

# THE BIBLE AND POLITICS IN AFRICA

Masiwa Ragies Gunda & Joachim Kügler (Eds.)



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# The Bible and Politics in Africa

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Masiwa Ragies Gunda & Joachim Kügler



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**MASIIWA RAGIES GUNDA & JOACHIM KÜGLER**

INTRODUCTION .....7

---

## **SECTION 1:**

**THE BIBLE AND BROAD POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN AFRICA.....21**

**MASIIWA RAGIES GUNDA**

“REWRITING” THE BIBLE OR DE-BIBLIFYING THE PUBLIC SPHERE?  
PROPOSALS AND PROPOSITIONS ON THE USAGE OF THE BIBLE BY  
PUBLIC FIGURES IN ZIMBABWE .....22

**ELIOT TOFA**

THE BIBLE AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY AND  
DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA: THE ZIMBABWE EXPERIENCE.....42

**JANNIE HUNTER**

THE BIBLE AND THE QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENTAL JUSTICE:  
THE CASE OF ORPHANS IN NAMIBIA.....61

**OBVIOUS VENGEYI**

THE BIBLE IN THE SERVICE OF PAN-AFRICANISM: THE CASE OF  
DR TAFATAONA MAHOSO’S PAN-AFRICAN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS.....81

**GERALD WEST**

THE ANC’S DEPLOYMENT OF RELIGION IN NATION BUILDING:  
FROM THABO MBEKI, TO “THE RDP OF THE SOUL”, TO JACOB ZUMA .. 115

**JEPHTHAH KIARA GATHAKA**

THE BIBLE AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: HOW BIBLICAL SCIENCE CAN  
CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PLURALITY AND  
DEMOCRACY, THE BIBLE AS A RELEVANT TOOL IN THE QUEST FOR  
ENGENDERING PLURALITY..... 145

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## **SECTION 2:**

**SOME READINGS OF THE BIBLE**

**IN/FOR POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN AFRICA ..... 176**

**MOJI RUELE**

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL READING OF THE BIBLE WITH INDIGENOUS  
COMMUNITIES: THE CASE OF THE BASARWA/SAN IN BOTSWANA. .... 177

**PHILLEMON M. CHAMBURUKA**

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON ROMANS 13:1-7  
IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ZIMBABWEAN POLITICS..... 191

<b>FRANCIS MACHINGURA</b>	
THE JUDAS ISCARIOT EPISODE IN THE ZIMBABWEAN RELIGIO-POLITICAL DEBATE OF “SELLING OUT” ...	212
<b>STEPHANIE FEDER</b>	
INSPIRING FOR LIBERATION – LEGITIMIZING FOR OCCUPATION. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EXODUS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA .....	236
<b>JOACHIM KÜGLER</b>	
POLITICS OF FEEDING: READING JOHN 6 (AND 1 COR 11) AS DOCUMENTS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS.....	251
<b>EZRA CHITANDO</b>	
“IF MY PEOPLE ...” A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF 2 CHRONICLES 7:14 DURING THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS .....	274
<b>CANISIUS MWANDAYI</b>	
TOWARDS A NEW READING OF THE BIBLE IN AFRICA – SPY EXEGESIS.....	290
<b>PIETER VERSTER</b>	
EMPOWERING THE POOR: THE BIBLE AND THE POOR IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN AFRICA WITH REFERENCE TO MANGAUNG, SOUTH AFRICA. ....	314
<hr/>	
<b>SECTION 3:</b>	
<b>THE BIBLE, GENDER AND POLITICS IN AFRICA .....</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>ADRIAAN S. VAN KLINKEN</b>	
THE POLITICS OF “BIBLICAL MANHOOD”: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MASCULINITY POLITICS AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IN A ZAMBIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCH.....	341
<b>ELIZABETH VENGEYI</b>	
THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AMONG ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN DURING SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISES.....	363
<b>TAPIWA PRAISE MAPURANGA</b>	
AN ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICATION OF 1CORINTHIANS 14:34-35 AND 1TIMOTHY 2:11-14: THE POLITICS OF PENTECOSTALISM AND WOMEN’S MINISTRIES IN ZIMBABWE.....	379
<b>NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS .....</b>	<b>395</b>

Masiwa Ragies Gunda & Joachim Kügler

## **Introduction**

Since the beginning of 2009, we started thinking about the creation of platforms for collaboration between African biblical scholars and their European counterparts, especially German scholars. We were thinking of how we could expand our collaboration, which had started in 2006. The first major breakthrough was our decision to co-edit a series, Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS), soon in its tenth volume. Further, we came up with the idea of organizing a conference that could be a starting point in establishing some kind of networking between biblical scholars of the north and south. As our idea gained traction, we were extremely elated when the Hanns Seidel Stiftung (HSS) saw value in our idea and decided to become our partners. Our idea and the conference, running on the theme “The Bible and Politics in Africa (and the West?)”, was therefore made real through the funding of the HSS. Between 29 July and 1 August 2010 biblical and theological scholars coming from Africa (specifically Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe), coming from their different bases in Africa, Europe and the United States of America converged at Kloster Banz, Bad Staffelstein, Germany alongside European biblical, theological and missiological scholars with interest on Africa, coming from Germany and the Netherlands. The conference delegates eventually agreed to alternate the conference between Germany and Africa, with the follow up conference being hosted in Botswana in July 2012. We hope this is the beginning of a long and productive collaboration.

The theme “The Bible and Politics in Africa (and the West?)” shows that the Bible was a significant component of the conference discussions because we thought the Bible was a powerful resource for both good and bad. This interest was based on the observation that “the Bible has socially occupied an uncontested place in the hearts and minds of many Zimbabweans [African Christians in general]; making Zimbabwe a *de facto* Christian state” (Machingura in this volume). In situations where the Bible is “the last court of appeal” (Gunda 2010:21), it is only logical to expect the Bible to be among the most important resources for transformation. When one considers the words of Gerald West’s protagonist in his article in this volume “You will see; Jacob Zuma knows the Bible



much better than Thabo Mbeki” one begins to appreciate the importance that is attached not only to Bible knowledge but most importantly Bible usage across African societies today. Our interest in the Bible was also driven by the realization that “what gives biblical faith its foundation and shape is the idea of God who has acted in history” (McClanahan 1999:178-9), suggesting that not only is the Bible a resource for Christian spirituality, it also is a resource for daily living in ways that some of the contributions in this volume will try to elaborate. In doing this, we sought to challenge ourselves as biblical scholars to consider responses to the challenges facing the African continent, which make these challenges clearly multisectoral and thereby calling upon all to respond.

The second major component of the theme was politics, politics in Africa or politics in the West. While the interest was on the interface between the Bible and Politics in Africa, we were not interested in limiting politics to national or party politics only, or even to a single political system. We did not and do not think that the Bible speaks for a single and particular political system, we rather are more agreeable that central to the desired biblical human community is the demand for justice, equity and equality. We were, therefore, driven by a loose understanding of politics as “anything that involves decision making, and usually characterised by diversity and conflict” according to Tapiwa Mapuranga in this volume. This broad understanding of politics meant the conference discussions and presentations touched on varied subjects and this is fairly reflected in this volume. The third major component of the theme has to do with Africa, the context from which most of the discussions would be emanating from or would be targeted at. Africa today is a divisive subject such that the „mention of the African continent brings many memories and images flooding into our minds. For some, Africa is synonymous with strife, hunger, corruption and lately human rights abuses. For others, Africa is synonymous with rich resources, minerals, metals and fertile soils. Yet for others, Africa is synonymous with “rampant mass victimization”, exploitation and plunders through slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and lately despotism has reduced most Africans to victims“ (Gunda in this volume).

The challenges facing Africa and the continued meteoric growth of Christianity in Africa coupled with the entrenchment of the Bible as the primary African book in most sub-Saharan African countries meant that Africa provided an important background to broach the subject of the

Bible and politics. Clearly, As Gerald West (1995:447) observes “Christian faith continues to grow in Africa, particularly among the poor marginalized,” meaning any solutions to their plight must of necessity include their manual of hope, that is, the Bible.

### ***Africa and Europe: Different ways of the Bible***

While we had initially planned to have a conference that critically and comparatively considered the function of the Bible in politics in Africa and in Europe, the European side of the discussion failed to receive interest in the form of viable abstracts hence the conference ended up being a conference on “Bible and Politics in Africa.” The lack of interest from the European side could be explained by noting that once one had understood “politics” to mean national politics or party politics; then those from most European countries would see no such direct relationship. It is widely assumed by many biblical scholars in Europe that the era of a Bible-influenced politics is past them, much in the same way that some scholars would argue that the role of religion in the public sphere has waned since the 1970s as Europe secularized herself (Forrester and Kee 1993). Further, it is also a rare occurrence that politicians will seek to justify their official responsibilities by resorting to the Bible in contemporary Europe, in that regard it is relatively true that the Bible is absent in European politics. The lack of interest could also be a result of the fact that Europe suffered a lot of “biblical” warfare, where wars between states and civil wars were caused by religious difference and the interpretation of the Bible played a major role in these battles (Harrisville and Sundberg 1995:1-9), hence talking of the Bible and politics may actually be opening up a sad past. A past which sought to rigidly separate state and church because “the Westphalian constitutional treaties (1648) successfully solved the problem of deep religious disagreement by imposing protoliberal religious liberties on the estates of the Holy Roman Empire, which left the subjects with exclusively secular duties towards their authorities” (Straumann 2008). Having experienced the extremes of highly biblified environments, it is not surprising therefore that peace treaties following religious wars in Europe sought to eliminate the Bible (and religion generally) from the public discourse on political topics, essentially, as Gunda argues in this book, “Europe had de-biblified the public or political sphere.” These developments are understandable also when one considers the earlier thrust and impact of historical criticism

to the integrity of the Bible as divinely originated Scripture. While these developments in Europe made the Bible appear to be of no consequence politics and public discourse, we are aware that the rise of Islamic fundamentalist groups domiciled in Europe and across the world has brought back the subject of sacred texts and politics (though focusing especially on the Koran). The general understanding among many European biblical scholars is that the Bible has no relevant and valid function in contemporary political discourse.

While there may be ways in which it could be argued that western politics have been de-biblicized since the advent of the separation of church-state in western discourse, the same cannot even be considered as a subject of discussion across Africa because the Bible “is the book. It is read in times of joy and in times of sorrow” (Togarasei 2008:73). It is not debated in many African communities that the Bible was brought in by the white man, that at some point local people felt the white man and his Bible had to be resisted, especially because of the connection both had to colonization. However, “it is becoming increasingly clear that if previously the Bible was regarded as a ‘white man’s book’ or a ‘foreign oracle’, it has gradually become an ‘African text’” (Chitando in this volume). This development has put paid to the “anti-religion” predictions that religion, especially Christianity would go into extinction. “Whereas throughout the 1950s and 1960s leading scholars and other observers, such as Indian historian and diplomat K. M. Panikkar, predicted with breathtaking confidence and uniformity that Christianity in Asia and Africa would collapse once the coercive pressures of Western colonialism were removed, Christianity and especially Protestantism saw continuing expansion, not contraction, in the last decades of the twentieth century” (Shah 2008:x). These predictions were developed in an environment where it had become clear to oppressed masses that religion and sacred texts, like the Bible, were being manipulated to prolong their suffering and exploitation by appropriating divine agency for the exploiters and perpetrators of injustices. It was apparent that some readers and leaders read the Bible to make their judgments look unquestioned and ancient, even timeless, and certainly as descended from divine authority (Gunda 2010:83). What these predictions did not see was the reality that once the status quo had been overturned, the needs of the elites could remain similar hence the contention that “there is a consistent interpretation and appropriation of the Bible by those who are privileged within the status quo to the detriment of the underprivileged and marginalized

members of society.” (Gunda 2010:66). In such communities being a Christian and citing from the Bible becomes “fashionable ... in order to seek the votes of the Christian community” (Phiri 2008:111). Citing from the Bible is particularly critical because of the undisputed position of the Bible across denominations and the idea that “Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible” (Mbiti 1986:26). A lot of political statements be they at national, community or even family level are mostly couched in biblical terms to give them credence and weight. To that extent, we engaged in this journey hoping that we could also scrutinize these biblical claims, since “the claim to be simply ‘biblical’ requires careful scrutiny. Normally it masks an attempt to construct a theory out of a few texts, which is then fathered on ‘the Bible’. Because of a fundamentalist understanding of the Bible, there is no way to control the doctrines supposedly derived from it” (Gifford 2002:180). Religion in general and the Bible in particular remains a political resource in many predominantly Christian nation-states in Africa. This use of the Bible has been observed by many scholars across Africa and a survey would show that the Bible has always occupied this function and role from the colonial period to the post-colonial era in Africa. The prominent prints of the Bible in African politics at all levels meant that the conference was a necessary starting point for scholars of the Bible who are convinced they are called to serve this world more than the biblical world. In other words, we congregated as socially engaged scholars to deal with contemporary pressing issues. This desire is apparent from the different contributions in this volume and our hope as organizers of the conference as well as editors of this volume is that these contributions will go some way in adding to the resources that are already in circulation on the Bible in Africa.

### ***An array of issues: A bird's eyeview***

This volume is divided into three sections: In the first section are six contributions focusing on the Bible and broad political discourses in Africa. In this section issues of democracy and democratization, developmental justice, Pan-Africanism and the public sphere feature prominently, especially how these interface with the use and abuse of the Bible by public figures and ordinary Bible readers. The contributions in this section largely focus on the Bible in general without focusing on a single

or particular text or section of the Bible. The section opens with the thought-provoking contribution by Masiwa Ragies Gunda who tackles the use of the Bible in the public sphere, especially by politicians. By reviving the 1990s call by Canaan Banana (1993) for a new Bible, Gunda asks whether “rewriting the Bible” can be a viable option for the search for a just society. Realizing the important position of the Bible in many African communities, Gunda argues that “the exclusive claims of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are so fundamental to their existence that it is close to impossible to “rewrite” a universally valid Bible, not only because of clear cultural differences but also because each religious tradition has a set of non-negotiables.” If the Bible cannot be rewritten as suggested by Banana, can African communities consider de-bibliifying the public sphere in the quest for establishing a just society in Zimbabwe? A third alternative is suggested as the critical biblicization of the public sphere, where politicians and public figures have to be taken to task whenever they make use of the Bible to sustain or evade genuine questions regarding their public roles and functions hence Gunda notes “by critical biblicization we mean that gradually a critical appropriation of the Bible should become a part of public discourse in Zimbabwe. We should bid farewell to the days when people (public officials and religious leaders) would get away with careless appropriations of the Bible.” Eliot Tofa brings to the fore one of the topical questions in biblical and democratic discussions: what has the Bible got to do with democracy? One could also pose an even broader question; can religion with the exclusive claims that apparently militate against plurality become a resource for democratization? Further can the Bible be a resource for democratization? These and other questions are asked and answered using the Zimbabwean experience. In carrying out a synopsis of Zimbabwean history, Tofa argues that “although, the country’s constitution allows multi-party politics, Zimbabwe largely remained a de facto one party state in the post-independence era. Arguably, the post-colonial state somewhat betrayed the spirit and letter of the struggle against colonialism and it has occasioned brutish suffering among the citizens.” It is this element of suffering that occasioned the conference and the discussions that cut across this volume. Questions are raised against post-colonial African governments mainly because they have either ignored the suffering of the masses or they have actively sponsored such suffering to finance their own luxuries. The chapter challenges the idea that God will defend the poor where it appears to be in the service of the

status quo. Tofa contends “while the argument that God is on the side of the oppressed is Biblically and spiritually true; this is hardly applicable in contemporary politics. It gives the oppressed a passive approach to fighting against their oppressors and oppressive institutions. The fight against authoritarianism in contemporary societies requires the adoption of affirmative action.” While Tofa calls for affirmative action on the democratic processes, Jannie Hunter calls for affirmative action on developmental justice as he tackles the plight of orphans in Namibia. The Bible is taken as a resource from which principles on good care and understanding of the importance of children can be gleaned. “The Bible can at most provide us with certain principles, which we find with sound and thorough interpretation of the Bible and which we may now call ‘ethical’ principles.” For communities that already live on and off the Bible, the appropriation of principles for contemporary living is not totally impossible. “The Bible describes children as part of the religious community or covenant community and they have to be respected and taught within this community, not only by the parents in their early lives but also later by the priests and others responsible.” In other words, children with or without parents are supposed to be fully catered for by the entire community for the future of the community is dependent on the future of the children.

Pan Africanism as an ideology that seeks to galvanize African opinion against western and imperial ideologies has been a part of the African political and religious landscape for the past half-century or more. This however is not to say it is unanimously agreed upon. In this volume, Obvious Vengeyi focuses on how a Zimbabwean pan-Africanist has deployed the Bible in entrenching and augmenting the Pan-Africanist arguments. This is especially interesting for a Pan-Africanist to adopt a text that has clear colonial connections. “Dr Tafataona Mahoso could be described as one of the most faithful, if not pious, disciples and rabbi (teacher) of pan-Africanism... Of late however, Mahoso has added the Bible to the list of ‘weapons’ in his quiver. While he has been citing or mentioning biblical characters in his analyses, Mahoso’s citation from the Bible is becoming more pronounced, more elaborate and even sustained” writes Vengeyi. By drawing connecting lines between the African and the Israelite, it appears the western connection is sidelined in this pan-African biblical exegesis in such a way that pan-Africanism itself becomes biblical. While Vengeyi looks at Mahoso, Gerald West looks at

the ANC of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and President Jacob Zuma and how they have consistently deployed religion in the nation building discourses. West traces the role of religion in post-apartheid South African politics from the apparent separation of politics and religion during the reign of Nelson Mandela, to the intermittent uses of the Bible by Mbeki as Deputy to Mandela until 2006 when Mbeki became blatant in his use of the Bible in the “RDP of the Soul” and finally to President Jacob Zuma. To close this first section, Jephthah Gathaka interrogates the use of the Bible in the sermons of Archbishop David Gitari of the Anglican Church focusing especially “on how he used the Bible in his sermons to rebuke the authorities in Kenya on various socio-economic and political issues and thus contributed immensely to the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in Kenya.” Gathaka argues that “the Bible continues to be used as a tool to advance democracy in Africa. It has been accepted as part and parcel of instruction for the African way of life though it is alien in origin, geography, language and history. Its literary forms however are very much like many African forms. Its cultural background is so much what the African everyday life entails.” In making these observations Gathaka sheds light on the thinking behind the deployment of the Bible in the public sphere across many African countries and communities, it is now widely seen as an African book.

In section two one encounters various and specific readings of the Bible or parts of the Bible in particular contexts in Africa. One of the most common ways of engaging with the Bible in Africa is “contextual” where the most important context is that of the African community. This is not to downplay the fact that different contexts “are at play in interpreting the biblical message; the ‘Bible culture context’; the culture of the missionaries; and the culture of the receiving people” (Verstraelen 1998:85-6). This section is opened by Moji Ruele with his contextual reading of the Bible with the Basarwa/ San of Botswana. Ruele argues that a contextual approach makes certain that “Christians are reminded that they can no longer ignore the complexities of their societies, be they political, economic, or otherwise, but instead, they should collectively exercise moral responsibility to work with and through structures in their various countries, because, the Bible as a Christian document which also deals with political issues provides that forum.” Still on the question of context, one biblical text that has been prominent in political discourses for a long time is Romans 13 with the exhortation to submit to authorities. Phillemon Chamburuka analyses how this text has been used in the

contemporary politics of Zimbabwe, especially noting that “with the advent of a meaningful opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, this text started to be the talk of the day.” It is suggested that once political power had come under threat, the ruling elites in Zimbabwe resorted to biblical justifications for their continued stay in power and were happy “to quarantine the church from political affairs as if to suggest that she had no role or influence in such matters”, highlighting the fact that “since Constantine, Christians have long been confused about what to do when presented with evil or unjust regimes” (Budde 2011:152). Francis Machingura looks at the interface between the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot and the political concept of “selling out” as articulated in Zimbabwean politics. “The concept of ‘selling out’, although having its background in the world of the Bible, that is, the gospels, has created a fertile ground in the contemporary religious, social, economic and political environment of Zimbabwe.” Among the various problems caused by the use of this labeling being the upsurge in politically motivated violence against those labeled sell-outs. Machingura proposes a re-reading of the Judas Iscariot narratives with a view to eliminating the vagaries that have been exposed by those who “deliberately exaggerated their characterization of others as ‘sell outs’ suggesting that violence against such people was justified.”

Stephanie Feder throws light on the contradictions of the readings and meanings of the Exodus within Southern Africa focusing on Paul Kruger, Isaiah Shembe and Musa Dube. The three represent the Boer settler communities of South Africa, the black nationalists and contemporary African postcolonial feminist. Feder shows how the same text can inspire liberation forces while at the same time legitimizing occupying forces, focusing especially on South Africa, Feder shows how the Bible became an indispensable part of the contending parties showing that “although the biblical text remained the same, the results and the political intention for which Kruger, Shembe and Dube used the text were totally opposed”, showing especially with Kruger how “one’s own perspective on the Bible could become a dangerous one” if not understood in a context that listens to the pain of the other. Joachim Kügler engages with the all-important topic of eating and feeding noting that “the Gospel of John is traditionally seen as the most ‘spiritual’ gospel without any political dimension. In antiquity, however, there is no kind of religion without political dimension and I even dare to doubt that a non-political religion



exists today.” This sets the tone to the approach on the Lord’s Supper, it is political and social and it is a real meal. “The egalitarian structure of early Christian communities is an indispensable expression of God’s new world order, and therefore early Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a different way from the banquets of the old world.” Kügler gives many insightful principles to be learned from biblical texts, among them; “Do not trust royal breadwinners, trust the one and selfless king, social justice and gender equality belong together.”

The Zimbabwean “crises decade” (1998-2008) has captured the imagination of many scholars and ordinary citizens, not only because of the spectacular collapse of a community that had promised so much before but because of the manner some of the clearest consequences of mismanagement of national resources became couched up in religious and spiritual language. Ezra Chitando focuses on the use of 2Chro. 7: 14 during the years of political, economic and social crises in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2008, showing that “as Zimbabweans sought to come to terms with the crisis, the Bible served as a powerful resource. The Bible was resorted to in the quest to find meaning.” This text became a rallying point in an interesting period where everything else went down with the exception of inflation and religiosity. The text, Chitando observes also became a ruse to protect the clear human hand behind the calamitous suffering inflicted on the people of Zimbabwe. Canisius Mwandayi takes a rather unusual perspective on the Jesus Movement by invoking the fears, rumours and facts surrounding the operations of state secret services across the universe and suggesting that using “spy exegesis”, one could understand the Jesus movement as having survived by deploying the techniques and strategies used by secret or spy services. He argues that “one common thing the world over is that world leaders and influential people since time immemorial are faced with the task of making important decisions every day, and information (known as intelligence) is the key to making the right decision.” This so-called spy-exegesis depends heavily on some clues of information gathering in the Jesus narratives. “Apart from the ‘Jesus knew’ passages we also find incidences where unnamed informers brought word to him” contends Mwandayi. To close this section is Pieter Verster whose contribution focuses on the dominant African theme, poverty! “Stories from Africa are often stories of despair. Social, economic and political problems are challenging the search for a better life for many in Africa.” Verster looks at what churches are doing to alleviate the poverty of those living in

informal settlements in South Africa, he also goes on to show how the Bible has also become a resource, which is giving hope to these people. Finally, in section three, focus is now on the Bible, gender and politics in Africa and three contributions occupy this part of the book. Adriaan van Klinken opens the section with his contribution on the politics of biblical manhood. This is a contribution that raises critical questions on concepts of masculinities and with a case study from a Zambian Pentecostal Church; this is a thought provoking contribution in an area that remains fairly new and largely still developing within African studies. Central to the subject of masculinities both in the case study of van Klinken and in general masculinities studies is “the ‘distortion’ of manhood perceived in society, for example in phenomena such as violence against women, men’s sexual performances, homosexuality, alcoholism, and an overall irresponsibility of men in matters concerning marriage and family life.” The chapter shows how the Zambian Northmead Assembly Church has tried to use the Bible to reconstruct a responsible manhood. Elizabeth Vengeyi looks at the manner in which Zimbabwean women engaged with the Bible during the crises decade 2000-2010. She observes that “due to colonial and contemporary factors especially the emergent Pentecostalism that has dominated Zimbabwe, which views the Bible as so central to daily living that it is consulted on every subject of life and treated as fetish by the members, the Bible has become crucial in socio-economic and political discourses.” This importance attached to the Bible means that the Bible is the readily available resource for those in need of hope and legitimacy. She shows how a female politician “presented herself as a woman who fears God and who gets inspiration from the Bible for her political path. She, in an interview argued that when she talks about injustice, she is basically referring to all the things that are forbidden in the Bible.” Finally, Tapiwa Mapuranga considers the contribution of Pentecostalism in the empowerment of women in ministry and how some have tried to undermine the same through a reading of 1Cor. 14:34-35 as well as 1Tim. 2:11-14. “Pentecostalism has brought with it an influx of women pastors and preachers in the church. This new (or rather revived) phenomenon of women and leadership roles has sparked fierce social debates. The central question being, ‘should women be allowed to preach and teach in the church?’” While in some churches, ordination remains a preserve of men, there are many among

the Pentecostal churches which have now opened the doors to women in ministry.

## **Conclusion**

The journey that started in 2009 and which is now maturing into a book of various contributions on the subject of Bible and politics in Africa has been and remains predicated on the assumption that we are called to be “socially engaged biblical scholars” agreeing “that the Bible must be read from the perspective of the poor and marginalized, that the Bible must be read with the poor and marginalized, that Bible reading is related to social transformation, and that the Bible must be read critically” (West 1995:454). These are convictions that run through the different contributions the readers will encounter in this volume. Unless we make contributions towards the betterment of our respective communities and the world at large, we think we would have failed in our calling for two major reasons: As we engage with the Bible, we are aware that we are dealing not with a piece of ancient literature only but with a collection of writings considered holy and sacred by believers meaning we do not seek an audience for the Bible, it already has a huge following. We therefore engage with the Bible not only to understand its history but also as a way to addressing our concerns, we may differ on how we do this but we agree that doing so is necessary (Rogerson 2000:47). It is in this context that Joerg Rieger (2007:300) argues “one of the basic reasons why religions have the power to change the world and to ‘birth global peace and justice’ is because they hold collective power that is more in touch with the voiceless than governments or anyone else.” This fact alone means it is almost impossible for Africa to follow the secularization that happened in Europe in the manner it happened there; rather we need to admit that the Bible is a resource and force that can be appropriated for good, even if it has been appropriated for evil sometimes. Further, we are driven by the realization that “the ultimate context is the divine purpose that justice-righteousness should be realized in human society on earth” (McConville 2006:99). This is what we desire in common than a single political system or economic system or social system; we seek justice, equality and equity for all in the world. The fact that we do not agree on the ways to justice and peace is absolutely normal. First because the field of politics is by nature a field of diversity and second the Bible is in itself a document of diversity. Thus the topic “Bible and poli-

tics” brings together two “machines” which generate plurality and the best thing we can learn is to deal with diversity. In the name of peace and justice we have to go beyond accepting plurality as just unavoidable. We have to cherish it as human richness. If this volume contributes a bit in learning this then we have done a really good job.

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## **SECTION 1:**

### **THE BIBLE AND BROAD POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN AFRICA**

*Masiwa Ragies Gunda*

## ***“Rewriting” the Bible or De-bibliifying the Public Sphere? Proposals and propositions on the usage of the Bible by public figures in Zimbabwe***

### ***Introduction***

Religion, theology and sacred texts remain highly uniting and divisive elements in human societies over millennia. As Zimbabwe tethers on the brink of collapse even with the Government of National Unity (GNU), we have all been asking ourselves hard questions because we all seem united in not wanting this beloved country to collapse. While most of us have been looking squarely at the doorsteps of all powerful institutions looking for answers, we have been convinced that the challenges we face are political and economic resulting in some social imbalances. We have hardly sought to understand the interface between the political, economic challenges and religious, theological frameworks and the role played by sacred texts in sustaining such religious and theological frameworks.

This study is born out of the Zimbabwean experience and has a special focus on the use of the sacred texts in the public sphere in Zimbabwe. As clearly illustrated in other papers, the Christian Bible has been extensively used in the public sphere by politicians, judges, industrialists and religious functionaries in such ways as to raise critical questions about the nature of development we aspire for as Zimbabweans. I am fully aware of the importance of all manner of economic and political reforms prescribed for our society, but unless we begin to engage with the fundamental beliefs that largely function in our lives at the subconscious level, we never achieve the goals we set for ourselves. This paper seeks to critically ask: what is the future of the Bible in Zimbabwe? Shall we reconsider the call made by Canaan S. Banana two decades ago? His call was to “re-write the Bible!” Alternatively, shall we seriously consider the way of Europe, a way created over centuries? This is the way that essentially “de-bibliifies” the public sphere. It minimizes the direct or sometimes even perceived use of sacred texts in the public sphere by providing a number of checks and balances on how and where sacred texts can be used, a process largely understood by many as secularization. These appear to be two extremes on a continuum of resolving this conflict.

