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# Beyond Pietism and Prosperity:
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**Beyond Pietism and Prosperity:**

**Religious Resources for Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe[1]**

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**ABSTRACT**

It is often assumed that charismatic Christianity in Africa promotes either a pietist withdrawal from social and political concerns, or a preoccupation with gaining individual health and wealth (the prosperity gospel). This research presents an alternative vision of the role of charismatic Christianity in Zimbabwe. Drawing on an ethnographic case study of a charismatic congregation, it analyzes how these Christians are drawing links between spirituality and social action. This congregation is developing an egalitarian conception of power, promoting service to the poor, and using biblical discourses to support their actions. This can be understood as part of a wider process in which Zimbabwean Christians are using religious resources to develop a vision for reconstruction and reconciliation. This article points to further areas in which the churches could use their public position to raise sensitive issues, including how to deal with the past and heal relationships between previously antagonistic groups.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The stereotypical image of African Christianity is that it is "a mile wide and an inch deep." This image is based on the explosion of charismatic Christianity on the continent. Charismatic Christianity is characterized by an emphasis on " 'gifts of the spirit,' including any combination of healing, exorcism, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, as well as an emphasis on emotional and experiential expressions over and against discursive and doctrinal ones" (Casanova 2001: 435).[2] The emotional and experiential aspects of charismatic Christianity mean it often is dismissed as a superficial faith that encourages either a pietist withdrawal from social and political concerns or a fixation on the "prosperity gospel," which teaches that God will make believers materially wealthy, if only they have enough faith (Jenkins 2006, 2002; Gifford 1998, 1995, 1991; Martin 2002, 1980). This has raised concerns amongst some scholars and African Christians, who view with alarm the decline of "mainline" denominations at the expense of the charismatic movement. The mainline denominations are the largest of those which are associated with the Western missionary churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Methodist Church.[3] For example, Gifford (1995) notes that generally, the mainline denominations in Africa have challenged dictators, charismatics have provided the support. Mainline denominations have focused on "social justice" issues, charismatics have not. Mainline denominations have contributed to democratization, charismatics have propped up authoritarian regimes.

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[2] Definitions of charismatic Christianity are contested. For historical reasons which are beyond the scope of this paper (see Poloma 2003: 20-24). Pentecostals are usually associated with revivals beginning around the first quarter of the 20th century while charismatics are usually associated with movements from the 1960s and later. Poloma writes of Pentecostal/charismatic (P/C) Christianity in terms of a "worldview": "This worldview is a curious blend of premodern miracles, modern technology, and postmodern mysticism in which the natural merges with the supernatural. … the P/C worldview is experientially centered, with its followers in a dynamic and personal relationship with a deity who is both immanent and transcendent" (Poloma 2003: 22-23).

[3] The term "mainline" is used in the study of Christianity cross-nationally to denote what are usually the largest and longest-established denominations, in most contexts the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, and Presbyterian Church. These denominations usually have more rigid institutional structures than charismatic or evangelical churches (see Wuthnow and Evans 2002).

These stereotypes reinforce a false dichotomy that is being challenged by empirical research on African Christianity. Gifford (1998) and Jenkins (2006) provide some evidence that these churches are concerned not just with charismatic religious experience, but also with the material needs of their people. Unruh and Sider (2005) argue that the dichotomy between spirituality and social action reflects an Anglo American bias, noting that African American churches have been more likely to view spirituality and social action as two sides of the same coin. This also may be the case in Africa, where worldview and material necessity dictate that believers do not draw distinctions between spirituality and social action. What is meant here by social action are any activities or programs that are designed to meet people's material needs.

The research presented challenges stereotypical assumptions about the relationship between spirituality and social action in Africa. Drawing on an ethnographic case study of a charismatic congregation in Zimbabwe, it demonstrates how people link their spiritual practices with social action. This is happening through a process within the congregation, referred to as "de-institutionalization." De-institutionalization involves people questioning old forms of spirituality and developing new ones. It has meant changes in spiritual practices and discourses, which are identified in this article. This process is taking place in a context of state collapse, oppression, and almost overwhelming social problems. These practices and discourses – particularly those that focus on the poor and the development of egalitarian conceptions of power – could provide a basis for a spirituality-based social engagement well-suited for contributing to reconstruction and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

The article proceeds with an overview of the causes and consequences of the current crisis in Zimbabwe. It then considers the role of Christianity in contemporary Zimbabwe. That is

followed by a discussion of the selection of the congregation for the case study and the methods of inquiry that were used. It provides empirical analysis of the de-institutionalization process, including discussion of changes in spiritual practices (prayer, worship and social action) and the identification of the discourses that accompanied these changes (relationship, waiting, serving, and acknowledging difficulties and injustices/persevering). It concludes by analyzing how people in the congregation are drawing links between spirituality and social action, arguing that this congregation's egalitarian conception of power and use of biblical discourses could have a wider resonance in Zimbabwe's public sphere. It also argues that other churches and Christian organizations are well-placed to build on such examples of home-grown spirituality and social action. Christian congregations and organizations provide one of the few alternatives to the state in terms of material resources and moral authority. This research begins to uncover how Zimbabweans might use religious resources for reconstruction and reconciliation in their country.

**CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS IN ZIMBABAWE**

Zimbabwe is a failed state, its economy, political institutions, and socio-cultural fabric in tatters. At the time of my fieldwork in Feb-April 2007, unemployment was 80 per cent and inflation 3,000 per cent. By the end of 2007, other estimates put inflation at between 15,000 and 100,000 per cent (BBC News). Its political institutions lack legitimacy and its ruling party, ZANU-PF, uses violence to maintain power. The octogenarian president, former revolutionary leader Robert Mugabe, has held power since independence and has implemented destructive policies such as the forcible eviction of white farmers and their workers, and *Operation Murambatsvina*, which demolished the homes of poor people suspected of voting for the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). At the time of writing in April 2008, Zimbabweans were still waiting for the results of the 29

March elections to be officially announced. The MDC had claimed a majority of seats in a new parliament after those elections, but ZANU-PF was pressuring the electoral commission to sponsor a number of re-counts. The MDC also claimed that its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, had won the presidential poll outright. With each day that the results of the elections are delayed, reports surface of violence and intimidation by the organs of the state (McGreal 2008). Outside of Mugabe's party, ZANU-PF, there are few opportunities for meaningful participation in the public sphere. The MDC and civil society groups such as the Christian Alliance, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) have faced intimidation and in some cases imprisonment and torture. The state is unable or unwilling to provide basic social services.

Before it is possible to begin thinking about reconstruction and reconciliation, it is necessary to consider how Zimbabwe has reached its present point. In the first years after independence from white-run Rhodesia in 1980, Zimbabwe seemed a success story. Mugabe was a popular leader both in Africa and the West. The agricultural economy was left relatively untouched, and the large-scale commercial farms (most of which continued to be run by whites) continued to produce food, tobacco and flowers for export and internal consumption. Reforms in health care and education meant that Zimbabwe produced a generation of literate, highly-skilled citizens.

But this was not the whole story. Ian Smith's Rhodesian government had left behind a massive debt, with 'more than US$65 million … required in debt serving in 1980" (Bond and Manyanya 2002: 17). ZANU-PF, backed financially by the British government, promised land reform that would transfer significant chunks of agricultural land from whites to blacks. Land reform did not proceed on the scale or within the time frame promised, so the British withdrew support. Neither could Zimbabwe escape the crippling effects of debt or the neo-

liberal terms of trade dictated by the Western powers through the IMF and World Bank. Beginning in 1991, the IMF and World Bank imposed a series of structural adjustment programs to liberalize Zimbabwe's economy. These reforms were imposed largely from above and were spectacularly unsuccessful (Bond and Manyanya 2002; Kanyenze 2004). Even the World Bank admitted that the programs were unpopular and that they had failed (Kanyenze 2004: 127). Unemployment increased and Zimbabwe's Central Statistics Office reported that between 1990-1996 poverty increased from 40.4 per cent to 63.3 per cent (Kanyenze 2004: 125). There was a stock market crash in 1997, when Zimbabwe's currency plunged from Z$10 to Z$30 to the US$ in just four hours of trading time (Bond and Manyanya 2002: xi).

The economy had not recovered from this when, in 2000, Mugabe began to implement a new fast-track land re-distribution program. This was announced just days after his government had lost a referendum which, had it passed, would have changed the constitution and given him even more powers. Groups of young people, claiming to be war veterans, were released into the countryside to take over white-run farms (Reference?). They were sometimes directly transported or supported by the government, and usually ignored by the police. The so-called farm invasions were accompanied by anti-white rhetoric that heightened tensions. Some farmers were murdered and many fled. Of about 5000 white owned farms, only 200 remained operational in 2008. After the March 2008 elections, it is estimated that a further 60 of those 200 white farmers and their families left (Corcoran 2008).

The collapse of Zimbabwe's economy means that it has gone from a country that exported food to one that now relies on food aid. The health care and education systems have suffered as doctors, nurses and teachers have emigrated, leaving under-funded and under-resourced hospitals and schools. The lack of health care and education means that the development of

Zimbabwe's most valuable resource – its people – is severely compromised. Life expectancy has dropped from 61 to 33 years since 1990 and one and five children is an AIDS orphan (Elder 2005).

Further, Zimbabwe's colonial history had left it with a legacy of tension between whites and Zimbabwe's two largest ethnic groups, Shona and Ndebele. There had been tensions between Shona and Ndebele before the arrival of white settlers from the middle of the 19th century, and these were not resolved after independence. From 1982-1987 Mugabe dispatched a North Korean-trained Shona special unit, the Five Brigade, to Matabeleland, the Ndebele homelands. It is estimated that up to 20,000 were murdered and many more tortured and raped in what Dube (2006: 99) has called the "Gukurahundi genocide." Gukurahundi means "the first rains of the wet season" and has a connotation of washing away all that is undesirable (Godwin 1996: 343). Most whites, for their part, maintained their privileged economic status but withdrew from politics and the social and cultural worlds of other Zimbabweans (Alexander 2004). Mugabe announced an official policy of 'reconciliation' between ethnic groups shortly after independence. But nothing was actually done to improve relationships or to seek truth or justice around the human rights violations carried out by all sides during the colonial period and Gukurahundi. Raftopoulos (2003) has argued that this has led to a culture of violence in which ZANU-PF sees the use of force and repression as an acceptable way to maintain power. Despite this, Raftopoulos and Alexander (2006) claim that civil society activism has increased since 1999, citing the work of the trade unions/labor movement, women's organizations, the legal profession, what remains of the independent media (in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora), and in civic groups within the diaspora.

