknowledged through a systematic approach to justice to heal a deeply fractured society. These demands, even though they were not accommodated by the government, underscored a pivotal moment of moral leadership within the CCZ, positioning it as a critical voice amidst the turmoil of the nation's struggle for peace and justice.

Reconciliation is still possible

The bishops, dismayed by the continued presence of the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, continued to follow developments in the villages through reports sent by priests to the CCJP offices in Harare. The ZCBC on 30 March 1983 issued a pastoral statement that was also published in the *New York Times* (30 March 1983) alleging that the Fifth Brigade had 'brought about the maiming and deaths of hundreds and hundreds of innocent people who are neither dissidents nor collaborators' (ZCBC 1983). The compilers of the report, Mike Auret (Chairperson of the CCJP), Bishop Henry Karlen, Helmut Rekter, and Patrick Mutume

presented the report to the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe on 31 March 1983 over the crisis in Matabeleland, but he dismissed it (Malunga, 2023: 9). They presented a dossier of atrocities, and a pastoral statement entitled 'Reconciliation is still possible' (CCJP 1997:53). Clearly, the latter was meant to re-ignite the prime minister's commitment to reconciliation as announced at Independence, while acknowledging the need for the government to maintain law and order, especially in situations where six tourists were abducted, maltreated and massacred by dissidents (Harris, 2023).

The Catholic Church was in fact calling upon all citizens, not just government officials, to be responsible and to act responsibly. In their pastoral letter, *Reconciliation is possible*, Catholic bishops argued that it is the compelling duty of everyone to put reconciliation into effect. The bishops argued that all Christian churches were duty bound to pray for survivors of the atrocities and 'to help them in any way possible, and to pray for Government in their difficult task of trying to restore peace' (ZCBC 1983: 2). The meeting and the requests led to a 'marked decline in atrocities' (CCJP 1987: 53). However, the government continued to deny wrongdoing and scornfully labeled its critics as prophets of doom.

The operations of the Fifth Brigade were characterised by callousness and used unbridled power that negated the CCZ's emphasis on human dignity. 'In the eyes of the Ndebele public, what was portrayed as a mission to stamp out dissidents became an anti-Ndebele campaign that deliberately conflated Joshua Nkomo, PF-ZAPU ex-ZIPRA and every Ndebele-

speaking person into a dissident; a dissident collaborator; a dissident sympathiser and sponsor' (Muzondidya and Gatsheni, 2007: 286). This has variously been described as ethnic cleansing (CCJP, 1997: 96), or quasi-nationalism because of the violence it legitimated (Werbner 1992: 159; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2004:22). This explains Eldred Masunungure's 2006 observation: 'Zimbabwe as a state came into being in 1980 but Zimbabwe as a nation did not.'

When the CCZ criticised the formation of the Fifth Brigade and their scorched earth measures, Mugabe came out guns blazing and described the critical bishops as 'sanctimonious prelates' (CCJP 1987:53-54). Mugabe's true colours were starting to show as it grew increasingly clear that he was prepared to crush any form of opposition – whether political or spiritual. His campaign against 'dissidents' was sold to the nation (and internationally) as the only way to bring peace and order to Matabeleland

and the Midlands. Whilst Bishop Ernst Heinrich Karlen, a member of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannhill (CMM), emerged as a prominent figure to comment on developments in Matabeleland, Bishop Tobias Chiginya, in stark contrast, was silent on developments in the Midlands where his diocese was located. Similarly, Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa in the Archdiocese of Harare remained tight-lipped over the situation in Matabeleland and in the two dioceses where government forces were said to be fighting ‘dissidents’. The divisions within the CCZ between the ‘sanctimonious prelates’ and the ‘quiet bystanders’ like Bishops Chiginya and Chakaipa can be explained by raising questions of moral responsibility and leadership within the CCZ community. While the latter have chosen to be silent, no comments have been made on their dereliction of duty by failing to uphold the CCZ’s calling to advocate for justice and the protection of human rights. Some have interpreted government operations against alleged ‘dissidents’ as a troubling indication of complicity with the ZANU-PF government and not the suffering people. This division does not only illustrate the varying approaches to pastoral leadership in navigating political crises but also sparks debates about the role of ecclesiastical authority in times of social unrest. Thus, the quieter bishops have been interpreted as desiring to avoid political confrontation at the expense of marginalised voices’ call for justice. While these bishops could have been confronted by congregants and fellow clergy over their stance against atrocities (and they were not confronted), silence underscored individual convictions, and the complex dynamics in the CCZ during this time of critical moral reckoning.

The state sanctioned violence (metaphorically ‘civil war’)³ in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces was characterised by widespread human rights abuses. Thousands of Ndebele were detained by government forces. Villagers were force-marched to re-education camps. Furthermore, thousands were tortured, raped, and summarily executed (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) 1998). Mugabe openly remarked, ‘where men and women provide food for dissidents, when we get there, we eradicate them. We don’t differentiate when we fight, because we can’t tell who a dissident is and who is not...’ (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1986: 38 in Makambanga 2022: 61). However, to save face, a Commission was set up in

3 Civil war is a term that has been used by ZANU-PF politicians to justify their state sanctioned violence in the predominantly PF-ZAPU region where most speakers were Ndebele.

September 1983 headed by Stanislaus Chihambakwe. The report produced by the Commission was embargoed in November 1985 (CCJP 1987: 61) and still remains unavailable to the public. The government's silence can be explained by the evidence that was given by the CCJP and LRF's report: *Breaking the Silence: Building True Peace* (1997). It systematically captured human rights violations perpetrated during the civil conflict in the face of governmental obfuscation and accountability evasion. The report chronicled incidents of egregious abuses, including extra-judicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. The rigorous evidentiary approach it employed underscored the imperative for transitional justice mechanisms to foster national healing. This exposed the persistent culture of impunity by government's suppression of Chihambakwe Commission's findings.

Attempt to muzzle the voice of the church

Throughout this period, the ZANU-PF government attempted to control the affairs of the church in its bid to create a one-party state (Martin and Johnson 1981: 30). State incursion on the freedoms of the church triggered the 1984 publication of a pastoral letter by the ZCBC (ZCBC 1984: 1). In the letter, the bishops' main contention was that the Kingdom of God' is a greater system than 'any political, social or economic system' (ZCBC 1984:1, quoted in Gundani, 2008: 9). Catholics did not deny state ideology but disagreed with radical scientific socialism that advanced atheism, and was arbitrarily applied to suppress the people it was supposed to liberate. The ZCBC denied that atheism was ideal for human liberty as God was the only Being able to bring about a new creation through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (ZCBC, 1984: 3; Gundani 2008: 9). In response, the prime minister retorted, 'If the problem with socialism is that it is Godless; then give it a God, but certainly not the God of capitalism' (Banana, interview, 7 May 1999, quoted in Gundani, 2008: 9). The CCZ understood that the ZANU-PF government's imposition of Scientific Socialism and the aspiration to establish a one-party state were contrary to the Christian faith and conscience. Despite skirmishes between the government and the CCJP, the CCZ continued to render services to citizens. Although the ZANU-PF government invested much in socialist propaganda it failed to translate the latter into 'practical programmes and policies beyond the levels of slogans and campaigns' (Mandaza 2006: 106).

Zimbabwe's failure to deal with the truth, has contributed to brutal state repression, orchestrated in a cycle of state-violence and denial,

without learning much about public accountability, nation building and truthfulness (Eppel 2004: 43). The CCZ, the CCJP and the LRF conceived reparations, in the form of justice, compensation and rehabilitation for the victims of organised violence, to be fundamental to reconciliation.

The Unity Accord in Zimbabwe and the role of the Roman Catholic Church

The CCZ appealed to all – including dissidents – to effect change in Zimbabwe by voting rather than fighting. Bishops also appealed to the government to extend a hand of friendship to their enemies (ZCBC 1985: 2). The Gukurahundi crisis finally ended after long negotiations between the ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU leadership. In December 1987, a Unity Accord was signed between the two rival parties. Although the Accord succeeded in stopping the ‘dissident problem’ and pacified Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, the downside was that it was reached without any commitment to post-conflict clean-up (Ndlovu–Gatsheni 2004: 32). This failed to meet the demands of the 1983 pastoral letter; Reconciliation is Possible and its call for the government to set up a commission of inquiry to identify both perpetrators and survivors to provide appropriate action upon both as a remedy to address the crisis of the moment (ZCBZ 1983: 2). However, perpetrators who had been convicted in the July 1986 High Court and sentenced to death were immediately pardoned by the President (CCJP 1987: 62). The avoidance to rigorously and effectively adjudicate post-conflict measures hindered genuine social reconciliation. Impunity on egregious violations, and the pardon of convicted perpetrators by government undermined the foundational tenets of restorative justice.

The Unity Accord of December 1987 was followed by a blanket amnesty to cover excesses during the ‘time of madness’,⁴ leading Zimbabwe into a de facto one-party state. According to Sisulu (2008: 494), ‘[T]he Unity Accord completed what the Gukurahundi had failed to do.’ Although beneficiaries of the Unity Accord in the erstwhile rival parties celebrated the Accord as a victory for peace, it was essentially ‘a surrender deal by Nkomo to ZANU-PF hegemony, accepting to play a second fiddle as Senior Minister and later Vice President under Robert Mugabe’ (Ndlovu–Gatsheni 2009: 30). This is so because it offered PF-ZAPU very little except a commitment that killings within their strongholds would stop. ‘In short, you cease to exist, and we will stop killing you’ (Eppel 2009:8). Nkomo yielded to the arm-twisting wherein even the then Minister of State Security, Emmerson

4 ‘A time of madness’, *The Zimbabwean*, 24 July 2013.

Mnangagwa, stated: 'blessed are they, who will follow the path of the government laws, for their days on earth shall be increased... but woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents for we will certainly shorten their stay on earth' (Makambanga 2022: 61).

Sithole (1991: 285-6) argued:

Even a cursory look at the terms of the Unity Accord [let alone the Willard Chiweve minutes] gives one the impression that the document spells out terms of surrender and not compromise. Nowhere in the eleven-point agreement does Nkomo's name appear, but Mugabe's appears three times. [Nkomo's name only appears as a signatory to the document] ... Eight of the eleven points are pregnant with victorious Mugabe's ideas. Where mention is made of PF-ZAPU it is to indicate that henceforth it shall be called ZANU (PF).

The role of the government's apology in national healing

The CCZ through the CCJP called for government accountability and an apology as necessary steps towards national healing and reconciliation. Until his passing, Mugabe and ZANU-PF continued to refuse to apologise to the people of Matabeleland for atrocities committed by government security forces. As Eppel observes, 'In Zimbabwe, perpetrators of violence are still in powerful positions, and survivors are often silenced and afraid' (Eppel 2004: 50). The CCZ has been aware of this scenario and has tried to actively promote regions that were affected by the past including truth-telling and reparations. The CCZ through the CCJP has initiated public hearings and community engagement dialogues in affected areas to allow survivors to share their stories while it documented such reports. This has led it to advocate for reparative justice measures by the state, including health, education and memorialisation in honour of the victims. In fact, sensitisation campaigns to educate policymakers and the public were carried out as well as the calls to establish truth commissions and transitional justice frameworks (Mandikwaza, 2022): the latter has led to the founding of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), despite questions of its effectiveness.

Democratic contestation in Zimbabwe

The birth of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was a response to the 1999 violent food riots that damaged properties. In May 1999, a National Working People's Convention (NWPC) was convened and

‘mandated to map out strategies to protect workers from the economic hardships and put in place a strong, democratic popularly driven and organised movement which represented a broad spectrum of society’ (Dansereau 2003). In the NWPC Article 3 Section 1 states: ‘the MDC shall be a Social Democratic Party (SDP) whose core values shall be solidarity, justice, equality, liberty, freedom, transparency, humble and obedient leadership and accountability’ (MDC Constitution 2000: 4). The NWPC held wider consultations with workers, churches, women, lawyers, and students and noted their overwhelming aspiration to form a broad-based political party (Ibid.: 3-4).

As stated in its founding document (Article 4 Section 3), the MDC prioritised peaceful approaches (MDC Constitution 2000: 7). It also highlighted the importance of inclusiveness to fulfill its goals and objectives (Ibid.). Conversely, ZANU-PF, instigated confrontations to rationalise its aggressive tendencies. The MDC’s focus on legality (constitutionalism) and transparency was met with resistance from ZANU-PF among other entities. Besides external violence, the 2005 parliamentary elections led to internal squabbles, which led the MDC to split, some along ethnic lines and others ideological differences. While some may subscribe to the theory of infiltration, what is true is that it led to an outcry within the leadership of the party. Violence in the party became so prevalent that its members believed they had been captured by ZANU-PF as one member stated:

We have become so accustomed to violence being used as an acceptable political weapon that we have lost sight of the fact that the democratic world has moved on and that such methods are anathema. By a silent and insidious process of osmosis, we have absorbed this disease and tragically we do not understand the extent of the problem (Coltart 2006).

This speaks to the rhetoric of violence it received in Matabeleland where there was a return to Gukurahundi tactics during campaigns by ZANU-PF against MDC (Eppel 2004: 47). The MDC also experienced unprecedented violence in Manicaland (Buhera South), during the 2000 Parliamentary elections, which began on 15 April 2000, with the petrol bombing of Tichaona Chiminya and Talent Mabika in Murambinda, and ignited by ZANU-PF leadership (Makambanga 2022: 8). Thus ‘over 200,000 incidents of political violence in the first half of 2000 forced the MDC to cease campaigning a few weeks before the election in over 20 constituencies, mainly rural ones’ (The Amani Trust 2000: 20). The MDC

could not be allowed to win the 2000/2 elections because senior ZANUPF officials were wary of the consequences of a range of unresolved issues that included the Gukurahundi atrocities, electoral violence, fraud, and public corruption, among others.

ZANU-PF was saved by its radical alliance with the war veterans who had been accused of orchestrating violence (Selby 2006: 4). With the land reform and other strategies, ZANU-PF used a multi-pronged approach to threaten MDC, including the statement: '[those] who try to cause disunity among our people must watch out because death will befall them' (ZHRNGOF 2001: 39). Also, Stan Mudenge, the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, threatened civil servants who supported MDC, who were under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare saying: 'you will lose your jobs if you support opposition political parties in the presidential election. As civil servants you must be loyal to the government of the day. You can even be killed for supporting the opposition and no one would guarantee your safety' (ZHRNGOF 2001: 39). Thus 'ZANU-PF declared a political war against the imagined and real supporters of the opposition MDC and in the process destroyed opposition structures that were in their formative stages of development' (Chigora, Guzura and Mutumburanzou, 2011: 346). This led to '[t]he institutionalization of violence as an electoral tool, disregard of the rule of law, and rampant violations of human and people's rights' (Masaka 2012: 56).

Using similar approaches to those of the Gukurahundi era, MDC murders and displacements by ZANU-PF supporters were officially denied, and perpetrators received *de facto* impunity. While a few ZANUPF supporters were arrested for heinous crimes, many opposition supporters were falsely arrested for engaging in their democratic rights such as peaceful protests and private meetings (Eppel 2004: 48). Similarly, ZANU-PF stated that to support MDC in Matabeleland was to be an enemy of the state, the same rhetoric used against former PF-ZAPU. For this reason, supporters of opposition parties were variously vilified as puppets, terrorists, and enemies of the state, being used by the West to recolonise Zimbabwe. The violence that had been used against PF-ZAPU began to be used against Shona regions that also supported opposition politics.

Catholicism, Christian unity, and joint efforts during the coalition government in Zimbabwe

The document entitled *The Zimbabwe We Want* was a product borne out of ecumenical collaboration led by Bishop Patrick Mutume (CCZ), Bishop

Sebastian Bakare (Anglican) and Bishop Trevor Mananga (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe). It facilitated dialogue that led to the formation of Zimbabwe's first coalition government (2009-13), marking an effort in which the future of ecumenism was going to be defined. This was achieved after the signing of the GPA, which was a political agreement between MDC-T, MDC-N and ZANU-PF, mediated by former South African President Thabo Mbeki representing SADC after the disputed June 2008 presidential run-off. It ushered in the Government of National Unity (GNU). Christian unity made churches a formidable coalition to defend ordinary people during the period of the unity government (Gunda 2018: 44-45). Noteworthy is the formation of the Church and Civil Society Forum (CCSF), from a broad spectrum of efforts (Ncube, 2014: 284), representing a 'network of faith-based groups and individuals with a calling in peace and justice work' (Tarusarira 2016: 64). The CCSF was used to create Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) to mobilise community clusters for peacebuilding and the prevention of violence using publicity campaigns (Ncube 2014: 284). This initiative has become useful in removing name-calling among churches such as calling people 'sell-outs', leading to the moral imagination that the quality of an individual's life is dependent upon the quality of life for another individual (Lederach 2005: 35). Despite the difficulties the ecumenical body faced with attendant political party polarisations, the contribution of the CCZ and other churches has rebuilt trust with the public, especially on renewing 'the national social contract, advance the economy, and empower citizens to engage in the processes' (Gaga, Masengwe and Dube 2023: 63). The CCZ like the ZCC thus believes that 'Human beings were given an obligation to leave the earth as good as they had found it at creation' (ZCC 2019: 5).

Scholarly discourse suggests that the Zimbabwean churches missed a significant opportunity to facilitate national dialogue on pressing issues due to what Gunda (2018) characterised as 'speaking with forked tongues' (p. 46). This discord is illustrated by the differing positions held by the ZCC and the ZCBC against the EFZ with regard to the 2006 Kairos Zimbabwe, the ZWW. The ZCC and the ZCBC unequivocally wanted the government to uphold the Constitution, especially in relation to 'democratic freedoms' (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006, Chapter 3 section 2 subsection 4). Unfortunately, the EFZ whose hands held the document became compromised and the latter was doctored. The Jesuits, from the Catholic constituency, who had participated in the drafting of the NVDD

were not happy, and the Jesuit Communications Office (JCO) made it clear that the document presented to President Mugabe had been significantly altered and diluted, especially in its language on freedom of association, speech, and expression.⁵ Indeed, the revised document softened crucial assertions, including a directive that no individual should be victimised for their political affiliation. The JCO was critical of these omissions and deemed them unacceptable, insisting on their re-instatement based on principles of the Social Teachings of the Christian (Catholic) Church. They argued that freedom of expression is fundamental to a vibrant democracy. Citing Vatican II's 'Gaudium et Spes' – The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (1965), they emphasised that the Church must have the freedom to judge and speak out whenever the fundamental rights of individuals are compromised (Vatican II 1965). On the section, The Attitudes of the Church towards Atheism, it states: 'The church therefore deplores the discrimination between believers and unbelievers which some civil authorities unjustly practice, in defiance of the fundamental rights of the human person' Unfortunately, the section was not reinstated, but we believe the 2009-13 constitutional consultations heard the concerns.

The Roman Catholic Church and citizen participation in post-constitutional era

The CCJP in the Catholic Church has significantly influenced citizen engagement in Zimbabwe since independence. This active participation in political processes, across party lines, has been done by leading lay Catholic members such as Michael Auret, Isaac Phiri, and Prisca Mupfumira. Civic participation, as noted by Isaac Phiri (2001), has successfully engaged in political activities with the aim of resolving political impasses and contributing to the development of an active citizenry in line with the CCZ's commitment to social justice. These efforts are rooted in the Catholic commitment to promote citizen participation in addressing public life concerns.

To inspire greater involvement among lay Catholics, reports from chapters of the CCJP demonstrate the vibrant lay participation in the deepening of social justice across the eight dioceses of the Church (Phiri 2001) through guilds, professional associations and parishes using the Catholic social teachings. These teachings advocate for the moral

5 'Vision document Was "Doctored", Allege Jesuits', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 24 November 2006.

responsibility of individuals to contribute positively to society and address social injustices. The CCZ thus extends beyond national levels to local communities, which supports the impact and effectiveness of the CCZ on citizen participation. While critiques may arise regarding the intentional marginalisation of certain denominations from political discourses – prompted by apprehension about conflating ecclesiastical authority with state governance – there is also a palpable concern about the systemic exclusion of minority groups within this framework. Nonetheless, it can be posited that these concerted efforts have engendered substantive and enduring transformations within Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape using the CCZ's efforts.

I want to encourage Catholic academics and student bodies, from the perspective of Vice Chancellor, to take up leadership roles in promoting awareness of social teachings and mobilising fellow students to engage in community service projects. Initiatives such as workshops, discussions, and collaborative efforts with local organisations can enhance understanding and inspire active participation in social justice issues, ensuring the Church's mission resonates deeply within the youth and broader community.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has managed to impact transitions in Zimbabwe due to the unity of purpose in the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and collaboration of the ecumenical protestant churches under the ZCC and the EFZ. In a limited way, the CCZ has managed to fulfil its ecclesial mandate by facilitating social justice and equality. The use of STCC in ecumenical actions, and of importance, the pastoral letters, made the CCZ a pacesetter along with the ZCC in prophetic advocacy in Zimbabwe. The CCZ has influenced the church's engagement with the state. Its interaction with the ZANUPF government has to a limited extent helped the nation to adopt a multiparty system that by 2017 was yet to find its feet.

The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has, since 1974, consistently emphasised the theme of reconciliation. While this is a fundamental aspect of its doctrine, and especially pertinent to its ministry, there has been insufficient attention given to the necessary conditions for achieving genuine reconciliation within the complex arena of secular politics. Notably, the CCJP has underscored the necessity for the ZANU-PF government, particularly its then President Mugabe, to issue an apology

for the atrocities committed in the 1980s against the people living in Matabeleland. Evidently, reconciliation that is devoid of truth, apology, repentance, and reparation or restitution, risks cultivating the seeds of future conflict. There is no doubt that if reconciliation lacks accountability, it inevitably fosters a culture of impunity. Regrettably, Zimbabwe currently exhibits an excess of impunity, which poses significant challenges to the nation's quest for lasting peace and justice.

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Evangelicals and ‘The Zimbabwe We Want’

REVD DR ROY MUSASIWA

Introduction

The preamble to *The Zimbabwe We Want* (ZWW) document, published by the Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe (EPIZ) in 2006, paints the sad reality of a nation which was divided, traumatised and impoverished on the back of a political, economic and social crisis which ‘assumed exponential impetus following the launch of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in 2000’. The document further describes an ‘unrelenting downward spiral and economic meltdown’, ‘the massive brain-drain into the diaspora, hyper-inflation, widespread shortages of basic commodities, decline in agricultural and manufacturing productivity, shortages of foreign currency, escalating corruption, flight of foreign investments, rampant and black marketeering’ (EPIZ 2006:8). This chapter will describe how these realities motivated three umbrella church bodies (the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC) to constitute an Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe which is the precursor to the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) whose attempts to address the national crisis culminated in the publication of the ZWW in 2006. In describing the process leading up to the publication, particular emphasis will be given to the contribution of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe.

The chapter will depict the publication of the ZWW as an example of the way ecumenical unity can overcome insuperable obstacles. These included

the suspicion by ruling party politicians that the church was setting itself up as a 'regime change agent'. The few months prior to the actual publication of the document were particularly tense with state security agents attempting to manipulate the final product. The polarisation of society along political lines created an atmosphere requiring the church to walk a tight rope of courageous impartiality, wisdom and discernment, while refusing to be manipulated by either side of the political divide.

The chapter will also discuss the significance of the various sections of the document such as the mandate of the church, vision and values of the *Zimbabwe We Want*, towards a home-grown constitution, national economic and social transformation, the land question, and national reconciliation. Together these sections constitute the vision, values and vehicles for the Zimbabwe We Want.

The sequel to the publication of the document of 2006 will also be an important subject for discussion. The attempts to transform it from a focus within the church to a broader national vision will be discussed, highlighting the limitations and potential critiques of the document, as well as changes across the last two decades, and the relevance of the document today. This chapter will end with lessons gained from the Zimbabwe we Want process.

When reading this chapter a distinction should be made between the *Zimbabwe We Want* document and the Zimbabwe we Want process that accompanied and followed the period after its publication.

Build up to the Zimbabwe We Want process

The preamble to the *Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document spells out why it became necessary for the church to embark on the Zimbabwe We Want process.

The first fifteen years of an independent Zimbabwe showed much promise, and the nation was held in high regard on the continent of Africa and the world. The country's economic progress was remarkable, typified by such high productivity in agriculture that the Zimbabwe earned recognition as the '*bread basket*' of the southern African region. The expansion of education was also unprecedented in all sub-Saharan Africa, as was the phenomenal expansion and quality of medical services and social welfare.

The first years were followed by deepening disappointment. In 2005, Zimbabwe celebrated its Silver Jubilee in the grip of discouragement and depression. The lack of a shared national vision manifested itself in

political intolerance and contentious laws. The economy took a severe battering, exemplified by the highest level of inflation in the world.

Deep levels of corruption exacerbated our economic challenges. The land issue which had remained unresolved since the Lancaster House agreement had degenerated into a chaotic land grab with a consequent plunge in agricultural productivity. Unemployment ran very high, and poverty levels deepened. In the middle of all this, Zimbabwe lost some of her international friends and even exited from the Commonwealth in December 2003 as a result of political tensions, particularly regarding issues related to land reform and human rights. The fact that since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe still had no home-grown democratic constitution did not help in resolving the myriad of challenges the nation was facing.

The immediate impetus behind the church's initiative was the launching of 'Operation Murambatswina' (Operation Restore Order) on 19 May 2005 by the combined forces of the Ministry of Local Government and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the City of Harare Commission and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The operation was conducted from May to July 2005. This controversial government campaign was ostensibly aimed at removing illegal settlements and structures, particularly in urban areas. The operation led to the demolition of homes, shops, and other structures deemed illegal by the Zimbabwean government, affecting thousands of people and leading to significant displacement and a humanitarian crisis. It was criticised by various human rights organisations and the international community for its harsh tactics and the impact on vulnerable populations. In the words of Human Rights Watch:

Police burnt, bulldozed and destroyed tens of thousands of properties around the country. The destructions resulted in the mass evictions of urban dwellers from housing structures and the closure of various informal sector businesses throughout the country. According to the United Nations, 700,000 people—nearly 6 percent of the total population—have been forcibly evicted from their homes, made homeless or lost their source of livelihood since May 19. The evictions and demolition of houses and markets stalls, and the manner in which they were carried out, constitute serious human rights violations. (HRW: <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/africa/zimbabwe0905/1.htm>)

It was against the background of this and other humanitarian crises that

church groups took various individual initiatives to address the Zimbabwe crisis. It later became clear that such national issues required co-operative efforts on the part of the church. Such co-operation was initially epitomised in the efforts at engagement by three bishops: Bishop Sebastian Bakare (an Anglican affiliated to the Zimbabwe Council of Churches), Bishop Patrick M. Mutume (affiliated to the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference) and Bishop Trevor Manhanga of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe (affiliated to the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe). The efforts of these three bishops did not prevent the three umbrella bodies from separately trying to influence the nation towards a solution to the growing national crisis.

In February 2006, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) produced 'A Pastoral Letter on the Zimbabwe Crisis', distributed amongst member churches and other stakeholders, depicting Zimbabwe's challenges. The Pastoral Letter opened the doors for the Church to collectively influence the political processes in Zimbabwe. It prompted President Robert Mugabe to invite the leaders of the ZCC, EFZ and the ZCBC to discuss ways in which the Church could participate in solving the country's problems. That meeting between the church leaders and Mugabe took place on Africa Day, 25 May at the State House. Nearly five hours of private intense discussions followed. The president agreed with the church that the magnitude of challenges confronting the nation required a shared national vision and could not be handled by the government on its own. He pointed out that the door was open for honest dialogue by Zimbabweans for the benefit of Zimbabwe and discouraged those who would only speak through the media for the benefit of the outside world. This meeting can therefore be seen as the formal commencement of the church-led Zimbabwe We Want initiative culminating in the publication of the ZWW National Vision Discussion Document which President Mugabe agreed to launch on 27 October 2006.

The launching of the document by the president has raised legitimate questions on whether this was a truly church initiative, or a government initiative in which the church was invited to participate. Some even speculate that the church was given a mandate to write the document by President Mugabe on condition that he would launch the document. As someone who was deeply involved in the process, I need to clarify that despite various challenges and attempted interference by some state actors, this was a church initiative with only writers nominated by the church

being involved. This point will be further elucidated below.

Motivation for the involvement in the ZWW process by evangelicals

The involvement of evangelicals in such a radical political intervention would have been almost unthinkable before the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelisation. Until that congress, evangelicals, the world over, saw their mission as being primarily evangelism (encompassing the preaching of the gospel and the discipling of believers) and social service – ‘relieving human need; philanthropic activity, seeking to minister to individuals and families, and works of mercy’ (LOP¹ 21). Involvement in social action was seen as the preserve of ‘liberal Christians’ who believed in the ‘social gospel’. The LOP 21 explains social action as ‘removing the causes of human suffering, political and economic activity, seeking to transform the structures of society and the quest for justice’ (<https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/lop-21>)

It was only at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 1974 that evangelicals began to embrace ‘social action’ as an integral part of our Christian mission. Paragraph 5 of the Lausanne Covenant dealing with ‘Christian Social Responsibility’ clearly stated:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. (<https://lausanne.org/occasional-paper/lop-21>)

In subsequent meetings of the Lausanne movement this integration of evangelism and social responsibility continued to be developed right up to 2010 when the third Lausanne Congress, meeting in Cape Town,

1 The Lausanne Congress of 1974 became a movement which, among other things, produced and published various Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) on various subjects of interest to the Christian community.

produced the ‘Cape Town Commitment’ (<https://lausanne.org/statement/ctcommitment>)

It is this development in evangelical thinking that accounts for their significant involvement in the Zimbabwe We Want process. This involvement can be seen by the number of evangelical leaders in Zimbabwe who became involved, and the quality of their involvement. High ranking evangelicals such Dr Goodwill Shana, Bishop Trevor Manhanga, Bishop Marvellous Mhloyi and the writer of this chapter (Revd Dr Roy Musasiwa) became crucial members of the Zimbabwe We Want process. We partnered with the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches to form the Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe that was to later evolve into the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOD). Thus the creation of ZHOD in 2007 was a product of ecumenical activity in this period.

The EPIZ defined the political mandate of the church in Section 2 of the *Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document. What stands out in the mandate are the following:

- We have a theological Mandate (EPIZ 2006:10). The nature of the Gospel demands that we be involved in the transformation of the social, economic and political systems or environment within which God’s people live. The Church’s concern with issues of good governance, justice and peace, is a demonstration of God’s concern that human beings should have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).
- We have a historical Mandate (EPIZ 2006:11). The Church has a long history of dealing with social needs of the people of Zimbabwe and the world over. The Church has always been engaged in nation-building through the schools, hospitals, relief and development programs. It was only natural that that the church’s social concern should develop into social action as an accompaniment and a consequence of our evangelistic mandate.
- The Church is the people’s representative (EPIZ 2006:12). As a religious organisation the Church embraces the vast majority of the people of Zimbabwe. It is closest to the people compared to secular organisations and state agencies.

It is these convictions that define the motivation by Zimbabwe evangelicals in their involvement in the Zimbabwe We Want process.

The writing of *The Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document

The actual writing of the discussion document was a collective endeavour under the banner of the EPIZ. It began by agreeing on the following vision of the Zimbabwe We Want:

Our vision of the Zimbabwe We Want is that of a sovereign, inviolable and unitary member state of the international community; a nation that is democratic and characterized by good governance as reflected in all its structures, institutions and operations at all levels; a nation united in its diversity, free, tolerant, peaceful, and prosperous; a nation that respects the rights of all its citizens regardless of creed, gender, age, race and ethnicity as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with a leadership that puts the interest of the people of Zimbabwe above all personal gains; a nation where all citizens enjoy equal protection of the law and have equal opportunity to compete and prosper and, above all, a nation that is God-fearing (EPIZ 2006:17).

After the framework was agreed, individuals were assigned various sections according to their perceived skills and areas of interest. Each writer, however, had a team of people they consulted, and their proposals were brought to the table for finalisation by the entire EPIZ leadership. I will illustrate this methodology with reference to Section 3 of the document (values of the Zimbabwe We Want) that was assigned to me (an evangelical) to craft with the assistance of Dr David Kaulemu (a Catholic). I also consulted via email and telephonically with Dr Ambrose Moyo of ZCC persuasion who was then resident in South Africa. It had been agreed that the vision of the nation of Zimbabwe must be underpinned by certain values if it is to be a reality. In working on this section, I was free to consult anyone within the EPIZ team apart and to learning from the experience of other nations like South Africa whose Christians produced the influential *Kairos Document*.² Out of this work emerged the following seventeen values:

- Spirituality and morality
- Unity-in-diversity
- Respect for human life and dignity
- Respect for democratic freedoms
- Respect for other persons
- Democracy and good governance

2 Kairos Theologians, 1986.

- Participation
- Sovereignty
- Patriotism
- Gender equity.
- Social solidarity and the promotion of the family
- Stewardship of creation
- Justice and the rule of law
- Service and accountability
- Promotion of the common good
- Preferential option for the impoverished and marginalised
- Excellence

This section on values held the key to the Zimbabwe We Want. Let me illustrate this with reference to the first four values. We recognised the danger of secularism eroding our spirituality and our morality. We argued that morality must be built on spirituality and that ‘If we define our personhood apart from the biblical concept that we are created in the image of God, we inevitably devalue one another leading to violence, permissive sex or political corruption.’ The document stated: ‘we cannot expect God to bless our nation, and individuals in it, unless integrity becomes a cherished core-value in our nation. The role of the Church, and other religious groups, in shaping the spiritual and moral fibre of the nation should continue to be encouraged in Zimbabwe.’ (EPIZ 2006:18).

The second value we articulated was that of ‘Unity-In-Diversity’. We recognised this to be at the core of our definition of a nation. ‘A nation is the aggregation of individuals, families, communities and ethnicities bound together by a combination of history, birth, geography and a common system of governance.’ Zimbabwean society is heterogenous in terms of race, culture and political affiliation. These diversities can be mutually enriching provided we adopt the stance of accepting one another and tolerating those differences that may not be to our liking, such as political differences. The ZWW document noted that unfortunately, ‘intolerance has made the Zimbabwean society highly polarised. This has in turn bred a culture of violence in the home and different spheres of the public life. This we must detest and resist as we work together towards the Zimbabwe We Want.’ (EPIZ 2006:18-19). It was asserted that by practicing the value of unity-in-diversity we would avoid being ravaged by the sort of civil wars and the bloodshed that has arisen in other African countries as a result of a sense of exclusion by

radicalised minority sections of the population.

Thirdly the ZWW commented on respect for human life and dignity. Concerning this value we boldly declared:

Since human beings are created in God's image, human life is sacrosanct. Everything must be done to safeguard basic rights of every member of our society in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981) to both of which Zimbabwe is a signatory. (EPIZ 2006:19).

It followed that adherence to this value will mean that 'deliberate and avoidable taking of human life had to be regarded as immoral and against the will of God.' Therefore 'we as human beings, and our social, political, economic, cultural and military institutions, systems and processes should always respect human life.' (EPIZ 2006:19).

Value number 4 was 'respect for democratic freedoms'. Democratic freedoms 'provide a conducive environment for good governance and democratic participation and ensure that basic human rights are adhered to.' Indeed 'our struggle for liberation was for freedom and the Zimbabwe We Want must allow every member of our society to enjoy those freedoms that contribute towards nation building.' (EPIZ 2006:19).

The enormous problems that Zimbabwe has experienced in its past can be attributed to the denial / disavowal of these fundamental values. For this reason, we ended by recommending that the core values we articulated needed to be instilled into the national consciousness in the following ways:

- The values must be enshrined in the national constitution of Zimbabwe
- They must be exemplified in the operation of all the three organs of state: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.
- Every social level must practice these values, starting from the family level and going into churches, schools, commerce, industry and government.
- Values education must be introduced in our schools and tertiary institutions (EPIZ 2006:28).

The work done on the values section of the *Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document reflects the same kind of work done for other sections of the document. Section 4 advocated for a homegrown constitution. Up

to 2013 the supreme law of the land was a constitution drawn by political parties at Lancaster House in 1979, in order to end the war of liberation. There was no democratic participation in its crafting and therefore the citizens did not own it. The ZWW document therefore gave guidelines on constitutional reform as well as articulating main areas of divergence, contention and convergence. An important part of this section was the Bill of Rights which we considered essential for promoting individual freedoms and maintaining a system of checks and balances within government.

Section 5 dealt with national economic and social transformation and provided theological reflections on economic stabilisation and development. Among other things, it stipulated the need for good governance as a condition for the creation of a productive environment for development. It also advocated for the mainstreaming of the informal sector and the building of bridges with the international community.

Section 6 tackled the emotive land question as part of the economy. As in other sections, biblical and theological perspectives were given for the handling of the land question. Policies were then suggested for land reform, agricultural productivity, social protection, the handling of special enterprise farms, and compensation for those who were forced to give up their land and the improvements thereon.

Section 7 concluded *The Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document by dealing with national reconciliation and forgiveness. The history of Zimbabwe is littered with conflicts that present a cry for reconciliation. These include the ‘Gukurahundi’ conflict which claimed thousands of lives in the early 1980s, the land question, the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) which displaced 570,000 people,³ the lack of a homegrown constitution and conflictual party-politics. All these episodes were inflamed by Zimbabwe’s polarised media. These moments of conflict presented an opportunity as well as the imperative for the church’s engagement in national reconciliation, including the possible setting up of the equivalence of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Launching of *The Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document

The Zimbabwe We Want discussion document was far-reaching in its extent and radical in its tone in the context of the Zimbabwe of that time and its feared President Robert Mugabe. Never before had the church

3 This is according to the United Nations Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka who was sent by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to study the effects of Murambatsvina operation.

spoken 'truth to power' in such a united way. We were conscious that without the consent of the State President there was no way the church would be allowed to spread the vital message of the Zimbabwe We Want.

The next task of the church was therefore to capitalise on the goodwill of our initial meeting with President Mugabe and persuade him to launch the *Zimbabwe We Want* discussion document. The easy part was persuading him to agree to do so. The difficult part was to navigate through the state security apparatus. Our draft document had to be thoroughly scrutinised for any 'regime change' signal. The sincerity of the church could not be faulted, but the state agents were uncomfortable with the critical tone of the document. Many changes of wording were suggested causing us to have sleepless nights of consultations. In the end we succeeded in resisting any changes that would dilute the message of the church or seek to whitewash the severity of the situation Zimbabwe found itself in. In this endeavour we were greatly assisted by State President himself who had to instruct the state agents that the document must remain a genuinely church document; not one doctored to become a state advisory. The only compromises we agreed to affect had to do with toning down some of our supposedly 'harsh' language. An example of this was our agreeing to change the language from 'oppressive laws' to 'contentious laws'. We felt this was a small price to pay to get the document legitimised through being officially launched by President Mugabe.

This insider view of events is at variance with uniformed critics who take the *Zimbabwe We Want* document as a state-sponsored attempt to whitewash the oppressive system. Such critics are typified by Magezi and Tagwirei (2022) who believe that except for a few isolated individual Christians, the church has failed to emulate 'The Old Testament's fearless prophetic involvement in political affairs' (2022: 7) and to play New Testament role of the church being the salt and light according to Mt 5:13–16 (2022: 7). Their criticism includes the united effort of the church which led to the production of the ZWW document in 2006. They write that in 2006 Robert Gabriel Mugabe:

seemed to have accommodated the clergy's views on the kind of Zimbabwe they wanted, and he bribed some of them with cars, land, farms and unlimited access to state resources to build churches (Dombo 2014:144–146). Following their meeting with Mugabe, the Church leaders produced a document termed *The Zimbabwe We Want*, which omitted some critical issues, and it was believed that the leaders were

bribed to portray the state positively (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022:3)

These authors fail to point out a single example of critical issues omitted from *The Zimbabwe We Want* document or to point out a single example of those involved in the crafting of it, who were ‘bribed to portray the state positively’. On the contrary what was launched on 27 October 2006 was, according to *The Independent Catholic News* (ICN), the church’s proposed ‘roadmap to national restoration’ (<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/6902>). In that same issue Conrad Chibango, communications secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference, wrote: ‘This event was a historic moment in Zimbabwe, a moment when all the mainline Churches laid their doctrinal differences aside and spoke with one voice.’

In an unpublished statement of 27 October 2026 the churches stated:

Although the church has held discussions with both the government and several opposition parties, this document holds no brief for any political party or pre-conceived political agenda. It reflects a vision of the three ecumenical bodies regarding the Zimbabwe that we want. It is inspired by our faith in a sovereign God who, in Jesus Christ, demonstrated His solidarity with suffering humanity and his power to transform our thinking and relationships through the power of the Gospel.

All this goes to demonstrate that *The Zimbabwe We Want* was a genuine church-initiated and crafted National Vision Discussion Document. As such, it was not meant to be a comprehensive and final document. But it tabled all that the church considered critical for discussion in the search for a nationally owned, national vision document. The launch of this document by the State President gave the church the legitimacy it needed to roll out the document to Zimbabwe’s ten provinces

Towards the production of *The Zimbabwe We Want* national vision document

What was launched on 27 October 2006 was the churches’ ZWW discussion document. The next step was to transform this into a national vision document which could be owned, accepted and actioned by all sectors of society. That was a very tall order as it would involve a roll-out to all Zimbabwe’s ten provinces, gathering views of representative population groups across the nation; and the actual writing process itself. This would require a significant budget, a dedicated secretariat and a huge manpower

base. Moreover, we would be racing against time, as 2008 was set to be an election year. Once electioneering began our work would be impossible.

Despite these challenges the EPIZ partners decided to embark on the process beginning with the formulation of a grand strategic plan in which we identified an opportunity to bring about meaningful transformation to the nation by:

- giving voice to the voiceless,
- instilling a culture of dialogue on national issues,
- restoring hope to a despairing nation
- redefining the role and mission of the church in society

We identified our strengths as the church which we could utilise in engaging in the National Vision Process (NVP). These strengths included the unity of the church represented by the three large umbrella bodies, the church being the largest constituency in the country; the endorsement from stakeholders, including government and political parties; the church possessing competencies to carry out the process, it being the only credible impartial body for such a process.

However, we were mindful of our weaknesses and threats which included a dependency on donor funding. There was also the perception that some church leaders were aligned to the ruling party or one of the opposition parties; discordant voices from some church bodies seeking to discredit and misrepresent the process; political pressure for alignment; the non-participation of some independent church bodies; a polarised media; and the crisis of expectations. The church's expectation was that the rollout process would itself be the means to mitigate these challenges and misconceptions.

In the one-year strategic plan (1 February 2007 – 31 January 2008) we agreed on three strategic goals of the NVP:

- Engage all stakeholders, including government, the private sector, the church, civil society organisations, the general public and the international community
- Dialogue with all stakeholders – dissemination and insemination
- Transformation of and in the nation – resolution of the crisis

The agreed participatory policy formulation had four goals

- To ensure ownership of the process is achieved by the church at all levels.
- To ensure ownership of the process is achieved by all other stakeholders.

- Ensure ownership of the process is achieved by all other nationals
- To engage the international community

The year 2007 was taken up with the work of actualising the agreed strategic plan. A steering committee was confirmed which would report to the Heads of Christian Denominations of the three umbrella bodies.

The Steering Committee consisted of:

- the Presidents of the three umbrella bodies: Bishop Trevor Manhanga (EFZ), Bishop Robert Christopher Ndlovu (ZCBC), Bishop Wilson Sitshebo (ZCC)
- The General Secretaries of the three umbrella bodies: Revd Andrew Muchechetere (EFZ), Fr Frederick Chiromba (ZCBC), Mr David Mafinyane (ZCC).
- Dr Godwill Shana (EFZ)
- Revd Dr Roy Musasiwa (EFZ)
- Fr Edward Ndeti (ZCBC)
- Mr L. Sigauke (ZCC)
- Bishop Eben Nhwitiwa (ZCC)
- Archbishop Robert Christopher Ndlovu (ZCBC)
- Bishop Ambrose Moyo (ZCBC) .

Nine taskforces were also appointed, each of which would report to the national steering committee. These were:

- Dialogue and the Political Environment taskforce to deal with political matters, including dialogue.
- Values taskforce responsible for values and dissemination with the aim of ensuring that the values are inculcated into various sectors of the Zimbabwean society.
- Reconciliation taskforce to identify and prioritise areas that need reconciliation and then to spearhead dialogue and processes leading to reconciliation.
- Land and the Economy This task force would deal with economic and land issues.
- Constitutional Reform taskforce to work on constitutional reform with the objective of eventually coming up with a new constitution for the Zimbabwe We Want.
- Church Engagement taskforce to disseminate of the national vision document (NVD) to churches.
- Stakeholder Engagement taskforce to disseminate the NVD to the other stakeholders for them to buy into the document. The other

stakeholders comprised everyone other than the church and includes those represented by government, civic society, the business sector, labour, political parties, the international community, and the non-believing Zimbabweans.

- Media and Advocacy taskforce: The Zimbabwean population, the church and media included, must be informed: As Hosea 4:6 says: 'My people perish for lack of knowledge. Thus, the media has a crucial and pivotal role to play in the process of transformation.
- National Prayer Taskforce: The process must be supported by vigorous prayers.

Evangelicals were represented in every one of the nine taskforces and in fact led the taskforces on dialogue, values, constitutional reform and national prayer.

In order to co-ordinate the work of all these taskforces an Ecumenical Peace Initiative of the Zimbabwe secretariat was established with Dr Ranga Zinyemba (ZCBC) as its full-time national director and supported by staff drawn from all the member bodies. The envisaged end-product would be the production of the national vision document. However, the strategic plan was viewed as an inception phase of the process that would see Zimbabweans develop and maintain the Zimbabwe they want.

Of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe, the NVP successfully reached nine of them. It became impossible to conduct successful outreach to Mashonaland Central as the 2008 electioneering season had commenced. However, the nine provinces reached remarkable agreement with the discussion document. It was therefore fair to assume that the nine provinces were an excellent representative sample of the entire nation. On that basis *The Zimbabwe We Want: National Vision Document* could have been produced to take the place of the discussion document.

This course of action was abandoned for three reasons. Firstly, the process ran out of funds in the second half of 2008. Up to that point certain Scandinavian countries had funded the national vision process through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, the ruling party became so uncomfortable with the process that it influenced UNDP to stop funding it. In an interview, Fr Frederick Chiromba (2 September 2024), former General Secretary of the ZCBC, explained that the EPIZ was considered to have become too vocal because of the 2008 disputed election, which resulted in the financial sabotage of the funding. The second reason for abandoning the production of *The Zimbabwe We Want:*

National Vision Document was the feeling that the discussion document was still adequate in its own right and had received the support of the nation through the outreach process that covered nine out of Zimbabwe's ten provinces. The third reason was that we misguidedly perceived that our job was done when we helped, behind the scenes, in securing the Global Political Agreement that resulted in the 2009 – 2013 Government of National Unity. The church was also involved in the constitution-making process that resulted in the 2013 constitution.

When all this was achieved the church reverted to business as usual. The momentum of the Zimbabwe We Want process was not sustained as it now lacked a champion.

Lessons learnt from the Zimbabwe We Want National Vision Process

The ZWW process left the church with some very important lessons for the future.

The first lesson is the power that the church holds if it stands united. Until 2006, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and other umbrella bodies were separately attempting to influence the course of events in Zimbabwe mainly through press statements and pastoral letters. It was their coming together to form the Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe that created a voice which compelled the political authorities to listen. For the first time in the history of the church in Zimbabwe, churches, as represented by the three umbrella organisations, put aside their differences to work together for a common purpose. The informal consultations that took place a few years before were concretised in the production of *The Zimbabwe We Want: National Vision Discussion Document* which was launched at the Catholic University in Harare on 27 October 2006.

The second lesson is the value of our strategic choice of engagement, dialogue and transformation. Some individuals and organisations like the National Christian Alliance led by Useni Sibanda showed some impatience with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (successor of the EPIZ) for not playing an activist role in national affairs. They say we should be issuing condemnatory statements and, if need be, even go onto the streets to stage demonstrations. There is of course a place for activism in society under certain circumstances. Activism can create 'communities of struggle' (Hamann and Turkmen, 2020) and aid in the performances of anger and catharsis as has been the case with the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA (Hooker, 2016). However, in the judgement of the

three umbrella bodies, and given the undemocratic environment then prevailing in Zimbabwe, it is the engagement dialogue that had the greater potential to bring about transformation and real progress. Certainly, former President, Robert Mugabe, would not have co-operated with a combative church to the extent of launching *The Zimbabwe We Want: National Vision Discussion Document* in 2006. In a telephone interview (2 September 2024) Dr Ranga Zinyemba, then head of the EPIZ secretariat, said that in his experience of the process, 'When we engage in constructive criticism government responds positively. Constructive criticism works.'

The third lesson is that the church needs to change her perceived role from being a mid-wife (helping to deliver the Zimbabwe We Want) to being a nursing mother to the same. A midwife considers her job done when a baby is born. That is what the church did when she helped to achieve the Government of National Unity (GNU) as a climax of the Zimbabwe We Want process. Abandoning the process at that stage was definitely premature. The church needed to continue supporting it and making her voice heard forcefully. We underestimated the power of the saying that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Documents that are produced and agreements that are made do not count for much without a change of values. The highest office in the land – represented by President Mugabe – agreed to launch *The Zimbabwe We Want: National Vision Discussion Document* in October 2006. And yet as early as Monday 12 March 2007, independent media were dominated by the news that opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) had on the previous day been brutalised by the police arm of Mugabe's government. Jen Redshaw of *The Times* reported on 13 March 2007 that 'The leader of Zimbabwe's main opposition party needed hospital treatment for severe head injuries after police beat him following his arrest at a prayer rally on Sunday, his party said'. The article then quotes MDC party spokesman Professor Mukonoweshuro as saying that the former trade unionist had a very deep wound to his head. 'He can hardly eat and hardly talk. In fact, it was an attempted murder. Mr Tsvangirai had fainted three times while police were beating him', he said. This happened hardly five months after State President had endorsed the Zimbabwe We Want document which advocated for a just and peaceful society.

In the same way, there was a cry for a new democratic constitution. That was achieved in 2013, with the help of the church. But this did not end Zimbabwe's problems. Nor did the constitution prevent the military-

assisted coup of November 2017 and the ushering of a new dispensation whose record on human rights violations were no better than the former. All these developments provide ample proof that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The church needed to stay engaged in an effort to inculcate the seventeen values articulated in *The Zimbabwe We Want: National Vision Discussion Document*. For these reasons the church should have continued nursing the process without ever being over-reliant on the paid secretariat.

The fourth lesson, according to Dr Zinyemba in the same interview referred to above, is that in development you need to hear directly from people concerned. In the outreach process we heard from Zimbabweans directly. On this basis, although it is unfortunate that no national vision document was produced as a result of the outreach, it remains significant that Zimbabweans in nine provinces were given an opportunity to discuss and have a sense of ownership of the ZWW document.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the publication of the ZWW discussion document is an example of the way ecumenical unity can overcome insuperable obstacles such as that of confronting an oppressive system of government. The Zimbabwe We Want process showed that the church has the potential to make a real difference in national affairs. Having a presence in every part of the country and constituting not less than 80% of the population, the church can be the voice of the voiceless. But the strength of the church lies not just in its numerical strength but much more in its unity in diversity. The church in Zimbabwe is diverse in its racial, tribal, class and denominational composition. It even allows its members free choice of political affiliation. Yet it can choose to be united in promoting the sort of kingdom values espoused in *The Zimbabwe We Want* document. It can together confront the evils of corruption, injustice and oppression. At the same time the Zimbabwe We Want process how total unity is an ideal which difficult to achieve, maintain and sustain. The Zimbabwe We Want process could not include those who wished to align with the political system and wanted the *status quo* to be maintained on the one hand, and those and the radicalised Christians for whom activism was the only option for achieving change.

In this whole process evangelical Christians have played a very significant role. While maintaining their doctrinal distinctiveness, they chose to work with other branches of the Christian faith who shared the

same vision of a nation 'united in its diversity, free, tolerant, peaceful, and prosperous; a nation that respects the rights of all its citizens regardless of creed, gender, age, race and ethnicity' (EPIZ 2006:17). We always believed that this is not just the Zimbabwe We Want, but more importantly the Zimbabwe God wants.

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Bridging Faith and Advocacy: The Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and the Development of Integral Liberation Theory (2005-2020)

USENI SIBANDA AND TRAVOR MURAI

Introduction

This chapter employs Liberation Theology (LibThe) as a theoretical lens to explore the role of the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) in addressing Zimbabwe's governance crisis between 2005 and 2020. The ZCA, initially conceived as a loosely structured faith-based movement, has evolved into a civil society organisation (CSO) operating at the intersection of religious and secular activism. Its formation was a response to governance challenges marked by electoral disputes, repression, and social injustice. In this chapter, we examine ZCA's advocacy efforts, particularly its leadership role in the Save Zimbabwe Campaign (SZC), and its contributions toward democratic reforms and fostering an engaged citizenry.

Liberation Theology offers a valuable framework for analysing the church's involvement in social justice movements (Boff and Boff 1987). It emphasises the need for religious belief to inspire concrete actions against injustice, aligning the church with marginalised communities and confronting oppressive systems (Diko 2024; Alston 2023). We position ZCA as a case study of this theology in action, focusing on how it applied faith-based advocacy to pursue political and social transformation in Zimbabwe. The organisation's mission reflects key LibThe tenets by

championing the rights of the oppressed and seeking spiritual, social, and political liberation. ZCA's engagement with the SZC – a coalition of churches, civil society organisations, human rights advocates, and trade unions – demonstrated how ecumenical efforts could promote democratic governance and human dignity through collective action.

The chapter further explores how ZCA navigated the tension between being a prophetic voice challenging state power and maintaining non-confrontational ecumenical dialogue. This balancing act has proven difficult, as religious bodies in Zimbabwe often face criticism for their involvement in politics. Church leaders who engage in governance matters risk being labelled as confrontational 'noise makers,' while those who avoid activism are seen as complicit in state repression. ZCA's strategy, rooted in LibThe, sought to avoid such binary traps, advocating for both spiritual renewal and democratic reforms without becoming an extension of political parties.

The governance crisis in Zimbabwe – characterised by recurring electoral disputes, political repression, and economic collapse – created a complex environment for religious-political activism. Elections in 2008 and 2018, tainted by violence and allegations of fraud, illustrate the contested political terrain within which ZCA operated (Siachiwena and Saunders 2021). The government's crackdowns on dissent and control over public institutions restricted political pluralism, suppressing civil society and limiting citizens' ability to challenge state power (Bratton 2022; Marjoke and Gukurume 2023). Against this backdrop, ZCA emerged not only as a critic of authoritarian governance but also as a mediator between the state and society, advocating for a prophetic church and active citizenry.

While ZCA's approach earned praise for bridging the gap between the church and civil society, it also attracted criticism. Some scholars, such as Tarusarira (2016), argued that ZCA's activism leaned too heavily into political advocacy, risking partisanship and compromising the church's objectivity. This critique aligns with broader concerns about the limitations of Liberation Theology, which has been criticised for neglecting personal spirituality, creating internal church conflict, and having limited applicability beyond contexts of oppression.

These criticisms prompted our efforts to refine LibThe, leading to the development of Integral Liberation Theory (ILT) – a revised framework that draws insights from Ecclesial Mediation Theory, Critical Realism, and Moral and Ethical Theology. Ecclesial Mediation Theory encourages

dialogue and negotiation within the church to resolve internal conflicts (Greggs 2014, Fisher 2013), while Critical Realism expands the analysis of social structures beyond overt oppression (Monaghan 2024, Zhang 2024). Moral and Ethical Theology emphasises personal moral responsibility (Long 2007), complementing the collective orientation of traditional LibThe. ILT, as outlined in later sections, seeks to integrate personal spirituality, social justice, and sustainable development. It reflects ZCA's recognition of the importance of balancing pastoral care with political engagement, maintaining ethical distance from political actors, and fostering institutional resilience to remain relevant and effective in advancing social transformation.

This chapter's argument is anchored in the belief that ZCA's experience offers valuable lessons for future ecumenical efforts in Zimbabwe, particularly as the country prepares for the 2028 elections. The organisation's ability to integrate theological reflection with political activism highlights the potential for religious movements to advance democratic governance without seeking political power. However, we also reflect on the challenges ZCA faced, both internally and externally. Internally, the organisation grappled with a transition from a social movement to an NGO, limited resources, and tensions within the broader ecumenical community. Externally, it contended with government repression, media suppression, and efforts to delegitimise its work by framing it as political interference.

This chapter contributes to the discourse on the intersection of religion, politics, and democracy by illuminating how ZCA sought to mediate between the competing demands of faith and activism. It situates ZCA's activism within Zimbabwe's post-independence governance history, marked by recurring cycles of political repression, economic turmoil, and contested elections (Bratton 2022; Noyes 2020). As the church continues to navigate these complexities, the lessons from ZCA's journey remain relevant, offering insights into how religious movements can foster social justice and democratic renewal.