This article argues that, a critical deployment of sacred texts in the public sphere can be productively used to extract accountability and responsibility among all citizens.

### **Background to this study**

As already intimated above, this study is informed by the situation obtaining Zimbabwe, and the desire to see a prospering Zimbabwe cannot be said to have been a passive element in the writing of this paper. However, there is a historical basis for raising the questions that we raise in this study. Canaan S. Banana, the first president of Zimbabwe from 1980 until 1987 is indeed a courageous man, not only was he the president of Zimbabwe, he was also a Methodist Church in Zimbabwe ordained minister, a theologian of note, Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe. These are offices that Banana held with distinction and it is unfortunate that his legacy was tarnished because he was convicted of "engaging in unnatural acts with men". While all these offices demands one to be courageous, the reason for calling Banana courageous lies in the fact that he made a daring call in 1991, when he called for the "re-writing of the Bible" as a way of finding long term solutions to the problems of political and economic domination which are sometimes packaged as divinely sanctioned ambitions. There is no doubt that Banana would ruffle a lot of feathers, especially when one reads Banana's explication of the holy, a word that we use to describe sacred texts such as the Christian Bible:

To maintain something as holy – sacred and divine – is a label and a concept people have about something they treasure. It is also a way to maintain the status quo and to develop an unthinking populace which continues to be at the mercy of the elite. Present and future generations must not be held hostage by dogmas and dogmatists who were themselves captives of their own parochial world. Holiness must not be confused with legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> (Canaan S. Banana)

This call may be at home in Africa, because all the reasons that led Banana into making this call can be found in Africa. However, when it was made, Banana was responding to the heartrending situation of the Pales-

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<sup>1</sup> Canaan S. Banana "The Case for a New Bible" in: *"Rewriting" the Bible: The Real Issues*, Ed. by I. Mukonyora, J. L. Cox and F. J. Verstraelen. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993, 17-31, 18.



tinians and the Israelites, who despite their long history as neighbouring peoples, were escalating hostilities in the 1980s and 1990s, hostilities that continue to date. Banana was brave for making this call because he risked and received hatred from all major religions but especially Christianity in Zimbabwe. He was labeled all sorts of names and when he faced trial for “performing unnatural acts” with other men, it was taken as due punishment for his bold call years earlier. Indeed, Banana was a bold man. This article therefore engages Banana on the call to re-write the Bible, as one option of restructuring society focusing especially on the practicality of the call.

While this call by Banana received a lot of attention from a number of stakeholders, especially Christian leaders and ordinary Christians, other actions surrounding the Bible by prominent people have not received as much attention. Below, I will bring two statements of conviction from two prominent Zimbabweans, one a Member of Parliament and Banana again.

I stand here representing God the Almighty. Women are not equal to men. This is a dangerous bill, and let it be known in Zimbabwe that the rights, privileges and status of men are gone.<sup>2</sup> (Timothy Mubhawu MP, MDC, addressing Parliament on the debate on the Domestic Violence Bill).

There is no such animal as neutrality; neutrality at best means deafening silence and indifference, and at worst smiling at and admiring the status quo. I refuse to accept the notion that Jesus assumed the role of an honoured guest in the theatre of human slaughter and misery.<sup>3</sup> (Canaan S. Banana).

The mention of the African continent brings many memories and images flooding into our minds. For some, Africa is synonymous with strife, hunger, corruption and lately human rights abuses. For others, Africa is synonymous with rich resources, minerals, metals and fertile soils. Yet for others, Africa is synonymous with “rampant mass victimization”, exploitation and plunders through slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and lately despotism have reduced most Africans to victims. There may be even more images that are in your minds as well not covered here so far. For some like myself, Africa, particularly

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<sup>2</sup> Masiwa Ragies Gunda, “Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos in the quest for a just society in contemporary Zimbabwe” in: *BOTSA Electronic Forum*, available online: [http://www.mhs.no/article\\_533.shtml](http://www.mhs.no/article_533.shtml) accessed 28 June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Banana “Foreword” in: Michael Lapsley, *Neutrality or Co-option? Anglican Church and State from 1964 until the independence of Zimbabwe*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986, 7.

Southern Africa, brings the image of the Bible flooding in our minds, colonialism was inspired by a reading of the Bible, which inspired some Dutch sailors to identify South Africa as the Promised Land, given to them by God.<sup>4</sup> Colonialism was packaged as a blessing from God to the people of Africa and was early on understood as part of the trinity of Colonialism, Civilization and Christianity. The use of the Hamitic myth was one of the rationalizations of the mass victimization of indigenous Africans. The fight against colonialism was packaged as a new "Exodus from the oppression of Pharaoh" to the "Promised Land flowing milk and honey", yet "the Exodus to Freedom (has) turned out to be an exodus to bewilderment; honey and milk (have) turned out to be agony, killings and hatred."<sup>5</sup> In the post-colonial era, we have had several politicians proclaiming the greatness of God, even claiming to have been appointed by God to be leaders of their respective countries.<sup>6</sup> The Bible has been a feature of the public sphere in Africa for bad and for good, inspiring selfless deeds by some, while sustaining selfish deeds by others.

The question to be raised in this presentation is critical as we meet for this first ever conference on "Bible and Politics in Africa (and the West?)": is the biblicization of the public sphere good for Africa? By which it is meant, is the widespread usage of the Bible in the public sphere good for Africa? Behind the biblicization of the public sphere is the assumption that the Bible is clear and authoritative on all matters. But, is the Bible clear? Is it binding on non-Christians? To the question on the clarity of the Bible, the public declaration of Leonard Hodgson may be of greater use;

As one who has been a professional teacher of theology for forty-three years, I now publicly declare my hope that no pupil of mine will ever be guilty of using the expression: 'The Bible says...' Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, when that expression is used, it means the speaker has found some passage which he/[she] quotes as authority for the position he/[she] is maintaining, regardless of the fact that those who disagree with him/[her] may find others which support their views. In the hundredth case its use may be more deserving of respect: it may be based on a study of the Bible as a whole, and

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<sup>4</sup> Roy J. May (Jnr), "The Promised Land and Land Theft": excerpt from *Joshua and the Promised Land*, available online: <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/joshua/may7180.stm#T22> accessed 13/07/2010.

<sup>5</sup> Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Acton Publ., 2003, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Gunda "Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos."

the words may be intended to mean that what is being said is in accordance with... 'the Bible view of life'. Even so the phrase is misleading, and its use is to be discouraged.<sup>7</sup>

If these reservations apply to ordinary Christians who are influenced by their dogmas, what then could be the impact when such dogmas are allowed to influence the public sphere? Further, such dogmatic uses can easily be sponsored to influence public opinions, especially where texts are read to spiritualize causes of social challenges.<sup>8</sup> It is argued in this paper that one of the critical contributions of the biblicization of the public sphere in Africa has been the creation "of the God-fearing ruler [public official] ...who fulfills the law of God, and that such a king [public official] inevitably pleases God..."<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding this association, Jesse Mugambi correctly identifies the paradox that afflicts liberation movements and which can be extended to African states, some of which are still governed by former liberation movements, by noting that "when liberation has been achieved, there is always the temptation of former slaves to become oppressors themselves."<sup>10</sup> Janice McLaughlin was informed by members of ZANU-PF, when it was still a liberation movement, that "by preaching against the use of force, [missionaries] softened the people so they could not defend their rights. Religion is nothing but a concept aimed at preserving the white rule."<sup>11</sup> In these cases the paradox noted by Mugambi is best illustrated because the liberators are now in the forefront of "monopolizing honey and milk with greed, leaving the majority in the shadows of poverty and death."<sup>12</sup> Clearly, therefore, the unaccountability of public officials is a long term challenge dating back to colonialism and has outlived colonialism.

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom volume 2*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Paul Gifford „The Bible as a Political Document in Africa” in: *Scriptural Politics: The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa*, Ed. by Niels Kastfelt. London: Hurst and Company, 2003, pp16-28, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," 23.

<sup>10</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton Publ., 2003, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Janice McLaughlin, *On the Frontline: Catholic Missions in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, Harare: Baobab Books, 1996, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal*, 101-2.

## **Rewriting the Bible or de-bibliifying? Some fundamental differences and a possible middle way**

While I have been greatly impressed by Banana's courage to even think about "rewriting the Bible" let alone that he could publicly make such pronouncements, I, nonetheless, am aware of fundamental differences between his call then, and my call today. Banana's call is a reaction to the continued challenge of Middle East peace in which region "Christians, Jews and Muslims, who share history and who share an understanding of sacred scriptures out of common origins, continue to fight one another in order to achieve domination politically, socially, economically and religiously."<sup>13</sup> The focus on the Middle East by Banana was at a time when no major challenges were confronting the people of Zimbabwe hence the search for illustration and inspiration from distant places, things have since changed. The call I make today is not inspired by the Middle East, rather it is inspired by Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general. From the time Banana made his call, living standards in Zimbabwe have gone down<sup>14</sup> and from 2000 economic, social and political challenges have become part of everyday living for ordinary Zimbabweans. The multiplicity of conflicts in Africa has left many Africans in search of a "just society", a society that guarantees them dignity and protection as they search for happiness and prosperity, a society that creates opportunities for all citizens irrespective of their faith, race, gender and sexual orientation background. This is the background to my call. Further, I am aware that Banana envisages a situation where the world will "create a Bible that reflects the realities and possibilities of today's world [focusing on] a unifying element that will help our world to set aside our differences and learn to live together."<sup>15</sup> My own call does not share the optimism of Banana about the world we live in; neither do I share the vision of a world that is not inherently controlled by selfish interests.

Banana's call for the "rewriting" of the Bible is inspired by the vision of a supra-Bible, which is above all contemporary religions, in which the voices and experiences of all peoples of the world are condensed into a

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<sup>13</sup> Banana "The Case for a New Bible", 28.

<sup>14</sup> Moeletsi Mbeki, *Architects of Poverty: Why African Capitalism needs Changing*, Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2009, 101ff.

<sup>15</sup> Banana "The Case for a New Bible", 29.

single universal collection of sacred writings for a universal religion.<sup>16</sup> While noble this vision maybe, I am coming from a background where I am inclined to argue that religions are by nature selfish and exclusive in their claims. Banana is aware of this element of religion because he correctly identifies one of the major challenges as the “ideology of chosenness”, which he blames for many injustices in the world.<sup>17</sup> The ideology of chosenness plays a critical role in the self-understanding, survival and propagation of the three Abrahamic traditions, that is, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, yet interesting is that the others do not consider their peers as equally chosen and seek to convert the others.

Despite these fundamental differences, through the work of Banana an alternative proposal, largely operational in the European context, would be to call for the de-biblification of the public sphere in Africa because the vision of Banana is our vision today, he yearned for a legitimate system of governance that guarantees opportunities to all citizens, a system that increases “its capacity to pull people together as they search for happiness and fulfillment.”<sup>18</sup> This is in contrast to the ideals of the “ideology of chosenness”, so central in religions and through which non-believers are sometimes viewed as necessary victims or collateral damage in pursuit of private gain. This alternative call, is based on my opinion that “rewriting” the Bible as advocated for by Canaan Banana is a mammoth task that is likely going to be attacked by the different religious traditions that are part of the status quo, that Banana so much wishes to change. The exclusive claims of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are so fundamental to their existence that it is close to impossible to “rewrite” a universally valid Bible, not only because of clear cultural differences but also because each religious tradition has a set of non-negotiables.

The de-biblification of the public sphere on the other hand recognizes this exclusivity of religions, and does not seek to create a supra-religion for all. Instead, de-biblification seeks to remove religion from the public sphere, which is already constitutionally legitimately secular. This call is also a recognition of the fact that while religion has played important roles in different societies, it nonetheless has also been a critical instru-

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Banana “The Case for a New Bible”, 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Banana “The Case for a New Bible”, 21-3.

<sup>18</sup> David Kaulem, ‘Christian Responses to the Crisis in Zimbabwe’, *Unpublished paper*, presented at Arrupe College, Harare, 23/10/2006.

ment in "blurring issues of accountability and legitimacy" within the public realm, a public realm that is presided over by people who think running the states is an entitlement and not a privilege.<sup>19</sup> It is observable that the Bible and religions in general have been central in this substitution of legitimacy and accountability by dictatorial tendencies, and this call is based on the assumption that de-bibliifying the public sphere maybe one way towards establishing accountability and legitimacy in the public officials, by removing the association of the divine with public policy and duty.

Finally, de-bibliifying the public sphere is also based on the misgivings that sometimes characterize different works from African scholars. First is the acknowledgement that the Bible is a feature of the public sphere in Africa, and was widely acknowledged as a valid feature of the public sphere especially during dominant years of Liberation and Black theologies. However, at the inception of Reconstruction theology, Mugambi called for the shift from liberation to reconstruction and challenged the validity of the Exodus-Eisodus motif as a paradigm for liberation and condemned it for being a model for colonial plunder.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, this influence of the Bible on the public sphere was unacceptable. The reservations of Mugambi were based on the understanding that this motif could and was being manipulated by the elites to sustain selfish interests at the expense of the "common good". As an alternative to the Exodus motif, Mugambi chose Ezra-Nehemiah as the valid motif. To this, I argued that the worst problem with Ezra-Nehemiah is that they can be models for unaccountability and can also be manipulated by the elites.<sup>21</sup> Central to these differences among different theological persuasions is the fact that "biblical texts are typically open to competing reasonable interpretations"<sup>22</sup> by which it is possible that there is no single correct interpretation of any given text. This fluidity of the text then

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Masiwa Ragies Gunda "Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos in the quest for a just society in contemporary Zimbabwe" in: *BOTSA Electronic Forum*, available online: [http://www.mhs.no/article\\_533.shtml](http://www.mhs.no/article_533.shtml) accessed 28 June 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold war*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publ. Ltd, 1995, 40ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gunda, "African Theology of Reconstruction: Painful Realities and Practical Options" in: *Exchange* 38/1, 2009, 84-102, 89.

<sup>22</sup> Charles H. Cosgrove, "Introduction" in: *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, Ed. by Charles H. Cosgrove. London: T & T Clark International, 2004, 1-22, 2.

allows for unconscious as well as deliberate twisting of some texts to sustain private interests.

The fundamental difference between the observations of Mugambi and myself is that while we both tried to find a new model for the influence of the Bible on the public sphere, Mugambi settled for Ezra-Nehemiah while I settled for Amos. This disagreement may be taken as a basis for de-biblifying the public sphere since it clearly shows that some of the models may eventually be manipulated by public office bearers as I pointed out in my critique of the Ezra-Nehemiah model. The threat posed by the biblification of the public sphere can better be appreciated from the words of John Calvin spoken in 1587:

The power with which the preachers should be endowed will here be clearly described. Since they are called as administrators and propagators of the word of God, they have to dare everything and to coerce all the great and mighty of this world, to bow to God and to serve him alone. They have to give orders to all, from the lowliest to the most elevated. They have to introduce the statute of God, to destroy the kingdom of Satan, to spare the lambs and to exterminate the wolves. They have to exhort and to instruct the obedient, to accuse the reluctant and opposing. They can bind and absolve, cast lightning and thunder, but all this according to the word of God.<sup>23</sup>

The power abrogated to the preachers by Calvin in the above statement clearly shows how the power of God can become deadly when it has to be operationalized by mere mortals who take their enemies and friends to be God's enemies and friends respectively. The danger posed by this breed of preachers, was equally feared and inspired the historical critical study of the Bible in the seventeenth century Dutch Kingdom, where Spinoza argued against "the interpreters of the divine word."<sup>24</sup> This is what makes Banana's call self-defeating, in that however we rewrite the Bible, the interpreters or preachers of that rewritten text will mostly likely continue to manipulate the rewritten text to drive their own interests, especially if their word can become the policy of a society with power to give direction to the public sphere. Where the public sphere is constitutionally secular, it could be better and easier to de-biblify the public sphere than rewrite a universal Bible which would be selectively

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<sup>23</sup> John Calvin quoted in: Peter Bernholz „Ideology, Sects, State and Totalitarianism: A General Theory“ in: *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen: Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs Band II*, Ed. by Hans Maier & Michael Schäfer. Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997, pp271-298, 289.

<sup>24</sup> Preus Samuel, *Spinoza and the irrelevancy of Biblical Authority*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001.

acceptable to all believers. Talking of de-biblication of the public sphere draws the objection of limiting Christianity or in some cases the accusations of trying to declare Christianity illegal or bluntly, a declaration of war on Christianity. Further, there are some who object to de-biblication because they interpret it as a return to the eras of being persecuted for being Christian. I am fully aware that this fate awaits anybody who makes such a call within the Zimbabwean context.

In the context of Zimbabwe, therefore, the two options can only spell doom for whoever makes the call. Rewriting, as already seen in the case of Banana brought him too many enemies than friends.<sup>25</sup> The same fate awaits the call to de-bibliify the public sphere. Any attempt at changing the position of the Bible in Zimbabwe is taken as a direct challenge on God because the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>26</sup> The Bible's availability on the public sphere is seen as the workings of God and it is this belief that has allowed some to manipulate the Bible. With many Zimbabwean Christians being largely conservative and evangelical in the manner in which they view the Bible, the two options discussed above will not be tenable hence the suggestion for a middle way, a "critical biblication of the public sphere" that I propose here. By critical biblication we mean that gradually a critical appropriation of the Bible should become a part of public discourse in Zimbabwe. We should bid farewell to the days when people (public officials and religious leaders) would get away with careless appropriations of the Bible.

The manner in which the Bible is invoked as in the case of Mubhawa cited above should no longer be allowed to escape public censure and correction if we are to build a society that is just. The tools of critical biblical engagement must be distilled in a language that allows more people to engage with the text of the Bible critically. This is possible if we follow the lead set by Gerald West and others, where scholars and untrained readers of the Bible become reading partners.<sup>27</sup> This way, not only are scholars exposed to the reading techniques of ordinary readers, they also equip the ordinary readers with their own reading techniques and thereby fostering a critical appropriation of the Bible in more people than if scholars only waited for University students. This critical appro-

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<sup>25</sup> Mukonyora et al (eds), *"Rewriting" the Bible: the Real Issues*, x.

<sup>26</sup> Gunda, *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe*, (BiAS 3), 2010.

<sup>27</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.



priation of the Bible can become a partner of de-biblication in some instances without raising the ire of Zimbabwean Christians as shall be demonstrated in the section below.

### ***The Public Sphere: A delimitation exercise***

While we have considered above the possibilities of what we can do with the Bible, we still have not asked a prerequisite question; what is the meaning of public sphere in this article? I will therefore begin by undertaking a delimitation exercise, setting boundaries and clarifying the usage of the phrase “public sphere” in this article and to contrast it with the “private sphere”. It is never easy to carry out a delimitation exercise without raising eyebrows but any attempt will be made here to do this in a fairly sustainable manner. Public sphere is conceived of here in terms of place and event. First, by public sphere, therefore, we mean places that are of necessity to all citizens and residents of a particular country. Second, we also mean events that are of necessity and of significance to all citizens and residents of a given country. Clearly from this broad delimitation, Church buildings and religious gatherings are not understood as constituting the public sphere because they lack in the key marker of the concept, that is, they are not of necessity to all citizens and residents of a country, because of the freedom of worship provision in our constitution.

Clearly therefore, this paper agrees with Wole Soyinka’s “ideal state” which allows individuals to follow their personal beliefs while acknowledging that religion primarily belongs to the private sphere, something that is widely guaranteed by the constitutions of the African nation-states.<sup>28</sup> While political campaigns and gatherings appear to fall outside of this conception of public sphere because ideally they are only freely attended, there are reasons which make them part of the public sphere. First, political rallies are intended to gather enough support from all citizens in order to get the mandate to govern, the subjects to be governed will include all citizens including those voting against the winning party. Second, since political rallies are supposed to be events where would-be governors articulate how they intend to govern; their pro-

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<sup>28</sup> Wole Soyinka cited in: Holger Bernt Hansen “The Bible, The Qur’an and the African Polity: Towards a Secular State?” in: *Scriptural Politics: The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa*, Ed. by Niels Kastfelt, 2003, pp42-54, 42.

nouncements are necessarily of interest to all citizens hence they should be considered as falling under the public sphere.

The public sphere in terms of places is informed by the fact that there are places where all citizens expect to be assisted, especially through the government or other service providers. In these places, service is for all citizens irrespective of their religious confession if they have one or even if they are agnostic or atheistic. The only qualification for such service is being a citizen or resident of that country. Government offices, hospitals and clinics, including privately run surgeries for as long as they offer to treat all patients irrespective of their religious faith or lack of it, banks, insurance companies, universities, colleges and schools (unless they clearly discriminate against other faiths in their recruitment of both students and staff), sporting facilities, public transport etc. It is clear from this understanding that it is possible for private citizens to create public spheres, hence the idea of private property does not necessarily apply in all circumstances.

Privately owned public spheres would include such institutions as schools, hospitals, banks etc, which may be owned by an individual but serving all citizens and residents. The faith of the owner cannot therefore be imposed on clients. These are places where citizens, Christians, Muslims, Bahais, Hindus, Traditionalists, Agnostics and Atheists all expect to be served. The services are also clearly marked out to be for all those who meet certain requirements but none of which being "religious faith" whereas if faith is specified, then such institutions would naturally become part of the private sphere. This is clearly the case in some schools where applicants and parents/guardians are clearly informed of the religious basis of the institution and where acceptance of a place is taken as acceptance that one would abide by the faith demands. In those places where service is offered to all, without the faith requirement, a policy of de-biblicization would appear much more reasonable and indeed foster the idea of tolerance in a pluralistic society like ours.

The public sphere in terms of events is informed by the fact that there are events that bring together people of the same country as part of a shared history and identity. In Africa, after years of colonialism, independence celebration is such an event that clearly is meant to go beyond one's religious faith. Sporting celebrations are also supposed to be broader than religious convictions; religious education in public schools must also be broader than "Bible Knowledge or Divinity". Other public

events are national speeches by the head of state and/or government, national budget presentations by the minister of finance, monetary statement presentation by central bank governor. This would also apply to the official opening of parliament, and public meetings between elected officials and their constituents, where such elections were held and were open to people of other faiths or Agnostics and Atheists. Such events are considered significant by all citizens; it is in these circumstances also that the call for de-biblication can become important. There is no attempt to undermine the role of Christianity or the Bible in the private lives of Christians.

However, in the case where public officials are issuing public statements and are interested in extracting legitimacy from the Bible, it would be critical for an analysis of such usage of the Bible to censure and rebuke misuse and abuse of the Bible for political or economic mileage by such prominent individuals and corporate institutions.<sup>29</sup> The use of the Bible by prominent Zimbabweans was covered in my earlier publication citing, Dr. Herbert Murerwa, then Minister of Finance, Renson Gasela, then an opposition MP<sup>30</sup> among those people who directly cited biblical texts to make an argument. Where such things happen, a response must come from the critical appropriation of the Bible, to show the dishonest and selfish interests that lie behind such uses of the Bible. The case of Mubhawa cited above is yet another example of cases where an immediate response and rebuke is called for before some destructive ideas are canonized in the society. Similarly, it is on record that in 2008 after losing the first round of elections, Robert Mugabe came up with some reason why he would not vacate office, even if he lost elections by suggesting he was put in the office by God. While he did not cite the Bible directly, a response to such reckless and careless statements by public officials should have been strongly worded, showing the mischief in the statement. The public sphere, in my thinking calls for a combination of de-biblication and critical biblication.

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<sup>29</sup> Econent Wireless makes use of John 14: 14 on its recharge cards as a marketing gimmick. The text “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it”, clearly has nothing to do with the business of Econent unless Econent now claims some divine status!

<sup>30</sup> Gunda, Reconsidering the Relevance of Amos, see also Gunda and Mtetwa “The Bible as a Political Resource in Zimbabwe” in Chitando (ed), *Religion in Politics, Politics in Religion in Zimbabwe’s Crisis Decade* (forthcoming).

### ***A Biblified Public Sphere: Can the Bible be Offensive?***

Of critical importance here is the assumption that if the Bible (understood in this paper as a private document, Christian Scripture) interferes with the public sphere, what stops the public sphere from interfering with the Bible? Clearly, one of the questions that hardly feature in African discussions on the Bible is the possibility of the Bible being offensive or detrimental to social well-being, this despite the association of the Bible with colonial plunder and racial segregation. As we meet here to discuss the Bible in/and politics in Africa, is it not a better forum to begin thinking critically about the role of the Bible in our communities. It is one thing to argue on the good intentions of most biblical texts and the concepts of justice, fairness and the respect for human dignity, but it is completely different when one considers the manner in which the Bible features in our public spheres. In being suspicious to public usages of the Bible, we are inspired by the critical observations of Norman Gottwald, when he notes that issues about sacred books were never simply about religion but essentially about who had controlling power in the society.<sup>31</sup> It would appear, however, that scholars of the Bible in Africa have largely ignored this fundamental dimension of the Bible and have therefore focused largely on how the underprivileged people continue to derive inspiration from the Bible to the benefit of an inefficient and corrupt public institution.

This is certainly important, but at the same time, is the uncritical biblification of the public sphere not also based on exploiting this confessional use of the Bible by smuggling the divine in areas and events that are supposed to be judged in terms of their efficiency and not religiosity? Should the Bible be let to influence the necessary "wider social responsibility" to the extent where it appears that "only Christians matter"?<sup>32</sup> Having spent two hours in a government office waiting to be served by an official discussing personal issues on a public phone, all I could do is read biblical quotation after biblical quotation, what is the purpose of these biblical quotations? How would I have felt if I were a Muslim, Baha'i, or traditionalist? Is the Bible not being offensive under these circumstances? With the Bible having a life of its own, it would appear that where once legitimation depended on the Church, now the Bible is

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<sup>31</sup> Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 111.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Gifford „The Bible as a Political Document in Africa”, 20.

performing the “supportive and legitimizing function”<sup>33</sup> for an inefficient and outright incompetent public institution or officials inasmuch as it was used to legitimize the massive land disposessions that occurred during the colonial era.<sup>34</sup> Or, imagine at the much awaited national budget presentation by the minister of finance, who is presiding over a melting economy which melting is a result of a combination of high level corruption, condoned mismanagement of resources for the benefit of the elite, and a round of international sanctions presumably targeted but whose effects may not be as targeted, the minister of finance invokes the Bible, the minister reads from the book of Jeremiah.<sup>35</sup> Two critical questions come to mind: why should the minister read from the Bible in a country which legally recognizes that it is religiously plural? Secondly, why does this minister find it easy to invoke the Bible and not acknowledge that we are in a man-made fix? What is the function of the Bible under these circumstances? Can the Bible be regarded as being offensive in this particular case? Could it be that the Bible is being invoked to serve political interests? In yet another case, take the national independence day and the place is the national sports stadium, where buses paid for by the taxpayers, some of whom being non-Christians, have been picking up people in different locations irrespective of their political affiliation, religious faith etc, to this national rendezvous, then when all are sat down, then everyone including those at home following the proceedings on national television and radio also funded by taxpayers, are asked to follow through the Bible readings and sermons from a Christian minister. In a public place on a national event bringing together all citizens, is the Bible not an offensive instrument? Is independence a Christian event or a national event? Why should one collection of sacred texts be considered mandatory in a country that constitutionally guarantees freedom of worship? Should we then expect that if a Muslim Zimbabwean is elected President, then the Koran will become the national sacred text? Is the faith of the President or public office bearer supposed to be a national faith?

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<sup>33</sup> Hansen „The Bible, the Qur’an and the African Polity“, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Chengetai J. M, Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe 1890-1939*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Gunda, *Reconsidering the Relevance of Amos*.

## ***De-bibliification of the Public Sphere: The Role of Biblical Scholars***

The position being taken in this presentation, which it is envisaged should become one of the central issues for biblical studies in Africa, is that it is high time biblical scholars began highlighting cases where the Bible appears to become an instrument for curtailing full social participation by all citizens in issues of national development. This call is made with two critical assumptions in mind; first that I am only a biblical scholar hence my contribution to this quest should be influenced by this professional commitment. Second, is the fact that teachers and students of the Old Testament are never content with the world of the Bible only, but in essence seek to transform the world they abide in.<sup>36</sup> Valentin Dedji correctly observes that "the myth of a resurgent or resilient people created by Mugambi [and other reconstruction theologians] would remain an ideal dream, a pure slogan unless we start talking frank and honest language to ourselves."<sup>37</sup> Part of this frankness involves admitting that the Bible has been used in the public sphere to hoodwink believers and non-believers alike. This curtailment is subtle in that the "ordinary readers"<sup>38</sup> of West do not have a say in how the Bible is used outside their own reading circles and frequently these ordinary readers derive their inspiration from the "literal text of the Bible", the same text which is manipulated in the public sphere. These ordinary readers believe what they believe to be the meaning of the Bible and take it to be true. These characteristics of ordinary readers pave the way for the abuse of the Bible in the public sphere. The Bible has become an instrument of hoodwinking people from the actual intentions of the elites and in this case, the continued oppression of the poor by the elites has essentially become part of the wrath of the Bible.