In sum, the collapse of the economy can be traced to the pressures of neo-liberal reforms and destructive internal policies. This, combined with political repression and the knock-on

effects to the health and education systems, means that Zimbabwe waits in urgent need of reconstruction.

## CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY ZIMBABWE

Christianity in contemporary Zimbabwe must be understood as located in both a global and a local context. The process of globalization has brought changes "in the patterns of relations between church, state, nation and civil society" that has altered the way scholars and practitioners look at relationships between "church and state" (Casanova 2001: 424). For Casanova, an important aspect of this is the "de-territorialization" of religion. What is meant by this is the unlinking of the association of specific religions with specific nation-states. De-territorialization is significant in two main ways. First, for nations such as Zimbabwe that have a large diaspora due to political repression and persecution, it means that emigrants take their religion with them to other parts of the world. There, they use religious institutions as bases for political agitation in their adopted lands and in their former homes. They also use religion to construct new identities and discourses that may transcend previously antagonistic ethnic identities, and to provide solace in a time of exile (See Hepner 2003). Second, within Christianity many of the denominations are transnational organizations or part of transnational networks. This means that the churches in a floundering state like Zimbabwe can call on people from vast international religious networks for material resources and moral support. As such, Casanova (2001: 430) sees religions as offering people an alternative "imagined community" to the imagined community of the nation-state.. In part because of these de-territorialized, transnational connections, the churches in Zimbabwe may be (relatively) freer to act without state interference than other local civil society organizations (See also Hackett 2008).

It is important to understand the role of religion in a global south nation like Zimbabwe, where Christianity is popular and growing. The shift of the center of Christianity to the global south is well-documented, although scholars are still beginning to analyze the wider social and political significance of this (Jenkins 2006, 2002; Sanneh and Carpenter 2005). A number of studies have concluded that the Christian churches have contributed to democratization throughout Africa (Anderson, 2005; Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004; Gifford, 1998, 1995). In Zimbabwe some of the churches and the clergy supported the liberation struggle (Hallencreuz and Moyo 1988; McLaughlin 1996), although Dube (2006) argues that on balance they supported the colonial regime. Currently, the churches have a large grassroots constituency, as about 75% of Zimbabwe's population is estimated to adhere to some form of Christianity, whether it is the mainline denominations, new African Initiated Churches, or a mix of traditional and Christian religious practices (US Department of State 2007). It might be expected that the churches would be a voice of critical opposition to ZANU-PF policies. Potentially, then, the churches have the social platform and the moral authority to play a significant role in contributing to reconstruction and reconciliation.

But there is considerable debate and uncertainty about the role of the Christian churches in contemporary Zimbabwe. Much of the analysis of the churches focuses on the activities of Zimbabwe's major 'para-church' organizations. These are loose, umbrella organizations in which leaders (usually clergy) from the major denominations interact. It is possible to group these para-church organizations into two camps: those that seem to offer mixed support to the present government (such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and those that stridently oppose it (the Christian Alliance and the Zimbabwe Pastors Forum, as well as prominent clerics such as Pius Ncube, the former Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo). There is evidence that ZANU-PF has attempted to co-opt

the power and independence of the churches, offering land and favors to prominent clerics to convince them to support the party. The government censored a national discussion document, "The Zimbabwe We Want," which was produced by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference. Mugabe has attempted to identify his regime with the churches by appearing at events such as national prayer breakfasts. It also is likely that ZANU-PF has been behind a scandal in which Ncube has been accused of an affair with a former secretary, with purported footage of the cleric caught in the act of adultery broadcast on state-run television. Ncube has resigned his post as archbishop but remains within the church. He has been bogged down with legal proceedings and it is not certain that his vocal criticisms of ZANU-PF continue to carry the same authority. Further, it is not clear to what extent Zimbabwe's charismatic Christians are engaged in this sometimes dangerous public sphere. Maxwell's (2007) recent study of the prominent and largely charismatic home-grown denomination Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) identifies the "pietist" and "prosperity" strands so common throughout Africa. This echoes earlier work by Gifford (1991), which emphasized the influence of American Pentecostalism on these trends in Zimbabwe. Maxwell demonstrates that charismatic or Pentecostal congregations in Zimbabwe have rarely challenged the state, and in some instances have produced versions of Pentecostal "big men" that mirror the authoritarian "big men" or "chefs" of secular politics (218).