Through this analysis, we argue for a nuanced LibThe model that is better suited to Zimbabwe's evolving political landscape – one that incorporates the insights from Ecclesial Mediation Theory, Critical Realism, and Moral and Ethical Theology. This recalibrated framework can guide future ecumenical efforts as Zimbabwe confronts ongoing governance challenges and prepares for elections in 2028. Our exploration of ZCA's formation, strategies, and challenges underscores the critical

role religious organisations play in building resilient communities and advocating for democratic reforms in repressive contexts.

Liberation Theology: tenets and contextualisation

Liberation Theology provides a valuable lens for understanding how faith-based movements engage with social justice, political reform, and human dignity, making it an essential framework for analysing the ZCA role in addressing governance crises. Originating in Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s, LibThe emerged as a response to systemic oppression, advocating for the alignment of faith with activism to dismantle social injustices (Boff and Boff 1987). Its focus on collective liberation, preferential treatment of the poor, and the prophetic role of the church resonates deeply with the historical realities of post-colonial African states, including Zimbabwe (Buffel 2015). Across the continent, where economic inequality, repression, and contested governance prevail, LibThe offers a theological justification for religious institutions to challenge oppressive structures (Nwadiakor and Nweke 2013).

In Zimbabwe's context, ZCA draws directly from LibThe's core tenets to advocate for political and social transformation. The concept of the 'preferential option for the poor' underpins ZCA's alignment with marginalised communities severely affected by economic collapse and political repression, especially during the period from 2005 to 2018. By engaging in advocacy efforts that extended beyond spiritual revival to encompass governance and human rights, ZCA positioned itself as an active player in addressing Zimbabwe's structural challenges. This activism is exemplified through its leadership in the SZC, where it coalesced with CSOs, unions, and residents' associations to demand electoral reforms, justice, and democratic accountability. ZCA's involvement was pivotal in pushing for a Government of National Unity (GNU) and influencing the adoption of Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution, reflecting LibThe's call for solidarity and systemic change.

A key element of ZCA's praxis was the exercise of the church's prophetic voice, where clergy and church leaders assumed the dual role of moral arbiters and social activists. In alignment with LibThe's principles, ZCA held the state accountable for systemic failures, amplifying the voices of those excluded from political processes. This prophetic stance enabled ZCA to build partnerships across secular and religious sectors, bridging gaps between religious institutions, grassroots movements, and political actors. However, ZCA's activism also revealed the tensions inherent

in LibThe. The organisation's involvement in political negotiations, particularly through its engagement with the GNU, raised concerns about maintaining institutional integrity and non-partisanship. Some critics, such as Tarusarira (2016), cautioned against the risk of over-politicisation and co-option, highlighting the need for faith-based movements to strike a delicate balance between advocacy and spiritual identity.

While LibThe provided the initial framework for ZCA's engagement with governance issues, the limitations it encountered – such as perceptions about partisanship and the challenges of remaining relevant amidst political turbulence – necessitate the integration of complementary theoretical perspectives. To address these limitations, we draw from Ecclesial Mediation Theory, Critical Realism, and Moral and Ethical Theology later in this chapter. These perspectives offer pathways for faith-based movements to navigate complex political environments while maintaining institutional coherence. For example, Ecclesial Mediation Theory emphasises dialogue and negotiation, enabling religious organisations to mediate between conflicting interests without compromising their core values (Greggs 2014, Fisher 2013). Critical Realism broadens the analytical scope beyond oppression, considering nuanced power dynamics (Monaghan 2024, Zhang 2024), while Moral and Ethical Theology adds an emphasis on individual conversion and moral responsibility, complementing LibThe's collective approach to social change (Long 2007).

As Zimbabwe prepares for the 2028 elections, faith-based organisations like ZCA must reflect on their past experiences and adopt a more nuanced approach that balances activism with sustainable development and spirituality. This approach ensures that their engagement with governance issues not only addresses immediate crises but also fosters long-term societal well-being. We are of the firm belief that by integrating activism with theological principles and remaining vigilant against the risks of partisanship, ZCA can continue to contribute meaningfully to democratic governance and social transformation. Through this framework, the church can reaffirm its transformative role in both spiritual and socio-political realms, offering a model for religious-political activism in Zimbabwe and beyond.

The formation and genesis of the ZCA

The ZCA was established in 2005 during a turbulent period in Zimbabwe's governance. The governance crisis that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s placed immense pressure on the church's role as a moral

compass. Historically, Zimbabwe's mainline churches had demonstrated a strong public and prophetic voice, denouncing colonial and neo-colonial injustices, Gukurahundi atrocities, and post-independence repression. In the post-independence period these included the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), and Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ).

However, by the time Operation Murambatsvina, also known as Operation Restore Order, was launched in 2005, these bodies had adopted a quieter, more diplomatic stance that appeared complicit, or at least unresponsive, to state abuses (Tarusarira 2013; Dombo 2014). While these umbrella church organisations adopted a cautious approach toward political engagement, ZCA took a more activist stance, prioritising direct advocacy. The absence of a bold, public outcry during this crisis created a vacuum that ZCA emerged to fill. The organisation became a bridge between established church bodies – including the ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC – and a growing network of CSOs.

The government's demolition of urban informal settlements and small businesses under Operation Murambatsvina displaced nearly half a million people, triggering a humanitarian disaster (Benyera and Nyere 2015; Bratton and Masunungure 2007). Faced with mass displacement, churches became places of refuge, forcing religious institutions to confront the immediate needs of affected communities. This crisis exposed the inadequacies of existing church bodies in addressing both the humanitarian fallout and broader governance issues. While the mainstream churches had previously been vocal in opposing injustices, their uncharacteristic silence during Murambatsvina raised critical questions about whether they had been co-opted by the state or whether they could still maintain their prophetic mission (Chitando 2013).

ZCA was born out of the frustration felt by non-conformist church leaders who believed that the established churches had failed to respond adequately to the humanitarian and governance crises. Inspired by LibThe and influenced by the teachings of figures like Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King Jr., these leaders sought to revive the church's prophetic role by forming a movement that could advocate boldly for justice. LibThe, as highlighted above, emphasises the church's obligation to challenge oppressive systems and uplift the marginalised, making it a fitting foundation for ZCA's mission to resist state co-optation and speak truth to power.

Central to ZCA's philosophy was the belief that all people, created in the image of God, possess inalienable rights – including the right to participate in political decisions. This belief reinforced ZCA's mission to advocate for marginalised communities, particularly those affected by state repression and socio-economic exclusion. During Zimbabwe's governance crisis, marked by Operation Murambatsvina and escalating human rights abuses, ZCA leaders actively engaged with opposition members, labour unions, and grassroots organisations to confront injustice. The organisation's advocacy was grounded in a prophetic mandate to 'speak truth to power,' challenging the ruling ZANU-PF government's policies and amplifying the voices of the disenfranchised. As scholars such as Chitando (2013) and Tarusarira (2016) argue, moments of national crisis demand the church's involvement as a prophetic and transformational force.

The formation of ZCA also reflected broader societal dynamics. In the early 2000s, grassroots movements such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) had mobilised for a new constitution to address structural injustices in Zimbabwe. ZCA shared this vision for systemic change, seeing the governance crisis not merely as a political failure but as symptomatic of deeper institutional problems. The alliance aimed to mobilise civil society, including churches, to advocate for justice and reform.

ZCA emerged as a decentralised, faith-based social movement composed of pastors and lay leaders from various denominations. These individuals leveraged their personal and institutional resources to support the movement's activities, initially operating with minimal formal structures. This flexibility enabled ZCA to respond swiftly to crises and connect with grassroots groups. Collaboration with organisations such as the Churches in Manicaland, Ecumenical Support Services and the National Pastors Forum allowed ZCA to amplify the voices of the marginalised (Dombo 2014). Prominent figures, including Archbishop Pius Ncube, also provided critical support by speaking out against injustices and reinforcing the alliance's prophetic agenda.

However, the formation of ZCA did not occur without resistance. Mainline church bodies, such as ZCBC, EFZ, and ZCC, viewed ZCA's activism with scepticism, especially given its perceived confrontational approach toward the state. In 2006, these mother bodies launched *The Zimbabwe We Want* (ZWW) initiative, which sought to address the national crisis through dialogue with the government. Although the

ZWW document initially aimed to foster democratic space, critics argued that it ultimately reinforced the *status quo* by aligning with President Mugabe's rhetoric (Love and Vezha 2009). The emphasis on a spiritual crisis and collective responsibility obscured government accountability for the nation's problems and marginalised political opposition as a path to change.

The divergence between ZCA and the mainline church bodies reflected different strategic approaches. While ZCA pursued a non-conformist and advocacy-driven model, the mother bodies favoured dialogue and consensus-building with the state. Both strategies had their strengths and limitations: ZCA effectively mobilised grassroots voices and challenged state repression, but the mainline churches sought to promote national unity and stability through negotiation. However, critics of ZWW noted that this engagement with the government often resulted in the churches being co-opted, diluting their ability to speak out against injustices (Kadenge 2013).

As ZCA gained prominence, especially through its role in leading the SZC, tensions with the government intensified. The government responded harshly to ZCA's activism, perceiving the alliance as aligned with opposition movements. Key ZCA leaders, including Bishop Levee Kadenge and Revd Ancelmo Magaya, faced arrests, harassment, and death threats. This persecution underscored the risks involved in challenging the state but also cemented ZCA's position as a significant force for social justice in Zimbabwe.

The ZCA's early success in mobilising civil society attracted the attention of donors, who encouraged the movement to formalise its operations. By 2008, ZCA had begun to institutionalise by creating provincial hubs and appointing team leaders to coordinate activities. This process of NGOisation brought both opportunities and challenges. While formalisation enhanced accountability and sustainability, it also risked undermining the grassroots spontaneity that had initially defined the movement. ZCA's transition into a Trust by 2020 marked a pivotal moment, as the alliance sought to balance its prophetic mission with the demands of professionalisation.

ZCA's evolution highlights the complexities of faith-based activism in Zimbabwe's political landscape. The alliance sought not only to address immediate crises, such as Operation Murambatsvina, but also to tackle systemic governance issues at their roots. This involved advocating for

constitutional reform, challenging the role of the military and security forces in state repression, and fostering open dialogue on national transformation (ZCA Matopos Strategic Plan 2006).

While ZCA's approach emphasised direct tackling of oppressive systems, the mainline churches pursued reform through engagement with the state. Both strategies reflected valid responses to Zimbabwe's crisis, yet each faced limitation. The tension between maintaining a prophetic voice and avoiding co-option remains a recurring theme in Zimbabwe's religious and political spheres. For ZCA, the challenge is to sustain its grassroots activism while navigating the demands of institutionalisation and donor expectations.

In retrospect, the formation of ZCA underscores the need for a dual strategy: advocating for governance reform while inspiring transformation and vigilance within the church. We believed that these two objectives were interconnected, as a reawakened church could play a pivotal role in building a just and equitable Zimbabwe. Our journey has been one of balancing flexibility with structure, resistance with engagement, and prophetic witness with strategic pragmatism. As we continue this mission, we remain committed to amplifying marginalised voices, challenging oppressive systems, and fostering genuine transformation in Zimbabwe.

The ecumenical response: ZCA's role in church and society

The formation of the ZCA marked a turning point in Zimbabwe's ecumenical landscape, uniting Christian leaders and CSOs under a common cause of justice and governance reform. Its ideological foundation not only guided ZCA's efforts but also distinguished its approach within Zimbabwe's religious and political context. As an ecumenical platform, ZCA's strength lay in its ability to unite Christian voices for advocacy and human rights. This unity was further reinforced through collaborations with CSOs such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, the NCA, and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, among others. By forging alliances with these diverse actors, ZCA positioned itself as a key player in the broader movement for social justice and governance reform.

ZCA's commitment to non-violence further shaped its advocacy. Drawing inspiration from the teachings of King and Mahatma Gandhi, ZCA leaders underwent training in peaceful resistance methods, aligning their work with a missiological approach that framed the church as an agent of liberation. This orientation not only strengthened the movement's

resolve but also allowed it to navigate Zimbabwe's volatile political environment with a measure of restraint. ZCA's focus on peaceful advocacy exemplified the strategic shift among some sections of the church toward more assertive public engagement without compromising their spiritual integrity.

Despite its achievements, ZCA's activist approach was not without challenges. Its perceived 'alignment' with political opposition and anti-state civil society initiatives sparked tensions with more conservative elements within the mainline churches. These tensions reflected broader theological and political debates about the church's role in state affairs. While bodies like the ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC recognised the need to address social injustices, some leaders were cautious about overt political involvement, wary of state reprisals. ZCA, however, insisted that the church's role extended beyond spiritual care to include public advocacy for justice and good governance. This divergence highlighted the complexities of balancing the prophetic mission of the church with the risks of political activism in a highly polarised environment.

Ultimately, ZCA embodied a model of ecumenical engagement that redefined the role of the church in Zimbabwe's society. By uniting diverse Christian voices and collaborating with CSOs, the movement demonstrated how faith-based organisations could actively shape public discourse and promote social change. ZCA's legacy lies not only in its advocacy but also in the theological debates it sparked about the relationship between faith, politics, and social responsibility – a legacy that continues to influence Zimbabwe's church and society today.

This narrative situates ZCA as a dynamic ecumenical force, navigating the intersections of theology, activism, and public life. Through collaborative advocacy and prophetic witness, ZCA exemplifies how religious movements can inspire societal transformation even amid political repression.

The SZC: birth, evolution, and impact

The Save Zimbabwe Campaign emerged as a pivotal ecumenical initiative that united churches, CSOs, labour groups, youth, students, and opposition political parties to confront the escalating political and governance crisis in Zimbabwe. The ZCA played a central role in coordinating the campaign, capitalising on its religious legitimacy to operate under government restrictions that often stifled civil activities. While some argue that SZC was driven by opposition political forces (Mugochi 2018), from ZCA's

perspective, the campaign was primarily an ecumenical movement aiming to foster democratic reforms and resist political repression. ZCA's involvement also served to ensure that church leaders would refrain from pursuing political office, allowing them to function as neutral brokers.

The SZC aimed to unify diverse actors around two key objectives: ensuring free and fair elections in 2008 and ending political violence and repression. Its strategy focused on advocating for constitutional reforms, setting minimum electoral standards, and building regional and international support to pressure the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government to address the country's crises. The campaign's early activities kindled hope across civil society, uniting various groups – including both formations of the MDC – around shared goals for democratic reforms.

SZC's efforts unfolded in three distinct phases: the pre-March 11, 2007, phase, the March 11, 2007, event itself, and the post-2008 elections period. During its initial phase, SZC established a coherent organisational structure. The General Council, chaired by ZCA, functioned as the highest decision-making body, with leaders from CSOs and political parties participating. The executive arm, known as the Task Force, was also chaired by ZCA and divided into thematic working groups: Advocacy, Mass Mobilisation, Resource and Legal Mobilisation, Information, and Constitutional Reform. These structures operated under the principles outlined in the Zimbabwe Democracy Charter, a foundational document introduced at the campaign's 2006 launch.

The March 11, 2007, prayer rally marked a turning point for SZC. Organised to promote democratic reforms, the rally was violently disrupted by over 1,000 security personnel in Harare (Mugochi 2018; Wakatama 2006). Security forces killed two people, arrested more than 50 opposition activists, and subjected detainees—including Morgan Tsvangirai, Grace Kwinjeh, and Sekai Holland—to brutal torture. Despite suffering fractured bones and internal injuries, the activists were denied medical care and legal representation for days. The gruesome images of their injuries, which circulated widely, sparked international outrage and galvanised domestic support, shifting public opinion and mobilising broader resistance against government repression.

The violent crackdown at the prayer rally triggered swift regional intervention. Just three days later, on March 14, 2007, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) convened an emergency

meeting, where it initiated mediation efforts. At a summit held on March 31, 2007, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, SADC appointed then-South African President Thabo Mbeki as the chief mediator between Zimbabwe's political factions. This mediation was instrumental in facilitating the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in 2008, which laid the foundation for the GNU formed in 2009.

While SZC advocated for greater inclusion of CSOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the negotiations, these groups were largely excluded from the formal mediation process. ZCA leaders, such as Bishop Sebastian Bakare, functioned as intermediaries, but their role was limited to delivering messages between political leaders rather than participating directly in negotiations. Mbeki's mediation sidelined the churches and civil society, reflecting a broader tension between political actors and non-state stakeholders during the GNU negotiations.

The establishment of the GNU represented a critical achievement for SZC and its coalition. The power-sharing arrangement between ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions provided a temporary respite from political violence and created space for democratic reforms. The GNU oversaw the drafting of the 2013 Constitution, which introduced significant changes, including presidential term limits, expanded human rights protections, and the establishment of independent commissions such as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission.

However, the GNU period also exposed tensions within SZC. Following the signing of the GPA, political parties began withdrawing from the campaign as their focus shifted toward governance. The MDC factions, now part of the unity government, distanced themselves from SZC, leaving the campaign with diminished influence. Internal power struggles further weakened SZC, with Arthur Mutambara's MDC faction accusing the campaign of favouring Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T faction.

The alignment of civil society with opposition politics during the GNU period also compromised its independence and credibility (Masunungure 2014). Some organisations, such as the NCA, the ZCTU, and the Zimbabwe National Students Union, criticised the GNU and the constitution-making process, arguing that it lacked genuine public participation. Others chose to participate to maintain political relevance, creating divisions within civil society that persisted through the 2013 elections.

Despite these challenges, the SZC's advocacy efforts left a lasting

impact. The campaign played a key role in pressuring ZANU-PF to accept reforms, particularly during the GNU period. It successfully lobbied for the inclusion of presidential term limits, the creation of independent commissions, and the expansion of human rights protections in the 2013 Constitution. These achievements were crucial in reshaping Zimbabwe's political landscape, although the challenges of implementation and political backsliding remain.

In sum, the SZC was instrumental in catalysing significant political developments in Zimbabwe. Its activities, such as the March 11, 2007, rally, directly influenced regional mediation efforts and contributed to the formation of the GNU. The campaign's persistence in advocating for free and fair elections, constitutional reforms, and human rights protections helped shape the 2013 Constitution, marking an important step toward democratisation. However, the campaign also grappled with internal divisions and the shifting dynamics of political power during the GNU period, which ultimately limited its long-term influence.

The SZC's legacy lies in its role as a unifying force during a period of political upheaval and as a catalyst for democratic reforms that continue to shape Zimbabwe's governance framework today. It exemplifies how ecumenical collaboration can evolve into a powerful advocacy force, mobilising diverse constituencies to confront systemic injustice and demand accountability. Although the campaign faced internal power struggles and external resistance, its legacy lies in the groundwork it laid for governance reforms and its demonstration of the church's potential to contribute meaningfully to national discourse. The lessons from SZC's birth, evolution, and challenges remain relevant for ongoing efforts to foster democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe.

Post-SZC advocacy for democratic reforms

After the SZC concluded, the ZCA transitioned its efforts toward long-term democratic reforms. Despite the diminished visibility of the SZC following the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009, ZCA remained committed to promoting democratic governance, accountability, and human rights. However, this advocacy was not without challenges, as ZCA navigated both state opposition and internal tensions within church bodies.

Government officials framed ZCA's outspoken advocacy as political activism, branding it a destabilising force rather than a legitimate religious movement. As a result, some mainstream churches distanced themselves

from ZCA, criticising its perceived confrontational stance as inconsistent with a biblical mandate of peace. This narrative, fostered by both the state and compliant church actors, further isolated ZCA within the ecumenical space and diminished its influence.

Despite these obstacles, ZCA alongside other actors, remained a key player in Zimbabwe's constitutional reform efforts, especially during the drafting of the 2013 constitution. ZCA's advocacy was instrumental in the inclusion of presidential term limits – one of the most significant reforms aimed at preventing the entrenchment of power and promoting peaceful leadership transitions. Through grassroots mobilisation, community forums, and public discussions, ZCA educated citizens on the importance of these reforms, ensuring their participation in the constitution-making process. The organisation also engaged lawmakers, policymakers, and constitutional drafters, lobbying for the adoption of term limits to enhance accountability. Working alongside CSOs such as Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), ZCA built a broad coalition advocating for governance reforms, amplifying the public demand for greater executive oversight.

In addition to presidential term limits, ZCA together with other CSOs championed the inclusion of a comprehensive bill of rights in the new constitution. Drawing from its moral authority and vast networks, the organisation highlighted the importance of safeguarding civil, political, economic, and social rights. Through collaborative efforts with legal experts, activists, and other CSOs, ZCA advocated for the alignment of the bill of rights with international human rights standards. ZCA's contributions were central to ensuring that the constitution guaranteed fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association, alongside socio-economic rights, including the right to education, healthcare, and housing.

The inclusion of independent commissions under Chapter 12 of the constitution also reflected the influence of ZCA and other CSOs. ZCA was an active proponent of establishing accountability mechanisms like the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission. These institutions aimed to address historical injustices, foster sustainable peace, and promote reconciliation – objectives that aligned with ZCA's long-term vision for national healing and democratic governance. Through workshops, seminars, and community outreach programs, ZCA engaged citizens in these discussions, ensuring widespread awareness and support for these reforms.

The 2013 constitution was a milestone in Zimbabwe's democratic evolution, marking a shift toward more accountable governance. However, ZCA's advocacy efforts did not end with the constitution's adoption. The organisation continued to monitor governance challenges and human rights violations, using its platforms to hold leaders accountable. In the post-GNU period, ZCA actively engaged with new political realities, remaining vigilant against any backsliding on democratic principles. Its continued advocacy underscored the message that Zimbabwe's return to authoritarianism would face resistance from both civil society and the public.

ZCA's journey beyond SZC illustrates the complexities of balancing religious leadership with political activism in an authoritarian context. While state-sponsored narratives sought to undermine its efforts, ZCA persisted, contributing meaningfully to the establishment of democratic norms. Its work during the constitutional reform process, alongside collaborations with civil society and political actors, left a lasting legacy. These reforms—particularly the presidential term limits, the bill of rights, and independent commissions—signalled a crucial step toward building a more accountable and inclusive governance framework for Zimbabwe. Through these efforts, ZCA not only advanced democratic principles but also reaffirmed the church's prophetic role in advocating for justice, accountability, and human dignity.

Influencing the church: reawakening the prophetic role

ZCA sought not only to advocate for democratic reforms but also to transform the church into an initiative-taking agent of social change. At the heart of this transformation was the reawakening of the church's prophetic role – calling it to confront governance failures and injustice. Through workshops, public statements, and collaborative platforms, ZCA encouraged church leaders to engage with political and social issues in meaningful ways. This influence was particularly evident within the EFZ, which became more aligned with ZCA's advocacy for human rights and democracy. In contrast, the ZCC and the ZCBC initially adopted more cautious stances, preferring silent diplomacy over direct confrontation. However, ZCA's persistent advocacy pressured these umbrella bodies to reconsider their roles and gradually encouraged them to engage more actively in national issues.

While ZCA was instrumental in expanding the church's involvement in political and social matters, its efforts built upon a historical foundation.

As highlighted above, during Zimbabwe's early post-independence years, ZCC and ZCBC had previously taken prophetic positions on justice and governance. However, by the early 2000s, these institutions had retreated from such stances, becoming more hesitant to challenge the state. ZCA reignited this dormant prophetic voice, compelling the broader church to reclaim its role as a moral compass. In doing so, ZCA demonstrated that the church could neither remain silent nor allow itself to be co-opted by political interests in the face of injustice.

ZCA's influence inspired a new generation of outspoken church leaders, including figures like Bishop Ancelimo Magaya, Dr Raymond Motsi, and Bishop Patson Netha. These individuals became vocal advocates for social justice, addressing pressing national issues such as human rights abuses, political violence, land reform, and electoral fairness. Through these efforts, ZCA contributed to shaping a church that could independently engage with political realities and speak truth to power. This shift marked a departure from earlier tendencies within some church bodies to avoid conflict by adopting conciliatory approaches.

As political dynamics evolved after 2013, the main umbrella bodies – ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC – began to demonstrate greater assertiveness in their public engagements. Leadership changes within these organisations played a pivotal role in this transformation. Dr Kenneth Mtata at ZCC, Dr Shingi Munyeza at EFZ, and Archbishop Robert Ndlovu at ZCBC ushered in a more advocacy tone, aligning these bodies more closely with ZCA's prophetic approach. The pastoral letters issued by these organisations during this period reflected a renewed commitment to advocacy. Statements like *'God Hears the Cries of the Poor'* and *'The March Has Not Ended'* exemplified this shift, signalling the church's willingness to challenge the state openly.

The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCDD) further supported these efforts by defending the more forthright letters from ZCBC. This alignment strengthened the church's position as an independent moral authority, capable of holding the government accountable. ZCA's role in fostering this reawakening underscored the church's responsibility to engage with society's political and moral challenges, even when doing so came at a cost.

ZCA's efforts also demonstrated the tensions inherent in balancing pastoral care with political engagement. Some church leaders and institutions remained wary of embracing ZCA's non-conformist methods,

fearing that they could alienate congregants or jeopardise relationships with the state. However, ZCA maintained that speaking truth to power was an essential aspect of the church's mission, particularly in an oppressive political environment. Arrests of ZCA activists highlighted the cost of prophetic witness but also reinforced the importance of the church's role in holding oppressive regimes accountable.

Ultimately, ZCA's work redefined the church's role in Zimbabwe's governance landscape. It catalysed a shift from silent diplomacy to bold advocacy, reasserting the church's prophetic mandate to promote justice and accountability. This transformation not only influenced national discourse but also positioned the church as a critical actor in building a more just and democratic society. Through this journey, ZCA affirmed that the prophetic role of the church is not merely about offering spiritual guidance but about being an active force for social change.

Remodelling LibThe: Integral Liberation Theory

Drawing on the ZCA's experience, we propose Integral Liberation Theology (ILT) – a revised LibThe framework that addresses the complexities of contemporary governance crises and the evolving role of the church in advocacy. While traditional LibThe, rooted in Latin American church experiences (Boff and Boff 1987), provided a valuable foundation for social justice movements, its application in Zimbabwe's context exposed limitations. ZCA's journey – particularly during the SZC – highlights both the strengths and constraints of traditional LibThe. ZCA's experience provides new insights into how churches can adapt their prophetic role amid political co-option, violence, and changing ecumenical dynamics.

To remain relevant, LibThe must evolve by integrating lessons from ZCA's journey with contemporary frameworks, including Public Theology, Neo-Weberian Institutional Theory, Moral and Ethical Theology, Ecclesial Mediation Theory, and Integral Human Development (IHD). This reimagined theology moves beyond rigid activism to address personal spirituality, institutional renewal, and sustainable development.

Traditional LibThe focuses on confronting oppressive systems and advocating for structural reforms. ZCA aligned with these principles through bold governance reform efforts, involvement in the GPA leading to the GNU, and pressuring churches to engage with justice issues. However, intense activism often created perceptions of overshadowed pastoral care, creating tensions between advocacy and the church's spiritual mission. Some leaders resisted ZCA's non-conformist approach,

preferring traditional pastoral roles focused on spiritual guidance.

Public Theology provides a way to balance these tensions, emphasising that churches can engage public issues without compromising their spiritual mission (Frame 2010). A revised ILT integrates both advocacy and pastoral care, ensuring the church remains a source of spiritual nourishment while speaking truth to power. It recognises that liberation requires both systemic change and personal faith development, aligning activism with congregants' individual journeys.

ZCA's involvement with the MDC-T and engagement in GNU negotiations revealed the risks of partisanship. While ZCA pursued non-partisan democratic reforms, perceived close political associations jeopardised its neutrality and credibility. Neo-Weberian Institutional Theory emphasises the need for critical distance from political actors to maintain legitimacy (Bouckaer 2024). ILT reflects this insight, requiring the church to preserve its moral independence, avoiding political co-option while engaging constructively with governance reforms.

ZCA's ability to influence umbrella bodies such as ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC demonstrates that effective advocacy requires institutional autonomy. This revised theology ensures the church remains a principled, non-partisan advocate, speaking truth to power regardless of political alliances.

Traditional LibThe's focus on structural change created perceptions of neglect of individual spirituality, creating internal tensions within ZCA. Some leaders prioritised political activism, while others defended the church's pastoral role, weakening the alliance's unity during critical moments like the GNU period. Moral and Ethical Theology bridges this divide by promoting both personal moral responsibility and social justice (Long 2007). ILT recognises that true liberation involves not only collective change but also individual transformation through ethical behavior and spiritual growth.

ZCA's work exposed tensions between advocates of bold political engagement and those favouring caution. These divisions, exacerbated during the GNU period, illustrate the limitations of traditional LibThe's confrontational stance. Ecclesial Mediation Theory offers a solution, emphasising the importance of fostering dialogue and negotiation within church institutions (Greggs 2014, Fisher 2013). ILT integrates this approach, promoting internal cohesion and enabling diverse voices to coalesce around shared goals for justice and transformation.

While traditional LibThe focuses primarily on confronting oppression,

ZCA's journey shows the need to broaden the framework to address development challenges beyond political reform. Integral Human Development offers a more comprehensive approach to human flourishing, incorporating economic, social, spiritual, and environmental dimensions (McGreevy 2021). ZCA's advocacy evolved to address issues such as electoral fairness, land reform, and human rights, but ILT emphasises that sustainable societal well-being requires a long-term focus on development and community resilience.

Tenets of Integral Liberation Theology

1. Adaptive Prophetic Witness

The church's prophetic role must remain flexible, responding to political shifts. ZCA's evolution from the SZC into a broader advocacy network illustrates the need for agility in liberation movements. ILT rejects rigid opposition, advocating for dynamic strategies that adapt to changing conditions.

2. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

ZCA's partnerships with (CSO) like the grassroots movements such as WOZA highlight the importance of collaboration. Effective liberation work requires building coalitions across sectors to amplify voices and drive democratic reforms.

3. Navigating State Co-option and Internal Divisions

Liberation efforts must anticipate attempts by the state to co-opt church initiatives or sow divisions within religious bodies. ZCA's influence over the ZCC, EFZ, and ZCBC demonstrates the importance of internal renewal and unity in resisting fragmentation and maintaining advocacy momentum.

4. Balancing Pastoral Care with Political Engagement

ILT recognises that pastoral care and political advocacy are not mutually exclusive. Churches must engage in

advocacy for human rights and justice – such as ZCA’s efforts in the 2013 constitutional reforms – while providing spiritual guidance to their congregants.

5. A Pragmatic Option for the Marginalised

ZCA’s advocacy extended beyond traditional liberation themes to address systemic governance issues like presidential term limits and political accountability. ILT emphasises that liberation must engage with governance structures to build lasting peace and justice.

6. Institutional Resilience and Leadership Renewal

Sustainable liberation requires institutional resilience and leadership renewal. Leadership transitions within the ZCC and EFZ, reflected in the confrontational approaches of figures like Dr. Kenneth Mtata and Dr. Shingi Munyeza, highlights the importance of renewing leadership to sustain advocacy efforts.

7. Liberation through Ethical Distance

Maintaining ethical distance from political power ensures the church retains its prophetic voice. ZCA’s ability to speak independently underscores the importance of safeguarding moral authority.

The ZCA experience enriches traditional LibThe by demonstrating that modern liberation requires sustained engagement with governance structures. It emphasises ecumenical collaboration, showing that churches are most effective when united across denominations despite initial differences. ZCA also highlights that liberation is a continuous process—requiring churches to periodically reinvent themselves to remain relevant.

Furthermore, ZCA’s struggle against state co-option teaches that liberation movements must guard against being subsumed by political interests. Finally, ILT expands the scope of liberation theology to address gendered injustices and human rights, promoting inclusive advocacy through partnerships with groups like WOZA.

ILT offers a more nuanced framework for liberation by addressing the limitations of traditional LibThe. It balances prophetic witness with pastoral

care, maintains non-partisan moral authority, fosters multi-stakeholder collaboration, and integrates long-term development goals. Rooted in the ZCA experience, ILT positions the church as both a prophetic voice and a strategic partner in the ongoing struggle for justice, accountability, and sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The ZCA exemplifies the critical role churches can play in addressing governance crises by balancing prophetic witness, advocacy, and institutional renewal. From 2005 to 2018, ZCA emerged as a formidable force, championing democratic reforms, human rights, and social justice. Through the SZC, ZCA exerted pressure for political change, contributing to the formation of the GNU and the adoption of the 2013 constitution. Notable achievements included advocating for presidential term limits, a bill of rights, and independent commissions to safeguard democracy.

Beyond political reform, ZCA redefined the church's role by rekindling its prophetic mission, moving the church from a position of institutional complacency to active engagement with public issues. This shift enabled the church to speak truth to power while resisting political co-option, maintaining critical distance from political actors. ZCA's ability to engage with ecumenical bodies, such as ZCC and EFZ demonstrates that effective liberation efforts require broad-based collaboration across diverse religious and CSOs.

This chapter introduces ILT as a revised framework, drawing lessons from ZCA's journey. ILT offers a more holistic approach to liberation by integrating personal spirituality, social justice, and sustainable development. It recognises the importance of balancing pastoral care with political advocacy, promoting ethical distance from political actors, and fostering institutional resilience. Through ILT, liberation becomes an ongoing process that adapts to shifting socio-political contexts, encouraging churches to engage in nation-building while maintaining their spiritual mandate.

Looking ahead, the ZCA experience provides valuable insights for future governance challenges, including the 2028 elections. The SZC model offers a blueprint for forming broad coalitions focused on promoting electoral fairness, conflict resolution, and governance reforms – without seeking political office. Such an approach ensures that the church remains an independent moral force, advancing democratic principles and national stability. ILT positions the church not only as a reactive voice against

oppression but as an initiative-taking agent of transformation, fostering community resilience and long-term human flourishing.

Through the lens of ILT, churches can continue to evolve as dynamic institutions—flexible enough to respond to emerging challenges yet grounded in their core mission. This framework ensures that the prophetic voice remains relevant in today’s complex world, empowering churches to function as catalysts for justice, peace, and sustainable development.

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Navigating the Transition

Zimbabwean Churches and the Global Political Agreement 2008-13

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Introduction

The negotiation and implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) from 2008 to 2013 in the face of an escalating political crisis confronted Christian denominations of Zimbabwe and faith-based networks with new, yet familiar, strategic challenges: how to engage and work with the political parties, external mediation, unity government, transitional programmes, secular civil society organisations (CSOs) and other churches. This chapter examines the ways in which Christian denominations and networks sought to navigate these strategic challenges.

The GPA process

In the wake of a decade-long multifaceted crisis and a violent police crackdown on opposition leaders in 2007, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mandated South African President Thabo Mbeki to broker talks over early elections between the governing Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the main formation of the Movement for Democratic Change of Morgan Tsvangirai

(MDC-T), and the breakaway party led by Arthur Mutambara and Welshman Ncube (here MDC-N). After a surprise victory by the opposition in the unprecedentedly fair 2008 parliamentary elections, the military, veterans and youth militias orchestrated a campaign of violence and intimidation during the presidential run-off. This intense brutality forced Tsvangirai to withdraw from the run-off elections, allowing President Mugabe to claim victory and be hastily sworn in. The African Union (AU) and SADC, however, rejected the outcome of the vote, and mandated the South African facilitation team to broker an agreement to install a transitional power-sharing government pending new elections (Aeby 2017, 272; Masunungure 2009; Raftopoulos 2009, 227-32).

The painstakingly negotiated GPA comprised a range of standard components of Comprehensive Peace Agreements (CPA) that are hoped to enable a simultaneous transition to both peace and democracy in societies that are affected by violent intrastate conflicts in accordance with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm (Mac Ginty, Joshi, and Lee 2019). The GPA established a framework for such a 'post-conflict transition' by providing for an interim power-sharing executive, a constitution-making process, democratic, economic, land, social and security reforms, a national healing programme, an implementation monitoring mechanism, and transitional elections at the end of an interregnum (GPA 2008).

Whereas the Inclusive Government completed a full term of office despite constant tension, the GPA was only implemented in part and produced mixed outcomes. The GPA process succeeded in easing political tensions, producing a new constitution, establishing a level of economic stability, and restoring social services. However, democratic and security sector reforms as well as a transitional justice and reconciliation programme that would be required to set Zimbabwe on a path towards peace, stability and democracy in the long run were not implemented. In 2013, the transition culminated in another disputed election, which ZANU-PF won in a landslide. It was followed by a renewed economic demise and political upheavals (Aeby 2021b, 690-94).

Churches in the GPA process

In the GPA negotiations, the three political parties and SADC mediation excluded societal stakeholders. The implementation of transitional mechanisms and reforms during the interregnum was dominated by the power-sharing executive and parties (Aeby 2016a: 724; Hoekman 2013: 904). The Zimbabwean churches, affiliated faith-based non-governmental

organisations (NGOs), and an array of secular CSOs nevertheless sought to engage the political protagonists and seize the limited opportunities the GPA process provided to further their respective agendas, which included promoting peace, social justice and / or democracy, amongst others (Aeby 2016b: 112–49; Chiroro 2013: 117; Chitando and Togarasei 2010; McCandless 2012).

The negotiation and implementation of the GPA required the Zimbabwean churches to navigate several strategic challenges and dilemmas. Whereas some of the former had already emerged in the crisis period, others were specific to the power-sharing arrangement: How should the churches engage the political parties, Inclusive Government and SADC? Should the churches embrace flawed transitional mechanisms and participate in highly politicised and manipulated programmes for institutional reform and national healing? How should the churches relate to CSO that coalesced around competing political agendas and with one another to further their objectives?

Research objectives, methods and scope

The objective of this chapter is to analyse how Zimbabwean churches navigated these strategic challenges during the GPA process. More specifically, it examines the approaches chosen by the major Christian umbrella organisations and networks vis-à-vis the three GPA parties, the power-sharing executive, SADC facilitation and the principal transitional mechanisms. Furthermore, we seek to assess the viability of these strategic choices and draw lessons for potential future transitions.

We consider the role of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), their joint platform of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) in the period between the 2008 and 2013 general elections. The study is based on a secondary analysis of 63 semi-structured key-informant interviews with representatives of the religious organisations, GPA parties, transitional mechanisms, CSOs and experts, which we conducted as part of a PhD project in 2013 and in subsequent studies. Additional sources include publications by the mentioned organisations, government and SADC, as well as secondary literature.

The following sections (1) contextualise the churches' engagement in

the GPA process and discuss (2) their role in the negotiations, (3) relations with the GPA parties and Inclusive Government, and (4) participation in transitional mechanisms. The study concludes by assessing the viability of the churches' strategies vis-à-vis the GPA process and draws lesson for prospective transitions.

Key findings and argument

We argue that by maintaining a neutral stance vis-à-vis the political parties and engaging them on an equitable basis, the major denominations and ZHOCD pursued the only feasible strategy to play a credible mediation role, retain access to rival political leaders, ease polarisation and prevent a schism within Christian umbrella organisations. This was, of course, fully in line with their past practice and allowed them to tread a well-worn path, recycling established dictums and pieties, and surprising no one. The formation of the Inclusive Government greatly facilitated churches' relations with all parties and government as they could address appeals and criticism to the power-sharing executive without appearing to take sides, which must have been a great relief to all concerned (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Tsvakai 2013; Zwana 2013).

Churches and secular CSOs encountered a further strategic dilemma when deciding how to engage with the GPA's deeply flawed transitional mechanisms. Faith-based NGOs embraced the limited opportunities for institutional reform and participating in the constitution-making process and official Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) (Aeby 2016a; Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Sibanda 2013). The experience of the state-controlled ONHRI, Church and Civil Society Forum (CCSF) and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, which resulted from the GPA process and was thwarted by government, suggests that in future churches and secular CSOs must claim leadership in a prospective national healing process to achieve meaningful advances towards truth-telling, transitional justice and reconciliation (Chiradza 2022; Chiromba 2013; Zwana 2013; Shana 2013; Eppel 2020; 2013; Respondent 19 2022).

Our research further suggests that rather than seeking an external intervention to resolve the enduring political crisis in Zimbabwe, Christian leaders should marshal their own resources to provide leadership. Even though the ZHOCD was in a strong position going into the 2008 crisis, because they already engaged the South African SADC facilitators behind

the scenes, they were nonetheless sidelined (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Sibanda 2013). SADC's approach to the GPA was shaped by the enduring political logic of liberation movement solidarity, which trumped the voices of Zimbabwe's church and civil society leadership (Aeby 2016a; 2017; Nathan 2012: 1-20; Raftopoulos 2013). As a result, we suggest that rather than risk a future SADC-facilitated transition inevitably run by the same logic, Church leaders build peace-making capacity through the ecumenical platform, and explore possibilities to facilitate an internal national dialogue, i.e. a national convention that sets the ground for a consensual transition analogous to the dialogue led by the Lesotho Council of Churches (Motsamai 2018).

Churches and church organisations in Zimbabwe's politics

Zimbabwean churches in politics: mediators and moderators

Political crises in independent Zimbabwe have repeatedly created moments where Zimbabwe's clergy is forced to the forefront to articulate 'apolitical' ideals and seek to mediate between competing political visions. Churches are expected – or feel compelled – to take up these roles not simply because of the importance given to religion in Zimbabwean society. The theological, material and structural context in which they operate further shapes their distinctive approach. Although certain churches or denominations have been perceived to have 'leanings' towards certain theological or political orientations, Church membership remains one of the few social cleavages in Zimbabwean society which, to a large extent, cuts across class, ethnicity and political affiliation. As such, church leaderships have long felt compelled to seek 'unity' and 'tolerance' within their own congregations as well as between political groupings (Dorman 2001). Colonial-era norms of churches as supposedly 'apolitical' continue to dominate. Church leadership did benefit from limited autonomy from the state, which has tended to protect them from state hostility, enabling them to articulate pleas for peaceful political engagement, without fear of repercussions, but preventing most from becoming overtly partisan or critical. Their international ties have also sometimes given them financial support and pushed them to engage with political elites. But church leaders and organisations have tended to identify theological approaches to navigating the post-colonial state which emphasise treading a careful path between polarised political encampments, while calling for peace and mediation.

Post-2000 Polarisation: impact on the Churches

As politics became increasingly polarised in the post-2000 period, high-level battles took place for control of the leadership of denominations, especially in the Anglican church. To their credit, the ZCC, ZCBC and EFZ leadership attempted to rise above this mudslinging, but instead became embroiled in futile attempts to mediate between the MDC and ZANU-PF (Dorman 2016: 178-9). These three big organisations also came together to write ‘The Zimbabwe We Want’ a 55-page document which reads more like a consultancy report than a declaration of faith. It was described as an ‘important stage in the church’s participation in political affairs’ and continued to be cited as reference document within the churches (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011: 94-5, Ngwenya 2007: 49). Yet its political impact was limited – perhaps in part because of allegations that it was altered to make it more acceptable to ZANU-PF (Gokova 2010 104-111). The document itself moves awkwardly between pious statements, urgent exhortations, and technical analysis. On some level, this document encapsulates all the ambiguities and uncertainties of Zimbabwe’s church-state dialogue. Chitando and Manyonganise capture something of this unease when they note that to avoid accusations of ‘dabbling in politics’ the paper is framed as a discussion document. The fact that this needed to be said – and doubtless they are correct in saying it – pinpoints exactly how the church was sidelined, made to feel an unwelcome contributor – like a child who dares approach the adults table and demand an equal portion.

Meanwhile, change was taking hold at the grassroots. Just as the crises of the 2000s transformed Zimbabwe’s political landscape, they also changed the opportunities and expectations of Zimbabwe’s church people. In many cases, the latter found themselves ‘the only ones to pick up the pieces following incidents of violence’ Chitando and Manyonganise 2011: 78). The experience of state-led violence at the local level – farm invasions and urban clearances – led them to fundamentally question their role and responsibilities (Ngwenya 2007). In October 2005, Pastor Ray Motsi suggested that Operation Murambatsvina had created ‘A redefinition of the role of the church in Zimbabwe – a call for the church to be more engaged with the community, to reject the “Christian missionary mentality” in which politics was a no-go zone.’ This then was also a period in which alternative church institutions sprang up. The churches in Manicaland, for example, were deeply involved in providing shelter and food to victims of

political violence displaced during the elections and land invasions, while in Bulawayo churches organised broad ecumenical coalitions, which publicly condemned the violence (Dorman 2016: 179). The ZCA, launched in 2006, linked together a number of these smaller organisations. In a marked distinction from ecumenical efforts of the 1980s and 90s, many of those who joined these organisations were from smaller, charismatic and evangelical churches, often perceived as 'apolitical'. They were practical, on-the-ground responses to the lived reality of pastors encountering crisis on their doorsteps.

Save Zimbabwe and the 2008 election crisis

Despite their uneven response to the emerging crisis, Zimbabwe's churches came to play a significant role in the developments that provoked the SADC intervention and establishment of a power-sharing government. In 2006, space for civic organisations to organise protests and demonstrations was dramatically limited and political rallies banned, yet economic and political conditions on the ground were becoming increasingly difficult. The ZCA took on the leadership of the Save Zimbabwe campaign and organised mass prayer meetings to demand constitutional reform, the scrapping of repressive acts and an end to violence before the holding of early elections (Lewanika 2013; Sibanda 2013; Gokova 2019). These prayer meetings and vigils were met with arrests of church leaders and, most notoriously, beatings of political leaders who attended a March 2007 vigil (Zwana, 2019, Gokova 2019). As public outrage increased, church leaders were able to use an established platform, which linked NGOs, labour movements and the churches across SADC to call for support from the regional body.

As Chitando and Togarasei (2010: 155-60) observe, in the run-up to the June 2008 general elections, the ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ undertook efforts to diffuse political tensions. This came after the Christian denominations had already advocated peace and moderation in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2000 and 2002 respectively. The church bodies seconded monitors to observe the 2008 elections, but monitoring would become a major risk when political violence unfolded, and independent observers were accused by ZANU-PF of being puppets of the West.

After the MDC won the 2008 presidential elections and ZANU-PF unleashed a campaign of violence and intimidation ahead of the presidential run-off, the church leaders called for a culture of peace and tolerance and the respect of the sanctity of human life. The leaders of

the major denominations had previously used an extremely diplomatic approach towards the authoritarian regime, which alienated activists of the ZCA and Zimbabwe National Pastors' Conference (ZNPC). In the context of the 2008 election crisis, the leaders of the Christian denominations took off the gloves according to Chitando and Togaresei (2010: 158) and articulated candid critiques of the crisis of governance and moral leadership that engulfed the country. The ZCBC had already issued a pastoral letter prior to the elections that demanded morally legitimate political authority, denounced the use of violence, intimidation and oppression for political power, and expressed solidarity with citizens who voiced their justified grievances and demonstrated for their human rights during the post-election crisis.

As the post-election crisis unfolded, members of the major denominations and ZNPC provided humanitarian assistance to survivors of political violence. When offering assistance to survivors and, in particular, opposition supporters who sought refuge at the MDC-T headquarters at Harvest House in Harare, pastors risked being targeted by the violence-makers as the regime prevented the provision of humanitarian assistance (Chitando and Togaresei 2010: 157).

The churches in the GPA negotiations

The major Christian denominations had sought to mediate between the political parties since 1999 and promoted dialogue through the joint ZHOCD platform since 2005. Whilst these efforts were appreciated by the parties, both the major denominations and their joint platform lacked the institutional capacity and technical peace-making expertise to manage a high-level mediation process. Therefore, the ZHOCD liaised with Mbeki's facilitation team in the talks preceding the 2008 elections and deployed delegations to meet SADC leaders, whereby they advocated the formation of a Government of National Unity as the conditions for credible polls were not given (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013). The following discussion outlines the SADC-facilitated power-sharing talks, terms of the GPA, and the churches engagements with the facilitators and parties during the negotiations.

The SADC-facilitated power-sharing talks and the GPA's transition framework

Since the annual AU Assembly took place amidst Zimbabwe's post-electoral crisis, the AU rather than SADC mandated Mbeki to resume

the mediation and broker a power-sharing agreement that reflected the outcome of the parliamentary elections. However, as neither the AU nor SADC demanded that Mugabe resigned, the sponsors of the talks accepted ZANU-PF's grip on the presidency as a precondition for negotiations (AU 2008).

Although neither the MDC-T nor ZANU-PF was initially prepared to negotiate, the SADC facilitation team achieved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a first meeting of Mugabe and Tsvangirai on 21 July 2008¹ (Chikane 2014; Misihairabwi-Mushonga 2013; Mufamadi 2014; Muleya 2008; Tsvangirai 2013). In the MOU, ZANU-PF and the MDC formations agreed to form an Inclusive Government and resolve difference through dialogue, whereby SADC had the exclusive authority to mediate and guaranteed for the resultant agreement (SADC 2008). Whereas transitional justice, accountability for violence and security sector transformation were among the most controversial agenda items, the structure of the power-sharing executive was the crux to reaching an agreement (Misihairabwi-Mushonga 2013; Mufamadi 2014; Mutambara 2019; Tsvangirai 2013). A marathon meeting with Mbeki brought the breakthrough as the parties agreed to introduce the office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers alongside the existing Presidency and Cabinet (GPA 2008 Art XX; Chikane 2014; Tsvangirai 2013).

The GPA established a comprehensive transition framework without detailing the design of transitional mechanisms. Its power-sharing provisions were introduced into an interim constitution, while reform plans were solely contained in the agreement between political parties and, thus, hard to enforce (GPA 2008, Art XXII). The GPA signatories pledged to desist from violence and hate speech and hold perpetrators accountable if prosecutors found evidence. A Constitution Parliamentary Committee (COPAC) was tasked to lead a constitution-making process, and electoral and media reforms should level the playing field (GPA 2008 Art VI - XVIII). Whilst the GPA provided for an ONHRI to promote reconciliation, the interim constitution established the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (Austin 2013; Mzila-Ndlovu 2013). The Inclusive Government was obliged to ensure that security forces operated in a non-partisan manner. It would rebuild the economy, conduct a land audit and reform that Britain should finance, and work towards international

1 Muleya, Dumisani (2008) 'New Dawn in Zimbabwe as Mugabe Accepts Deal'. *Business Day*, 22 July 2008.

engagement and the lifting of Western sanctions. A tripartite Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) should monitor and facilitate implementation, verify compliance, and resolve disputes (GPA 2008, Art VI-XVIII). The agreement, although thin in detail, hence, bore a chance to address major conflict drivers (Aeby 2016b: 243-52).

Since the GPA did not allocate ministerial portfolios, the power-sharing negotiations continued for five months amidst a humanitarian crisis. A breakthrough was reached at an Extraordinary SADC Summit in Pretoria in January 2009. To reach an agreement, ZANU-PF relinquished the finance portfolio, and the MDC-T agreed to co-govern the Ministry of Home Affairs after the SADC Chair, South African Interim President Kgalema Motlanthe, convinced Tsvangirai to seek democratic change from within the Inclusive Government (Aeby 2017: 276; Tsvangirai 2013).

Churches' engagements with the SADC facilitation and negotiating parties

Although churches and secular CSOs appealed for an inclusive dialogue, civil society actors and fringe parties, were, with a few exceptions, almost completely excluded from the power-sharing negotiations that took place behind closed doors (Dabengwa 2013; Chiromba 2013; Makoni 2013; Shana 2013; Williams 2013). According to Frank Chikane (2014), who served on Mbeki's facilitation team, SADC decided only to include elected parties at the negotiation table. After receiving written submissions by CSOs and churches, the facilitators, moreover, found that, whilst churches took positions that were independent of the political camps, those of the MDC-T and CSOs of the civic democratic movement were essentially the same. Their positions would, however, start to diverge when the party made concessions in the talks. MDC-T representatives held the Mbeki-facilitation responsible for the exclusion of civil society (Cross 2013). But the head of Mbeki's team suggested the GPA parties opposed the inclusion of civil society in the negotiations (Mufamadi 2014). The MDC-T leadership, Hoekman (2013: 904) argues, side-lined and misinformed civil society allies fearing they would turn constituents against the power-sharing pact.

Whereas mediators must balance the inclusivity against the feasibility of negotiations and respect parties' will, the failure to adequately include civil society defied international best-practice standards for peace mediation, including AU guidelines, which recommend inclusive dialogues to promote the broad-based ownership of negotiation outcomes and popular

support for peace processes (Aeby 2021a: 19; Nathan 2013; Carl 2019). Indeed, interviews with church and NGO representatives suggested that the exclusion of civil society not only alienated the MDC-T's allies but undermined societal ownership and support for the GPA process (Chimbgwa 2013; Chiromba 2013; Chisi 2013; Chivasa 2013; Matendere 2013; J. Moyo 2013; Lewanika 2013; Matombo 2013; Sibanda 2013; Zwana 2013). Whereas SADC, to date, lacks policies for inclusive peace-making, the exclusion of civic stakeholders stood in stark contrast with the SADC mediation in Lesotho, where the SADC Chair and facilitator encouraged the Lesotho Council of Churches to lead a national dialogue (Aeby 2022: 12; Motsamai 2018, 150-79).

Although displeased with the exclusion of civil society, the leaders of the major denominations and ZCA welcomed the GPA negotiations as an opportunity to make peace, resolve the crisis through dialogue, initiate reforms, and foster a culture of democracy (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Sibanda 2013; Tsvakai 2013; Zwana 2013). Whilst the confrontational ZCA was shut out by the mediation, owing to their status, neutral approach and prior engagements, the ZHOCD were the only stakeholders besides women's organisations who were permitted to make representations to the facilitation team (Chikane 2014; Chiromba 2013; Sibanda 2013; Shana 2013; Williams 2013). During the GPA talks, they submitted a list of priorities to the SADC facilitation that included service delivery, education, constitutional reform, governance, land and reconciliation, whereby the ZHOCD and their members advocated a national healing mechanism that was led by churches rather than the political parties and government. Working behind the scenes, the leaders of the major denominations remained in dialogue with the facilitators until the inauguration of the Inclusive Government. When the talks were at the brink of collapse, the ZHOCD wrote an appeal to the party leaders to continue their dialogue (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013).

Thus, whilst the ZCA and its allies were key in bringing about a SADC intervention and all major church networks seized the limited opportunities provided by the GPA to advance their transformative agenda, only the ZHOCD were permitted to contribute to the SADC-facilitated power-sharing talks. Their cautious approach and special status gave them access denied to the others (Chiromba, 2013; Shana, 2013; Sibanda, 2013).

The churches' engagements with the power-sharing government and parties

The inauguration of the Inclusive Government significantly altered the conditions for churches to engage both the government and political parties. In the preceding period, the polarisation between the liberation party government and democratic movement exacerbated political and generational rifts among clerics, some of whom declared their allegiance to parties. To prevent a schism within the organisation and play their preferred mediating role, the umbrella bodies of the Christian denominations adopted a non-partisan stance and held back overt criticism of the government and parties notwithstanding unease with human rights violations and corruption. The non-partisan stance prompted accusations by the respective political camps that the churches had been co-opted, and the parties exerted pressure on clerics to endorse their positions (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Tsvakai 2013). The following discussion outlines the workings of the inclusive government and examines the churches' engagements with the power-sharing government and parties during the interregnum.

The Inclusive Government

The Inclusive Government was inaugurated in February 2009 and completed a full term of office although being repeatedly at the brink of collapse. The power balance within the Inclusive Government remained heavily skewed in favour of ZANU-PF as the executive structure designed to balance power between the President and Prime Minister proved ineffective, and ZANU-PF ministers systematically eluded regulation. However, the Inclusive Government was characterised by selective co-operation and obstruction. Rather than entirely determined by party strategies, the power given to MDC officials depended on the ministerial portfolio and personalities. Although tensions rose repeatedly, inter-party relations improved gradually, and the power-sharing process succeeded in reducing polarisation, promoting dialogue and fostering mutual understanding among rival political elites. Yet, it could not transform an entrenched political culture that was characterised by authoritarian and coercive governance practices (Coltart 2013; Dzinotyiwei 2013; Gabuza 2013; Kasukuwere 2013; Matinenga 2013; Timba 2013; Madzore 2013; Makone 2013; Matibenga 2013; Matinenga 2013; Mpariwa 2013; Mutambara 2019; Musungu-Masaiti 2013; Mutinhiri 2013; Mzila-Ndlovu 2013; Sipepa-Nkomo 2013; Tsvangirai 2013; Zvidzai 2013).

Churches' engagements with the Inclusive Government and parties in the interregnum

After the Inclusive Government took office, the ZHOCD played no meaningful role in facilitating dialogue, but the heads of the umbrella bodies occasionally met political leaders including the president, prime minister and their deputies to plead for moderation and the national interest. The ZHOCD and the represented denominations maintained their non-partisan approach vis-à-vis the three political parties by only sharing national platforms that served to promote national cohesion with political actors and engaging them on an equitable basis. The approach, however, proved problematic when a party snubbed an event (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Tsvakai 2013).