What the elites (be they political, religious or economic) need primarily is loyalty from the majority of the people who also happen to be poor. Workers are cowed through daily morning prayers in which the very

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. John W. Rogerson, „The potential of the Negative: Approaching the Old Testament through the work of Adorno" in M. Daniel Carroll R. (ed), *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts: Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 24-47, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> See Gerald West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

people who are underpaying them take part and preach how God enjoys seeing people working without complaining. Politicians are known for citing from the Bible and some have even vowed not to ever attend a rally without the Bible. In negotiating this complex situation, we are grateful to observations by scholars in the field of political theory, who in attempting to explain the emergency and survival of totalitarian institutions contend that there is need for an organization with a leader or leadership, who will have the monopoly of interpreting the content of their ideology. Further, it is also argued that in the case of states, the secular power of the state has to be conquered leading to the amalgamation of spiritual and secular leadership in the same leader or leadership. A crisis afflicting the said state is crucial in facilitating this takeover of the power of the secular state eventually leading to a mature ideocracy.<sup>39</sup>

The use and abuse of the Bible in the public sphere should be a cause for concern among biblical scholars particularly because in the quest for reaching the ideocracy, religions and religious texts can be appropriated as bases upon which the ideology is founded hence texts such as the Bible can be central “not only for establishing but also for stabilizing a totalitarian regime.”<sup>40</sup> The ordinary readers of the Bible are impressed by this God-fearing, Bible-carrying elite but the intentions of these elites remain hidden to the ordinary readers. In the so-called letter of Leopold II, the ordinary readers are being convinced of their predestined fate of servitude, while the elites through mismanagement and outright cheating accumulate wealth for themselves. Are we really destined to be poor? Is the Bible being useful to the ordinary readers if it does not inspire them to take action to right the wrongs committed against them for so long by colonial structures which have since outlived colonialism and have become critical tools for black elites? There has been no respite for the vulnerable in Africa!

What should be the role of biblical scholars in this de-biblication and critical biblication exercise? Clearly, biblical studies in Africa have been dominated by theologians and the major focus has been to entrench theological positions and interests. For African theologians like John

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Bernholz „Ideology, Sects, State and Totalitarianism: A General Theory“ in: *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen: Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs Band II*, Ed. by Hans Maier & Michael Schäfer. Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997, 271-298, 273.

<sup>40</sup> Bernholz „Ideology, Sects, State and Totalitarianism“, 273.

Mbiti, the Bible is at home in Africa hence Christianity should also be at home in Africa. I am questioning the validity of this assertion, widespread among African theologians, the only question is: which Bible is at home in Africa? Further, which Christianity should be at home in Africa? Is it the Elitist Bible and the Elitist Christianity read in order to pacify the oppressed or a Bible and a Christianity that inspires the poor to act on their man-made predicament? These two parallel Bibles and Christianities have been highlighted where the interest has been to draw lines between western Bible/Christianity and African Bible/Christianity. It would appear to me that the colonial system in which this parallel Bible/Christianity developed outlived the colonial era and persists in contemporary African states. The attempt to paint this duality as only affecting the colonial era is therefore not plausible. It is humbly submitted here that biblical scholars in Africa must of necessity begin to defend the Bible by exposing its excesses and the manner in which it has been used to curtail the aspirations of the poor. It appears to me to be a great disservice to the poor in Africa to continue on the path of denying the existence of abuses of the Bible. The first such work should focus on highlighting the major abuses of the Bible in the public sphere, whenever they occur.

### **Conclusion**

A de-bibliified public sphere removes the often abused combination between public service and the divine service, which in the public sphere is an attempt at removing accountability from public officials. This is not as many would want to assume an attempt at minimizing the essence of the Bible; rather it would appear to me one move towards protecting the integrity of the Bible. Should the Bible be associated with the incompetence that sometimes accompanies public offices? What has the Bible got to do with a mandate to provide service to taxpayers? Clearly, the African public sphere is heavily bibliified and this bibliification has only helped the elites to remove accountability by hiding behind a religiosity that is questionable because of the existence of clear determinative private interests in their actions. The Bible therefore is an instrument towards their goals and as ordinary readers continue to base their actions on some literal texts, they are helping sustaining their own oppression. The challenge for biblical scholars is whether we shall continue to speak no evil, see no evil and do nothing.



On the other hand, as I noted above, the Bible remains a critical and central text in the life of the majority of Zimbabweans who are Christians and who genuinely believe that the Bible is Scripture, the Word of God. Calling for an indiscriminate de-biblication can only bring suspicion and entrench the tensions that already exist between academics and ordinary believers. Realizing this complexity, I am convinced that we need more than simply a de-biblication exercise; we need a critical biblication exercise. This would mean becoming more engaged and involved in the issues that affect our society by monitoring how religion and in our case, Bible is used and abused in the public sphere and clearly making our observations public in order to equip ordinary readers to resist being hoodwinked. This critical biblication should also see academics and ordinary readers constituting themselves into “Bible reading partners” which is mutually beneficial.

If we refuse to answer to this call of duty, let me invite you to join me in taking our seats and be honoured guests in the theatre of human slaughter!<sup>41</sup> This is a call to action in our chosen professional field!

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Banana „Foreword“ in: Lapsley M, *Neutrality or Cooption? Anglican Church and State from 1964 until the independence of Zimbabwe*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986, 7.

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*Eliot Tofa*

## ***The Bible and the quest for Democracy and Democratization in Africa: The Zimbabwe Experience***

### ***The political landscape in Zimbabwe Party politics and the Church***

Although, the country's constitution allows multi-party politics, Zimbabwe largely remained a de facto one party state in the post-independence era. Arguably, the post-colonial state somewhat betrayed the spirit and letter of the struggle against colonialism and it has occasioned brutish suffering among the citizens. Zimbabwe is one of the African countries that gained independence in and through a vicious and protracted armed struggle. It was granted independence on 18th April 1980 following the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979.

From time immemorial, the Church, on scriptural basis, has been always involved in state politics. The church rallied behind a sizeable number of political parties participated in the 1980 elections. These included the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF ZAPU), United African (National Congress UANC) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU NDONGA). The first national leaders were clergymen although the 1980 elections were won by ZANU. President Robert Mugabe, a former Marxist-Leninist leader became the first president of Zimbabwe. Although the church was critical of the post-independence challenges, the only significant criticisms to ZANU PF was the PF ZAPU, initially a Soviet backed communist group which also had participated in the liberation struggle. PF ZAPU consisted of the Ndebele, a minority tribe which is based in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces.

### ***The Matabeleland Massacres and the co-optation of ZAPU***

Since 1980, Zimbabwe has been gradually falling into a political quagmire. In the immediate aftermath of the attainment of independence, ZANU PF indicated the determination to introduce a one-party state in Zimbabwe. The major huddle to this intention was PF ZAPU since it was an established political party with a relatively large following in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces. ZAPU was formed on December

17 1961 under the leadership of the late Joshua Nkomo but the settler regime was hostile to nationalist politics that nationalist parties were banned under the brutal Unlawful Organizations Act.

Under this Act, any organizations which were regarded as engendering public unrest were declared unlawful. The colonial regime made extensive use of an array of brutish legislations in order to guard against any threats to its power. Most of these colonial legislations were not only inherited by the post-colonial state but they were broadened in terms of their reach. To evade the Unlawful Organizations Act, nationalist parties operated from clandestine bases within the country or from exile. ZAPU was therefore formed immediately after the banning of the nationalist National Democratic Party (NDP).

However, the settler regime banned ZAPU in 1962, a move which was instrumental in igniting the liberation struggle. ZAPU's armed wing, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) together with the ZANU wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) waged a fierce struggle against the colonial administration which inaugurated independence in 1980. Dissident activities erupted in the early 1980s in which some disgruntled elements from the Ndebele population engaged in bombings, abductions, killings, harassment, torture and raping of the local people particularly the Shona. Most of these activities targeted the ZANU PF headquarters, the Prime Minister's house and other confessed and prominent supporters of ZANU PF.

The ZANU PF-led government attributed these activities to PF ZAPU especially after the discovery of large arms caches to property which belonged to PF ZAPU in Matabeleland in 1983. Relations between these political parties became very tense. In an effort which was mainly intended not to quench these activities but to co-opt PF ZAPU, the Prime Minister unleashed the North Korean trained 5th Brigade to Matabeleland. According to Ncube (1991) from the beginning of 1983, the people of Matabeleland experienced terror which can be hardly distinguished from that inflicted on the people of Zimbabwe by the Rhodesian state.<sup>1</sup>

The celerity, ferocity and catholicity of the acts of indiscriminate killing, raping, harassment, maiming, detention and torture which were perpe-

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<sup>1</sup> Welshman Ncube, "Constitutionalism, Democracy and Political Practice in Zimbabwe," in *The One Party State and Democracy: The Zimbabwe Debate*, eds. Ibbo Mandaza and Lloyd Sachikonye (Harare: Southern African Political Economy Trust, 1991), 162.

trated by the 5th Brigade against innocent and defenseless civilians was regrettable. Ncube further maintains that in January 1983, the ruling party deployed the 5th Brigade in Matabeleland North and within three weeks, its troops had massacred more than two thousand civilians, beaten and raped thousands more and destroyed hundreds of thousands of homesteads<sup>2</sup>. The Catholic Commission on Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP) prepared a scathing report in which it detailed the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade during the massacres.

According to Hatchard (1987), the dissident problem was largely political and eventually political measures were taken to cease the destabilization<sup>3</sup>. In October 1987, meetings commenced between ZANU and ZAPU with a view to the possible merger of the two parties but they collapsed in April 1987 when the government reattributed dissident activities to PF ZAPU. Hatchard further maintains that the final pressure to merge the two parties was stepped up when the then Minister of Home Affairs (Enos Nkala), inter alia, banned any PF-ZAPU meeting or public rally, ordered the closure of its offices nationwide and dissolved six PF-ZAPU dominated local authorities in Matabeleland North<sup>4</sup>. These steps forced PF-ZAPU to go back to the negotiating table and in December 1987 an “agreement of unity” was ratified by the two parties.

The two parties merged under the name Zimbabwe African National Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). This agreement has been described by scholars as a “shotgun marriage”, an “intra-elite cohesion” and a “marriage of convenience”. Under this agreement, six PF-ZAPU members were appointed to ministerial posts and Dr. Joshua Nkomo was first appointed a senior Minister in the Office of the President and later a Vice President, a post he held until his death.

President Mugabe became the first Secretary and president of the united party. One of the major provisions of the unity accord was the introduction of a one-party state constructed along Marxist-Leninist principles, an objective which ranked high on the agenda of ZANU since independence. From this discussion, it has emerged that ZAPU signed the Unity Accord. However, discontentment with the Accord among some high ranking ex-ZAPU elements continued and in November 2008, they

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<sup>2</sup> Ncube “Constitutionalism, Democracy and Political Practice in Zimbabwe,” 163.

<sup>3</sup> John Hatchard, *Individual Security and State Security in the African Context: The Case of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Univ. of Zimbabwe Publications, 1987), 112.

<sup>4</sup> Hatchard, *Individual Freedoms and State Security in the African Context*, 115.

resolved to pull out of ZANU PF and to resuscitate PF-ZAPU. They organized a meeting at the White City Stadium in Bulawayo where they criticized ZANU PF of acting in bad faith as far as the Unity Accord is concerned.

Although the singing of the unity accord witnessed an instant cessation of dissident activities, it failed to efface the bitter memories of the Matabeleland holocaust from the minds not only of the people of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces but the nation at large. The atrocities were of iniquitous gravity that the people of Matabeleland are still struggling to recuperate from them. The Matabeleland massacres became to be known as “*Gukurahundi*” (the first heavy rains which washes away the chaff) because of the indiscriminate killings which were associated by it. After the atrocities, the government established a commission of inquiry into the massacres under the chairmanship of Justice Chihambakwe. Because of the astonishing findings of the commission, the findings were of the report were not disclosed to the public. The Matabeleland genocide remains a highly -charged political topic in Zimbabwe and the Church called for truth telling as a first step towards reconciliation and forgiveness.

### ***The Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM)***

ZUM was the first opposition political party to be formed in post- independence Zimbabwe. It was formed immediately after the signing of the Unity Accord. It was formed by Edgar Tekere, a former ZANU PF Secretary General. Tekere is one of the founding members of ZANU PF and he played a pivotal role in the liberation struggle. In the mid-1980s, Zimbabwe began to experience higher levels of corruption in both the public and private sectors. The first case of infamous corruption occurred when government ministers engaged themselves in the buying and reselling of luxurious cars known as the “Willogate scandal”. The majority of the ministers who were involved in the scandal resigned and one of them committed suicide. The civil society in general and University of Zimbabwe Students in particular protested against this infamous act by high-ranking government officials.

The government reacted with a heavy-handed repression of the civil society. In the case of the University of Zimbabwe, the government passed the University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (1990) in which it outlawed student protests. According to Ncube (1989), the university was

closed, members of the Student Representative Council (SRC) were arrested, and student grants were temporarily suspended. Shadreck B.O Gutto, a Kenyan lecturer in the faculty of law was arbitrarily deported on a 48 hour ultimatum under the Rhodesian Immigration Act No 18 of 1979 which gave the minister of home affairs powers to deport any person without being obliged to justify the deportation<sup>5</sup>. Bond (1998) maintains that this draconian legislation was meant to suppress the students and effectively making the university a parastatal institution<sup>6</sup>.

Tekere openly criticized leaders of being the cradle of corruption and was dismissed from ZANU PF and he went on to form the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM). The incumbents made extensive use of state security forces and the state owned media to suppress the ZUM challenge. Considering that ZUM was formed soon after the Unity Accord, this was regarded as a negation of national unity. The term national unity became synonymous with monolithic politics. ZUM was denied access to media and most of its rallies were banned by state security forces. Its supporters were harassed and in most cases detained by security forces<sup>7</sup>.

ZUM contested the 1990 general elections and won only two seats in the Manicaland province. In fact, ZUM was not a credible political party with the capacity to mount a serious challenge against ZANU PF. The Central Intelligence Organization were clandestinely implanted as members of the in ZUM in order to engender internal internecine.

As a result of these and Tekere's alleged dictatorial tendencies, ZUM disintegrated in the early 90s and it eventually died a natural death. A plethora of small and ephemeral opposition political parties were formed after ZUM. Most of them emerged immediately before elections and disappeared immediately thereafter. Some of these parties have been alleged to be counterfeit parties which were formed and financed by ZANU PF in order to split votes in its favor and to deceive the electorate and the international community into believing that Zimbabwe is indeed a multi-party state.

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<sup>5</sup> Ncube "Constitutionalism, Democracy and Political Practice in Zimbabwe," 171.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Bond, *Uneven Zimbabwe: The Study of Finance, Development and Underdevelopment* (Harare: World Press Inc, 1998), 83.

<sup>7</sup> See Jonathan Moyo, *Voting for Democracy* (Harare: Univ. of Zimbabwe publications, 1989) 88.

## ***The Movement for Democratic Change and the Land Reform Programme***

The Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999 under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. Like the Movement for Multi-party Democracy in Zambia, the MDC was formed out of the labor movement, viz. the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). The ZCTU has been critical of ZANU PF especially following the adoption of the IMF-World Bank sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes in 1991.

As a result of the adoption of economically lethal policies (such as the granting of \$50 000 per individual war veteran as compensation in 1997 and Zimbabwe's involvement in the DRC war in 1998), Zimbabwe began to experience daunting economic problems beginning the late 1980s. The period was characterized by galloping inflation, critical shortage of foreign currency, poor housing, shortage of basic commodities, and rampant corruption. All of these problems resulted in the inordinate impoverishment of workers in particular and the population in general.

The MDC proved to be a strong and organized political party with the capacity to wrestle power from ZANU PF. Since its formation, it was criticized as "puppet party" which seeks to reverse the gains of independence. The seating president got this impression because the whites openly supported and financed the MDC. Initially, the MDC got much of its support from the urban population. It contested the 2000 elections, the first hotly contested ones in post-independence Zimbabwe and on realizing that the MDC threat was really credible, the ruling party unleashed terror of the worst sort<sup>8</sup>.

The country witnessed the extensive use of state security agents in order to ward off the MDC threat. In the 2000 elections the MDC won 56 of the 120 contested seats<sup>9</sup>. The MDC fared quite well especially considering that it was still a budding political party. Had it not been of rampant electoral malpractices, chances that the incumbent party was going to lose elections were great and the subsequent elections were characterized with unprecedented levels of political violence against supporters of opposition political parties. The MDC was labeled as a party of "sell-

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<sup>8</sup> See Amandah Nerwande "Mugabe Steps up Violence," *The Independent*, March 07, 2000, Editorial Section. Wongai Zhangazha "ZANU PF Unleashes Unprecedented Violence," *The Standard*, February 20, 2000, Main Paper Section

<sup>9</sup> See Tatenda Makaru "MDC is a Credible Opposition Party," *The Standard*, September 10, 2000, Main Paper Section



outs”. The church however, in the Zimbabwe We Want engendered patriotism by citing scriptural passages such as Nehemiah 2:3 and Psalms 137:1.

In 2000, President Mugabe embarked on the controversial land reform programme in which he forcibly displaced the whites from their farms and gave them to the blacks. The minority white farmers had arrogated themselves vast tracts of fertile land and relegated the blacks to mountainous and impoverished places where they were congested. Knowing that the land question was at the heart of the war of liberation, the whites made a provision in the Lancaster House Constitution in which no land was supposed to be distributed for ten years after independence. Thus constitutionally, any distribution of land was supposed to be done from 1990 after this egoistic provision had lapsed. However, efforts to redistribute the land were hampered by protracted negotiations with the colonial masters.

The idea of redistributing the land in itself was superb especially considering the damnable inequalities which had for long existed between the minority whites and the majority blacks. The Churches of Zimbabwe in The Zimbabwe We Want maintained that land is a gift from God and therefore a fundamental human rights issue. The Churches further maintain that land is the means which God created and gave to human beings together with everything that is in it in order to sustain life regardless of ethnic group, political or religious affiliation, gender or race (Genesis 1:25-30). However, the redistribution itself was not mainly intended to address the colonial injustices but to vitiate the opposition support. This explains why it was characterized by violence, chaos and multiple ownerships of farms by high-ranking political figures. The Churches opines that the land reform programme is a noble idea because in Biblical terms the freedom of those who have been oppressed is manifest in the repossession of their land. However, with reference to Nehemiah 5:5, the churches criticized the programme on the basis that it created disparities between the rich and the poor because of the irregularities which are associated with it.

The land reform programme witnessed the total breakdown of the rule of law in Zimbabwe. The legality of the land reform programme was challenged in the High Court which ruled out that the fast track programme should be stopped because it offends against the canons of the laws of the land. However, the incumbent party continued to defy the

rule of law and according to Sithole and Ruswa (2003). This is true because on the 10th of December 2002, a leader of the war veterans declared that:

We are not afraid of the High Court ... this country belongs to us and we will take it whether they like it or not. The judges must resign. I am telling you what the comrades want and not what the law says.

This culture of defiance of the rule of the law permeated through the entire structure of political structures. Chikwanha, Sithole and Bratton (2003) maintains that the war veterans and youth militia forced rural citizens to attend rallies and overnight political orientation meetings (*pungwes*) with the youth leading the way in forcing villagers to chant pro-ZANU PF and anti-MDC slogans. Chikwanha, Sithole and Bratton (2003) further argue that the president openly called on his supporters to “crush the MDC” and he even boasted of “having many degrees in violence”.

This presidential call for violence occasioned ruthless killing of white farmers during the land reform programme. For example, according to Sithole and Ruswa (2003), on the 15th of April 2000, David Stevens was kidnapped at his farm and taken to a police station in Murehwa, then taken from the station with the knowledge, aid and blessing of the police and tortured before being shot dead<sup>10</sup>. The land reform programme engendered the widespread displacement of hundreds of thousands of farm workers.

The President’s gesture in itself sent a clear message to the pro-government agents that they have the prerogative to commit political violence without the law catching up with them. This explains why there have been continued incidents of political violence perpetrated by the CIO personnel in Zimbabwe. For example, in April 2001, Morgan Tsvangirai’s aides, Tichaona Chiminya and Talent Mabika were murdered in open day light in politically motivated violence. According to The Daily News of 15 March 2001, they were allegedly killed by staunch ZANU PF supporters who were based at Murambinda growth point in Buhera. Although overwhelming evidence against them was found, to date, no punitive measure has been taken by the state<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Thulani Sithole and Gray Ruswa, “The Power of Propaganda: Public Opinion in Zimbabwe,” (*Afrobarometer*: No. 42,2003).

<sup>11</sup> See Lovejoy Makope “Joseph Mwale and Tom Kainos Found Guilty” *The Daily News*, March 15, 2001, Editorial Section.

There were several incidents of assault, torture, displacements and unlawful arrests of demonstrators by the police during MDC-organized mass protests such as stay-aways, the Final Push and Winter Battles. According to The Standard of 09 January 2009, the statistical report prepared by the Human Rights Forum found out that between January and September 2004, 12 people were killed in politically-motivated violence, 202 were unlawfully arrested, 7491 were tortured while 329 were assaulted. It is against this background that the church called for spirituality and morality citing Matthew 22:37-40, John 10:10 and 1 Corinthians 12:26 (TZWW, 12,13,15).

The report alleges that the bulk of the cases were perpetrated by state security agents, war veterans and the youth militias although this is disputed by the incumbent party. The president also enacted the new legislations: the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) which curtailed the freedom of the peoples.

The 2002 Presidential elections were held at the peak of the Land Reform Programme and many known and suspected supporters of opposition were killed. However, it must be pointed out that the election by their very nature were combative. Consequently, in 2002, Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth, its membership rights in the IMF were revoked and “bomb sanctions” were imposed on the president and other ZANU PF individuals. Zimbabwe became a “persona non grata” in the international community and this development clamped its economy.

### ***Operation Murambatsvina and the economic crisis***

By 2002, the president and those close to him were declared persona non grata in the international community and Zimbabwe was labeled a “pariah state”. The imposition of “bomb sanctions” and the subsequent isolation of Zimbabwe from the international community clamped the economy of Zimbabwe that by 2005, Zimbabwe had degenerated into a tumbledown state. Zimbabweans began to engage in a myriad of informal sector activities in order to cope with an increasingly harsh economic dispensation.

These activities included cross border trading, street vending, gold panning, flea marketing, foreign currency dealings and so on. Hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans left the country and foraged for opportuni-

ties in other African and European countries. Neighbouring countries notably South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia bore the brunt of this mass exodus. The mass exodus prompted the late Zambian President (Levy Mwanawasa) to regard Zimbabwe as “a sinking titanic whose members are jumping out”<sup>12</sup> and xenophobic attacks according to some sections of the media.

This was interpreted in the context of a derelict economic order. These activities bailed many families out of abject impoverishment. In the housing sector, the people of Zimbabwe experienced severe accommodation problems because the government had built a few houses since independence. Zimbabwe, to date, remains one of the African countries with a very poor accommodation delivery system. Since there has been a high rate of rural-urban migration, the demand for accommodation became increasingly high and the overcrowding led to the death of over a thousand people from communicable diseases.

The problem of acute shortage of accommodation and the ever-increasing standard of living, coerced (especially in high density suburbs) began to build backyard houses. These backyard structures played a pivotal role in providing accommodation to the majority, many of whom could not afford to rent houses in medium and low density suburbs.

However, in 2005, the government moved to destroy the backyard houses and vending sites nationwide in an operation which was meant to “clean up” the cities code-named “Murambatsvina” (Clean up filth). The operation was so brutal because of its celerity, ferocity and catholicity. The plan to embark on this operation was made clandestinely and quickly as if the government was dealing with a dangerous and crafty terrorist group and not its own nationals because in this operation, the government made use of state security forces in a way that was evocative of the brutality the people of Zimbabwe experienced under the colonial security forces.

Both the national and the international community reprobated the operation because of the profundity of its brutality. The operation attracted the attention of the United Nations that then UN Secretary General Kofi Anan sent an envoy on a fact-finding mission. The fact finding mission, headed by Tibaijuka, came to Zimbabwe and carried out a full-scale inquiry into the on-going operation. The mission produced a compre-

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<sup>12</sup> See Parick Tom “Mwanawasa Slams Zimbabwe” *The Independent*, June 20, 2007, Main Paper Section.

hensive and damning report following completion of the inquiry. According to Tibaijuka (2005), on 9 May 2005, with little or no warning, the government of Zimbabwe embarked on a “crush” operation code-named “Operation Murambatsvina” to “clean up” its cities. Popularly referred to as “Operation Tsunami” because of its speed and ferocity it resulted in the destruction of houses, business premises, and vending sites. An estimated figure of 700,000 peoples in cities across the country lost their homes, their source of livelihood or both while a further 2,4 million were affected in varying degrees<sup>13</sup>.

Most of the desperate victims of the operation were ferried and discarded on a distant farm where the living conditions were brutish: hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens to lethal living conditions in a state with a derelict health delivery system was arguably the worst form of immorality. Most of these victims lost their valuable property and their access to education, health, jobs and other forms of essential services.

The government came under censorious criticism from many sections of the society as the conditions of the victims evidently exacerbated. In a move which was intended to save face, the government made a cosmetic move to build houses for some of the victims under an operation code-named “*Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*”. Given the magnitude of the people who were affected and the dire economic conditions in Zimbabwe, the government could hardly afford to build houses for even a quota of the displaced people.

### ***The 2008 Harmonized Elections***

It is important for any government anywhere to respect the sacrosanct right of the citizens to elect a government of their choice. According to the New York Times of October 31 1990, the 19th century US President, Abraham Lincoln, while a member of the US congress, made a passionate speech on January 12 1948 with regard to the US invasion of Mexico in which he said:

Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government and form a new one that

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<sup>13</sup> Anna Tibaijuka, *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Access the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina* by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, 2005, 12.

suits them better. This is the most valued- the most sacred right which we believe, is to liberate the world<sup>14</sup>.

For years, the people of Zimbabwe have been divested the right to elect people of their choice on the basis of an uneven political ground. The 29 March 2008 elections marked a watershed in Zimbabwe's electoral history. These were the first harmonized elections (they consisted of the parliamentary, the presidential and the council elections) which were held following the unanimous passing of the constitutional amendment number 18 Act by the parliament. The Act stipulates that all these elections be held together unlike the past in which they were held separately. Unlike the 2000 parliamentary and the 2002 presidential elections, the pre-electoral period of the 2008 elections was fairly violence free. The Church called for the contact of free and fair elections and condemned the use of violence.

However, it was tainted with some electoral malpractices such as the monopolization of the state media by the incumbents, irregularities in voter registration, impartiality of bodies which are responsible for the contact of elections, politicization of food and other forms of aid, salamandering of constituency boundaries and isolated incidents of political violence. For the first time in history, ZANU PF lost the majority of the parliamentarian and council seats to the MDC.

The Electoral Commission (ZEC) did not release results were close to a month and when the results were released, the MDC was on the lead had not received the popular vote. The president evoked section 110 (3) of chapter 2:3 of the Electoral Act which stipulates that "where two or more candidates for President are nominated, and after a poll taken in terms of subsection (2) no candidate receives a majority of the total number of valid votes cast, a second election shall be held within 21 days after the previous election in accordance with this Act" and declared Tsvangirai the winner but with less than the required 50 % in order to be declared the outright winner in Zimbabwe's first-past- the-post electoral system. Consequently, a run-off between Tsvangirai and Mugabe was to be held and the results were announced on 01 May 2008 (a month after the polling day) following a catcall from sections of the national and the international community. ZEC announced that Tsvangirai had polled 47,9%, Mugabe polled 43,2% and independent candidates Simba Ma-

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<sup>14</sup> Nzongola Ntalaja, "The State and Democracy in Africa," in *The State and Democracy in Africa*, eds. Nzongola Ntalaja and Margret Lee (Eritrea: World Press Inc, 1997) 82.

koni and Langton Towungana polled 8,3% of the valid votes cast. Under these circumstances, a presidential run-off between Tsvangirai and Mugabe was inevitable.