However, it would be a mistake to equate the churches' social action simply with protesting against ZANU-PF. Much of the commentary on contemporary religious activism in Zimbabwe would focus on this as a litmus test of Christians' commitment to social justice. Here, I take a broader view of what it would mean to achieve social justice in Zimbabwe, recognizing that a change in government would not necessarily bring social justice. It is a broader view of social action that informs the analysis of the congregation below.

**CASE STUDY AND METHODS: MOUNT PLEASANT COMMUNITY CHURCH, HARARE**

Case study approaches to social research often seek examples that are exceptional or unusual. The aim of a case study is not to make wide generalizations about social trends. Rather, it is through studying atypical cases that social scientists provide perspectives on how alternative, micro-level processes take place. This is useful to the extent that it yields information about underlying social or political processes that are not yet readily recognized. It also may allow people to gain new perspectives, encouraging them to develop new visions for society.

So it is important that case studies are chosen carefully. Gifford (1998) has concluded that the decline of mainline denominations in Africa is evidence that they are failing to meet the "spiritual" needs of their congregants. While recognizing the stereotypical image of charismatic Christians as seeking either pietism or prosperity, Gifford argues that churches that meet people's spiritual needs through charismatic experience *and* address social, economic and political issues have the potential to be dynamic sources of change in Africa. I sought to study a congregation that could be such an agent of change – one that addressed both spiritual and material needs. That meant seeking a congregation that did not endorse either pietism or prosperity teaching.

Through an Irish friend who had been living in Zimbabwe for seven years, I learned that he was attending a congregation – Mount Pleasant Community Church (MPCC) in Harare – that fit this profile. The congregation was cross-cultural, in that it had both black (although predominantly Shona) and white congregants and a black-white eldership team. MPCC also

was in a relatively well-educated and wealthy area, in a suburb near a university. This was important, because in the current context in Zimbabwe churches in deprived areas are unlikely to have the same level of social, educational and monetary resources for social activism. These three factors make MPCC atypical.

After securing permission from the elders to conduct the research, I used an inductive, ethnographic approach to identify and frame research questions. The study was conducted Feb-April 2007. I entered the research curious about how a congregation might cope with the increasing difficulty of everyday living in Zimbabwe. I intended it as an initial, scoping study to provide the basis for further research. With that in mind, I asked people in the congregation what they thought was important about their congregation and what their concerns were for the future. My main methods of interaction with people were participant observation and in-depth interviews. There were congregational meetings six days of the week for most of my stay, so I interacted with congregants almost daily. Between 100-150 people met for the main Sunday morning service. There were prayer meetings five evenings per week, with attendance ranging from as few as three to as many as twenty. The ethnic make-up of the congregation was 80-85 per cent Shona, 10-15 per cent white, and about 5 per cent Ndebele, other African nations, European nations, and others. The high percentage of Shona reflected the high percentage of Shona in Harare. Whites were over-represented if one takes into account their presence in the wider population – they make up less than one per cent of Zimbabwe's population. The congregation has two elders: an Ndebele man and a white Zimbabwean man. Because it is near a university, MPCC has a strong student population and a number of young, middle-class professionals. There were few people over 40 in the congregation. I conducted 18 interviews with people who are part of the congregation. There were seven Shona, seven white Zimbabwean, two Ndebele, one white European and one from another African nation. They were divided evenly between males and females. Whites were

over-represented because of their preponderance in the over-40 age group. This was necessary to get the perspective of people who had been attending the congregation for a number of years, most of whom were whites over 40.

The major insights from the research came through the identification and analysis of a process that people in the congregation called "de-institutionalization." They traced this process to 2002, when a small group of people began meeting once a week for prayer. In 2005 people felt the need for prayer intensify, so they began meeting for prayers five days a week in the church offices. The elders and others said that God was revealing that the congregation had begun to rely too much on "structures," such as cell groups and organized fellowship events. As people questioned the old forms of spirituality that had been dominant in the congregation they concluded that people were using structures to relate to God, rather than relating to God directly. As a result, cell groups were replaced with smaller, more intimate discipleship groups. In 2006, even these were discontinued, although the university students continued to meet midweek in one large cell group.

De-institutionalization has led to new spiritual practices and discourses within the congregation. The new practices include a more inclusive and free-flowing worship style and increased service to the poor and needy. The new discourses justify these changes and provide people with resources to make sense of challenges and difficulties. The practices and discourses of the congregation are linked together and reinforce each other.

**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES: PRAYER, WORSHIP AND SOCIAL ACTION**

Many of the prayer and worship practices at MPCC would be expected and familiar in an African charismatic congregation: lively songs, spontaneous prayer, and the giving of

prophetic words. But throughout the de-institutionalization process, people in the congregation began to make changes that reflected their new spiritual understandings. The conviction that the congregation was relying too much on structures was linked to a perception that people were expecting elders and cell leaders to relate to God for them. This began a process in which leadership became more egalitarian, and this was reflected in the conduct of prayer meetings and worship services. For example, prayer meetings were held in a room in the church offices or outside on the grass. Elders did not usually attend these meetings, and it was difficult to determine if or when anyone was "in charge" of the meeting, although there were individuals who habitually signaled when the praying would begin either by inviting others to pray or starting to pray or read scriptures themselves. These meetings proceeded like a series of chain reactions: one person shared a scripture; another person started singing a song with lyrics related to that scripture, hearing that song led another person to a scripture with a similar theme, and so on. Prayer meetings lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. These meetings required a great deal of biblical literacy and confidence on the part of the congregants. People either recited biblical passages from memory, or located them in their bibles and read them. Men and women, lay and elders, participated. Some congregants, however, never shared a scripture, prayer or song.