The power-sharing process and the churches' contributions to national healing efforts, which all parties appreciated, eased the umbrella bodies' complicated relations with ZANU-PF. Thanks to the transition process, the leaders of the major denominations had better access to party leaders to seek dialogue. The ZCA likewise regularly conversed with ZANU-PF representatives through the GPAs' constitutional reform and implementation support mechanisms. Crucially, the power-sharing arrangement permitted leaders of the major denominations to criticise the unity government as a whole without appearing partisan (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Sibanda 2013).

ZANU-PF, meanwhile, sought to leverage churches to promote its political agenda and recruit liaison persons in umbrella bodies. The major denominations, according to their leaders, retained their independence although individual bishops and pastors expressed their loyalty to the liberation movement (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013). Prominent ZANU-PF-aligned clerics who promoted a party agenda included Prophet Obadiah Musindo of the Destiny of African Network and the ex-communicated Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga (Aeby 2016b: 141; Chiroro 2013:127). UDACIZA maintained a non-partisan position, but ZANU-PF's ties to Apostolic and Zionist groupings grew stronger in the GPA period, with some falling under the aegis of Vice President Joyce Mujuru. Motivated by a liberation ethos and material benefits, in the run-up to the 2013 elections, partisan clerics promoted ZANU-PF's indigenisation policy at religious gatherings, promised land to communities, and declared God wanted ZANU-PF to win (Shana 2013; Tsvakai 2013). The integration of indigenous churches into ZANU-

PF electioneering, according to one campaigner, was most valuable, for ‘people are so attached to their churches that an encouragement from a pastor can persuade people to follow a certain direction’ (Togarepi 2013).

Both in the preceding crisis period and the transition, the churches’ positioning vis-à-vis the MDC formations also proved challenging. The MDC agenda of human rights, truth and reconciliation and democratisation resonated with the churches’ social teaching, but the common concerns made it difficult for church leaders, who were sympathetic to opposition activists who became victims of repression, to express theirs without appearing biased. Whereas the umbrella bodies, including the ZCC that had co-launched the constitutional movement in the 1990s, avoided institutional ties to the opposition, some church activists, such as Mike Auret, joined the party to represent it in public office. The MDC formations likewise sought churches’ public endorsement for campaign purposes and, in some instances, interpreted the lack thereof to reflect support for ZANU-PF (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013).

The power-sharing period also facilitated relations with the MDC-T by enabling the leaders of the major denominations to engage the party as part of the unity government rather than ‘the opposition’. After joining government, the party leadership, however, became less accessible to both secular CSOs and the leaders of the major denominations, who were displeased with the continued marginalisation of civil society and found MDC leaders overly comfortable with the situation. Disagreements also related to the GPA’s inadequate national healing mechanism and positions on the death penalty and homosexuality in the constitution-making process (Chiromba 2013; Mwonzora 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013).

The ZCA, which had co-operated with the MDC-T in the Save Zimbabwe campaign and assisted the party to garner international support, was widely perceived to be working with the party, although the faith-based network did not explicitly endorse the party and avoided double-membership (Shana 2013; Sibanda 2013; Zwana 2013). According to the ZCA director, Useni Sibanda (2013), the Alliance co-operated with the party because they shared the common goals of promoting constitutional reform, liberal democracy, transitional justice and pro-poor policies. Both MDC-formations, however, sought to use the Save Zimbabwe platform and prayer meetings for electioneering.

In the GPA period, the ZCA’s exclusion from the negotiations opened a rift between the MDC-T and the religious network. After the Inclusive

Government took office, the ZCA leadership sought to exert pressure on the party as it was disappointed with the MDC-T's perceived inaction and performance with regard to the constitution, security sector reform, national healing, human rights, and electoral commission. Although the MDC-T, after 'joining the ruling elite' backed government policies, which the ZCA did not approve of, overall, it still represented the interests of the alliance in transitional mechanisms, including the constitutional reform. In the 2013 elections, several ZCA activists left the Alliance to run for office on an MDC-T ticket (Sibanda 2013).

Although the access and influence of the Christian umbrella organisations and networks on the MDC-T leadership decreased after it became part of the government, the party remained one of the most viable avenues for faith-based organisations to promote institutional reform, democratisation and reconciliation in the exclusionary politics of the interregnum (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Sibanda 2013; Zwana 2013). The much smaller MDC-N likewise pursued a compatible policy agenda, and the Bulawayo-based party was particularly receptive to the churches' drive for transitional justice and national healing, which held particular salience in Matabeleland. Whilst both the members of ZHOCD and ZCA sought to engage both MDC formations on an equitable basis, the ZCA was perceived to favour the MDC-T (Chiromba 2013; Sibanda 2013).

5. Participation in transitional mechanisms and reforms

The transitional mechanisms and reforms that were envisaged in the GPA were only partly implemented in the interregnum. The mechanisms provided limited opportunities for the participation of societal stakeholders, including churches and secular CSOs, as the power-sharing parties kept a firm hold on all aspects of the transition (Aeby 2016b: 303–67; 2021b, 690–94; ZLHR 2013). The following discussion focuses on the implementation and participation of the churches in the constitutional reform, official national healing mechanism, and preparations for elections.

COPAC Constitutional Reform

The adoption of a new constitution that emanated from the protracted COPAC process was the transitions' most meaningful institutional reform achievement. Parliament claimed control over the constitution-making process that featured an outreach and referendum. However, a 'people-driven process', which the National Constitutional Assembly demanded, was illusive in the realpolitik of power-sharing pact. The leaders of the

Inclusive Government had tremendous influence over the parliamentary process and an effective veto over the draft constitution (Madhuku 2013; Mangwana 2013; Matinenga 2013; Mwonzora 2013; Matyszak 2013). The public outreach, which was mired in manipulations and intimidation, produced unrepresentative, poor and disputed data (Crozier 2013; Linington 2013; Phiri 2013). The drafting process was characterised by political manipulations and indiscretions. A deadlock in the negotiations between the ministers in the COPAC Management Team who captured the parliamentary process could be broken thanks to parallel negotiations among the COPAC co-chairs (Crozier 2013; Mangwana 2013; Mwonzora 2013; Tsvangirai 2013). Although the reform process was deeply flawed, the electorate approved the COPAC constitution in a rushed referendum (Linington 2013; Marunda 2013; ICG 2013, 2).

The 2013 constitution kept the power-concentrating presidential system, massively bloated parliament and provided for minimal devolution. Its judicial reforms would require an independent judiciary to be effective (Crozier 2013; Zvidzai 2013; Mangwana 2013; Mwonzora 2013; COPAC 2012: Chap. 6, Part 4, 124.). The Declaration of Rights could prove a powerful instrument to protect human rights. Constitutional commissions on corruption, elections, gender, human rights, land and peace were hoped to improve oversight and governance (Matyszak 2013; ZLHR 2015; COPAC 2012, Chap. 12, Part 1-6). Whereas the constitution brought significant gains, its yield was disproportionate to the time and resources the reform consumed (Aeby 2016b, 367).

The marginalisation of civil society in the constitutional reform prompted protests on the part of churches and CSOs. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and ZCA nevertheless participated in the COPAC process, embracing it as an opportunity to advance their transformative agenda. The faith-based organisations submitted positions on constitutional talking points and deployed activists to COPAC's consultative forum. The CCJP, however, withdrew their representative prior to COPAC's second All-Stakeholder Conference as the political parties claimed the prerogative to select participating civil society actors. Overall, the CCJP's preferred positions were reflected in the draft constitution (Chiromba 2013; Sibanda 2013). According to the COPAC co-chairs, it took considerable efforts to bring evangelical circles on board and prevent religious groups from opposing the draft constitution over issues of homosexuality and abortion (Mangwana 2013; Mkhosi 2013; Mwonzora 2013).

National healing and reconciliation

Zimbabwean churches and CSOs had long developed elaborate plans for transitional justice and reconciliation. In Matabeleland, the transition raised hopes for a truth-seeking process for Gukurahundi atrocities (Eppel 2013, 216; Eppel and Raftopoulos 2009; Ndlovu 2009, 113). However, in the GPA, the negotiators only agreed to 'give consideration' to a mechanism to advise government on how to achieve national healing, hence, deferring the modalities of a programme for reconciliation to the interregnum. The term 'justice' was not mentioned in the relevant GPA provision, for it risked turning human rights offenders who feared accountability to turn against the negotiated settlement, hence, reflecting the 'peace versus justice dilemma' (GPA 2008; Misihairabwi-Mushonga 2013). Based on the vague GPA provision, the Inclusive Government created the ONHRI not as an independent body with a dedicated budget, but as a mere committee consisting of three ministers of state in the office of the President (Holland 2013; Mzila-Ndlovu 2013).

During the interregnum, the ONHRI held meetings with traditional and religious leaders, explored popular views of national healing, consulted CSOs, and undertook a history project with academics (Charumbira 2013; Eppel 2013, 214). Its successes included a national healing policy that was approved by cabinet and a code of conduct for elections which the parties signed. Most importantly, it successfully advocated the inclusion of a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) in the COPAC constitution (Aeby 2016b: 346-50). Attempts by the ONHRI ministers, including ZANU-PF Vice President John Nkomo, to involve security sector leaders in a dialogue on peace and reconciliation were in vain (Mzila-Ndlovu 2013). Owing to differences over the approach to reconciliation, the ONHRI ministers went separate ways in 2011 and undertook unconnected projects, whereby the MDC-N representative was arrested for attending a prayer meeting to commemorate Gukurahundi victims (Mzila-Ndlovu 2013).

The MDC formations had long advocated a truth-seeking process, and their ONHRI ministers appreciated the need to involve churches and CSOs owing to their expertise (Eppel and Raftopoulos 2009). However, the ONHRI ministers opposed that religious organisations rather than a government-led a reconciliation process (Holland 2013; Mzila-Ndlovu 2013). As ZANU-PF preferred an approach to reconciliation that Shari Eppel (2013: 231) describes as 'healing without revealing', the

ONHRI made minimal progress towards meaningful truth-seeking and reconciliation. Advocates of a truth justice and reconciliation process within churches and CSOs, thus, regarded the ONHRI as an instrument to prevent meaningful debate rather than a viable vehicle for national healing (Aeby 2016b: 346-50.)

Both the members of the ZHOCD and ZCA considered the ONHRI ill-suited to lead a national healing process as it was controlled by political parties which were responsible for violence. Nevertheless, they partnered with the ONRHI through the CCSE, a joint platform which the members of the ZHOCD and ZCA launched together in March 2009 to build consensus and develop a template for a national healing and reconciliation programme. The CSSF was co-governed by its institutional members and administered by the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO). It came to serve as the interface between churches, secular CSOs and the ONHRI (Chisi 2013; Chiromba 2013; Dube 2013; Sibanda 2013; Shana 2013). The CSSF undertook a broad consultation process to design a national healing mechanism and, together with the OHNRI, advocated the establishment of the NPRC under the COPAC constitution. Independent of the CCSE, the individual umbrella organisations conducted a range of peacebuilding activities including workshops for trauma management and conflict transformation (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Sibanda 2013; Zwana 2013).

Democratic reforms and elections

Reforms to open democratic space and create suitable conditions for the harmonised elections of July 2013 made little progress. Attempts to remove repressive laws that restricted the freedom of assembly and speech, ultimately failed (Gonese 2013; L. Moyo 2013). The intransigent media minister, Webster Shamu, blocked media reforms (Ngwenya 2013; Timba 2013; Tsvangirai 2013). The Human Rights Commission was muzzled by its Act (Austin 2013; Mudenda 2013). Measuresto remedy the politicisation of the military and police were not implemented (Brickhill 2013; ZLHR 2013: 82).

The revised Electoral Act improved the overall transparency of voting. However, by permitting persons who did not feature in the register to vote with a registration slip, it opened loopholes for potential fraud, including the printing of slips, double voting, and bussing voters to different constituencies. The independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) remained doubtful and the discredited Registrar General still

managed the voters' roll. Western observers were barred but civil society and African missions could monitor the polls (Matyszak 2013; Research & Advocacy Unit 2013; ZESN 2014: 23-25). Parties could campaign freely despite several violent incidents, but inflammatory language was widely used in the media (Tendi 2013; ZESN 2014: 50). A climate of fear that had lingered since the 2008 elections was entrenched by veterans, security agents and politicians. The integrity of the vote was compromised by misrepresentative boundaries, an inconsistent voters' roll, a registration that disenfranchised urban voters, and a chaotic special vote (CCJP 2015: 11, 33; Matyszak 2013; Masunungure 2013). Numerous urban voters were turned away, youths were bussed into contested constituencies and an abnormal number of assisted voters were denied a secret ballot. Since ZANU-PF won in a landslide, these irregularities undermined the elections' credibility, but it is doubtful that they would have changed the result (Aeby 2016b: 359-419).

In the run-up to the 2013 elections, the members of the major denominations intensified their peacebuilding efforts. The religious leaders reached out to the political parties and pleaded for a peaceful electoral campaign on national television. To monitor violence and intimidation during the election period, the ZHOCD set up the Ecumenical Peace Observation Initiative of Zimbabwe (EPOIZ). After the GPA period ended, EPOIZ, which was equipped with a permanent team, was expected to serve as the coordinating organ for the umbrella bodies' peacebuilding programmes (Shana 2013).

The CCJP, EFZ and ZCC moreover participated in the Zimbabwe Election Support Network's monitoring mission, which was chaired by the ZCC secretary general Solomon Zwana.² In its election observation report, the CCJP concluded that the electoral environment did not allow for a genuinely credible and even electoral contest and, thus, significantly compromised the free expression of the political choices of the people (CCJP 2013: 14).

Conclusion

Christian denominations and faith-based networks navigated the strategic challenges the GPA posed, while still advancing their agendas, which included promoting peace, social justice and / or democracy, but above all to remain broadly apolitical. The Churches strategically engaged with the political parties, Inclusive Government, SADC facilitation, transitional

2 *News Day*, 'ZESN Elects New Governing Board', 30 July 2012.

mechanisms, secular CSOs and other churches. The following conclusions assess the viability of the chosen strategies and draw lessons for a potential future transitional governance process in Zimbabwe.

In the preceding crisis and the GPA period, the members of the ZHOCD maintained a neutral stance vis-à-vis the political parties. It sought to engage the three GPA parties on an equitable basis and only share national, multi-party platforms. This strategy was the only feasible way to play a credible mediation role, retain access to rival political leaders, ease polarisation and prevent schisms within and between the Christian umbrella organisations. Conversely, in a context where one political camp held the overwhelming responsibility for political violence, misgovernance and the violation of democratic principles, maintaining a non-partisan stance made the members of the ZHOCD vulnerable to accusations of being biased and failing to stand up against human rights violations (Shana 2013; Chiromba 2013; Zwana 2013).

The ZCA, in contrast, denounced the abuses of the ZANU-PF government during the crisis and demonstrated its solidarity with the opposition in joint platforms. But it avoided double memberships and fought attempts by MDC representatives to co-opt the faith-based network for electioneering purposes. The ZCA's proximity and assistance to the MDC-T was insufficient to prevent it from being marginalised in the GPA negotiations and losing its access and influence on party leaders once they joined the Inclusive Government (Chikane 2014; Sibanda 2013).

The advent of the Inclusive Government greatly simplified the church organisations' relations with both the government and political parties, enabling them to direct appeals and criticism towards the power-sharing executive as a whole without running the risk of appearing biased (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Tsvakai 2013; Zwana 2013). When considering any future transition, engaging parties on an equitable basis whilst speaking up against human rights abuses and misgovernance, promoting a national dialogue and the formation of a government of national unity, and holding the latter to account vis-à-vis the citizenry, hence, remains the most feasible strategy for the Christian organisations to promote an agenda of peace, social justice and democratisation.

As part of its strategy vis-à-vis SADC, the ZHOCD discreetly engaged the South African government, which was mandated to lead the SADC facilitation, and advocated the brokering of a power-sharing arrangement and transition behind the scenes as the Zimbabwean crisis unfolded.

Thanks to these prior engagements, their status and non-partisan stance, the ZHOCD were among the few stakeholders who were invited to in-person consultations and had the ear of the SADC facilitation, whilst the ZCA was excluded (Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Sibanda 2013). The religious leaders nevertheless had little sway on SADC's handling of the crisis and transition that was determined by political imperatives of anti-imperialist solidarity among erstwhile liberation movements and regime stability, which had long been hostile to churches, especially those which talked about human rights or democracy (Aeby 2016a; 2017; Nathan 2012: 1-20; Raftopoulos 2013).

The political logic of liberation party solidarity that has continued to shape the relations among SADC states well beyond the GPA period is likely to inform the handling of a prospective SADC-sponsored transition (Aeby 2019: 1-5; Nathan 2019; Van Nieuwkerk 2020). Whilst a different international sponsor such as the AU, which Zimbabwean churches could lobby to facilitate a transition, might follow different political imperatives, the governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe are likely to ensure that any external mediation is led by SADC, where they have the greatest leverage. The modalities of another SADC-sponsored transition would likely resemble those of the GPA and possibly, lead to similar outcomes.

Rather than banking on another external peace-making intervention to resolve Zimbabwe's enduring political conflict, the Christian denominations may bolster their technical peace-making capacity and explore possibilities to facilitate an inclusive internal national dialogue that paves the ground for a consensual transition. The prospects of such a national dialogue convention may be low as it hinges on the political protagonists' willingness to participate in good faith and accept the facilitation by the ZHOCD. It is, however, hard to see who, if not the leaders of the Christian denominations, may have the social standing and necessary resources to initiate an internally facilitated national dialogue to lead Zimbabwe out of the political impasse.

In the GPA period, churches and secular CSOs also faced a strategic dilemma when deciding whether to boycott deeply flawed transitional mechanisms or to embrace the limited opportunities to further their agendas (Aeby 2016a; Chiromba 2013; Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Sibanda 2013). The constitution-making process was controlled by the power-sharing executive rather than parliament and provided tokenistic windows for civic participation (Aeby 2016b: 303-67; 2021b: 690-94; ZLHR 2013).

The church-affiliated NGOs and ZCA nevertheless chose to engage in the COPAC process to promote reform whilst protesting the exclusion of civil society (Chiromba 2013; Sibanda 2013; Zwana 2013). The ONHRI was denied an adequate mandate, structures and freedom to lead a meaningful truth and reconciliation process but successfully advocated the creation of the NPRC (Aeby 2016b, 346–50; Mzila-Ndlovu 2013). In the ten years of its existence, the NPRC likewise made little headway on transitional justice as it was thwarted by the ZANU-PF government (Chiradza 2022; Respondent 19 2022). Whereas these state-controlled mechanisms could not deliver, by launching the CCSF in the GPA period, churches and CSOs ensured that civil society remained the primary locus to plan and advance a viable truth, justice and reconciliation process notwithstanding the political actors' attempts to capture the space (Shana 2013; Zwana 2013; Eppel 2020; 2013). The experience of the ONHRI and NPRC illustrate that, in a future transition, a truth and reconciliation process led by churches and secular CSOs, if granted the necessary civic freedom, stands a better chance of making meaningful advances towards national healing and reconciliation.

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Evangelicals and the Public Sphere: The Shifting Stance of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

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The nation of Zimbabwe, like many others, has gone through moments of political turmoil and upheaval. During these times – from the war of independence precipitated by colonial rule and its unjust policies of racial segregation against the black majority population to the protracted economic instability that is currently obtaining – the church has not been quiet. The church, through its leaders, became a voice for the voiceless and oppressed. Some mission schools such as those run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ) became bases for the recruitment of ZANU and ZAPU freedom fighters, sometimes with the blessing of some church authorities. While it cannot be said the denomination itself had a policy to support the liberation struggle, its African ministers and parishioners were not only sympathetic to the cause but often actively supported the guerillas. Bhebhe (1999) describes in detail the interactions of the ELCZ missions of Masase, Mnene, Msume, and many others with both the government forces and guerilla groups.

Leading church leaders from various Christian denominations among them Bishop Donal Lamont (Catholic), Bishop Kenneth Skelton (Anglican), Bishop Ralph Dodge, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Revd Canaan Banana (all Methodist), and Revd Ndabaningi Sithole (United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe) played pivotal roles in both colonial and post-

colonial Zimbabwe. The church leaders addressed issues such as racial segregation, the land question, and numerous other injustices perpetrated by the colonial government. It should be pointed out that while church organisations such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) were vociferous in condemning the oppressive policies of the government of the day, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) remained silent, choosing to align with the government against the communist ‘terrorists’ (Mangwende 2017: 2). Consequently, at independence, the EFZ was limited to a few social issues and not weighty matters of governance. It continued to address matters that had to do with ethics, morality, and poverty alleviation. However, around the year 2000, the EFZ discovered its voice as it began to address broader issues including politics and governance, health, and community development. In the early 2000s, the then EFZ president Bishop Trevor Manhanga together with Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the Anglican Church and Bishop Patrick Mutume of the Catholic church, all from Manicaland sought to bring Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai to the negotiation table as the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe took a turn for the worst. Such co-operative efforts of engagement by the church leaders were a result of the realisation that only collaborative efforts by the church would yield better results. This early collaboration would ultimately form the foundation for the formation of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination (ZHCOD) through which the umbrella Christian bodies speak to national issues.

The Zimbabwean nation is faced with a myriad of challenges: a widening gap between the rich and the poor, a high unemployment rate, a volatile exchange rate, fervent political tensions, poor medical facilities, high poverty levels, drug abuse, increasing rate of suicide, increasing crime, moral bankruptcy, the accommodation of many vices in the society, and disillusionment among the young leading to severe brain drain. How does the church address all these issues? What has the church been doing? In particular, this chapter aims to show how the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe has moved from a passive stance to active engagement on public issues. We will address EFZ’s role from the 1960s to the present. In the end, we will comment on a way forward for the organisation. We will begin with a brief overview of the socio-political context of Zimbabwe from the 1960s to the present.

An overview of Zimbabwe's socio-political context (1960s to present)

After gaining the status of a responsible government in 1923, the white settlers of Rhodesia went on to create a segregated society with privileges for the white minority settlers. As this community increased, so did the need for land, leading to the dispossession of the black population which was forcibly removed from its land and resettled in less productive and restrictive 'reserves'. Land dispossession through such laws as the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and the Land Husbandry Act (1951), segregation through the Native Affairs Act (1927), unjust laws, poor remuneration in the urban areas, and taxation fomented resentment within the black populace. The two world wars in which Africans participated alongside their white counterparts aroused political awareness in the black population. Trade unionism in the 1940s became the primary expression of frustration leading to mass nationalism in the 1950s. By the 1960s the black population became militant and a bloody fifteen-year liberation struggle erupted from 1965 until the nation attained independence in 1980.

At independence, the nation was fragmented along racial, tribal, religious, and economic lines. The racial tensions, though toned down by the new government's policy of reconciliation, were not completely overcome. They simply lay dormant waiting for a spark. Ethnic tensions, however, quickly escalated because of the deep suspicions between the ZANU and ZAPU fighters of the liberation struggle leading to state-sanctioned political violence known as *Gukurahundi* translated 'the early rains that wash away the chaff before the spring rains.' An estimated 20,000, mainly Ndebele-speaking people in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, lost their lives at the hands of North-Korean-trained Fifth Brigade. The Unity Accord of 1987 brought an end to the hostilities and unified the two warring factions placing Zimbabwe on the path to prosperity and growth. Zimbabwe was the 'jewel of Africa' and the 'breadbasket' and everything seemed to be moving in the right direction. However, the 1990s saw life in Zimbabwe becoming increasingly difficult for the ordinary citizen. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) did not yield the intended results as life became harder with the removal of subsidies on social services and food. The 1992 and 1995 droughts severely affected agricultural production, the mainstay of Zimbabwe's economy. Zimbabwe's entrance into the Congo war in 1998 exacerbated economic decline.

Opposition to the ruling ZANU-PF mounted and when the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a labour-backed political party, came onto the scene, matters reached boiling point in the 2000 elections. The nine years from 1999 – 2008 were characterised by political violence, often associated with elections, and a worsening economic situation. The violent election run-off of June 2008 led to a Government of National Unity (GNU) brokered by the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, with the support of SADC and the AU in 2009. This union which ran from 2009 until 2013 seemed to calm the tumultuous waters of Zimbabwean politics with the masses seemingly finding respite.

The end of the GNU in 2013 brought back bickering between the main political parties and life became difficult again. Within the ruling ZANU-PF, factions developed. This time, matters came to a head in 2017 when the military intervened, and President Robert Mugabe was removed from power. With the coming of the so-called ‘New Dispensation’,¹ there was hope for a better life for citizens, but it is evident that little has changed. While there have been significant milestones in some areas, especially the de-escalation of hostilities in the political sphere, life for the ordinary Zimbabwean is still difficult. The nation still grapples with a volatile exchange rate, widespread unemployment, incessant power cuts, and absence of water, a poor health care system, an inadequate transport network, poor service delivery, especially for urban dwellers, drug abuse among young people, and a high cost of goods and services among many other challenges. This is the socio-political context in which the church and in particular EFZ operates.

The church and the public sphere

Before addressing the role of the EFZ in the public sphere, we need to briefly examine the question of whether the church must be involved in social action or not. Other questions will arise out of this discussion. If the church is to engage in social action, is politics part of social action? How far does the church go and how can it be effective? These questions can be approached from various angles and there is no direct answer to them. However, we can proffer a plausible response without being too technical or comprehensive.

Unfortunately, many Christians see no relationship between the

1 After the removal of Zimbabwe’s long-time ruler, Robert Mugabe, in 2017 in a military coup, the new government announced a ‘New Dispensation’ to usher in freedom and prosperity for Zimbabweans.

preaching of the gospel and social responsibility. They choose to see these activities as mutually exclusive if not antagonistic. Yet, the church is called to provide a holistic ministry where both the spiritual and physical needs of people are met. The Lausanne Covenant (1974) declared that 'evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty' (Stott 1990, p.10). Wherever there is a humanitarian crisis, the church cannot hide indoors praying. Instead, believers must respond to such challenges in practical ways. Volf (2011) argues that regardless of our religious backgrounds and theological leanings, we all have a responsibility to publicly engage in meaningful and tangible ways. He contends that while our religions may differ, we must address challenges in our communities. Believers cannot afford to stand on the side-lines while the world grapples with complex challenges – homosexuality, democracy and human rights, poverty, natural disasters, etc. Instead, they must rise and get involved, helping to resolve the issues facing people in our day. Musasiwa (2020) sees the lack of a contextual and relevant theology as the biggest impediment to Christian involvement in public life. He argues for a theology that promotes democracy, a theology that causes Christian involvement in governance.

We need to recognise that social action does influence evangelism. A genuinely saved person develops a desire to see transformation in other people's lives. As can be seen in the early church, the believers were quick to intervene in the plight of widows (Acts 6: 1-7) and when natural disasters like droughts and famines hit (Acts 11: 28-30). Thus, the early believers engaged in social action 'quite unselfconsciously' (Stott and Wyatt 2006: 24). Social action was and is an intuitive response from a regenerated heart. If we truly love God, then we love His people. If we love His people, then we will attempt to make their lives better by all means.

An examination of evangelism and social action shows that they are two sides of the same coin and complement each other (ibid.). Social action may be used to draw in people, who will then be open to receiving the preaching of the gospel. Thus, instead of placing them in opposition, the two must be seen as complementary. Nevertheless, the primary objective of social action is not the salvation of congregants but the reformation of the society. Evangelism is primarily for the redemption of the soul and not social action.

When getting involved in social action, the church must be careful not

to become sucked into the vortex of partisan agendas. Stott and Wyatt (2006) caution that there is a real danger of the ‘politicisation of the gospel’. This happens when the church is identified with a particular political agenda. The gospel is not to be restricted to a particular social issue or political programme, but it goes beyond that to address the spiritual condition of humankind. Thus, the gospel must not be used to endorse political agendas but must be allowed to do its work of addressing the spiritual needs of human beings. Holistic mission, therefore, relates both to the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of souls and meeting the temporal needs of the people.

Christian organisations in Zimbabwe have been active in social work that addresses all other aspects except politics. Fewer still have dared to engage the government on political matters of governance. The challenge is that most Zimbabweans equate politics with party politics which is often violent and intolerant (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022). It is often referred to as a ‘dirty game’ that soils and contaminates participants thereof. Such a perspective revolts the Christians who have become averse to an engagement with politics. In addition to that, the Zimbabwean state is intolerant of critics. Whenever the church has raised its voice to criticise it, it has responded with threats, warning the church to stay away from politics. In response to the pastoral letter issued by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop’s Conference on 5 April 2007 entitled ‘God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed’, the late former President Robert Mugabe warned the Bishops that they were taking a ‘dangerous’ path. When Evan Mawarire of This Flag successfully mobilised a mass stayaway in August 2016, Mugabe threatened to ruthlessly deal with religious leaders who spoke against his rule. Such episodes in Zimbabwe have led to Christians choosing to stay out of the ‘dirty game’ of politics and concentrate on prayer and other non-political developmental activities. However, if we are to truly become the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13-16), then we should not be afraid to make our hands dirty or to be misconstrued as political activists. Salt stops the rot, brings healing, and enhances flavour. The light exposes evil, drives away darkness, and shows the way. This can neither be done when the salt remains in the saltshaker nor when the light is hidden. If we do not get involved, we will be irrelevant. If we do get involved, we may be misunderstood. Either way, there are consequences. It is better to stand on the side of the Lord and do what is right no matter the cost. What we are saying here is that the church has not just a responsibility but an

obligation to address all social issues including political matters.

But how can the church address issues without being co-opted or neutralised by the state or any political entity for that matter? For that to happen, firstly, the church must acknowledge its mandate and view itself through the lens of Old Testament prophets and recognise its role as the salt and light (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022). Old Testament prophets did not shy away from speaking out against the corrupt authorities of their day. They became champions of social justice and condemned injustices by rulers and the rich. Secondly, the church must remain above partisan politics. It ought to address principles, not personalities. It must stand for the truth. This means it must be an impartial body committed to truth and justice. Thirdly, the church, both at a corporate level and at its leadership level must be exemplary in its walk. It must not compromise its witness in exchange for patronage from political players. The church leadership must be incorruptible, so that they retain the authority to speak out without someone pointing back at their own shortcomings. Political players are aware of the needs of both church organisations and church leaders. Oftentimes, both can be offered land, vehicles, and other gifts and these may be later used to neutralise or compromise their witness. In February 2020, at a National Day of Prayer organised by the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC), in response to a request for land by the leader of the Zion Christian Church, President Emmerson Mnangagwa pledged to provide free land to churches for the construction of places of worship, schools and for farming. Musasiwa (2020) warns against the polarising effect of Zimbabwean politics and asserts that the most credible form of political involvement in the Zimbabwean context is that of political influence and advocacy for godly values. This can be done by praying for the governing authorities, influencing political players through words and deeds, speaking up for truth and righteousness without fear or favour, participating in elections, and those participating in party politics are to do so without compromising their Christian identity and integrity.

EFZ in the colonial period (1964 – 1980)

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) was formed in 1962 by a small group of evangelicals to promote a Christian witness to the nation. This was to be done through the promotion of biblical values, providing fellowship among churches, and provision of support to churches (Bhebhe 1988). This support would come in the form of ministry training

and resources for Christian leaders to become more effective. Thus, the primary focus of the EFZ at its inception was to strengthen evangelical witness in the nation through evangelism, providing fellowship among evangelicals of like faith, and strengthening people's faith. In essence, the EFZ distanced itself from the political issues of the day and focussed on spiritual matters. With some of its founder members such as the Brethren in Christ Church who hold a pacifist position, it took as its primary obligation the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of souls. Major political issues of the day that included institutionalised racial segregation, the rise of African nationalism, land issues, and Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain among others were better left to the Rhodesian Christian Conference.

During the colonial era the EFZ faced the dilemma of confronting the colonial government over its injustices and facing sanction or collaborating with the government in exchange for the freedom to minister – it chose the latter route. To this end, unlike the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), EFZ did not openly confront the brutal Rhodesian regime. This was not because it agreed with the colonial government's injustices. Rather, it endeavoured to keep to its founding missional objectives of preaching the gospel and ministering to the weak and marginalised. It should be pointed out that the EFZ was significantly smaller in those days. It seems the initial members of the EFZ withdrew from the Rhodesian Christian Conference so they could focus more on spiritual matters rather than get 'bogged down with socio-economic and political controversies' (Banda 2017: 41). Their focus was the salvation of souls, fellowship with each other and leading people towards a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Early evangelicals were also wary of ecumenism and so sought to co-operate with those of similar faith. Therefore, in their view, meddling in the politics of the day would hinder their missional objectives. Individual member churches, however, took differing perspectives. Some supported the government while others supported the liberation movements and some like the Brethren in Christ Church and the Baptist Church chose neutrality.

The fact that the liberation struggle itself was supported by the communist nations of the Soviet Union and China did not help matters with some of the Evangelical churches. Communism and its atheist philosophy were seen as a greater evil and so the war of liberation was viewed in some quarters as a fight between good and evil; the good being

the Rhodesian State and the evil being the communist liberation groups. The reports of instances of burning of Bibles and disruption of church services by some guerillas in some areas further entrenched the belief that guerillas were anti-Christianity (Wakatama 1980). This understanding, supported by some American evangelicals, led some quarters of the evangelical community in Zimbabwe to offer support to the colonial government to protect Christianity from Communism. Thus, while some evangelicals went all out in support of Ian Smith's regime, some chose neutrality for as long as they were allowed to do ministry. The Southern Baptist Missionaries considered themselves neutral in the conflict and, hence, did not condemn the Smith regime's segregationist policies. Such a position proved untenable in the complex and volatile Rhodesian context which later required all white males to register for military draft. Most of the missionaries enlisted, albeit under protest, not only to keep their missions operational but because they believed in the maintenance of law and order. Those actions sent a message of collaboration to their African counterparts, both the clergy and parishioners. Consequently, through overt support from some quarters and silence from other quarters, the EFZ unwittingly became a collaborator of the Smith regime up to the independence era. Some churches, in contrast, supported the liberation struggle, with their leaders becoming political activists. Radical clerics such as Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the Methodist Church and Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe stand out as opponents of the Rhodesian establishment. Bhebhe (1979) describes how various missions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church supported the war effort through finances, medical supplies, and recruitment. While this was not the position of the denomination, the church's workers in these missions including pastors, teachers, and nurses actively cooperated with the freedom fighters.

It is important to mention that the silence by the EFZ itself implied that it was a supporter of the colonial government and all the injustices it represented. This had the effect of silencing the EFZ in independent Zimbabwe as it continued to be seen as a collaborator (Mangwende 2017). That tag took two decades to disappear after independence.

EFZ after Zimbabwe's Independence (1980 – 2000)

The attainment of independence did not fully change the EFZ's position on relations with the state. After 1980, EFZ continued with its soul-winning agenda typified in the 1990s by programmes such as Target

2000, which sought to saturate the nation with churches by the year 2000. The understanding was that when a nation is converted, Christian values of loving one's neighbour, peace, and compassion become a natural consequence. Thus, the church's role in the nation was viewed primarily in its evangelisation work. It confined itself to spiritual, ethical, and developmental issues (Mangwende 2017) collaborating with the government on social and developmental issues. With time, EFZ gradually expanded its operations to include social concerns in response to evolving needs as well as the establishment of partnerships with various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Tearfund.² EFZ was involved in the 'Give a Dam' campaign led by the United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with government, and local and international NGOs. This programme aimed at improving sanitation and agricultural production in the Matabeleland region. As regards active involvement in politics, it maintained neutrality. This was probably reflective of the dominant theological position of its member churches regarding church and state – that the church's role is to support the government by praying for it and honouring its leaders, a belief in non-violence, as well as collaborating with rather than confronting the government. Another possible explanation is that it seems the government is 'accommodative of those who support it and vindictive towards those who critique it' (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022: 1). Such passive neutrality has been viewed as active collaboration with the state or as being done for the personal benefit of evangelical leaders. It is important to note that the EFZ while having good structures from the top to the grassroots – the latter are not as vibrant when it comes to social and political action (Mangwende 2017). This leaves it operating from the top down. The consequence of this approach is dissonance and disconnect between what the member churches would like to see it doing and what it actually does. Much depends on who occupies the senior leadership positions. Thus, from the 1980s to the late 1990s, the EFZ continued to pursue social development issues partnering with the government in various community development initiatives.

It is critical at this point to paint a brief picture of the Zimbabwean socio-political context. Soon after independence, political disturbances in Matabeleland known as the Gukurahundi took place from 1983-87.

2 Tearfund is a Christian charity working with Christian organisations and churches to address issues relating to poverty and injustice. Its partnership with EFZ has seen the empowerment of rural households through its programme called Church and Community Transformation (CCT).

After the deployment of security forces in the area, allegations of human rights violations were made. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference (ZCBC) through the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) began to speak out on these issues (Dorman 2002). The CCJP went on to investigate these allegations and in 1997 produced a report entitled *Breaking the Silence: Building True Peace*. This was necessitated by the refusal by the government to publicly release the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into the alleged atrocities known as the Chihambakwe Commission. It became clear at this time that the socio-political landscape of the nation was changing and it was becoming imperative for the church to engage. The Catholics and ZCC were increasingly engaging and broadening their reach. Yet, the EFZ remained reluctant to engage in the public sphere until the 2000s.

Looking back, the EFZ lost a huge opportunity to become a prophetic voice during a tumultuous and trying period in the history of the young Zimbabwean nation. The movement became the proverbial ostrich, burying its head in the sand. It could have gained mileage by taking a stand on matters of justice as the situation in Matabeleland escalated in the early 1980s and as other groups were broadening their reach by the 1990s. Granted, it would be counter-productive to the EFZ's spiritual mandate to be seen dabbling in politics as the political terrain was becoming more and more treacherous.

Chitando (2011: 46) observes that churches and church-related organisations are deeply divided on matters of politics for several reasons: the desire for favourable treatment by the government; ideological similarities with liberation parties such as those regarding land, racial equality, and ethical mores (homosexuality and abortion); and economic benefits to church leaders (farms, vehicles, etc). Perceived co-option by politicians is another challenge in the polarised Zimbabwean political landscape. Doubtless, the EFZ was also a victim of these divisions. Former president of EFZ Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe, who when at the helm, pushed for the declaration of Zimbabwe as a Christian nation in 1999, is widely perceived as being aligned with the ruling ZANU-PF party. His proposal fell through as it did not receive much support from other evangelicals. While it is acknowledged that most Zimbabweans are Christian, it must be noted that Zimbabwe is still a secular state which embraces freedom of worship. Declaring Zimbabwe a Christian nation has far-reaching implications for this idea. Furthermore, evangelicals believe

in the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to individuals and not to nations and so declaring a nation Christian does not Christianise it. Another former EFZ president Bishop Trevor Manhanga has been accused of being co-opted by the ruling party after he toned down his criticism of the government and supported the controversial Fast Track Land Reform Programme (Dombo 2014). The late Archbishop Ezekiel Guti has not been spared criticism for not publicly rebuking government leaders. Instead, he called on the members of his church to pray for the nation and its leaders. There are also independent ministries and their leaders not holding membership with the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe whose utterances, actions, and practices sometimes cast a shadow on the broader church – especially the Pentecostal movement – whose membership now dominates the EFZ. It is important to note that their approach to public discourse differs from that of the mainstream evangelicals. Political actors mislead people using the views of this minority group as representative of the broader evangelical movement. Such is the challenging context in which the EFZ operates.

To summarise: between 1980 and the early 2000s, the EFZ was passive when it came to engagement with the government. It depended on its senior leadership for direction, concerning engagement with the state, and its leadership during this period was only inclined to collaborate with humanitarian endeavours. It is also important to point out that the Zimbabwean government continued to threaten the church against involvement in governance matters labelling those who did so ‘political’. Members of the EFZ avoided controversies to protect themselves from the state and maintain neutrality.

EFZ From 2000 to the present

By the 2000s, as EFZ could no longer stand on the sidelines as the socio-political context of Zimbabwe destabilised. As Zimbabwe’s economy worsened and living standards plummeted, it became imperative for the EFZ to come out of its shell and join the other Christian groups in speaking into the obtaining socio-political situation. By this time it had also grown in membership and influence. It now needed its voice to be heard in matters of politics and governance. It co-operated with the ZCC and the ZCBC producing a united voice of the church through initiatives such as the Ecumenical Peace Initiative in Zimbabwe (EPIZ) which later became the Zimbabwe Christian Heads of Denominations (ZHOCOD). The EFZ began to write pastoral letters which exhorted the government to uphold human

rights, justice, and equity, and improve the livelihoods of people. The letters include 'Free, Fair and Credible Elections: A Perspective from the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe' (March 2018) and 'Zimbabwe at the Crossroads: Between Danger and Opportunity' (August 2020). As part of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) comprising the ZCC, EFZ, ZCBC, and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Africa (UDACIZA), 'A Call to Conscience' (April 2005), 'The Elections We Want' (2022), and 'ZHOCD Statement on *Al Jazeera's* "Gold Mafia" Investigative Documentary' (May 2023). It also released a solidarity statement with the ZCBC Pastoral letter on the situation prevailing in the country (August 2020) and another statement condemning political violence (January 2023). These letters and statements were meant to appeal to the state and safeguard the nation from descending into anarchy. Such involvement undoubtedly brought controversy as church leaders were labelled 'political' and their humanitarian initiatives were increasingly scrutinised by the state. Despite these controversies, EFZ has continued to release pastoral letters and press statements to the government and to the nation on issues of national importance. In August 2021, the EFZ released a statement condemning child marriages following the tragic death of Memory Machaya who had been forced into marriage while a minor. In the same month, a statement expressing concern on the corruption highlighted by Zimbabwe's Auditor General's Report was released.

Perhaps, the highlight of the EFZ's involvement in Zimbabwe's public sphere was when in 2006, the EFZ together with the ZCBC and the ZCC produced a discussion document entitled *The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe'*. In the document, the church bemoaned the absence of a national vision for the country, political intolerance, corruption, and economic mismanagement among other issues. The church acknowledged that, with the exception of the ZCC and ZCBC, it had until now been 'an officious bystander caught in between the anguish of its constituents and the spiritual interpretation of its mandate'. It acknowledged that it had been divided along political affiliations and some of its leaders implicated in unethical and criminal activities and that this had been taken advantage of by some politicians and damaged its credibility. The church was now seeking 'constructive engagement' as opposed to either non-engagement or confrontation. The church outlined its theological mandate stating that the nature of the gospel demands its involvement 'in the transformation of the social, economic and political

systems or environment within which God's people live'. The church presented its vision of a democratic, moral, just, and peaceful society. This was not just a watershed moment for evangelical Christians but for all Christians in Zimbabwe as they came together and spoke with one voice. With this document, 'the church stood behind the birth of the GNU just like it opened the ground for effective multi-party politics towards the end of the 20th Century' (Mhandara, Manyeruke, and Hofii (2013). The church, as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) engaged the late former President Robert Mugabe, the late Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and Former South African President Thabo Mbeki calling for a GNU to bring respite to the people of Zimbabwe. The document was vindicated by the resultant Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 2009 which ushered in a season of relative stability after a period of hyperinflation and political violence. Through *The Zimbabwe We Want* project, EFZ entered the arena of peace-building and political mediation. Its involvement with the ZHOCD significantly influenced its approach to public engagement.

When Zimbabwe embarked on the constitution-making process in 2013, the EFZ was part of that process. Thus, the church made a significant contribution to the supreme law of the land. The church's involvement in civil society organisations in Zimbabwe enabled it to engage in various initiatives. It can be argued that the church has had an important role towards the turn of the millennium and is behind the birth of vibrant multi-party politics in Zimbabwe' (Mhandara, Manyeruke, and Hofisi 2013: 108). While this claim might appear exaggerated, it is important to acknowledge the church's influence in Zimbabwe's post-independence socio-political landscape.

The EFZ has engaged in voter and civic education, observation and monitoring of elections, and advocacy on political issues. People have been encouraged to participate in the democratic political process and make informed choices. In 2012, church leaders under the ZHOCD led by the EFZ president, Dr Shana, produced a position paper on 'The Role of the Church in Nation Building in Zimbabwe' which was lauded by the Crisis Coalition but censured by ZANU-PF. The state-controlled *Chronicle* newspaper accused the bishops of selling an MDC-T paper and accused the clergymen of pursuing a regime change agenda.³ This is because the paper called on the government to implement the GPA including a people-

3 'Church leaders join regime change bandwagon', *The Chronicle* 28 February 2012.

driven constitution, key electoral, media, and security sector reforms. These were some of the demands made by civil society to enable free and fair elections. In 2018, the EFZ launched the #PrayRegisterVote campaign which was an initiative to encourage the Christian community to vote in the 2018 elections.

EFZ was part of ZHOCD's proposal for an election Sabbath whereby in the context of often violent and disputed Zimbabwean elections, it called for a hiatus on political contestation for seven years in order to build trust and reset the nation's politics. In making the call, the church had considered that the current political context was not feasible for meaningful political reforms or inclusive economic participation by the ordinary citizen. After the disputed 2018 elections and post-election violence, Zimbabwe entered 2019 a divided nation. The rising cost of living led to widespread demonstrations to which the state responded with heavy handedness. The church condemned state repression and called for dialogue to resolve the crisis. The ZHOCD hosted the National Leaders Prayer Breakfast on the 7 February 2019 which included civil society, student movements, key government officials, and diplomats. In May 2019, the National Ecumenical Episcopal Conference was convened where the Sabbath proposal was made. In October 2019, the proposal was formally publicised and communicated to the political actors. Though the initiative was rejected by political leaders, it remains a more viable option to remedy the continuing deteriorating political and economic situation. In February 2021, the ZHOCD called for a National Consensus to bring the Zimbabwean people together and map a way forward highlighting the continued challenges in the nation. The church also pointed out that the rejection of the Sabbath call by the political parties was due to political expediency rather than for national healing. In the recent 2023 harmonised elections, the EFZ was instrumental in bringing political parties together to sign a peace pledge. This was done by seven contesting political parties including the two main parties, ZANU-PF and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) led by Nelson Chamisa. Other parties that signed the pledge were United Zimbabwe Alliance (UZA), Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), Zimbabwe Coalition for Peace and Development Party (ZCPD), and United African National Council (UANC). This surely is a long way from where the organisation had been from its inception until the early 2000s. It shows that EFZ has become a relevant movement concerned not only with

spiritual well-being with the total needs of human beings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EFZ engaged both its members and the country's political leaders on the best way to manage the crisis as well as holding theological discussions on its online theological forum where position papers were presented and discussed to address the uncertain environment. Issues that arose during that time included whether to be vaccinated or not, whether COVID-19 was the 'end times', and whether to comply with the government on the ban on gatherings. EFZ advised its members to take all the necessary measures to prevent infections including wearing masks and vaccination. However, the government was urged to assure members of the public on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. It also urged its members to comply with government regulations relating to gatherings while it also negotiated for relaxation of the restrictions. The pastoral letter of July 2020, 'Pastoral Letter #3: Prayer for the Restoration of Zimbabwe', spoke to the rising tensions caused by difficult living conditions in the context of COVID-19 and the resultant hard lockdowns that left Zimbabweans, the majority of whom are in the informal sector, unable to earn a living. The letter called for engagement and dialogue for a way forward to address both the rising cases of COVID-19 infections and the threat of mass protests planned for 31 July 2020.

Over the years, EFZ has grown from a small group of evangelicals seeking to fellowship with one another and minister to the soul to a grouping of over 850 member bodies representing up to 4.5 million Christians in Zimbabwe. It is no longer confined to spiritual matters but is now involved in matters of national importance. It has moved from the periphery of the Zimbabwean story to become a central figure in its unfolding. Even though the EFZ now addresses broader national issues, it still places high priority on the salvation of souls. It has simply broadened its focus. It now self-describes as one existing to mobilise, empower, and network evangelicals for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. This means it now has a broader vision that seeks to share a holistic message that addresses the whole person – spirit, soul, and body. The EFZ has launched various evangelism and prayer initiatives. In June 2017, EFZ partnered Christ for All Nations (CfAN) on a series of evangelistic campaigns in Zimbabwe. In June 2020, the organisation launched the *90 Days Prayer Watch* to pray for the country and in 2022 conducted the *31 Days of Prayer* commemorating its sixtieth anniversary. The EFZ has also warned its members against falling prey to false doctrines and cults

encouraging them to be discerning. In May 2023, the EFZ as part of the ZHOCD issued a statement raising concerns over the *Al Jazeera* produced *Gold Mafia: The Laundry Service* documentary that aired between March 23 and April 13 2023 and implicated government officials, business people, and prominent preacher, Prophet Uebert Angel as engaged in corrupt activities. The statement condemned the corruption alleged in the documentary and urged Christian ministers to uphold high standards of integrity and probity. It also called upon parliament and the President of Zimbabwe to take action in the interests of restoring public confidence in state institutions and government officials.

Through strategic partnerships with local and international organisations such as Mercy Corps, Higher Life International, Tearfund, Living Water International, and World Vision among others, EFZ has been engaged in holistic ministry. Some of the main areas it focuses upon are:

- Leadership development through training and resourcing Christian leaders
- Promotion of unity among Christian leaders and denominations for the furtherance of the gospel
- Addressing humanitarian challenges such as poverty, natural disasters, health, and improving the quality of life of people
- Mobilising the church for revival and spiritual awakening in the nation

It is important to highlight the EFZ's humanitarian and developmental agenda. To alleviate suffering and to holistically address the issues facing people in the nation, the EFZ has various commissions namely the Commission of Ministry Development, the Humanitarian Relief and Development Commission, Peace and Development Commission, Gender Development Commission, and the Research and Development Commission. The commissions were established in 2005 to give impetus to EFZ's vision of impacting the nation in all aspects of life. The Commissions were fully operational by 2006. Through the commissions, the EFZ now addresses matters of social justice such as human rights abuses, corruption, and inequality. The EFZ also is involved in providing social services such as water and sanitation, community projects, and food relief. Some of EFZ's activities through these commissions are highlighted below.

The Commission for Ministry Development facilitates, co-ordinates, and provides ministry programmes to members. It conducts evangelism, discipleship and church planting and youth and child evangelism

programmes, prayer initiatives, and integral mission which is concerned with empowering communities to become self-sufficient. This helps in poverty reduction. It successfully held gospel crusades featuring renowned speakers like Joyce Meyer, Dag Heward Mills, and Daniel Kolenda. On the integral mission front, the commission, through its Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP) assisted in the building of bridges and school blocks and other initiatives in ten districts.

The Humanitarian Relief Development Commission is involved in relief work through programmes such as WaSH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) aimed at improving access to clean water by installing boreholes in rural communities, child protection, and helping communities in environmental sustainability (addressing climate change issues). Through strategic a partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the commission has worked in providing shelter to displaced people. It also partnered Living Water International and Partners to provide access to safe and portable water, sanitation and hygiene, combined with the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in communities in Murehwa, Mutoko, and Epworth. To date, 750 boreholes have been sunk and rehabilitated in Epworth, Murewa and Mutoko. When Cyclone Idai hit some parts of the country in March 2019, the EFZ through the commission mobilised resources to assist the affected people in Chipinge and Buhera districts. Other humanitarian efforts have been carried out with victims of the Tokwe/Mukosi Dam disaster of 2014. The commission also crafted an HIV Policy for Churches in 2005. These initiatives have helped to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life for many Zimbabweans.

The Gender Development Commission facilitates gender mainstreaming in all EFZ systems, processes, and programmes. The commission addresses issues such as Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), access to education for girl children, poverty alleviation through the establishment of Self Help Groups (SHGs) especially targeted at empowering women and girls, and menstrual hygiene for rural women and girls.

The Justice and Peace Commission addresses matters of national governance, advocacy of justice and peace, election monitoring, and election observation. Through this commission, the EFZ successfully lobbied against NGO Bill in 2006, was part of the ecumenical bodies that crafted the 'Zimbabwe We Want' vision document, was involved in the

Zimbabwe Constitution making process as a member of the Constitution Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC), and participation in the electoral process through the Register, Prayer, Vote campaigns.

The Research and Development Commission promotes the implementation of evidence-based interventions through the generation and dissemination of relevant information and knowledge. This is accomplished through monitoring and evaluation processes of projects as well as research and documentation.

The EFZ also joined the Zimbabwe Interreligious Council (ZIRC), an interfaith platform that collaborates on matters of peace, governance, and empowerment of member bodies. One can see that it now addresses not only spiritual matters but also those issues that used to be relegated to the political sphere or other civil society organisations unrelated to the church.

Conclusion

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe has over the years evolved from an organisation confined to humanitarian welfare to one addressing national politics. It has evolved from a simply passive community development-oriented institution to one that engages on a national platform. It has evolved from being a timid collaborator with the state to becoming a voice for the voiceless carrying the concerns of its constituency to the corridors of power. It has become a strong, growing and unifying platform for preaching the gospel, equipping church leaders and facilitating fellowship and joint ministry, meeting the needs of vulnerable communities and being a positive influence in nation-building efforts. It took the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe in the 2000s to awaken this giant from its slumber to begin to address issues affecting the total person.

It is critical that EFZ does not rest on its laurels and think that it has arrived. There is still a lot of work to be done. For example, not many of Zimbabwe's citizenry are active in the civic space. Many people are afraid of being labelled 'political' or even losing their lives. This is because Zimbabwe's politics is often characterised by violence and intolerance. There is a lot of work to be done, not only in the church which needs to be taught on how to effectively influence the current situation without losing integrity. It still needs to be equipped with a holistic theology of mission for individual and community transformation. Communities themselves need to be economically empowered so that they do not become pawns in the political game – especially during election time. We have come a long way. We still have a long way to go.

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What is a Christian Citizen: Learning from the political action of apolitical actors

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In 2016, a series of social actions took place across Zimbabwe, with a range of civil and labour groups mobilising.¹ Civil servants were awaiting salary payments, a mounting cash crisis was making daily life difficult, import bans had been imposed, and the proposed introduction of bond notes had residents on edge. Continued high unemployment, infrastructure failure, and police crackdowns had left many feeling overwhelmed and increasingly frustrated. Mobilisation by the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe, the #ThisFlag campaign led by Pastor Evan Mawarire, and the social protest movement Tajamuka/Sesjikile, among others, culminated in marches, street presence, and protest ‘stayaways.’ Tajamuka/Sesjikile are phrases in Shona and Ndebele respectively, translated variously as ‘we are agitating’ (Chitando and Tarusarira 2019: 232) or ‘we strongly disagree,’ described by one of its leaders as meaning, “outraged”, “angry” with an implicit component of “action” – something like “Let’s act”.²

Pastor Evan, one of the figureheads of the ‘stayaway,’ had initiated the

- 1 Many of the actions I describe engaged new media but built upon many decades of mobilisation and resistance by a range of civil society, student, labour, NGO, and religious organisations. Those who participated in 2016 did so well aware of the history of ruthless suppression of such resistance.
- 2 “We are at the tip of the end of President Mugabe” Zimbabwe’s Tajamuka campaign says’, *International Business Times* UK, 29 July 2016. <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/we-are-tip-end-president-mugabe-zimbabwes-tjamuka-campaign-says-1573282>

#ThisFlag patriotic campaign by posting a YouTube video in which he lamented the state of the nation and the loss he felt as a citizen. As Joram Tarusarira and Ezra Chitando (2019) detail, Mawarire used the symbolism of Zimbabwe's flag to highlight the disappointments and failures of the national project and reinterpreted its meaning in ways that resonated with many who listened and shared his post. It quickly went viral, and viewers began posting their own statements while wearing the flag. Pastor Evan, drawing on previous uses of such actions, suggested a 'stayaway'-- a day strike in which people would remain at home. On the day of the proposed stayaway, shops, businesses and even church offices were closed, leaving many parts of Harare's capital empty. Not long after the stayaway, Mawarire was arrested, charged initially with inciting public violence.

As these activities gathered momentum, I was spending time conducting ethnographic fieldwork with a particular group of middle-class Christians in Harare. They belong to an informal network of Baptist and Baptist-affiliated churches. Between 2015 and 2017, I had been researching morality and social change, living alongside my interlocutors while facing increasing challenges and learning about the variety of responses they produced. While sometimes supportive of stances taken by groups attempting to call the government to account, my Christian colleagues were generally reticent to participate directly. I heard advice against participating in protests, and I knew no one who did so during this period. Among young adults, whose uncertainty about the future might have motivated them to more active participation, most told me that they did participate in the stayaway of 6 July, but as much by default as by choice: many of them reported that their places of school or employment were closed over fears of surveillance and reprisal, and those who did not work or go to school chose to stay home over similar concerns about what might erupt in the streets of town.

It thus came as a surprise to me that when the court date for Pastor Evan's hearing arrived, a number of attendees of the network of Baptist and Baptist affiliated churches were present in the gathering crowds. I later learned that while some had been characteristically very reticent to participate in the visible support for Mawarire, their own consciences did eventually lead them to the courthouse.

Needless to say, the courtroom was packed by the time of Pastor Evan's hearing, which was delayed for some hours. The halls outside the courtroom were full too. As the day wore on, people in the room prayed,

sang, and waited. Outside, as it grew dark, many more people gathered, also praying, singing, and kneeling for several hours. Riot police and water cannons stood ready nearby. It was a momentous occasion for many reasons, and the visible mobilisation of people from different walks of life was one of the many striking events which preceded the forced resignation of President Mugabe.