### ***The Presidential run-off elections***

After the full announcement of the results, ZEC declared that it will decide the date on which the run-off will be conducted. 27 June was eventually chosen despite the fact that the law stipulates that the run-off should be held within 21 days after the previous election. ZEC justified its decision on logistical problems. The pre-electoral period leading to the run-off elections witnessed political violence characteristic of a country at physical war. Hundreds of thousands of homesteads and business premises of known and suspected opposition supporters were burnt.

According to a survey which was carried out by an accredited research institute which is based in Harare, (the Mass Public Opinion Institute), more than three hundred homesteads were burnt in Bikita district alone. The nastiest incidents involve the burning up of the supermarket and a holiday resort which belongs to Mr. Edmore Marima, the incumbent Member of Parliament for Bikita East and the entire homestead of Mr. Zhangazha, a suspected MDC activist<sup>15</sup>.

Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, maimed, raped, tortured, harassed and detained. There are widespread reports that a number of people were abducted and never seen again. Reports are that most of MDC polling agents during the harmonized elections were arrested, harassed and in some cases killed. For example, Clemence Makombo who was a polling agent in Bikita was killed by ZANU PF youths. Gift Mutsvungu who was a polling agent in Harare was killed and his decomposing body was found on July 3 2008. Peter Chihombori and scores of other MDC polling officers in Masvingo were arrested and detained at Mutimurefu prison and later Bikita prison in Masvingo. In his letter to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) dated 25 June 2009, Tsvangirai claimed that more than two thousand of MDC polling agents were arrested nationwide.

Allegations that ZANU PF elements also embarked on a massive, systematic and widespread confiscation of identity particulars of MDC

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<sup>15</sup> See Elias Nhimba, "Opinion Poll Reveals Widespread Burning of Homesteads by ZANU PF Elements" *The Independent*, June 16, 2009, Main Paper Section.

supporters with the view to divest them of the opportunity to vote on 27 June are common. The slogan “27 June...ini nemhuri yangu tinovhotera vaMugabe chete! meaning that on 27 June me and my family will vote for Mugabe only became the catchword for the run-off elections, a clear appropriation of Joshua 24:15(b). Another slogan was “kumuda kana kusamuda ndiyeye, kumuvhotera kana kusamuvhotera ndiyeye, kurohwa kana kusarohwa ndiyeye” ( meaning whether you like him (Mugabe) or not he is the one, whether you vote him or not he is the one, whether you are beaten up by his supporters or not he is the one). Every household and vehicle had to display a ZANU PF campaigning insignia in order to avoid being victimized by the vicious ZANU PF youths. ZANU PF sent a strong message to the entire nation that although “elections” were to be held, the presidential post was not an elective one but was “eternally” reserved for the seating president.

In his letter to ZEC dated 25 June 2008, Tsvangirai justified his withdrawal on the following reasons: disenfranchisement of voters and the MDC’s lack of access to rural areas, the partiality of ZEC itself in the conduct of elections, political violence (in which the MDC recorded at least 86 deaths, 10 000 homes destroyed, 200 000 people destroyed and 10 000 people who were injured), threats of war made by Mugabe, the participation of the uniformed forces in ZANU PF campaigns of terror, intimidation of MDC supporters and its lack of access to the media, and the banning and disruption of its meetings and rallies nationwide. ZEC ruled out that the “elections” will be held because the law required Tsvangirai to formally withdraw his candidature 21 days before the harmonized elections. This ruling demonstrated that ZEC had no elaborate regulations of dealing with the run-off elections. This explains why it initially thought of declaring Mugabe the unopposed winner.

Tsvangirai instructed his supporters to either refrain from voting or to spoil the ballot papers. The “elections” were indeed held and Mugabe was declared the winner. The 27 June “elections” were a mere farce and they became to be popularly known as a “one-man-race”. They were the most ignominious “elections” to be held the world over!



### ***Formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU)***

The formation of the unity government was tortuous. The Churches of Zimbabwe played a critical role in bringing the antagonistic principles to the negotiating table. The seating president had indicated during his campaigning speeches for the harmonized elections that he was prepared to hold talks with the opposition MDC with the view to form an all-inclusive government after the elections. This was probably based on the understanding that the MDC was going to fare quite well against ZANU PF, a development which would call for the formation of such a government. Mugabe was also aware of the fact that ZANU PF had failed the economy that its chances of resuscitating it alone were non-existent.

Mugabe's main concern was to hold on to power regardless of the consequences thereof. However, at this juncture, Mugabe had been forced into checkmate that he had to revisit his consistent and iron-clad intolerance for opposition politics which can be dated back to the Matabeleland massacres. After the announcement of the results of the run-off "elections", secret meetings were held between Mugabe, Tsvangirai and Mutambara (President of the smaller MDC faction which defected from the MDC following internal misunderstandings). These talks resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the three formations on Monday 21 July 2008. The SADC appointed mediator, former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki played a pivotal role in the signing of the MOU. The MOU was to build the agenda for full-scale talks between the three formations and it was agreed that the talks were to be completed within three weeks following the signing of the GNU.

The formations agreed that the talks were to be concluded within two weeks of the signing of the MOU. The MOU was predicated on the shared understanding that the formation of an all-inclusive government was the only way of extricating Zimbabwe from its economic and political crisis. Given the antagonism which existed between the MDC and ZANU PF in general and Tsvangirai and Mugabe in particular, the people of Zimbabwe had never envisioned a situation whereby the two parties could settle for talks. The signing of the MOU raised much hope among the people of Zimbabwe.

The MOU built a foundation which witnessed the holding of a series of meetings between the three political parties. The parties agreed that

there be created a position for the Prime Minister. However, internecine disputes ensued as ZANU PF and MDC-T disagreed on the duties and powers of the Prime Minister and President. This derailed progress. The MDC wanted the Prime Minister to have more powers than the President whereas ZANU PF wanted the President to have more powers than the Prime minister. These disagreements mainly stemmed from the fact that the parties were negotiating from two different platforms. The MDC based its argument on the understanding that Tsvangirai had won the 29 March harmonized elections while ZANU PF maintained that Mugabe had won the 27 June run-off “elections”.

The talks collapsed a number of times as a result of these disagreements. However, as compromises continued to be made, the parties finally made an agreement and on 15 September 2008 an agreement to form an all-inclusive government was signed. This agreement was signed before the parties agreed on the allocation of ministries. Talks on the allocation of ministries began and the parties agreed that ZANU PF allocated fourteen ministries, MDC-Tsvangirai thirteen ministries and MDC-Mutambara three ministries.

Mugabe initially allocated the ministries as follows: ZANU PF was allocated the Ministries of Defense, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Transport, Local Government and Urban Development, Mines and Mining Development, Lands, Agriculture and Resettlement, Environment, Natural Resources and Tourism, Higher and Tertiary Education, Small and Medium Enterprises and Co-operative Development, Justice and Legal Affairs, Media, Information and Publicity, Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Finance, Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment.

MDC Tsvangirai was allocated the Ministries of Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs, Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, Energy and Power Development, Health and Child Welfare, Labor and Social Welfare, Water Resources and Development Management, Public Service, Sport, Arts and Culture, State Enterprises and Parastatals, Science and Technology Development, Information Communication Technology, Public Works, National Housing and Social Amenities. The MDC-Mutambara was allocated the Ministries of Education, Industry and Commerce and Regional Integration and International Co-operation. As is evident from the list, ZANU PF scooped all the powerful

ministries leaving the MDC with ministries whose main tasks are to restore the economy of Zimbabwe.

This caused a heated and protracted disagreement between the two parties. The talks to share the ministries collapsed a number of times with Tsvangirai boycotting some of them. The talks culminated in the holding of the SADC extraordinary summit on 19 November 2008. The summit resolved that an inclusive government be formed immediately thereafter with the two parties co-sharing the much disputed Ministry of Home Affairs. The MDC, which had hoped that SADC will pressure Mugabe to cede the Ministry of Home Affairs to it, disagreed with SADC's position and refused to join the unity government. Tsvangirai threatened to withdraw from the talks and he left the country for Botswana where he stayed for some time.

Mugabe made it clear that his party was not going to make any further compromises as far as the talks were concerned. He threatened to form a government without Tsvangirai but the threat was less credible. It was at this time that regional pressure mounted against Tsvangirai to join the inclusive government. Even Zambia, which has been severely critical of Mugabe's sincerity in the power sharing deal, had its biggest daily newspaper (The Post) on 2 December 2008 "warning" Tsvangirai that should he continue to refrain from joining the unity government, "the tide of African public opinion may soon shift against him, and with it a decline in his political fortunes". Talks resumed again in Zimbabwe and they collapsed. In January 2009, talks were held in South Africa and the parties finally agreed to form an inclusive government in February 2009.

### ***The biblical basis of the church's Vision for Zimbabwe: conclusion and recommendations***

The church is of the view that there are a number of restorative steps which need to be taken in order to reconstruct the nation. In its message of hope to the nation, the Pastoral Letter by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference maintained that God hears the cry of the oppressed. This argument is premised on a number of Biblical verses including Deut 26:5b-8 which reads:

My father was a homeless Aramaean. He went down to Egypt to find refuge there, a few in numbers, but there he became a nation, great, mighty and strong. The Egyptians ill-treated us; they gave us no peace and inflicted harsh slavery on us. But we called on the Lord, the God of our fathers. The Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, our toil and our oppression, and

the Lord brought us out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great terror, and with signs and wonders. (*God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed People*, Pastoral Letter by the Zimbabwe Catholics Bishops conference)

Psalms 103:6 also reads that “God, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed”. This paper holds that while the argument that God is on the side of the oppressed is Biblically and spiritually true; this is hardly applicable in contemporary politics. It gives the oppressed a passive approach to fighting against their oppressors and oppressive institutions. The fight against authoritarianism in contemporary societies requires the adoption of affirmative action.

The Church holds that the crisis in Zimbabwe negates the God’s proclamation that “I [Jesus] came so that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The suffering of the people of Zimbabwe is interpreted in the context of all members of the family (1 Cor. 12:26) and so the Christian community “is feeling the pain with us; it wants to walk with us and to listen to our story just as Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) (TZWW, 13). The church therefore calls for love, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation (2 Chron. 7:14). As in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-280, the church calls for people to extend ‘love to all people regardless of race, religion, nationality, or any other artificial distinction. We must practice love towards our enemies!’ (TZWW,19). The church calls for justice and the rule of the law: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly or to require mercy and to walk humbly with your god” (Mic 6:8;3:1-4;6:10-11;7:2-4) (TZWW,21). In short, the Church bemoans the negation of human rights and freedoms on the basis that Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the Jubilee year – “the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk. 4:18-19) (TZWW,31)!

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*Jannie Hunter*

## ***The Bible and the quest for Developmental Justice: The case of Orphans in Namibia***

*“This is a paper I did not want to write because I would be happier if the data did not exist.” (Graburn 1987)*

### ***Introduction***

The above citation from Graburn comes from a situation of child abuse in Canada, which as such, might be somewhat different from that which we wish to address in Namibia. This does not mean that child abuse does not appear in Namibia. It certainly does, and is reflected in the media as well. The quotation is appropriate though, because it also addresses the overall situation with regard to children who cannot defend themselves and are exploited in a variety of ways in the world. Frightening facts are available with regard to the exploitation and vulnerability of children throughout the world, which may be worth mentioning as background to our exploration of the Namibian situation and the quest for justice in the country.

There are over a 100 million street children in the world and as many as 200 million children spend most of their waking hours working (Nordstrom 2004a:25). Between 40 and 60% of known sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 15 years of age, despite the fact that 90% of the world's children live in countries which ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Ibid.:26). Further, the number of child prostitutes in the world exceeds 200 million (Ibid. 2004b:11). Over half of the world's refugee population of 17 million people is children (Ferris 2004:21). In Johannesburg, South Africa, the trauma centre reports as many as 40 cases of incest per day. Abitbol and Louise (p. 27) say: “A nation collapses when a majority of her youth wakes up in the morning facing nothing but despair, fear and frustration.” The statistics mentioned here are mostly the result of extreme poverty in which millions of the world's population live, not only in Africa but also in countries considered as “First World Countries”. A statement by Wolfgang Huber points to the “alarming poverty” in so-called wealthy countries. He notes (referring to Germany): “The large number of children who live in poverty is scandalous.” (2005:4).

“During the 1990’s, more than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflicts, often deliberately targeted and murdered. More than three times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured.” This quotation from the book of Graça Machel (2001:1) explains the terrible plight of children involved in wars. “In wartime, children are subjected to the most severe forms of maltreatment, and war is definitely the worst type of aggression against children” (Kocijan-Hercigonja, Škrinjarić, Marojević 1998:340). Ferris (2004:20) notes that the patterns of childcare in the United States changed because 20,000 women were sent to the Gulf war and grandparents mostly had to care for the children. The same authors report the numerous problems that children experience during war and urge the international community to do whatever is possible to stop war and to provide adequate rehabilitation programmes for children who suffer the trauma of war (see also Matačić 1998 and Costin 2006:55ff.).

Children are, however, not only involved in wars as victims, but are involved involuntarily and voluntarily as so-called “child soldiers” who fight side by side with adults. Many are kidnapped and forced to kill, as they were in the eighties in Mozambique (Sendabo 2004:13). Sometimes the children are even forced to kill people and family in their own villages, which makes sure that they cannot return to villages or communities. To make sure that they perform their tasks well, they are often kept under the influence of drugs and alcohol (Ibid.:14).

Sendabo (Ibid.:62) refers to the Liberian war and writes that children were taught to take orders without questioning, and that their personal feelings and actions were subordinate to their commanders. Further, the children were put under high pressure that kept them silent. After a war, most children feel guilty. Many children do not go to school or find a job after the war and become beggars because they have no training or education (Ibid.:44). A comprehensive treatment on the traumatic stress children experience during and after wars is given by De Jong (2002). He includes the results of the studies in various countries, including South Africa and Angola, Namibia’s neighbours.

The one outstanding factor influencing children in today’s world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, is HIV/AIDS. The Namibian newspaper on 18 May 2010 reports the facts of HIV/AIDS in the world as follows: Globally, more than 25 million people have died since 1981. More than 40 million children in Africa have become orphans due to AIDS. In 2005

alone, 3.1 million people died because of HIV/AIDS related illnesses and about two-thirds of the people living with HIV and AIDS reside in Africa. Despite campaigns against the spread of HIV all over the world, people are infected by the virus every single day.

Except for being orphaned because of parents who die of AIDS related illnesses, many children are born carrying the virus, especially in rural areas in Africa where access to hygienic circumstances is extremely difficult during child birth, but also because of breast feeding for long times.

### ***Children in the Bible***

Finsterbusch (2004:71) states that children play a very significant role in the Book of Deuteronomy and notes that it is surprising that so little is written about children as theme in the Bible. It is evident from Deuteronomy that children are not only part of the holy gatherings but that children (girls and boys) should be taught from early on by both parents at any time when the opportunity arises. Not only the texts of the commandments should be taught to the children but also their meaning should be explained by the parents (Ibid.:71ff.; cf. also De Vaux 48ff.).

Deut 1:39 indicates that children are seen as innocent at a small age: “And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad...” Children cannot distinguish between evil and good. Parents have the obligation to teach children the right ways “so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life” (Deut 6:2). The wisdom texts emphasise particularly well the point that righteousness, the right way of living, is closely linked to justice (see the text of Nel 2000:319, who demonstrates this in the Book of Proverbs). He says: “Great value was attached to the protection of the rights of the under-privileged and the guarantee of a righteous dispensation for them” (he refers to Pr. 31:9, 29:14, and to an article written by Fensham in 1962). “The harassment and suppression of the under-privileged are explicitly seen as an insult to their Maker” (Pr. 14:31 and 17:15, see Nel 2000:319). These sentiments are also expressed earlier by Alexander and Alexander (1973:62), who write that the Christian law “protects the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the women and children,



the fatherless and widows against those who would neglect and exploit them.”

A society based on the teaching of righteousness is therefore a just society. “The conceptualisation of what organised society should be was built upon the transmitted values of wisdom which include religious, communal, parental, judicial and individual ethical values” (Nel 2000:322). Nel further demonstrates that righteousness, and with it a sense of justice, must be part of a person’s values, and not the position a person takes because of the law. He writes: “Law without wisdom has often in human history become the tool of oppression. Righteousness becomes the slave of ideology” (Ibid.:326). This tuition that brings an inbred sense of justice was not done at schools in biblical times; it was done by the father and the mother, as noted by Finsterbusch (2004) and De Vaux (1973). Even in the time of Jesus the daughter’s education was still done by the mother. By then boys enjoyed an education at the synagogue until they were 13 and considered men (Alexander & Alexander 1973:94).

The tuition of children on religious matters was, however, not exclusively in the hands of the parents. Children were part of the people, of the covenant assembly, and took part in the festivals. They were part of the assembly gathered before the Lord (see Finsterbusch 2004:73-76). It is logical that they learned matters concerned with religion and about what the law of God required from an early age. Neumann-Gorsolke (2004:179-187) understands Psalm 8:2 as the result of such teaching: children and infants praising the Lord makes the enemy realize what power the word of the Lord has, and therefore it is evident what the teaching to children meant in the survival of the nation of Israel.

Jones (1987:27) says that for Jesus “ethics are an element in one’s whole response to the revelation given by God of his will for human life”, and refers to the passage in Hosea 6:6 where the prophet gives God’s words to the nation: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” This particular theme is one that echoes through the whole of the Old Testament. There is a development away from the importance of sacrifices towards the importance of a “theology of the heart”. When Jerusalem and the land of Israel are taken away from the nation of Israel by Babylon, the cry at the end of the Book of Lamentations is clear: “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return.” There is no doubt that this means a theology of hope (compare Renkema 1988 and 1993) deeply grounded in a theology of the heart (Compare Hunter 1995). In several verses Lamentations demon-

strates the severity of the siege of Jerusalem by referring to children and infants: Lam. 2:11 cries out: "My heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city." (See also 2:19, 4:4 and 4:10). In the final chapter, seen as a prayer, the desolate state of the people and their despair are expressed as follows: "We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows" (Lam. 5:3), a text that makes evident the thorough understanding of the plight of the "orphans and fatherless". The Book of Lamentations could just as well be a report on a modern war scene, as described in a number of books mentioned above, especially that of Machel who has the following dedication in her book echoing the hope Renkema describes in Lamentations (especially based on Chapter 3): *"This book is dedicated to the indomitable spirit of the children who inspired its preparation. Their hopes and aspirations live throughout this text."*

White (1979:114ff.) indicates that ethical behaviour in the Christian understanding of ethics is deeply rooted in "love". I Corinthians 13 does not have a different understanding: love is the greatest. Yes, one can have enough faith to believe that everything is possible; enough hope to land there where your beliefs are supposed to take you, but love, that is what makes the Christian live correctly (is it righteously?). Jones (1987:20) elects four words which, according to him, dominated prophetic messages: holiness, righteousness, justice, and love. These are the words constant with the "character of the Lord". To describe Jesus' message, he says (1987:29): "The one all-embracing reality is the ever-present merciful love of God." He also states: "A previous generation of theologians used to say that Jesus' message could be summed up as 'the fatherhood of God' and the 'infinite value of the human soul'." According to him, law now has a different emphasis: our own morality, our inner spirit is at stake in the development of the Old and New Testaments.

Children are therefore seen as very important in the whole of the Bible. This is true in both Old and New Testaments. It is, moreover, evident from both, what we can call, "positive" and "negative" texts of the Bible. For example, the texts of Lamentations can be seen as negative descriptions of what happens to children. So too, the last plague of the liberation of Israel from Egypt, which attacks children and shows how important the children were. After the plague that killed the first-born, the pharaoh realizes that he has to let the Israelites go.

The Bible describes children as part of the religious community or covenant community and they have to be respected and taught within this community, not only by the parents in their early lives but also later by the priests and others responsible. (See also the book of Dube 2003 on the use of the Bible in sermons directed to people, families and children living with HIV/AIDS).

### ***The Namibian Situation HIV/AIDS and children***

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare notes that around 140 000 children in Namibia under the age of fifteen are registered as orphans with the Ministry (quoted from *Die Republikein*, May 2010). It is estimated that Namibia will have over 250 000 orphans by 2021 (Hopwood, Hunter & Kellner 2007:10). This potential figure should be compared with a population size of only 2,3 million people. They further quote the Ministry of Health and Social Services as projecting an increased morbidity and mortality on young adults, with 38% of boys and 48% of girls who are assumed to be HIV negative on their 15th birthday dying before they reach their 40th birthday” (ibid.). “The HIV/AIDS epidemic has already reduced the average life span of a newborn Namibian by more than a decade” (National Planning Commission 2004:25). This report further notes that the epidemic has “a particularly disturbing impact on children” (ibid.).

The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is immense on the Namibian society. The 2008 National HIV Sentinel Survey (p. 28) in Namibia indicates that the highest age specific prevalence rate was observed in the age group 30-34. These are the young adults who are or should become economically active and who normally already have children. It is further observed that progress towards preventing or slowing down HIV infection in the age group 25 to 44 is slow. (See also the Ministry of Health and Social Services report of 2008b:5). In this group the vulnerability of particularly young women stands out. A 2009 report of the Ministry of Health and Social Services notes the following persons as those particularly vulnerable to HIV infection:

1. Young, educated, employed and urban women who are least likely to abstain from sexual relations if not married, and most likely to have multiple partners, and have sexual relations under the influence of alcohol. These women, however, are also most likely to use con-

doms, although the extent to which this counters their risk is unclear. They also represent a fairly small group of women.

2. Young married and cohabitating women, particularly the poor and uneducated ones who are mainly exposed to risk through their spouses, and who are far less likely to use condoms or be able to negotiate sexual relations.

The prognosis that many of these people will die whilst economically active and having children, is good. The mortality rates of adults and children in Southern Africa are discussed by Haacker (2010:40-44) in an article on the development impact and policy challenges regarding HIV/AIDS, and see the Ministry of Health and Social Services Report of 2008b (p. 5) that says: "Despite the rollout of ARVs the number of people dying of AIDS related causes will continue to grow." The same report mentions that there are about 39 new infections per day in Namibia and the number of people in need of ART treatment will grow from 69 500 to 114 500 by 2012/2013. The report does mention, though, that there is a decline in HIV/AIDS related deaths in Namibia because of the roll out of ARV's. Nevertheless, in specific places, such as Katima Mulilo in the North of Namibia, the prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS is as high as 31.7%. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Namibia will increase to 247 000 in 2012, which represents almost one eighth of the population (given that the number of people in Namibia stays more or less the same). (Prognosis of the Ministry of Health and Social Services 2008:21).

Hopwood, Hunter and Kellner (2007:14) indicate that great pressure will be created by the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the extended family support system as the first impact will be felt on the household level and then will have an effect on the community and on the economy. In this situation, children are normally the first to suffer. They are disrupted because of the death of one or both parents. In Namibia, the Caprivi region has a percentage of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC's) as high as 42%, with at least five other regions with a percentage well over 30%. The percentage of the OVC's in Namibia in the age group 15-17 is 40%. (See the Democratic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2006-07:257).

Normally, OVC's are taken up by the extended family, but mostly by their grandparents. The 2004 UNAIDS Report notes that orphans living with their grandparents have increased to 61% by 2000, whereas 28% live with relatives. Whilst having contact with siblings is very important,

55% of orphaned children in Namibia do not live with all their siblings under the age of 18.

“Families are the best hope for the care of orphaned and vulnerable children, but they require support from outside sources” (DHS 2006-07:263). The UNICEF 2005 report specifically mention faith-based organisations as part of a wider support system. The problem is that external support is not readily available and only 17% of OVC’s live in households that do receive external support.

HIV/AIDS may be the main contributor to the orphan crisis in Namibia and therefore also the main cause for the fact that there are so many dysfunctional families in the country but there are, of course, driving factors causing and upholding the epidemic in Namibia. The most pertinent of these is the situation of extreme poverty in the country even though the country is classified as lower-middle income country. This affects the OVC’s in the country severely, since many of them are taken up in families which are falling in the categories of poor to severely poor. A brief explanation of the situation in Namibia follows below.

### ***Poverty in Namibia***

Namibia is one of the countries with the largest gaps between rich and poor in the world and even though the country has managed to narrow this gap somewhat, the Gini coefficient is still 0,6%, down by only 0,1% in twenty years (see an article by Schlettwein 2010:18). Schlettwein, however, is a government official, and in an independent study of October 2009 it is determined that this figure cannot be correct. This study reports a mere 0,01 reduction in the Gini coefficient, which is negligible by any standards (see Schmidt 2009c).

Poverty can be measured with different scales. Two of these have been used in Namibia to determine the poverty line in the past. The Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (NHIES) of 1993/94 and 2003/4 used the food share in consumption approach, whereas a recent article by Schmidt (2009a) used the cost of basic needs approach (CBN), the approach or method that is used in Namibia today, and also in many countries of the world. “The poverty determines the minimum standard of living one has to achieve to be considered non-poor. In other words, any household below the poverty line is considered poor” (Schmidt 2009c:2). Schmidt (ibid.) explains the CBN method as follows:

Firstly, it looks at how much food an average person needs to eat per day, and how much it would cost. That is then called the 'food poverty line': the amount of money needed to buy just enough food to survive. To that, the cost of other non-food basic needs, such as shelter and clothing, is added to obtain the absolute 'poverty line'. If a household spends less than that amount per adult, it is considered 'poor'. In Namibia, this poverty line was N\$ 264 per month for each adult in the household in 2003/4.

Schmidt (ibid.) admits that the CBN method is not ideal or completely objective, "but the CBN method is better than most".

In the above report of Schmidt the share of poor individuals in Namibia is on average 38% in 2003/4. In rural areas the share stood at 49% (Schmidt 2009c:3). There is, however, a difference between the various regions in Namibia. In the Kavango, for example, the share of poor individuals stood at 64%. The latest (2010) figures now show that Namibia has an unemployment rate of 51,2%, a staggering figure indeed (see a report in *The Namibian*, June 1, 2010). For the purposes of this paper and in light of what is said above about the fact that most orphans are cared for by their grandparents, the information that those who are the poorest in the country, are the pensioners with a poverty rating of 65% is most disturbing. (See also the paper of Schmidt 2009b, which provides more extensive explanations and statistics about poverty and the sharing of services.) In this respect, an article in *The Republikein* of July 2006 by Nicolette Laubscher may be of interest: she writes that 57% of people who care for orphans have an income of N\$101 to N\$500, whilst 32% of care givers must make do with an income of less than N\$100. She also notes that 55% of persons who care for orphans are between 60 and 96 years old. The statistics come from a survey made by Project Hope in 5 constituencies in Northern Namibia. Mónica Ruiz-Casares (2005:35) writes in a report on the Third National Conference on Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Namibia (2005) that in 2001 over 7,000 households were headed by persons younger than 18 years of age. Only one in four of these persons had a job. Polisi Kivava (*In die Welt für die Welt* 1/2006:4-5) notes that for some girls in Africa prostitution is the only possibility to earn some money in order to care for their younger brothers and sisters. Ruiz-Casares (2005:39) confirms Kivava's findings that girls will turn to prostitution for money. This she reports in quote form from a Kavango girl, aged 16. (See in this respect also Jauch, Edwards and Cupido 2009:15).

Despite these disturbing figures for Namibia, it is indicated that the country has been and is experiencing pro-poor growth. (This means that, despite the poverty rates in the country, there has been a slight reduction in poverty, given the definition of the poverty line.)

The position of women has to be especially mentioned in a report on poverty in Namibia. “Women are the primary caregivers, providers and protectors in the family” (Jauch, Edwards & Cupido 2009:13).

“Because of labour migration, poverty and AIDS mortality, the rural matri-focal family often takes the form of the Elderly Female Headed Household or grandmother and her grandchildren that various children left behind due to migration or mortality. Often the state-provided pension is the only source of cash income to these families” (Ibid.:14).

HIV/AIDS and poverty may count as the biggest, but numerous other problems are also faced in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and poverty, apart from problems that all children face anyhow whilst growing up. Platt (in Ecumenical Papers Series 01/06) lists many such other problems that the child faces, even without taking into account the ever-present threat of HIV/AIDS. Such problems include a lack of education, children used for work, drugs and related substances, violence, sexual abuse, and poor health care. (See also DHS 2006-07, and a recent report in *Die Republikein*, June 14, 2010, which quotes UNICEF as saying that there are now 150 Million children under 14 years of age who are used for work world-wide). Platt relates the problems he mentions to a large extent to the lack of ecumenical will between churches and church leaders. The problems have dire effects on children. In an interview with Magdalena Sitoris in *In die Welt für die Welt* 1/2006:7-8 about children’s rights in Asia, she notes that the churches must recognize the problems of children and says the following: My church, the HKBP, a very large church, does not really do anything for the protection of children.” The above-mentioned UN Report (2004:62) quotes Foster as follows:

“Many (children) experience depression, anger, guilt and fear for their futures. This experience can lead to serious psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, alcohol and drug abuse, aggression and even suicide.”