The Sunday morning worship services, which lasted two hours or more, had a similar pattern. These services were held in a high school auditorium. In the latter months of 2006 and the early months of 2007, the congregation began to experiment with its organization of the worship space. Previously, the band had stood at the front of the auditorium and the elders also had preached from the front. But now the band was placed in a corner, and the chairs were arranged in concentric circles with a circular, open space in the middle of the floor. This seating arrangement forced people in the congregation to look at one another, which they said

helped to build a sense of community. This space was open for people to rise from their seats during the service to sing, pray, recite scripture, or share a prophetic word. Elders no longer had a special physical space such as the front of the auditorium. Now the elders and the band blended in with others in the congregation. Before the service there was a prayer meeting outside under the trees. The worship services began with singing a mixture of songs in English, Shona, and other African languages. From there, it developed a free-flowing character as people shared scriptures, songs or testimonies. When there was a break in this flow, an elder or an appointed lay preacher rose to share a prepared message. But some Sundays the time for the service had expired before anyone had a chance to share a prepared sermon. People in the congregation said that the changes to the worship service reflected the greater emphasis now being placed on "the priesthood of all believers." This was reinforced by the elders' plan to move away from paid, full-time employment by the church.

A tapestry was placed at the entrance to the auditorium before the service, which quotes Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." This visually reinforced what people in the congregation saw as a renewed emphasis on social activism. Some people in the congregation drew a direct link between de-institutionalization and increased social activism. The issues highlighted most frequently were caring for orphans and widows, and ministering to the rural poor. These ministries were displayed on the church notice board and highlighted by elders during announcement times in Sunday morning services. The congregation also had a ministry for university students, including on-campus activities and an off-campus residence that housed 14 students.

Evidence for increased and more effective activism was given in two main ways: more people volunteered for service, and people who already worked for Christian or humanitarian

NGOs felt more supported and valued in their work. I was able to observe examples of MPCC's new social action projects: ministering to orphans and widows in the high density suburbs, and ministering to the rural poor. Visits to orphans and widows were organized on Sunday afternoons. People brought food, clothing and toys to the neediest families and talked with them, offering tips on cultivating small backyard vegetable gardens or accessing job skills training. They also prayed with the people, including prayer for healing. There were two types of rural ministry: medical missions and evangelistic missions. A number of people who attend MPCC are medical doctors. Those doctors and others from the congregation would travel to a rural congregation and share an evening meal and worship service with them. They would stay overnight and the next day set up tents, where people could access free medical care. There was an additional tent for prayer and spiritual healing. The evangelistic missions followed a similar pattern. People from the congregation traveled to a rural area on a Saturday evening, bringing food, other supplies, a movie projector and a large portable screen. They shared an evening meal, then watched the Jesus Film outside on the large screen. After the film, people were encouraged to become followers of Jesus. On the Sunday morning, there was a shared worship service outside under the trees. MPCC endeavored to visit its two partner congregations on at least a bi-monthly basis, with the aim of building relationships rather than providing short-term relief.

As for supporting those already engaged in humanitarian work, one woman said that not having cell groups reduced the pressure on her to be doing so-called "Christian" work. She said people in other congregations equated "ministry" only with what their particular congregation was doing and overlooked people who were working fulltime for Christian or humanitarian organizations. The de-institutionalization process did not begin specifically to make the congregation's social ministries work better. People said that this process was initiated by God, so that individuals would have closer relationships with Him. But the way

in which de-institutionalization has progressed means that people see links between the congregation's new spiritual practices and its increased social action – so much so that social action is recognized as a spiritual practice.

**SPIRITUAL DISCOURSES**

I identified four major discursive themes which accompanied the de-institutionalization process: Relationship (with God and with others), Acknowledging Difficulties and Injustices, Waiting and Persevering, and Serving. I identified these themes through careful consideration of my interviews and field notes, which I took during prayer meetings and Sunday services. The repetition of these spiritual discourses is important. People often remember what another congregant has said in a meeting and repeat it in another meeting, thus reinforcing it. These discourses draw primarily on passages from the bible and on what people say is the witness of the Holy Spirit. They legitimate and justify the process the congregation is going through.

In March 2007, I presented the elders with an initial report on my research, which identified the discursive themes above. In a conversation with the elders after they had read the report, they said my identification of the discourses was accurate. I then asked how long they thought the discourses had been present in the congregation. They said the relationship theme had surfaced in 2005 and waiting surfaced around November or December 2006. This was followed by serving, and then by acknowledging difficulties and injustices. They felt that persevering fit better in the "acknowledging difficulties and injustices" category, rather than being linked with "waiting." I have adopted the elders' revision in my presentation of these themes below.