As a Pastor, Evan Mawarire might well be expected to garner more support from Christians than someone merely holding a political office. Tarusaria and Chitando (2019) point out that Mawarire sometimes quoted the Bible and drew on Christian ideas, and also that he fit within a longer line of prophetic Christian leaders. He clearly utilised sermon-like preaching skills, and I would add that his very effective code-switching between English and Shona served to draw a larger audience. While Pastor Evan did call for public civil action to pressure the government to live up to its responsibilities to ensure provision of basic services, end corruption, and right the economy, his message was purportedly non-partisan, meaning that he was not supporting any particular political party. He simply wanted to be proud to be a Zimbabwean again. Still, his actions became political ones as he mobilised one kind of power to challenge another to fulfil its commitments. While he argued that he was not calling for the ousting of the regime, he was indeed advocating for political change, pushing citizens to take a more active role in holding the government to account.

Despite his religious pedigree, I remained surprised about the presence of my middle-class Baptist interlocutors in the courtroom. As I have already indicated, members of the community with whom I was conducting research were overwhelmingly reluctant to encourage public activity of this kind. When other serious civic proposals were raised, including one which addressed the introduction of a national pledge in schools, members of these churches were very concerned. Even so, their key directives in such cases were to pray and to raise awareness for themselves. If church leaders took any further action, or did begin to lobby policymakers directly, it was not something readily apparent to congregants in the pews.

This volume asks about the relationship between ecumenical councils and political transition in Zimbabwe. Many Christians associated with the network of churches I'm describing seem unlikely candidates for such a discussion. This is the case on two main fronts: first, as I've just indicated, they remain reluctant to participate in any overt political action,

ecumenical or otherwise, and second, their commitments to individual conscience and to the autonomy of the local church, as well as very strong assertions around orthodoxy, lead them towards a complicated relationship with ecumenism. What, then, might the concerns of this group of Christians tell us about the role played by ecumenical councils in political transitions in Zimbabwe?

In answer, I want to draw on some of the questions raised in the remit for this conference. One concerns whether ‘ordinary Christians’, rather than participating in the political interventions of church councils, are pursuing private means for the kind of transformations they desire. This might include forms of spiritual liberation in prosperity messages, or mechanisms that lead them towards an ‘apolitical quietist faith’. Another asks about whether the major church councils are able to encourage and support forms of ‘participatory’ democracy at the grassroots by creating ‘local autonomy’.

As a socio-cultural anthropologist, what I hope to add to this conversation is a consideration of what apparently apolitical actors, or actors with apolitical commitments, can tell us about political change. I suggest that the approach of certain of Harare’s Baptists offer a worthwhile case to consider in response to both of these inquiries. First, despite apparent apoliticism, this group has indeed mobilised a specific vision of political life, and of the role that the church should play in seeking justice and transformation. They teach about what it means to be a Christian citizen, and they have an account of the nature of appropriate secular government, including concrete assessment of government failure. Their commitments to a view of divine sovereignty affect the possible interventions that they see as real or necessary in the realm of human politics.

Second, as Baptists who prioritise the autonomy of the local church, I suggest that their approaches may have something to add directly to the pursuit of democratic governance. Their view of the church as locally governed shapes whether and how they are willing to participate or choose to abstain from ecumenical activities. As I will show, the Baptist Union of Zimbabwe (BUZ) wrestles with how to decide whether to affirm statements or interventions made by larger ecumenical bodies, like the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). Additionally, their democratic commitments to local autonomy might also suggest possible ways to develop greater grassroots participation in the mobilisation of churches to produce desired change.

The Christians with whom I did fieldwork are members of several different churches, some of which are explicitly Baptist, and maintain membership in the BUZ, and others that share a similar doctrine but are not part of the BUZ. These various churches co-operate on events, and are often also connected through schools, neighbourhoods, and fitness groups to which their members belong. Many would be characterised as middle-class, possessing important resources and education, but without the political connections of the nation's elite. This middle-class position shapes their perspectives and their capacities in important ways.³ I want to be very clear that the group of churches that I describe here are not representative of Zimbabwean Baptist Christianity at large, nor are they entirely representative of the BUZ, though some of them do have particularly loud voices in the Baptist Union. My view is ethnographic and partial, and so not intended to be representative or historically comprehensive. I draw on some of the matters that were important to this group of Christians, in order to make a few key points about how locally autonomous congregations engage with ecumenical activities and approach political intervention. Thus, my contributions to the discussion here will be suggestive, rather than prescriptive or definitive. My anthropological commitments also demand that I maintain anonymity for my interlocutors, so I refer to the main church to which they belong as 'Fairside Baptist'. I also maintain anonymity by speaking in more general terms about members of the group and of the churches in the network.

I first detail the challenges posed to ecumenism by the structure and role of the Baptist Union of Zimbabwe, before turning to the accounts of sovereignty, citizenship and governance that they claim. I conclude by suggesting what a commitment to both divine sovereignty and human autonomy might mean for grassroots mobilisation of Christians.

The BUZ and challenges to ecumenism

The Baptist Union of Zimbabwe is a part of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). The EFZ was founded in 1962, and as of 2021 counts 865 institutional members among its ranks (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, n.d.). Since its founding, the EFZ has had varying approaches to broader ecumenical participation and to political intervention. A number of scholars have pointed out the, at times, reticence of the EFZ to participate in directly 'political' actions. Relative to other much older

3 This is a matter I cannot fully address here but do so at length elsewhere (Williams Green 2021, 2022).

ecumenical groups, it also lagged behind in developing mutual relations with the state (Ruzivo 2018). In a broader sense, the relation between church and state in Zimbabwe has been a matter of differing phases over time (Hallencreutz and Moyo 1988). The approach of the EFZ changed around the start of the new millennium. As Zimbabwe faced greater challenges economically, politically, and socially, the EFZ started to participate more actively with a number of ecumenical groups. Markedly, the EFZ initially participated with other church and ecumenical groups in the work of the National Constitutional Assembly, before later withdrawing.

The observations about a reticence toward political stances track with findings by one Baptist pastor, Naison Mangwende (2017), who recently conducted research with a number of EFZ church leaders. Speaking to Mangwende, these leaders perceived the EFZ as being mostly concerned with spiritual and ‘social concern’ issues and more ‘silent’ on political matters (p. 50). Mangwende notes that while the EFZ has also started to promote activities such as attendance at the hearing of bills, it is mostly leaders who actually participate in these public meetings (p. 54). He also found that one reason why the EFZ seems to struggle with increasing democratic participation is the high degree of internal ‘political polarisation’ with which it must contend (p. 63). Churches or members are seen to align themselves with one or the other political approach – allegiance to the ruling party, or heavy critique and a staunchly oppositional stance towards it – with little ground for engagement between. There are also significant doctrinal differences among the various members of the EFZ, which pose an additional challenge.

While members of BUZ are part of the EFZ, Baptists in this group are also committed to the local autonomy of the church. They participate in their Union, pay affiliation fees and gather for an Annual Meeting where delegates from member churches vote on issues and decide on the direction for their denomination. However, individual churches maintain their own constitutions and govern themselves accordingly. Institutionally, they are organised democratically. At Fairside, many decisions are made by elected church elders, and even admission of any new member to the congregation requires a vote from the existing membership. Individual autonomy of churches is refracted in the individual autonomy of each believer, who needs no spiritual mediator other than Christ, and learns and tests spiritual truths according to the Bible and the Holy Spirit, rather than the authority of the church. This commitment to autonomy has the capacity to raise

additional challenges to fostering ecumenical co-operation.

Early in my fieldwork, a church leader from Fairside, whom I call Mr Mabereki, gave me a tour of Harare. As he did so, he outlined a brief history of the role of the church in Zimbabwean society, including the role and status of the Baptist churches. He saw the Zimbabwean church at large as having more centralised influence in the country prior to 1980. This was, in part, because of the important role played by mission schools and hospitals in providing much needed services. At the same time, settlers were accused of bringing the Bible but then taking the land. During the armed struggle, many mission schools and hospitals were closed. Churches were in some cases seen as being more 'sympathetic' to settlers. Following national independence in 1980, the 'established churches' were 'riddled with so many scandals' – financial, sexual and otherwise – that they lost the authority to speak with a public voice, in Mr Mabereki's view. The subsequent fracturing of denominations meant that there was a 'sidelining of the centrality of the church', which 'kind of weakened the church's own influence'. The church had to 'reassert itself' anew as independent of the settler project. There was a concerted nationalisation of leadership in established churches, as well as the growth of many African Independent Churches and various new evangelical churches that had no connection with Western institutions. But this growth of various churches also meant new sets of power relations with which to contend. According to Mr Mabereki, all these developments served to fragment the influence of the church.

Post-independence, it became much more significant that churches speak collectively in unity, Mr Mabereki told me. If a single church or even denomination spoke out about a subject of significance for the whole country, politicians did not need to listen. While the earlier issues faced by the church included racial and political oppression, the current issue was mostly an economic challenge, he concluded. Thus, there was a need to have some kind of co-operation between churches to meet the significant social and economic challenges facing the country. A unified church voice would mean that politicians would have to listen.

Mr Mabereki had more specific accounts of how the Baptist Union fit into the history of relations between state, society and the church. Despite its presence in Zimbabwe for over a hundred years, the number of Baptists remained very small. As of 2024, the total number of members counted among the various Zimbabwean Baptist denominations that

fall under the umbrella of the World Baptist Alliance is 330,011 (Baptist World Alliance), from a national population of nearly 17 million (United Nations Population Fund). By these figures, Baptists account for less than 2% of Zimbabwe residents. In 2024, the World Baptist Alliance, of which the BUZ is a member, lists the group as having 72 churches and 4,725 members. The Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe, by contrast, counts 500 churches and 300,100 members among its ranks (Baptist World Alliance). Early on, the Baptist Convention invested in schools and hospitals, so that people were trained to be loyal to Baptist beliefs from an early age, Mr Mabereki told me, while the Baptist Union, by contrast, had no such avenues to create loyalty. Instead, even many Baptist pastors were trained in non-Baptist institutions.

While the emphasis on ‘local church independence or autonomy of the local church’ was certainly an important and valued part of what are termed ‘Baptist distinctives’, Mr Mabereki affirmed, it could also cause problems if people were not themselves trained in these distinctives. In turn, the atomisation of churches in the Baptist Union could undermine the very teaching of Baptist distinctives. The result is that they have ‘struggled as a church to maintain some relative agreement on theological positions’ and ‘hence congregations within the Baptist Union have [too often] pronounced... the local church autonomy principle to the exclusion of co-operating with other congregations to advance the cause of the gospel’.

The BUZ’s own Annual Meetings are revealing in terms of showing how groups committed to autonomy negotiate belonging and mobilisation at various scales. Each year, delegates from member churches meet to give reports on various ministries, elect officers, confirm new ministers, and make decisions about new directions for their Union. At the Annual Meeting in 2016, the relation of the BUZ to the EFZ and Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) came up as a point of discussion, raised as a matter of addressing the tremendous challenges and suffering endured by Zimbabweans in recent years. As ‘affiliates’ of EFZ and ZHOCD, the BUZ necessarily assumed to be in support of the position of the latter two groups on the situation in Zimbabwe. But many felt the need for the BUZ to make a clear statement on its own position, so that it would be clear when and how they might be directly involved when pressing matters arose in Zimbabwean society and how they would go about determining the stand that should be publicly taken.

One male member picked up on the matter of how the EFZ and ZHOCD take particular stances on various issues related to the evolving situation in Zimbabwe. He suggested the need for having specific BUZ guidelines, in the instance that the position on Zimbabwe, taken by one of these larger councils, might be something with which the BUZ would want to differ. He foresaw this as a potential challenge in the future, though he did not consider it a matter of conflict at that current moment. A woman member suggested that the issue at hand was a matter of having representatives prepared to speak up. As the BUZ was a member of the EFZ, a representative of the BUZ would be present at the relevant meetings where positions were debated and codified. It was the task of that member, she asserted, to raise objections on behalf of all the BUZ members when and if they disagreed.

Several members suggested the need for an explicit group to be charged with addressing social concerns, a kind of theological think-tank prepared to get together quickly and generate recommendations on behalf of the BUZ. However, the issues that needed to be addressed often changed on a daily basis – 2016 was the year of worsening drought, of stay-away protests, and the initial introduction of a new pseudo-currency – the bond note. So, some argued that it was simply not possible to generate a series of guidelines in advance, one that could simply be drawn on to represent the BUZ at EFZ meetings.

Two other issues were raised as potential tensions by those who agreed with the need for greater clarity on how the BUZ would interact with interventions or statements made by their larger umbrella bodies. First, it became clear that the BUZ representative to the EFZ was not likely to represent everyone very well. This was particularly evident, one person pointed out, given that the group had just participated in several hours' worth of discussion about how to deal with a single infrastructure issue within the BUZ. No conclusion had been reachable on the topic.

Second, a proposed BUZ justice desk or think-tank would still require working within the umbrella body to which they had committed. The representative in such cases, one member proposed, could suggest they were not comfortable with something put forward by the EFZ, and could ask to bring it before their own Baptist Union to debate. This would still require consultation as the BUZ.

The debate at the BUZ annual meeting, with these final two arguments, pointed to a central question: what role do denominations play in larger

ecumenical organisations? If the purpose is to have the various groups unite to make single statements, then what should happen when a single denomination or church body disagrees with the interventions made by the umbrella organisation? Should the single dissenting group withdraw from the larger one? Or should they lobby and negotiate until the statements of the ecumenical council incorporate all the views represented? This question also scales downwards to a point I raised at the outset about the relation of the 'grassroots' to the elite: how are decisions reached by church leaders, and what relation does this have to the views of congregants?

To raise the challenges of developing ecumenical co-operation is not novel. As Joram Tarusarira points out for another ecumenical group: 'the ZCC [Zimbabwe Council of Churches] as an ecumenical body has not been spared the limitations of ecumenical institutions, especially when faced with socio-economic and political crises' (2020, p. 74). Molly Manyonganise also makes this clear when she highlights how 'church bodies are bound by different doctrinal beliefs which at times may militate against always agreeing with one another' (2020, p. 45). These doctrinal disagreements can at times also curtail the possibilities for collective action. But it is not always doctrinal divergence alone that produces disagreement on whether or how to act as a church; even in cases of doctrinal alignment, church bodies can differ markedly on matters of acting together.⁴ I return to this point again in the next section.

In addition to questions about how smaller groups relate to umbrella ones when it comes to public-facing statements, the concerns of the BUZ and its institutional structure offer some possible ways to think about the role of autonomy in mobilising collective democratic efforts. The commitment to local church autonomy, as well as the autonomy of the individual believer, fosters a strong sense of commitment to democratic governance. The Baptist church itself takes a decidedly democratic model, though this is also mediated by commitments to orthodoxy and spiritual patriarchy. The very impulses to autonomy that raise challenges to ecumenical collective action may also hold the seeds for mobilising democratic participation in public and political life.

Views from the pews: discussion and debate on citizenship and secular government

While I have thus far pointed out the general reticence of members of the network of Baptist and Baptist-affiliated churches that I describe to

4 I thank David Kaulemu for making this vital point.

advocate direct political action, they teach and promote the development of an explicitly Christian vision of citizenship, and encourage reflection on the range of ways in which a Christian can and should interact with the world of secular governance.

In the last section, I shared the long *durée* perspective of a Baptist church leader, Mr Mabereki. While his views are based on having worked with and led many groups at grassroots level, his view is still that made from the position of leader. So, too, in the prayers offered on a weekly basis from the pulpit on behalf of the nation, churches in the Baptist network asserted a particular view of secular government. They viewed it as responsible for orderliness and care for the most vulnerable. I heard church leaders clearly cite the increase in street children needing care as evidence that the government was not fulfilling its responsibility to ensure the just running of the country. The church was more than willing to help those who needed it but did so well aware of the larger political failings that prevented the most vulnerable from receiving right and fair treatment. This view of what a responsible, just government would look like thus also incorporated ways to assess government failure of responsibility.

On the other hand, I heard Baptist young people express political frustrations in their own terms. They lamented how often Zimbabwean citizens did not actually know the rights that they had been given under the new constitution, and so these rights were often infringed. They disagreed among one another about the solution, but most confirmed that greater awareness of constitutional rights was vital to bettering the situation in their nation.

If the question is how Christian institutions might generate an active citizenry, it is clear that there are many ways in which space for democratic participation as well as dissent can be fostered. Even where there are limits to the kind of ecumenism that a particular Christian view allows, this does not prevent the development of environments that motivate political discussion, debate, and indeed, action.

A few months after the #Thisflag campaign had taken off, and Pastor Evan had been arrested and acquitted, Fairside Baptist and several churches in its network hosted an annual youth week event. While the morning sessions focused on large-group theological teaching, each afternoon attendees could choose from among various elective workshops. Designed to address perceived needs, the workshops focused on how a Christian might deal with issues faced in everyday life. That

year, one teacher created a workshop titled ‘#Thisflag and #Thiscross’.

This workshop was one among many other similar kinds of meeting – weekly gatherings and study groups of varying degrees of formality that take place regularly within this Baptist church network. These gatherings made explicit the importance of reflection on ethically and spiritually based activity in political life. I participated in the workshop, alongside a dozen or so other attendees in their late teens and early twenties – most of whom I knew fairly well – several older event leaders, and the workshop organiser. What emerged from the workshop was that many young people shared the concerns raised by Pastor Evan and were looking for guidance.

One man in his twenties came to speak to the group and pointed out how his own quiet critiques of government injustice in his workplace, couched in patriotism for his own country, were necessarily interpreted as political. The young man, whom I call Tendai, talked about the importance of being a good citizen who obeyed laws, like keeping a fire extinguisher in his car, as required. But, he stated, civil disobedience was not wrong. Prayer was important, but so was engagement, he argued. He advocated talking about the issues that were actually happening and knowing what the law stated, rather than just following the flow of those around you. Finally, Tendai recommended the importance of a ‘united platform’ when advocating for change. He did so, even as he emphasised his own action on the basis of his conscience.

It is precisely this kind of ‘united platform’ that proves difficult in a context where personal conscience and church autonomy are held in high regard. Additional commitments to ideas about divine sovereignty mean that this group does not need to advocate for the declaration of Zimbabwe as a ‘Christian nation’, as the EFZ did in 1999 (Ruzivo 2018). To take a strong stance on divine sovereignty presumes that God is the ultimate actor, and that humans themselves may not actually be able to generate much change, perhaps least of all political change. A hard-line view of divine sovereignty also entails a different vision of what political transformation will look like: divine work can take many forms that reach for justice. These forms are not dependent on the visions of a particular leader or political party. Neither do they require mass mobilisation. This makes many avenues, beyond collective human agency, possible channels for political transformation, leaving open the question of the role that an ecumenical council might play.

In the volume engaging the work of Brian Stanley and the development

of World Christianity, editors Emma Wildwood and Alexander Chow (2020) make both 'ecumenism' and 'independency' their central themes. In her introduction, Wildwood argues that '[e]cumenism and independence exist in critical tension with one another', highlighting 'two distinct impulses in the history of Christianity: on the one hand, desire for unity, collaboration, connectivity, and often for shared believe and practice; on the other, the need for distinction, plurality, and the contextual translation of the gospel' (2020, p. 2). This tension is highlighted within Baptist Union Christianity in Zimbabwe through efforts to foster action based on conscience and to promote a church free of imposed intervention from various secular or religious authorities in a specific post-colonial context. Adherents do so while wrestling with the commitment to justice that calls them towards unified action with fellow Christian kin. Their experience suggests that ecumenism and commitments to independence or autonomy of conscience may often persist productively in tension with one another, and both a part of the pursuit of democratic participation.

Conclusion

What does all this mean, then, for our consideration of the history of ecumenical councils and their relations to political transitions in Zimbabwe? First, it alerts us to the persistently wide range of stances taken toward political engagement even within this small network of Baptists and affiliates. While Mr Mabereki and Tendai both advocated the need for more unified action on the part of the church writ large, the Baptist commitment to acting on one's conscience and to local church autonomy pose particular challenges, like those faced by the BUZ in their participation and support of the EFZ statements. These commitments, coupled with a strong view of God's divine control, leaves me asking whether a strong view of divine sovereignty can motivate collective political action that is not reliant on ecumenical co-operation. What this diversity of views does mean is that any ecumenical efforts, if they are to include those who have been reticent to be active contributors to the Christian councils, have to take into consideration the vastly differing view, not just of what political change is necessary, but of how political transformation will or can come about.

The debates among delegates at the BUZ annual meetings show that there remain challenges to developing collective stances on issues that might assist ecumenical groups in advocating for political change. Still, contexts like the elective workshop with youth, and even to some degree

the BUZ meeting discussions, may also serve as examples in themselves of the possibilities of fostering local autonomy and forms of participatory democracy. The presumption in these settings that individual churches and individual believers who are also individual citizens should be developing their own stance on issues – even if the stance ultimately taken is a quietist one – is an instance of grassroots mobilisation. Sara Rich Dorman notes that when the church affiliated NGO Ecumenical Support Services held public meetings on topics of ‘social justice and theological issues’ in the 1990s, there was significant attendance, but with few follow-up opportunities for attendees to continue to participate in discussion (2002, p. 86). This indicates interest in such discussions, but without enough opportunity for these to be pursued at the level of the participant in the pew. It also suggests alternative barriers to participation, other than the oft presumed apathy or fear.

Of course, even the same institution or movement may be democratic at one level and decidedly not at another, as David Maxwell (2006) has shown in the case of ZAOGA, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa. The case of efforts on the part of one group of Harare’s Baptists to come to terms with the possibilities for political change also foregrounds that there may be some inherent contradictions between the push for ecumenism on the one hand, and the interest in democratic grassroots participation on the other. This does not preclude the possibility of committing to both simultaneously, but it does suggest the need to better understand and address the tensions that their contradictions may raise.

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‘That they may be one’: The ZCC’s contribution to church and national unity – 2013 to 2023

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At the heart of Zimbabwe’s protracted challenges is the failure of the political class to provide a unifying vision and programme for the nation, supported by relevant implementable policies that will inspire national convergence, justice and equitable access to the national wealth for all. Inspired by Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21, that ‘they may be one’, the ecumenical movement at global and local levels, has sought to inspire, not only the unity of the churches, but also of peoples everywhere. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) drew from such ecumenical inspiration an agenda for church unity that would extend to national convergence through comprehensive and inclusive dialogue between 2013 and 2023. This chapter seeks to map out ZCC’s contribution to the understanding and practice of unity through negotiated means in the context of a volatile situation in Zimbabwe during this period. The efforts by churches to unite the nation began in pre-independent Zimbabwe but have become more urgent today.

Socio-economic and political context

The last time Zimbabweans had a semblance of unity was when, after years of bloody politics between 2000 and 2008, they agreed on a Government of National Unity (GNU), brokered by the former South African President,

Thabo Mbeki in 2009. After the honeymoon of the GNU, Zimbabwe held its first election under the new constitution on the 31 July 2013. The results shook the over-confident main opposition, the Movement for Change (MDC-T), led by Morgan Tsvangirai. The ruling party, ZANU-PF, won a resounding two-thirds majority in the national assembly. As in all previous elections, there were concerns about the election's freeness and fairness, and the opposition rejected its legitimacy and outcome. This legitimacy challenge further polarised the nation. There was no co-operation among political players. Internationally, Zimbabwe remained isolated. The economy took a further downturn. The economic challenges during this period fomented political discontent within and between different interest groups.

Unlike the opposition which focused on governance, and alleged the 'self-enrichment' by some, the ruling ZANU-PF party used the period of the GNU to recover its political losses of 2008 by winning back and consolidating power by reorganizing its party bases. After winning the 2013 elections overwhelmingly, the ruling party left the opposition in further disarray with further fragmentation. Although the elections were peaceful, there were again allegations of the uneven playing field. But there was no consensus among election observers on their assessment of the elections. By 2014, the world had moved on. The EU lifted sanctions on the state-owned diamond mining firm Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation, echoing a 2011 decision by the Kimberley Process. This emboldened the ruling party but also gave its security sector and its elites access to much needed financial resources from mining monopolies. These resources were useful in power consolidation but the fight over their control also threatened the apparent unity of the ruling party.

At the same time, the ruling party had the task of resolving the inevitable succession question, since Mugabe was growing old and frail. The rumours of his inevitable retirement fanned concerted internal jostling for control of the party. The positions left vacant by the expelled members of parliament of the ruling party,¹ and those left vacant through infighting and recalls in the opposition,² necessitated a by-election in June

1 In June 2015, several of the ruling ZANU-PF members of parliament were expelled. These included Mwenezi East's Kudakwashe Bhasikiti, Marondera Central's Ray Kaukonde and Guruve North's David Butau. In May, three other senior members had been expelled. These included former Vice President Joice Mujuru and former secretary for administration, Didymus Mutasa.

2 In March 2015, 21 lawmakers from the breakaway Movement for Democratic Change Renewal party were expelled from the MDC of Morgan Tsvangirai.

2015. The ruling party consolidated its power and concluded the demise of the opposition by sweeping all these vacant seats since the opposition boycotted the by-elections. But this was a hollow victory for the ruling party as it did not resolve the succession conundrum, which by the end of 2015 saw Mugabe raising new concerns about factionalism. This time, the factional fights pitted younger members of ZANU-PF, the Generation 40 (G40),³ which boasted of the support of the president's wife, against the other faction led by the Vice President Mnangagwa, called the Lacoste, which boasted of the support of the army. The tension between the two factions reached its climax with a coup in November 2017 which saw President Mugabe being forced out of power, the G-40 destroyed and many of its main leaders exiled. On the other hand, Morgan Tsvangirai's party, other opposition voices, and even civil society, seemed open to this change, inspired by the hope that if Mugabe was no longer in place, there could be a new era. Rumours and wishful thinking were not in short supply. Many associated President Mnangagwa with the dawn of a new era. His slogan when he returned, 'the voice of the people is the voice of God', made many to conclude that he had rediscovered his Christian roots. Some speculated that he had enough wealth and would bring corruption to an end. Others concluded that he was driven by the *ngozi* (avenging spirits) of Gukurahundi and wanted to make amends by putting the nation first. Though unconstitutional, the coup seemed to get rid of what was thought to be the biggest stumbling block to national transformation, Robert Mugabe.

The 2017 change of power in ZANU-PF and government produced winners and losers. Winners promised to usher in a new era of national unity, democratic maturation, and economic development for everyone's benefit. Losers pointed to the unconstitutional nature of power grab and poured scorn on the legitimacy of the process. Mugabe himself, before he died a sad man, argued that 'we must undo this disgrace', in reference to the coup, implying that it would remain a curse on the nation. The national fissures did not take long to manifest themselves. For many, the violent suppression of protest that saw the shooting of citizens in the aftermath of the 2018 elections, pointed to a future not very different from that of Mugabe's tenure. The alleged abductions of members of the opposition⁴

3 Generation-40: an informal group of ZANU-PF politicians working on generation change by replacing the older officials of the party with themselves. It included Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere and Patrick Zhuwao, a nephew to Robert Mugabe.

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/05/zimbabwean-opposition-reports->

and the deaths in quick succession during Covid-19 of the army generals who had participated in the coup such as Sibusiso Moyo, Perrance Shiri, Paradzai Zimondi and General Douglas Nyikayaramba precipitated fear, paranoia and fragmentation. The legislative changes that followed were viewed as aimed at centralising the power of the executive. The general perception was that the judiciary was captured.

The allegations of corruption scandals from 2017 to 2023 through government tenders and the opulent living of those named as beneficiaries, deepened ordinary people's disdain of the political elite and further divided society.⁵ Threats of the enactment of the Private Voluntary Organisations Bill cowed civil society for fear of being deregistered. The announcement by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that 'some aspects of the harmonised elections fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act and the SADC principles and guidelines governing democratic elections of 2021', further denied the nation of that badly sought legitimacy from the 2023 elections. Some people feared that without addressing the 2017 coup it would be impossible to hold free and fair elections. The implosion of the opposition because of alleged infiltration and the failure to build internal cohesion, was another face of the nation's fragmentation. In such a deeply polarised, splintered and paralysed situation, many looked up to the church as a possible driver of genuine unity and national convergence for meaningful transformation to a more just, peaceful, united and prosperous future for all. This was the context in which the churches in general, and the ZCC in particular, were called to offer their ministry of unity. As the churches worked for unity of the nation, they also worked on their own unity since they were also deeply divided.

The ZCC from 2013 to 2023

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) was formed in 1964 as a result of a long ecumenical development. In 1903, the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (SRMC) was established in Bulawayo with Reverend Charles Daniel Helm as its founding president. The presidents tended to represent the membership of the Council while General Secretaries led the operations. The first General Secretary of the Christian

human-rights-abuses

5 <https://www.thezimbabwemail.com/main/in-depth-corruption-opulence-and-a-showy-attitude-in-a-sea-of-poverty-in-zimbabwe/>

Council of Rhodesia, later called the ZCC,⁶ was the 37-year-old African clergyman, Rev. Herbert Philemon Chikomo (1927-2018). Chikomo served from 1964 until 1971 with the Anglican Bishop Kenneth Skelton as the President of the Council. He was replaced by Cornelius Dick Watyoka who was expelled under the pressure from the government in 1980. Revd Murombedzi Chikanga Kuchera served between 1980 to 1997; Densen Mafinyani was subsequently replaced by a fellow Methodist, Dr Solmon Zwana, in July 2009.

Solmon Zwana served under the period of our examination. The context of his tenure was both a blessing and a curse. It was at the beginning of the Government of National Unity (GNU). It was a curse because in the absence of any open conflict and violence, the church, like the opposition and civil society, did not have robust programmes of action to prepare for the end of the GNU. In fact, there was a sense that these non-political entities had been marginalised during the discussions about a government of national unity and were only being given token recognition during the constitution-making process because the political parties had more say. Since the nation was experiencing relative social, economic and political stability – though this did not mean that the underlying problems had been resolved, – the agenda of the churches and civil society seemed unclear. Individual voices of some church leaders from the council were heard here and there.⁷ Speaking to the WCC in September, soon after assuming his role as General Secretary, Zwana expressed his desire to see a revitalised council: ‘We are still trying to revitalise ourselves as a voice... a voice for the voiceless.’⁸

One of the issues the church needed to address was the division within itself. In his interview, Revd Zwana stated that the ‘church leadership is divided along political lines’ so ‘that it is difficult to speak with one voice’ (Chovere 2011). Due to these divisions, some church leaders started working on alternative ecumenical platforms. For example, the

6 It changed from being called Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (1903-1953), to Southern Rhodesia Christian Conference (1954-1963). From there on, some names are interchangeable, such as Christian Council of Rhodesia and Rhodesia Christian Council, Christian Council of Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe Christian Council. Only from 1990 was it called Zimbabwe Council of Churches.

7 This is the period of the formation of the Ecumenical Church Leaders’ Forum, led by Bishop Ambrose Moyo, because of dissatisfaction of the responses of the churches to the growing crises, as will be discussed below.

8 ‘Churches find role in “New Zimbabwe”’, World Council of Churches, 2 September 2009.

Ecumenical Church Leaders’ Forum (ECLF), led by Bishop Ambrose Moyo and other church leaders like Bishop Naison Shava, Bishop Lazarus Mphande Khanye, Bishop Ishmael Mukuwanda, Bishop Obert Shatai, Rev Aimon Ndhlovu and Bishop Danisa Ndhlovu was initiated around this time in 2009.⁹ The forming of parallel ecumenical bodies was a sign of frustration with the ZCC, as can be seen from Bishop Moyo’s comments:

The problem we have in the ZCC is a leadership problem. The leadership is divided along political lines, and they cannot decide on one thing and follow it. Others do benefit from this corrupt system, and they forget that they are called to fight for the common people, to fight against oppression and systems that marginalise others. What the leadership say on Conferences is not what they do. They are not speaking with one voice, and this has destroyed the church’s social mandate.¹⁰

While, during its formation in the 1960s, local and regional ecumenical bodies were its source of strength; after 2000 these parallel actors were viewed by the ZCC as threats, but also a reflection of the internal fragmentation of the church (Tarusarira 2020). The fragmentation was also fomented by competition for financial resources from donors, even though some new formations saw themselves as complementary organs to the mother bodies like the ZCC. For example, the Churches in Manicaland (CiM), formed in 2000, saw itself as a local expression of the nation ecumenical effort. According to Revd Shirley DeWolf, one of the founders, the CiM began when:

Manicaland clergy tried to get the ZCC to take a lead role in addressing issues of major concern – especially violence – but did not get anywhere. We then changed strategy and looked to WCC to help apply leverage. Manicaland representatives of WCC member churches requesting WCC Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) to make an urgent pre-election visit to Zimbabwe to stimulate church action here. WCC came with Fellowship of Christian Councils in East and Southern Africa (FOCCESA)¹¹ and insisted on visiting not only ZCC national office where *there was considerable*

9 Bishop Khanye says ECLF started as a platform of ‘concerned church leaders’. My interview with Bishop Mphande Lazarus Khanye, 19 November 2024.

10 Ibid., p.47.

11 It was founded in 1980 as the Fellowship of Christian Councils in East and Southern Africa (FOCCESA) and in 1999 as the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA).

resistance, but also member churches in the region.¹²

From the above, it looks as if the shortcomings of ZCC attracted splinter groups. The Ecumenical Peace Observation Initiative in Zimbabwe, established under the auspices of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), was also established in 2014 aimed at ‘promoting peace, reconciliation, non-violence and justice,’ a mandate known to belong to the Council since its formation.

Revd Zwana left the council in 2014 and took up parish work in Borrowdale. The unity he envisaged between and within the churches had not yet been achieved. The revitalisation of the churches to speak with one voice to the nation, was not achieved. The impotence of the churches to unite the nation was not only reflected in the divisions but also in the churches’ lack of financial sustainability. The ZCC was unable to replace the Revd Zwana with a substantive General Secretary due to financial challenges. Instead, Gabriel Sheunopa Manyangadze, the ZCC programme director and a Reformed layman, was assigned the role from 2014 until 2016 when he was replaced by Revd Dr Kenneth Mtata. The ZCC was too institutionally fragile to tackle national problems. The Council’s inability to resolve its financial debts, to pay staff salaries and statutory bills rendered it an easy target for government attack in case it raised any challenges to the state. Staff had very little programme funds and were hence not motivated. The church leaders rarely met to reimagine the role of the Council together.

The Council was in need of comprehensive organisational renewal when Revd Mtata took up his role on 1 September 2016. At the June 2016 biennial General Assembly, soon after his appointment, Revd Mtata proposed changes in four areas, namely, (a) governance, (b) membership commitment, (c) public engagement, and (d) organisational sustainability. This programme of action was also articulated in the context of the commissioning service of Revd Mtata on 31 October 2016 in the Anglican Cathedral in Harare. The invitation letter captured the new vision as follows:

Today, informed by its theological values and vocation, the ZCC is once again called to provide space and resources towards *national dialogue* and *comprehensive transformation* of a post-colonial nation. The landscape has changed but the Christian values of *justice, peace and empowerment* remain. With the current situation of *national*

12 Personal correspondence, 12 July 2024.

*fragmentation at different levels, amplified economic inequalities, and challenges for democracy, Christians and churches have a new calling to renew their ecumenical commitment for the sake of social cohesion and holistic salvation. It is to the attainment of such foundational Christian values that the new general secretary of the ZCC is called to serve. It is also such values that will inform the 2017-2020 ZCC strategy.*¹³

This renewal process included strengthening the local and regional ecumenical structures. It also included strengthening the secretariat by bringing in new programme staff like Tinashe Gumbo, Fambai Ngirande, and Ronald Nare, all of whom had had strong civil society experience. To strengthen its accountability, the Council also hired a chartered accountant, Caroline Jeche. This raised the confidence of the funding partners. Within a year or so, funding improved, and the Council started to slowly take the lead in some key national processes.

The strength of the ZCC increased its influence within the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), where it worked with Zimbabwe Catholics Bishop Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA). During the period from 2016 to 2023, the ZCC regularly served as the secretariat of the ZHOCD and hence initiated joint processes. As the church bodies increased their co-operation, their voice was heard more on national issues. One could ascribe some of this to the collegiality between the General Secretaries.¹⁴ When they ceded these roles in quick succession, the ZHOCD also lost valuable institutional memory.¹⁵

To unite the nation, the churches needed to strengthen their unity. One important action towards this was when the ZCC invited the ZCBC to become an associate member of the ZCC in 2017. The two bodies had had a long and strong relationship in the past but this had become weak over time. The Catholics were founding members of the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference at its formation in 1903 until their withdrawal

13 Invitation letter by Bishop Ishmael Mukuwanda, the ZCC President, to the commissioning of the new General Secretary of the ZCC and the launch of the ZCC strategy, on 31 October 2016 at the Anglican Cathedral in Harare.

14 The General Secretaries were Father Fredrick Chiromba (ZCBC), Rev Kenneth Mtata (ZCC), Revd Edson Tsvakai (UDACIZA) and Pastor Blessing Makwara (EFZ).

15 Father Frederick Chiromba retired in Mutare in 2022. Revd Tsvakai of Zviratidzo Zvavapostori church was the General Secretary of UDACIZA and passed away in October 2021. Pastor Makwara was the General Secretary of the EFZ from 2016 to 2021. Revd Mtata took up a new responsibility at the WCC in October 2022.

without explanation in 1938. Relationships remained subdued until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) (Woodhouse 2018). Thereafter, there was more openness, and Catholics worked together with Protestants in the 1960s and 1970s under the Heads of Denominations umbrella. They had an observer status in the ZCC at Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, though this drew complaints from some ZCC heads, and the Catholics drew back again, though they continued to co-operate at what was now called the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations.

The ZCC invitation to the ZCBC in 2017 was significant. It was extended 'in the Spirit of Pentecost, on the 31st May 2017'.¹⁶ On 1 August 2017, the ZCBC accepted the Associate Status within the ZCC as defined by the ZCC Constitution. The two bodies then signed a memorandum of association on 30 October 2017 during a festive service at the Anglican Cathedral. The date was also symbolic as it marked 500 years since the Protestant Reformation of 1517: a day before Reformation Day for Protestants and two days before All Saints Day for Catholics. The two bodies agreed to express their unity by taking up joint commitments in peace, justice, and ecumenical efforts.

This unity between the biggest church bodies strengthened them in their efforts to unite civil society. From the 1990s, especially in the areas of peace and justice, civic education and elections, governance, humanitarian and development work, the ZCC had played catalytic role in building civil society. Over time, there was some uncertainty about whether church engagement in civil society work was appropriate. In the 60s and 70s, the Smith regime made it a requirement for churches to register their humanitarian, development and civil society engagements. The churches refused to comply with this directive. The Council then established Christian Care in 1967 to circumvent this legal impediment. From the 2000s, as resources shrank, the business logic of civil society and church programmes in peace, advocacy and development incurred an element of competition and operating space became restricted, just as had happened before. There was a sense among civil society that working together with the churches would (a) give CSOs access to the huge constituency, (b) root the work of CSOs in the spiritualities and cosmologies of the ordinary people, (c) allow CSOs to lean on the moral authority of religious leaders when a situation becomes hostile, and (d) that CSOs could draw on the volunteerism in the churches to drive their work. All this became evident

16 Five shared commitments of the memorandum of association between the ZCC and ZCBC signed at the Anglican cathedral on 30 October 2017.

during the difficult period from 2002 to 2008 when CSOs, and even the opposition, found refuge in the churches. In 2009 the Church and Civil Society Forum's (CCSF) inaugural National Healing and Reconciliation Conference was held in Kariba, aimed at establishing 'a national co-ordination mechanism for the fragmented efforts' of churches and civil society working on peace building.¹⁷ By 2015, the CCSF was working closely with the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission to discharge its work towards peace in Zimbabwe.

In 2015, in partnership with civil society, the churches attempted the first national dialogue to resolve the outstanding challenges after the end of the GNU. Together they established the first National Convergence Platform (NCP) in 2015 and appointed the Anglican bishop of Manicaland, Bishop Sebastian Bakare, as its convener. It was meant to be a platform of 'church leaders, political actors, civil society, business leaders, students, women's groups and ordinary citizens to prepare for the great indaba that is expected to usher in a new establishment to bring back prosperity and good life to Zimbabwe.'¹⁸ In Bishop Bakare's assessment, there was a 'consensus that our country is crying out loud for dialogue and we are, therefore, in discussion with key stakeholders as we plan to hold a national convention of concerned citizens under the theme, Unity in Diversity, whose objective is to define a clear national plan of action for dealing with the political and economic crisis that grips Zimbabwe ... The NCP is a non-partisan platform that seeks to enhance national convergence and the restoration of national unity, cohesion and tolerance to the Zimbabwean society.'¹⁹ However, Bishop Bakare gave up on the NCP after certain selfish civil society actors started using the platform as a vehicle to raise money for their own personal projects.²⁰

As we have already seen, the commissioning of the new ZCC General Secretary in October 2016 put the issue of national dialogue at the centre of his mandate. This call became more important as internal tensions were growing in ZANU-PF and the economy was rapidly deteriorating. However, it soon became clear that the Council did not have the necessary clout to convene such a dialogue. A decision was made to seek global

17 Church and Civil Society Forum 2012 'Development of a Church and Civil Society Forum Conflict Early Warning System', p.6. Harare: CCSF. <https://www.nangozim.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/bi-annual-conference-27-28-june-2012.pdf>

18 'Sunday Opinion: Time for a true people's movement', *The Standard*. 8 February 2015.

19 Ibid.

20 From my interview with Bishop Bakare on the 26 July 2024.

ecumenical solidarity. An invitation to the WCC General Secretary, Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit was accepted. A global ecumenical solidarity delegation led by the WCC General Secretary himself arrived in Harare in May 2017. On 19 May 2017, I accompanied the Revd Tveit together with the ZCC President, Bishop Ishmael Mukuwanda, and others to meet the then Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa. The delegation that was made up of participants from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Canada, Zambia and other countries also paid a courtesy call to the ailing leader of the opposition, Morgan Tsvangirai, himself a member of the Methodist church. On both sides of the political spectrum, there was an openness to finding a mutually agreeable solution to the national question. A thanksgiving service for the visit was held at the Anglican Cathedral.²¹ The visit raised the profile of the ZCC because it was not only broadcasted in Zimbabwe but also in other news networks in the region.

On 27 September 2017, the ZCC would issue a public statement on the deteriorating economy and intra-political tensions in ZANU-PF. It was in this statement that an explicit call for an all-stakeholder dialogue was made:

The Government of Zimbabwe must take it up as an urgent matter to address the fundamental deficiency of trust in our society. Zimbabweans have lost trust that the government is sincere in addressing national problems when they see the government officials choosing to send their children to foreign schools and being treated in foreign hospitals. The conclusion is that they themselves have no confidence in the institutions they preside over. The government must, as a matter of urgency, *seek broad stakeholder engagement* to foster confidence and trust. The current situation can only be resolved by *broader stakeholder participation* and not under partisan politics. The government must also note that trust is not built by misrepresenting facts about the state of affairs. Trust is not to be derived from coercion. No amount of propaganda can sustain lost trust and legitimacy. *Trust can only be built on the foundation of truthful dialogue and transparency.*²²

Although this statement was inviting a national dialogue, in comparison to statements issued by the church in the recent past, it was quite strong.

As the situation continued to deteriorate, the fragmentation in the

21 'In Zimbabwe, connections could strengthen peace'. WCC Press release, 20 May 2017. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/in-zimbabwe-connections-could-strengthen-peace>

22 ZCC Public Statement 27 September 2017.

ruling party sucked in the churches. On what was dubbed 'Super Sunday' on 5 November 2017, Grace Mugabe, wife of the President, hosted an interface with almost 40,000 indigenous church members comprising Apostolic and Zion churches at Rufaro stadium. She used the event to lambast the opposing faction led by the then vice-president, Mnangagwa. She intimated that he would be fired; and, indeed, he was fired the following day. Then all hell broke loose as the coup was activated; Robert Mugabe was axed, and Emmerson Mnangagwa was inaugurated on 24 November 2017.

National People's Convention

On the same day that Mnangagwa was inaugurated as the President of Zimbabwe, the ZCC together with the ZHOCD convened what was called the National People's Convention (NPC). The ZCC played an important role in organising civil society to respond in a co-ordinated way to the coup. What started as a trilateral reflection between me as the ZCC General Secretary, Fambai Ndirande, and Sally Ncube grew to become a convening space for civil society and churches, the NPC, and an assembly of citizens held at the Rainbow Towers Hotel in Harare. It was attended by about 4,000 civil society actors, academics and church leaders. The platform sought to facilitate consensus among ordinary people on key national trends, issues or processes in ways that were positive, constructive, proactive, and responsive.²³

The NPC was able to provide a credible platform for churches and civil society to give a coherent response after such a major national event. The NPC produced a Declaration summarising the key issues which the participants considered that the new government should urgently address. On 28 November 2017, the NPC consolidated these issues under the special guidance of governance experts such as Brian Kagoro into a letter sent to President Mnangagwa's office for his consideration. However, the NPC's ambition to build this initiative into a national movement, functional at provincial, district and ward levels, was not realised. A few months after the coup, it became clear that the euphoria and the hope that the nation could turn a corner was not founded on reality. National polarisation deepened and national unity remained elusive.

23 Statement on the 5th Anniversary of The National People's Convention in November 2022.

Regional unity

One longstanding challenge to national unity in Zimbabwe is the ethnic, or more precisely, the regional question. Gukurahundi, or the massacre of ZAPU members or those associated with the party, mainly in Midlands and Matabeleland regions, from 1983 to 1987, has left a deep scar. The roots of ethnic and regional divisions had of course been established by the Rhodesian government using divide and rule tactics. These tensions intensified during the liberation war with competition and hostility between the two political parties, ZANU and ZAPU, and the two armies ZANLA and ZIPRA. But the Gukurahundi terror always resurfaced when triggered by actions of regional neglect or perceived marginalisation or even insensitive utterances. The Unity Accord in 1987 did not heal this wound or lead to national cohesion. The ZCC believed that there was not enough reflection at the level of principles to address the Gukurahundi brutality which saw some 20,000 people killed, often with the dead not receiving a decent burial. Children were often left without certification, which had long term implications. Families were broken, with some members fleeing to neighbouring countries, especially South Africa and Botswana.

After several engagements with different interest groups in the Matabeleland region, on 16 January 2018 at the Njube Lutheran Youth Centre, the ZCC launched what it called the principles for comprehensive engagement on the Gukurahundi. These principles were developed by several key actors from the region working through the Gukurahundi issue. These ten key principles sought to protect the process from being instrumentalised for political purposes. The principles recognised that even though the history of the nation was littered with many atrocities, Gukurahundi held a key place in the national conscience. It was also noted that there had been other efforts to address Gukurahundi, including reports from different commissions.²⁴ It was agreed that current engagement with the issue of Gukurahundi should not be done in isolation but must build upon past initiatives. It was also noted that the truth of what really happened cannot be fully uncovered without taking into serious consideration the experiences and testimonies of the victims, although their testimony alone would not be able to account for the whole picture. It was therefore

24 The Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry was established in 1983 to investigate the Gukurahundi. <https://www.usip.org/publications/1983/09/commission-inquiry-zimbabwe>

also agreed that, even though there are different levels of victimhood and different levels of accuracy in recalling what happened, such subjective views must be triangulated with independent objective research to get to the closest account of what really happened. This was not to undermine the previous ground-breaking investigations such as 'Breaking the Silence', but to build on it. It was also noted that the effects of Gukurahundi had a clear gender dimension. Women and children in particular were affected through rape, sexual harassment and displacement. As such, it was agreed that disaggregation of the victims by age, gender, ethnicity and other key variables will enable effective redress for the various categories of victims. The principles also disputed the assumption that Gukurahundi could be viewed as purely a legal issue; that they must recognise the traditional, religious, social and cultural dimensions of a multi-faceted approach to address violence, trauma and then healing and reconciliation. This meant that Gukurahundi could not be solved simply by having a public apology from government officials. Engagement must result in acceptable and just forms of formal closure for the majority of affected persons through the realisation of tangible peace dividends including reparations and equalisation. Some people thought that Gukurahundi left casualties only among survivors. The reality of the matter is that many perpetrators remain traumatised and mentally ill and thus pose a danger to society until today.²⁵ It was agreed that, while engagement on Gukurahundi must focus on empowering the victims to move on with their lives in spite of the effects of their brutalisation, it must also result in the healing of the perpetrators so that they are transformed and reintegrated into healthy society. It must lead to the reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators as much as this is possible. The principles noted with concern that some people thought once the Gukurahundi issue had been addressed, it could be forgotten. Instead, they were clear that it must be memorialised through dignified re-burials, monuments and rituals at multiple levels of society so that future generations will not be misinformed through a falsified, sanitised national history, but that all can learn from the faults of the past and be moved to pursue unifying national narratives. Preventive justice mechanisms should also be put in place so that never again will one group of people in Zimbabwe execute systemic violence against another. It was not easy to promote and propagate these principles as there was not enough convergence between different groups. The big gap lay in the

25 'Principles for comprehensive engagement on the Gukurahundi', 6 January 2018, Njube Lutheran Youth Centre, Bulawayo.

competing narratives regarding the national question and how dialogue could be deployed to address it.

Competing dialogue narratives

In January 2019, President Mnangagwa had to cut short his foreign trip to deal with unrest triggered by the price of fuel being increased 150 per cent. Upon his return, he announced through his Twitter account that he would want to call churches, business, political parties and civil society organisations to a national dialogue. This pronouncement resonated with the call that churches had been making since 2015. However, there was a groundswell in favour of national dialogue from January 2019. In no time, it became clear that different entities meant different things by this dialogue.

The ZCC provided its own understanding of dialogue. The summary was:

Zimbabwe's problems can be described in terms of their manifestations or their causes. If we are going to deal with the root causes, these need to be understood in their historical context. The aim of the process is to develop a shared understanding of the problems as well as to show that they cannot be resolved outside a negotiated context. Such challenges are difficult to resolve by any other means because, (a) they are historical, they have their roots in the past and have tended to fossilise and taking different shapes with time, (b) they are interconnected, they may take a social, economic or political form, but they share common roots, (c) they are both personal and collective, the problems affect individuals and groups of people, (d) they have the potential only to deteriorate, because they cannot be addressed, they will tend to fester and get worse.²⁶

The main opposition, MDC-A, wanted the national dialogue to be between President Mnangagwa and their leader, Nelson Chamisa. Their rationale was, 'the dispute is between Mnangagwa and Chamisa.' For the churches, however, the main goal of a national dialogue was 'to find and broadest national consensus, to consolidate peace, unity, democracy and inclusive socio-economic and political development to achieve equal opportunity for all.'²⁷ In this view, for the churches and later the civil

26 The 2021 version of the Concept Note for the National Dialogue as the Sustainable Solution to the National Challenges in Zimbabwe.

27 'The Prospects of National Dialogue in Zimbabwe, Guide for the Informal Working Group on National Dialogue.' ZCC, 23 February 2019.

society organisations, a national dialogue would provide a platform to comprehensively address the length and breadth of issues that had affected the flourishing of the relational, constitutional and economic efforts of the nation since independence.

Two processes emerged that reflected how President Mnangagwa and his government understood possible dialogue and the unity it intended to produce. First, in a bid to show that his commitment to reach out to all sectors of society, on 30 January 2019, President Mnangagwa announced the appointment of a 24-member Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) which included me. The PAC 'members are appointed by His Excellency the President based on experience, expertise, leadership, contacts, and standing in society,' said the announcement. However, on the same day, I publicly announced that I could not take up the role and hence requested to have my name withdrawn. My justification was that this role would compromise my objectivity in contributing to the 'Nation Building agenda.'

At the same time, the ZCC, together with its ecumenical partners in the ZHOCD, was preparing for a National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, planned for 7 February 2019, which we wanted the President to attend; and we wanted to use this occasion to launch the national dialogue call in the presence of President Mnangagwa and the leader of the main opposition party, Nelson Chamisa. I went to see the President at his Munhumutapa office on the morning of 6 February 2019 to clarify the purpose and nature of this event. During the meeting, which was attended by myself and two others, I explained that the churches wanted to see unity and healing of the nation in light of recent – but also past – hurts. I also shared with him that we had designed a liturgy in which the message of national peace and healing were the main themes. I explained what role the leader of the opposition would play during the service, having been prompted to do so. I explained that Chamisa would be expected to lend his endorsement to the national dialogue process during the service. When I left, I received assurance that the president would attend the prayer breakfast, and all the preparations were carried out accordingly.

But on the afternoon of the same day, President Mnangagwa announced through his Twitter handle that he had 'invited the leaders of all political parties to come together, without preconditions, to begin a process of national dialogue. Let us all put the people first and politics second.'²⁸ In the evening, on the same handle, he announced that 'Today we began

28 https://x.com/edmnangagwa/status/1093114704208248832?t=fGs2Bu8eBZCS_1B0-NGB6Q&s=08

a national dialogue, the fulfilment of my pledge to engage & consult all Presidential aspirants on ways to move Zimbabwe forward.’²⁹ This would go on to become the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), a platform for those presidential candidates that had lost in the just-ended 2018 elections. At that same 6 February event, President Mnangagwa asked the office of the Vice President Kembo Mohadi to oversee the different efforts towards national dialogue. The reason for this was that the VP’s office held overall responsibility for national reconciliation and healing.

The inaugural 6 February 2019 political dialogue meeting did not start well, and this would have a bearing on the churches’ organised National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, planned for 7 February 2019. First, most small political parties³⁰ participated at this meeting but Joice Mujuru of the National People’s Party and Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance did not participate. The meeting would go on to appoint committees to oversee the agenda setting, dialogue framework and other issues, but would struggle for legitimacy. The second challenge was that Chamisa decided to attend the churches’ organised National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, planned for 7 February 2019. This gave the impression that the two dialogue events were in competition. The situation was complicated by President Mnangagwa’s statement: ‘I had invited an unnamed cleric to chair this meeting (the 6 February 2019 inaugural POLAD), who then became an activist, so I had to drop him and engaged Retired Justice Selo Nare.’³¹ Who was the cleric who had turned down the invitation to chair the meeting? I was glad no one tried to find out. But from these insinuations, I knew that the churches’ efforts towards national dialogue would face an insurmountable hurdle.

Our fear was fulfilled the following day when, after waiting for some time, we heard the news that the president would not come but would be represented by the ZANU-PF chairperson, Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri. The churches were disappointed because they did not want this event to appear to be in competition with the POLAD. But many things were now militating against the churches’ efforts. Chamisa used the event to up his rhetoric of ‘stolen elections.’ This also put the church in bad light. In general, however, the event was well attended. Almost all members of the ZANU-

29 https://x.com/edmnangagwa/status/1093209041755652096?t=x4C2YOd-wK6Fo3niD5_0Ag&s=08

30 <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-02-06-chamisa-snubs-mnangagwa-dialogue-call/>

31 <https://www.thezimbabwemail.com/zimbabwe/its-chamisas-democratic-right-to-snub-dialogue-mnangagwa/>

PF politburo came, as well as members of the diplomatic and business communities and the churches. But without the president, the event did not carry the envisaged weight. We never received a full explanation as to why he chose not to come, but with hindsight, and examining all the issues, it is now easier to understand.³²

Sabbath Call

The following months after the prayer breakfast were hectic. We wanted to find ways of putting the dialogue process back on track. It soon became necessary to further clarify what the churches meant about national dialogue as distinct from the POLAD. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations organised an ecumenical reflection meeting called the Episcopal Conference at the Large City Hall, Bulawayo on 8 and 9 May 2019. The event was attended by high-ranking representatives of the ZHOCD mother bodies. It was even graced by the All-African Conference of Churches (AACC) General Secretary, Revd Dr Fidon Mwombeki. He spoke about the priestly, pastoral and prophetic role of the church. This conference became an opportunity for church leaders to discern the best way to respond to the protracted national challenges. Among the resolutions at this Bulawayo meeting was the decision to recommend suspension of all elections until electoral reforms had been made (what would become the 'Sabbath Call'). But after consulting with high-ranking officials in government on the night of 9 May, it was felt that the Sabbath call was premature. We were advised that it would be interpreted to mean that we were parroting the claims of the opposition that the elections were rigged. We decided to mention the Sabbath in our May statement but did not make the call.