### **“Struggle Kids”**

Namibia has also inherited a large number of so-called “struggle kids”. These are children who were born during the struggle for independence or who were left orphaned because their parents were killed in the war

for independence (before 1990). Even though it sounds as if these cannot be children any more, which they are not, many of them suffer post-traumatic stress, as they could not really find their way in the new Namibia. Many of them were born in the struggle and then sent elsewhere (countries such as Cuba, East Germany, Russia, for example) and came back not even able to speak their “native” languages or were not acquainted with their indigenous cultures. Many of these young people feel that they were forgotten by the governing (ruling) party of Namibia, which left them to try and cope with the new Namibia after 1990. In 2008, for example, such a group of young people had a strike in front of the Ministry for War Veterans in Windhoek, protesting the fact that they were born in exile but were then afterwards never cared for by their families, extended families or the government. These young people were then removed from Windhoek in 2009 and settled at Mount Aukas, a farm north of Windhoek. These people practically live in squatter circumstances, with no regular transport to Windhoek. After a recent protest march to Windhoek, the “struggle kids” were told by Government (through Youth Minister Kazenambo) that they were “unruly” and that Cabinet has decided that they will not get government jobs because of this (*The Namibian*, June 22, 2010; see also e.g. the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 May 2010 and *The Namibian*, June 10, 2010).

## ***The Position of the Namibian State The Constitution***

Naldi, a lecturer in law, who did an analysis on constitutional rights in Namibia in 1995, made some interesting remarks on the Constitution of Namibia of which I wish to quote a few:

Unlike, for example the South African Constitution, “the Namibian Constitution does not seem to envisage the concept of the best interest of the child to be a paramount consideration.” (p. 79)

“Article 15(1) of the Constitution acknowledges that the best interests of the child may necessitate the child’s separation from its parents, e.g. in cases of neglect or abuse. However, international law requires that the child maintain regular contact with his/her parents where possible. Furthermore, where the authorities taking children into care the European Court of Human Rights has held that the parents must be involved in the decision-making process, in particular the right to be heard and to be fully informed.” (pp. 79-80)



It is “not clear whether the rights of children born out of wedlock are protected by the Namibian Constitution. The ACHR (*American Convention of Human Rights – my explanation of the abbreviation*) appears to be the only international instrument which explicitly protects illegitimate children.” (p. 80)

The above, however, does not mean that Namibia does not have laws on the protection of children, even though the current Children’s Act 33 stems from 1960, but currently there is a new draft bill, which was drafted in cooperation with the Legal Assistance Centre in Windhoek. This was done in 2009 and is currently with the Ministry for promulgation. This new draft Child Care and Protection Act includes several new proposals to be included in the law, which include, amongst others, the following:

To change the age of majority from 21 to 18, as in many other countries, which means that an eighteen year old person will be seen as a “major”, that is, legally an adult.

To introduce parenting plans to protect the best interest of the child. These plans may include agreements between parents on, for example, where and with whom the child lives, payment of maintenance, maintaining contact with the child, and schooling and religious upbringing of the child.

To introduce a Children’s Ombudsman who can help in protecting the rights and interests of children in society, and

To introduce a Child Welfare and Advisory Council, which should be a government-appointed body with the task of promoting the rights and interests of children in society. (Countries with such councils are, for example, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone.)

### ***Who is doing something?***

Apart from the mentioned efforts with regard to law changes in Namibia, the government has proposed several plans to curb the problem with orphans, particularly AIDS orphans in Namibia. The problem, though, lies in the fact that these plans have not really worked thus far. The above-mentioned facts about Namibia illustrate that. This is further illustrated by individual reports. Only the latest two are indicated here. One report is on the general situation in Namibia and the second on a

more specific monitor action that took place in 2008 in two of the regions (Erongo and Hardap) of Namibia.

In 2007 a **Namibia National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children** was drawn up by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare in Namibia, with the following indicators targeted as monitor actions for 2010:

**Rights and Protection**, with target: all children should have access to protection services;

**Education**, with target: Equal proportions of OVC versus non-OVC aged 16-17 years have completed Grade 10;

**Care and Support**, with target: 50% of all registered OVC receive any external support (economic, home-based care, psychosocial and education);

**Health and Nutrition**, with target: 20% reduction in under-five mortality of all children / equal proportions of OVC and non-OVC aged 15-17 years are not HIV infected;

**Management and Networking**, with target: “multi-sectoral” (my quotation marks) coordination and monitoring of quality services to OVC are significantly improved.

In 2008 the plan of action was monitored in a volume specifically on Monitor and Evaluation (M&E) and in many of the mentioned indicators, specifically in **Education**, **Care and Support** and **Health and Nutrition**, it seems that the plan has failed up till then. In **Education** and **Care and Support** dismal results are reported. In the category **Education** only two of thirteen target categories have been given values for 2010 and in **Care and Support** only two of ten categories do not have the value “*To Be Discussed*” for 2010.

In the more specific regional report mentioned (of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social and Community Development, 2008) a few categories were discussed of which a few findings will be mentioned. With the first “**Functioning of OVC Committees**” category, the report found that “the functioning of these committees and their activities was at times exclusive and not broad based in their operations, and it was evident that all the new OVC committees were still in need of training to help them do their job effectively” (p. 5). In the category of the “**Provision of Identity Documents**”, a requirement to register as OVC in order to receive a social grant, it was found that in many places it was

difficult to obtain these, sometimes simply because of very practical issues such as the long distances to travel and the cost of travel (p. 6).

In the category “**Exemption from School Fees**”, it was reported that, “although there is a national policy in place regarding the exemption of OVC from the payment of school development fund fees it was not adhered to by some school principals” (p. 6). And further: “It was widely reported that pensioners could no longer cope on their pension as they also had to cater for the needs of family members and OVC who are not registered due to the absence of national documents and inaccessibility of registration services.”

As further proof that the government did not seem to “get it right” another report from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare appeared in September 2009 with the title “*Standards to Improve Service Delivery for Organisations Working with Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Namibia*” (My emphasis).

Except for Government, of course, many other organisations, as suggested in the above-mentioned title, are involved in the delivery of services in Namibia. They include a number of church-based organisations such as Apostolic Faith Mission AIDS Action, Catholic AIDS Action, Church Alliance for Orphans, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia AIDS Programme and Rhenish Church AIDS Programme, to mention but a few. One other organisation, which may be mentioned in this regard, is the so-called BIG (Basic Income Grant) Coalition, which had its roots in the Church.

BIG recommends to Government that each person in Namibia should be granted a basic income grand per month. This should be recovered from the personal and other taxes of Namibians who are eligible to pay tax. This will place an extra burden on the tax payers of Namibia, but will, so the Coalition claims, relieve the poverty situation in Namibia such that many other social problems will be solved.

BIG has created quite a controversy in Namibia. Henning Melber, well-known commentator and writer on Namibian politics, has called BIG “so far the most serious effort to come to terms with the horrendous discrepancies” in the Namibian economy and social structures. On 10 May 2010 the President of the Republic of Namibia, Pres. Hifikepunye Pohamba, said that the monthly grant will encourage people “to do nothing” (See the report on the *Namibian*, 12 May 2010). This, in turn, was heavily criticized by Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Chairperson of the BIG

Coalition, and well-known anti-Apartheid poet, writer and commentator, who called for an in-depth study to be conducted into the matter with the aim of possibly introducing the grant in Namibia.

The BIG Coalition introduced a pilot project of the basic income grant in the settlement of Otjivero at Omitara, near Gobabis in the North-East of Namibia in 2008. A basic grant of N\$ 100.00 ( $\pm$  10 Euro) was paid to each person in every household. Bishop Kameeta reported that this was a huge success and brought complete change in the community with some business activities going on, more children going to school and more people seeking work because of the fact that they have money for transport and basic foods. In fact, he said that the BIG project in Otjivero was proof that people did not become “lazy” after the grant. Rather, they are encouraged to seek work and to become active (see the report of the *Republikein*, 11 May 2010; see also NANGOF 2008).

The controversy about introducing a general income grant in Namibia is going on, with political commentators from other countries, such as South Africa, Germany and Sweden, joining the debate (see, for example, the *New Era* article of 4 June 2010).

Another initiative, specifically aimed at orphans in Namibia, which should be mentioned, is the Churches’ Alliance for Orphans (CAFO), a sister organisation of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). This organisation has initiated various projects with the aim of assisting and educating orphans in Namibia. Foreign donors, such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development), have come to the aid of CAFO as can be seen in articles published in the *Namibian* and the *Republikein* on 10 June 2010. In the specific case reported, CAFO received 70 metric tons of food packages from the Center for International Health to be distributed to OVC in Namibia.

### **Advocacy, Church and Bible**

“Advocacy is an effort to influence a law, a policy or some other decision. Advocacy can be directed at various levels of government, government bodies, or other institutions or individuals” (LAC, p. 3).

To start with the Bible: It should be clear that there is no way for us to directly apply either Old Testament or New Testament texts to our situation. It is perfectly clear that the Old Testament saw children as part of a religious community, which ultimately, was also intrinsically part of the government of the day, however one would like to define this link. In the

New Testament the situation was not the same but the concept of the religious community and the place of children within the community essentially stayed the same.

Our religious communities in secular governments have no part as religious community per se of government. We are normal citizens or non-governmental organisations that have to take part in or influence good governance in those roles. Our opinions and votes do not convince government as religious opinion. They must influence political policy decisions. Once Government is convinced of a matter, a political decision has to be made, based on the Constitution and other human rights policies subscribed to and ratified by Government.

If we say this, what do we take from the Bible? And on what do we rest our opinions and advocacy? The Bible can at most provide us with certain principles, which we find with sound and thorough interpretation of the Bible and which we may now call “ethical” principles. But even these principles are mostly rather broad and open to new interpretation, because our principles and our understanding of them can be brought to government in an advocacy campaign but they will ultimately not necessarily look like we have meant them to be. For instance, if we interpret in our theology that our children are condemned from the beginning we would have a different perspective on illness than when we would have the Old Testament opinion as extracted above, that children are born free of “sin” and do not know good from bad, but even this is an interpretation, because “do not know good from bad” is only an epistemological expression. Many other examples can be taken in this regard.

The problem is, though, that if our principles from the Bible are so broad, they can be written or “found” by any religious text. We have a major problem. Our text is not unique and may not bring unique principles to the table when advocating for major problems in society. We have to have a canon that can address issues of society without simply repeating texts and verses like empty refrains! This does not mean rewriting the Bible, but it means that pastors and other church people must have a handbook that follows the principles of advocacy; that can address political officials on their level of thinking; that can take into account the social problems and their tentacle effects; that can convince Government that homework has been done on the issues of the day; that research has been done which takes into account the beliefs and basic text of our beliefs but is a well-informed canon, which, when used in advocacy

campaigns, will have convincing effects. Empty repetition of what is fair, just, and good governance with repetition from text verses from the Bible will not work. Church people must come with information and strategies from the brunt of reality, so much so that Government would find it unfair that they are so convincing that they cannot be denied in their requests. This does not mean that we must write a new Bible, but our church leaders, who include the normal pastor in a congregation somewhere in rural areas must be empowered to get the message over. While pastors are preaching and bringing the message of the Bible every day by repeating biblical values through normal interpretations and dogmatic repetition, the country of Namibia is in a deteriorating process. The Church in Namibia is the only organisation well dug into reality, with its tentacles in every little village, place, town, or city in Namibia. The Church is the only organisation with the potential to know where every orphan or child lives in Namibia. The Church finds its basic ethical principles from a sound book from a different era but the church has to translate those principles into a canon for action.

Every theological training seminary or school in Southern Africa should include, to my mind, a proper course on Advocacy. It is time that pastors spend less time on digging themselves into the details of Dogmatics, Missiology or Church History (from which a lot can be learnt) and more on Advocacy. It is time to fight the social problems within the nations in Southern Africa because problems are already far beyond the means of other bodies. The Church is still in a position to fulfill a most important role but may lose that role to other organisations which fulfill this with great vigour. These other organisations do not necessarily take their inspiration from the Bible. There is enough of a biblical mandate to see children as most important in our society but in the Namibian society enough is not done and it is time that the church should fulfill this most important role to fight for the children of Namibia.

Furthermore, it is important for pastors to know how government systems work and to know whom to approach when there are problems in society. For this reason it might even be important for pastors to follow a basic course in government studies to make sure that they approach the right people through the correct channels.

The church is involved in some work, which includes soup kitchens and counseling, but the Church should play a much more aggressive role in

advocating for funds for help, education and other matters important to give children hope for the future.

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*Obvious Vengeyi*

## ***The Bible in the Service of Pan-Africanism: The Case of Dr Tafataona Mahoso's pan-African Biblical Exegesis***

### ***Introduction***

Dr Tafataona Mahoso could be described as one of the most faithful, if not pious, disciples and rabbi (teacher) of pan-Africanism. In Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and Africa at large, he is known in academic and political circles for nothing other than his radical but in-depth pan-African analyses. He could be called a prophet of pan-Africanism, an African prophet Elijah calling for traditional nationalism. Mahoso through his column, 'African Focus', in the weekly Zimbabwean newspaper, The Sunday Mail, has commented on African politics, economics, media, culture, history, religion and any other subject of relevance to Africa. To argue his case, Mahoso normally appeals to many sources; African history, culture, philosophy, religion, art, proverbs, riddles, wisdom sayings and anything from the African heritage.

Of late however, Mahoso has added the Bible to the list of 'weapons' in his quiver. While he has been citing or mentioning biblical characters in his analyses, Mahoso's citation from the Bible is becoming more pronounced, more elaborate and even sustained. The year 2011 has especially seen Mahoso appeal to the Bible more often than not. It seems logically sustainable to suspect that he has deliberately and consciously brandished the Bible as one of his many 'weapons' to fight the battle against imperialism, which imperialism for pan-Africanists has become so pervasive that it has sometimes disguised itself by among other means, fronting blacks; political, academic, media, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and religious leaders. Although not a trained biblical hermeneutician, Mahoso is one person who is talented in bringing together an array of issues that seem unrelated into one smooth running story that clearly agrees with the theme of the biblical passage he would have chosen.

Characteristic about Mahoso's articles I have chosen to analyse in this article is not only their profuse biblical citations but also their reliance

on a particular, vernacular (Nda<sup>1</sup> version) translation of the Bible. I assume that Mahoso's citing of the Bible and especially a vernacular version is not a matter of coincidence. It is very tactful. Mahoso knows his context well. There are four related Zimbabwean context-specific issues to consider here to understand Mahoso's choice of the vernacular version of the Bible as a 'weapon' for pan-Africanism. These factors are based upon historical and current influential position of the Bible in Zimbabwe and Christian population trends.

### ***The Bible and Zimbabwean Christian/Population background***

First, Global research indicates that Christianity is on the rise in Africa and other third world countries. Between 1900 and 2000, for example, the number of Christians in Africa grew from 10 million to over 360 million, from 10 % of the population to 46 %. Hence today, the most vibrant centres of Christian growth are in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Zimbabwe, in particular is a *de facto* Christian nation in that while other religions are constitutionally allowed to freely practice, for many reasons, Christianity is the single most dominant hence, mostly visible. As of 2011 estimates, about 75 % of the population are practicing Christians.<sup>3</sup> And with Pentecostalism that seems to be harvesting converts on almost daily basis, the percentage could be higher. Interesting about Pentecostalism is its influence on behaviour and beliefs in nearly all other churches in Zimbabwe. Of particular importance is the Pentecostal belief in the Bible as fetish,<sup>4</sup> the absolute word of God, directly inspired by God hence its claims must be taken as literal as it is written. While this belief has always been found within mainline churches, one could argue that the rise of Pentecostalism has accentuated it. Mahoso is quite alive to this influential role of the Bible in the lives of the majority of the Zimbabwean populace, such that citing the Bible could have been a consideration of this context-

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<sup>1</sup> Nda is one of the five dialects that constitute the Shona language. It is spoken in the Southern-Eastern parts of Zimbabwe, and in parts of Mozambique and South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Religion in Zimbabwe. <http://relzim.org/major-religions-zimbabwe/>. (Accessed on 21 January 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Obvious Vengeyi, 'Gona and the Bible among indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe: A comparative approach', in Masiwa Ragies Gunda (ed.), *From Text to Practice: The Role of the Bible in daily living of African People Today* (BiAS 4), 2011, 95-129.

tual fact. Communicating to Christians therefore means communicating to the majority of any given community in Zimbabwe. And citing the Bible is one of the many ways by which one can appeal to all the Christians, irrespective of their different denominations. But why would he cite the vernacular Bible? This question takes us straight into the second major assumption regarding Mahoso's reasons for citing the Bible.

The second major assumption regarding Mahoso's interest in the Bible particularly the vernacular (Ndau translation), could be related to the above. It relates to pan-African ideology and numbers of people who can read and understand Ndau. Ndau, the dialect, is spoken in South-Eastern parts of Zimbabwe, and some parts of Mozambique and South Africa. Also, as part of the Shona family of languages which-language (Shona) is spoken, read and written by almost 80 % of Zimbabweans, communicating in Ndau is as good as communicating in Shona. Because, except for a few words, all the Shona speaking people can understand Ndau and the same with Ndau speaking people, they can understand all other dialects that constitute Shona. In relation to this, is another historical fact; everybody in Zimbabwe at least among the young generation speaks Shona or at least can read and understand Shona. That means even the 15 or so % Ndebele speaking people and some minority groups can be part of the conversation. But why not use the English version of the Bible, which can equally communicate to all the Zimbabweans without any problems? After all, English is the official language in Zimbabwe. To address this question, I am going to spring to the third assumption why Mahoso appealed to the vernacular Bible and not any other.

Dr Tafataona Mahoso hails from Chimanimani which may suggest that he speaks Ndau as his first dialect and that he belongs to United Baptist Church, the most dominant Christian denomination in this area. This church is known to have maintained its '*Ndau* ness' even as it moved to other places where Ndau is not well represented. Although it is a missionary church, in a way, United Baptist Church has been made local. From that perspective Mahoso's reference to the Ndau version could have been unconscious, but a reflection of whom he is. Could there be another reason apart from these, why Mahoso cites the Ndau version? Yes, there is.

For me, while all the other assumptions above are important and possibilities, Mahoso's reference to the Bible especially a vernacular version is

in consideration of long established facts about the power of the Bible in all matters of life particularly a translated Bible, in cultures such as those in Africa. Jenkins observes that, ‘cultures that readily identify with biblical worldviews (such as Zimbabwe and almost the rest of Africa) find it easier to read the Bible not just as historical fact, but as relevant instruction for daily conduct’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, reading the bible in political, economic, and social issues is common and is usually adhered to without questions of original contextual meaning. And Mahoso is quite aware of this truism. Connected to this reality is the issue of a vernacular translation of the Bible.

Eulogising the importance of biblical translations in Africa, one of the most celebrated African scholars, whom I will cite here at length, John Mbiti observes that when the Bible is translated into African languages,

people hear the story of God’s salvation, love and grace unveiled in their own language, the language they understand with their whole being, the language of their childhood and old age, the language of their dreams and expectations, their fears and their hopes. But they also hear other things in the Bible. Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible’. and so it is with the stories in Genesis such as the Creation accounts, the story of Noah, family stories about Abraham and his descendants, accounts of Jewish life during the time of the judges and kings; traditional wisdom as collected in the Book of Proverbs; so also the parables of Jesus in the Gospels. In these records and many more, African Christians see and hear descriptions parallel to those of their own traditional life. The Bible is not simply an historical book about the people of Israel; through a re-reading of this scripture in the social context of our struggle for humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation. This divine Word is not an abstract proposition but an event in our lives, empowering us to continue in the fight for our full humanity.<sup>6</sup>

It is from this understanding that Mahoso appeals to the Bible that he uses as a ‘weapon’ to fight African battles against imperialism. He also knows that the people, as eloquently expressed by Mbiti above, find answers to their problems in the Bible when it is presented in their own language but also when it is read and interpreted in the light of their daily struggles. This is a conscious departure on the part of Mahoso from the colonial missionary method of reading and interpreting the

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<sup>5</sup> Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. Nairobi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986, 26; Cf. African Theologians conference communiqué held in Ghana, Accra in December 1977.

Bible that skirted real issues that the African people struggled with, such as land disposessions, economic marginalisation, racism among others. This missionary practice is not yet over in Africa. Although some mainline churches have moved to briefly criticise the colonial structures, most of them are still perpetuating colonial biblical interpretation that seeks to enslave the Africans and reduce them to beggars who survive on (alms) Western aid. They do not ask fundamental questions such as; why are Africans poor? When was the beginning of their present state of poverty? What do Africans need to escape the web of poverty? Instead, the main interest of these churches, especially in Zimbabwe, is to source food aid for the poor and criticise government strategies for addressing colonial land and economic imbalances.

Mahoso understands fully well that these churches as well as those opposed to the pan-African agenda appeal to the Bible to justify their arguments. It is historically well documented that the process of Bible translation as well as biblical interpretation is not an innocent and objective undertaking;<sup>7</sup> they both have always been exposed to manipulation by sectional interests, such as race, class, gender and ideological (political and cultural). Thus through biblical translation and interpretation, Western missionaries in Southern Africa entrenched Western–white cultural values while denouncing, suppressing and eliminating African traditional values especially the spiritual worldviews.<sup>8</sup> Mahoso understands this history quite well. He knows that the Bible has been influential as a weapon to subjugate and to blind the African people so as to accept ‘slave status’ in their own land through this two pronged approach of translation and interpretation.

It is well known, for example that, it was through missionary Bible translation (and interpretation) upon colonisation that not only were the people and the lands colonised but also the Shona Supreme Being Mwari was conquered and gendered following the Western cultural values. As Nisbert Taringa argues, the concept of God among the Shona (before Bible translations) may be expressed as: ‘Thou art woman, Thou

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lovemore Togarasei, *The Bible in Context: Essays Collection* (BiAS 1), 2009, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Dorah Mbuwayesango, ‘How local divine powers were suppressed: A Case of Mwari of the Shona’, in Musa Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading the Bible: African Women and the Bible*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001, 63-77; Cf. Musa Dube, ‘Consuming a colonial Cultural Bomb: translating ‘badimo’ into demons in the Setswana Bible (Matthew 8:28-34; 15:22; 10:8).’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 73, 33-59.

art man’,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that Mwari was neither male nor female or that Mwari was both. Equally, Mahoso traces the roots of the idea of a male-conqueror-God to the process of translation of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek, to Latin, to English and later to Shona, by the Europeans, who had the idea of a dominant male God. For Mahoso,

looking at Africa in relation to Europe, we see that the historical record gives us three belts: A belt, mostly in Africa, where Mwari, Musikavanhu (God), is neither male nor female; a belt where God is depicted as mostly female... and a belt far in the North, where God is projected as a male warrior God. What makes this geography important is not only the fact that the culture of the aggressive warrior God has overrun the belt of the Goddess and the belt of the non-gendered Mwari (Musikavanhu)...Even our idea of Mwari (Musikavanhu) has also been overrun and overturned. Mwari Baba, though in Shona, is not a Shona expression. It is a translation from Eurocentric language and thought. Consider the impact of this Northern tradition and language on translations of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek, to Latin, to English and later to Shona.....Consider the opening to the Book of John in the New Testament in view of three belts I have outlined: The Shona translation from English says: “*Pakutanga Izwi rakanga riripo, Izwi rakanga riri kuna Mwari, Izwi rakanga riri Mwari.*” We get some relief that in Shona there is no need to put a “he” or “she” to represent Mwari. But the translation of the Greek term logos to mean izwi or word is a problem for vanhu (the Bantu). Logos combines the sense of word with that of thought and that of reason and wisdom. But Izwi may mean only voice or word. In terms of African relational thinking and philosophy, the opening of John could read as follows: “*Pakutanga Mwari akapa simba rekufunga nokutaura. Simba repfungwa nokutaura zvaive na Mwari, zvikauya muvanhu sechipo chaMwari. Pasina simba rekufunga nokutaura hapana unhu, hapana ruzivo. Ruzivo rwa Mwari runojeka murima, nerima harina kurukunda.*”<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, Mahoso and many African scholars believe that the same (translated) Bible can be a weapon to liberate the oppressed African masses; against the intention of the translator. In fact, history has it that although the translation of the Bible was aimed at indoctrinating Africans with Western values, in the end it achieved the opposite as Africans began to read it to affirm rather than dismiss their traditional values that the missionaries had always suppressed.<sup>11</sup> From then on, Africans un-

<sup>9</sup> Nisbert Taringa, ‘African Metaphors for God: male or female’, *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa*, Vol. 86. 2004, 174-179.

<sup>10</sup> Tafataona Mahoso, ‘Language rescue and African Liberation’. *AFRICAN FOCUS: Zimpapers*. 03 September 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Masiwa Ragies Gunda, *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A Socio-historical analysis of the political, cultural and Christian arguments in the homosexual public debate*

derstand as eloquently articulated by Itumeleng Mosala that, 'the Bible is not only the product and record of class, race, gender and cultural struggles, but also the site and weapon of such struggles. The Bible is the place where and the means whereby many contemporary struggles are waged'.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Zimbabwean Political realities from the pan-African perspective: Context for understanding Mahoso's biblical exegesis***

From a pan-African perspective, one of the most noticeable features in Zimbabwean politics is interference from the Western world. This has seen the West found and sponsor opposition political parties (throughout Africa) which parrot none other than the Western transcript. These political parties in Africa characteristically, have teamed up with Western media, and local (African) academics, NGOs, churches, among other non-state actors.<sup>13</sup> They all chant well-coordinated anti-African liberation slogans and have developed an almost irredeemable hatred of nationalist leaders/forces across Africa. Their common agenda is not to address colonial imbalances in terms of equitable land and economic redistribution, among other structural injustices, but the preservation of the status quo whereby black people especially in Southern Africa are almost slaves of the whites. As a matter of fact, in Southern Africa, all the best opportunities; economic, social, educational and health, are enjoyed by the whites owing to nothing other than colonial history. For many blacks these services have remained a pie in the sky several years after political independence.

Be that as it may, the so called 'pro-democracy', political parties or 'progressive' forces in the Western governments and local private media circles are not concerned about this state of affairs. This position has led

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*with special reference to the use of the Bible* (BiAS 3), 2010, 88-111; Mbiti, *Bible and Theology*, 29; David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968, 109 f, 127-134; M.L. Daneel, *Quest For Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987, 84-86.

<sup>12</sup> Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Company, 1989, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vengeyi, 'Israelite Prophetic Marks among Zimbabwean men of God: An Evaluation of the Conduct of Selected Zimbabwean Church leaders in Recent Politics', *Exchange*, Vol. 39 No. 2 (2010), 159-178; Vengeyi, *Davidic Royal Psalmody and Propaganda: A Comparative analysis with Zimbabwe's Third Chimurenga Songs*. VDM Verlag Müller GmbH & Co, 2011, 53-68.



the pan-African camp to label them as Western puppets or stooges of the white colonial masters. This label is difficult to shake off, for a mere observation of the activities of these forces reveal a sinister motive. They are only concerned about ‘democracy, multi-partyism, human rights, civil liberties, etc’; claims that they do not only inconsistently but also narrowly define. Africa for these forces should open up to the Western world for lectures on democracy, human rights, freedom, and to receive intellectual as well as food aid. For example, despite having previously, in 2010 taken a hard-line stance like Robert Mugabe against homosexuality,<sup>14</sup> Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC, made a surprising U-turn in October 2011 and now is pushing for the legalization of homosexuality in Zimbabwe,<sup>15</sup> a practice that Africans regard as foreign and unnatural. His new stance is believed to have been dictated to him by Western governments especially David Cameron, who has called upon Africans to embrace homosexuality to qualify for financial aid from Britain.<sup>16</sup> Parallel with Tsvangirai’s push for homosexuality, his party’s Member of Parliament for Bulawayo East, Thabitha Khumalo is vigorously advocating for the legalization of prostitution,<sup>17</sup> another idea that a majority of Africans detest and view as morally repugnant to the African values. These forces, from the perspective of the pan-Africanists do not inspire confidence in African sons and daughters to be self-sustainable and independent. They are thus, agents of the ‘enemy’ and this position influences the harsh tone in the writings of Mahoso and other pan-Africanists who see themselves as engaged in a real struggle.