The development of these discourses is just as significant as the changes in the congregation's spiritual practices (See also Ammerman 2001; Ammerman et al 1998; Ganiel 2007, 2006; Marty 2000). The changes in practices and in discourses occurred simultaneously, and each depended upon the other. Further, research on "new social movements" has found that discursive change is vital for achieving social change (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Touraine 1978). People require new vocabularies to describe and justify new social, political or religious projects. Zimbabwe has a large Christian population that is familiar with biblical passages and tolerant of religious discourses in the public sphere. In such a context, new discourses grounded in biblical language have the potential for wide-ranging impact.

*Relationship (with God and with others)*

Some congregants said that the deinstitutionalization process had strengthened their relationships with God and with others. They said that the desire to build better relationships was what had gotten the de-institutionalization process started. For example, this woman said that de-institutionalization has caused her relationship with God to become more important to her, and stronger:

> I mean like we always say, all we need is God. But when you are really in a place where there's no one and no institution, none of those things that you normally associate with religion, and then it really is you and God face to face, I think well that for me has changed my walk with Christ definitely in a big way.
>
> Interviewer: And what would you say is different about your walk with Christ now?

Woman: I still have troubles as a Christian but I think I'm more inclined now to turn to Him first. Before if I had an issue I'd send a text message to whoever, or call whoever it was, now I'm more inclined to turn and seek God out first. … [on] the whole I'm more challenged about being in a relationship with him because [before] it was always easier to let other people [relate to God for me]. (23 Feb 2007)

In contexts where previous social, economic and/or political structures are breaking down (including Western, 'post-modern' contexts), relationships are often a casualty of these processes. For people at MPCC, taking practical steps to build relationships and thus to form a tight-knit community provided them with an opportunity to adjust to and make sense of change. Some also saw their relationships with God and with others as providing them with the encouragement to engage in social action. They credited the Holy Spirit with bringing about their changed perspectives on relationships, so that God – not the shifting social and political contexts – was seen as the reason for the change.

*Waiting*

There were two main areas in which people at MPCC said they were waiting: for God to do his work on them as individuals and on the congregation collectively, and for God to deliver Zimbabwe. People said that waiting was not always easy, but they used scriptures and other encouraging words to remain hopeful and to persevere. An example of this sort of discourse comes from a Sunday morning service, when a visiting missionary to another African nation (a white Zimbabwean man) offered an impromptu sermon:

This man says he remembers that seven years ago in Zimbabwe, they were hopeful – they used to have all night prayer meetings and ask for deliverance. Now he says he thinks it's a case of 'hope deferred makes the heart sick.' He says that all of us have lost family and friends through death or emigration and their hearts are sore, they are all battling with their response to that. And he is tired of hearing Christians say that everything is fine when clearly it's not. He was at some sort of meeting with people in the medical profession. He says that none of the radiotherapy machines in Zimbabwe work now. He was shown pictures of a girl who had been receiving treatments and her tumor shrunk, but then the machine broke. He saw another picture of her with the tumor back – a picture that was taken and then she died later that day. He says that all this is happening when people in high places, the Reserve Bank and so on, want for nothing. He says he was relieved that at least he was still able to feel anger about that, that his emotions hadn't been deadened completely. … He says people are exhausted. They can't get drugs for [AIDS treatments and so on]. … There's been a battle for his soul and his spiritual existence and he is still quite low in his spirit but he feels something is happening now. (4 March 2007)

It is important to emphasize that this is not a pietist withdrawal – a "let go and let God" approach. Rather, people anticipate God's deliverance, and believe that Zimbabwean Christians will play a part in it. Some people admitted that they had grown weary of waiting and that they felt a bit deflated the God had not yet delivered the nation. They contrasted this to a few years earlier when there had been a number of prayer meetings around the country. This had led some people to take a step on from waiting to serving, so that they would be ready, and already contributing, when deliverance came.

Playing a part in God's deliverance of Zimbabwe means that people must be prepared. Preferably, they should already be involved, serving others in areas where they see the greatest need. An example comes from a service on 4 March 2007, when a woman shared a scripture:

> She says as the congregation has been seeking God she feels God asking 'what are you doing with church?' She then reads James 1:27: 'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.' She says that she works with women and orphans everyday. In her own life she has no suffering, but her life takes on a different perspective when she sees people who have nothing. She says it is one thing to give money and resources, and that is good, but it is another to visit the people and to see them and spend time with them. She urges people to go on the visits today. [It was a Sunday in which visits to child headed homes had been organized for after the service] Then she focuses on the second part of the verse, which she says sometimes gets lost, on 'keeping yourself unspotted from the world.' She says in Zimbabwe it is easy to catch the negativity – to say that the nation is crumbling and so on. You could become bitter towards the president and government, but that it is important not to do that.