After some months of further reflection, some members of the ZHOCD felt that the situation was not improving and that the Sabbath Call had to be made. In the first week of October 2019, a statement was drafted. After much deliberation, the Sabbath Call was announced at Africa Synod House. It basically proposed that, considering 'the currently unfolding national crisis in its totality', the churches propose:

What we believe is a comprehensive but sustainable solution. We have prayerfully come to the conclusion that in light of the current political paralysis, deepening mistrust and the dehumanizing economic decline, the nation will need to take a bold decision to address the root causes

32 It was rumoured that there were some who wanted to discredit the church and hence persuaded the president not to participate. We could not prove this.

of our national challenges that have a very long history and will not be fully resolved by one entity. In this light we are calling the nation to SABBATH on all political contestation for a period of seven years to allow for the rebuilding of trust and confidence, reset our politics and chart a shared way forward towards a comprehensive economic recovery path in a non-competitive political environment. This position builds on the founding vision of the 2006 church discussion document, the Zimbabwe We Want' ... and on the resolutions of the 'Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations Episcopal Conference at the Large City Hall, Bulawayo of 08-09 May 2019.³³

The Sabbath was a proposal for a seven-year Sabbath period³⁴ for the purposes of establishing an emergency recovery mechanism to address the dire national situation, especially for the most vulnerable communities. It was also meant to create an environment for rebuilding trust and confidence by healing all the hurts of the past as well as space for developing a shared national reform agenda to deepen our democracy, establishing a shared and inclusive national economic vision. While the Sabbath call entailed the suspension of the constitutional provision of elections, this could only be done through a national referendum.

The Sabbath Call was a ZHOCD product but was authored and largely driven by the ZCC, which served as the secretariat. There was a mixed reaction to the call even within the church. The government gave a nineteen-page response with an attempted theological argument. The opposition gave an unofficial response. There was also a response from some civil society actors. The base-line criticism of the statement was that it was proposing an idea that was against the constitution since the latter required the holding of elections every five years. The proponents argued that the current environment did not allow for the possibility of realising this constitutional requirement in an effective and just manner, hence the need to attend to its assumptions. But there were those who saw the Sabbath Call for what it really was, a means by which the nation could pause its meaningless, predetermined political contestation, so as to find a way out of the impasse. The success of the Sabbath Call was that it has continued to stand out as an alternative

33 'Call For National Sabbath for Trust and Confidence Building'. Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations, 7th October 2019.

34 We received questions like, 'Who would govern during this period?' 'Would the current government simply remain in power without contestation?' But these questions were outside the ambit of the Sabbath Call as it was assumed that it would only be implemented after an agreed process through a referendum.

pathway towards resolving the national question.

National Convergence Platform II

Some civil society organisations decided they wanted to sign up for the Sabbath Call and rally the nation around it. They established the National Convergence Platform (NCP) as a vehicle towards this purpose. This would be the second attempt at establishing an NCP after the one that had failed in 2015. After a period of deliberation, on 13 December 2019 the NCP was finally launched at the ZCC head office at the Kentucky Hotel in Hatfield, Harare. The event was marked by a colourful church service led by the ZHOCD through an inspiring and flowing liturgy. In attendance were about 1,200 delegates from the diplomatic community, civil society organisations, representatives of various cities, the informal sector, labour, the diaspora, the church, academia, business and professional bodies, representatives of the Chapter 12 Commissions, leadership from the police force and students from various universities. Also in attendance were members of provincial consultative meetings spearheaded by the ZHOCD in all the ten provinces which served as a build-up to the launch. Political parties were not invited.; it was felt that they would see it only as a political space.

As the ZCC General Secretary and the spokesperson of the NCP, I gave the keynote address in which I traced the NCP to the various national convergence efforts of the past. I revealed the role the church had played in nation-building processes since 1979, when the Revd Murombedzi Kuchera, former ZCC General Secretary, and Bishop J.C. Shiri, former ZCC President, provided pastoral support to the Lancaster House processes.³⁵ They both attended the launch of the NCP. (It was an emotional moment when I requested them to stand for the delegates to recognise them.) I emphasised the role played by the late Revd Canaan Banana in brokering peace between the ZANU-PF and PF ZAPU leadership in 1987, and I traced the role of the church during the development of the current constitution having proposed some key reforms through the Zimbabwe We Want discussion document of 2006. I further reflected on how the church had contributed to shaping citizens' convergence in the formation of the civil society organisations like the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) and Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), both formed in 2000, the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT), formed in 2004, the Church and Civil

35 They were not there as delegates but as a supportive presence.

Society Forum (CCSF) in 2009, and many others. I emphasised that the broader role of the church in shaping the development of civil society in Zimbabwe was to ensure meaningful participation of citizens in the nation-building process. I reminded guests that the church was taking its rightful position to unite the nation through the formation of the NPC, reminding them of the failed NCP initiative of 2015. The launch concluded with Revd Dr Kennedy Gondongwe, the then Principal of the United Theological College, presiding over the signing ceremony. The apex CSO bodies, including ZHOCD (as convener), Citizen Manifesto, National Transitional Justice Working Group, Platform for Concerned Citizens, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum and the Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped signed the agreement. Other apex bodies (over ten working on elections, education, business, youth, women, labour and legal issues) including NANGO, Woman's Coalition of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Law Society of Zimbabwe, many business associations, NAYO, and others, signalled interest. They wanted to consult with their constituencies before signing up to the Platform.

Comprehensive National Settlement framework

The NCP established working groups whose routines moved the co-operation of civil society and churches closer. One major outcome of the NCP was its definition of the kind of solution the nation needed. It called this the Comprehensive National Settlement Framework (CONSF) for the Zimbabwe crises. In 2020, the NCP Council agreed the framework which would be based on inclusive, non-partisan participation. The process was going to be locally owned and based on a consensus decision-making system. Its solutions would be holistic and people-centred. The proposed CONSF would address fundamental national issues: national healing and reconciliation; a broadly agreed reform process towards constitutionalism and the rule of law; renewed trust in the electoral process, and minimal contestation of election results. The hope was that such a process would see the renewal of the social contract, on the basis of an inclusive national economic vision where the natural resources would serve both present and future generations while preserving the environment, and where corruption was eradicated. If these conditions were in place, the framework would allow for a move to address Zimbabwe's international isolation and the debt trap. This CONSF became the rallying cry and foundational document for different member organisations. This enabled

churches and civil society to converge on agenda and vision. Even though the NCP suffered internal disagreements during the efforts to engage with the South African envoy in September 2020, this framework became a common guide.

The limits of unity

In 2021, a debate arose within the ZHOCD in general, but in ZCC in particular, regarding the understanding of the unity the nation needed. It became evident that some actors in and outside the church benefitted from national polarisation, even though they acted as if they wanted a solution to the national question. Additionally, there were genuine differences that needed to be addressed for unity to be meaningful and improve lives. One of the central challenges for church unity was whether the ZCC could collaborate with all groups that identified themselves as churches. This issue became particularly pronounced after 2017, with the rise of church groups that were openly partisan, eager to exchange their allegiance for government recognition. They sought the same status enjoyed by the ZHOCD, claiming to represent the broader church community. Some within the ZHOCD felt that this plurality of voices complicated the government's engagement with authentic churches, allowing it to selectively engage with whichever 'church' it preferred on national matters. The debate centred on whether the ZCC and ZHOCD should unite with these groups for the sake of unity, or distance themselves to preserve their integrity.

In response to this, I wrote a reflection for pastors on 16 July 2021, exploring the nature of true Christian unity. I identified three pressures that might prompt the church to unite. First, there is a biblical call to unity, exemplified by Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:21 and Paul's assertion that we are one body with many parts in 1 Corinthians 12:12. Second, the church may feel societal pressure to demonstrate visible unity, as it faces criticism for double standards when it calls for peace and unity while remaining divided. Third, unity offers practical benefits, as churches tend to have a greater impact when they act collaboratively.

However, I aimed to critically examine these assumptions. First, I posed the question of whether all forms of church unity align with the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17. Scripture at times condones separation between genuine and false Christians, as well as among genuine Christians when unity might compromise the integrity of the gospel. Second, before pursuing unity, churches must agree on foundational principles of what it

means to be the Church; not every group engaged in co-operation can be considered a church. In essence, koinonia, or Christian fellowship, must be informed by ecclesiology, defining what it means to be the Church. Unity in action cannot overshadow the need for shared understanding of the Church's essence.

We must ask what kind of church unity empowers the church to foster societal unity. Such unity should be rooted in a shared belief in the collective sinfulness of humanity, which can only be resolved through faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and in the promise of God's kingdom, characterised by righteousness and justice. This belief must manifest in a commitment to align individual and community lives with scriptural demands: to love God fully and serve our neighbours with love. Those who share this faith will naturally seek unity with fellow believers, not as a mere human endeavour but as a reflection of the unity already present in Christ. They will strive to participate in the unity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, from whom true unity flows. This is the unity Christ prays for – an authentic belief that transcends intellectual acknowledgment and is demonstrated in real-life interactions.

In contexts of state oppression and racial segregation, such as apartheid South Africa, the churches' beliefs faced rigorous testing. The question of church unity was challenged, revealing three prominent theological orientations. First, some churches adhered to a 'state theology', viewing the state as divinely ordained and worthy of unquestioning obedience, even if it upheld unjust racial segregation. They often cited Romans 13:1 to justify this stance. The second group neglected Romans 13:1 in favour of Hebrews 13:14, promoting a 'church theology' that focused inwardly and upwardly, ignoring societal injustices. By remaining neutral, they effectively endorsed the status quo. The third group interpreted Romans 13:1 considering Acts 5:29, believing they must prioritise obedience to God over human authorities. This 'prophetic theology' compelled them to confront racial segregation as an injustice to be challenged through public statements and liberation actions. The different theological perspectives significantly influenced the potential for unity among churches. It is telling that when the state sought church representatives, it often chose those aligned with state theology. In a quest for state recognition, churches inspired by prophetic theology might have sought unity with state theology churches despite their conflicting beliefs, a union that would not reflect the biblical concept of unity. Since these theological issues have not been

resolved, one can safely say that the church is not yet ready to be a broker of national unity. If it will, it must use other means that have not yet been tested.

Conclusion

The quest for national convergence through comprehensive and inclusive dialogue could be viewed as the main way in which the churches in general, and the ZCC in particular, played their public role in Zimbabwe between 2013 and 2023. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches focused its efforts on national unity by, among other means, uniting the churches and civil society and trying to unite the political parties. This chapter has sought to narrate the convoluted story of this effort, especially how it got intensified after the coup of 2017. It has also shown that there were both accidental and deliberate distortions of the churches’ effort to this unity by mimicking it and by demonising it. What cannot be denied is that no other organisation in Zimbabwe popularised the notion and language of unity and dialogue in the public discourse more than the church in the last decade. A tradition of unity through dialogue that can be traced to the early ecumenical fathers in Zimbabwe that never died but always rose to the fore when the nation was going through convoluted and intertwined challenges. There is still a factor to consider for the churches’ efforts to bear fruit. It requires another chapter.

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The Roman Catholic Church and the Struggle for Social Justice

LAWRENCE DAKA SJ

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church is an institution that is both universal and local with central governance based at the Vatican City and the Pope as its supreme leader; local churches are led by bishops within juridical boundaries called dioceses. Under the umbrella of this Church, are many religious congregations or orders that follow different charisms of their founders, for example, the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), Franciscans, and Dominicans. The Church in its different categories of identity and operations, has corporate and individual organisations that initiate many faith-based programmes that contribute to social justice in their communities, and more especially in marginalised societies around the world. It is in this context that the Church in Zimbabwe has made an immense contribution towards integral development of people before and after the country's independence. The Church has challenged the *status quo* as well as creating conditions of possibility for social justice. Very often when the Church strongly challenges the government on questions of injustice, corruption or violence and demands a fairer distribution of resources, it leads to divisive and tense relationships with political leaders who respond with the mantra that the Church is overstepping her mandate.

The history of the colonial and post-independence Zimbabwe is characterised by huge disparities between the haves and have-nots, racial

politics between blacks and whites, and ethnical divide especially between the Shona and Ndebele. There are also disparities within particular ethnic groups, and between political parties such as Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the former Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Political antagonism due to factionalism can exist within same parties. Fortunately, however, the country has been spared injustices exacerbated by religious intolerance.¹ During the early years of colonisation before the revolutionary quest for political and economic emancipation, missionaries, by omission or by choice, opted to improve people's livelihoods by establishing institutions such as schools, health and social centres, as well as agricultural and livestock farms. There is no doubt that this church leadership was aware of the injustice of colonialism, glaring poverty and the urgent need for the local people to emancipate themselves. Most looked the other way and opted to convert and show the natives the way to God instead of liberating them.

In the 1950s, with the formation of freedom movements beyond the then Rhodesia, few in the church hierarchy saw the light and chose to stand on the side of the oppressed majority. But these few began supporting the revolution which led to the armed struggle, one that was fought by courageous indigenous people who today are hailed as heroes. Some of the Church's leadership paid the ultimate price by being tortured or killed.² Others, such as Bishop Desmond Lamont of the then Umtali Diocese, the Jesuit priest, Dieter Scholz, as well as Mike Auret who worked with the Justice and Peace Commission were expelled from the country.

In post-independent Zimbabwe, the Church as an institution is more vocal in propagating social justice in addition to social and economic emancipatory initiatives. It has also become more confrontational through pastoral letters and in some sermons. The former are often written to address issues of significance to the people as a whole, regardless of their faith. Tension gradually rose between the Church and the majority rule government which saw criticism and condemnation of its injustices by the Church as an attack on the political leadership. For example, in response to the pastoral letter 'God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed' (2007), President Mugabe said:

- 1 It is arguable to what extent early missionaries and colonisers embraced traditional religions after their interface with anthropological studies. What can be observed is that more than a century since the missionaries collaborated with colonisers to invade Zimbabwe, some still hold on to this religious intolerance.
- 2 An example is Fr Grego Richert SJ who was shot and killed at St Rupert Mayer Mission, Makonde, Mashonaland West.

If I had gone to church and the priest had read that so-called pastoral letter, I would have stood up and said nonsense ... the bishops have decided to turn political... And once they turn political, we regard them as no longer being spiritual and our relations with them would be conducted as if we are dealing with political entities, and this is quite a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves,³

As a result of this church-state acerbic relationship the then new government led by Robert Mugabe oscillated from being cordial to outright frosty. Whenever the Church issued a pastoral letter that criticised the government, counter accusations would ensue. Humiliations and threats of one by the other have sometimes been devoid of reason and reasonableness. The Church's hierarchy has been unfazed. With more threats and persecution of the Church by the government, the former has sometimes found herself isolated or marginalised. As highlighted by the above example, Mugabe a professed Catholic, used some opportunities he had at political and church gatherings to attack the Church. He however sometimes invited bishops to dialogue with his government instead of publicly criticising it.

In this chapter, I argue that the Catholic Church has contributed to and delivered the social justice agenda more through its humanitarian initiatives in education, healthcare, social work, farming, civic training, advocacy, and accompaniment of the young people than through public confrontations. Many early African government leaders in many newly independent countries were alumni of church-run institutions. Their awakening to political activism was not from what they read in pastoral letters, but through the empowerment they received in the form of education and other emancipatory programmes.

I aver that the skills of positive engagement can be employed to achieve a better church-state relationship. The Church should not only point at wrongdoing by politicians through pastoral letters, but also try to engage with them through dialogue, and empowerment and capacitating initiatives. I argue that the Church's work in social justice should be viewed in the context of capacitating people to make choices they have reason to value, while enabling them the freedom to be who they want to be, and do what they choose to do, through many humanitarian programmes. With sufficient human capacities as conditions of possibilities, people can liberate and emancipate themselves.

3 'Mugabe warns Catholic bishops over politics', *Reuters*, 10 August 2007.

Basis of Catholic social teaching on justice

The sources of the Roman Catholic Church are sacred scripture, reason, theology, and tradition traced back to the historical Jesus. To understand the basis upon which social justice is anchored, it is important to unpack, albeit briefly, guiding principles of this important teaching. Catholic social teaching is a combination of the Gospel message that emphasises the dignity of every human person, the pursuit of the common good, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor and marginalised people. Through the lenses of sacred scriptures, experience, teaching, and tradition, the Church finds a mandate to advocate for a just society in pursuit of the common good by respecting human rights, promoting social justice, and addressing systemic injustices and inequalities. Promotion of good and accountable governance becomes the means to achieve these objectives.

Catholic social teaching articulates the Church's response to the plight of suffering of the poor in the world and the dangers brought about by certain practices such as colonialism and authoritarian ideologies. To put this into perspective, after the Second World War which resulted in huge suffering by many people with very little intervention of the Church, many church leaders and members called for reform. They desired to see a Church that is credible and relevant to the reality of its constituents. This led Pope John XXIII to convene the Second Vatican Council that would introduce reforms that can be figuratively translated as the Church opening its windows to fresh air. This major council which convened from 1962 and ended in 1965 ushered in major reforms. A few years later, Pope Paul VI who had taken over the leadership of the universal Church in 1963 implemented recommendations of the Second Council and convened a Special Synod of Bishops. At this high level gathering, the bishops discussed what the mission of the Church and people of God was in pursuit of justice in the world (*Synod of Bishops*, 1971). This introspection and reality check by the bishops led them to a breakthrough declaration which they immediately shared with the world:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation (*Synod of Bishops*, 1971: 289).

This declaration clarified the role of the Church in the contemporary

modern world in terms of politics, economics and social justice.

The three decades from the fifties to the seventies were a momentous period in the human quest for a just society. Those were the years when blacks in the United States of America (USA) were increasingly taking the centre stage in their fight for an equitable society. In the USA the fight for civil rights intensified in the 1950s resulting in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 and the assassination of the fearless black human rights activist and pastor Martin Luther King Jr in 1968. Such pivotal events encouraged struggles for emancipation elsewhere. In South America advocacy for liberation theology was becoming increasingly effective and therefore discomfiting to the ruling elite. This led to the assassination of Oscar Romero in 1980. In many African countries including Zimbabwe, armed struggles for independence were underway. Perturbed by the prevailing political and social situation, John Rawls responded to the American challenges of the time with *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971) which sought to address the problem of inequality. Many scholars, including Amartya Sen, also increasingly interrogated the unjust economic order and theories of the time.

In the meantime, theological reflection continued in Europe similarly ignited by the atrocities of the Second World War. Johanne Baptist Metz (1978) questioned the Church's apparent silence during the extermination of Jews in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp (1941-45). He argued for a church with eyes opened to the reality of suffering people. Decades later, in 1994 the world would witness to the same kind of silence by the Church during the genocide in Rwanda and many troubled spots in Africa. These realities and consequent reflection have impacted on the need for the whole Church to become relevant and credible in the world.

In the context of the Church in Zimbabwe, we note the contribution of many churches and different religious congregations including the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) to the development agenda. For the latter, inspiration came from the experience of the 1960s but also from the reflections of the universal body's 32nd General Congregation in 1975 when the Society gathered in Rome and reformulated its mission: '... the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement' (GC32, Decree 4, #48). This new mission was to guide the Society and the Church to work efficiently:

in a world increasingly interdependent but, for all that, divided by injustice: injustice not only personal, but institutionalized: built into

economic, social and political structures that dominate the life of nations and the international community (GC32, Decree 4, #52).

The bold declarations by both the Synod of Bishops and the Society of Jesus became the reference point for the quest for social justice in the world in general, and the Zimbabwean church, in particular. They set in motion a paradigm shift from the church as a hierarchy back to the experience of the early Church, a church of the streets and villages, a church for and with the people.

Social justice in the context of the Church in Zimbabwe

From the above brief map of the global and local contexts of the Church and its general understanding of social justice, it is necessary to provide a cursory overview of the compelling drivers of the social justice agenda in the local Catholic Church today. This impetus is articulated under the umbrella of the catholic social teaching at different but significant levels. At the level of the universal church, we need an appreciation of Papal encyclicals, while at the local level we assess relevant episcopal pastoral letters which derive from the universal teaching of the Church within the context of the local reality and experience. These letters addressed to all people of good will are the anchor of the Catholic social teaching.

Many scholars of Catholic social teaching begin by evaluating papal encyclicals that focus on integral human development in which social justice is a constitutive dimension. Some encyclicals have had a catalytic effect on the work of the local Church and society. Examples might include *Rerum Novarum* (*The Condition of Labour*) by Leo XIII (1891) which addressed the need for fairness on humans as they work; *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) by John XXIII (1963) which emphasised the fact that humans have rights and obligations, and the urgency for upholding human dignity and human equality; *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples) by Paul VI (1967) addressing the need for the world resources to be equitably shared and to be at the benefit of all peoples; *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work) by John Paul II (1981) which emphasised themes dealt by *Rerum Novarum*; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On the Social Concern) by John Paul II (1987) which was a celebration of *Populorum Progressio*; *Centesimus Annus* (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*) by John Paul II (1991) addressing the urgency of issues raised by *Rerum Novarum*; *Caritas in Veritate* (On Charity and Truth) by Benedict XVI (2009) which invited all people of good will to engage in social justice

and peace initiatives; *Laudato Si (Care for our common Home)* by Francis (2015) which addressed the need for ecological conversion and the care for the earth as our common home; and *Fratelli Tutti (On The Fraternity and Social Friendship)*, Francis (2020) which underlined the fact that we are all brothers and as such we need each other and we should take care of each other. This brief sampling of papal writings offers a glimpse into the rich resources of the Catholic Social teachings. The encyclicals, together with many Papal Exhortations, post-synodal exhortations, and Apostolic letters issued in the form of *Muto Proprio*, have established a solid ground for the Church and all people of good will to understand what their roles could be; how to engage with civic and political structures; and how to implement social justice in their local churches.

Guided by the universal teachings of the Church, and reflecting on their local context and circumstances, Catholic bishops in Zimbabwe have written several pastoral letters that address the question of social justice in the country. Some of the more forceful and impactful letters that have irked government leadership include ‘*God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed*’ (2007) which sought to give light and hope to church followers in the face of rising crises of governance, spiritual, and moral leadership which was increasing the gap between the poor and the rich; *Work Together For the Common Good: ‘Watchman, how much longer the night’* (2014) which sought to reconcile the nation in focusing on economic and social disparities following the bitterly contested and controversial national elections of 2013, and ‘*The March is not ended*’ (2020) which addressed the escalation of human rights breaches in the wake of government’s crackdown on dissent after nationwide demonstrations earlier that year.

There is no doubt that these and many other pastoral letters have had wide coverage and impact partly based on the recognition that when the Catholic Church speaks, the nation listens and often reacts. While noting the huge impact of these letters, it is crucial not to overlook or minimise the work that the Church has done and continues to do among marginalised communities in enabling and facilitating their livelihoods as we will see below. It should also be noted that controversial letters have tended to be confrontational by publicly embarrassing government perpetrators instead of engaging the same in dialogue. Engaging in dialogue requires clear understanding and having facts about the issues at hand. I submit that some of the more controversial pastoral letters in Zimbabwe were produced with too much haste, were poorly informed and often written

without proper consultation or having achieved consensus with regard to the content.

The Church should be constantly aware that she has a mandate to be balanced in her messages so that she is able to speak to all protagonists who are people of good will. On many occasions the letters of Bishops have tended to be on the aggressive side towards the ruling party and government as opposed to being balanced. An example of this aggression is the reaction of Mugabe to the pastoral letter '*God Hear the Cry of the Oppressed*' in which the President suggested that bishops were not fair in their criticisms of his government. He remarked that, 'It was a sorry letter, a disgraceful piece of work, an error, a disastrous error and we shall tell them when we meet them.'⁴ The Church is a community of believers not of politicians and as such she must always remain relevant to people of opposing political views. She should not be partisan but proclaim love which forms the basis of her founding by Jesus Christ. This view does not in any way condone unjust activities of the state, but rather calls for peace and justice through dialogue and appropriation of the common good on both sides. I am aware that the universal Church is often criticised that she is usually late in making her opinion public. As an expert in humanity,⁵ the Church should endeavour to make a pronouncement on a matter that has been thoroughly studied, seek consensus so that she cannot be faulted and forced to revoke her statements. A clear understanding of the issues at hand can help both the Church and political leaders to find each other.

In addition to the institutional pronouncements, a few high-ranking churchmen as well as lay Catholics have been hailed to have contributed to the struggle for social justice through dialogue and in some instances, brokering some peace and reconciliation deals. Such is the contribution to the struggle and emancipation of the people of Zimbabwe by lay Catholics who include Patricia Deary and her husband John Deary. Currently among the clergy Fr Fidelis Mukonori is one such towering figure who is arguably popular in the Zimbabwean politics partly because of the different roles he has played in mediating peace and resolving conflicts between political opponents. There is no doubt that his interventions have also been controversial within and outside the Catholic Church. Fr Mukonori has chronicled some of his experiences through social and mass media, and in a book (Mukonori 2017). He further extends his influence in the Zimbabwean church and political platform as the founding member

4 Mugabe warns Catholic bishops over politics', *Reuters*, 10 August 2007.

5 The term is found in many universal and local churches' pastoral letters.

and current Board chair of the Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (2021).

4. The Catholic Church and special purpose vehicles for social justice delivery in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, terms such as social justice, immediately evoke political overtones. There is a narrow understanding of what the concept entails both in the Church and in government. Some confuse it with political activism. It is, however, a very broad concept. In addition to the papal encyclicals noted above, social justice is central in almost all writings by Pope Francis. He used the term to focus on alleviating poverty and improving the lives of marginalised peoples not simply by giving to them, or talking to them, but also, and more importantly, by walking with them. This, in my view, is a more persuasive approach to social justice than partisanship and the politics of blame that tend to be divisive. Francis challenges us to be committed to social justice by living with disadvantaged people and improving their livelihoods.

Action on behalf of social justice in Zimbabwe has unfolded through different special purpose vehicles and institutions. The Church in Zimbabwe has established, developed and maintained many social centres for social justice and transformation, vocational training, educational institutions at all levels, health care, and agricultural enterprises. Of late, the Church's focus is broadening to include mitigations against climate change and care of the environment through planting forests and building water reservoirs and dams. Now I will focus on some of these different approaches that contribute to the Church's social justice agenda of emancipating and empowering impoverished communities. I discuss these institutions but not in any order of their impact to the intended recipients.

The Church has established many social centres in Zimbabwe. Among the shining beacons is the Jesuit owned and run Silveira House which is a social justice and development centre; one that has made a significant contribution in the training and propagation of social justice in Zimbabwe before and after independence. Established in 1964, the centre soon became a brand name within marginalised communities in both urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe. This response resonated with the socio-political mapping of the period. It is therefore not surprising that political and social emancipation of the poor and marginalised formed the main reasons for establishing this institution. This explains why some of the political activists were supported with shelter and accorded

mentorship at the centre during the liberation war and in the early years after independence. At the funeral of Father John Dove SJ in 2014, the late President Mugabe fondly and gratefully spoke about how he and his sister Sabina Mugabe found shelter at the centre during the liberation struggle.

Initially, Silveira House organised its programmes with a focus on youth in the following areas: civic education, leadership training, industrial relations, and agriculture. These programmes instilled hope and alleviated poverty among those who were targeted by them. Furthermore, young people were trained in microfinance and entrepreneurship and supported in many other ways. Over the years, the centre drifted from the work among marginalised people into governance issues, political participation, and advocacy, among others. For a while, the centre began training lawmakers in governance issues. It also trained some members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police in managing violent situations. This shift of focus was mainly driven by donors who originally supported the intentions of the initiators, but later created their own criteria and conditions for anyone who applied for funding. Eventually, the donor mindset compromised the original strategy of how the founders of this and other institutions viewed action on behalf of social justice through integral development work.

Despite this distraction from its original mandate, for Silveira House social justice has continued to mean the emancipation of the whole person. This philosophy promotes freedom and conditions of possibility that enable people to make choices about what matters to them. Through its training for transformation programmes the centre enhances agency and involvement in governance affairs and developmental issues that involve targeted people.

Sixty years later, operations at the centre are almost at a halt as a result of donor fatigue. There are many reasons for this. Donor communities have many challenges where those who contributed to vibrant fundraising of the yesteryears are either dying off or are shifting modalities for donating. With less and less available funding, priorities have changed, and paradigms shifted. As a result, receiving communities that relied upon this funding have had to refocus, downgrade or even shut down altogether. Silveira House now faces an urgent need for new strategies to revamp the centre. Like many other church centres in the country that are in the same quandary, Silveira House stands ready to continue to contribute immensely to the Catholic Church's social justice initiatives in Zimbabwe.⁶

6 It is noteworthy that whereas many church programmes and projects have been sustained through donor funding, there has been no contingency plans to carry

Through education, churches the world over have transformed and enhanced capabilities of many people. In Zimbabwe, the Catholic Church's education sector has some of the most robust and oldest church institutions. Priests, religious brothers, and sisters from various Catholic religious orders took up the establishment of educational institutions as a constitutive dimension of their missionary work. In the early years of colonisation, Catholic education in Zimbabwe primarily focused on providing basic literacy and numeracy and vocational skills to the local population. Schools were built alongside churches. This was the case with some of the earliest schools like Chishawasha Mission primary school established in 1893 and Gokomere school which was founded in 1898. David Harrold-Barry (2022: 220) observes that most church schools were primary schools which did not prepare students for entrance to universities. From about 1939 the establishment of secondary schools took off in earnest.

The Catholic Church was among the first religious denominations to correct this injustice when she established secondary schools such as Kutama College, Musami Mission, and St Ignatius College, to name but a few (Harrold-Barry 2022). Although the Jesuits had earlier established St George's College in Bulawayo in 1896, regrettably this elite secondary school enrolled only white learners until the 1960s when a few black learners were admitted. Regardless of this racial divide, the College which moved to its current Harare campus in 1927, continued to impart values of responsibility and compassion among its learners.

By teaching learners values of responsibility and respect of human dignity, one can only admire the courage of students who participated in different struggles for freedom. A few examples can illustrate this assertion. During the First World War 198 Old Georgians (OGs) signed in as volunteers and 26 were killed. During the Second World War, 438 OGs served as soldiers and 58 were killed.⁷ At St Ignatius College students protested against injustice of white colonial rule after their colleagues were arrested by the Criminal Investigation Detectives in 1971. Five years later, another group of courageous students protested as they walked from their Chishawasha campus to the main city located some 21 km away,

forward their activities should donor funding cease. The latter is not permanent but short term. Donors are not and should not replace responsibilities of governments to ameliorate the livelihoods of their citizens. Many donor communities have seen their operational capital greatly reduced by world pressures such as regional and global wars and pandemics.

7 <https://www.stgeorges.co.zw/aboutus/landmarks/>.

overturning some police vehicles on their path (Harrold-Barry, 2022: 225-27).

Beyond secondary schools, the Church also established social and vocational centres to train people to develop themselves. Some of the technical vocational schools still making huge impact include Gokomere, Chinhoyi vocational training school, and St Peter's Kubatana. Later, in this struggle to improve people's lives through education, the Catholic Church brought home the trend long established by churches in many parts of the world by establishing universities. Some of current tertiary institutions include the School of Social Work established in 1964 to promote social work, Arrupe Jesuit University formerly Arrupe College established in 1994, and the Catholic University in Zimbabwe established in 1999. These institutions are known for their commitment to academic excellence and their emphasis on holistic development, including spiritual formation, and promotion of values of social justice in a broader sense.

The impact of education in transforming people's lives was recently echoed when the Vice President of Zimbabwe Dr Constantine Chiwenga, himself a Catholic and product of such education, asserted that 'Churches play an immeasurable role in Zimbabwe's national education system and general human capital development and that government appreciates this role'.⁸ This is a call for more collaboration to empower marginalised communities, promote gender equality, and in so doing, instil awareness of social justice values among citizens by establishing a more just and equitable society. Many graduates of church educational institutions have gone on to become reputable and some controversial leaders in various fields, including politics, business, and civil society.

Another flagship contribution of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe through which contribution to social justice has been achieved is the provision of health care, especially to the periphery communities. Throughout Zimbabwe, the Catholic Church has established and continues to manage numerous healthcare facilities such as hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries. Many such institutions have provided timely interventions to various health crises the country has faced. Some of these institutions like Brunapeg, Regina Caeli, St Rupert Makonde, St Michael and St Albert continue to save lives especially of the vulnerable poor.

The provision of healthcare in Zimbabwe reflects the Church's commitment to the integral well-being of individuals and its efforts to

8 'Role of church immeasurable: VP', *The Herald*, 3 July 2023.

uphold the principles of social justice. Through its healthcare infrastructure, advocacy work, response to public health challenges, training programs, and humanitarian efforts, the Church has positively transformed society and continues to contribute significantly to the welfare, especially, of ordinary people.

Zimbabwean Catholic Church organisations at the service of social justice

Apart from institutions discussed above, the Church has established organisations to support the mission of social justice in Zimbabwe. Some of the most effective organisations that have played significant roles in transforming lives especially of poor people and upholding their human dignity include the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) now renamed Caritas.

The CCJP is an organisation established by the Catholic Church to promote social justice and peace within the country. It operates under the guidance and authority of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Zimbabwe (ZCBC). Its objectives include influencing legislation, public policies, and practices that affect marginalised and vulnerable individuals and communities. The Commission promotes citizenry in conscientising people about their constitutional rights such as participating in general elections. The CCJP promotes social justice through advocating respect for human rights and access to justice for all individuals. It endeavours to raise awareness about human rights issues, monitors human rights violations, and supports victims of human rights abuses. In some extreme cases, the Commission provides legal aid, facilitates alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and promotes efforts to strengthen the rule of law.

The CCJP advocates for equitable distribution and redistribution of resources, access to basic services, and fair economic policies. It runs campaign and programmes that promote economic empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and social protection for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. During elections, the CCJP has represented the ZCBC in encouraging voter education, election observing and monitoring. In these and many other initiatives, the CCJP strives to create a more just and equitable society in line with the well enunciated principles of Catholic Social teaching that uphold human dignity, solidarity, and the common good.

For many decades, the Commission has been a consistent voice of conscience to the political leadership and people of Zimbabwe. Some of

the human rights activists who fearlessly spoke against injustice include John and Patricia Deary and a long-time chairman and Director of CCJP Mike Auret. Other activists comprise of Sister Janice McLaughlin, an American nun who exposed abuse in Zimbabwe through her dedication to social justice,⁹ Bishop Lamont who denounced political injustice, and the then student activist Ranga Zinyemba who got movement restriction orders. Some clerics like former Archbishop Pius Ncube became victims of both the Church and government.¹⁰

These courageous men and women who publicly denounced political violence, corruption, misrule, plundering of national resources in the face of rising poverty have greatly contributed to the decline of overt action on behalf of justice. Incessant victimisations and persecutions by the state and its agents have, in my view, contributed to this radical shift in strategy. The once feared and revolutionary Commission now does less political confrontation. Instead, it opts to deal with lesser controversial agendas such as climate change advocacy.

To further support and compliment the Church's social work through the CCJP, in 1972 the Rhodesian Catholic Bishops Conference established the Commission for Social Services and Development. The organisation was renamed CADEC in 1984 due to a shift in the emphasis of its work from focusing on social welfare to development.¹¹ CADEC and CCJP have had a strong relationship. Later, the commission became known as Caritas in line with Caritas International. A brief appreciation of the role played by CADEC before it was renamed Caritas is important to celebrate its humanitarian programmes as constitutive of the struggle for social justice in Zimbabwe.

Through CADEC the Church in Zimbabwe has assisted many poor people. This was in line with its objectives as an institution dedicated to promoting social justice, development, and the well-being of individuals and communities in Zimbabwe. It was and still is active in all dioceses in the country. The organisation drew its mandate from the principles of the Catholic social teaching as articulated above. In this way, CADEC aimed to contribute to the holistic development of individuals and communities, promote social justice, and advocate for the rights of the marginalised and vulnerable people

9 'Janice McLaughlin, Nun Who Exposed Abuse in Africa, Dies at 79', *New York Times*, 26 March 2021.

10 Individual contributions of Pius Ncube to the struggle for social justice have not been publicly recorded for scholars to peruse and take informed positions. Pius Ncube retired and is praying for the Church in the Diocese of Hwange, Zimbabwe. Reasons for his early retirement have not been made public.

11 <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/africa/zimbabwe/>

in Zimbabwe. Thus, CADEC was a special purpose vehicle of the Church to translate the teaching of the Church into practical ways, among the people.

This engagement was critical at the time when the country was recovering from the harsh colonial years including destruction brought about by the war. CADEC created and managed many programmes. Some highlights include development projects that aimed at improving the livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalised communities in areas such as agriculture, provision of clean water, sanitation, income generation projects, and infrastructure development in communities. CADEC also responded to humanitarian emergencies and crises by providing relief assistance to affected communities by distributing food and non-food items, providing shelter, and offering support to displaced populations. The Commission advocated for social justice, human rights, and good governance, land rights, gender equality, and fair access to education and healthcare. The Church through CADEC went further to take part in capacity building and leadership training through programmes that empower individuals and communities with the skills and knowledge needed to address development challenges and promote social justice.

In refining its scope, Caritas has continued with the work done by CADEC that include responding to the challenges of our times such as sinking bores for the availability of clean water, ensuring food security, small-scale income generation projects, vocational training, and microfinance. Today Caritas Zimbabwe is the official social development and humanitarian arm of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. It is people driven, committed to social justice, and contributes to integral human development. Its advocacy and lobbying activities address systemic challenges related to poverty, inequality, and social injustice. In this way, the Church through this agency is improving the livelihoods of vulnerable communities and addressing social and humanitarian challenges.

Empowerment of legislators and the youth for social justice

In addition to the different initiatives already discussed in this chapter, the Catholic Church plays a special role in advocating for the Catholic ethos in the legislative programmes. These initiatives are a demonstration of the Church's keen interest in working with the youth as agents of social justice.

Catholic bishops created the office of the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Officer (CPLO) to advocate the Church's priorities to Catholic legislators. The CPLO creates platforms of engagement between the local bishops, the legislators and the executive branch of government. For example, during the Covid pandemic, the Ministry of Health through the

CPLO sought the bishops' influence who encouraged their congregations to be vaccinated. Occasional important meetings between the Papal representative in Zimbabwe (the Nuncio) and the Speaker of Parliament have been facilitated by the CPLO. The office also maintains the visibility of the Catholic Church leadership at official state functions.

Notwithstanding the challenges the office faces such as certain church submissions to Parliament not being taken up due to party politics and limited times of engagement with legislators, the CPLO is making giant strides towards social justice. Channels of communication and dialogue between church and government are kept open through the work of the CPLO.

In addition to advocacy work, youth ministry, among many other church ministries in Zimbabwe, has significantly contributed to the engagement and transformation of young people towards social justice. Just as political parties count on the youth to articulate their agendas, so too does the Church, although these two different types of youth groups are different based on their ideological underpinnings. The Integral Youth Development Programme (IYDP) has facilitated leadership and civic education training for youth movements. The National Movement of Catholic Students in Zimbabwe (NMCSZ) which operates under the Catholic Bishops' conference has continued to co-ordinate activities of Catholic tertiary students throughout the country which include raising their awareness to the prevailing economic, political, and social challenges of their time.

Other platforms through which the Church in Zimbabwe has engaged the youth are Young People for Others (YPO) and MAGIS Zimbabwe where civic training takes place in the form of workshops, conferences, seminars and sporting galas. Young people are urged to actively participate in the affairs of their country such as registering to vote and casting their ballots. For instance, in 2013 NMCSZ rolled out a programme dubbed 'Pray-Register-Vote' which mobilised young people to register to vote. The initiative resulted in a turnover of more than 3,000 catholic students registering to vote during that year to participate in the 2013 referendum that adopted the new constitution of Zimbabwe. Most of these young people also voted in the harmonised general elections later that year. Few years later, the Jesuit Youth Ministry in Zimbabwe, in partnership with the *Konrad Adenaeur Stiltftung* created a digital platform that mobilised young people as they unpacked issues related to voter education, effective

civic participation, advocacy and policy awareness. In partnership with NMCSZ the youth ministry trained youths and encouraged them to contest for public office under the project 'Pray-Run-Vote'. Of the 30 young people who trained, two won the 2023 parliamentary elections. The impact of their training on these social justice issues will be determined by their conduct as members of parliament.

These and other initiatives on behalf of the youth are a response to Pope Francis' invitation to the young to actively participate in issues that concern them and not leave the deliberations of their future only to the elders. Francis challenges the young people to:

Make the most of these years of your youth. Don't observe life from a balcony. Don't confuse happiness with an armchair or live your life behind a screen. Whatever you do, do not become the sorry sight of an abandoned vehicle! Don't be parked cars but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anaesthetized or approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus! Cast out the fears that paralyze you, so that you don't become young mummies. Live! Give yourselves over to the best of life! Open the door of the cage, go out and fly! Please, don't take early retirement (Pope Francis, 2019: #143).

Different programmes and activities assessed above show that young people are undoubtedly responding to the Pope's invitation, and through them the Church can achieve a great deal by instilling solid foundations of social justice in their lives. Indeed, the youth, as invited by Pope Francis, are descending from their terraces to the ground of play cognisant that the future of this country belongs to them.

International support for the local Church's social justice programmes

In her struggle for social justice the Church in Zimbabwe has been supported by many Catholic international organisations and agencies. These partners in the struggle for social justice have covered a wider spectrum of projects and programmes including education, poverty alleviation, and health care. In recent years there is a concerted drive to broaden social justice issues to include gender-based violence.

Some notable international agencies and organisations have journeyed with the Church for a long time supporting action on behalf of justice in Zimbabwe. The struggle to ameliorate conditions of living for marginalised

people is incomplete without mentioning the invaluable contribution of some major agencies.

The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) is renowned for availing funding for programmes in Zimbabwe that focus on combating 'disease, malnutrition, and the effects of climate change and natural disasters'¹² Miserior, an institution of the German Catholic Bishops, has for many years supported various programmes at Silveira House. The Catholic Relief Services is a broad project-based agency which has funded most of the programmes run by local institutions. Porticus has been a pillar of support for many struggling schools and educational programmes in the country. Entreculturas, a Spanish agency, continues to facilitate funding for many educational works and other projects to the poor communities in Zimbabwe. Finally, last but not the least, the Jesuit Refugee Services is an arm of the global Society of Jesus (Jesuits) committed to the plight of displaced, especially those forced to leave their homes and countries due to wars and other unjust suffering. In Zimbabwe, with the help of the government, the organisation established Tongogara, one of the famous refugee camps which took in many displaced persons from the Great Lakes region of Africa. The camp closed down in 2022 and the work is continuing under the banners of Caritas and CCJP.

Reimagining the Church's struggle for social justice

Action on behalf of social justice in the Church has and continues to shift focus. Educational, social and healthcare institutions are no longer providing the same quality service as before. The impact they once made on people is fading away. Social centres and many programmes that have been donor-funded are falling apart, whilst those that are still being funded are being tied to conditions, objectives and goals of the funding agencies. This thrust is different from the early development work of the Church where donors were attracted by the good work being done by the Church and came in to partner as collaborators. Most donor communities have now shifted their focus. The interest of the donor comes first, not of the applicant or receiving community. That creativity and independence the Church once enjoyed in pursuing her agenda of emancipating communities is now a thing of the past. Whereas formerly many institutions financed their operational budgets through donor funding, today because of conditions and limited funding, many such institutions are falling apart as they fail even to maintain their infrastructure. This is why some people

12 <https://cafod.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/africa/zimbabwe>

have suggested that donor funding is like cocaine that get people high but does not take care of them. The mindset of local communities was so dependent on foreign donor funding that it is not easy to locally raise funding for humanitarian work.¹³ This unfolding change of landscape presents new challenges and direction. The Church is being challenged by the experience on the ground and in the world to rethink and reimagine herself in view of her struggle for social justice.

To illustrate how this donor fatigue is affecting the Church and its social justice agenda, it is important therefore, to further demonstrate how this shift is informing political transitions in Zimbabwe. Here I briefly look at the shifting political landscape in Zimbabwe and suggest emerging new trends the Church can embrace to move forward the struggle for social justice.

(a) The polarisation of the political and religious landscape in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean political situation is extremely polarised! It's either you are with them or with us. There's no middle way. This division permeates every facet of society and cuts across religions, civic associations, families, as well as religious leaders. Everyone must be careful what they say or do. An example is a comment made by a Catholic priest on social media on the day the Zimbabwe presidential election results were announced on 26 August 2023. He posted: 'How are we going to preach to an angry congregation tomorrow?' My immediate reaction was that the priest had already taken sides with those who had lost the election. I was certain that at his church service, there would be parishioners from opposing political parties. It seemed to me that this priest would not be well disposed to minister to the other side. At one parish on the country's Independence Day, a white priest criticised the ruling party ZANU-PF from the pulpit saying the country had fallen apart and that there was nothing in Zimbabwe worthy celebrating. Immediately after mass he was picked up by party youths who handed him over to the police. Reflecting on these realities leads me to assert that with our polarised standpoints, there is no room for expressing one's opinion without being labelled. Indeed, a church official has a right to free speech, but not as long as he speaks

13 It is regrettable that many mainstream churches did not evangelise by emancipating their people to be self-reliant. Instead, people were taught to depend on handouts from the West instead of giving to churches. This is why independent churches are making great strides in raising local funding in the name of prophecies, fake healings, and selling of purportedly anointed products and intentions.

from the pulpit and in the name of the Church. The latter should always embrace diversity and inclusion.

Unfortunately, polarisation and partisan politics cut across political and religious divides in Africa, if not globally. Polarisation obstructs rationality. Reasoning and reasonableness become compromised to the extent of undermining universality of judgements (Scanlon 2000) and obfuscate positive contributions from the other to respectfully present contrary or opposing arguments. Polarisation and partisan dialectics impact negatively on human and social development, and ultimately, on social justice. This is sadly true for Zimbabwe.

The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has been affected in its delivery of social justice by many incessant political stalemates. It is an undeniable fact that in her attempt to bring about social justice, the Church has found herself caught between the push and pull factors of political factionalism. Before independence, the Church was caught between the colonial state and the indigenous citizens who demanded justice. In post-independent Zimbabwe, the Church has found herself caught between the ruling and opposition parties. Very often she has been accused by the government for interfering in political affairs, and sometimes labelled as the opposition hiding behind the pulpit. This mudslinging has created stalemates where dialogue between government and church has almost become impossible. Examples include the hate speech that resulted after the Church's interventions in the wake of violent acts of Gukurahundi, Murambatsvina, and persecution of political activists. This assertion does not suggest that the Church should have remained silent in the wake of such an alarming injustice.¹⁴

Strong divisions and political rhetoric have also invaded places and communities of worship where, instead of animosity, unity of purpose and pursuit of the common good should be nurtured. Even amongst churches beyond the Roman Catholic Church, political infiltration has dominated some worshipping spaces leading to political campaigns being made at worship gatherings. Consequently, instead of uniting the country, political actors and churches have greatly contributed to the polarisation and further division of the country. An urgent reawakening of all players is needed to stop the country from further crises beyond what is already being experienced. In this re-awakening process, the Catholic Church can learn from its rich history where she has both spoken boldly but

14 There may be need to make a cross-section survey of citizenry sentiments and positions after the just ended elections in Zimbabwe to prove this assertion.

also emancipated people and assured them livelihoods. She needs now to explore a new strategy based on a faith that does justice, a faith that seeks understanding, embrace engagement instead of confrontation and prioritise dialogue instead of outright condemnation of government leadership.

(b) Broadening social justice and climate change advocacy

Proposals to include climate change programmes to the subject of social justice are making inroads. Through his encyclical Pope Francis (2015) is reshaping our thinking and engagement on social justice. For Pope Francis, sustainability of the future will depend on how we take care of our environment. The earth is such a critical common home that whatever happens in some part of the world, affects the other. One of the key concepts Pope Francis uses in this encyclical is that everything is connected. He explains this conviction by further saying: ‘everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others’ (Pope Francis, 2015: #70). The Pope challenges us to learn and uphold the value of sharing when he avers, ‘Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone’ (Pope Francis, 2015: #93). In this way, Pope Francis has invited the world to begin nurturing our environment because without it there can be no social justice.

In the Zimbabwean church and the southern Africa region, there are now *Laudato Si* movements in schools, social centres, and parishes who draw their inspiration from this teaching of Pope Francis to reimagine a church which is constantly facing new challenges which include:

the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle’ (Pope Francis, 2015: #17).

In this new challenge, the tone of the conversation on social justice in the Church is changing and readjusting.

On the global political platform, The United Nations has been organising climate change summits in the name of Conference of Parties (COP). Since 1995, the COPs have met consistently to discuss the

reduction of emissions and to promote the use of cleaner energy. At the most recent COP27 which met in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in November 2022 not only states, but the Catholic Church, including the Church in Zimbabwe had representatives there. The quest for social justice is now broader than before.

(c) Synod on Synodality

In the recent past, conversation in the universal church has taken a new approach. In 2021 Pope Francis put the entire Catholic Church on a four-year spiritual journey, the Synod on Synodality. The Synod's emphasises on 'participation,' 'communion' and 'mission' is timely. The Synod on Synodality is about journeying together, which shifts the focus from individualist or siloed approaches towards communal engagement in all areas of life lived together in society. This thrust's impact on Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular should not be overlooked. Synodality rhymes with togetherness, family cohesion, and the African concept of Ubuntu advocating that we are who we are because of others. With this synodality, the Church as the bastion of life, reminds us that it is everyone's responsibility to work towards social justice. In light of the invitation of the Church to re-imagine herself, the synod on synodality offers a new hope and emancipation strategy for the local churches. When properly understood and articulated, synodality becomes a means by which everyone in the community can climb up to the stage where issues that concern them are discussed and solutions examined, adopted and implemented. It should be noted that with the decline of the Church's influence in areas that include educational, health and social institutions, the synod on synodality is destined to reignite a more robust conversation in the economic, political, and social spheres.

Conclusion

The struggle for social justice by the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has been and continues to be successful through programmes that transform livelihoods of people, especially, in mostly marginalised communities. This agenda has been and continues to be implemented through different institutions that focus on education, healthcare, social centres, and supporting agencies and organisations. Although political will through conducive and effective government policies is essential to the work of creating an environment that promotes social justice, it is important to note that government alone cannot do everything. Churches, in particular

the Catholic Church, have filled in the gap. It is in this context that in recent times, the Catholic Church has been very cautious in the statements she makes so that she is not caught up in the politics of polarisation. The work of the Church in social justice compliments the Government of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 as outlined in its first phase of National Development Strategy.

Through her action in developmental and transformational programmes, the local Church has responded to the universal teachings of the Catholic Church on social justice. In so doing, she has taken up the challenge by Pope Francis that church leaders should live with the smell of the sheep. Consequently, through her many institutions and programmes, the Church has played a significant role in promoting social justice through, for instance, education, which prioritises inclusivity, equity, and access to quality education for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. Students are encouraged to be agents of change in society and to work towards building a just and equitable nation. By committing to a robust education agenda, the Church has created emancipatory opportunities for marginalised communities including those living in absolute poverty, in rural areas, and with disabilities.

In addition, churches influence behavioural change through preaching the gospel of love, peace, harmony, altruism and integrity; they thus contribute to the conversion of human conscience in the formation of a just social order. In this way the Church has contributed more to social justice than her critics admit, that is those who call upon the Church to openly criticise certain government actions or announcement. It is the Church's humanitarian programmes that have saved lives. Mugabe often challenged the Catholic Church to register and become a political party rather than hide behind the Church.

It is very unfortunate that in Zimbabwe there is a dearth of verified and credible information regarding political operations. Rumours, speculation, and conspiracy theories reign supreme. This sometimes gives rise to fake news. It then becomes a challenge when the Church as a respected institution ends up acting on speculation that is inadmissible in a court of law. While it may be a tool by the government to withhold information and facts about the matter at hand, it also puts the Church in bad light to make noise where facts are not clearly known. The Church should always ground her judgements on verified information and must be extremely careful not to make a pronouncement she can later withdraw.

The quest for social justice in Zimbabwe by the Church is not primarily

through political activism. Instead, it is about creating conditions of possibility for people to emancipate themselves. The Church will do well if she is credited for forming citizens who are politically, socially, and economically capable to live a life of their choice. It is about enabling people to appear in public without shame as Hannah Arendt would say. The Catholic Church can achieve more by appealing to dialogue than confrontation. In line with 21st century educational trends, the Jesuit education office in southern Africa is now rolling out a values-based-education system. This new strategy highlights inculcating human values as the foundation of and means to achieving social justice. This emphasis, this paradigm shift, it is hoped, will create better citizens who are able to manage very well their *oikos nomos*, that is, put order in the management of their household or country affairs. It is buttressing Pope Francis' call for people to quit being spectators to the matters that concern them. The struggle for social justice in Zimbabwe is on a new trajectory.

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Catholic Social Thought: a Driver of Political Transition?

DAVID KAULEMU

Introduction

Catholic social thought (CST) is a growing body of religiously inspired social wisdom about the nature of human beings living in society and supported by all of God's creation – our common home (Pope Francis, 2015). It emanates from religiously inspired reflections on social, political, economic and cultural structures, cultures, systems, and processes of society. The purpose of CST is to understand social realities from a Gospel perspective in order to enable all human beings to systemically navigate their way towards the fullness of social life, consistent with the principles of the rest of natural life – in religious language, towards salvation. Hence, CST can be a driver of social and political transition to salvation – in ordinary modern language – towards human flourishing and environmental sustainability. Catholic social thought is the sum-total of all genuine attempts, by Catholic and Catholic-inspired individuals, groups, organisations, and communities, to interpret the Gospel values, in order to translate them into guidelines for social, political, economic, and cultural life.

I use the term 'Catholic social thought' advisedly, to include unofficial experiences and reflections by committed Catholics and people of goodwill striving to contribute to better political practices and inspired by Gospel values and Catholic principles. While not ruling out the importance

and contribution of official Catholic Social doctrine (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004) and Catholic Social teaching¹ produced by official church structures, I take seriously the experiences and reflections of lay political actors who may or may not be directly taking instructions from Catholic ecclesial authority. I do so because the Catholic ecclesial authorities and their social justice efforts have benefited from the activities of many actors, Catholic and non-Catholic, who have acted under the inspiration of Catholic social teaching. As a lay Catholic person, I take a political position, inspired by the Second Vatican Council that declared that,

Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and their own specific manner.²

Catholic lay persons can therefore take political action inspired by Christian and Catholic values without that action being officially claimed to be Catholic by ecclesial authorities. It may not be deemed Catholic action because the legitimate ecclesial authority may not claim it as such. However, there is no reason why the Catholic layperson may not claim to be inspired by CST, and that they act according to its tenets. They may find it more difficult to claim that they act according to Catholic social doctrine or teaching, although that would not be impossible. I, therefore, use the term Catholic social thought in its wide sense that is not only restricted to direct and explicit official Catholic doctrine or teaching. I, however, believe that politically committed laypersons should take seriously ‘the teaching authority of the Church.’ This, however, does not mean that they should allow themselves to be spiritually limited by official ecclesial authorities who can be narrow-minded, ignorant, prejudiced, tribalist, sexist and racist just as lay people can also lose their way. In many African countries, ecclesial authorities are politically and ethnically divided. Some have been implicated in genocides. (Rutagambwa 2021) In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the laity are advised and

1 This refers to the official teachings of the Catholic Church structures at different levels and especially when they refer back to the Catholic Bishops as the official teachers of the Church. As the Vatican Council declared, ‘But no enterprise must lay claim to the name ‘Catholic’ if it has not the approval of legitimate ecclesiastical authority’. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November 1965, #24.

2 Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November 1965, #7

encouraged as follows.

It is their task to cultivate a properly informed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city. For guidance and spiritual strength let them turn to the clergy; but let them realise that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) that arises; this is not the role of the clergy; it is rather up to the laymen to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church.³

Unfortunately, in spite of many commendable efforts by politically committed laypersons, 'to shoulder social and political responsibilities', Catholic social thought is still not very influential in public political debates and transitions nationally, or internationally. It is far from 'permeating and improving the whole range of the temporal' sphere.⁴ Relatively few Catholics, let alone 'people of goodwill' are motivated on a day-to-day basis by CST, teachings, or doctrine. Catholic social thought is not yet a culture that Catholics and Christians can claim to live by in their social, political, and economic lives. As Jonathan Boswell, Frank McHugh, and Johan Verstraeten point out,

Neither in the current bubbling debate on political theory nor in the heated exchange of ideas on national and international politics does Catholic social thought make an effective entry on the public stage in our day. Externally, it is all too often ignored even by the 'people of good will' appealed to in the papal encyclical *Centesimus annus*. Inside the Catholic Church it is more frequently neglected than vigorously adopted or put into action. (Boswell 2000: xiii).

Matters are worsened by the fact that the values and principles of CST are drowned by the dominant ideology and forces of global neo-liberal capitalism and its cultures of possessive individualism. In the current economic architecture, the impoverished, including Catholic social justice animators, teachers in schools, and lecturers in colleges and universities, are too busy trying to survive to find or create time for the apparent luxury of reflecting on moral principles to drive political transition. On the other hand, the rich and powerful are too happy and comfortable with the opportunities offered to them by the status quo, to do anything about CST.

3 Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, #43.

4 *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November 1965, #7.

As De La Torre points out, ‘...those who are oppressed by these structures, along with those who benefit, are in need of liberation, another word for salvation’ (De La Torre 2004: xiii).