It is these people that Mahoso and other pan-Africanists are in confrontation with as they write. Because of their decision to collaborate with the West against African aspirations, Jonathan Moyo, scathingly labels all these variegated groups including church organizations as ‘enemies of

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Vengeyi, ‘Mapositori Churches and Politics in Zimbabwe: Political Dramas to win the support of Mapositori Churches’, *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 40 No.4 (2011), 351-368, (see, 364, footnote no.26).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. BBC News Africa, ‘Zimbabwe PM Morgan Tsvangirai in gay rights U-turn’, 24 October 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15431142>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BBC News UK, ‘Cameron to dock some UK aid to anti-gay nations’, 30 October 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15511081>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Staff Reporter, ‘MP’s Bill to legalise Prostitution’, New Zimbabwe.com, 06 October 2011. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-5757-MPs%20Bill%20to%20legalise%20prostitution/news.aspx>.

the state and national security threat'.<sup>18</sup> These views by Moyo about the character of most of these forces are difficult to dispute. Bishop Levee Kadenge's research into the activities of Christian organisations in Zimbabwe which he claims are 'fighting for democratic change', is quite revealing of the link between opposition political parties, Christian organizations, NGOs, and the Western governments through their embassies which sponsor the activities of these groups. The article also exposes the key characteristics of this camp as hatred of leadership of African liberation forces, hatred of nations that are hated by the West especially countries that helped Zimbabwe (and Africa at large) to fight against colonialism, hence they have no appreciation of African independence.<sup>19</sup> Kadenge's ideas confirm what the pan-Africanist camp has always claimed and sought to expose at every turn. Mahoso, for example unravels the interconnectedness between the Western empire building strategies from the beginning of colonialism to date as having made good use of missionaries, journalists, academics, NGOs, as fronts to cover the evil intentions of the empire.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The world narrative: Up Side Down: A pan-African perspective***

Contrary to the Western propaganda about the end of slavery, colonialism and empire building, pan-Africanists believe that the West has only coined new names to the same phenomena of slavery and colonisation. The West has done so through a number of strategies in all countries they have their interests threatened. According to pan-Africanists, the Western interests are not the same interests as those say, of Africans. Their (Western) narrative is also not the same as that of Cuba for example. As such, whatever pleases the West cannot be pleasing to pan-Africanists. Leaders, either in politics, economics, religious and social spheres who are celebrated in the West as role models and those institutions regarded as progressive forces are for the pan-Africanists retro-

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Moyo, 'MDC-T threat to National Security'. 08. July 2011. [http:// www.prof-jonathan-moyo.com/2011/07/08/mdc-t-threat-to-national-security/](http://www.prof-jonathan-moyo.com/2011/07/08/mdc-t-threat-to-national-security/).

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Levee Kadenge, 'The Relationship between the church and its funding partners in Zimbabwe', in *The Role of the Church in the Struggle for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe*. [http://www.zimbabweinstitute.org/File\\_Uploads/file/Role%20of%20the%20church%20book%20Projects.pdf](http://www.zimbabweinstitute.org/File_Uploads/file/Role%20of%20the%20church%20book%20Projects.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Mahoso, 'Racist Media, African Leadership', *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 13 February 2011.

gressive forces. Those individuals and institutions chastised by the West as rebels and enemies of progress are celebrated in the pan-Africanist camp as heroes and progressive forces.

This radical reversal of the Western narrative is not unfounded. History and socio-economic realities on the ground in Southern Africa especially dictates the radical tone in the pan-Africanist camp. At the dawn of political independence, white people did not embrace reconciliations that were extended by the black leaders. In Zimbabwe, whites even told black farm and domestic workers that ‘Zimbabwe was outside their premises; inside was Rhodesia’.<sup>21</sup> They devised subtle ways to sustain and pursue colonial separate development.<sup>22</sup> To date in Zimbabwe, as well as in South Africa, black people are still called Kaffir, Negros, baboons, and monkeys among other derogatory terms.<sup>23</sup> One British diplomat to Zimbabwe from 2006-9 confirmed this attitude in white farmers in his memoirs. He said:

“Most Zimbabwean Farmers I have met have attitudes that would simply not be tolerable in modern Western society....As they got used to my presence, they started to joke about farm dogs chasing black labourers. In no time they were happily talking about niggers and kaffirs. With a change in accent, they would have fitted right into 1950s Mississippi...”<sup>24</sup>

This observation is just a confirmation of what Zimbabweans have always known. Black people have gone out of their way in trying to reach out a hand of friendship in reconciliation but white people have not accepted it. As long as their privileged positions are maintained, everything else does not matter. They do not even want to hear the genuine cries of the black people for economic justice especially land redistribution.<sup>25</sup> This is the narrative that Western governments and media would always want to suppress. For Mahoso, Westerners to sustain the privileged position of their kith and kin in Africa created a propaganda myth:

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<sup>21</sup> Frans J. Vestraelen, *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses: Contemporary Aspects of Christianity in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998, 114; Cf. *The Herald*, 5 Feb. 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. James Kilgore, See review of his novel, *We are All Zimbabweans Now*. South Africa: Umuzi, 2009, published by Newzimbabwe.com News. 28 February 2010. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-1921-We+are+all+Zimbabweans+now/opinion.aspx>.

<sup>23</sup> Joram Nyati, ‘Why I want to be a white man’, *NewZimbabwe.Com*. 18 June 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Phillip Barclay, *Zimbabwe: Years of Hope and Despair*. Britain: Bloomsbury Publ. 2010. Cf. Clement Moyo, ‘UK Diplomat Blasts White Farmers’. *Zimeye.org*. 05 June 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Henning Mankell; Cf. Staff Reporter, ‘Writer blames white farmers for Zimbabwe Crisis’. *NewZimbabwe.Com*. 29 May 2011.

‘Many are called but a few are chosen (cf. Mtt.22:14). White settlers were chosen by God to turn Zimbabwe into a breadbasket. Let them continue’.<sup>26</sup> It is this narrative that pan-Africanists oppose. As such, the Western narrative is overturned upside down by pan-Africanists. Narrowly therefore, pan-Africanism equals anti-Western narrative and ‘values’.

Thus, for Mahoso, as evident in his biblical exegesis, all the countries and leaders; be they serving or retired, that are praised and highlighted as heroes in the Western media, no matter how big their names have become as a result of that propaganda; they are puppets of the Western empire. As such, people such as former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela,<sup>27</sup> and Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>28</sup> (of South Africa), Raila Odinga Prime Minister of Kenya, Morgan Tsvangirai, Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, the Dalai Lama, Alessane Quattara of Cote d’Ivoire, to mention but only a few are regarded as stooges of the West, hence traitors like Judas Iscariot. In fact, according to pan-Africanists like Mahoso, every country, leader or individual in this world who receives praises from the West is a danger to his own people, therefore not a hero. The same goes for academics, organisations such as churches, NGOs and others that are celebrated in the West as exemplary.

On the contrary, for Mahoso, all those who cross the Western path are celebrated as heroes and champions of the interests of their people. This position influences Mahoso’s pan-African biblical exegesis. In Mahoso’s views one finds a combative response to the Western narrative, always taking the opposite of what the West claims. To understand Mahoso’s pan-African exegesis of the biblical texts one needs to understand arguments raised especially in the Western governments, media and their allies in Africa.

The Western narrative of African political and economic state especially that finds expression in Africans who have devoted to nothing but dishing out this Western mantra; journalists, academics, editors of newspa-

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Mahoso, ‘No going back on land issue’, *The Sunday Mail*. 20 February 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Mahoso, ‘The Robert Mugabe African Reality Vs Nelson Mandela Myth’. African Focus. *The Sunday Mail*. 05 September 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Winnie Mandela, gives the most stinging criticism of both Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu for selling out. And these views are shared by most pan-Africans, including Mahoso. *Uhurunews. Com*. ‘Mandela Let us Down’. [http://uhurunews.com/story?resource\\_name=winnie-mandela-on-nelson-mandela](http://uhurunews.com/story?resource_name=winnie-mandela-on-nelson-mandela).

pers, publishers and religious leaders is that Africa is poor and her peoples are struggling because the leaders, especially the revolutionary leaders who have fought against Western colonialism have overstayed. Attached to that is the notion that Africa is poor because there is no democracy since the leaders are despots, particularly because they are old. In order to eradicate poverty Africans therefore must get rid of their old leaders. In Zimbabwe, for example, biting poverty in the country and its entire myriad problems are explained as direct consequences of mismanagement of the economy because Mugabe has overstayed in power and is now too old to run the country. This is the philosophy behind MDC slogans<sup>29</sup> and policies of regime change.<sup>30</sup>

The MDC and its media allies have of late attached Mugabe's age and health to the national security issue. For them, Mugabe must go now, because if he dies in power that will plunge the nation into security crises. In other words, to be old, for the MDC and their allies, is synonymous to being dull, retrogressive, dictatorial and even outright stupidity. Supporters of the MDC derisively call people in the rural areas, especially, as, *zvichembere ne zvidhara zve Zanu (PF)* or *Mazidhara nemachembere eZANU(PF)*. Some have as such been implicated in violence against old people they suspect of being ZANU PF supporters, such as village headmen and traditional chiefs.<sup>31</sup>

This narrative is still ongoing in Zimbabwe. Conway Tutani for example, equates gerontocracy to dictatorship, poor governance and mismanagement, but associates democracy with young leadership.<sup>32</sup> While these

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<sup>29</sup> One of the most popular MDC slogans from as far back as 1999 was: Mover: kana Jongwe rakwegura rinoitwa sei? (when the cock is too old, what do we do?), then audience would respond; Mupoto (we cook it). In other words, the slogan meant that Mugabe must go because he is old.

<sup>30</sup> Tsvangirai is quoted as having said, 'I warned him and he wants out. I don't know whether it is fear, but he is old. He needs help from young people like me. He is just old' ... 'Robert Mugabe lied says Tsvangirai'. <http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/news/robert-mugabe-lied-says-tsvangirai/>. Also, Biti, secretary General of MDC is quoted as having told his supporters at a rally in Mutare that, "The major problem is that our country (Zimbabwe) is being led by very elderly people,... "We now need wheelchairs in Cabinet because a lot of them are too old..." "Give Save (Tsvangirai) a chance who still has the energy to take over," Cf. Kakomo Community Radio Station, 'Biti says Mugabe now too old to continue ruling' Thursday 13 August 2009. <http://mutareradio.blogspot.com/2009/08/bitisays-mugabe-now-too-old-to.html>.

<sup>31</sup> *The Herald*. 'Politiburo condemns assault on chief Serima'. 04. November 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Conway Tutani, 'Gerontocracy equals oppression'. *NewsDay*. 12 May 2011. <http://www.newsday.co.zw/article/2011-05-12-gerontocracy-equals-oppression>.

views may seem individual, considering the MDC position on the same matter and the western powers' interest in seeing regime change in Zimbabwe, an overhaul rather of the whole system of government to usher in young MDC leadership,<sup>33</sup> one cannot be wrong to suggest that these are sponsored ideas by the West to instigate a rebellion among the youth, (as happened in the Arab world and North Africa) so as to quickly effect regime change.

It is this Western narrative among others, I will discuss below that Mahoso as a pan-African is responding to by appealing to the Bible. Specifically Mahoso responded to Tutani's article; whose views for Mahoso are just a replica of the Western media, MDC and other African stooges' transcript, a transcript fraught with contradictions, inconsistencies and sometimes utter confusion. Mahoso feels that this misrepresentation of facts is deliberately to confuse Zimbabwean youths, as a ploy by the West to recolonise Zimbabwe. He thus sets to expose the inconsistencies in the argument by appealing to the Bible and a wide range of historical issues.

### ***Mahoso's PanAfrican Biblical Exegesis***

Mahoso begins the article entitled, 'Denigration of African Elders' by citing the Ndau translation of the Bible (Num.11:16-17; Exo. 4: 29-31).<sup>34</sup> In the article, Mahoso seeks to reveal to the readers (of Zimbabwe), the foreignness or unAfricanness of the doctrine of interpreting old age, leadership by old people as something to be ashamed of as a nation, and as individuals. He argues that to denigrate elders is contrary to the Bible hence against God's dictates. For him, it is a Western sponsored philosophy forced into the minds of the African youths so as to further imperialist/ colonial interests, which interests can only be achieved through making sure Africans especially youth hate themselves (through hating their elders; mothers, fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers and social and political leaders) and love their Western former colonizers, who by implication are forces against God. The verses as he paraphrased below, read:

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. US Ambassador Charles Ray's address to journalists in Bulawayo, *Zimeye.org*. 'Mugabe exit no magic bullet: US envoy'. 16 June 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'. *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 21 May 2011.

*Na Jehovha wakati kuna Mosi, ndiunganidzire makumi manomwe evasharuka (elders) vaIsraeri avo vounoziva kuti vari vakuru vevanhu, vane nduna padera pavo; uvaunze kutende romusangano, kuti vamire (to take a stand) newe. Neni ndinozodzaka ndirekete apo. Ndinozotora mweya uri kwauri, ndiudurure padera pavo. Navo vanozotakura mutoro (mutwaro) wevanhu pamwepo newe, kuti usachazotwara wega. (Zvierengo 11:16-17) Mosi na Aaroni vakaenda vakaunganidza vasharuka vese va Israeri. Aaroni wakaereketa mazwi eshe akaereketa Jehovha kuna Mosi. Navanhu vakatenda. (Ekisedusi 4:29-31)*

According to Mahoso, African culture and philosophy is biblical. For him therefore, to link age of a leader to democracy or oppression is going against the Bible. Since God asked Moses to select elders from the tribes of Israel to help him govern, it therefore follows that God is happy with old leaders of Africa. In particular, for Mahoso, God has not only chosen Mugabe to lead Zimbabwe together with his cabinet and army generals who are also old, but God is also happy with their leadership. Mahoso believes that having elders in your midst is something to be cherished and celebrated.

To respect and receive knowledge and wisdom from elders is very biblical as it is also Godly, according to Mahoso. The logic is simple; God speaks to the elders as he did with Moses and the Israelite tribal elders that he summoned to come and take a stand with Moses. That is why, ‘when the message of leadership and liberation was first revealed to Moses, the first to be told and convinced were the elders, (Num.11:16-17; Exo. 4:29-31). And it was the elders who had to teach that message and teach it to the people, for 40 years, before the people finally reached the Promised Land.<sup>35</sup> In the same way, according to Mahoso, God has chosen Mugabe as Zimbabwe’s Moses, war veterans, army generals and other elders who are like Israelite elders to lead the people until they repossess their land and economy. It is only through them that God speaks to Zimbabwe about the strategies of liberation from colonial shackles. They thus, shall lead Zimbabwe out of Egypt (state where the economy is controlled by foreigners) into the Promised Land (state where the economy is owned by the indigenous blacks) characterised by eternal prosperity, where Zimbabwe will never borrow but lend.

In Mahoso’s understanding, this is very much in agreement with African values of *unhu (ubuntu)*. With this African relational philosophy of ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, “I relate therefore I am” or “I am who I am because of who we are,” the African differs most profoundly from

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<sup>35</sup> Mahoso, ‘Denigration of African Elders’.

the European not because of the obvious physical and biological features or the fetishised technologies, but because of his or her relationships throughout our history'.<sup>36</sup> In other words the Bible in Num.11:16-17 and Exo. 4:29-31 confirms and approves African values. As he argues, in terms of the African philosophy of *unhu*, the structure of a sound education for children and youths comes from siblings, peers, mentors, elders, ancestors and God, more or less in that order, but with wise elders (*vasharuka vakangwara*) being the most critical.<sup>37</sup> It is important to underline the fact that elders according to the structure given here are not only nearest to ancestors but they are also the first humans to receive from God and not the young ones. For Mahoso, African philosophy of *ubuntu* is therefore biblical and God given and that should be respected. By implication, only those Zimbabweans who support ZANU-PF respect their elders hence are *abantu*, have *unhu*.

Mahoso also, clearly associates old age with wisdom. His addition of *vasharuka vakangwara* in his interpretation of Num.11:16-17 and Exo. 4:29-31 suggests that there are some old people who are not wise hence should be avoided. In the same way, there could be youths who are elders by virtue of their wisdom, thus should be respected. This position sounds contradictory to his argument. But looked at closely, this is not a contradiction. Mahoso praises whoever is a messenger of his people, one who refuses to buy the Western narrative. That stance has seen him sing praises for old Robert Mugabe, together with young generation of leadership like Hugo Chavez, Ahmadinejad and Julius Malema for example. And the same stance has seen him rant at Mandela or others young or old world leaders, whom he accuses of having decided to collaborate with the West against the wishes of their people, hence forfeiting their right to elderhood. The wisdom of the elders according to African *ubuntu* philosophy is by virtue of them being vessels of the divine or communication channels between ancestors and God on one hand and the rest of humanity on the other.

In that order, according to Mahoso, listening or being led by elders is not anything wrong but everything to be celebrated as it is connected to divine presence and wisdom. To be led by an elder is to bask in God's favour. Elders as spokespersons of ancestors and God in the African

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<sup>36</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'. AFRICAN FOCUS: Zimpapers. 28 May 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'.



culture as well as in the Bible are custodians of order and wisdom. They are libraries of the community in as much as they are anchors of the society. The elders represent stability, health and wealth of the community. That is why the death of an elder in Africa has been equated to the burning of a library. The logical conclusion therefore for Mahoso, as well as pan-Africanists in Zimbabwe is; disrespecting elders (Mugabe, war veterans, army generals, among others) is tantamount to disrespecting ancestors and God himself. They are indeed ancestors. In other words, disobeying in form of voting against Mugabe and showing disrespect to him is unbiblical, unchristian and equally unAfrican.

According to Mahoso's pan-African biblical exegesis, that is rooted in African history and is supported by facts that have become almost universal, elders are very important pillars of any nation, as was made clear in the Bible (Num.11:16-17; Exo. 4:29-31). For him, that is the reason Britain and other Western powers spend a lot of money trying to dissuade Africans from respecting their elders.<sup>38</sup> Citing Colin Turnbull<sup>39</sup>, whose views about the role of the elders in politics augurs well with pan-Africanism, hence with Num.11:16-17 and Exo. 4:29-31 Mahoso teaches the youth of Africa represented by those in Zimbabwe's MDC, academia, and media like Conway Tutani, whose views evidence strong hatred of African political elders and Africa's old people in general that it is un-Godly to hate your own elders but only to love those of others.<sup>40</sup>

This attitude to substitute African elders, with foreign elders especially former colonisers, substituting own institutions with foreign ones is rife in Africa. It is indeed a big setback to African liberation; hence an African tragedy. In Zimbabwe, conspicuous about the MDC leadership and supporters; academics, church leaders, NGOs among others is a consistent, spirited and devoted contempt of national liberation leaders, institutions and national celebrations such as Independence ceremonies.<sup>41</sup> As I have shown above, contrary to the biblical teaching (Num.11:16-17;

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<sup>38</sup> Tafataona Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'.

<sup>39</sup> Colin Turnbull, *The Human Cycle*. Simon & Schuster, 1984; Cf. Tafataona Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'.

<sup>40</sup> Tafataona Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'.

<sup>41</sup> Tsvangirai even after he became Prime Minister in February 2009 continued to boycott national events; Cf. Mahoso, 'Zimbabwe: Rhodie Shadow in MDC-T's Front Office'. *The Herald*. 10 November 2009; Cf. NewZimbabwe.com. 'Mugabe's fury as US envoy admits playing golf with Tsvangirai'. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/powell65.18841.html>.

Exo. 4:29-31), old people in ZANU PF are derogatorily and derisively called *zvichembere nezvidhara zve ZANU PF* and the youth are called *ma Green bomber*, thugs, militia, while war veterans are called *mazi war veteran* and dismissed as dull, uneducated and clueless on matters of democracy and human rights, yet they fought for the liberation of the country, to bring about democracy, against the same people who are celebrated today as champions and lecturers of democracy. This is the sad reality in almost all African states, leading President Museveni's to say, 'what always amazes me is the ability of Africans to hate themselves and love their enemies', the West.<sup>42</sup>

For Mahoso, the same war veterans dismissed as unintelligent and old men and women in the rural areas are the wise elders, the very people that God speaks to first, so that they would communicate to the rest of Zimbabwe, in the same way God spoke to the elders of Israel (Num.11:16-17; Exo. 4:29-31) to speak to the Israelites about independence and deliverance from Egypt slavery, not the so called 'fighters for democracy', puppets of the West. History, for Mahoso has recorded that the West sponsors puppets for their selfish economic interests and are not concerned about human rights. Mahoso asks, 'if they cared about human rights how would the British and Israel create Idi Amini Dada of Uganda and how would the great champion of freedom and democracy, the United States of America support Mobutu Sese Seko?'<sup>43</sup>

Thus associating dictatorship to old age as is the tendency in Zimbabwe is for Mahoso, as well as pan-African scholars, a futile exercise devoid of historical facts behind imperialist hostility and violence against leaders and countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia'.<sup>44</sup> Former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who himself as Mahoso, is pan-African and on many instances profusely cites the Bible to support his ideas,<sup>45</sup> carries the same sentiments about the West's vested interests, in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya.<sup>46</sup> Mahoso sees the same attempt in Zimbabwe, where

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<sup>42</sup> Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, 'Africans: Surviving at the Mercy of Others? The African Executive. 13-20 July 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Mahoso, 'Racist Media, African Leadership'.

<sup>44</sup> Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Gerald O. West, 'Thabo Mbeki's Bible: The Role of Religion in the South African public realm after liberation'. *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa*. 01 March 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Thabo Mbeki, 'What the world got wrong in Cote d'Ivoire'. *Foreign Policy*. 29 April 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/29/what\\_the\\_world\\_get\\_wrong\\_](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/29/what_the_world_get_wrong_)

Britain, as the former colonial master in Zimbabwe wants to install Tsvangirai, their puppet, on false claims that old age equals dictatorship. Mahoso argues that if protests, riots and crises in Africa: Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, and Tunisia (for example) were triggered by how long the leader or the party has been in power, then the riots and protests on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 when students in Britain attacked Prince Charles's motorcade were because he has been a prince for too long.<sup>47</sup>

According to Mahoso the imperialists have tended to use anything for the purposes of furthering their interests, including not only teaching youth in Africa to hate their elders who are divinely ordained by God as explicitly stated in the Bible (Num.11:16-17; Exo. 4:29-31), but also natural disasters and other scenarios that cause shock as opportunities to reorder the society.<sup>48</sup> For him, only those youth with *unhu* philosophy in their heads endure this Western onslaught and do not rebel against elders. Such African youth are like Jesus.

### ***Life of Jesus as confirmation of the African philosophy of Ubuntu***

Mahoso argues that all those people in Africa who buy the Western narrative have 'African disks full of white memory'. This is the reason for him why they would hate themselves; hate their own people, hate African culture, African values and above all, their elders, but only to love the Western culture and values. All such individuals for Mahoso do not exhibit *ubuntu*,<sup>49</sup> since they are guided by 'white man's Eurocentric localisation of humanity called globalisation (which) itself leads to narcissism. And for Mahoso, Narcissus is the enemy of African Relational Ethics, because instead of relating, Narcissus or Europe's man goes as far as Rene Descartes' "I think, therefore I am". An African, (with Afri-

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in\_cote\_d\_ivoire. (accessed on 16 June 2011); Thabo Mbeki, 'Thabo Mbeki Speaks on Lybia', taken from: Pan-African Views, Insights and Opinions from Zimbabwe, posted by Tichaona Zindoga on: <http://tichzindoga.blogspot.com/2011/04/thabo-mbeki-speaks-on-libya.html>. (accessed on 22 January 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Mahoso, 'Racist Media, African Leadership'.

<sup>48</sup> Mahoso, 'Denigration of African Elders'; Cf. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Metropolitan Books, 2007, who analyses the CIA publication of 1996, *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, which lays the strategies for America to dominate other countries by rearranging society and creating disaster situations for the opportunity to rearrange memory.

<sup>49</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'.

can disk full of African memory-*Ubuntu*) in contrast, chooses his or her leaders from within the *dariro* (circle) where the opposite dictum is the foundation and context of leadership.<sup>50</sup>

Even the Bible for Mahoso acknowledges and accepts this African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which philosophy penetrated the world of the Bible through Egypt. In other words the Bible does not condone the Western conception of reality but that of Africans. Therefore, flushing out white disk from the African memory entails accepting the biblical teaching (African philosophy of *ubuntu*) over non biblical philosophy which is represented by the Western mentality.

Typical of him, Mahoso cites the Bible, (Luke 2:40, 52) the vernacular (Ndau) translation, to confirm the validity or 'biblicity' of the pan-African ideology of *ubuntu*. He argues that, the Bible itself expresses the Judeo-Christian debt to the African relational ethics of Egypt when it tells us: In *Ruka 2:40*: (that) *Nomwana (Jesu) wakakura, akagwinya, anoungwaru, nenyasha dza Mwari dzaiva padera pake*'. But it was not enough for Mahoso, for Jesus to just grow and become strong, and be filled with wisdom and the grace of God, that is the reason we are told, 'In *Ruka 2:52*: *Na Jesu wakakura muungwaru nokudikana ndi Mwari nevanhu*', that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men. This is important for Mahoso, since, 'the leader, the teacher, leads and teaches because he has a deep relationship with God and the povo'.<sup>51</sup> By implication therefore, Mugabe and other African liberation leaders do not only have wisdom and the hand of God upon their lives, but they also have a relationship with the masses (povo). This povo, for Mahoso, is a community of Africans with African disks full of African memory of the African struggles against slavery and colonialism. From this perspective, the African struggles against imperialism are inspired by Jesus.

In praise of ZANU PF government, the same government loathed and blamed for destruction of the economy by those he describes as 'Africans with disks full of white memory', Mahoso strikes a similarity between ZANU PF leadership and Jesus' mission. According to him, 'the liberation movement on which the Government of the new Zimbabwe was based in 1980 was deeply entrenched within and among the rural communities (like Jesus) as a legitimate government of the people'. Therefore, 'this new state built by the liberation movement has suc-

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<sup>50</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'.

<sup>51</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'.

ceeded because it has connected the three mapfiwa of legitimacy in the rural African community: It has linked the spirit media, the mambo (chief), and the mhondoro'. This is an intersection of spheres or circles of relational power which produce a new reality where they all meet.<sup>52</sup> And this for Mahoso is not the case in the other camp, that group of 'Africans with disks full of white memory'. In Mahoso's hermeneutics, since Jesus is identified with ZANU PF's pan-African ideology it follows that the devil is identified with the MDC, since they are not connected to the masses like Jesus (ZANU PF). The legitimacy of African leadership as Mahoso observes, 'derives from its capacity to remember or reconnect relationships disrupted and disconnected by the evil forces of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, imperialism and neo-colonialism'<sup>53</sup> and this is what ZANU PF stands for.

According to Mahoso, the worst thing that ever happened to Zimbabwe in the last years is the willingness of leaders of the MDC formations and the supposed intellectuals and activists supporting them to lie about and against Zimbabwe in exchange for money, sponsorship and other Western inducements.<sup>54</sup> Blessing Miles-Tendi, observed this trend among academics in Zimbabwe, who always misrepresented or exaggerated the negative situation in the country for financial gains.<sup>55</sup> Such people, for Mahoso are not worth of being leaders, as they are not rooted in the masses like Jesus.

Under the conditions Zimbabwe was subjected to, even some staunchest African liberationist scholars were forced to reconsider their positions for survival, hence were rewired. It was only the few scholars like Mahoso, who never recanted their pan-Africanism. In a country, where the shock that was deployed upon its people could be described as unprecedented in history, Mahoso believes that the failure of all the strategies to bring about the much desired results of regime change, even after flooding the disks of many with white memory, was because God protected Zimbabwe. In deed it is even difficult to understand how people of Zimbabwe managed to survive in a nation whose grocery shops were literally

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<sup>52</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'.

<sup>53</sup> Mahoso, 'Flush white disk from an African memory'.

<sup>54</sup> Mahoso, 'Wikileaks confirms the puppets in the MDC that we already knew'. *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 05 December 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Blessing Miles-Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media*. Britain: Peter Lang, 2010, 59-60; Mahoso 'Wikileaks confirms the puppets in the MDC'.

empty for more than two years. For Mahoso, it was a miracle; it can only be attributed to God.

### ***God's promise of eternal prosperity to Zimbabwe***

Mahoso claims that all machinations of the enemy have failed; neither sanctions, filling African disks with white memory nor threat of military aggression have yielded the desired results in Zimbabwe and in Southern Africa at the moment, not only because the elders were vigilant and stood to the task; fighting for the rights and justice of their people until the enemy was confounded, but especially because God who speaks through the elders, the same God who believes in pan-Africanism, stood with them (elders) as they defended the nation (pan-African values) and the same God has promised Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and Africa at large that no such disaster shall overcome and overwhelm them again. God, for Mahoso, promised unlimited protection and prosperity to Africa, Zimbabwe in particular.