Another example is from a man who works for an NGO:

In Matthew 25 it talks about – when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you give me drink, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was in prison you visited me, and as much as you did for the least of these you did for me. So whenever we put a pair of shoes on a child, we're putting a pair of shoes on Jesus. We give them a plate of food, we're giving a plate of food to Jesus. That alongside our teaching of the word. Because we believe the word of God changes lives for eternity. A plate of food today can change you today, take your hunger away, but you'll still be hungry tomorrow. … Someone said to me [that there is] warfare in the heavenlies and [we are] being bombarded. … He asked me what do you do [about that warfare]? I said I put shoes on their feet. I put food in their belly. Every shoe I put on a child that says to the devil he's barking up the wrong tree. To me that's very strong, that's a strong thing for us. (5 March 2007)

There also were discourses that developed alternative concepts about leadership and power. These included a concept of servant leadership, exemplified in images of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Such discourses help to develop a conception of power which is not wielded through force or from a position of elevated authority, but a conception of power which is diffused and linked to serving and giving away time, money or possessions. These discourses are perhaps the most significant for motivating people to engage in social action, and to stay the course even when it becomes difficult.

*Acknowledging Difficulties and Injustices/Persevering*

It might seem like "acknowledging difficulties and injustices" would be a given in Zimbabwe. But it is not immediately obvious that a charismatic congregation is a place where this might be done. As noted above, many charismatic churches are known for preaching

pietism or prosperity, neither of which engages with these themes. Freedom of expression is limited throughout Zimbabwe due to political intimidation. Further, some Christians may be reluctant to admit to one another that they are facing difficulty or trial. MPCC attempted to cultivate an open atmosphere in which people were encouraged to share their difficulties. But there is a subtle difference between acknowledging difficulties and identifying injustices. Here, what I mean by identifying injustices is when people acknowledged difficulties and pointed to definite human causes for them. Here is a narrative from a male NGO worker:

> There is a lot suffering in this country. I see it because I'm working in projects that help people. There are women who have been widowed and they have no way of earning income. Or even if they do, they go and work for people and they are given next to nothing for the work that they do. There's a lot of injustice that goes on, governmental officials take advantage of people's money, they steal from people and that kind of thing. And they oppress people. We have a lot of orphans. Who have both parents have died, hey, they have nobody to look to, to help them and the structure of the extended family has been disturbed because of hard economic conditions. People are concentrating on themselves and just looking after their immediate families and the son of whoever is a son of whoever - if whoever dies then too bad, they need to find their own way of surviving. And there is a lot of drug abuse, there's a lot of prostitution, there's a lot of evil things – child abuse is going on, you know. And ah, there are enough things that are going on in which the devil is really having a garden party for lack of a better word. There's a lot of suffering that is taking place so as a result the need that is there is for people to express God's love. … And we need to go and embrace those people, we need to meet the needs of the people who are suffering.

Here, the man turns to his Bible and reads from Isaiah 58:

Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast, tell my people Israel of their sins, that they act so pious. They come to the temple every day and seem delighted to hear my laws. You would almost think that this was a righteous nation that would never abandon its God. They love to make a show of coming to me and asking me to take action on their behalf. We have fasted before you, they say. Why aren't you impressed? We have done much penance and you don't even notice it. I will tell you why. It is because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling. This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like a blade of grass in the wind. You dress in sackcloth and cover yourself with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord? No. the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned. And to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers to your homes. Give clothes to those who need them and do not hide from relatives who need your help. If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call the Lord will answer. Yes, I am here he will quickly reply. Stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumours. Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out in the darkness and the darkness around you will be as bright as day. The Lord will guide you continually watering your life when you are dry and keeping

you healthy too. You will be like a well watered garden, like an ever flowing stream. Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities then you will be known as the people who rebuilt their walls and cities. Keep the Sabbath day holy, don't pursue your own interests on that day but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as a holy day. Honour the lord in everything you do and don't follow your own desires or talk highly. If you do this, the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and give you your full share of your inheritance I promised to Jacob your ancestor. I the Lord have spoken.

You see this scripture? I know it was talking about the children of Israel but we have been adopted into this family by virtue of Jesus coming to die for all of us … [so] I'm convinced this scripture applies to every Christian and that this is what God wants us to do. ... So we as a body of Christ or Christians in this nation should be willing to face any dangers or consequences for what is right. (20 Feb 2007)

Although this man clearly identified injustices, later he said that he thinks churches are not addressing them adequately. For instance, there may be many Christians working quietly for orphans and widows, but this has not been accompanied by a strong enough "speaking out" against injustices and the human causes of them. To perseverance, this man might say, should be added courage.

**CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND PIETISM AND PROSPERITY**

This article has explored how a charismatic congregation is functioning in a context of social, economic and political collapse, focusing on how it is changing its practices and discourses. It provides evidence that African charismatic Christianity does not inevitably focus on

pietism or prosperity teaching – even in the face of almost overwhelming difficulties. Rather, in MPCC charismatic Christianity is providing people with deep religious resources on which they can draw to justify social action. This is important in Zimbabwe, where the Christian churches offer some of the few remaining resources for addressing the challenges of living in a crumbling state. Those same churches also are likely to be prominent in shaping any future reconstruction and reconciliation processes.