Civil society can hardly do anything either. Civil society in Zimbabwe and other African countries has been under siege for some time now. On the one hand, global capital has been pushing for the universalisation of the business model through the professionalisation, commercialisation and ‘NGOization of grassroots politics’ and of civil society. (Choudry and Kapoor 2013: iix) On the other, the state has been using political power to tame and control civil society for the sake of maintaining the political status quo. This has meant the dwindling of space for the kind of civil society that is capable of pushing for values, virtues, and practices that could drive political transition in the direction of virtue, justice, equality, community, human flourishing, and environmental sustainability. As Pope Benedict points out, ‘A strong civil sector is the basis of a healthy society and a healthy economy; economic contracts and state bureaucracies cannot hold a society together in peace, nor increase its solidarity.’⁵

Civil society is the realm that builds the values, virtues, institutions, and relationships that sustain society, such as solidarity, generosity, and respect for the dignity of everyone especially the impoverished and marginalised. The realm of civil society is made up of ‘intermediate institutions’ that include the family, community, and various local associations that are based on voluntary association, participation, and solidarity. Civil society works with a unique logic that is different from the logic of commodities and contracts found on the market and that of coercive bureaucratic power and public obligation of the state. Civil society is the space where human beings meet as human beings, and not as either cogs in an economic machine or soldiers in political ideological warfare. It is in this realm that people are formed or moulded as human beings in families, communities, and solidarities and take moral responsibilities for their lives and those they love. Civil society is the realm where humans learn and re-learn what it means to be fully human. In Africa, with the encouragement of foreign powers, civil society is sometimes mistakenly reduced to be only the space where human rights organisations should be allowed to bring in foreign values in the name of human rights. Civil society is wider and local. It must be local and meaningful to the local people (Freire 1998). Modern society

5 Benedict XVI, Pope (2009) *Caritas in Veritate*. Papal encyclical given on 29 June. Rome, Vatican. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

has seen the expansion of the state on the one hand and the capitalist market on the other at the expense of the realm of civil society and all its 'intermediate' institutions that can be the basis of a healthy society. Explaining this point, Pope Benedict XVI asserted,

When both the logic of the market and the logic of the State come to an agreement that each will continue to exercise a monopoly over its respective area of influence, in the long term much is lost: solidarity in relations between citizens, participation and adherence, actions of gratuitousness, all of which stand in contrast with giving in order to acquire (the logic of exchange) and giving through duty (the logic of public obligation, imposed by State Law)... The exclusive binary model of market-plus-State is corrosive of society, while economic forms based on solidarity, which find their natural home in civil society without being restricted to it, build up society. The market of gratuitousness does not exist, and attitudes of gratuitousness cannot be established by law. Yet both the market and politics need individuals who are open to reciprocal gift.⁶

Catholic social thought can be a driver of political transition that is transformative if its values and principles are more visible and influential within public policies and practice, private business, and the activities and practices of civil society generally. CST is most suitable and at home in the spaces of civil society as key to any society. Modern society invented both the bureaucratic systems of governance and the economic market system. They both have a role to play in human life. However, they both have in their logic, de-humanising tendencies for which civil society must provide limits. The market, for example, has the tendency to commodify objects. History demonstrates how the modern capitalist market is capable of turning natural objects, human beings, and all of God's creation into things that can be sold and bought. In its nature and logic, the capitalist market does not follow moral principles as its focus is on profit. Without being controlled, the capitalist market is capable of selling and buying anything: human beings, dangerous weapons, dangerous drugs, human body parts, etc. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* quotes his 'Apostolic Exhortation' and observes that, 'whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule' (*Laudato Si* 2013: 35) He also describes how modern bureaucracy combines with technology to form the 'dominant technocratic paradigm'

6 Benedict XVI, Pope (2009).

that undermines life. He concludes,

The fact is that ‘contemporary man has not been trained to use power well,’ because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.⁷

Civil society is the realm that has the most potential to remind economists, scientists, bureaucrats and politicians that humans and the rest of God’s creation should not be instrumentalised and reduced to cogs in the economic and political machinery. In Immanuel Kant’s language, civil society reminds us that human beings and God’s creations are ‘ends in themselves’ (Kant/Paton 1948: 95) that should never be treated merely or solely as means for political, economic, and bureaucratic purposes.

In this chapter, I argue that Catholic social thought offers the kind of wisdom that we, in Zimbabwe, need in our yearning for a better political society which does not lose sight of the humanity of its members. It is a gift that the Catholic Church and its members, especially the lay faithful, can give to the rest of Zimbabwean citizens. It is a toolbox that can contribute to driving our most needed social, economic, and political transitions. CST suggests a moral framework, and tools for social analysis and proposes values and emotional responses to the political challenges we are facing today. Therefore, Catholic social thought is a body of social wisdom that helps us to organise society in the context of our natural environment in ways that facilitate all human beings to grow fully in all their different dimensions. The body of social thought is not immune from tensions, ambiguities, ambivalences, and even contradictions, between theory and practice; definitions and social realities; past and more contemporary responses, and so forth.

I believe that Zimbabwe is at a crossroads. Forty-four years after independence, we must, as Kant would say, ‘emerge from our self-incurred immaturity’ (Kant 1996: 51) or wake up from our ‘dogmatic slumber’ in order to cross the Red Sea into Canaan. We are nationally and politically standing at an interregnum – at a crossroads. Explaining this concept, Zygmunt Bauman quotes Antonio Gramsci, ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Bauman 2012: 49) Writing after the Zimbabwe national elections of 2023, the ‘morbid symptoms’ are still vivid in our minds and our eyes. It is clear that the old

7 Ibid. p. 61.

is dying and yet the new is refusing to be born. The political transition is stalling. It is as if Zimbabweans are so glued to the past that they are afraid of the future – like a baby terrified by the possibility of its own growth. Zimbabwe needs to grow and mature. It needs to transition from social, cultural, economic, and political arrangements of the colonial past to a more modern, or even post-modern democratic society with more respect for the dignity of all persons.

The Zimbabwe political landscape is characterised by this national desire to move from one kind of politics to the other, i.e.

- From a politically unequal society supported by an ‘enclave economy’ (Kanyenze et al. 2011) and ideologies of racial, ethnic, and patriarchal superiority to a more equal and inclusive society
- From a political system that favours the rich and powerful to one that takes an option for the impoverished and marginalised.
- From a de-facto one-party state to a political system that genuinely respects the equality of all political parties and the will of every Zimbabwean expressed through democratic processes including through national elections.
- From a political system that is misinformed by a narrow, manipulated, and militarised ‘patriotic history’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015) of Zimbabwe to one that is informed by a balanced and nuanced sense of history and acute sensitivity to the present and future needs and political rights of all citizens.
- From a political system that obfuscates the distinctions between the ruling party, the government, and state institutions, and subordinates all national institutions to the person of ‘the father of the nation’ to one that respects the country’s constitution, the separation of powers, and the spirit and culture of constitutionalism.
- From a toxic political environment characterised by the spirit of war, and deep political divisions that sacrifice life normalcy, truth, national healing, solidarity, and basic human decency.

Wisdom for transition

Catholic social thought as a body of social wisdom (touching our heads and our hearts – what we think and how we feel), is gleaned from the Scriptures, writings of theologians, the documents of various churches, witnesses of just persons and communities as they struggle for better societies, and from the experiences of church and faith traditions.

Reflections in Catholic social thought suggest ways of social and

political analysis and appropriate emotional responses that can guide people at a personal level. There is an attempt to guide individual conscience in making just decisions, for example, about wages to pay workers, treatment of men, women, and children, and respect for the environment. The wisdom is also meant to shape the responses of the church as a social body addressing social issues, for example about racial attitudes, social inequalities, tribal attitudes, political involvement, care for those in poverty, good governance, cultural recognition, trade, development, social justice, education, health care, work, culture, etc. Catholic social thought reflects on the nature of the public sector – what it is and what it ought to be. It tries to influence the activities of the public sector and the state itself by appealing to the Gospel values and principles. For example, human development, economic policies, political organisation, technological and cultural developments, democracy and participation, economic justice, health and education, peace and personal security, and protection of the environment. It also aims to influence international relations, globalisation, international trade, global economic inequalities, the development and impact of technological developments, peace, and war decisions. Examples of CST working towards influencing consciences and emotional responses can be seen in many Catholic bishops' pastoral letters, statements and research outputs. For, example during the difficult years of 2008, the latter wrote, 'Be Compassionate! Reclaiming Our Right to Give Food to the Hungry' (11 December 2008)⁸ This letter was written in the context of extremely polarised politics. The ruling party, ZANU-PF, was facing electoral defeat and it decided to close all political and social spaces by restricting churches, NGOs and civil society organisations, especially international ones, from distributing food to communities and helping opposition members who had been affected by political violence. In a panic, the ruling party, or its members operating especially in the rural areas, put pressure on churches and NGOs to channel their help through the structures of the party to prevent them from using their resources to campaign for opposition parties. Effectively, the ruling party made a de-humanising demand. It meant that the church was supposed to act like the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). The Catholic bishops responded: their pastoral letter opened with the following words, 'We, the Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe are deeply concerned about the continuing harassment, by some Government officials, of our priests and

8 *ZCBC Pastoral Letters 1986-2015*, Volume II, ZCBC Social Communications.

other Church personnel who distribute food to the hungry'. They were refusing to be turned into Levites. They wanted to be good Samaritans.

In 2006, at the height of political tensions and divisions, the Zimbabwe Catholic bishops came together with other Christian ecumenical networks to produce *The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Toward a National Vision for Zimbabwe'*.⁹ This was a response to what the bishops later called, 'a crisis of governance' and 'a crisis of leadership'.¹⁰ It was also a result of internal reflection by different churches who felt that they could not remain silent and dormant in the light of the various crises the country was facing. They recognised the need to do something and yet they realised that the dominance, and even brutality, of the ruling party and government called for solidarity and co-operation among the churches, if they were to be effective. The Catholic tradition of publishing pastoral letters became in handy. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) also had a tradition of publishing pastoral statements. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) was still new in the tradition of engaging with social and political issues from the point of view of Gospel values. There was, during this time, a demand from various church communities and organisations to reflect on what the Gospel values could have been saying about the Zimbabwean political, economic and social crises. I was, then, the Co-ordinator of the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST), a regional network for eastern and southern Africa. I found myself being invited by ZCC, EFZ and ZCBC to present talks and reflect on the relevance of Christian social teaching to various topics. When the Churches in Manicaland complied a 'A Compendium of Christian Social Teaching' to which Bishop Patrick Mutume of the ZCBC, Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the ZCC and Bishop Trevor Manhanga of the EFZ wrote the Foreword, I was invited to write on 'The role of the Church in Society'.¹¹ The Churches in Manicaland described themselves in this compendium in the following words,

The churches in Manicaland are an ecumenical gathering of church groups and institutions in the Province of Manicaland, Zimbabwe. Since May 2000, the Churches have been seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in taking action to promote tolerance in society, to give

9 The ZCBC, EFF, and ZCC, *The Zimbabwe We Want: 'Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe'*, September 2006.

10 ZCBC (2007) 'God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed', Pastoral Letter on the Current Crisis in Zimbabwe. Holy Thursday, 5 April.

11 Churches in Manicaland (2006) *The Truth Will Make You Free: A Compendium of Christian Social Teaching*.

direction to public decision-makers and to enable our people to live by gospel values and principles. The Churches are strictly non-partisan in regard to party politics and are available to all people for counselling, pastoral care and the building of a Christian vision for our society.

Many ecumenical groups were initiated throughout the country during this period. They included the Christian Alliance, The Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference, Christians Together for Peace and Justice, and ecumenical networks in Manicaland, Bulawayo and Harare (Gokova 2010). There were robust debates about the social implications of gospel values, strategies and tactics, and especially how to engage the government. Many of these ecumenical networks were formed and supported by members of mainline churches who challenged the strategies that were being used by their respective church leaders.

In response, AFGAST published and distributed several booklets on different topics to popularise, stimulate and deepen reflections on Christian social teaching. In 2010, through AFGAST I co-ordinated and published a book on political participation (Kaulemu 2010). This was an attempt to widen the national understanding of participation beyond political party politics and to sanitise and demonstrate the legitimacy of political participation through appealing to guidance from Catholic social teaching. The process of writing the book involved inviting people working in a wide variety of areas to share their experiences, engage others, research on the topic, and help to find solutions to challenges the country was facing. AFGAST put on the table, the Pastoral Cycle¹² as a research tool and Catholic social thought as a framework imbued with values and principles that could guide reflections and engagements.

In 2011, I published another book, but this time, on ending political violence (Kaulemu 2011) which had intensified throughout the country. In 2012, I co-ordinated and edited one on citizenship after the Zimbabwean government had revoked the citizenship of Zimbabweans who had been born in the country but whose parents had been born

¹² This is a participatory research methodology developed in the Catholic tradition. The methodology involves what is referred to as action research, i.e. research which stimulates communities to think about their situation and respond to the issues emanating from their community. Researchers are encouraged to listen and insert themselves into the community, where they help it to analyse and reflect on their situation, using ethical and gospel values and then plan their response to the issues that arise. Once they plan their action and implement it, the community then starts the process of evaluating and identifying other issues to be tackled and the cycle begins afresh of insertion, analysis, reflection and response.

elsewhere (Kaulemu 2012). I too lost my Zimbabwean citizenship at that time. When I went to Lusaka to renounce a Zambian citizenship (through my mother), the Zambian officers did not know that I was (or could be) a Zambian. They gave me a letter to the effect that I was not one, and this convinced the Zimbabwean government to allow me Zimbabwean citizenship. However, every time I apply for a new passport, I am asked to produce my Zimbabwean citizenship certificate. It was a most humiliating experience to be asked by a revolutionary, African, liberation political party and government, one I had supported and for which I had voted in 1980, to renounce my Zambian mother who had been forced by the colonial system to leave her country that had, after its own independence, supported the Zimbabwean liberation struggle!

The work of Silveira House, a Jesuit development institute became critical as it researched and published articles on the Zimbabwean 'social and economic lives of the people' under the title 'Silveira House Social Series' (Harold-Barry 2022: 251). Fr Oscar Wermter, SJ, at the Jesuit Communications (JesCom) and the ZCBC Social Communications (SocCom), for many years produced materials for reflection.¹³ Another Jesuit, Fr David Harold-Barry edited a book in which strategically placed professionals reflected on how the past was influencing and interacting with the Zimbabwean future (Harold-Barry 2004).

In 2003, the Ecumenical Support Services (ESS) published a book (Mkaronda et al. 2003) which tried to bring together 'critical voices emerging in times of crisis'. In their publication they described themselves as,

'a service programme motivated by the prophetic gospel values of *justice, solidarity, and, liberation*. It comprises of Christians of different denominations who take seriously God's preference for the *oppressed, poor, and marginalised*. It *fosters relationships*. It fosters relationships and programmes that demonstrate this conviction.

The accumulation of all these ecumenical reflections, networks, prayer sessions, demonstrations and other activities culminated in the expression of a need for a national visioning process led by the three church networks from the mainline churches. I was invited to contribute a chapter on the values which would lead this process, and to initiate the co-ordination of other chapters. This process began on my little Amstrad computer. The section on the rule of law by Prof. Walter Kamba was the second

13 Ibid. 318-319.

contribution. Rev. Musasiwa was then asked to contribute values from other church traditions. As the document began to take shape, one felt that larger political and security forces became interested in the direction in which it was moving; it was also noted that some church leaders were collaborating with government. In the end, the ecumenical movement allowed itself, either from fear, or genuine support of the Mugabe regime, or both, to collaborate with the government in the production of the final document, *The Zimbabwe We Want*. Those of us who had hoped for a genuine church document, produced by an independent ecumenical movement, became irrelevant to the process.

In 2020, the Catholic bishops addressed the calibre of national leadership in Zimbabwe in a pastoral letter entitled *The March is not Ended*. They decried:

It is not clear to us as your Bishops that the national leadership we have has the knowledge, social skills, emotional stability and social orientation to handle the issues that we face as a nation. All we hear from them is blame of our woes on foreigners, colonialism, white settlers and the so-called internal detractors. When are we going to take responsibility for our own affairs? When are we going to submit to the requirements of national accountability? While our neighbours in the region are strengthening their democratic institutions, we seem to be weakening ours, Our Chapter 12 institutions, the judiciary and Prosecuting Authority seem to be losing their independence and effectiveness. Our health care institutions have collapsed. Our well-trained doctors and nurses remain incapacitated.¹⁴

The responses to this pastoral, by government ministers, illustrated by default, that indeed many of our leaders lacked the ability and emotional intelligence ‘to handle the issues that we face as a nation’. Some descended into tribal innuendos at the expense of the Archbishop of Harare, Robert Christopher Ndlovu.

Catholic social thought is always growing as the church reflects on Scripture, as theologians write more books, and faith communities reflect on their emotional responses to social and political realities. Therefore, CST does not provide cookbook solutions or a set of prescribed answers to issues. Rather, it proposes guidelines, raises questions, suggests possible directions, and offers insights in dealing with human challenges.

14 ZCBC (2020) ‘The March is not Ended – Pastoral Letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference on the Current Situation in Zimbabwe’, 14 August.

Catholic social thought usually come in different forms and at different social levels.

Forms and levels of CST:

(a) CST as General values and principles

These are the Gospel values and principles regarding the dignity of persons, the common good, solidarity, participation, subsidiarity, option for the poor, and others. At this level of general values and principles, the church will be restrained in making specific policy choices; it can, however, teach the general nature of integral development, stewardship of creation, good governance, the responsibilities of citizens, and the nature of public virtue. Many church pastoral letters are of this kind; they have condemned injustice generally but hesitated to identify it in the concrete world. They have defined social evil but refused to name names. For example, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) has written pastoral letters about corruption without identifying specific corrupt individuals and their institutions. They have taught the general qualities of good leadership and encouraged voters to choose good leaders without identifying specific individuals and political parties as examples.

(b) Getting into social policy debates

At this level, the church has tried to unpack general values by illustrating their meaning in concrete policy development, policy monitoring, and evaluation processes. The work of Catholic commissions for communication, justice, peace and development and social centres such as Silveira House and Jesuit Communication have ventured into engaging with Zimbabwean policy development, resulting in direct involvement with the state and government in such areas as education, health, media, and social policy. Sometimes these interactions have been positive, but some have resulted in confrontations with the state on such issues as media freedom, food distribution, human rights, and community development. Hence many Catholic Church leaders have shied away from this approach except on issues of sexuality, the death penalty, and personal morality. We can see this approach in the Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter of 1994, 'Human Life is Sacred: Catholic Bishops Strongly Oppose Abortion'¹⁵ and a statement on land reform.¹⁶

15 In *ZCBC Pastoral Letters: Volume II 1986-2115*, pp. 48-50.

16 Ibid. 'ZCBC Statement on Land Reform', 8 December 1997.

(c) Acting as a witness to Christian values

CST has sometimes inspired the church and its members to institute development programmes, organisations, and activities. In Zimbabwe, the Catholic Church has established the Commissions for Justice and Peace, Caritas, and other social justice institutions. As *Ecclesia in Africa* declares, ‘In Africa, the need to apply the Gospel to concrete life is felt strongly.’¹⁷ This need explains why the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe and indeed other Christian churches have established schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, and social centres. These institutions are a way of preaching and bearing witness to the gospel values of hope, justice, health, knowledge, solidarity, care and respect for the environment.

Challenges of realising CST in real life, especially in transitions

All these levels of Catholic social thought have been implemented by the church in different contexts. The challenge is whether the Church has offered consistent teaching at all levels – and whether lessons from the experiences of witnessing Christian teaching, or developing and implementing public policy, have informed the Church’s understanding of general values and principles. We have seen claims that the values and principles of Catholic social thought never change. We are told that statements of Catholic social teaching build upon and never contradict previous ones. Yet we know from the history of CST that the concept of human rights was once looked at with suspicion if not antipathy. The bishops of the Second Vatican Council talked about how ‘new avenues to truth are opened up’ by exchanges with the world. With greater participation of the lay faithful in the work of the church; with greater visibility of Catholic social teaching, there is greater pressure for CST to develop in its insights and language, a greater relevance to people’s concrete realities. This is more so in the African contexts where the colonial experience has not always benefited how the church and its practices are viewed even by the lay faithful.

Catholic social thought is at a crossroads. It must deal with its various ambivalences and ambiguities created by the development of CST at the different levels identified above. If Catholic social thought is presented as operating at the general level of values and principles, it will continue to be dominated by concern for logical coherence and consistency that may not transform the world. But if, on the other hand, it ventures into greater direct engagement with the world through policy development

17 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, #51.

and witness of action, it may achieve greater social impact at the expense of logical unity and consistency.

Catholic social thought may develop in this direction in Africa. As *Ecclesia in Africa* points out, 'the church is aware that her social doctrine will gain credibility more immediately from witness of action than as a result of its internal logic and consistency'.¹⁸ For the social teaching to develop in this direction, the church will need to recognise more formally and learn from the 'witness of action' of the lay faithful. More thought will need to be placed towards clarifying not only the objectives of Catholic social thought, but also the roles of the various players and the instruments to be used to 'transform humanity from within and make it new'. Clearly, the development of CST demands re-examination of Catholic institutions, organisations, and the respective roles and relationships of Catholics and those with whom they work. Pope Francis has recognised this need. I write at a time when the Catholic Church has chosen representatives, including the lay faithful, from all over the world to meet in Rome in a Synod on Synodality.¹⁹ Here, in October 2023 and October 2024, the Church wants to discuss how different members of the church are to 'journey together' while respecting and listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit in order to strengthen communion, participation, for the mission.²⁰ In many ways, the Church, through the Synod on Synodality is pushing for political transitions. In order to do so, the church must deal with several ambivalences in Catholic social thought and practice which involves the role of the lay faithful especially the following:

1. What social responsibility is given to the laity with one hand seems to be taken away by the other. For example, recognition is made of the 'priesthood of the laity' and the special role and relationship the latter have to the world, and yet the institutional and organisational arrangements in the Church do not facilitate a concrete recognition

18 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* of The Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops Priests And Deacons Men And Women Religious And All The Lay Faithful On The Church In Africa And Its Evangelizing Mission Towards The Year 2000, #21, Given at Yaoundé, in Cameroon, on 14 September, Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the year 1995.

19 The Vatican (2021) *For a synodal church: Communion, participation, mission*, Preparatory Document, Synod 2021-2023. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

20 Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. Synod 2021-2023, *Vademecum: For the Synod on Synodality: Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*. Vatican City, September 2021.

of that role and responsibility. We are told that the Pastors (Bishops) have a role to give the ‘principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use to be made of the world’. The laity, on the other hand, have the duty to renew the temporal order ‘guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love’. Effectively, Catholic social teaching is taught by the bishops to the lay faithful who are expected to implement or live the teaching. While the lay faithful are encouraged to be creative and take initiative in collaborating with others in society, the lay experiences do not seem to have any added influence on the ‘principles concerning the purpose of creation’.

2. The lay faithful are encouraged in the social teaching to bring ‘before the ecclesial community their own problems, world problems, and questions regarding man’s salvation, to examine them together and solve them by general discussion.’²¹ I can imagine cases where specific social problems could be solved ‘by general discussion’. But many need specific responses which the church tends to hesitate to give. We have seen this in its inability to use its social thought to deal with racism, tribalism, class inequalities, poverty, the environment, education, health care, and community development. The church is not institutionally organised in such a way that the lay faithful can fully live – unambiguously – some of the instructions of the Catholic social teaching.

3. The latter encourages us, especially the lay faithful, to collaborate with ‘all people of goodwill’ nationally, regionally, and internationally. In doing so we must be witnesses to our faith and the Gospel values. Yet in so doing, we are exposed to situations of learning and growth. More needs to be said about how we can positively learn from others and spiritually grow from our interaction with other faiths, scientists, and other Christians. How, for example, can we witness synodality with non-Catholics if we cannot share the Eucharist with them at funerals, weddings and other events where we are supposed to be in solidarity with each other? How can we be the body of Christ if we cannot share the body of Christ together? The limits of our ecumenical relations as Christian churches is a challenge to our witness to national reconciliation and our teaching messages to national leadership.

4. Catholic social teaching is presented in different forms. It is sometimes presented as *principles to be followed*, e.g. principles of

21 Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, Vatican II, 1965, #10

the dignity of persons, participation, subsidiarity, common good, solidarity and option for the poor. These principles can be used to assess the justice of social situations and to suggest criteria for improving them. Yet Catholic social teaching has also been presented in terms of *virtues to be cultivated* in individual persons, societies and institutions. But the common good, solidarity, participation and stewardship of creation have also been presented as ideal *goals to be pursued*. These three approaches are not always consistent with each other. Their social consequences are not always consistent with each other. It is not clear what teaching we, as lay people, can use in specific situations that require specific guidance. For example, Catholics have been divided on how to deal with specific social, political and economic issues such as bad governance, traditional cultural practices, land reform, and economic prescriptions.

The situation is made more complex when all Christians and all people of faith are consulted on what the Gospel says about Zimbabwe's political transition. The three mother bodies of ZCBC, ZCC, and EFZ admitted in *The Zimbabwe We Want*, that in their attempt to contribute to the political transition in Zimbabwe, there was an 'Inability of the Churches to speak with one voice'. They go on to say,

As Churches we confess we have failed the nation because we have not been able to speak with one voice. We have often not been the salt and the light that the Gospel calls us to be.²²

Catholic social teaching has the potential to transform the temporal order. But this can only happen when there is full participation of all people of faith, and if church structures and processes unambiguously facilitate that participation, thus creating space and facilitating discussion on the meaning of the values and principles of social teaching in the African context. We have discovered many ambiguities and ambivalences in Catholic social teaching. What, for example, does solidarity mean in the context of land reform in Zimbabwe, election violence in Kenya, or xenophobia in South Africa? Catholics, and indeed Catholic leaders, have different views on these issues. Episcopal conferences have been split on them. These challenges cannot be solved by attempting to banish them from the top or by pretending they do not exist. For the church's social teaching to feel authentic and relevant to people's lives there needs to

22 *The Zimbabwe We Want*, 1.2.9.

be greater recognition of the lay people's role in helping the growth of the social teaching in concrete political, social and cultural transitions. God's Spirit will allow answers to social and political questions to emerge through our social engagements and dialogues. Unless the lay faithful, in collaboration with all other members of the church, take full responsibility for the social teachings, church documents will continue to be written, and yet the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres will remain only partially transformed.

CST is most effective in driving political transitions when it is seen as prophetic. I must be careful when I speak of the prophetic. In Zimbabwe, there are many different types of prophets. By prophetic, I do not mean the ability to foretell who will win the elections or by how much Manchester United will be defeated by Brighton the next time they meet.

Prophetic Thought: Cornel West comes to Zimbabwe. (I have shared some of the views in this section in my book, *Ending Violence in Zimbabwe*.) In his book *Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism*, (West 1993) the African American philosopher, Cornel West, identifies the four components of prophetic thought. These are *discernment, connection, tracking hypocrisy, and hope*. These four constitute a good summary of Catholic social thought that can drive political and social transition, anywhere in the world. I use West's categories, placing them in the context of Catholic social teaching in order to suggest a framework for driving political transition in Zimbabwe, Africa, and the world.

These aspects of Catholic social teaching can be used as minimum standards for Zimbabwean and African political practice. They point to the possibility of establishing alternative cultures to the undemocratic cultures of selfishness, inequalities and violence that dominate us.²³ They suggest values and principles that could act as guidelines for new ways of doing and organising matters. Ideals and principles are prophetic in so far as they help to give us a vision of what could be, beyond what they currently are.

Catholic social thought is prophetic in so far as it goes beyond *what is* in order to suggest and inspire people to transform *what is* into *what ought to be*. They help us to see clearly what is morally wrong with our society and, more positively, help us to develop ideals with which to work in order to build a more humane, just, and peaceful society. In this sense,

²³ I do not deny that religion, including Christianity, has been responsible for the development of social and political violence. This piece presents a form of Christian social teaching that facilitates the development of cultures of peace.

the principles of social thought can be transformed into personal and social virtues that we can cultivate in ourselves and in our institutions and communities in order to replace unjust political systems.

1. Discernment

West understands discernment as ‘the capacity to provide a broad, deep analytical grasp of the present in light of the past.’²⁴ Discernment is what the Second Vatican Council called ‘reading the signs of the times’ in order to develop ‘a nuanced historical sense’. It involves having the ability to ‘keep track, to remain attuned to the ambiguous legacies and hybrid cultures in history.’²⁵ In other words, history should not be understood as proving the exclusive virtues of one group of people against the exclusive vices of another. Every individual and every group that has vices also has virtues and the other way round. This is what it means to be human. Any human history needs to reflect this fact. History that refuses to acknowledge the contribution of others is not history. It is propaganda. This means that ‘a nuanced sense of history’ is to ‘call into question any notions of pure traditions or pristine heritages, or any civilisation or culture having a monopoly on virtue or insight’²⁶

To have a nuanced sense of history is to accept the various and sometimes contradictory forces that have contributed to the construction of modern Zimbabwe and Africa. We cannot deny that colonialism, no matter how evil we think it was, contributed to the construction of some of the most influential aspects of modern Zimbabwe. Neither can we deny that some of the worst aspects of modern Zimbabwe derive from our African inheritance. To say this is not to claim that African heritage did not give us some of our best qualities, nor to say that we do not inherit the worst from colonialism. Political violence has been the worst inheritance from both colonialism and African inheritance. The modern political culture of violence is a result of co-operation between colonial oppression and its African appropriation.

1. Modern violence as an attempt to banish ambiguity

In *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Zygmunt Bauman demonstrates how modernity is obsessed with order and the banishment of ambivalence. He declares that the ‘typical modern practice, the substance of modern politics,

24 West, 1993. p.4.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

of modern intellect, of modern life, is the effort to exterminate ambivalence' (Bauman 1991: 7). We see it in modern law, modern geography, modern management, and governance. Some of the most violent modern political processes have involved the definition of humanity versus the animal kingdom, civilisation versus the primitive, man versus woman, and the modern against the traditional. Violence is always implicated in modern attempts to banish chaos and establish order.

African modernity takes over from the imperial, colonial project the desire to design, manipulate, manage, and engineer life through the modern African state and through methods that attempt the impossible – to banish ambivalence. These methods include attempts in Africa and even in Zimbabwe to establish 'a territorialised identity and a racialised geography' (Mbembe 2000: 9). We have slogans like 'Africa for Africans' which we struggle to explain what they mean and what their political implications are. The tribalisation and ethnicization of geographical regions are seen in such terms as Matabeleland, Mashonaland, Zululand, Manicaland, etc. Political attempts at banishing ambiguity are experienced in efforts to establish *de facto* one-party states by banishing opposition parties and restricting and managing civil society.

Every culture that we know of, especially that of any post-colonial Africa is a result of the weaving of cultures that have come before it. An attempt to write out of history the contribution of some people from the history of any culture is a violent act. The attempt by the colonial settler regime to write off the history, wisdom, rights, and reality of local Africans is a violent act. Any attempt to write a narrow history of the country that ignores the reality of various groups and languages is a violent act. It is a violent act to write a history of Zimbabwe that refuses to recognise the dignity and humanity of some of its own people.

Discernment means, for example, recognising that Zimbabwe and Africa are as much creations of colonialism as they are of the liberation struggles – that Zimbabwe and Africa have simultaneously suffered and yet simultaneously benefited from a multiplicity of traditions. No tradition or culture antecedent to contemporary Zimbabwe and Africa can be wished away. This, of course, does not mean that everything from every culture and tradition should be morally acceptable. But it means accepting them as part of the legacy of the continent and nation and allowing healthy debates about the significance and implications of these legacies for today and the future.

Discernment means the ability to offer a subtle social analysis (Opongo and Orobator 2008: 5)²⁷ that offers ‘powerful descriptions and persuasive explanations of the evolution of wealth, power, status, and prestige’ (West 1993). It means keeping track of who is enjoying the benefits of history and who is bearing most of the social and political costs. It means looking at the world from the point of view of the impoverished, marginalised, and the victimised. The condition for truth is to allow those who suffer to tell their own stories in their own words. This of course does not mean those who suffer have a monopoly over truth or virtue. But it means that truth must always be ‘in tune with those who are undergoing socially induced misery’.²⁸ In Catholic social thought it means taking an ‘option for the poor’ and marginalised.

2. Connection: human social solidarity

Connection is the second component of prophetic thought that is capable of driving ethical political transition. In Catholic social thought, it is called solidarity. Solidarity is having the capacity for empathy i.e. the capacity to get in touch with the joys and hopes, ‘anxieties and frustrations of others’.²⁹ As the Second Vatican Council says in *Gaudium et Spes*, Christians are by their faith in solidarity with humanity, its history, and the rest of God’s creation.

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men who united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all human beings. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.³⁰

Human connection means that our histories and disagreements should never be excuses for us to lose sight of the humanity of others. We should never define ourselves in ways that imply the dehumanisation

27 Here the authors help us to link discernment and social analysis when they analogise social analysis to discernment as experienced by St Ignatius of Loyola. p.5.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. p.5.

30 Vatican II, ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’, (*Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965)

and instrumentalisation of others. Dehumanisation is the attempt to look at and treat human beings as if they were not human. Violence helps us to do that. In the history of genocides, the killers describe their victims as non-human. In the Rwanda genocide, the Tutsi were referred to as 'cockroaches'. In Zimbabwe, we have had names for each other. To this extent, we are implicated in violence by categorisation.

To be in solidarity with others means recognising them as human and working to help create social conditions that facilitate the fulfilment of their desires and aspirations. It also means helping to remove the obstacles in their lives. Essentially our crisis is a moral and spiritual one. Our major intellectual and emotional weakness is our inability to see ourselves as one nation, one continent, and one world, bound by human connections that are all-inclusive. We have not so far developed enough universal social solidarity that covers the whole nation, continent, and the world. It is this spiritual and moral crisis that explains why the world is a divided society.

Solidarity makes moral demands on how we should organise our society. Ultimately it makes moral demands for the cultivation of specific virtues that are consistent with realisation of the common good. It is this morality and spirituality which becomes the cement of our universe.

Unfortunately, culturally, we suffer from a poverty of imagination. Our concept of Zimbabwe is very narrow. Our national emotional capacity is very shallow. For example, white people in this country who still live in Rhodesia must come out of their laager. At least some are willing to try,³¹ but they are very few. Also, do they have the knowledge and skills to go through the process? Clearly, the white community needs help to get out of their laager. But do we have the kind of national leadership that can even begin to help this process?

But then are the majority of blacks prepared to come out of their own social ghettos? Are we emotionally ready to open ourselves to social and cultural risks as we engage others to build a modern solidarity society? Do we have the social and political skills to do so? These are questions we must answer not only theoretically and academically, but practically in real life on a day-to-day basis – in our thoughts and in what we do. Again, we do not seem to have the kind of leadership that could help us in this process.

31 I think of David Coltart's emotionally courageous book, *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe*, in which he tries to discuss his complicity with Rhodesian political violence and describes how he begins the journey towards contributing to efforts to build peace.

We are in a spiritual crisis because we have attempted to think and live in our old ways in a new world. Old skins must give way to new ones if we are to receive new wine. If Jesus were to physically come again to Zimbabwe today, he would say the same things he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, ‘You know how to judge the appearance of the sky, but you cannot judge the signs of the times. An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given it...’ (Matthew 16:3-4). We suffer the fate of an unfaithful generation.

3. Tracking Hypocrisy

West identifies ‘tracking hypocrisy’ as his third component of prophetic thought. In Catholic tradition, this is covered under the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is a request for human beings to show some humility. Without humility people find it difficult to critically look at themselves and acknowledge their own weaknesses. Without humility people find it difficult to acknowledge the strengths of others. Without humility people cannot admit to the need for forgiveness. This is our condition. The failure to say we are sorry for Gukurahundi, Murambatsvina and political violence during elections.

Tracking hypocrisy, for West is ‘accepting boldly the gap, in our lives, between principles and practice, between promise and performance.’³² He insists that we must have the courage to point out human hypocrisy while at the same time ‘remaining open to having others point out that of our own.’³³ Tracking hypocrisy is self-critical. Often, we are complicit with the very thing we criticise. Many of us condemn corruption and yet we are implicated in its growth.

4. Hope

To have hope is to believe that as human beings, in spite of our present crisis, we still have the capacity to do something right and to solve our challenges – that the future is still open-ended – we have not come to the end of history. Our children need to be given a sense of hope for their future.

Conclusion

I have argued that Catholic social thought can be a driver of political transition in Zimbabwe, Africa, and the world at large. However, CST

³² West, 1993, p. 5.

³³ Ibid.

does not, and cannot provide cookbook solutions to human challenges. This means that Catholic social thought contributes, along with other thought traditions, to political transitions. In the process, CST is challenged to deepen, widen, and even transform itself. This is, hopefully, what the synodality processes are about. The political transition that is being experienced in Zimbabwe, challenges Catholic social teaching in many ways. It challenges the institutional church itself as, simultaneously an agent and victim of political change. No wonder why the Catholic church leadership and its members seem mesmerised, paralysed, and even confused by the political transition in the country.

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The Absence of Women's Voices in Ecumenical Responses to Political Transitions in Zimbabwe

MOLLY MANYONGANISE

Introduction

The word 'ecumenism' comes from the Greek word 'Oikoumene' which implies 'a world-wide phenomenon or a general movement in extent, influence or application...' (Eregare, Ekpendu and Adesina, 2017: 51). Chitando and Biri (2016: 74) define ecumenism as a theological concept that seeks to encourage communion and interaction amongst different Christian denominations and promote Christian unity. Achunike (1995: 84) views ecumenism as both a movement and an attitude of openness towards Christians of different traditions, in order to learn from various experiences and deepen one's own commitment to the gospel. Eregare, Ekpendu and Adesina (2017) provide the historical development of ecumenism globally, which this chapter will not repeat. The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 gave impetus to Christian unity, and this eventually led to ecumenical groups emerging across the world, including Africa in general, and for the purposes of this study, Zimbabwe in particular. Ecumenical initiatives in Africa illustrate the various ways by which converging and competing claims to the Christian faith endeavour to convince Africans how to become 'joyfully Christian' while remaining 'truly African' (Mugambi 2015).

The birth of ecumenism in Zimbabwe took place in colonial Zimbabwe when the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference (SRMC) was formed in 1903 (Ruzivo 2017: 2). For Ruzivo (2017: 2), the SRMC was formed to: (i) promote Christian missions in Southern Rhodesia, (ii) encourage fraternal spirit in the mission field, (iii) delimit denominational boundaries of all Protestant mission churches, (iv) collect statistics and papers concerning missionary work and (v) secure uniformity in dealing with native customs and affairs. Later on, bodies such as the Rhodesia Catholics Bishops' Conference (RCBC) now the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), the Rhodesia Christian Council (RCC) now Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) were formed. The EFZ was formed in 1962, the ZCC in 1964 and the ZCBC in 1969 (Ruzivo, 2008). In post-colonial Zimbabwe, other bodies were constituted such as the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA) (1993). After 2000, other bodies emerged in response to the Zimbabwean crisis namely Churches in Manicaland (CiM) (2000), Grace to Heal (GtH) (2003), Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) (2005) and the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) (2007). Tarusarira (2016) calls CiM, GtH and ZCA quasi-ecumenical bodies. Ecumenical groups have played pivotal roles in Zimbabwe's political transitions throughout history: indeed, the church has been a critical player in Zimbabwean politics since the pre-independence period. However, what is apparent is the absence of women's voices. Despite a focus on religion and gender by many Zimbabwean scholars, the status of women in the ecumenical movement in the country remains largely unexamined. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to close this gap by interrogating and challenging the patriarchy underpinning ecumenism in Zimbabwe. We shall do so by (a) providing a historical analysis of the gendered ecumenical responses to political transitions in Zimbabwe; (b) by examining women's representation and participation in ecumenism; and (c) highlighting the absence of their voices in the country's political transitions. Our argument is that as long as religion and politics in Zimbabwe remain gendered spaces, women will remain on but not at the table resulting in decisions being made for them. In conclusion, we suggest ways in which the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe can become gender-inclusive in their response to political transitions. Our argument is theoretically informed by the African Womanist Approach, which emphasises solidarity between women and

men in the struggle towards gender equality. For this particular chapter, the approach questions the exclusion of women's ecumenical contributions from most of Zimbabwe's official Christian historiographies. I contend that the patriarchy that obtains in Zimbabwe's ecumenical bodies renders invisible women's initiatives in ecumenism. It can, however, be argued that the ecumenical activities of women assisted to move the male-dominated leadership structures towards ecumenism. In Zimbabwe, the case of Elizabeth Maria Ayema (Mai Musodzi), as shall be shown later, comes to mind. Dove (1998) avers that African Womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and recreate cultural integrity that espouses principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness, etc. Thus, for purposes of this chapter, the African Womanist Approach calls for the recognition of women's ecumenical contributions in Zimbabwe and the documentation of the 'her-stories' which have often been ignored in church history. The next section examines the intersections of ecumenism and political transitions in Zimbabwe.

Ecumenism and political transitions in Zimbabwe: an historical analysis

Ecumenical bodies have been vocal in the political transitions throughout Zimbabwe's history. The liberation movement in Zimbabwe spurred the formation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) an organisation which falls under the ZCBC (Manyonganise and Chirimuuta 2011: 290). According to Badza (2010), the Commission needs to be applauded for documenting the injustices of the liberation struggle and condemning the war atrocities. When Gukurahundi occurred from 1983-87, the Commission was vocal and together with the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) documented the atrocities of the Fifth Brigade in the Midlands and Matabeleland regions in Zimbabwe (CCJP and LRF 1997). Gukurahundi was an operation launched by the Zimbabwean government in the Midlands and Matabeleland Provinces to flush out 'dissidents' but it is estimated that 20,000 people (mainly civilians), were killed during this period. The EFZ and ZCC did not speak out strongly against Gukurahundi. Did they fear the ZANU PF-led government? The operation ended when a Unity Accord was signed in 1987, a conclusion that was supported by the churches in Zimbabwe. For instance, when it seemed as if the negotiations between the two political parties, ZANU and ZAPU, had failed, the ZCBC

approached Joshua Nkomo and Enos Nkala¹ and encouraged them to dialogue for a peaceful solution. Canaan Banana, a Methodist minister, and first President of Zimbabwe, hailed the Accord as a stepping-stone towards peace, describing it as a magnanimous achievement (Banana, 1996: 278 and 229)

Other ecumenical bodies appeared to cower in fear of ZANU-PF prior to the new millennium; they did become more vocal from 2000 during the era known as the Crisis period (see Manyonganise 2020), seeking not to remain silent in the face of government atrocities,² (Amani Trust, 2005) as well as trying to find ways of dealing with political violence that was/is becoming endemic in Zimbabwean society. The enormous human suffering, attacks by the state on opposition members, and criticism from church members and partners, pushed the Zimbabwean churches to a point where common reflections and action became the only answer (Zakeyo n.d). In response, the Zimbabwean government has attempted to limit the church's activities to prayer, morality and charity. The government has also co-opted perceived powerful members of the public who profess to be Christians such as Kuda Tagwirei who is a Seventh Day Adventist as well as church leaders of apostolic sects (Vapositori). Nonetheless many Zimbabwean church leaders refused to subscribe to the government's narrow interpretation of the mission of the church and endeavoured to make a difference in a heavily polarised political environment' (Chitando 2011: 43). For example, Andrew Wutawunashe created a nationalist campaign, 'Faith for the Nation', an initiative that allied with his Pan-African thinking,³ a concept supported by President Mugabe (Togarasei 2006: 223). His campaign sought to infuse Christian ideals into the national body politic wherein the people were encouraged to take responsibility for the national fortunes. For him, it was vital for all Zimbabweans to put aside their political differences and to work together for the national good' (Chitando 2011: 44). However, people generally ignored Wutawunashe's campaign due to his close relationship with the state through patronage.

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- 1 Joshua Nkomo was the leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) which primarily represented people in Matabeleland where the atrocities had taken place. Enos Nkala, Minister of Defence in the ZANU government.
 - 2 These atrocities include Gukurahundi, political violence, abductions, state-sanctioned human disappearances and murders, torture, more especially before and after elections, etc.
 - 3 Andrew Wutawunashe strongly believed that he was called by God '... to start an African revival in Zimbabwe'. His 'Faith for the Nation' was meant to mobilise Zimbabweans towards unity.

During Zimbabwe's electoral periods, the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe has acted as the voice of the voiceless by speaking out against the injustices of government. The older ecumenical bodies (ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ) played a critical role in championing dialogue after the 2002 presidential election⁴ which had effectively resulted in the polarisation of the country. After this contentious, often violent, presidential election, Bishop Patrick Mutume of the ZCBC, Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the ZCC and Bishop Trevor Manhanga of the EFZ advocated for dialogue between the different political players (Manyonganise, Machingura and Museka 2018). They pleaded with the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe and with Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the MDC 'to consider the welfare of ordinary men, women and children: they maintained that there was more to unite the different political actors than to divide them' (Chitando 2011: 44). They called for a compromise in political ideologies and challenged the political leadership of both parties to set the stage for national reconciliation in a deeply polarised country. The bishops provided a platform which became useful in 2008 as the different political leaders negotiated the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). In this case, the GNU that governed Zimbabwe from 2009 to 2013 should be seen as the brainchild of these leaders (Muchena 2005: 265; Chitando and Manyonganise 2011; Manyonganise 2016).

As the Zimbabwean Crisis intensified, the ecumenical bodies responded through pastoral letters and documents as a way of nudging the political establishment to account for its repressive actions. I have elsewhere discussed the impact of pastoral letters such as *A Call to Conscience* (ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ 2006), *God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed* (ZCBC 2007), *The Zimbabwe We Want* (ZCBC, ZCC, EFZ, 2006) (Manyonganise 2013; Manyonganise 2020; see also Chitando 2013). Other pastoral letters were produced by the ZHOCD, ZCA, CiM and GtH. While some pastoral letters sought 'soft' engagement with politicians, others were confrontational⁵ (Tarusarira 2016). Pastoral letters that sought soft engagement were those that desisted from ruffling government feathers. Having faced criticism from established ecumenical bodies, the ZANU-

4 For the first time in 2002, Robert Mugabe, leader of ZANU-PF, the governing party, met with serious opposition from Morgan Tsvangirai, a former Trade Union leader, and now leader of the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change.

5 Some of the confrontational pastoral letters were: Concern over the Deteriorating Situation in Zimbabwe: Message from the Heads of Christian Denominations in Zimbabwe (2008), Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called Children of God, (HOCD 2013).

PF government devised ways of countering the constant criticism. During the Mugabe era, organisations purporting to be Christian, were formed such as the Destiny for Africa Network led by Obadiah Musindo. These together with Wutawunashé's Faith for the Nation spoke in favour of the government. In 2010, another group, the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) which was pro-government was also formed. In fact, the general sentiment was that these had been sponsored by the government to speak in its favour. In the post-Mugabe era, the Zimbabwe Indigenous InterDenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) emerged in 2020 as a pro-ZANU PF coalition of churches. In the run-up to the 2023 general election, they were joined by another grouping calling itself 'PastorsforED'. The leader of this group was a woman which brings us to the way ecumenism intersects with gender. I will critique such a development later. In the next section, I provide an overview of the way women interface with ecumenism generally.

Women and ecumenism: an overview

Globally, Christian women have historically actively participated in activities that positively contribute to the life of both the church and society. Gnanadason (1992: 237) argues that:

A rereading of the history of women in the Bible, a critical look at the leadership roles that women played in the early church, an assessment of the impact that women in the missionary movements of the nineteenth century have made on the lives of the people they encountered, or an objective, positive relook at the contributions that women have made to the church and the ecumenical movement in this century, will all affirm that indeed women have been at the forefront of the missionary and evangelistic tasks of the church throughout its history.

However, Gnanadason notes that while women have contributed so much to the church, their contributions have been very inadequately recorded because their selfless and devoted service has often been trivialised or counted for nothing. In her analysis, women and the gifts they bring to the church have been marginalised because it is assumed that it is natural that they give so much of their time and talents voluntarily, to the life of the church and society both in safeguarding the faith of the church, and in spreading the good news they have experienced as they struggle for dignity and humanhood. She further argues that what is offered by women to the church is in most cases perceived as peripheral

because it is seen as an extension of their ‘housewifely’ tasks. As a result, their service is considered not worthy of gratitude. In order to counter this marginalisation, Christian women sought to influence their recognition in the church through the formation of women’s groups.

One of the first active groups of ecumenical women was the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) formed in 1858. A plethora of other Christian women’s organisations were subsequently formed globally, regionally and nationally. The purpose of such organisations was to advance the work of women in ministry and the church, as well as negotiating the impediments of patriarchy. Within the southern African region, there emerged the Manyano/Ruwadzano Movement loosely translated as ‘Women’s Fellowship’ in the 1920s. Originating in The Methodist Church in South Africa, it spread to other countries. The movement had two critical areas of focus: (i) that women pay attention to their domestic duties and (ii) contribute to the church’s evangelisation process (Manyonganise 2023). The influence of the movement is seen in how other churches also embraced the concept which in Zimbabwe culminated in the formation of the Mubatanidzwa weMadzimai (Women’s Union), a guild which brings together women of different denominations. The latter began in 1964 as women’s informal engagements under the auspices of the ZCC and was formally recognised in 1974.

As the church recognised the need for unity for the successful expansion of the gospel, a number of meetings and conferences were held. For example, the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference held in 1910 with the intention of Western mission to co-ordinate its efforts and resources for the effective evangelisation of the world (Schuster, n.d). In 1927, a conference on Faith and Order was also held in Lausanne. However, of the four hundred attendees at the latter, only six were women (Maxon 2015). They highlighted the important role of women in the church and their own under-representation at the conference. As alluded to earlier, the need for church unity led to the formation of the WCC (Mateus, n.d), which from its onset was made to focus on the status of women in the church. For example, ‘gender’ commitment of the WCC may be traced back to the work of the *Commission of Churches on Diakonia and Development* (CCDD 10) which was established in 1970 (Kopiec 2013: 98). As a result, of the lobbying of Christian women globally, the WCC pronounced an *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women* (1988-98) which focused on themes such as women’s participation in the

work and life of churches, violence against women in church and society, and global economic injustice and racism as related to the lives of women. The Decade aimed at ending both emotional and physical abuse of women and their economic, political and cultural deprivation and powerlessness (Kopiec 2013: 98). It challenged the ecumenical movement to find non-patriarchal ways of reading women's missional contribution to the history of the church and should be seen as one way in which the ecumenical body has attempted to encourage gender advocacy (Siwila, 2016: 335). Siwila (2016: 336) argues that the decade was a time to place more emphasis on training women to take up leadership positions and adopt shared leadership and decision-making roles, and for men to intentionally make space for women to equally share their gifts in leading the church and mission. In Siwila's analysis, this decade was supposed to be a time for the church to rediscover and use its prophetic voice to advocate the full participation of women in the work of the church and find other gender-affirming ways of being church that is all-inclusive.

Although this was a noble objective initiated by the WCC, gender and religion scholars have criticised it. For example, Heider-Rottwilm cited in Siwila (2016: 336) is of the view that the decade was not a decade for women but a decade in solidarity with women. Hence, despite the contributions of women, Gnanadason (2020) notes that structures and processes that permit many forms of exclusion and violence against women, both continue to persist in society, the church and the ecumenical movement. In her analysis, women often point to the glass ceiling that blocks their upward mobility in leadership and the slippery floors that restrict and stifle their uninhibited and creative participation in both church and society. For example, she points out that discussions on the ordination of women have not been easy as many churches still do not recognise the need for this innovation. She argues:

Hierarchical bureaucracy, associated with patriarchy and gendered as male, was embraced by churches that engaged in mission in the global South. In order to address this setback, there was need for gender mainstreaming of these bureaucratic organisations that controlled mission work. The gendered nature of bureaucracy meant that men controlled the decision-making of the organisations on behalf of women. This caused resistance among some women missionaries who had an alternative vision of gender justice in mission understanding and practice (Siwila, 2016: 333).

A study I conducted in 2023 shows the many ways that religion interfaces with politics in Zimbabwe to the extent that it influences the marginalisation of women in the leadership of both religious institutions and political offices. The women and church leaders I interviewed made reference to the Bible as well as African religio-cultural practices as impediments to their active participation in politics. Literal readings of the biblical texts (most of which were written by men) as well as the constant reference to cultural norms that oppress women perpetuates their subordination in political spaces. It thus becomes clear that such a scenario also obtains in the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe where women's voices are absent showing an intentional sidelining and silencing.

Women, ecumenism and political transition in Zimbabwe: sidelined and silenced

From the pre-colonial period, women were generally sidelined in religio-political spaces (Machakanja (2015). There were indigenous cultural beliefs and practices that relegated women to marginalised positions even before the advent of colonialism (Maxwell 1999). Moreover, 'during the colonial period, most women in Zimbabwe became Christians and were introduced to new forms of patriarchal control while old forms were reinforced' (Manyonganise 2023). The education that was introduced in most mission schools was aimed at domesticating women. Gender-biased education provided by Christian missionaries is credited with isolating women within the domestic realm, severely damaging their public position and opportunities for empowerment, and providing one of the most critical determinants of persistent gender inequality in (Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular⁶ (see Summers 2002). Commenting on mission work in Zambia, Siwila (2016: 332) argues that because of the patriarchal nature and construct of most Protestant mission organisations, mission work assumed an ambiguous gender perspective that allowed male missionaries to emphasise their supremacy over women. She further argues that as 'missionaries engaged in working particularly with African women, an embedded patriarchal construct shaped the agenda of the mission station and grossly restricted efforts for mutual partnership between men and women and a need for a holistic,

6 Christian missionary education throughout Africa emphasised the domestication of women through offering them subjects such as sewing and cooking so that they would become good wives to the men who were being prepared for professional jobs in industry, schools, etc.

gendered approach to mission'. Such a position has persisted in post-colonial Zimbabwe particularly within the church/ecumenical movement and national politics. These spaces have remained largely gendered with women rendered invisible (Manyonganise 2023).

The church's involvement in politics is seen as its prophetic voice. In fact, it is part of its mission. Within the Zimbabwean context, as alluded to earlier, Mugabe wanted to restrict the Church to the confines of the pulpit.⁷ However, the above-mentioned ecumenical bodies, and most churches refused arguing that speaking out to issues of social justice formed part of its mandate. However, in doing so, throughout the political historical epochs, women's voices are not only sidelined, but also silenced. In the colonial period, voices that are heard loudly condemning the excesses of the colonial government are those of male church leaders such as Bishop Lamont of the Roman Catholic Church and Bishop Dodge. Even though women were the majority of victims, their voices are either mute or muted in response to the violence of the colonial period. At independence in 1980, Mugabe unilaterally announced his policy of reconciliation which imposed silence and amnesia on the atrocities of the liberation struggle (Manyonganise 2016). According to Huyse (2003: 36) the imposition of official amnesia on the populace

drew a veil over the human rights violations of the Rhodesian secret service, army and police. It was, at the same time appreciated by the leaders of the liberation movements because it meant also closing the books on their violence against civilians in Rhodesia and against their rivals in the training camps in Mozambique.'

Of particular interest is that certain war atrocities were peculiar to women, e.g., sexual abuse and rape by both Rhodesian forces and freedom fighters. However, it is instructive to note that women were never made part of the policy of reconciliation. We should also question the position of the church in this regard. Though contested, Fisher shows the total exclusion of the church from the formulation of the policy. She argues that 'the 1980 national reconciliation was presented by the state as a moral discourse and was not infused with religious values or portrayed as a Christian approach to healing the nation' (2010: 46). However, in 1980, the church was called upon to support the ideologies of the state and it answered the call hoping

7 In Mugabe's opinion, politics was outside of the church's purview, rather the church needed to concentrate on issues of morality. In response, the church in Zimbabwe has been using the pulpit as space for political communication as well.

to partner with the state in developmental programmes. Dorman (2002) argues that the church in Zimbabwe, after independence, had little room to manoeuvre save to 'bless the state' and 'work in unity with it' but not to 'challenge it'. In assuming this approach, the male-led church did not consult women, even as it embarked upon supporting the government in what was deemed to be 'development'. Other scholars such as Auret (2011) are of the view that the Catholic Church through the ZCBC were instrumental in informing the reconciliation policy that was adopted by Mugabe at independence. The pastoral letter of 17 April 1980 focused on the need for reconciliation in post-colonial Zimbabwe and has been cited as crucial in influencing the reconciliation policy. Regardless of the contestations, what is apparent is that women were not consulted when the policy was being formulated.

The occurrence of Gukurahundi soon after independence is another example of a political moment where women in the ecumenical movement were sidelined. Yet the major victims of Gukurahundi were women who were either beaten, raped or killed because they were accused of having husbands or sons who were 'bandits'. The Unity Accord (1987) that ended the conflict did not factor in the experiences of women during the hostilities. Banana praised the Accord but overlooked issues of gender and sexual violence against women because the process was male-dominated. Vambe (n.d) has posited that the voice of women was absent as it was the male politicians who negotiated for the 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU-PF and ZAPU. This, therefore, implies that their experiences of Gukurahundi were never put into perspective when the Accord was signed. Listening to current debates on the Gukurahundi massacres, one tends to hear competing male voices trying to get credit for the Accord (Manyonganise, 2016), which points to the fact that the negotiations were a 'men-only' affair. A male-led ZCBC encouraged the negotiations but failed to ensure that women were also represented. (One should not be surprised by this because the Catholic Church has continued to reject the ordination of women.)