In a long article, worth to be called a sermon of thanksgiving for God's protection and blessings on Zimbabwe, Mahoso digs deep to expose what he thinks are the evil plans that had been hatched by the enemies of Africa in trying to influence regime change in Africa, Zimbabwe in particular. For Mahoso, the West used Africans with white 'no fly zones' mentality, or 'Africans with disks full of white memory' some as high as presidents and African Union dignitaries. Despite all these almost seemingly intractable strategies, for Mahoso, God has foiled them all and the enemy is on the run. Mahoso interprets the global financial crises in the West since 2008 as confirmation of the scripture, where God outlined a plan for his beloved people (Israelites) Zimbabweans. He thus begins the article, 'Africans with white no fly zones mentality' with a biblical quotation from Deut 28:7-13, again from a Ndau translation of the Bible and not English:

*(7) Na Jehovah unozoita kuti vavengi venyu vamumukire nokumurwisa, vechipinda ngenzira inwe chete; Asi Jehovah unoita kuti kana vomutiza vavengi venyu, vachapararira nenzira nomwe. (12) Na Jehovah uchamuzarurira pfuma yake; amupe mvura yenyika yenyu ngenguva yayo; nokuropafadza mabasa ose amavoko enyu; Imi muchapa marudzi mazhinji zvikwereti, asi imi hamuzotori zvikwereti. Jehovah uchakuitai misoro yeutungamiri; hamungaite miswe kwete. (Deut 28:7-13)*

According to Mahoso's biblical interpretation that penetrates deep into the historical social and economic issues bedeviling Africa, Deut 28:7-13

is specifically true on Zimbabwe. The enemies in Mahoso's view have come to attack Zimbabwe in a single file; to attack through economic sanctions (imposed in 2001 by Europe and America) and other ways such as sabotage, demonization and propaganda among others to cause social strife in order to achieve regime change, which is another version of recolonisation, are now retreating in seven ways. The camp is fragmented. Some already want sanctions to go. Citing, the German ambassador to Zimbabwe Albrecht Conze who has confirmed that 'in Europe ... some countries are pushing a little faster for the review of sanctions on Zimbabwe while others are hesitant',<sup>56</sup> Mahoso brags that, 'Zimbabwe and the SADC region are triumphant and feeling blessed (by God) because Zimbabweans have overcome a decade of full economic and financial warfare and those who imposed their sanctions on this country are frantically looking for face-saving ways to dump the MDC formations they have used for the last 10 years and to start doing normal business again with Zimbabwe; a Zimbabwe which lies at the heart of SADC and whose economy is growing despite the horrific sanctions'.<sup>57</sup> From this hermeneutical perspective, the sanctions which have been used as an economic warfare by the enemies of the people of God have been defeated as was promised by God to (Israel) Zimbabwe (Deut 28:7-13).

Mahoso claims that contrary to their expectations, by trying to lynch Zimbabwe in every forum, through all channels and on every platform: at the IMF, at the World Bank, at Kimberley Process meetings, at the EU and at the UN, the Anglo-Saxon powers have instead awakened the entire population of Zimbabwe to the evil intent of their sanctions. Most importantly, each time they have attempted to pin Zimbabwe down, Zimbabwe has prevailed over them and exposed the aggressors both morally and legally,<sup>58</sup> not only because Zimbabwe is led by the anointed sons, elders but also because God himself was with Zimbabwe, as he promised in Deut 28:7-13.

The sprouting of massive wealth in diamond deposits everywhere countrywide in Zimbabwe, which deposits are believed to be 20 % of the world's diamond deposits and estimated to turn around the economy of

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<sup>56</sup> Albrecht Conze, 'EU divided over Zimbabwe sanctions-Conze.' *The Herald*. 06 June 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Mahoso, 'Africans with white no fly zones mentality'.

<sup>58</sup> Mahoso, 'Africans with white no fly zones mentality'. *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 26 June 2011.

the country in two years when Zimbabwe becomes the top diamond producer country and massive deposits of platinum, gold, coal, copper, iron and other minerals are for Mahoso evidence of have God's providence. For him, these are not only the reason for the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe by the West, but they are also the 'means that the (same) illegal sanctions will not only be defeated by the people themselves but they are likely to end up punishing and embarrassing those who invited them and those who imposed them.' For him, this is not far from happening; as the rest of the growing economies of the world apart from the struggling and debt-ridden West are very happy to do business with Zimbabwe.<sup>59</sup> He thus pushes his argument in another article by citing 1 Sam 17:49 where David defeated Goliath by throwing stone a stone that struck Goliath on the forehead leading to his death as a representation of what is happening in Zimbabwe. For him, the mineral deposits especially diamonds are stone that David (Zimbabwe) used to defeat Goliath (the West).<sup>60</sup>

In practical terms, Mahoso argues that it is business with the emerging markets in friendly nations that shall prosper Zimbabwe (while hostile nations have a down turn) as Deut 28:7-13 says, out of the fruits of the land; agriculture and minerals.<sup>61</sup> In the same light, Mahoso sees the economic crisis in Greece as well as the rest of Europe and America as a fulfillment of the word of God (Deut 28:7-13) that Zimbabwe shall prosper as her enemies not only scatter but drown in poverty, such that Zimbabwe will never borrow from anyone but will lend (Deut 28:13). According to Mahoso, this is particularly true because already, 'the very same white racist governments which imposed illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe....today suffer and behave as if they are the ones who have been sanctioned', that is why 'they now want to return to a new Berlin Conference and a new partition of Africa', as 'has already happened over Libya and Cote d'Ivoire, but Southern Africa' has survived, thanks to 'a solid revolutionary alliance between young people of the generation of Julius Malema and their grandfathers (elders) who fought in the Second

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<sup>59</sup> Mahoso, 'Africans with white no fly zones mentality'.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mahoso, 'Ngoda-Stone that blasted away Goliath', *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 14 August 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Mahoso, 'No going back on land issue', *The Sunday Mail*. 20 February 2011.



Chimurenga, the war veterans and liberation intellectuals represented by President Robert Mugabe'.<sup>62</sup>

The sprouting mineral resources countrywide, therefore is not a mere accident of history. For Mahoso, they are clear signs of the presence of God among the people of Zimbabwe. These natural resources shall prosper Zimbabwe to the extent that she will not borrow but will lend other nations (Deut 28:12). Contrary to several prophets of doom who believe that the future of Zimbabwe is bleak as long as ZANU PF is in power, Mahoso sees the brightest future ever with ZANU PF on the steering wheel and gloomy future if MDC and her allies were to take charge. The logic from Mahoso's biblical exegesis is; since God promised Zimbabwe under ZANU PF leadership (and not MDC) that all the monetary institutions that have been used by the enemy to arm-twist Zimbabweans will not extend their grants to Zimbabwe again; it follows that it is only under ZANU PF that Zimbabwe will be a lender and not a borrower.

In Mahoso's analysis, although Africa's sons and daughters; 'those with white 'no fly zones' mentality have sold out and collaborated with the enemy, God has remained committed to Africa. This is the only reason Africa, Zimbabwe in particular has survived all these years. However, Africa needs to take stock and begin to take measures to prevent such Africans with white 'no fly zones' mentality to take responsibilities of countries. In Mahoso's words for example, Zimbabwe is soon to be a "no-fly zone" for imperialism, even when that imperialism is fronted by black faces. In Zimbabwe, Mahoso is already seeing the defeat of the enemy that was promised in the Bible (Deut 28:7).

The enemy, in the case of Zimbabwe, has been defeated with the help of so many gallant (elders) 'sons and daughters' of Africa, especially SADC and Thabo Mbeki, in particular,<sup>63</sup> which prompted Mahoso's gratitude. According to Mahoso, since Mbeki inaugurated the GPA in Zimbabwe enemies have begun to disintegrate, evidenced by the divisions in Europe over sanctions. As such says, 'Zimbabwe and much of SADC feel that Africa is blessed (by God); this region in particular is blessed....Thabo Mbeki's diplomatic shield (GPA) for Zimbabwe and

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<sup>62</sup> Mahoso, 'All Lasting Constitutions secure the majority', *AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail*. 24. July 2011.

<sup>63</sup> While Mbeki is praised by many pan-Africanists, he is loathed by the West and their African allies.

Sadc, has so far survived and been spared from the add-ons which the MDC formations and their Anglo-Saxon sponsors have been spinning...<sup>64</sup> But even after the Unity Government was formed, it is claimed that the West continued to try to influence politics in Zimbabwe by among other strategies; the setting up of parallel government structures,<sup>65</sup> and influencing SADC facilitator's decisions such as what happened in Livingstone, Zambia.<sup>66</sup>

For Mahoso, what happened in Cote d' Ivoire, Libya and what nearly happened in Zimbabwe as evidenced by the Livingston summit, has been a result of Africans with white 'no fly zones' mentality, who because they are black they pretend to be Africans while in reality on the basis of their minds, they are agents of the enemy. They are the proverbial wolves in sheep skins. Like Judas Iscariot who although he was among the disciples of Jesus nevertheless sold out, African leaders who collaborate with the West are traitors, the present day Judas Iscariots, agents of the devil. He thus draws some criteria from the Bible of recognising them. The story of King Solomon and the story of Judas Iscariot are the models by which we can see and understand who belongs where.

### ***The Solomons and the Judas Iscariots in African Politics***

In the article devoted to analysing the situation in Cote d' Ivoire during the unrest caused by inconclusive elections 2010 and the role of the mediators, Mahoso seeks to reveal the treachery in some so called 'international' mediators. His main focus was to show that the UN Security Council is not a fair mediator but a tool of the powerful North Atlantic nations to achieve their economic interests, which are intrinsically connected to political interests. Mahoso begins the article as has become his tradition, by an appeal to the Bible. This time he chooses the story about two women who approached King Solomon for mediation (1 kgs 3:17-27) as his port of entry into analysing African politics whose miniature is the Cote d' Ivoire case. And characteristically he uses the vernacular Bible translation (version).

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<sup>64</sup> Mahoso, 'Africans with white no fly zones mentality'.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Moyo, 'MDC-T's parallel Government treacherous'. 15 September 2009. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/blog/index.php/2009/09/jmoyo/mdc-ts-parallel-government-treacherous/>.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Jonathan Moyo, 'Similarities in Zuma, Morgan's Reports'. Zimpapers. 09 April 2011.

“Haiwa, Ishe wangu, ini nomukadzi uyu tigere paimba imwe chete; ini ndakapona mwanakomana ndigere naye paimba. Zvino ndapona mwana wangu mazuva matatu, mukadzi uyu akapona mwanakomana wake ... Zvino mwanakomana womukadzi uyu akazofa usiku, nokuti mai vake vakavata pendera pake pamusana pamavato muhope . . . Amai ava vakataura saizvozvo pamberi pa Mambo Soromoni. “Mambo akati, nditorerei banga rehondo. Varanda vakauya nomunondo kuna Mambo. Mambo akati gurai nepakati mwana wasara ari mupenyu, mupe mai mumwe nemumwe rutivi rwake. “Ipapo mukadzi aive mai vechokwadi vemwana mupenyu akati kuna Mambo: Haiwa, Ishe wangu, chipai zvenyu mumwe wangu mwana ari mupenyu, pane kuti aurayiwe. “Asi mumwe wake wakanga asiriye nyakubereka mwana mupenyu akati kuna Mambo: Zvirinane tienzane. Kuita kuti mwana asave wangu kana kuti wemumwe wangu; mugurei zvenyu napakati, tipedze bopoto. Ipapo Mambo Soromoni akapindura akati: Mai varamba kuti mwana adimburwe nepakati, ndivo nyakubereka. Vapei mwana.” (1 Madzimambo 3:17-27, *Native Version, paraphrased*)

For Mahoso, mediation as was shown by King Solomon requires tact and neutrality; which elements are missing in global political mediations. Today’s mediators for Mahoso already have their favourites and sometimes themselves are the creators of the problems they try to mediate. He thus compares some of these mediators to Judas Iscariot, the one who sold Jesus to the enemy (Mk 14:43-50; Mt. 26:14-56; Lk. 22:1-53).<sup>67</sup> While he is sometimes clear on who fits the Judas hat and who fits the Solomon title, sometimes one can glean from his analysis depending on the images given. In the case of Cote d’ Ivoire, the two women who went to Solomon for arbitration are represented by Alessane Quattara and Laurent Gbabo. One is the mother of the child (nation) while one is not for she killed the baby as she was asleep.

Quattara, for Mahoso as well as pan-Africanists, does not enjoy grassroots or local (African) support, that is why he was sworn in as president in the hotel against the law soon after disputed elections; he was protected by the UN peace keepers; that is why he called for sanctions on the nation to starve the workers and the security forces into submission and that is why he was holed up in a luxurious hotel paid for by the western powers through the UN. He is as Mahoso sees it, a puppet imposed on the people of Cote d’ Ivoire, to manage Western economic interests. On the one hand, Gbabo, for Mahoso and pan-Africanists is

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<sup>67</sup> Mahoso’s deployment of the Judas Iscariot imagery here is not new. He is borrowing it from his previous articles; See, Mahoso, ‘Betrayal of Africans by Judas-like characters’, AFRICAN FOCUS: *The Sunday Mail*. 06-12 May 2007.

the legitimate leader of the people since he drives the pan-African agenda of sovereignty and self-determination. For Mahoso, the total blockade/sanctions demanded by Ouattara on the people of Cote d' Ivoire reveal that Ouattara is eating from somewhere separate from the people: in Nato, outside Cote d' Ivoire.<sup>68</sup>

This is the reason according to Mahoso, in relation to the people of Cote d' Ivoire, Ouattara is no different from that whore who begged Solomon to cut the one living child into two dead halves so that she, as the false "mother", would reduce the real mother to the "equal" status of childlessness'.<sup>69</sup> The problem for Mahoso is the role of the West that Quattara begged to impose sanctions on the country. The West has for him, always used the UN to fix nations and leaders of countries they are blocked from accessing economic interests. The UN as such is not Solomon at all, a neutral arbiter. Instead of being a Solomon, who is impartial, for Mahoso, the role of the United Nations in Cote d' Ivoire, Lebanon, former Yugoslavia and Iraq has been scandalous. And this history reminds Africans of the abuse of the same UN by Belgium, the US and their allies in the overthrow and assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the legitimate, popularly elected Prime Minister of Congo in 1960-61.<sup>70</sup> UN is therefore incapable of arbitration, for it is partial and usually takes sides with the one who is not the mother of the child, the whore in the biblical story cited above (1 kgs. 3:17-27).

With all this wealth of knowledge about the evil intentions of the UN, African Union leaders according to Mahoso, should have solved the problem by suggesting an African Solomon as the arbitrator. Unfortunately, for him, the AU Commission is also another whore. Instead of looking for an African Solomon to mediate, they rushed to ask that 'Judas Iscariot'-Raila Odinga, to be the mediator, knowing very well that he is another (puppet) client of the US and EU and would happily deliver the head of Gbagbo on a platter.<sup>71</sup>

Equally depicted as useless pretenders and claimants to Solomonic wisdom and mediation, while in fact they are Judas Iscariots, are Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) member states. According to

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<sup>68</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'. AFRICAN FOCUS: The Sunday Mail. 30 January 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'.

<sup>70</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'.

<sup>71</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'.

Mahoso, from as far back as 2004-6, the role of ECOWAS has been that of Judas Iscariot and not that of Solomon in Cote d' Ivoire. Mahoso argues that ECOWAS, which is led by Nigeria, was responsible for overseeing the Pan-African agenda in all of West Africa. And the same Nigeria was chairing the AU in January 2006 when the problems that bedevil Cote d' Ivoire today surfaced to the whole world. Therefore, it should have been easy to integrate the West African agenda with the AU agenda to bring about a Pan-African solution to the Ivorian impasse. But that did not happen, primarily because Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo was a pretender.<sup>72</sup> As it finally became clear, there were two competing camps. There was a real contest between 'Solomon' and 'Judas'; between one who was a real pan-African statesman, pushing for a pan-African solution and another sell-out who masqueraded as pan-African.

That is why, for Mahoso, from 2004 to 2006, it was so confusing as to who exactly was the mediator in Cote d' Ivoire, for at one time President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa had become the key mediator. But as the Mbeki mediation proceeded well, what appeared in the media was apparent competition for leadership between Obasanjo and South African President Thabo Mbeki. All became clear for Mahoso, 'when Obasanjo sold out former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor to the Europeans and North Americans that there was no sovereign Pan-African agenda or strategy in the Ecowas region'.<sup>73</sup> In a nutshell, Obasanjo and the rest of Ecowas are consequently not African 'Solomons' in Cote d' Ivoire but 'Judas Iscariots', while Mbeki is the bonafide pan-African statesman, hence an African 'Solomon'. This, according to Mahoso is the reason Mbeki's views were never accepted by neither the UN nor the AU Commission, when he flew into Cote d' Ivoire soon after the election impasse (in December 2010) and prepared a report which was well balanced. As Mahoso claims, instead, Raila Odinga was smuggled into being the chief 'negotiator' by the AU Commission with the blessings of the UN so as to pin down Gbabo, the nationalist leader, the legitimate mother of the surviving child, as he draws his mandate from the majority of the people of Cote d' Ivoire as opposed to Quattara, the whore whose support base is foreign.

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<sup>72</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'.

<sup>73</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote D' Ivoire'.

The lesson from Cote d' Ivoire, for Mahoso is that what is at stake are white (Western) interests versus black (African) interests. And this is the same story everywhere in the world; wherever Western interests are served and protected (against those of the indigenous people) the leaders of those countries, who protect white interests are called heroes and massive media propaganda to promote such leaders into 'global icons' or 'international elders' is mounted. In reality however, these people, to use Mahoso's analogy 'are mere whores', enemies of their own people. Another reality in the world, which Mahoso brings out, clearly is; wherever the Western interests are challenged, but those of the indigenous people served and protected; the leaders of such countries are called names and are vilified at every given opportunity. The UN and other institutions such as AU, SADC, in the case of Zimbabwe which are supposed to play the role of Solomon are penetrated or rather bought by 30 pieces of silver to become 'Judas Iscariots' (so as to betray the 'Son of Man') in order to bring about the desired results of protecting white people's interests and the Western business interests. Frivolous claims such as violation of human rights and democracy are raised by the West whenever their interests are not protected and ways are designed to entrench those threatened interests, usually through fronting. The UN is abused by the same powers to achieve their aims.

Thus, Mahoso praises Zimbabwean patriots for having come to appreciate more deeply the need to overhaul the UN after the shocking behaviour of the 'Judas Iscariots' so-called UN special envoys: Anna Kajamulo Tibaijuka and Jan Egeland, during and after the two envoys' separate visits to Zimbabwe in 2005, who instead of coming to assess humanitarian needs and to objectively appreciate the government programme of constructing houses for the people, after Operation Murambatsvina, they found the opportunity to score political goals for the opposition, MDC.<sup>74</sup> Thus, far from being neutral observers, they came to Zimbabwe with the conclusion already. In all respects therefore, for Mahoso, these were examples of Judas Iscariot and not objective and independent 'Solomon'.

### ***Evaluation and Conclusion***

This article has exposed three related issues. First, I have argued that Mahoso consciously cites the Bible, as a pan-African rabbi to put across

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<sup>74</sup> Mahoso, 'Quattara's Nato demands on Cote d' Ivoire'.

the pan-African ideology. It sounds weird that pan-Africanism struggles could be fought using the Bible, the same Bible that has been used and continues to be used as a weapon against African values, culture and African memory—the values that pan-Africanism seeks to preserve. Yet, it is precisely upon the realisation that the Bible has great influence in the lives of the people of Africa that to ignore it is to risk being irrelevant that Mahoso cites it. This realisation has of late seen politicians either in the MDC or in ZANU PF addressing major political, economic or social issues appealing to the Bible. Mahoso's approach therefore is well justified. In a society such as Zimbabwe where the population seems to be intoxicated with the Bible, the only way to appeal to them convincingly is to cite a verse or two from it.

Second, I have argued that to understand Mahoso's radicalism against the Western narrative in his pan-African philosophy, as he exegetes the Bible, one needs to understand the context from which he is writing. Mahoso, together with other pan-Africanists, are surrounded with a reality that the Western world may not know or purposely choose to ignore. The context of Africa is that of poverty in the midst of plenty. And the cause of this poverty has been a contested area. For the West, Africa is poor because, it lacks young democratic leadership and the leaders stay long in office. But the reality on the ground shows that even in nations where leaders are very young and where leaders have the most possible shortest time in office, poverty is ravaging the masses, the black people. But as poverty runs amok in the black communities, white people, most of whom former colonizers, are not affected. They almost live on an island. It is this stark reality that pan-Africanists expose for all to see, the structural sins of colonisation. But the West does not seem to bother to expose this in their narrative.

Third, the article has offered as much as possible the broader background to understanding pan-Africanism in general and Mahoso's biblical exegesis in particular. I have argued that history of the West from the days of slavery to colonisation and now globalisation as understood by pan-Africanists seems to evidence a consistent trend to look down upon Africans if not utter racism. The relationship between Africa and the West is still as it was during slavery and colonialism; that of master and slave, horse and rider. The West has for the pan-Africanists discredited itself by being inconsistent in responding to world affairs. The West seems to be more concerned about their political and economic interests

than anything else. This has seen them sponsor and stand with rebels against legitimately constituted governments. It is this context Mahoso responds to. Without this understanding of how the West is viewed from a pan-Africanist perspective, it is impossible to understand Mahoso. Thus, I have invested some time describing the context of Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and Africa at large. The events in Zimbabwe are used by Mahoso to explain what is going on in other parts of Africa and the world. At the same time, he uses examples from other parts of the world and Africa to explain the political, economic, social and religious events in Zimbabwe.

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**BIAS 7** – *The Bible and Politics in Africa*

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*Gerald West*

## ***The ANC's deployment of religion in nation building: from Thabo Mbeki, to "The RDP of the Soul", to Jacob Zuma***

### ***Introduction***

"You will see, Jacob Zuma knows the Bible much better than Thabo Mbeki". This was said to me as I sat and waited for my car in a car-wash in central Pietermaritzburg several months before the Polokwane 52nd National Conference of the African National Congress in December 2007. The person who spoke to me, who was also waiting for his car, had noticed me working on a paper while I waited. Making conversation with me, he asked whether I was preparing for a speech. No, I said, I was actually correcting a paper I had written. I introduced myself, explaining that I lectured in Biblical Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He introduced himself as someone who also had an interest in theological issues, regularly writing booklets for his church, even though his tertiary training was in history and his work was in the department of education of the provincial government. When he asked me what my paper was about I said that I was writing a paper on Thabo Mbeki's use of the Bible in the public realm. I explained that as a biblical scholar I had been intrigued to note that Thabo Mbeki had begun to use the Bible more and more in his public speeches, culminating in his speech at the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture in July 2006. My conversation partner became even more animated at this, stating that Mbeki was not really interested in the Bible, and besides, "You will see, Jacob Zuma knows the Bible much better than Thabo Mbeki". Before I could pursue this comment, his car was completed and we separated. But his comment has led me to this essay.

The essay begins with analysis of Thabo Mbeki's appropriation of the Bible in some of his major speeches, arguing that during his period as Deputy President and President of South Africa Mbeki shifts his attitude to the Bible, culminating in his substantive use of the Bible as a resource to direct the nation to the need for an "RDP of the soul". The second section of the essay shows how Mbeki's call for an RDP of the soul is taken up by the African National Congress in its Policy Discussion Document "The RDP of the Soul", and goes on to analyse how this

Document envisages the role of religion in the public realm in South Africa after its 52nd National Conference in late 2007. Following the dramatic shift in power that took place at this National Conference in Polokwane, when Thabo Mbeki sought a third term as ANC President but was soundly rejected in favour of Jacob Zuma, the third and final section of the essay examines to what extent the “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document has been taken up, concluding that a quite different form of religion has made its way into South Africa’s public life.

### ***Mbeki’s deployment of religion***

Having observed the gradual withdrawal of Christianity and religion in general from the public realm after 1994, and Nelson Mandela’s careful refusal to use religion in the public realm and his even more careful refusal to refer to a specific religious tradition, I was surprised and intrigued by an extract of an article by President Thabo Mbeki which was published in the Mail & Guardian newspaper in June 2003, in which Mbeki referred directly to the Bible. The extract was taken from the May 30 edition of ANC Today (Mbeki 2003). Mbeki begins his online letter by referring to the Bible: “In the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew, it is said that Jesus Christ saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fishing in the Sea of Galilee. And he said to them: ‘Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men’ [Matthew 4:19]”. In the next line he goes on to interpret this biblical passage by saying that

Perhaps taking a cue from this, some in our country have appointed themselves as ‘fishers of corrupt men’. Our governance system is the sea in which they have chosen to exercise their craft. From everything they say, it is clear that they know it as a matter of fact that they are bound to return from their fishing expeditions with huge catches of corrupt men (and women) (Mbeki 2003:1).

The rest of his letter develops this theme, sustaining the ‘fishing’ metaphor throughout. The thrust of Mbeki’s letter is clear. He is deeply distressed by those in our country that assume the government is corrupt simply because it is a predominantly (black) African government. He rejects their “highly offensive and deeply entrenched stereotype of Africans” as they seek “to portray Africans as a people that are corrupt, given to telling lies, prone to theft and self-enrichment by immoral means, a people that are otherwise contemptible in the eyes of the ‘civilized’” (Mbeki 2003:4). The self-appointed task of these detractors, Mbeki seems

to be saying, is to fish for corruption when there is none (or very little). However, while Mbeki's basic argument is clear, his use of Matthew 4:19 is somewhat obscure. He may be using the Matthew text to set up a contrast between the legitimate appointment by Jesus of disciples who will go out and do good to men and women – Mbeki is carefully inclusive in his language – and the illegitimate self-appoint of those who “have appointed themselves” to the task of rooting out imagined corruption. Both sets of people are on a mission, Mbeki may be saying, one legitimate and one not. Or, as has been suggested to me by a colleague, Tinyiko Maluleke, Mbeki may be using the Matthew text more negatively, inferring by his use of this passage that just as religious people are easily taken in by religious propaganda, so too there are those South Africans who are easily taken in by anti-African stereotypes. Or, finally Mbeki may simply be using an image from the Bible that has become separated from and independent of its textual context, in which case there may be little or no connection between Mbeki's use of the image and Matthew's.

I was now hooked! What was our missionary schooled, but somewhat secular and urbane President doing quoting from and engaging with the Bible? What I discovered as I worked through Mbeki's public speeches was a religious shift (West 2009 (forthcoming)-b). In his earlier public speeches, whether as Deputy President or in the early years of his presidency, Mbeki was either instrumentalist or tentative in his appropriation of the Bible. However, 2006 brought about a substantial shift. In his “State of the Nation Address” in February 2006 Mbeki uses a quotation from the biblical book of Isaiah to frame his address. He quotes the biblical text in English, using the New King James Version (his favoured translation), and then follows immediately by quoting the text again, this time from the isiXhosa translation of the Bible. The focus of this speech is his reflection on the state of the nation within the “historic challenge” set before the nation by Nelson Mandela at “the very first Annual Regular Opening of our Democratic Parliament, on 24 May 1994”. The words of Mandela's challenge, quoted by Mbeki, form a regular refrain throughout the speech; but so do the words of Isa 55:12-13.

Mbeki's speech at the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture a few months later, in July 2006, went even further. In this case there is sustained engagement with the Bible. So much so that he felt the need to point out in the oral presentation of the lecture (though it is not included in the

published version) that his extensive reference to the Bible did not mean that he was “about to become a priest” (to which this audience responded with laughter) (Mbeki 2006a, 2006b). Remarkably, given the Africanist Mbeki is, in this speech he grants the Bible precedence over the African notion of ‘ubuntu’, using the Book of Proverbs to interpret it (Mbeki 2006a:1-2), saying:

The Book of Proverbs in the Holy Bible contains some injunctions that capture a number of elements of what I believe constitute important features of the Spirit of Ubuntu, which we should strive to implant in the very bosom of the new South Africa that is being born, the food of the soul that would inspire all our people to say that they are proud to be South African! The Proverbs say: [Proverbs 3:27-31] Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. 28 Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. 29 Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. 30 Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. 31 Envy<sup>1</sup> thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways (Mbeki 2006a:1-2).

Having quoted the text, he then goes on to appropriate it, making the point that “The Book of Proverbs assumes that as human beings, we have the human capacity to do as it says, not to withhold the good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of our hand to do it” (Mbeki 2006a:2). Adopting an African-American type preaching cadence, Mbeki elaborates on what Proverbs might be understood to assume of us in our current context: “It assumes we can be encouraged not to devise evil against our neighbours ...”, “It assumes that ... we should not declare war against anybody without cause ...”, and “It urges that in our actions, we should not seek to emulate the demeanour of our oppressors, nor adopt their evil practices” (Mbeki 2006a:2).

In the remainder of his speech Mbeki will return to Proverbs 3; he will also engage with Proverbs 6:6-11, as well as Genesis 3:19, John 1:1, and Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4. Indeed, so prolific has been his use of the Bible that he feels the need to explain to his audience why he has been so persistent and insistent “on the Christian Holy Scriptures” (Mbeki 2006a:12). “Let me explain”, says Mbeki (Mbeki 2006a:12).<sup>2</sup> The crux of

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<sup>1</sup> I have inserted verse numbers for reference sake; Mbeki’s version is from the King James Version (which clearly appeals to his ‘classical’ ear), but does not include the chapter and verse references.