A case study of a single congregation cannot be expected to uncover all of the religious resources that Zimbabweans could draw upon to begin processes of reconstruction and reconciliation. This study provides just one example of a limited number of practices and discourses that could contribute to a wider conversation on reconstruction and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. It also sheds light on how a particular institution is currently managing change, allowing us to understand how such micro-level processes might occur in the rest of the country. Three important lessons can be learned from this particular case study.

First, the de-institutionalization process described here is flexible and relatively egalitarian. It has increased lay participation in worship services, prayer meetings and in social action projects. People report feeling more supported in their everyday lives and work. They are developing alternative conceptions of power that emphasize ideas such as servant leadership. These changes could serve as a model for other institutions within Zimbabwe, providing a basis to challenge and change accepted authoritarian structures. This does not necessarily mean directly challenging the state through political protest. What it does mean is that people may be empowered to become social entrepreneurs, addressing pressing issues of need that have been neglected by the state.

Second, the use of religious and specifically Christian discourses is important in this process. People use these discourses to ground and justify their actions, appealing to a higher moral authority. In a context like Zimbabwe, which is broadly Christian and which accepts and expects religious discourses in the public sphere, discourses like those identified here could serve as powerful justifications for change. The potential impact of Christian activism is enhanced by the location of Zimbabwe's churches in transnational religious networks. MPCC, for its part, is embedded in the UK-based New Frontiers charismatic network, which claims almost 600 affiliated congregations in 50 nations (www.newfrontiers.xtn.org, accessed 5 March 2008).

Third, participants in my research identified some of the limitations of their congregation's work. They recognized that their de-institutionalization process was on a small scale, and some people claimed that their congregation (as well as the wider "church") was not doing enough to speak out against injustice. These limitations should not be read as severe criticisms of MPCC, rather they point to further areas in which other religious actors could begin to act.

This leads us on to a consideration of how what is happening at MPCC could contribute to reconstruction and reconciliation on a larger scale. Crucially, it seems that MPCC and other congregations and Christian organizations are constrained by a lack of communication and coordination, whether it is in addressing the needs of the poor or political injustices. Dube (2006) contends that the ZCC could have fulfilled this role, but it has failed to do so, lacking theological and practical vision. Churches cannot learn from one another unless there is a safe space where their leaders and laypeople can interact. Whether ZCC or another body can fulfill this role, remains to be seen. MPCC, and other congregations that are crafting creative responses to Zimbabwe's crisis, continue to labor in isolation, which stunts their effectiveness. This is important in the area of reconstruction, where it is sensible to work

together and without duplication on economic and social projects that meet people's material needs. It also is important in the area of reconciliation. Christians from different denominations and different regions might learn a lot from listening to what each other are saying about serving one another and transforming previously antagonistic relationships.

The identification of the four discourses at MPCC illustrates this point. These discourses are not and cannot be exhaustive of what Christians in Zimbabwe could use to justify reconstruction and reconciliation. Powerful religiously-based discourses could be constructed around a number of issues. An example of this can be seen in the Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter at Easter 2007, which critiqued the injustices perpetrated by the state. But even this is limited. The churches could be more far-reaching in their vision, drawing on their religious resources to begin constructing visions for a reconciled Zimbabwe. "The Zimbabwe We Want" document begins to do this, but it does not go far enough. Dube (2006) goes farther, arguing for the development of a contextual theology for Zimbabwe that will use social, political and spiritual resources to contribute to democratization. For him, contextual theology begins with the churches repenting for their complicity in colonialism, and for not speaking out against events like Gukurahundi, Murambatsvina, and other injustices. It privileges the perspective of the poor who have suffered the most from injustices.

There are a number of ways in which discourses that justify reconstruction and reconciliation could be identified and promoted, ranging from creating spaces where people can listen to each other's stories of exclusion and oppression, raising these issues in bible studies, prayer meetings or worship services, and including training about these issues in Zimbabwe's theological colleges. In South Africa, Archbishop Demond Tutu was masterful when it came to articulating religious discourses that reached into the popular consciousness, not only in South Africa but also abroad. These included his use of the term *ubuntu* to encourage the

restoration of relationships and community, and his use of the phrase the 'rainbow people of God' to articulate a vision for a harmonious, multicultural 'Rainbow Nation.'

Further insights from the wider fields of peace studies and reconciliation studies could be drawn on to assist Zimbabwean churches in this process. Lederach (1997), Appleby (2000) and Bloomfield (2003), amongst others, emphasize the need for local religious and secular actors to draw on their own cultural resources in reconciliation processes. Currently, even though ZANU-PF and the MDC have engaged in some negotiations about constitutional reform, neither party has wished to table issues such as dealing with the past, racial reconciliation, possible truth commissions, or restitution for events such as Gukuruhundi, Murambatsvina or the farm invasions. Zimbabwean churches are well-placed to raise these issues in a sensitive and context-specific way, providing resources for reconstruction and reconciliation.

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