In 2008, when the Zimbabwean crisis reached its peak, three male leaders of the major ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe mentioned above, have been credited with the formation of the government of national unity (GNU). The absence of women at the negotiating table is telling. This is not surprising given the absence of women in the leadership of ecumenical bodies. The ecumenical movement has continued to issue pastoral letters

and statements. One such being 'The March is not Ended', published by the ZCBC on 14 August 2020 in response to the deteriorating socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe. However, the signatories are all men. Even for those ecumenical bodies that released statements of support to the bishops after the government condemned the letter, did not reflect any women's voices.

In the run-up to the August 2023 election, men and women who claimed to be pastors and purported to support Emmerson Dambudzo (ED) Munangagwa to retain the presidency formed a group they called PastorsforED. For fear of reprisals from the public in the highly polarised political environment, these men put a woman (name unknown) at the helm, sacrificing her image and integrity on the altar of politics. They did not have the courage to be the face of the group as is always the case. After the elections, when PastorsforED was called upon to endorse the freeness and fairness of the elections, the men refused to speak to journalists and pushed the woman to do so.⁸ She embarrassed herself as she failed to articulate the issues to which she was being asked to respond; the interview had to be restarted several times, but she still failed.⁹ A gender analysis of this event suggests two conclusions namely, (i) when the topic is controversial, men protect themselves from public vitriol but are comfortable placing women in the firing line; (ii) men in the ecumenical movement are not ashamed to shame women and present them as incompetent while hiding behind the 'we are giving women a chance' mantra. Such contentious moves require that a way forward that works for both women and men be found.

The way forward

The Ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe needs to be gender-sensitive and inclusive even as it engages in political transitions. It is important that it acknowledges the many talents that women bring to it for its effectiveness. The starting point would be to allow the ecumenical her-stories of women be told and written, as these may have influenced the growth of larger ecumenical bodies led by men. For example, the story of Elizabeth Maria Ayema (Mai Musodzi) (Yoshikuni 2008) is one such story that validates women's contributions to ecumenism. While Ruzivo (2005) credits her

8 The video that was circulated on social media platforms showed a man refusing to answer questions from journalists, and instead asking the woman to respond.

9 After her failure to enunciate the political issues that were being addressed, public opinion pointed to the fact that the group was made up of Central intelligence operatives who wanted to influence voters to vote for the incumbent.

with the formation of the *Chita CheHosi Yedenga* (Sodality of Mary the Queen of Heaven), Catholic historiography has not captured any of her work.¹⁰ Ruzivo (2005) explains that when Pope John Paul II came to Zimbabwe, he was presented with a brief history of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe in which the whole history is of a patriarchal nature. Though Mai Musodzi is credited with founding the *Chita CheHosi Yedenga* in the suburb of Mbare in Harare by oral sources, Gundani (2019) argues that official tradition contained in the handbook of this sodality attribute Fr Alois Nyanhete, a diocesan priest, as the founder of the movement. In Gundani's analysis, the official sources contradict and marginalise the role played by Mai Musodzi in the formation of the sodality. For Ruzivo (2005), the patriarchal history of the Catholic Church needs to be countered with the inclusion of stories such as Mai Musodzi's. For this to be realised, Siwila (2016: 337) calls for a theology of partnership of men and women in mission/church. She argues that the church's missional identity and witness in which women are marginalised and enslaved are a result of a closer relationship between the global socio-economic system and the dominant religions. Siwila's argument is important because it shows that the historical marginalisation of women from powerful church structures has filtered through to other spaces as well thereby shaping the silencing of women in religio-political spaces. However, the absence of women's voices in the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe, and its response to the country's political transitions should make it uncomfortable and cause it to search for alternative ways to be both gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive. For example, my African Womanist Model for political participation is instructive of what the ecumenical movement could do to include women's voices in response to political developments. Having engaged with women in Zimbabwe who acknowledged their marginalisation from decision-making in both the private and public spaces, I formulated a model which rests on three institutions: the home, the church and national governance systems. I argue that any model for political participation needs not only to put gender on the agenda of political participation, but to place it at the centre of the model. This would include many critical components such as positive femininity and womanhood, transformative masculinity, life-giving reading and interpretation of biblical texts, daring patriarchy, collegiality. It is also Ubuntu-centred.¹¹ This new paradigm

10 Later, Silveira House, a Catholic NGO published a short biography of Mai Musodzi with Weaver Press.

11 Ubuntu is an African ethic which emphasises peaceful human co-existence through

calls the church – in this case, the ecumenical movement – to account for the many ways it has influenced gender relations in both the private and public spheres, and more importantly in the movement's engagement with politics in Zimbabwe. The church must avoid rigidity in its interpretation of biblical texts. Like the story of the Zelophehad daughters recounted in Numbers 27 in the Hebrew Scriptures, the church needs courage to challenge texts that disenfranchise women in all spheres. The fact that God agreed with the daughters when they challenged Jewish inheritance laws¹² is a clear indication that He is flexible when it comes to gender relations which should enable the church to become more flexible and open in its approach:

God's answer 'the daughters of Zelophehad are right' (Num 27:7) speaks to all women in Zimbabwe in particular who feel suffocated by oppressive patriarchy in the home, church and the nation; it is an answer that attests to the fact that oppressive cultural laws cannot only be challenged but changed. If God is a flexible God, an African Womanist model for political participation challenges the rigidity which we find in Zimbabwe in the way the written Bible and the Bible of culture have been used to disinherit women in political spaces. God's flexibility in Numbers 27:1-11 leads us to the conclusion that all the oppressive biblical texts cited in this study by church leaders and women are not cast in stone. They require women who have the courage to challenge them so that the church and society can have a paradigm shift in the way they treat women who desire to be at the table in the home, church and society. This is possible when women drop mantles of being weak, passive and common to being strong, active and aggressive. It is common knowledge that patriarchy is threatened by militant femininities, hence, an African Womanist Model for political participation cannot pamper patriarchy in the hope that it will willingly surrender. If anything, an oppressive patriarchy should contend with radical femininities (Manyonganise, 2023: 222-223).

In other words, women in the ecumenical movement need to challenge the sidelining and silencing of their voices when the movement responds

the maxim 'I am because you are'. It recognises that one's identity and well-being is inextricably linked to those of others within and beyond their own community.

- 12 The Jewish inheritance laws stipulated that if a father died with no son, but only daughters, his inheritance would be passed on to his male relatives. His daughters challenged this law because it would have been a travesty of justice for their father's name to be erased from the Jewish history books because he did not have a son. They demanded that they be allowed to inherit their father's land.

to national issues. However, such a challenge should begin by challenging the oppressive systems within individual churches as well as ecumenical bodies. I would suggest that the Women's Union (Mubatanidzwa weMadzimai) cannot continue to be a loose coalition of women's groups from various denominations but should evolve into a formidable force that tackles critical women's issues rather than concentrate on teaching women to be good homemakers. Older Christian women who lead the movement must desist from exhibiting dangerous femininities that reinforce the subordination, sidelining and silencing of women.¹³

Mapuranga (2020) applauds the establishment of a gender desk in the ZCC. She notes that its purpose is to ensure that (a) women have the same opportunities as men; (b) assume positions of influence in order to participate in the highest decision-making bodies within their church structures; and (c) encourage member churches to empower women economically. I have elsewhere advocated for the establishment of gender desks within both the ecumenical movement and individual churches (see Manyonganise 2016, 2017, 2023). They should provide platforms to equip women with skills that are critical for their upward mobility in all facets of life, politics included. Hence, political communication needs to be one of the skills that is taught in order that women's voices are added when pastoral letters and documents are published in response to political developments in the country. In other words, women's political concerns need not be communicated by the male-led ecumenical movement. Instead, space should be created so that women are also *at* the table and not *on* the table when such responses are being crafted. In fact, women should also be signatories to such statements. It is also critical to disrupt patriarchy within the movement by allowing and embracing female leadership of the many ecumenical bodies. This would make the ecumenical movement a platform for both women and men to engage in critical national issues.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to interrogate and challenge the absence of women's voices in the ecumenical movement's response to political transitions in Zimbabwe. It discussed the role played by ecumenical bodies in the country's political space from the colonial era to the present. It also provided an overview of women and ecumenism, and further examined

13 In this chapter, dangerous femininities are those that intentionally derail women's struggles with patriarchy for purposes of dominating other women solely for their selfish benefits.

the sidelining of women in Zimbabwe's ecumenical movement. We argued that this emanates from the way in which biblical texts on the status of women have been utilised. As a result, the movement representing the generic church has remained a gendered institution where women are almost invisible in its leadership. This automatically influences their place in the movement's responses to political developments.

Throughout Zimbabwe's history, it has been men calling each other to account in ways that ignore women's experiences of and contributions to politics. Thus, we can conclude that the ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe is highly patriarchal. Hence, this chapter proposed a way forward that could make the movement gender-sensitive and inclusive. It suggested the adoption of an African Womanist Model for political participation as presented by Manyonganise in 2023. While the study commended the establishment of gender desks particularly by the ZCC, it called upon the ecumenical movement to ensure that these desks are used to provide critical skills such as political communication to women. This would ensure that women are not confined to private spaces but can actively take part in public, including political, spaces.

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African Independent Churches: From Marginality to Political Influence

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Introduction

The history of African Independent Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe is characterised by their marginalisation as well as political influence during the colonial and the post-colonial eras. This only began to change towards the end of the second post-independence decade in response to a political shift in the national landscape. The factors which led to the gradual but increasing political influence of the AICs are of major interest. Our account in this chapter, which considers the nature and background of AICs, is not theological but historical, even though it makes reference to theological issues when necessary. Of major interest here are the African-led Pentecostal churches whose growth in Zimbabwe has been phenomenal in the post-colonial era. Interestingly, the marginalisation of AICs by both western missionary founded churches (WMFCs) and government during the colonial era is one of the factors which led to their emergence. As such AICs, such as ZCC (Zion Christian Church) and African Apostolic Church of John Marange (AAFCJM) are often described as protest movements. This chapter carefully assesses the marginality of AICs during the first two decades of independence when the contribution of AICs to Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and national development does not seem to have been recognised by Zimbabwe's political leadership. It appears that AICs only gained political influence when the ruling Zimbabwe African National

Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party lost its popularity towards the end of the nineties. This leads us to analyse the alliances between AICs and ZANU-PF functionaries and their ideologies, and the factors influencing AICs shift from marginality into the political arena.

African Independent Churches and their background

The term African Independent Churches has been used to describe three separate but related categories of Christian movements. First, there are Ethiopian or Separatist churches that broke away from mission churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries over issues of leadership and authority rather than theology or rites. Second, there are Zionist or Aladura churches. These movements of healing and exorcism, usually founded by individuals hailed as prophets, began to appear in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Finally, and more recently there are expressions of Pentecostalism. African-led Pentecostal churches first emerged in the 1950s but gained substantial momentum and followings in the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter is concerned with the second pneumatic category of independence which is often used to describe Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe.

Three major sets of ideological sources explain the emergence of AICs: first, a combination of mission Christianities and ideas from African traditional religions; second, selected elements from the former churches, resulting in a difference of emphasis; third, counter-establishment Christian movements in Europe and America, particularly Pentecostalism. Initially, scholars placed emphasis on the first explanation, arguing that AICs were syncretistic in a pejorative sense: that is, characterised by the pollution of a notionally pure tradition with symbols and meanings taken from alien religions. Missiologists and theologians such as Bengt Sundkler (1948) had a stake in defending religious boundaries often advanced in this explanation. However, anthropologists and social historians have increasingly discredited the idea of essential, untainted religious traditions and instead explored the processes by which these ideas, beliefs and practises were invented or imagined. More recent research has revealed the very considerable connections, AICs made with missionary ideas, beliefs and practices.

Examples of AICs in Zimbabwe are the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange, Johane Masowe's Gospel of God church, Mai Chaza's Guta raJehova, Zion African Apostolic Church, Habbakuk and Samuel Mutendi's Zion Christian Church (Ruzivo 2014: 18). The origins of

AICs are hinged on Zimbabwe's colonial history. Ruzivo (2014: 15-17) narrates the historical background of the AICs. The Zimbabwe Apostolic movements founded by the Shona prophets Johane Marange and Johane Masowe in the 1930s, drew on Dutch Reform and Wesleyan Methodist models of church government, a Sabbatarianism inspired by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and exotic-looking white robes and staffs derived from Catholic and Anglican sources. Counter-establishment movements of Non-Conformity and Radical Evangelism in the West also shaped Zimbabwean Christian Independency. This wave of evangelical mission activity had its social sources in late nineteenth century north America and Europe, and reflected the aspirations of those who had been marginalised by industrial capitalism. The movements emerged in religious form as a protest against the privilege, priestly supremacy and secularisation encountered in the establishment churches, and often made common cause with African Christians seeking to escape white missionary paternalism. Most counter-establishment Christian movements were pre-millennial, believing in the imminent return of Christ and the commencement of a thousand years of peace and justice. The urgency of this Adventist message gave the movements a strong proselytising impulse. Missionaries from the Chicago-based Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion arrived in South Africa in 1904 to proclaim their distinctive message of salvation and divine healing. A host of southern African Zionist movements rapidly followed, including Samuel Mutendi's. The most vital strand of counter-establishment Christianity was Pentecostalism, which appeared at the turn of the twentieth century. The Pentecostal apostolic message of Adventism, divine healing, and emancipation by the Holy Spirit combined with mainline missionary revivalism to animate South African Zionism and apostolic Christianity in Zimbabwe, contributed to its acceptance and growth amongst its members.

The motivations shaping the content of AICs were as diverse as their ideological sources but for our purpose it is important to highlight two. The first was the scriptures. In Zimbabwe, the Apostolic movements of Marange and Masowe, characterised by their eschatological millennialist biblicism, grew in the fertile soil of popular Methodism with its strong emphasis on equipping the believer with the translated word. Biblical stories of Zion and Bethesda, sacred cities, streams, and holy mountains provided the basis of a new African hymnology and the imaginative material to re-sacralise local landscapes in Christian fashion. Theologies

of the land would prompt many Apostolics to find common cause with the ruling party's programme of redistribution in the 2000s and thereafter.

In scripture, AIC members also read of dreams and visions, exorcism, healing, and notions of provision and personal security, which were often absent from the teachings of many missionaries and the churches they led. This leads to second factor shaping Christian independency in Zimbabwe, namely the existential pressure from possession cults and cults of the land. AICs did not so much adopt these aspects compete with them, engaging with the same material and existential issues in the search for healing, purity, and protection from evil. Pioneer missionaries had spent much time with the sick, their quirky medical practices not too dissimilar from those of traditional healers (Hastings 1994: 277). As missionary medicine professionalised and secularised in mission hospitals, so African Christian prophets instituted movements of healing and exorcism in the villages. It was in their striving for healing and deliverance that AICs would come into conflict with the colonial and post-colonial state.

AICs and marginality under colonialism

One of the main reasons for the emergence of AICs in Zimbabwe was the marginalisation and related evils that the African people suffered at the hands of the WMFCs and indeed the oppressive machinery of the colonial regime. In the perception of both – or indeed western civilisation as a whole whose philosophies and ideas characterised Zimbabwe's colonial era – the AICs were not churches, and their spirituality, theologies and practices were deemed unacceptable. In addition, their alignment to the African liberation fighters and promotion of African resistance to the colonial system perpetuated their marginality.

Daneel¹ (1999) acknowledges the characterisation of AICs as protest movements, and argues that their emergence is a clear combination of protest from colonial oppression, which was conspicuously evident in the worship practices of WMFCs and a home-grown, mission-driven approach to Christianity. The AICs approach to Christianity is still a protest against WMFCs as clearly evidenced by their contextualisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The characterisation of AICs as protest movements is founded on AICs having been formed in protest to the WMFCs' marginalisation of indigenous people in tandem with the colonial government of the day. The contextualisation is expressed through an inculturated theology of healing, exorcisms, prayers for rain, death rituals and liberation of believers from

1 A Dutch-Reformed missionary, and an academic.

fear of spiritual powers. While the western founded churches rightfully discouraged their African converts from traditional practices of the appeasement of the dead, consultation of traditional healers, and ancestral worship, they did not provide convincing spiritual alternatives or worship practices. The AICs capitalised on this absence and in so doing gained popularity. In our view, theirs was a major contribution to the Christian mission in Africa, let alone Zimbabwe, and yet it is one that is hardly acknowledged in mission or church history or in political circles.

Daneel (1999: 30-35) describes the AICs contribution to the liberation process of Zimbabwe during the colonial times through their involvement in tribal and national politics: the AICs' inculturated theology formed the foundation for such involvement. African traditional values emphasising the community, rather than the individual, also distinguished the AICs from WMFCs. For the former, God was involved in the administration of traditional leaders as well as national politics, while the latter focussed on individual morals and the salvation of the individual. Daneel (1999: 31) offers Marange of African Apostolic Church and Mutendi of Zion Christian Church (ZCC) as examples of AIC leaders in Zimbabwe who were not only aware of the problems faced by traditional leaders in local administration, but were also in close contact with them. Mutendi assigned some of his Zionist prophets to play an advisory role to the tribal courts of affiliated chiefs. They would provide them with revelations of the Holy Spirit to guide them in their customary judicial duties, especially boundary disputes. This made the gospel relevant within the context in which the AICs operated by engaging in tribal politics. Daneel (1999: 32) gives one major example of AICs' resistance of colonial rule: in 1965 Mutendi supported the Rozvi chief's protest against the district commissioner's ruling in favour of the Duma chief in the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute, which resulted in the ZCC holy city falling under the direct jurisdiction of a hostile Duma chief. This led Mutendi to appeal to the Supreme Court citing the district and provincial commissioners and the Minister of the Interior. When he lost the case, Mutendi led a multitude of the Rozvi people from Bikita to northern Gokwe where they built a new holy city, and the ZCC continued to flourish. Such rebellious action was not well received by either the WMFCs or the traditional leaders. Rungano rweZion Christian Church (Chiminige 2014: 37) report an incident in which the minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Bikita district reported Mutendi to the police for allegedly organising 'terrorists'

against the Rhodesian government, a charge that led to his imprisonment together with some of his followers. Thus, the emergence of AICs was both political and spiritual, being a revolt from the Christian faith, which was dressed up in European culture, by adopting a faith which was contextual or relevant to Africans.

Mutendi's bravery on account of his faith was a practical demonstration of liberation theology. While surely an occurrence worth acknowledgement as a church's contribution to Zimbabwe's liberation history, it is only cited in few academic accounts such as those of Daneel. The marginalisation of AICs during the colonial era offers the only explicable reason for such an omission: the AIC clergy were said to lack theological training, and to use unsound theological practices at the expense of making a meaningful contribution to societal development. Meantime, 'development' as understood by western churches was typically consistent with the colonial trends in colonial Rhodesia where Africans were marginalised in all areas of life and AICs were not spared. Maxwell (2006: 401) buttresses this fact through his observation that 'at worst the mission churches had appeared implicated in colonialism, at best their stance had been ambiguous'. So we can conclude that church history during the colonial period had little positive to say about AICs or Pentecostal churches led by Africans.

AICs and marginality during the first two decades of independence

The African post-colonial era which begins in the 1950s for the majority of sub-Saharan countries reflected a strained relationship between the WMFCs and the state, one marred by mutual suspicion. Churches struggled to understand their role within a Marxist-Leninist ideological framework while the state became irritable when church leaders acted or said anything that sounded political. Maxwell (2006: 412) gives an account of the marginality of AICs during the first two decades of Zimbabwean independence; the period 1980-2002 being attributable to the centrality of a development policy. This emphasis provided an opportunity which mission churches could exploit by expanding their activities into the provision of primary and secondary healthcare, education, self-sufficiency, water and the environment. They did this by establishing non-governmental organisations which focused on development. Meantime, 'the state-controlled press in Zimbabwe made sects a constant object of criticism for their failure to participate in programmes of primary healthcare' (Maxwell 2006: 412). AIC leaders focussed on such issues as personal security;

and ministry through healing, exorcism and prayer. Their focus was not recognised as significant in comparison to the work of WMFCs. Maxwell (2006: 413) asserts that while a few AICs, especially those in Zimbabwe which fell under the Fambidzano ecumenical movement, embraced development, the majority of them remained peripheral in the business of Zimbabwe's post-colonial state. Thus the marginalisation of AICs during the colonial era was perpetuated during the first two decades of the post-colonial era, due to the priorities of the WMFCs and the state.

The 1990s and the end of the cold war saw a shift in economic ideology in Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa. The Marxist-Leninist ideology was no longer sustainable, and the economy had shown signs of negative growth. In 1991 the Zimbabwe government agreed to implement the western-funded Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) whose main features were privatisation, reduction of government expenditure and the strict use of government revenue to pay foreign debt. The implementation of ESAP resulted in a very challenging socio-economic environment. Trade liberalisation meant the removal of protective tariffs on imports and the ripple effects led to a decline of the local manufacturing sector, loss of foreign currency, mass retrenchment of workers, a rise in unemployment, a decline of the middle class and the impoverishment of many (Machingura, 2012: 68). The same period saw the reintroduction of public healthcare facilities' medical fees, reintroduction of school tuition fees and removal of subsidies on basic commodities. All of this meant a low disposable income for the ordinary people and an increase in unregistered street vendors.

The 1990s also saw a gradual loss of respect and support of its citizens by the state due to the hardships faced by the populace. Maxwell (2006: 416) points out that Zimbabwe was one of the African states which 'retained a good deal of ability to coerce citizens where its ruling clique acting in a violent and corrupt manner to remain in power in the face of a loss of popular support'. Sadly up to this point the WMFCs avoided criticising government openly, with the exception of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), an NGO arm of the Roman Catholic church which published a report on Gukurahundi (human rights abuses perpetrated by Zimbabwe's military in Matabeleland which claimed the lives of about 20,000 people) (Moyo 1987: 71). The WMFCs continued to contribute to national development as well as running schools, colleges, hospitals and clinics. The marginalisation of AICs by government, mission churches and media remained a common feature, and entailed a failure by

society to identify and appreciate their approach to the Christian faith and contribution to societal development. The AICs theology, influence and impact were looked down upon in spite of the research done by Daneel (1999). Maxwell (2006: 417) observes that the political developments in the 1990s resulted in President Mugabe becoming more unpopular such that his struggle to remain in power towards the end of this decade was a desperate one. It led him to employ such strategies as land reform, allegations of political violence and electoral fraud to remain in power. This is the same period when his political party, ZANU-PF, turned to AICs for political support, which marked the end of their marginalisation.

The year 2000 ushered in an eventful decade against the backdrop of economic decline (Matikiti 2014: 100). The turmoil was exacerbated by a new political player the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a party led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai, which was formed in 1999 in a merger with the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and other civic organisations (Tarusarira and Humbe 2022: 165; Machingura, 2012: 112). The MDC gave ZANU-PF a real challenge in the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections. In 1997, an NGO called the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) comprising of Zimbabwean citizens, civic organisations such as labour movements, student and youth groups, women groups, churches, business groups, and human rights organisations was formed (Ndulo 2010). The founding chair person was Tsvangirai. The purpose of NCA was to promote the writing of a new constitution with a view to addressing most, if not all, of the country's woes. The NCA refused to participate in a government-driven constitution-making process whose draft was rejected by 54 per cent of the voters in a referendum held on 12 and 13 February 2000 (Ndulo 2010). In response to the rejection of the draft constitution, the ZANU-PF government spearheaded a violent, compulsory acquisition of land from white commercial farmers. While the empowerment of indigenous people was the ostensible motive for the *hondo yeminda*, land became a political tool as politicians promised to parcel it out to those perceived to be loyal to them including members of such organisations as Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) (Matikiti 2014: 100). 'A case in point is an address made by Zimbabwe's Vice President and matron of the ACCZ, Joice Mujuru who was dressed in the churches' white regalia on a national day of prayer on 25 May 2012 at Zimbabwe grounds in Highfield in which she affirmed the need for her audience to be given land in response to a request given to her at the

same event by Tadeu Mugodhi, leader of the Mugodhi Apostolic Church' (Chitando 2014) (Whether they were given land or not is a subject for further study.) However, when access to land is politicised, it becomes a very divisive tool.

Alliances between AICs and ZANU-PF ideologies

AICs maintained their stance after independence in 1980 and gradually developed into a formidable force in support of the ruling party. The ideology of ZANU-PF synchronised with the ideologies of AICs i.e. the celebration of African identity, culture, beliefs, practices, pride, land, cosmology and space. Matikiti (2014: 96), therefore rightfully avows that AICs in Zimbabwe were usually targeted by politicians for support as they found them easy to relate to. The broader AICs' structures generally favour one charismatic leader of great influence and authority who can interpret the biblical scriptures at will, and there is little bureaucracy which aligns to some extent with the political elite. The authority exuded by AIC leaders, coupled with their celebration of African identity, pride and space; their emphasis on healing and demonstration of spiritual powers often resulted in their followers unquestioningly accepting everything they said. Their philosophy was one in which Christian worship must be relevant to the African context and African needs. This was consistent with some of the liberation movements' objectives, particularly the drive to empower indigenous people. Thus, AICs tended to naturally align themselves to Zimbabwe's liberation movement. Both President Robert Mugabe and President Emmerson Mnangagwa developed close ties with the AICs.

Matikiti's analysis of the formation and establishment of AICs' ecumenical bodies such as the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA) in 1993 shows that while such developments were intended to address the health and education needs of church members, they went a long way towards providing a regulatory framework for AICs (2014: 96-97); the latter being known for denying children formal education, promoting child marriages (Machingura, 2014), and denying their members health care (for example persuading people not to take HIV medication). For example the Apostolic Faith Church led by Marange exclusively prohibited its members from attending formal facilities such as hospitals or clinics. Pregnant women delivered their babies at home under the care of untrained midwives and their children were not allowed to undergo the mandatory immunisation programme. The ZANU-PF government under the first republic (Robert

Mugabe) rewarded selected AICs, for example, the Johane Marange church, with land on which to build schools; something unprecedented, as it was not possible for AICs to own land during the colonial era. Matikiti (2014: 97) further observes that the ecumenical bodies also provided a major boost to the recognition of the AICs which were never formally recognised during the colonial era as black people were not allowed to lead churches. In fact, Revd Johannes Ndanga² alleges that AICs were previously associated with traditional healers, and their prophets required to be registered by the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (Zinatha). This arrangement was perceived by the churches involved as humiliating. The formation of ecumenical bodies for AICs gave member churches an opportunity to redeem themselves from the previous labels which were products of subjugation and discrimination of the indigenous people let alone AICs.

The association of AICs with the ruling party in Zimbabwe was again noticeable through the launch of ACCZ, a body with 350 members by Zimbabwe's then vice president, Joice Mujuru in September 2010 (Matikiti 2014; 97). Vice President Mujuru was also appointed matron of the organisation, a very unlikely phenomenon in the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence. It was a strong signal of recognition for AICs, not only as churches, but as partners with government in national development. In fact, Matikiti (2014: 97-98) perceives ACCZ as a pro-ZANU-PF ecumenical movement, a development which has been criticised as not expected of Christians or any Christian organisation. It appeared difficult for AICs, and some Pentecostal churches aligned to ZANU-PF, to criticise the party, or any aspect of it such as any commissions; for alleged acts such as vote rigging, vote buying, intimidation, abduction, political violence, hate speech and corruption. The alliance between ZANU-PF and some of the churches cited above saw some of them benefiting from land reform and they, in turn, were expected to support the ruling party at all costs. As a result, some AICs and Pentecostal churches were regarded as extensions of ZANU-PF as they became involved in the party's internal or external politics. It was the same with some mainline churches whose alignment or link to western nations disempowered and muted their voice during the critical moment of land reform. Gundani (2003: 499), Goronga and Dimingu (2019: 2) link the mainline churches – the Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodists

2 *The Sunday Mail*, 31 July 2011.

and Church of Christ – with a compromised situation where they could not promote Zimbabwe's land reform programme of early 2000s because they owned vast pieces of land awarded to them by the former colonial government. In fact, most mainline and Pentecostal churches with links to western nations condemned the land reform and chose to ignore the background and violence that led to the displacement of Africans to arid places or reserve areas characterised by infertile land, disease, drought and hunger.

The ACCZ body not only supported the *status quo* but was also found to be partisan, a position that rendered it ineffective in its supposed prophetic role to the nation. In the 2000s, ACCZ members in their white religious regalia attended ZANU-PF political rallies and every national event such as Heroes or Independence Day and a special seating area would be created for them. While there is nothing wrong with Christians attending national events, in this case a clear political agenda in support of the government of the day for ulterior motives was recognised. This is demonstrated by some of the requests ACCZ leaders made to the government as reported in public media. For example, *Newsday*³ reports on the then, President of ACCZ, Revd Ndanga's declaration of solidarity with President Robert Mugabe being laced with the hate speech against the opposition. *Newsday*⁴ also reports Ndanga claiming that, AIC bishops had greater influence and popularity than traditional leaders to the extent that they better deserved to receive vehicles from the government. He went on to castigate opposition political parties as western puppets. However, T. Jaramba in Matikiti (2014: 98), the branch chairman of ACCZ in Harare, alleged that Revd Ndanga's utterances, which portrayed ACCZ as an affiliate of ZANU-PF, were not in tandem with the ACCZ's stance as an ecumenical body. He described Ndanga's statements as his personal political views which should not be attributed to everyone in the organisation.

The period 2011 to 2012 was a pre-election period when Zimbabwe was preparing for the 2013 harmonised elections. At the time the nation was led by a Government of National Unity (GNU) formed in 2009 after the disputed election of 2008. The latter was composed of three parties: ZANU-PF, the MDC-T led by Morgan Tsvangirai, and the MDC-N led by Arthur Mutambara. Matikiti (2014: 98) identified Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Church, Nolbert Kunonga of the AIC version of the Anglican Church, Paul Mwazha of the Apostolic African

3 *Newsday*, 26 May 2012.

4 *Newsday*, 28 March 2011.

Church and Obadiah Msindo of the Destiny for Africa Network as some of the prominent charismatic AIC leaders who identified in one way or the other with ZANU-PF. The political position and affiliation of these religious luminaries could have been purely ideological (linked to the treatment that Africans faced during the colonial era), or for reasons of personal aggrandisement or opportunism. However, ZANU-PF was desperate for legitimisation after the souring of relations with mainline churches that had once supported it and its policies and ZANU-PF found willing and amenable new players or partners in AICs and some Pentecostal churches.

The major factor influencing AICs' shift from marginality to political influence

The marriage between ZANU-PF and AICs is not only confined to the era of Mugabe's leadership, but also evident in the post-Mugabe era. Masekesa (2012: 1) reveals how ZANU-PF political leaders including Oppah Muchinguri, Didymus Mutasa, Chris Mushohwe, Mike Madiro and Robert Mugabe attended various AIC church services, for example, the African Apostolic Church of John Marange, Gospel of God Church of Johane Masowe weChishanu, African Apostolic Church of Paul Mwazha. They were pictured putting on religious apostolic regalia usually worn by apostolic sect followers after being accepted and baptised as members. At these meetings they presented their political message ahead of the 2013 elections. Indeed, the second republic, under the leadership of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, witnessed the same practices over the two national election cycles, that is, in 2018 and 2023. Both President Mnangagwa and Vice President Constantino Chiwenga at one time or the other addressed AIC gatherings such as the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange, Zion Christian church of Nehemiah Mutendi, Johane Masowe *wechishanu vadzidzi* Church led by *Madzibaba* Wimbo and Family of God church led by Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe (Musoni 2019: 5). In most cases the leaders of these churches predicted a victory for ZANU-PF. One of the most active AIC ecumenical organisations in the second republic legitimising the ZANU-PF government is the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) led by Revd Wutawunashe (Tarusarira and Humbe 2022: 160). ZIICC is an ecumenical body formed during Zimbabwe's new dispensation whose clear mandate is to represent the AICs founded during the colonial era and to distinguish their voices from that of the western oriented mainline churches (Mutendi cited in Maponga (2021). While the ACCZ, an

ecumenical body of a similar nature led by Johannes Ndanga was formed during Mugabe's era, ZIICC was formed during Mnangagwa's time. Just as the ACCZ supported the Mugabe-led ruling party and government, ZIICC supports the Mnangagwa-led ruling party and government. To that end, ZIICC holds an annual national day of prayer which is usually attended by President Mnangagwa and other leaders in government.

Tarusarira (2022: 3) acknowledges that the marriage between religion, particularly Christianity and African Traditional Religion, and politics in Zimbabwe has a history dating back to the liberation struggle in the 1970s continuing into Zimbabwe's two republics. As a result, the claim by Zimbabwe to be a secular state is only theoretical because practically the society is very religious. Tarusarira (2022: 1) posits that Zimbabwe's political elites have the propensity to ride on either Christianity or ATR in order to promote their nationalist position and political interests. It is not uncommon to hear political elites in Zimbabwe refer to *midzimu yenyika* (national ancestors) as their source of strength or inspiration, a thought which probably led to the erection of Mbuya Nehanda statue at corner Samora Machel Avenue and Julius Nyerere Street (in 2022) and reference to the head of state as the Moses or Joshua of Zimbabwe sent by God to liberate the nation from colonial bondage. Tarusarira (2022: 1) calls the above approach as the sacralisation of political elite's actions and policies, an approach which closes off any debate against them. It is not surprising that, religion and quoting of scriptures dominate the political discourses in Zimbabwe. Political rallies are characterised by political songs drawn from Christian songs. Such a relationship between religion and politics is not only unhealthy for the nation but tantamount to promoting divisions and the status quo that serve political elites' interests at the expense of the society's needs. Tarusarira (2022: 4) therefore rightfully concludes that 'the fusion between religion and nationalism is not inherent or necessary. It is an instrumentalist relationship that is used to justify and legitimate political policies, actions, and imaginaries.' This conclusion is a befitting description for the marriage between nationalism and AICs in Zimbabwe during the first and second republics.

What baffles Musoni (2019: 5) is the clear distinction between the AICs and mainline churches in terms of their disposition towards some of the policies and decisions by the Zimbabwe government. Some of the mainline churches took great exception to the state-sanctioned violence against the Ndebele people in Matabeleland and the Midlands known as

Gukurahundi (1982-87) and the bulldozing of dwellings known as the Murambatsvina operation (2005) while AICs supported the ZANU-PF government unconditionally. None of them spoke out against the serious human rights violations which probably impacted negatively on the nation and some of their members, for example, Gukurahundi. Musoni (2019: 6) further observes that the disposition of AICs towards the Zimbabwe government's human rights violations won them greater latitude regarding the religious practice.

Some AICs are allegedly associated with the abuse of women and involved in girl child rapes and marriages which are criminal in nature despite there not being arraigned before the courts. Tarusarira and Humbe (2022: 165) highlight that despite Zimbabwe having experienced political violence and disputed elections since the year 2000, AICs never challenged such developments. Instead, they always endorsed both former and current presidents, Mugabe and Mnangagwa respectively. Therefore, Tarusarira and Humbe (2022: 165) accuse AICs of providing 'a sacred canopy for the ZANU-PF regime insulating the behaviour and practices of the powerful and diverting the marginalised from issues of arbitrariness, corruption and abuse of power stemming from state practices'. Musoni (2019: 6) similarly concludes that the marriage between AICs and ZANU-PF is one of political expediency on the part of ZANU-PF and material benefits on the part of AICs. The former seems to ride on the structural and theological persuasions of AICs which makes members submissive to their leaders to the extent that they take their words as having final authority. Zimbabwe's elite politicians also seem to believe that once the AICs charismatic leaders have thrown their weight behind the elite politicians, then the AIC congregations, or most of them, will do the same. Meantime, the AICs exploit their links with elite politicians to access government programmes such as land reform, agricultural mechanisation, and presidential farming inputs. On the other hand, Tarusarira and Humbe (2022: 164) accuse mainline churches of employing quiet diplomacy, except in a few exceptional circumstances during the postcolonial era making them priestly rather than prophetic.

Conclusion

AICs rose from marginality in the colonial era, to garnering political influence during the post-colonial era following the onset of the crisis in 2000. Some of the AICs and their leaders suffered persecution at the hands of missionary-founded churches and traditional leaders because of

their religious practice and beliefs. Both persecutors rode on the colonial system and pressed trumped-up charges, such as those of AICs promoting terrorism against the regime of the time. During the colonial era, AICs were associated with the poor, the marginalised and the downtrodden indigenous Zimbabweans, particularly in rural and farming areas. The post-colonial era saw the rise of AICs to political influence, particularly at the turn of the second decade after independence. The context within which the AICs became politically significant was characterised by economic decline, worsening poverty among ordinary people and joblessness. This is the context within which former Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe turned to AICs for political support. The period saw a mutual relationship between ZANU-PF and AICs in which both parties sought to benefit from each other and yet compromising the truth. Neither of the two parties was willing to chasten the other for wrongdoing in fear of losing mutual benefits. For some critics, AICs absolutely failed to play a prophetic or advocacy role to the nation by turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses perpetrated by those in authority but instead demanded hand-outs in the form of cars and land from the government.

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The Christian Churches and the 2017 Political Transition in Zimbabwe

MUNETSI RUZIVO

This chapter examines ecumenical bodies' pastoral statements linked to the political transition code-named Operation Restore Legacy of November 2017 which led to the removal from power of President Robert Mugabe. It will first discuss the possible causes of what the victors euphemistically termed a 'military-assisted transition', whereby the security sector intervened, taking a side in a complex political issue. This was not unusual given the historical relationship between ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and its army ZANLA (Zimbabwe National Liberation Army) during the liberation struggle. The charged relationship between politicians and soldiers was carried over into independent Zimbabwe. The chapter will then examine the pastoral statements of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). The Protestant bodies were content with the press statement issued by the ZHOCD. The press statement acknowledged the military takeover, blamed years of economic meltdown, and was optimistic about a new beginning. The ZHOCD is an umbrella body for three major ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe. It saw the crises as an opportunity for the birth of a new nation.¹ The ZCBC acknowledged the unfolding situation which it blamed on economic

1 <https://efzimbabwe.org/2017/11/zhocd-press-statement-15-november-2017/> accessed 15/9/2024.

hardships resulting in military intervention. The ZHOCD co-ordinated the ecumenical activities of the three bodies mentioned above. Its composition demonstrates the kind of co-operation on issues of mutual and national concern among the major representatives of the Christian Churches in Zimbabwe. This research will also analyse the public statements made by Fidelis Mukonori, a Catholic priest who acted as President Mugabe's confessor and took on the role of mediator, following the suggestions of various highly placed individuals.

The causes of the coup

The political tension between the military and the politicians is traced back to the liberation struggle. Fay Chung (2006) maintains that the contradictions created during the armed conflict were carried over to independent Zimbabwe. The rebellion in 1974 led by Thomas Nhari and Dakarai Badza, both ZANLA field commanders of the Mozambique Malawi and Zimbabwe territorial division, and its brutal suppression by Rex Nhongo (Solomon Mujuru) and Josiah Tongogara and the subsequent assassination of Herbert Chitepo, the Dare *reChimurenga* (War Council) leader and ZANU National Chairman, in March 1975 brought about the mistrust between the nationalist politicians and ZANLA commanders (White 2003: 16-59; Chung: 2006: 124-39). Chung recounts how those who guarded the nationalist leaders spied upon them on behalf of the commanders. These contradictions, emanating from long-standing grudges fuelled by different factions among the nationalists, have constantly manifested themselves in the history of ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) and its military wing ZANLA whose members now occupy strategic key positions in both government and security sector.

Factionalism has been a characteristic of ZANU-PF politics from the start. On 18 November 2004, ZANU-PF provincial chairpersons, some members of the politburo, the central committee, MPs and war veterans met at Dinyane Secondary School in Tsholotsho, a district in Matabeleland North, to install Emmerson Mnangagwa as Vice President, thus effectively filling the void that had been left by the death of Simon Muzenda in 2003. Some of the ZANU-PF officials who were allegedly present were Jonathan Moyo, Patrick Chinamasa, Abednico Ncube, Andrew Langa, Flora Bhuka and Josiah Hungwe. The move was designed to ensure that Mnangagwa became Robert Mugabe's successor.² However, according to Moyo, the

2 'Tsholotsho Saga Untold Story' <https://nehandaradio.com/2017/10/15/tsholotsho->

meeting did not take place at the school but at the Bulawayo Rainbow Hotel.³ Ironically, Mnangagwa did not attend the Tsholotsho meeting. He was therefore not suspended when the others were punished by Mugabe with suspension from the party. Did Mnangagwa and Moyo subsequently fall out over what must have seemed like a betrayal? President Mugabe himself mused:

... He is called Jonathan Moyo. I do not know where they parted ways with comrade Mnangagwa on Tsholotsho. They did Tsholotsho together. So who were in Tsholotsho. We said who went to Tsholotsho. We remembered them and we suspended them. At one politburo meetings, he told Mnangagwa that I will never support you again. If it is when the hatred started I do not know.⁴

Thirteen years later, there was another tussle between two factions in ZANU-PF, Generation 40 and Lacoste, over the presidential succession, which led to a military intervention. The G40 faction was led by Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere and President Mugabe's nephew, Patrick Zhuwawo. This trio coalesced around the first lady, Grace Mugabe, who by now was the secretary of women's affairs. The Lacoste faction was led by Mnangagwa. The tension between the two factions was brought into the open one morning at the Politburo meeting on 6 July 2017 by Moyo, who was highly critical of the *Blue Ocean* document authored by Mnangagwa and his cohort.⁵

Moyo claimed that Mnangagwa had captured various structures of the party and key arms of the state; and that he had also recruited key political players including senior members of the party and the youth to his side. He asserted that the Vice President Mnangagwa had more than six hundred foot soldiers for usurping power and undermining president's authority.⁶ Moyo argued that the attempt to remove the national political commissar

saga-untold-story-jonathan-moyo-2004/ accessed 13 September 2024.

3 Ibid.

4 'Mugabe explains how Jonathan Moyo, Mnangagwa beef started', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDuXjW3uK-o> accessed 17/9/2024

5 The Blue Ocean Strategy Document was prepared Zimbabwe War Veterans with the aim of setting up Mrs Mugabe and her backers for failure as they pushed for Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa to take over from her husband President Robert Mugabe. See 'The Secret War Vets Document that Rattled Under Siege Mugabe', *The Standard*, 20 June 2016.

6 Moyo, J. (2017) Presentation of the Blue Ocean Strategy Document at the Politburo meeting in Harare in www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZXqwFvPLPQ&list=PPSVmJonathanMoyo.

Kasukuwere from office was not a spontaneous expression of popular sentiments by the rank and file members of the party. Instead, it was part of a highly organised and systematic programme of action started in 2015 by Mnangagwa to take control of the party and government. Moyo further alleged that the attempt to remove Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku was part of a programme to capture state structures. Several journalists and civil servants had been drafted to work for the Lacoste faction and its successionist agenda and objectives.⁷

Mnangagwa reacted angrily and accused Moyo of being a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operative working to infiltrate and destroy the party from within. He further alleged that Moyo was a mole working for foreign hostile powers and accused him of recording politburo deliberations and leaking sensitive information about the party and government to Western embassies (including the US Embassy and its operatives) via his right-hand man, Edmund Kudzanai. In a nutshell, he said that Moyo was bent on tarnishing the image of ZANU-PF and that of the vice president. Mnangagwa pointed out that the Baba Jukwa online blog which released government-sensitive information used to be run by Moyo and his coterie of foot soldiers including Ibo Mandaza, Director of SAPEZ, and Gideon Gono, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.⁸ Saviour Kasukuwere and Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko were also accused of defaming Mnangagwa and working with Moyo for his successionist agenda. A recent photograph of Moyo standing next to the former spokesperson of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, lawyer Alex Magaisa and Saviour Kasukuwere at the Plot Café testified to Moyo's sinister activities.⁹ During the presentation, Mnangagwa asserted that Moyo pressured Gono to use his influence as a shareholder in Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe and push the *Daily News* editor to give G40 a favourite coverage.¹⁰ Professor Ibo Mandaza's National Transitional Authority¹¹ was presented as a new regime change agenda.

7 Ibid.

8 Mnangagwa even claimed that Gideon Gono was poised to become the President of Zimbabwe should Moyo's successionist agenda succeed.

9 <http://www.herald.co.zw/birds-of-a-feather/> Accessed 29 October 2024

10 'EXPLOSIVE: Full Text of Mnangagwa's dossier against "CIS agent" Jonathan Moyo', *Nehanda Radio*, 10 October 2017. https://nehandaradio.com/2017/10/10/explosive-full-text-mnangagwas-dossier-cia-agent-jonathan-moyo/#google_vignette accessed 12 June 2024.

11 'There is no other way than a Transitional National Authority', *The Standard*, 3 May 2020.

In the days following Moyo's critique, First Lady Grace Mugabe, sought to stir public opinion against Mnangagwa and his faction. At every forum, she chided and humiliated all those she thought were linked to the Lacoste faction. In consequence of her language and her accusations, many people believed that she provoked the downfall of Mugabe. Moyo, however, trashed the idea that the G40 was supporting the first lady for the office of the president. He said:

Those who executed the coup needed a narrative to justify the coup. As a student of politics, I give them credit for having given a narrative that resonated with not only the body politic in the country but also the outside world by coming out with this fiction that Grace was supposed to take over and she was being either supported or even propped up by the so-called G40. So that was an attractive narrative, especially when it was fuelled by the Mugabe-must-go mantra -- one of the oldest mantras going back to 1999. So I am sure as rational people we can understand how people who want to do something must come up with a story to support something they want to do. There is a famous German saying which says if you want to kill a dog you must allege that it has rabies and so Grace was the rabies... and this G40 thing. There is no rational basis that she could have been President even if her husband did not support her.¹²

The truth about Grace Mugabe's motives may never be known. Some scholars think she was part of a grand scheme over which she had little control. Insiders revealed that the president had side-lined his top generals and the vice president in the succession battle.¹³ But his sacking of Vice President Mnangagwa on 5 November 2016 with the accusation that he was not properly discharging his duties,¹⁴ changed matters. Charges of disloyalty, disrespect, deceitfulness and unreliability made by the ZANU-PF spokesperson Simon Kaya Moyo brought in the military top brass to take Mnangagwa's side precipitated the events that eventually led to the removal of President Mugabe after a period of protracted negotiations in November 2017.

During these negotiations, the Jesuit priest Fr Mukonori,¹⁵ stationed

12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acysHgD0zyk> accessed 15 September 2021.

13 Beardsworth et al., p.580.

14 'Zimbabwe politics: Mugabe sacks "disloyal" Mnangagwa', *BBC*, 6 November 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41890493>

15 Mukonori had worked with various levels of the ZANLA High Command during the war. He knew everyone in the high structures of the army and government.

at Chishawasha Mission, featured as a principal mediator between the military and Mugabe. The ZCBC and the Jesuit Superior sanctioned Mukonori's involvement. He, together with Gideon Gono, former Reserve Bank governor, George Charamba, the presidential spokesperson and permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information, and Aaron Nhepera, the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) comprised the negotiating team¹⁶ where it is acknowledged that Mukonori played a pivotal role. He had acquired skills in conflict resolution when he worked at Silveira House in the mid-1970s as Youth Co-ordinator and subsequently Youth Director, and Leadership and Civics Trainer; later he acted as the Internal Auditor at the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). He came to know Mugabe in 1974 when he visited his sister Sabina who was working at Silveira House, and later met Mugabe's mother Ambuya Bona Mugabe.¹⁷ Mukonori (2017: 100-106) states that in 1978 he, together with Patrick Chakaipa, the Archbishop of Harare and Helmut Rechter, the Bishop of Chinhoyi visited Mozambique to persuade ZANLA to stop the war and come to the negotiating table (ibid.). Nearly forty years later, on 17 November 2017, the day the coup was under way, Mukonori claims that he was phoned by Charamba to come and help in the negotiations intended to remove Mugabe from power. Besides saying that he, Mukonori, telephoned Mnangagwa and facilitated the discussion between the latter and Mugabe, and that he persuaded the president to resign, Mukonori does not shed light on what else was said during the tense negotiations, but he certainly helped to manage a situation which otherwise could have been bloody.

The concerns of the defence forces are well illustrated by a document addressed to the Chairperson of the African Union, Alpha Conde, prepared by the New National Patriotic Front (NNPF), a party founded in 2018 by Brigadier Ambrose Mutinhiri in league with expelled G40 faction members including Jonathan Moyo, Patrick Zhuwao and Saviour Kasukuwere, which contested the removal of Mugabe from office. According to the document, Generals with the highest ranks in the Zimbabwe National Army, known as the Command Element, wanted to prop up the authority of the president and to buttress his constitutional roles in the running of the

16 'Exclusive: Gideon Gono played key role in Mugabe resignation: Comments on leaked picture with #Mugabe and Grace', <https://nehandaradio.com/2017/11/23/exclusive-gideon-gono-played-key-role-mugabe-resignation-comments-leaked-picture-mugabe/> accessed 27 September 2024.

17 'Self-Discipline the Key: Mukonori', *The Herald*, 28 February 2015. <https://www.herald.co.zw/self-discipline-the-key-mukonori/> accessed 27 September 2024.

affairs of the party but were moved to change their plans by the instability caused by warring factions.¹⁸ The generals pledged loyalty to Mugabe as the founding father of the party, the icon of the revolution, and indeed the founding father of Zimbabwe. According to the NNPF, Operation Restore Legacy was occasioned by threats made to the integrity and legacy of the president posed by the plot of counter-revolutionaries who had hung around him for a long time. The reference here was to Generation 40 of Moyo, the former Minister of Higher Education; Zhuwawo, the former Minister of Public Service and Social Welfare; Kasukuwere, former Minister of National Housing and Urban Development, and the First Lady Grace Mugabe. These four had supposedly taken advantage of the ageing president to misdirect and misinform him. The 'Cabal' was described as corrupt and ambitious, undermining the public image of the president; but it was also seen as a powerful influence on ZANU-PF, and thus on government because of its proximity to the president.¹⁹ The Command Element also expressed its concerns over the legacy of the party. It was mindful of the demise of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia which had been the dominant, indeed sole, legal party in Zambia until the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1991. The Command Element cited the electoral defeat of ZANU-PF in 2008 as a case in point and noted that if the Cabal (G40) were not checked, this scenario would be repeated. The destabilisation of the party by the Cabal was of concern to the commanders. Its meddling in party structures was meant to influence the electoral processes to influence the extraordinary party congress that was expected to take place in December 2017. Other concerns were the purging of senior party officials sympathetic to the military, and the reckless behaviour of some G40 party hawks whose utterances wrecked national cohesion and unity. The dire economic situation in Zimbabwe was seen as a security threat to the country. The purged party officials were those aligned with Mnangagwa. In 2016 the following nine members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) were expelled from the party and among them were several executive members of the ZNLWVA: Christopher Mutsvangwa, Douglas Mahiya, Victor Matamadanda, Francis Nhando, Headman Moyo, Munacho

18 The Command Element, according to the New National Patriotic Front Document (NNPF), refers to those with the highest ranks in the ZNA, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services and CIO.

19 The NNFD was prepared by NNPF for the AU, SADC and the UN for a record in case in the future the Union would say it was not informed about the military transition in Zimbabwe.

Mutezo and three others at district and provincial levels.²⁰ The military commanders, and veterans of the Zimbabwe war of liberation, felt isolated by a president who was their wartime colleague and was now sidelining them. Thus, according to the NNPF document, Mugabe had removed the war veterans from the party and the government giving rise to the belief among the commanders that the first family (or, at least, the first lady) was protecting the offenders in the presidential palace – the blue roof.

The NNPF party maintained in its submission to the African Union (AU) that there had been a *coup d'état* in Zimbabwe, as key state institutions were put under siege. The NNPF objected to media views attributed to some Southern African Development Community (SADC) and AU officials that there had been a bloodless intervention. The aggrieved party argued that the military intervention violated the Constitution of Zimbabwe. They argued that the President of the Republic, Robert Mugabe, was put under house arrest and the link between him and the top brass of the military was irretrievably broken. The NNPF document alleges that the prime movers of the intervention convened at the King George VI Centre, Harare on 15 November 2017, was an act of disloyalty to the president. However, the NNPF agreed with its detractors on the causes of the intervention, their argument being that these were political matters that did not warrant illegal military intervention.

The G40 faction argued that the deployment of soldiers across the country had taken place in preparation for the 2018 elections. China took advantage of its historic link to ZANU and ZANLA which dates back to the liberation struggle and to their continuous mineral exploitation in the country. The NNPF document suggests two other reasons for the coup. The first was to maintain long-standing relations between the Zimbabwean military and China, a mutually beneficial relationship which gave the Chinese access to Zimbabwe's mineral resources and good terms of trade in return for aid. Secondly, the Command Element also appeared to have triggered the military intervention as a possible way of insulating themselves from recrimination from the state. The fear of countervailing interventions by the police exacerbated the simmering tensions.

The churches and the coup

The other two ecumenical bodies' reaction to the military takeover was similar to the ZCBC's which issued its statement on Wednesday, 15

20 'Mahiya shoots from the Hip,' *The Standard*, 7 August 2016. Mahiya was the ZNLWVA spokesperson.

November 2017. The Catholic Bishops declared:

The Church has keenly and prayerfully followed the recent tense events in the country. The Church has also observed the increased economic hardship for ordinary Zimbabweans. The atmosphere has drastically deteriorated culminating in the current intervention by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces. Let us pray for our country as we continue to watch developments carefully.²¹

The Catholic pastoral statement made connection with the statement by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) on television which connected the intervention of the defence forces with the economic hardships faced by people in the country.²² Both bodies, the ZCBC and ZHOCD, appealed for law and order and urged media houses to refrain from heightening tensions in the fragile situation. The ZHOCD announced that they could not support the restoration of the political arrangements that existed before the coup because the changes that came with the fall of Mugabe were irrevocable. Revd Dr Mtata on behalf of the ZHOCD issued a statement which accepted the developing situation. He said:

The heads of churches call for prayer, peace, respect for human dignity, a transitional government of national unity, and national dialogue. The church derives its mandate from its calling as a sign of hope. We are the people of God who are being called to champion the spirit of reconciliation. Abrasive and exclusionary politics threaten the already weak cohesion of society ... We see the current crisis not just as a crisis in which we are helpless. We see the current arrangement as an opportunity for the birth of a new nation.²³

While the coup brought about rapid changes in leadership of the government, the Church leaders noted that socio-political and economic problems bedevilling Zimbabwe had existed for a long time.²⁴ The Secretary General of the ZCBC, Fr Frederick Chiromba, and other senior church leaders, said that it was the responsibility of the military to make sure that human rights and human dignity were respected.²⁵ The statement implied that the ecumenical body had accepted the *coup d'état* without

21 ZCBC 'Pastoral Statement Reflections and Recommendations on Our Current Situation in Zimbabwe pastoral Statement', 19 November 2017.

22 ZCBC, 2017.

23 ZHOCD, *ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

questioning if the move taken by the military and those who marched in its support was constitutional. This failure undermined the prophetic role of ecumenical Christianity in Zimbabwe. The ZCBC appealed to those involved in the transition to allow the courts to deal with those accused of crime.²⁶ This was reference to the perceived counter-revolutionary elements and members of the G40 who had been apprehended. The above insinuations by the ecumenical bodies show that they accepted the developing situation. Their implicit statements of support put pay to any popular attempts to influence the direction of the coup.

Other regional Christian bodies also voiced their concern over the developing situation which had all the hallmarks of a *coup d'état*, but followed the narrative choreographed by their fellow ecumenical bodies. Bishop Gabuza of Kimberly who chaired the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference suggested that what was happening in Zimbabwe resulted from Mugabe's undermining of the democratic processes in the country.²⁷ All the main church councils, the ZCBC, the EFZ, and the ZCC believed that the politics in the country under Mugabe's leadership had become poisonous to the point that opposition was considered treachery.

A week after the resignation of Mugabe from the presidency, the ZCBC issued another pastoral statement which raised two key issues. The first was about the need for a plan for economic recovery, for peace and security. The second was the need for electoral reforms. Although the new constitution of 2013 had envisaged the latter, the Mugabe government had done nothing towards reforming the electoral system. Church leaders now saw an opportunity to address the issue with the ushering in of the New Dispensation under President Mnangagwa. Their letter urged the establishment of a National Envisioning Platform in which all sectors of the country would be included in the search for the 'Zimbabwe We Want'. This project was launched in 2006 by the ZHOCD. The platform was intended to harness the collective will in pursuit of peace, unity, progress, and prosperity. The churches were looking forward to a new dawn. With this (unwritten) proviso, the Catholic Church tacitly accepted the military intervention by armed forces (ZCBC Pastoral Statement 15 November 2017). They did not consider the challenges that normally follow undemocratic seizures of power and the legal implications of the process.

²⁶ ZCBC, op cit.

²⁷ *Catholic Herald*, 16 November 2017.

In the history of Zimbabwe, the churches have often partnered with the strongest side. In the 1880s, John Moffatt, an affiliate of the London Missionary Society, advocated the overthrow of the Lobengula's Ndebele kingdom because he believed that Christians should challenge the world order. In his own words, he said:

I fear there will be no change for the better until there has been a breakup of the Matabele power and a change of the whole regime... There is no blinking the fact that Christianity tends to overturn native governments. The process of enlightenment is not rapid or general enough to bring in a new order as an immediate substitute, and the result is as pitiful confusion and disintegration of the tribal system without any better system to take its place, a state of things for which there is no remedy but annexation by a civilise (Weller and Linden 1984: 22).

The Church sided with the colonial authorities to end the Ndebele and Shona uprisings in the 1890s. In the struggle for liberation from the 1950s to 1979 some churches supported the nationalist cause. They were also involved in persuading the nationalists to agree to a ceasefire and start negotiations at Lancaster House in 1979. What one can observe here is the Church's capacity to change sides and support the stronger. Eduardo Hoornaert summarises the Church's attitude of siding with the strong thus:

With the advent of modernity, the papacy gradually lost public space. In the 19th century, mainly during the long pontificate of Pius IX, the ancient strategy to oppose the "powers of this world" no longer worked. It brings no more victories, it only records defeats. Then Pope Leo XIII decided to change the strategy and initiated a policy of support for the strongest, a strategy that worked throughout the twentieth century. Benedict XV came out of the First World War with the victors; Pius XI supported Mussolini, Hitler and Franco, while Pius XII practised the politics of silence in the face of crimes against humanity perpetrated during the Second World War, at the expense of countless human lives. After a brief interruption with John XXIII, the policy of silent support for the winners (and generic words of consolation to losers) continues to our days...²⁸

Even in this intervention, it seems the Church took the same approach. The ZCC did not issue any statement on the eve of the transition but participated in a statement issued by the ZHOCD. Kenneth Mtata, the

28 Hoornaert, E. (2023) *How to Understand the Papacy*. (<https://www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/429p.htm>) accessed 24 February.

Secretary General of the ZCC, read the statement over the radio. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD 2017) saw the developing transition not as a helpless situation but as an opportunity – a Kairos – [literally the ‘right time’]. The ecumenical bodies believed that now was the moment in which the much-desired ‘Zimbabwe We Want’ dream could be realised. In its own words, the pastoral statement reads:

We see the current situation not just as a crisis in which we are helpless. We see the current arrangement as an opportunity for the birth of a new nation. Our God created everything out of chaos and we believe something new could emerge from our situation. But first, we must properly define our problem. Proper naming of the problem will give us a clear sense of where we must go as a nation (ZHOCD 15 November 2017).

The ZHOCD raised five points: (i) this concerned the loss of trust in the legitimacy of the national processes and institutions, and that the Constitution was not being taken seriously; (ii) that there was no clear separation in government between the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature; (iii) that there appeared to be no distinction between the ruling party and the government; (iv) that the priorities of the poor were not being addressed; (v) it was noted that there was a derailment of democracy through personalised politics which consigned the majority of the people to the margins of power. The ZHOCD called everyone to prayer and reflection. They also pleaded for peace and respect for human dignity and called for a national unity government, and made a passionate call for dialogue with all stakeholders. This never took place.

The Churches had made a partial diagnosis of the problems bedevilling the body politic, but in our view, they did not identify the root cause of the political turmoil. The reality was more complicated because the people were not initiators of the coup, and had remained largely silent and inactive until the war veterans’ leader, Christopher Mutsvangwa, invited them to demonstrate assuring them that there would be no violence, and no arrests.²⁹

That the Church did not seriously engage with members of the security forces, the ruling party or the judiciary on the real issues such as political violence, the denial of human rights, the failure to implement the 2013 constitution, mass poverty and economic instability leaves one wondering why the Christian bodies failed to seize the opportunity that the coup

29 Mutanda (2023), p. 3.

created. Instead, they rushed out a statement authorising the new status quo: ‘There is no way we can go back to the political arrangements we had some days ago. We are in a new situation...While the changes have been rapid in the last few days, the real deterioration has been visible for everyone to see for a long time.’³⁰ In other words, the churches sought to mediate a soft exit for the president believing that he was the source of all the problems that had brought about the standoff between him and the security forces.³¹ In so doing, the churches sought to create their niche or sphere of influence for many decades to come. Their intention was not conflict resolution but rather an evasion to avoid bloodshed.

The search for religious legitimacy

This chapter has explored the way in which different factions vied for political power. It has also examined how the military seized the government by force. However, those who govern like to believe that their power is legitimate and often seek out sources of religious legitimacy, thus the ruling party increasingly turned to the African Independent Churches (AICs) for support. Having disparaged AICs for their practice of the marriage of under-age girls, and unwillingness to inoculate their children or send them to school, the government realigned with them from the start of the crisis. AICs and ZANU-PF shared common ground on Africans’ sovereign rights to land and authoritarian models of leadership. AIC prophets willingly endorsed Mugabe as God’s servant. The relationship was institutionalised in 2010 when Vice President Joyce Mujuru founded the African Apostolic Council of Zimbabwe (AACZ) to strengthen her claims to the Presidency. Mujuru was subsequently deposed in 2014 for allegedly plotting against Mugabe. Notably, she was associated with the wrong kind of religious legitimacy, as she was accused of consulting oracles and involvement in bizarre rituals involving cockfighting as well as duels with aquatic beetles. Each of the creatures represented political figures in ZANU-PF and provided a means of fortune-telling; of revealing her odds in the presidential succession race.³²

One of Mujuru’s strongest rivals was the First Lady, Grace Mugabe. Between 2015 and 2017 the latter held a series of ‘Meet the People’ rallies around the country in which she talked about her work. In 2016, the rallies began to assume a political tone increasingly becoming critical of

³⁰ *Catholic Herald*, 16 November 2017,

³¹ ZCBC, 2017, *ibid*.

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4aay1B7yhg> accessed 26 September 2024.

Mnangagwa.³³ Grace and her allies Sarah Mahoka, and Mandi Chimene attacked Mnangagwa. They alleged that some people wanted to bomb her orphanage and her Gushungo Dairies.³⁴ Some of the rallies were dubbed ‘religious’ and aimed at church leaders. On 5 November 2017, a few days after Mnangagwa had been fired, the first lady attended and addressed an Interface rally dubbed Super Sunday at Rufaro stadium in Harare. It was mostly attended by her G40 supporters and members of the Apostolic sects under the umbrella body of the ACCZ, then under the leadership of Revd Johannes Ndanga.³⁵ Grace excoriated Mnangagwa and his faction and sympathisers.³⁶ She chided and humiliated the sacked Mnangagwa at every subsequent rally that she attended thus giving credence to those who held the view that she had presidential ambitions. She also publicly disparaged all those she thought were linked to the Mnangagwa Lacoste Faction. She made insinuations that Mugabe was divinely ordained and had a task to complete before retiring.³⁷ Mahoka, her dedicated colleague, read from Romans 13 where the Apostle Paul urges people to be loyal to the rulers as they are divinely appointed.³⁸ Chimene directly accused the Mnangagwa of running a parallel government.³⁹ This was meant to send a message to those who had presidential ambitions. Yet, many Zimbabweans sympathised with Mnangagwa, whom they saw as being persecuted by power-hungry Generation 40.

Mainline ecumenical bodies were not the only ones that made public statements about the 2017 ouster of Mugabe. Several religious actors made public statements about the *coup d'état*. Bekithemba Dube (2020) argues that so-called ‘regime enablers,’ often ignored by political commentators, are religious leaders whose influence and power can contribute to the prolonged tenure of African leaders. Upon the assumption of power, President Mnangagwa extended an olive branch to church leaders, perhaps an assurance that a new dawn had arrived. A select group of these

33 <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-grace-mugabe/3188086.html> accessed 12 June 2024.

34 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6uph1Myo_U accessed 13 June 2024.

35 Members of the Apostolic sect were prominent in most Interface rallies in the days leading to the coup.

36 https://www.pindula.co.zw/Apostolic_Churches_Council_of_Zimbabwe/12/6/2-24 accessed 27 September 2024.

37 Ibid.

38 ‘LIVE FROM CHIWESHE: Dr Amai Mugabe “Meet the People Rally”’, *The Herald*, 12 February 2016.

39 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySeiZQSt-dI> accessed 13 June 2024.

religious leaders then formed part of his power base.

Prayer sessions were held by Revd Wutawunashe of the Family of God Church and Bishop Nehemiah Mutendendi of the Zion Christian Church as a welcome gesture to the new government of the second republic of Zimbabwe. The reluctant ZCC, ZCBC, and EFZ representatives attended. AICs which had been on the periphery in matters of church and state relations were courted and for the first time were now cosyng up to those wielding powers of the state. Leaders of AIC including Mudzidzi Wimbo, aka Aaron Mhukuta of Vadzidzi vaJesu Apostolic Church, Noah Taguta of the Johane Maranke Apostolic Church, and Paul Mwazha of the African Apostolic Church willingly endorsed the new dispensation government. These leaders played a significant role in the ascendance of Mnangagwa having long comprised the religious power base for the Lacoste faction. Six years after the military intervention, which the church endorsed, the new dawn has not yet been realised. The church has resorted to time-honoured tactics of siding always with the stronger side without the foresight of the future implications of its decision.

Conclusion

Although the coup was driven by the Command Element of the military in collusion with the Lacoste faction led by Mnangagwa, the churches shaped the outcome. While Mukonori helped broker the agreement between Mugabe and his successor Mnangagwa, the Church Councils endorsed the settlement. In retrospect, the church leaders were too hasty in their desire to see Mugabe removed. Keen to rebuild the economy and restore good governance, they omitted to consult with the military, other elements in civil society or with ordinary Zimbabweans. Their trust in Mnangagwa's New Dispensation was misplaced. While the historic churches tacitly endorsed the outcome of the coup the AICs were more overt. While both the G40 and Lacoste factions competed for the sanction of Apostolic prophets, AIC leaders and prophets were quick to endorse Mnangagwa's assumption of power. AIC leaders supported the G40 faction by attending the First Lady Meet the People and the Presidential Interface rallies. In almost every election over the last 40 years, they have churned out prophecies or made utterances to encourage their supporters to support Mugabe. As the reality of Mugabe's ouster was unfolding, AIC leaders were quick to discern the direction the wind was blowing and they put their lot in with Mnangagwa as a survival tactic.

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The Church at the Crossroads: between Mugabe's shadow and the New Dispensation

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Introduction

The superior of the Zambezi Mission, Father Daignault, summarised the interface between the church and state in a way that has characterised past, present and future relations. Referring to Cecil Rhodes, he said: 'He wants to utilize us and as long as we are useful, he will be friendly.' The relationship occurred at two levels: Rhodes was praised publicly, and his goodwill was sought, but there was little adulation in private (Linden 1980). Surprisingly, nothing has changed.

The church plays an important role in society, and every government in Zimbabwe has sought endorsement from religious practitioners. Politics and religion have been instrumental in shaping Zimbabwe's public space. However, there is need to take cognisance of the ever-changing context which brings new challenges. With the changes in the country's government, the church finds itself constantly drawn to the drawing board, mapping scenarios and trying to be proactive to fulfil its mandate. At the same time politicians from time immemorial have been able to 'harness religious ideologies and concepts to serve their own interests' (Chitando 2020). The church has often succumbed to the political ploy of manipulation, coercion and dirty tricks from politicians, thus becoming numb and losing its prophetic voice.

Both church and state are autonomous within their own sphere, and

both strive to serve the integral needs of the whole person, who is equally subject to both. The church, however, seeks the achievement of those ideals which lead to reconciliation and concern for one another. The Vatican II is very clear about the proper relationship between the Church and the State:

The role and competence of the church of being what it is, she can in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. For she is at once a sign and a safeguard of transcendence of the human person (Tanner 2005: 76).

The ambivalent role of the Church in Zimbabwe's history

The church has always been at the crossroads of Zimbabwe's political history. To understand the current polarisation within Zimbabwean churches, it is necessary to focus on key moments and contributions from church umbrella bodies, faith-based organisations, and individuals. It is important to note that the church has not always spoken with one voice in matters of national concern, although there have been rare moments when Christian leaders have come together as exemplified by opposition to the Rhodesia Front's constitution in 1969; in 2006 'The Zimbabwe we Want' project; and in 2017 the response to the political New Dispensation ushered in by the military.

In its involvement in Zimbabwe's politics, the Catholic Church has been at the forefront. The blessing of the new Zimbabwean flag by Archbishop Patrick Fani Chakaipa at the Independence ceremony on 8 April 1980 was seen by many as a sign of acknowledgement of the role played by the Catholic Church during the liberation struggle. More normally mainline churches spoke through their mother bodies such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). Their relationship with the Mugabe government was not always easy because during the liberation struggle the leadership of the Rhodesia Council of Churches was white dominated and supported Ian Smith's government (Dorman 2002: 75-92). However, in the past two decades there has been an increase in the number of Christian bodies, such as the Zimbabwe Council of Pentecostal Churches (ZCPC), the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), and the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC). All these bodies are represented under the umbrella of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZH OCD), with the exception of the ACCZ

and the ZIICC. However, this plethora of ecumenical voices have served to weaken the voice of the church, prompting a few individuals who are politically connected to 'speak on behalf of the church' supporting government positions and denouncing the prophetic voices as fallacious.

On occasion, faith-based organisations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) helped to tackle issues of social justice and respond to the victims of the war of liberation. According to Ian Linden (1980:31) the church, through the CCJPZ, moved from a teaching church to a listening church. In response to the Zimbabwean crisis in 2006, a number of organisations were formed, such as the Churches in Manicaland, Christians Together for Justice and Peace, Churches in Bulawayo, and the Christian Alliance (Togarasei 2013: 97-109)

Within the history of the church in Zimbabwe, there have always been individuals who have challenged the status quo. During the colonial times, we can name the Revd John White of the Methodist Church the Revd Arthur Shearly Cripps of the Anglican Church, Bishop Kenneth Skelton of the Anglican Church, Bishop Ralph Dodge of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and Bishop Donal Lamont of the Catholic Church. In many cases they were ostracised and considered as villains within the white community.

There were also early African forms of resistance to white hegemony during the colonial period which sought an African expression of Christianity. Indeed, the African-initiated churches' response was arguably older than nationalist aspirations, as we can see in the preaching of Johane Marange, Johane Masowe, Samuel Mutendi, Paul Mwazha and Mai Chaza. They refused to be tainted by the colonial government and its imported religion, and sought to indigenise their religion and empower their flocks, long before it became a well-known route to follow.

The church's prophetic voice and the polarisation of the churches

In pre-colonial times, the first seeds of evangelisation were planted by Father Gonalo da Silveira in 1560-62, followed by Dominican and Jesuit missionaries in 1577-1759, the London Missionary Society in 1859-60, and the Jesuits from 1879-89. It soon became apparent that the missionary endeavour could only succeed under colonial domination, because of the reticence of Africans to accept Christianity. Cecil John Rhodes was of the view that a missionary was better than a thousand soldiers. He

welcomed them, offering about 3,000 acres of land per missionary (Baur 1994). The first twenty years of colonial rule from 1890 saw more than twenty missionary groups establishing themselves in Southern Rhodesia. Catholics grew to be the largest Christian denomination comprising 8 per cent of Zimbabwe's population to date,¹ and playing a significant role in the public life of the nation.

Rhodes, like Mugabe, held Jesuits in very high esteem, as they both did Catholics in general. The latter endeared themselves to the general populace as educationists running some of the best missions.² Unlike many other parts of Africa which were colonised by the English, the Anglican church was not the dominant church in Rhodesia. Archbishop Ashton Chichester (1931-56), a prominent figure in Catholic England, became the leading Catholic figure in the country. He always defended Catholic rights against the government, in the discreet manner of a typical English gentleman, preferably meeting officials at the Salisbury Club, a legacy followed by his successor Archbishop Francis William Markall. Their bonds with their kinsmen were natural and strong, and their concern for Africans was also genuine, but under the circumstances looked like an additional tack beyond the pastoral care of the white community (Baur 1994: 313).

The Catholic Church's historical fight against racism during the colonial era established its moral authority in Rhodesia. The earliest position was well articulated in Bishop Chichester's pastoral letter of 1931 following the Land Appointment Act, in which he declared:

Catholic justice and charity do not differentiate in the smallest degree between European and Native. In the presence of God every living human soul is equal. One Justice and one love embrace us all, and if in any way differentiation could be made it would be in favour of the more helpless... according to the model set by Christ (Linden 1980: 31).

The rural missions created a class of priests who became increasingly aware of the structural injustice, which marginalised 95 per cent of the population as second-class citizens with no legal rights, whose main function was to serve the other 5 per cent. On the other hand, the urban clergy ministered mostly to white communities, were oblivious of the situation of black people, and identified with their white parishioners and

1 'Inter-Censal Demographic Survey Report, 2017'. Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency.

2 Most missions have a school, always primary and sometimes secondary, a hospital or clinic, and a farm.

Ian Smith's government. The racial division became a serious challenge for the church, threatening a schism within the Catholic community. In a national pastoral letter in 1961, bishops proclaimed 'Peace through Justice', saying: 'There would be no stability in the society while the few possess much, and the majority have little or nothing' (Baur 1994:315.) Bishop Aloysius Haene of Gweru and Bishop Lamont spearheaded the African cause at the Rhodesian Bishop's Conference, after it was established in 1969, to give direction to the clergy and laity. Nonetheless, the position of the church remained ambivalent as it continued to permit segregation in her own schools and hospitals exhibiting a church once again on the crossroads.

In 1961 the five Catholic bishops for the first time spoke with one voice on moral issues involved in matters of state and the constitution after Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). The bishops stated that, 'the function of the state, as the administrative arm of the nation is to serve all people, without favouring one group more than another.' They demanded a state of affairs 'in which all men, irrespective of race, religion, or political affiliation, can live as fully accepted members of society, having equal opportunity of access to all those things which promote their full development.' In response to the new Republican Constitution, the Bishops said, 'The Christian's duty of loving his neighbour must transcend any barrier of racial legislation. The church refuses to be declared or to declare itself as either African or European; it is non-racial.' Although there were differences of opinion amongst various Protestant churches, through the Rhodesia Christian Council, the Protestants made common cause with the Catholic Bishops in their opposition to the Rhodesian State (Zvobgo 2005).

The 1960s provided an opportunity for the churches to come together in a united front and speak vehemently against the evils of the Rhodesian Front government under Ian Smith. Unfortunately, Smith was able to manipulate the white electorate to support his position and eventually found legitimisation within the Anglican Church under Bishop Burrough and various white congregations. Many of the churches within the Rhodesian Council of Churches began to play fiddler to their affluent powerful white-oriented urban congregants. The Catholic Church, through Bishop Lamont, spearheaded a prophetic voice against a regime bent on extending the suffering of Africans. Some Catholic members of the Chichester Club, a group of business and professional white men in

Salisbury, appealed to His Holiness Pope Paul VI to forthwith remove Bishop Lamont (Dachs and Rea 1979:216). However, many Africans stood with Bishop Lamont against the RF government; Fr Chakaipa (later the first African Catholic Bishop in Zimbabwe) recognised a double standard and deplorable inconsistency, whereby effectively the church represented the white man and his religion (Linden 1980; Baur 1994).

In response to the RF's racism, Africans were forced to take up arms. This struggle, or *chimurenga*, was led by Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). For Christians, the hour of discernment came in 1970, when the World Council of Churches offered grants to the liberation movements. The Rhodesian Council of Churches denounced the grant as supporting violence.

The creation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in 1972 was a turning point in church and state relations as it became the most efficient instrument for defending the rights of Africans. Bishop Lamont became the first president of the CCJP and was the most articulate among the bishops standing out against the regime. Many whites, including members of the church, bitterly opposed him. The CCJP served a number of functions: conscientisation of the Africans, listening to the rural communities, providing legal support and relief which served countless lives in 'protected villages', and the internationalisation of atrocities committed by the Rhodesian Security Forces in publications such as *The Man in the Middle* (1975), which showed the plight of Africans in the war zones, and *Civil War in Rhodesia* (1976), which described specific cases of torture, brutality and the murder of innocent civilians, all concealed by the government. More than 30 missionaries were killed during the war (Rogers 2017); according to Fathers Stephen Buckland and Fidelis Mukonori, the rural communities of the faithful were indeed the only protectors of the missionaries (Baur 1994: 318; Buckland 1993). Eighteen priests and nuns were imprisoned and twelve deported, including some members of the CCJP, namely Bishop Lamont, Fr Dieter Scholtz SJ (later to be Bishop of Chinhoyi) and Sr Janice McLaughlin MM. The Catholic Bishops published pastoral letters addressing the war and the anticipation of a new order in 'The Road to Peace' (1976), 'United By Consent' (1977), and 'A Plea for Reconciliation' (1978). There were also non-Catholic voices of dissent, such as Bishop Skelton of the Matabeleland Diocese of the Anglican Church, who resigned and left the country in protest, and Bishop Dodge

of the United Methodist Church in Mutare, who was deported because of his stance on racism. Nonetheless, the moral authority of the church during the liberation struggle was compromised, as the government of the time, and successive governments, have sought to co-opt religious leaders for their own political gain.

The Church in independent Zimbabwe

In a pastoral letter marking independence and freedom in 1980, the Catholic bishops welcomed the new nation: 'we the Roman Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe, are happy to congratulate all the citizens of this country and its constitutionally elected government' and pledged 'wholehearted co-operation'. On the relationship with the state, they had this to say:

While the State and Church are independent and autonomous in their own spheres, both are at the service of man. Their duty is to help man fulfil his personal and social vocation. The more they co-operate, the more effectively will they serve the good of all citizens. In this respect the Church and State are at the service of the country.

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, in an interview on the UK ITV religious programme broadcast on 30 November 1980, said:

I think the Catholic Church played a very significant role in the liberation struggle role in the liberation struggle. Not that they fought with arms as we did, but they opposed racialism, and refused to be made an agent of the Government implementing racial policies. We valued the support which the Church gave us as it helped to mobilize international support for us. Within the country it gave us a broader base than the one which we ourselves, acting entirely on our own, could have created. We felt that within the country there were democratic, or Christian forces, which were opposed to the regime established after UDI that we were fighting (Randolph 1985: 57).

Mugabe spoke highly of the church and was proud of his Catholic heritage. In the same broadcast he said, 'I want the church, especially the Catholic Church, to help this country more as we build a new society' (ibid.:57-58); that is, in so far as it safeguarded some of the values that the new nation was said to cherish, such as morality, family and ubuntu.

At the start of his term of office, Mugabe, struck the right chords. His conciliatory speech delivered on the eve of the country's independence is well known:

If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interest, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. If ever we look to the past, let us do so for the lesson the past has taught us, namely that oppression and racism are iniquities that must never find scope in our political and social system. It could never be a correct justification that because whites oppressed us yesterday when they had the power, the blacks must oppress them today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practised by white against blacks or by black against white.³

The Catholic Church received the message of reconciliation with great joy on the eve of independence and the 1980s witnessed a close partnership between the churches and government in development projects, and rebuilding infrastructure destroyed during the protracted war of liberation. She provided relief services for returning war refugees, orphans, ex-combatants and invalids. Mission schools and hospitals were rebuilt and enlarged and re-equipped.

However, the honeymoon ended when the bishops spoke out in a pastoral letter 'Reconciliation Is Still Possible' (Easter 1983) in aid of the civilian population in Matabeleland who were suffering at the hands of both insurgents and government forces. Mugabe lashed out at the bishops, calling them 'sanctimonious prelates' and accused them of being out of touch with the country's needs. Tensions did not diminish over the next few years and worsened with the release of the report by the CCJPZ and the Legal Resources Foundation (1987) on the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions. An angry Mugabe accused the church of meddling in politics and of 'peddling falsehoods' and radically changed his relationship with the church.

In a pastoral letter 'Peace and Unity and Freedom' (January 1985) the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference responded: 'A critical attitude towards the performance of government may well grow out of a deep sense of loyalty towards the State and its people.' Two years later, they welcomed the Unity Accord between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU of 22 December 1987. In a pastoral letter of February 1988, they said, 'We are glad you will be able to lead a united country'. In later engagements with the Catholic bishops Mugabe's relationship with the church was cordial, often calculated and pragmatic; he used the church when it suited him.

3 'Mugabe's most famous speech', *The Herald*, 6 September 2019.

During the 1990s, the Zimbabwean economy began to decline due to drought and the 1992 adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. The situation was exacerbated by the financial appeasement of the war veterans in 1996-97, and Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998. The economic collapse was worsened by worker's industrial action and mass stayaways, as they were the ones who bore the brunt of high inflation. Subsequently, with the highly politicised Fast-track Land Reform Programme of 2000, and Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) in 2005, Zimbabwe found itself with the highest hyperinflation in the world. In all these situations the voice of the church became more outspoken as it adopted more forceful language in addressing the state:

The people of Zimbabwe are suffering. More and more people are getting angry, even from among those who had seemed to be doing reasonably well under the circumstances. The reasons for the anger are many, among them, bad governance and corruption. A tiny minority of the people have become very rich overnight, while the majority are languishing in poverty, creating a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Our Country is in deep crisis. A crisis is an unstable situation of extreme danger and difficulty. Yet, it can also be turned into a moment of grace and of a new beginning, if those responsible for causing the crisis repent, heed the cry of the people (ZCBC 2007).

The chief critic of President Mugabe was Archbishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo who served like Bishop Lamont, an arch-critic of Ian Smith; he rose to prominence in the political space when he castigated Mugabe's government for gross injustices such as the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland (Chitando and Gunda 2013: 171), and Operation Murambatsvina. Archbishop Ncube became famous when he prayed for Mugabe's death so that human rights violations could cease in Zimbabwe in 2005. Despite many threats to his person he was not deterred. 'People are suffering and as long as they continue suffering I am going to talk; I can't stop talking because it is a God-given duty that the Church must talk when people are suffering. But I never advocated violence.'⁴ Unfortunately, Mugabe did not heed the Archbishop's call, in an interview on BBC One's Heaven and Earth Show, to retire gracefully,⁵ and allow Zimbabwe a new

4 'Zim archbishop in secret talks with Prince Charles', *Mail & Guardian*, 3 September 2004.

5 'Cleric calls for Mugabe to resign', *lexpress.mu*, 7 Mai 2007.

start. President Mugabe became more militant and lambasted the church saying:

It is criticism after criticism and I ask why, why, why? *Ukatarisa mapastoral letters avo* [if you look at their pastoral letters], most of them are ill-informed....⁶

Soon Mugabe's ZANU-PF government would turn its focus away from the established churches that belonged to the ZCC and towards the *Mapostori* (African Initiated churches) and some Pentecostal churches for legitimization (Dachs and Rea 1979; Linden 1979; Randolph 1985; McLaughlin 1996; Hastings 1991; Hallencreutz and Moyo 1991). Among the leading voices was Apostle Andrew Wutawunashwe, former president of the EFZ, who was appointed as a Constitutional Commissioner. Through his church, the Family of God, he established the Faith of the Nation Campaign desk, a platform through which the church addressed political issues affecting the country (Togarasei 2006: 215-225). Through their mediations, Pentecostal churches tried to facilitate dialogue between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of Morgan Tsvangirai. It should also be remembered that many Pentecostals responded to the Zimbabwean crisis by providing humanitarian relief; while others supported the status quo and the majority remained apathetic.

Another group that was used as pawns in the hands of ZANU-PF were the *Mapostori*, who soon became a feature at all national events, adorned in their white garments, in hope of receiving land and other favours from government. Even politicians began to dress in the same white regalia to drum up support, abandoning their historic churches. The events of 15 November 2017, a 'Super Sunday' rally by Grace Mugabe, President Robert Mugabe's wife, showed how far politicians would go to use religion for their political ambitions and how some religious leaders would stoop as low as to become sycophants and bootlickers to political actors. The church interface rally brought a number of indigenous churches together to support Grace Mugabe's political ambitions to become vice president. The following Monday Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa was fired by President Mugabe, leading him to flee the country.

6 'Mugabe opens Kutama hostel', *The Herald*, 9 June 2011.

Mugabe's legacy

Breaking loose from the fetters of colonialism and minority rule in 1980, Zimbabwe was economically sound, strategically well positioned, and had a leader who was deemed by many to be well suited for the job. Today we ask the question, was he? Sr Janice McLaughlin, writing after the death of Mugabe in September 2019, described him as 'a man who had raised such high hopes for peace, reconciliation and development in 1980, but instead left a legacy of violence, poverty, corruption, hunger and hopelessness' (McLaughlin 2019). Mugabe, as prime minister, was idolised by the international community – to the point that they were prepared to overlook some of his atrocities. One need only recall his knighthood, conferred on him by the British Queen, against the background of the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland.

It is difficult to capture the legacy of Mugabe. After 37 years in office, history remembers him as a man who due to his long stay undid the gains he had made. He was, however, consistent in some of his policies, for example, in his relations with the church where he held strong views. He believed that ZANU-PF was a vanguard party which ushered in freedom through a revolution and therefore had the mandate to lead and give direction. No other institution, organisation or individual could teach him and his party about freedom, democracy and good governance. It was this view which obfuscated the distinctions between party, government and state and held that the church must stay out of politics – even though he approved the church's role in helping him to learn about social justice and in his fight against Ian Smith.

From hope to disappointment

The political tensions within ZANU-PF between Vice President Mnangagwa and Mugabe's wife Grace Mugabe reached their melting point with the dismissal of the former in favour, putatively, of Grace. However, the army sided with Mnangagwa, placing Mugabe under house arrest and arresting some members of the G40,⁷ while others fled into exile. Many took to the streets calling for Mugabe to step down. There was unforgettable euphoria never before witnessed on the streets of Harare.

7 Generation 40. An informal group of ZANU-PF politicians including Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere and Patrick Zhuwao. Much younger in age, they did not fight directly in the liberation struggle, but were ambitious for leadership roles. They were supposedly allied with Mugabe's young wife, Grace, who also had ambitions for political leadership.

Many carried the Zimbabwe Flag, which in this instance was seen as symbol of resistance, after being popularised by Pastor Evan Mawarire in his ‘this flag’ campaign of 2016-17.⁸

The end of Mugabe regime was swift and unexpected. There was a sigh of relief, the church and people from all walks of life thought a Kairos moment had befallen Zimbabwe. A Zimbabwe without Robert Mugabe! It was for many a time of great hope and release from the suffering of ordinary people, hope that had long been denied. Thus, instead of condemning the military action and forced resignation of Mugabe as president, church leaders offered a more conciliatory approach, urging the new dispensation to embrace all Zimbabweans and take this opportune time to (re)build a new nation.

Mnangagwa’s promises of political and economic reforms dovetailed with these hopes. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations expressed cautious optimism, releasing a pastoral letter that said, ‘We see the current arrangements as an opportunity for the birth of a new nation’ (ZHOCD 2017). However, they also cautioned: ‘We can use this opportunity for us to find one another and to build something that is permanently healing for our nation’ (ibid.). They advised against the known option of ‘a winner takes all mentality’ as this can only bring ‘disaster for us and our future generations’.

Church leaders encouraged the nation to introspect and understand the root causes of the current crisis which went beyond economic and social woes. They acknowledged that there was a ‘lack of democratic renewal, resulting [in] stagnation, sterility, and fatigue’ (ibid.). They reiterated their awareness that ‘our constitution is not being taken seriously, and there is not enough confidence in the three arms of the state: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary’ and spoke of the need for checks and balances, and the distinction between the government and ruling party. The Christian leaders pointed out that in the past political leaders had not been concerned with the plight of the poor and that national resources had only been used to benefit a chosen few.

However, the church leaders inferred that all Zimbabweans, not just government and the ruling party, must assume responsibility for the current state of the nation. Everyone is to blame through connivance and

8 Mawarire protested against the rule of ZANU-PF and the suffering it had caused. He urged Zimbabweans to remember that the flag belonged as a symbol to everyone, and not just to the ruling party. In so doing he made the point that one could be a patriot, and critical of governance,

complicity. They acknowledged that as church leaders they had lost their prophetic urge and they invited the nation and its leaders to do five things: pray for repentance, be calm and peaceful, respect human dignity, institute a transitional government of national unity, and support the need for a national dialogue. The Christian leadership felt that the coup provided an opportune moment to build the nation with all stakeholders on board and willing to contribute towards a democratic transition to 'The Zimbabwe we Want' (ZCBC, EFZ, ZCC, October 2006; ZHOCD, 2018).

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference issued a pastoral statement, published on 19 October 2017 titled 'Reflections and Recommendations On Our Current Situation in Zimbabwe'. Like many previous statements, this open letter was written to guide the behaviour of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces after the military intervention. It was very cautious: the Shepherds urged the people to pray for peace and a return to normalcy. However, they also encouraged the leaders to 'embrace all Zimbabweans in their diversity and oneness' (ZCBC 2017) and safeguard human life and the nation from lawlessness, hate speech, retribution and anything that endangers peace and life. They urged the military leaders to accord those accused of crimes due process and protection of the law. Interestingly, the bishops did not acknowledge the national role played by Father Fidelis Mukonori in his mediation efforts between President Mugabe and the military, but stressed that 'we must pray for our country as we continue to watch developments carefully'. The bishops were succinct and did not repeat issues raised in the ZHOCD pastoral letter; nor did they show any gratification about a necessary intervention or the dawn of a new beginning. However, 'they acknowledged why the military had to act, because of the increased economic hardship for ordinary Zimbabweans' (ZCBC 2018). As Mnangagwa's government took shape, many indigenous churches were quick to align themselves with the new leadership, expressing optimism about the promised reforms. Their enthusiastic responses reflected a broader hope that the government would bring about much needed transformation.

Indigenous churches' responses

Many of the local churches received the new dispensation with enthusiasm; some even began telling of prophecies of President Mnangagwa's ascendancy to the presidency as the 'new Joshua',⁹ especially Apostle

9 'ED our biblical Joshua,' *The Herald*, 21 June 2018.

Andrew Wutawunashe,¹⁰ and Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church, who was invited to lead the opening prayer at the Inauguration of the third President of the Republic of Zimbabwe. Mutendi spoke of President Mnangagwa as Joshua *mutsva* (new) who is supposed to deliver us to Canaan (the promised land). In his prayer there was great optimism that the new president would bring about much needed economic and political transformation that would change Zimbabwe's fortunes. For Mutendi, President Mnangagwa was the cornerstone rejected by the builders. Revd Andrew Wutawunashe, a close advisor of Mnangagwa, organised a number of meetings to rally support and endorsement of the new president, such as the Thanksgiving Prayer Day held at the Trade Fair grounds in Bulawayo on the 31 December 2017.¹¹ Among them was Archbishop Johannes Ndanga of the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe who had been closely connected to the Mugabes. He had earlier prophesied that Robert Mugabe would die in power, and was allegedly the organiser of the Super Sunday Rally, which endorsed Grace Mugabe for vice president.¹² He also referred to Mnangagwa as the new Joshua. The meeting gave the church leaders an occasion to air their grievances, and endorse the new president.

Many church leaders who attended the meeting with the president on 5 March 2018 promised to advise their congregants to vote for Mnangagwa, while the ZCBC issued a pastoral letter 'Opening A New Door', which offered a commentary on the Zimbabwean situation. It began with an analysis of the aftermath of the military takeover, the transition to civilian administration, and attempts by the new government to create new political spaces and credible elections, while working hard to bring in investment to turn around the economy. In their assessment they said frankly that: 'Many ordinary Zimbabweans express disappointment that hoped-for changes are not yet felt'. Their main address, 'The Elections: Opening a New Door', raised a number of points that they felt were essential in building hope

10 'Birth of a new era: Wutawunashe,' *Newsday*, 25 November 2017.

11 The National Thanksgiving and Dedication Service which was first held in December 2017 at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) grounds in Bulawayo after the birth of the New Dispensation has become an annual event graced at each occasion by President Mnangagwa, hosted by Apostle Wutawunashe the founder of the Family of God one of the oldest Pentecostal churches and chairman of the Faith of the Nation campaign. 'Thousands expected at the 7th Annual Thanksgiving, Dedication Service,' *The Chronicle*, 28 December 2023,

12 'LIVE @Rufaro Stadium: First Lady addresses "Super Sunday" rally,' *The Herald*, 5 November 2017.

and a new Zimbabwe. They stressed that the 'will of the people, will clarify what happened in November 2017'. The Bishops spoke about the need for transparent free and fair elections, that would have local and international recognition. The Shepherds all said, 'Political Parties that contest in the forthcoming elections should have equal access to State media coverage'. As the bishops had done in their March 2013 pastoral letter, they listed qualities to look for in a leader such as 'Selfless Service, Responsibility, Accountability, Truthfulness and Respect, for Human Dignity'. In their pastoral letter 'Beyond the Elections: Towards a New Politics' they stated that 'It is the nature of free and fair elections that no individual or small group should be able to determine the results'. The bishops emphasised the need for a new Zimbabwean politics based on collaboration and inclusive politics, based on strong democratic institutions that embody and secure the values of our democracy, regulate our politics and administer peace, truth and justice to all (ZCBC 2018).

The Catholic bishops envisioned 'a reconciled Zimbabwean society living in harmony, justice and peace, in a democratic developmental State.' The church leaders ended the letter with an invitation to pray for this Kairos moment (moment of grace) in the history of Zimbabwe.

On the eve of the National Elections the Zimbabwe Council of Churches published a Pastoral Pronouncement, encouraging people to pray for a peaceful, free and fair election, without violence. The church leaders asked Christians to pray for leaders who would be accountable and committed to unity, peace, justice and the well being of Zimbabweans, but most of all that 'we pray that our political leaders will find each other and work together for the prosperity of all Zimbabweans' (ZCC 2018).

A blistering pastoral letter, 'The March is not ended' (ZCBC 2020), called on the government to address the economic and political crisis in the country without resorting to the violent suppression of citizens, and spoke about the leadership qualities, skills and temperament of political leaders. The letter followed a brutal police and military action on the 31 July protests. However, the government spokesperson issued a statement read in its entirety on national media which avoided the contents of the letter and chose to isolate and target Archbishop Robert Ndlovu, the President of the ZCBC. It also issued a vitriolic attack on the ZCBC, calling the church leadership 'misguided and evil-minded'.¹³ and accused Archbishop Ndlovu of fanning tribalism, and hiding behind the pulpit to

13 'Minister Mutsvangwa blasts Catholic bishops,' *The Sunday Mail*, 16 August 2020.
'Zimbabwean president turns on church leaders,' *The Zimbabwean*, 22 August 2020.

push a regime change agenda.¹⁴ Ironically, the Archbishop's appointment in 2004 as Archbishop of Harare was not well received, as opposed to someone 'local'. Politicians used the ethnicity challenge in the church to attack and sideline the Archbishop. Addressing members of the politburo, President Mnangagwa said that the ruling party has continued to work and enjoy good relations with the church:

In the post-independence period, we continue to work well with the church to advance the national development agenda, as a united people. However, it is most unfortunate when men of the cloth use the pulpit to advance a nefarious agenda for detractors of our country (ibid.).

The Apostolic Nuncio to Zimbabwe, Archbishop Paulo Rudelli, paid a solidarity visit to Archbishop Ndlovu, seen as symbolic act of solidarity with him and the Catholic bishops in Zimbabwe. Many Catholics and non-Catholics stood in support of Archbishop Ndlovu and the bishops, on social media platforms locally and internationally. Unlike the deafening silence witnessed after Mugabe's orchestrated attempt to shame and ridicule Archbishop Pius Ncube, who had spoken out against the injustices perpetrated by Mugabe's regime. Ncube was eventually made to resign as Archbishop of Bulawayo. Unfortunately, the ploy to isolate another Catholic leader, Archbishop Ndlovu, from the umbrella body of the Bishop's Conference did not work this time as the church and civil society stood in solidarity with him.

The Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) distanced itself from the Catholic bishop's letter, critiquing it as propaganda meant to paint the government as intolerant and corrupt.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the government gave positive reviews on state media platforms to church leaders who supported their views and polished their egos.

The strategy of the New Dispensation in dealing with the church has not differed much from that of Mugabe with his support for indigenous Pentecostal Churches such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa of Archbishop Ezekiel Guti. The focus has moved from the established churches to the homegrown churches such as the Zion Christian Church founded by Mutendi, the president's maternal uncle, and led by his son, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, and Apostle Andrew Wutawunashe of the Family of God. These two men have become important religious leaders at

14 'Church, Zanu PF bond unbreakable', *The Herald*, August 20, 2020.

15 'Indigenous churches say no to conflict in Zimbabwe', *The Herald*, 18 August 2020.

state and government functions. ZANU-PF has opened the way for some *Mapostori* and the Pentecostal churches and certain individuals among mainline churches to play public roles in the second republic (Togarasei 2013:101). Whereas the Mugabe regime kept the church and the state apart, only having the two come together when there was a common interest, the current regime has a very different approach. Certain church leaders are cultivated with material inducements. Churches are seen as key enablers. Many church leaders have fallen prey to their solicitations because of fear of retribution, or lust for riches or favours, and have preached a compromised gospel. The current government has taken advantage of every opportunity to be present at important religious functions and to address congregants, even among the established churches.

As previously stated, the historic churches spoke through umbrella bodies such as the ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ, but we now have a plethora of church bodies such as the ACCZ and ZIICC as well as many individuals speaking on behalf of the church. Whether this was a deliberate ploy to undercut the mainstream churches is yet to be ascertained. What is however clear is that the alternative voice of the church has been harnessed to push the government agenda. This was evident in the lead up to the 23 August 2023 harmonised elections. We had churches endorse the Head of State, and promise him votes from their flock at a meeting with President Mnangagwa on 5 March 2018 when church leaders led by Bishop Mutendi, the leader of the Zion Christian Church, had this to say:

Do not be afraid, President, we are with you. Some people say we are being ruled by soldiers, which is false. We are being led by mature people who came from the war. Those who are still in the army are not here. What is left is for us to go and tell our people on the direction to follow.¹⁶

This begs the question, can churches consciously determine the candidate to vote for in an election? If so, what happens to the individual voter's conscience and freedom. The New Dispensation 'created' loyal church bodies that openly support President E.D. Mnangagwa. There was an upsurge of such organisations whose sole purpose was to push for the election of the president, and within their spheres of influence, pastors encouraged their followers to vote for the ruling party and ED, as the one chosen by God.

16 'Churches endorse ED', *The Herald*, 6 March 2018.

Prophetic voice vs political manipulation

Whether one speaks of the Mugabe or the Mnangagwa era, one has a sense of *deja vu*. Certain trends developed in one era and are manifest in the other. In order to paint a picture of the reality that the church is living in, it is necessary to understand the political, social and economic aspects of life in present-day Zimbabwe. Under Mugabe, the church struggled to maintain its prophetic voice as it faced state manipulation. Similarly, Mnangagwa has employed new strategies to co-opt religious leaders, raising concerns about the church's ability to remain an independent voice in the face of ongoing corruptions.

Historically, the church was able to speak with a unified prophetic voice, challenging racial injustice and oppression through its Justice and Peace Commission. However, in the present context, this unified voice has fractured, leading to a dilution of the church's influence. Understandably, because politicians will stop at nothing to silence dissenting voices even within the church. Today, select individuals claim to speak for the church, contributing to the polarisation and weakening of its prophetic stance. Fr Oscar Wermter SJ captures this situation in the following observation:

A deplorable lack of unity between Christian churches is exploited by the government and its media: the latter never seem to have a problem finding a pastor presented as 'speaking for the church', who will support government positions and denounce truly Christian voices as being spiritually misguided (Wermter 2003).

The church, finding itself at the crossroads, must dig deep, asking our nation necessary, relevant and difficult questions. Drawing from its 'treasures things both old and new' and leveraging on its moral authority, it stands as a beacon of hope. It, however, must also contend with the many voices that purport to speak for it. This is not an insurmountable task. It only has to act correctly and bear credible witness to the truth – a reality that has the stubborn tenacity to outlive lies. Living under the shadow of Mugabe and of the new dispensation, the church must assert itself and seek dialogue with the state. In such a dialogue the church must be the salt, leaven and light. It has to prudently play a balancing act: speaking truth to power while at the same time engaging and challenging the state's various institutions to serve the people of Zimbabwe. There must be,

A firm commitment to justice and solidarity by each member of the people of God. Catholic professionals and teachers, businessmen and

civil servants, lawyers and politicians are especially expected to bear to goodness, truth, justice and love of God in their daily lives (ZCBC 2008).

'Zimbabwe has the potential to become the jewel of Africa – a beacon of hope for the entire continent. Her people are her most valuable asset. Zimbabweans are hardworking, literate, determined and considerate.' (Coltart 2016).

The church does not have to do all this alone. Its members are to be encouraged to enter freely into politics and influence it by their prophetic calling. It will take a training of the citizens to conscientise them of their rights to participate in politics.

Political space

Zimbabwe is characterised by a dangerous politics, a politics of exclusion. That coupled with the blurred boundaries between government and the party leaves many vulnerable. There is still an intolerance of divergent views. Those who challenge the status quo are dubbed stooges of the West and enemies of the liberation struggle. Zimbabwe as a nation was born out of a protracted struggle. Something that is seared into the consciousness, as our ZANU-PF leaders never fail to remind us of this fact. The drumbeat of 'liberation war' remains 44 years after independence. Long gone are the days of unity and reconciliation. This is a trump card that politicians of the liberation war generation use more than is necessary. There is a fixation with the wartime service, and many have failed to move beyond the war. The trauma of the liberation struggle must have been too deep to allow the victims to move on. Invoking the struggle, one rallies members of a certain age group behind him. At times the main reasons and motivations that led to the war of liberation have been forgotten, but serve as a reminder of what was done for the people, as if without them.

Our elections have been marred by controversy and violence. The churches urge government to create the social, political and economic climate that enhances moral integrity. The church speaks for all as evidenced by the composition of its members belonging to all parties. Christians have a duty to pray for their leaders 'so that they may adopt a Christ-like leadership that is God fearing and respects human dignity' (ZCBC 2008).

Human rights

Citizens are denied their fundamental rights simply because they do not belong to the ruling party, as seen in the arrest and detention of dissenting voices. With the new dispensation we have seen the democratic space shrink. The church will also have to deal with the toxic politics of a country that polarises everything. In trying to influence the politicians, the church has to be very prudent. It has to affirm politicians and speak to them of the nobility of their difficult vocation. Politics as practised at all levels must advocate for inclusion, dialogue and participation.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to many international and regional treaties. Yet its human rights record leaves a lot to be desired. It is high time that the government be held accountable. Human rights define the needs and the set of rights that each individual may claim, no matter where he or she resides. The concept of human rights can generally be defined as,

Those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs (Reichert 2011:2).

Fundamental to the realisation of human rights in Zimbabwe is the building of free and just societies. ‘The Church wishes to promote dialogue and engagement in the issues that affect people in our country... If we open our hearts to each other, we will find we all want the same thing for our country’ (ZCBC 2014).

The church and reconciliation

Reconciliation is critical for healing Zimbabwe’s wounds, and the church has a unique and vital role to play. While the government can set up commissions to address past wrongdoings, only the church, with its moral authority and community reach, can facilitate the deeper spiritual and emotional healing necessary for the true reconciliation. Through its message of forgiveness and rituals of reconciliation, the church can help victims and perpetrators move toward healing in a way that legislation alone cannot achieve. The church has a privileged position to bring about reconciliation through its resources, such as the message of love and forgiveness, and the power of its rituals and the capacity to create communities of reconciliation long after the process (ibid.:127). Religion possesses distinctive capacities to enhance participation and

commitment. Religion alone addresses issues of repentance, mercifulness, and compassion.

There are processes that must accompany the church's efforts to heal our country. Much of the trauma experienced has not been dealt with from the pre-colonial era where existing conflicts were used to by the system to divide and rule, a common strategy used for the purpose of maintaining power and control. The colonial era was dominated by conflicts stemming from racial discrimination; this created resentment that eventually led to the liberation struggle when approximately 20,000 people were killed and many from all sides were left traumatised. Post-independence, the violence of Gukurahundi led to an estimated 20,000 civilians being killed, often brutally, and again the nation needs to acknowledge and respond to the deep wounds that remain (ibid.). Other instances that should be addressed include the violence and killings that took place during the chaotic land reform programme, or Hondo yeminda (war for the land) of 2000; the trauma of displacement in Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) (Tibaijuka 2005) when government destroyed illegal structures in urban centres leaving approximately 600,000 people homeless; and election violence, especially after the harmonised elections of 29 March 2008. For example, the CCJPZ reported 'country-wide reports of systematic violence in form of assaults, murders, abductions, intimidation, and wanton destruction of property against innocent civilians whose alleged crime is to have voted wrongly.'¹⁷ Former President Mugabe in his last public address on 29 July 2018 spoke about a number who died in the 'soft coup of 2017', and on 1 August 2018 the army opened fire, shot and killed civilians. Six people were reported to have died, while many were brutally assaulted. The failure to deal with our past continues to haunt us (ZCBC 2009). The church has not been spared conflicts, intimidation and violence. There can be no healing without the truth being told and without the victims being allowed to tell their story. Only in those circumstances can the wrong done be acknowledged and an apology be given.

The situation in Zimbabwe is one that needs a ministry that focuses on reconciliation and the building of lasting peace. In *Africae Munus* Pope Benedict (2011) challenged the church in Africa to reflect on her Christian vocation as lived in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. The challenge, though addressed to the whole continent, is in Zimbabwe's case

17 'Zimbabwe could be "too traumatized" for runoff election, Catholic group warns', *Catholic News Agency*, 6 May 2008.

an urgent one. The Church may have to facilitate encounters between victim and perpetrator, working with other competent institutions. However, the church is prepared to offer the mechanism, not just advise; to play a significant role not only in healing and cohesion but also in the much-needed reconciliation, and for this to happen there is need for an environment that is open, free and democratic.

Unfortunately, political expediency will not take us far; it has to be a stakeholder initiative. The perpetrators or accomplices cannot be seen to lead the process; hijacking the national healing process will come at a cost. The current efforts by the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission and the Community Engagement by Chiefs on the Gukurahundi will not amount to anything significant. In May 2009 the churches and civil society came up with a framework for national healing and reconciliation, which proposes a comprehensive process of intervention by government, the church, civil society and all levels of our society, which could serve as starting point for national healing (NANGO 2009).

Corruption

Although infrastructure development has been prioritised, it has been accompanied by rampant corruption and cronyism. Major government deals are made with international and local partners, but they are so overpriced.¹⁸ Tenders are given to individuals who are close to power. There is no transparency in the floating of tenders (Chilunjika et al. 2022:79-103). Corruption is the evil in our society that everyone speaks about but there is reluctance to challenge it. The church has a responsibility to speak out against these injustices and call for greater transparency in governance. By leveraging its moral authority, the church can advocate for ethical governance that benefits all citizens rather than enriching a select few.

The rampant corruption under Mnangagwa's government, particularly in infrastructure projects, reflects a broader pattern of political manipulation seen in previous regimes, confirmed by the Vice President Constantino Chiwenga when he said; 'corruption is now a security threat undermining the rule of law and eroding public trust in private and public institutions.'¹⁹ The church's role in combating this corruption has been inconsistent, as certain church leaders have been co-opted, while others continue to raise their prophetic voice in opposition. The churches need

18 'Govt cancels overpriced laptops tender', *The Herald*, 17 September 2022.

19 'Corruption now a security threat: Chiwenga', *NewsDay*, 20 September 2024.

to address the issue of corruption. Under the new government there has been a drive to revamp the infrastructure, such as the construction of dams, roads, airports, water pipelines, border posts and major mining operations,²⁰ something that should be applauded, but this has come at a high cost while ordinary citizens languish in poverty. Some of the people-centred policies that characterised the government in the 1980s and 1990s have been abandoned, such as free primary education and basic health care. A new phenomenon of cronyism, or state capture, has emerged. Corruption is the evil in our society that everyone speaks about, but there is reluctance to challenge it.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe, Chapter 12, states that national commissions are supposed to be independent. Despite this, most perceive such institutions as 'state captured'. They are too under-funded to be able to carry out their duties. In some cases, there is the political hand influencing their decisions. Some of them, for example the National Peace and the Reconciliation Commission, started late and its ten-year mandate is about to finish without it having achieved anything tangible. Some worthwhile institutions are destroyed by the crafting of new laws or amending the constitution, such as local councils. The government needs to be challenged to adopt people-centred policies.

Economically, some decisions that have been made fail to meet the demands of social justice. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe in 2014 took over the legacy debts and settled liabilities incurred by the RBZ before 31 December 2008 worth over \$1.3bn pushing the country's external debt by \$7bn. A few powerful and well-connected individuals have had access to the credit lines. They borrow money and never service their debt. In the end the debt is passed on to the state causing the sovereign debt to keep on accumulating. Where money is to be used for the development of the state, it is only the few well cushioned individuals who have access to the national resources. This patronage system means that the few national projects that are undertaken are overpriced to cater for the 'facilitation fee', money that is given to those who secure a tender. The law should be allowed to take its course, without impunity or favour, and guarantee the equality of all citizens under the law.

Although the mantra under the New Dispensation is that 'Zimbabwe is open for business', there is no ease of doing business in Zimbabwe (Chakara 2018). Deals and tenders are done in a non-transparent manner.

20 'Zim spearheads infrastructure development despite sanctions,' *The Herald*, 18 October 2024.

When it comes to mining, the environmental degradation is deplorable. The damage is done not only by artisan miners but also by powerful conglomerates that do so with impunity (Ngirandi and Njaya 2023). As Pope Francis (2018) reminds us:

The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and the disadvantaged...

There must be a deliberate drive to improve the people's quality of life in all sectors of the society by both the church and state. It therefore follows that the church's clarion call must be that of advocating for the provision of social services to mitigate the suffering of many, especially those on the margins of the society. The churches are getting stronger on common reflections on important national issues and doing things together as seen in recent pastorals by the ZHOCD, ZCC and ZCBC. This is something to be encouraged and promoted, such as the involvement of faith-based organisations and empowerment of the laity to speak on behalf of the church.

Diaspora

The story of Zimbabwe will be incomplete without considering the diaspora population, a stark reminder of the country's inability to move beyond a narrow ideological mindset to a more inclusive one. It is estimated that 4-6 million Zimbabweans live in the diaspora. This phenomenon is due to the economic, social, and political woes the country has suffered, as well as unimaginable forms of political intimidation and violence (ZCBC 2012). Social institutions such as the family have been badly hit. Children are left with a grandparent, while one or both of their parents leave to earn an income elsewhere. We have breadwinners who now must live with the idea that they are failures, because they have been unable to find work – a tension that dramatically undermines stability and self-esteem. Our schools and tertiary institutions have become supply chains of graduates to lands far and wide.

To compound the diaspora challenge is the question: who deals with its members? When people leave their country, it takes time to settle outside. We ask the question, will they ever come back? If they

do return, what are they returning to? We need stable human capital to keep our vital institutions going, at the very least, instead we have a brain drain. Is it enough for the churches to send priests and pastors to the diaspora communities? Looking at Zimbabwean history, the church has a key role to play. Reflecting on our history, one that is ridden with so many ills, the church has to choose deliberately to act as an agent that helps communities heal, reconcile, build lasting peace and move on.

Conclusion

As Father Daignault rightly observed, the relationship between the church and state will always be determined by the political and religious leaders' interests of the day. The church can legitimise the state of affairs, or through its prophetic voice call for a change in the status quo. The church should always maintain high moral integrity and be a beacon of hope to the marginalised. There are certain fundamentals that the church must insist upon with its various stakeholders, such as improving the conditions for human dignity, promoting social justice and human rights, and challenging oppressive political structures. It should raise the dust and rock the boat to promote good governance, democracy and peace, while representing all citizens fairly and equally regardless of political affiliation.

To reclaim its prophetic voice, the church must resist political manipulation and unmask oppressive hegemonic systems and structures by refusing material inducements from the state and prioritising the welfare of the marginalised. The church is called upon to be the conscience of the nation and to raise alarm at the appropriate time and to speak with one voice. The churches should be the salt and the light that the gospel invites all Christians to be. The prophetic voice of the church is in danger when it does not speak the truth to power. At times the church in Zimbabwe is too close to power, and has distanced herself from the people. To maintain the prophetic voice and protect herself from manipulation, the church should maintain independence and moral integrity in her dealings with power. The church remains a vital force in Zimbabwe's political and social landscape. The question that remains is: Is the church ready and willing to play its role of being the conscience of the nation, or Is it happy to play the fiddler to power? Does the church have the freedom to act as the nation's conscience, and if so, is its freedom still guaranteed in the aftermath?

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