<sup>2</sup> As indicated above, it is at this point that Mbeki makes an aside, saying, “Do not worry, I am not about to become a priest” (Mbeki 2006b).

his explanation is that in the context of our country's daily economic deliberations, the debate itself "must tell us that human life is about more than the economy and therefore material considerations". This is important, Mbeki continues, because

I believe that as a nation we must make a special effort to understand and act on this because of what I have said already, that personal pursuit of material gain, as the beginning and end of life purpose, is already beginning to corrode our social and national cohesion (Mbeki 2006a:12).

What this means, Mbeki goes on to argue, is "that when we talk of a better life for all, within the context of a shared sense of national unity and national reconciliation, we must look beyond the undoubtedly correct economic objectives our nation has set itself" (Mbeki 2006a:12). What "our country needs", therefore, says Mbeki, is what Nelson Mandela called "an 'RDP of the soul'" (Mbeki 2006a:3). And, Mbeki implies, it is the Bible which provides the necessary spiritual trajectory for an RDP of the soul.

Mbeki admits that the RDP "was eminently about changing the material conditions of the lives of our people" and that "It made no reference to matters of the soul, except indirectly" (Mbeki 2006a:3). He then assures his audience, quoting extracts from the original Reconstruction and Development Programme document, that its concerns "were and remain critically important and eminently correct objectives that we must continue to pursue" (Mbeki 2006a:3). However, he goes on, deftly, to argue that the RDP's intention to improve the human condition implies a spiritual dimension. Human fulfilment, he says, consists of more than the access to "modern and effective services" promised by the RDP. "As distinct from other species of the animal world, human beings also have spiritual needs"; thus, he continues, "all of us and not merely the religious leaders speak of the intangible element that is immanent in all human beings -- the soul!" What is more, he adds, "all human societies also have a soul!" (Mbeki 2006a:4)

As he develops his argument for an RDP of the soul, Mbeki returns again to Proverbs, this time to Proverbs 6:6. The literary context in which he quotes the latter is worth indicating at some length:

With some trepidation, advisedly assuming that there is the allotted proportion of hardened cynics present here this evening, I will nevertheless make bold to quote an ancient text which reads, in Old English:

[Proverbs 6:6-11] Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: 7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, 8 Provideth her meat in



the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. 9 How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? 10 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 11 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

I know that given the level of education of our audience this evening, the overwhelming majority among us will know that I have extracted the passages I have quoted from the Book of Proverbs contained in the St James' edition of the Holy Bible.

It may be that the scepticism of our age has dulled our collective and individual sensitivity to the messages of this Book of Faith and all the messages that it seeks to convey to us.

In this regard, I know that I have not served the purposes of this Book well, by exploiting the possibility it provides to say to you and everybody else who might be listening, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise" (Mbeki 2006a:9-10).

This is a truly remarkable shift from Mbeki's earlier back-handed appropriations of the Bible. He not only engages with the text in detail, he distances himself from the educated, elitist, liberal, and sceptical attitudes that may dismiss his references to the Bible. He even deprecates his own grasp of the text. Though there is some coyness, embarrassment, and humour here, as is evident in the oral presentation, Mbeki is also deeply serious.

He realises that citing "from the Book of Proverbs will, at best, evoke literary interest and at worst a minor theological controversy", but his "own view is that the Proverbs raise important issues that bear on what our nation is trying to do to define the soul of the new South Africa" (Mbeki 2006a:10).

I believe they communicate a challenging message about how we should respond to the situation immanent in our society concerning the adulation of personal wealth and the attendant tendency to pay little practical regard to what each one of us might do to assist our neighbour to achieve the goal of a better life (Mbeki 2006a:10).

Mbeki invokes the hardworking and communal ant of Proverbs in order to argue that the nation "must develop the wisdom that will ensure the survival and cohesion of human society" (Mbeki 2006a:10).

He realises that "many among us might very well think" that he is indulging in wishful thinking in "trying to wish away the waves of self-aggrandisement that might be characteristic of global human society" (Mbeki 2006a:10), so he strengthens his argument -- by quoting another biblical text. The text he chooses is from the book of Genesis, and again

he states explicitly that he is quoting from “the Holy Bible”. The Genesis text he quotes is 3:19, and on this occasion the reference is given:

“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19) (Mbeki 2006a:10).

“This biblical text suggests”, argues Mbeki, “that of critical importance to every South African is consideration of the material conditions of life and therefore the attendant pursuit of personal wealth” (Mbeki 2006a:11). The point he seems to be making here, though again the logic is not that clear, is that immediate material means are important, perhaps even foundational. He supports this biblical claim by a fairly extensive appropriation of the materialist philosophy of Friederich Engels, Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin, citing from their work.<sup>3</sup> However, he then immediately juxtaposes ‘materialism’ with ‘idealism’ in order to make the related point that materialist concerns cannot be allowed to be our only concerns. “In the context of our own challenges, this ‘idealism’ must serve to focus our attention on issues other than the tasks of the production and distribution of material wealth” (Mbeki 2006a:11).

What Mbeki does through this intertextual exchange is to inaugurate a discussion of the relationship between materialism and idealism. This discussion is not that easy to follow, but he seems to be saying that though Marx and the Genesis text are legitimately concerned about material considerations, we must not abandon aspects of idealism, which, as we might now suspect, he also finds in the Bible, this time citing John’s gospel: “[John 1:1] In the beginning was the Word” (Mbeki 2006a:12). Our preoccupation, Mbeki seems to be arguing, has been with Marx’s “Man must eat before he can think!”, whereas we should also be considering Rene Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” (Mbeki 2006a:11). The Bible is useful in exploring this tension because it acknowledges the need for both bread and soul, body and mind/Word.

As Mbeki draws his speech to a close he returns to his critique of capitalism, saying “that for us to ensure that things do not fall apart,<sup>4</sup> we must in the first instance, never allow that the market should be the principal

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<sup>3</sup> In his speeches Mbeki regularly appropriates Marxist rhetoric. In his more recent appropriations, including this instance, the appropriation is ambivalent. Rhetorically, he shows he knows his Marx, but he also indicates that ideologically he is not fully persuaded.

<sup>4</sup> Mbeki is probably alluding here to the novel by Chinua Achebe (Achebe 1958).

determinant of the nature of our society” (Mbeki 2006a:14). “Instead”, continues Mbeki, “we must place at the centre of our daily activities the pursuit of the goals of social cohesion and human solidarity. We must, therefore, strive to integrate into the national consciousness the value system contained in the world outlook described as Ubuntu” (Mbeki 2006a:14). Which brings Mbeki back to the Bible, once again using the Bible to explicate Ubuntu:

We must therefore say that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that “Man cannot live by bread alone” [Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4] and therefore that the mere pursuit of individual wealth can never satisfy the need immanent in all human beings to lead lives of happiness (Mbeki 2006a:14).

This is Mbeki’s final reference to the Bible. He shifts his attention in the last few minutes of his speech to emphasising our need for a “cohesive human society” (Mbeki 2006a:15), praising our nation’s gains and pointing out the dangers that persist from our past. But we are fortunate, he concludes, because “we had a Nelson Mandela who made bold to give us the task to attend to the ‘RDP of the soul’” (Mbeki 2006a:16).

Among the outcomes Mbeki accomplishes in this speech are a severing of the RDP from the economic domain and its re-attachment to the spiritual domain. It is not GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), the Mbeki driven (Gumede 2007; SACP 2006:22) neo-liberal capitalist macro-economic policy that has constructed a system which celebrates material gain. The problem is the person not the system. An RDP of the economy has been replaced by an RDP of the soul (West 2009 (forthcoming)-a). A related outcome and the focus of this essay, is the return of religion to the public realm, but narrowly construed as religion centred on the soul. The tone is erudite, but the substance is a form of evangelical Christianity, what the Kairos Document referred to as “Church Theology” (theologians 1986), in which the focus of religion is the realm of morality, narrowly defined.<sup>5</sup>

### ***The ANC’s deployment of religion***

I turn now from Mbeki’s deployment of the Bible in the service of an RDP of the soul to the ANC’s Polokwane Policy Discussion Document

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<sup>5</sup> This is a form of theology that is more concerned with legitimating, sustaining, and consolidating the structures that constitute the status quo of the Church and State than with the challenges, questions, and critiques posed by the pain these structures perpetrate and perpetuate.

“The RDP of the Soul”. While Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture prepared the ground rhetorically for a shift from an RDP of the economy to an RDP of the soul, the ANC policy document, “The RDP of the Soul” (ANC 2007b), turns rhetoric into policy. In discerning the distinctive features of this Document’s understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere I will continue to use economic issues as a litmus test on the kind of ‘theological’ trajectory envisaged. Mbeki allocates economic issues to the realm of state and moral issues to the realm of religion. But what of “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document?

“The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document was produced by the ANC Commission on Religious Affairs.<sup>6</sup> Driven by the need to move our society beyond forms of religious apartheid in which religion and politics were separated and in which South Africa’s different religions remained separate, “The RDP of the Soul” set out to provide an alternative vision for the role of religion in South Africa’s public realm.<sup>7</sup> However, given that “Church Theology” was the dominant trajectory within the ANC itself, among both ‘lay’ and ‘ordained’ officials, this Policy Discussion Document received little attention. It remains, nonetheless, an official document within the ANC and deserves careful analysis.

This Document’s take on religion is in some respects quite different from Mbeki’s, though there is some significant overlap, not least in the forced-removal of ‘RDP’ from the economy to the soul. The preamble to the policy document “The RDP of the Soul” makes the link to Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture clear, following the document’s statement of intent with a quotation from the lecture:

This document reviews the problems we found in Liberation, analyses them, and sets out the way of Transformation through the reconstruction and development of the nation’s spirit. For it is the spirit of South Africans that drives our political, economic and social processes.

“The question must therefore arise – for those of us who believe that we represent the good – what must we do to succeed in our purposes? ... We must strive to understand the social conditions that would help to determine

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<sup>6</sup> All the information included on the production of this document and its reception and discussion within the ANC is based on discussions with and correspondence from Cedric Mayson, the Coordinator of the ANC Commission on Religious Affairs at the time.

<sup>7</sup> Much of the analysis and many of the arguments found in this Document were presented for discussion by the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs in the November 2006 edition of *Umrabulo*, a journal of the African National Congress (ANC 2006).

whether we succeed or fail. What I have said relates directly to what needs to be done to achieve the objective that Nelson Mandela set the nation, to accomplish the RDP of the Soul". Thabo Mbeki (ANC 2007b:1)

### ***Liberation Brought Us a Packet of Problems***

The first part of the policy document, headed "Liberation Brought Us a Packet of Problems", analyses the "packet of problems" liberation brought the ANC, under the following sub-headings: "The RDP", "Lack of experience", "The Population Explosion", "The Dictatorship of Capital", "The Western imperialist empire", "Corruption", "Crime", and "The Media" (ANC 2007b:1-3).<sup>8</sup> While there is no explicit or implied reference to religion in the analysis under the first three sub-headings, there is under the remaining sub-headings. Under the sub-heading of "The Dictatorship of Capital" the document states that "An economic system which allows dictators to administer capital without responsibility to anyone is wrong in principle for those who believe in the spirit of democracy" (ANC 2007b:1). This general ethical statement is then followed by a more religion specific statement: "To maintain that it is a legitimate human right to accumulate wealth through a system condemning the majority of our citizens to poverty is totally illegitimate. It is condemned by religious prophets, humanists and economists alike" (ANC 2007b:1-2). Already we can discern the shape of this policy document's take on religion. First, though the Document takes Mbeki's moral perspective as its starting point, there is definite recognition of the systemic nature of wealth accumulation. Here morality is about more than individual responsibility; morality is also about systems, especially economic systems. However, as we will see later on in the argument of the Document, the Document refuses to take sides on economic systems, imagining that the kind of religion envisaged will take South Africans beyond both capitalism and socialism. In this respect the argument of the Document sounds similar to the argument of "Church Theology" (theologians 1986:28).

As a second distinctive feature, the Document is careful to refrain from privileging any one religious tradition. An inclusive and broad understanding of 'religion' is deployed here, including even "the spirit of democracy" and "humanists" in its range. The systemic dimensions of

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<sup>8</sup> The use of upper and lower case in sub-headings is not consistent. I have reproduced the usage in the document.

morality are developed more fully further on under this sub-heading, with the policy document declaring that “The economic problem of the poor is the spiritual problem of the rich. To move from the greed of the rich to the need of the poor we must change the system. We need a new spirit – an RDP of the soul” (ANC 2007b:2).

Under the sub-heading of “The Western imperialist empire” another, third, feature of this Document’s take on religion becomes apparent. Arguing that the “dictatorship of capital is an integral part of the centuries old western imperialist Empire which is dominated today by the United States of America”, the Document goes on to say that “US efforts to indoctrinate Africa with fears of Islamic terrorism, to establish a US Military mission in every African country, to control our media, our financiers, our religions and our politicians.... inhibits our transformation” (ANC 2007b:2). Again we see an inclusive conception of religion, with a specific reference to Islam and a rejection of US definitions and portrayals of this religious tradition.<sup>9</sup> But the Document goes further, introducing this third thread in its understanding of religion. Though not explicit yet, the reference to US attempts to control “our religions” includes not only their characterisation of Islam, but also the influence of US forms of fundamentalist Christianity on South African Christianity.

There is no specific reference to religion under the sub-heading of “Corruption”, but there is extensive use of ‘morality’ language. The subsection begins by acknowledging that South Africa has “inherited a culture of corruption” established by colonialism and that corruption continues to be a concern, even within the ANC. “Many in society”, the section goes on to argue, “openly and avowedly promote self-centred, political and economic policies which worship anti-human greed, promote their own profit, and side line the needs of the poor and the survival of humanity” (ANC 2007b:2). At this point the Document again invokes Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture where Mbeki argues the: “The capitalist class, to whom everything has a cash value, has never considered moral incentives as very dependable” and that this class has entrenched in our society as a whole, “including among the oppressed, the deep seated understanding that personal wealth constituted the only true measure of individual and social success”. Indeed, the Document continues, quoting Mbeki, even “the new order, born of 1994, inherited a well-entrenched value system that place individual acquisition of wealth

at the very centre of the value system of our society as a whole” (ANC 2007b:2). This sub-section concludes with a succinct statement: “The root of the problem is the corruption of thought and motive. If the primary objective of life is to get rich, the means are secondary” (ANC 2007b:2). Again we see some recognition of the systemic nature of corruption as well as the impact of empire, but the focus is firmly on the individual and the individual’s values, thoughts, and motives.

This focus is sustained in the next sub-section dealing with “Crime”, though the starting point is profoundly systemic. Crime is situated, at least initially, within an unjust and unconstitutional “economic structure”, for “In hard fact the economic structure of South Africa condemns half our population to very limited life” (ANC 2007b:2). And while “This economic system does not justify those who steal to live”, it does recognise that “many turn to crime from need” (ANC 2007b:2). The Document then turns to “crimes of greed” and the value system that undergirds it. Such a system, which is “directly related to the worship of money and possessions”, is “denounced by all religions and ethicists” (ANC 2007b:2). Again we find many of the features of this Document’s analysis of religion and the public sphere: a recognition of a systemic root to crime, a broadening of what is meant by ‘religion’, and a focus on personal morality. This sub-section concludes with an emphasis on the last of these. All crimes, whether of need, greed, or violence, “are produced by the deliberate promotion of a community without moral integrity” (ANC 2007b:3). It is here, the Document argues, that the religious sector must accept substantial responsibility for the “promotion of false inhuman values”. “Because the main focus of much religion has moved to financial support for institutions, and individualistic concern for the afterlife, many have excluded themselves from its theological, ethical and social emphasis, with a consequent collapse of value systems”. In sum, the section concludes, “Crime is the result of spiritual failure” (ANC 2007b:3). A fourth distinctive feature in the Document’s analysis of religion emerges here, namely, the damage done by institutionalised religion in failing to hold together the individual and the social. Ironically, there is a tendency both in “The RDP of the Soul” policy document and in Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture of precisely the same dislocation.

The final sub-section on “The Media” is brief, but the argument is clear. The media is often irresponsible in handling its freedom, “portraying

western oppressive values, instead of the liberating values of *ubuntu* thinking” (ANC 2007b:3). A fifth distinctive feature in the Document’s analysis becomes readily apparent here, though it is implicit in most of the Document. The fifth feature is “western oppressive values”, with an emphasis on the first word in the phrase. The logic of the argument throughout is that lying behind and beneath the need for an RDP of the soul is the damage inflicted historically, institutionally, and psychically by western forms of knowledge and practice. This becomes even clearer in the next section of the Document. So though the Document adopts the moral trajectory of Mbeki, it broadens the trajectory substantially, recognising and analysing the systemic dimensions of ‘the moral’.

### ***The Role of Religion***

The second major section of Document deals with “The Role of Religion”, and is prefaced with another quotation from Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture, the section in which Mbeki argues that not only do all human beings have a soul, “all human societies also have a soul” (ANC 2007b:3). This quotation is followed by an analysis of the colonial misuse of religion and the emergence of liberating forms of religion in South Africa, the post-liberation relapse into institutional “religious apartheid” which refuses to collaborate across different faith traditions for transformation, the malaise in traditional institutional religion and the rise of agnosticism and fundamentalism, and the prophetic signs of a cross-sectoral commitment to progressive transformation of society (ANC 2007b:3-5).

The preamble to this section of the document is a set of quotations from Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture. It is worth quoting because it sets the scene for much of the rest of the argument of “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document.

Human fulfillment consists of more than access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for our people ...

As distinct from other species of the animal world, human beings also have spiritual needs. Thus all of us, and not merely the religious leaders, speak of the intangible element that is immanent in all human beings – the soul!

Acceptance of this proposition as a fact must necessarily mean that we have to accept the related assertion that consequently, all human societies also have a soul. Thabo Mbeki (ANC 2007b:3)



The argument in this set of quotations, which are true to Mbeki's more extended argument, is that the focus of the RDP, which committed the ANC government to "modern and effective services" for all our people should not be our primary focus; there is a more urgent concern, namely the moral failure infecting our nation, and so while the government gets on with sorting out the economy, we the people must get on with repairing our individual and corporate soul. As early as 1995, while Mbeki was Deputy President, he said that the liberation government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had "established a unique national consensus on the need for prosperity, democracy, human development and the removal of poverty". "However", he goes on to say, "despite its almost biblical character, the RDP Base Document did not provide us with all the answers". This is because, he continues, "We have always known that its many many priorities and programmes need to be distilled into a series of realistic steps, guided by a long term vision and our resource constraints" (Mbeki 1995:1). The vision of prophetic religion, Mbeki seems to argue, is unrealistic, particularly in economic terms. However, the vision of moral religion, "Church Theology", is adequate to our nation's needs. Again, this section of the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document seems to accept Mbeki's trajectory as its starting point, though it does on to broaden it.

The first sub-heading in this section on "The colonial misuse of Religion" focuses on the damage done by the imposition of colonial institutional religion on Africa and Africans. The colonial and missionary enterprise "coopted" us "into western civilisation and a corrupted version of the Gospel", undermining "the essentials of spiritual humanity proclaimed by the great spiritual leaders of the past", none of whom "were products of western civilisation", "not Hindus, Confucius, Isaiah, Amos, the Buddha, Jesus, or Mohammed" (ANC 2007b:3). The anti-western argument is clear here, and so is a sixth distinctive feature. According to this analysis religion is in and of itself not bad for us. There is an uncorrupted version of "the Gospel", with a capital 'G', and there are "essentials of spiritual humanity", and there are "great spiritual leaders of the past".

The next sub-section, on "Liberating Religion", draws attention to more recent examples of life-giving religion from our own recent past. Among these are the ecumenical and inter-faith movements of the liberation struggle, Liberation Theology, and various declarations (like the 1991

inter-faith “Declaration of Religious Rights and Responsibilities”) and institutional formations (like the National Religious Leaders Forum). But, the sub-section concludes, little became of this legacy (ANC 2007b:3).

The reasons for the failure of liberating religion are discussed in the next sub-section, under the heading “Relapse”. The continued colonial practice of “religious apartheid”, with a refusal, largely on the part of the dominant Christian majority, to embrace ecumenical and inter-faith collaboration is the first reason (ANC 2007b:3). A second reason for the failure of liberating religion is that “although religious institutions are aware of agreement on the principles of spiritual values and integrity for the whole human community, many are too busy running their inherited separate activities to work out united strategies of transformation” (ANC 2007b:3). A third reason is the rampant prevalence of what the Kairos Document referred to as “Church Theology”, in which “Many religious communities recuse themselves from involvement in the programmes of national, provincial or local government ‘because you cannot mix religion and politics’ (a totally un-godly anti-human colonial doctrine)” (ANC 2007b:3). Along with some of the other distinctive features we have already identified in the Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm there are signs here of a seventh (closely related to the sixth). Leaning on the contribution of the Kairos Document this sub-section, and the previous one on “Liberating Religion” recognises the reality of contending trajectories within a religious tradition. This is clearly articulated in the final analysis in this sub-section, when the Document argues that “There is a clear contrast between religious leaders (at all levels) who wish to present a united front for the better progress of humanity, and those who see no further than keeping their local religions going” (ANC 2007b:3-4). The Document elaborates further, and in so doing adds an eighth distinctive feature: “Many pulpits refuse to explore the spiritual unity in religious diversity which is written into our Constitution” (ANC 2007b:4). This eighth element is the implicit claim, which will be made more explicit later in the Document, that the Constitution (and government) should on occasion dictate to religion what directions it should take.

The final reason, perhaps (because the logic of the argument is incomplete here), why liberating religion as made little impact in our new democracy is that because of sectarian and institutional forms of relig-

ion, millions of people “have left religion” (ANC 2007b:4). The argument is development more fully in the next sub-section, “The Gap”. The crux of the argument here is that sectarian and institutional forms of religion have failed many so that “A gap has been formed between a world needing a new spirit of transformation and the failure of religions to provide it” (ANC 2007b:4). Two other forms of ‘spirituality’ (though the Document does not designate them as such) “have rushed in to take the gap”, namely agnosticism and right wing fundamentalism (ANC 2007b:4).

This analysis leads into the penultimate sub-section under “The Role of Religion”, headed “Right wing Fundamentalism”. Here the third distinctive feature of the Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm is extensively examined. “The fastest growing religion in the world including Africa today”, the Document argues, “is right wing fundamentalism” (ANC 2007b:4). Right-wing fundamentalism is characterised as having its roots in anti-scientific, anti-intellectual, and Pentecostal tendencies. In terms of content it is characterised by superstition instead of faith, the narrowing of theology to proof-texts, the salvation of the individual, the pursuit of health and wealth, a focus on life after death, and the desire for a sectarian end to the world (ANC 2007b:4). The Document makes it clear that fundamentalism is found in all religions and that it breeds extremists in all religions (ANC 2007b:4). The Document devotes considerable space to this topic, concluding that “Fundamentalism is a major problem preventing transformation” (ANC 2007b:4).

The final sub-section under section 2 on “The Role of Religion” turns from right wing fundamentalism to the other end of the religious continuum, namely “Progressive Prophets”. This sub-section is worth quoting in its entirety, for it reiterates many of the features of religion already discussed and introduces a ninth distinctive feature, namely the significant commonalities that characterise prophetic religion across various religious traditions (including secular humanism):

And throughout our society there are progressive people already enacting transformation. They are in all sectors, young and old, women and men, spiritual and secular, poor and rich, working as individuals or in institutions, seeking the transformation of society, citizens of the age whose dawn cannot be held back, promoting progressive movements in religion and politics, economics and academia, schools and colleges, unions and businesses, medicine and the media. Behind all the criticisms and tensions, across the board, people and communities are engaged in clear constructive commitment to human rights and social cohesion, to community renewal and spiritual adulthood from their living rooms and local communities to national

and international bodies. In many places in the world, especially in the West, the issue of transforming humanity is not even on the agenda. In Africa, you can smell it coming like the rain after drought, or the warmth of the sun after winter.

"Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilisation which will take its place in God's history with other great human syntheses: Chinese, Egyptian, Jewish, European. It will not necessarily be all black; but it will be African." Chief Albert Luthuli (ANC 2007b:4-5).

Central to this analysis, and affirmed by the quotation from Albert Luthuli, is the notion of an emergent form of progressive religion arising from the soil of African ubuntu but encompassing the best of each and every religious and secular-ethical tradition. This is perhaps a tenth distinctive feature in the analysis of religion in this Document, the flip-side of the argument about a damaging western legacy. If western imperialism is part of our problem, then the recognition and recovery of African conceptual resources is part of our transformation. This becomes even clearer in the third section of "The RDP of the Soul".

### ***Analysing the answers***

The third section of the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document returns to the problems that "inhibit the progress from Liberation to Transformation", and is headed "Analysing the answers". The preamble to this section notes that to the list of problems discussed under section one, section two has added another, namely "conservative religion" (ANC 2007b:5). But the focus of the third section is on the positive factors which are a resource for transformation, the problems notwithstanding. The first positive factor is that oppressive empires eventually collapse, and that there are already signs that "the oppressive violence", the politics of control, "the lust for wealth and power", and "the grim grip of right wing fundamentalist heresy" of the US Empire are collapsing (ANC 2007b:5).

The second factor is "a new economic system", where the Document finally lays an RDP of the economy to rest, without it being explicitly mentioned. The "recovery of soul in the secular world moves us onward", the Document argues somewhat obscurely, from thinking of economics "in terms of a conflict between earlier capitalist and socialist systems" (ANC 2007b:5). The "ongoing evolution of human society" and the "political wisdom which led us to liberation without ongoing violence, is directing our economic wisdom to discover a new role for capi-

tal in a new concept of socialism” (ANC 2007b:5). Socialism has not been abandoned, it would seem, but reconceptualised. The new economic relationship between

the national democratic state and private capital is one of unity and struggle. On the one hand, the democratic state has to create an environment conducive for private investments from which investors can make reasonable returns, and through which employment and technological progress can be derived. On the other hand, through effective regulation, taxation and other means, the state seeks to ensure redistribution of income, to direct investments into areas which help national development, and broadly to ensure social responsibility (ANC 2007b:5).

The argument here seems to be that “the recovery of soul” – an RDP of the soul – enables us to transcend not only the boundaries of different religious traditions but also the boundaries of different economic traditions. The work begun by Mbeki in legitimating the ANC government’s ideological shift to GEAR by invoking religion is now completed in this Policy Discussion Document. The lurking eleventh distinctive feature in this Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm is evident here; religion should enable us to move beyond economic contestation. Just when one imagines that the Document will break with Mbeki’s rather narrow moral trajectory, the Document baulks at the economic dimension, refusing to be prophetic.

The third factor in “Analysing the Answers” is “A new African identity”, centred on Africa as the cradle of humankind. Having sent out humanity millennia ago “into innumerable racial, national, religious and economic groups”, African now summons humanity “to come together again”, rediscovering its common core (ANC 2007b:5). This macro recall of humanity to its common core has been mirrored, so the Document seems to argue, in the ANC’s vision of South Africa’s diversity being held together “within the overall sense of being African” (ANC 2007b:6). Religion too has played its role here, working with politics, education, sport, and entertainment to recognise a “new Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) ... which is not western ... but African” (ANC 2007b:6).

The fourth factor which enhances the capacity for transformation is “A Secular Spiritual understanding”. The second distinctive feature of this Document’s analysis of public religion now becomes the focus. Not only is this Document careful not to privilege any one religious tradition, it goes further in advocating for the sixth distinctive feature, namely a common substratum underlying all forms of progressive spirituality,

called here “secular spirituality”. This form of spirituality “extends spiritual understanding from the religious world to the whole secular creation” (ANC 2007b:6). “Humanity”, the document argues, “is reaching for a new reality”, rooted in “the deep primal human concept of *ubuntu*”, and “given a thousand different words in a thousand different languages” (ANC 2007b:6). Secular spirituality explicitly “rejects the individualistic priorities of western civilisation as anti-human”, embracing instead, and here the Document quotes Mbeki again, “values and norms that have ... resided amongst our people and which have held together our communities from ancient times up to the present. These values [are] contained in the world view known as *ubuntu*” (ANC 2007b:6). “This is the spiritual truth of all humanity”, the argument of the Document concludes. “It is a basic understanding to be taken into all progressive religious, political, and economic institutions. Ubuntu rules” (ANC 2007b:6).

The final factor in this third section has to do with “Unity of the spirit is the RDP of the soul”, which continues the argument of the previous subsection, arguing that “All religions agree on the great spiritual truths which drive humanity, and we need to accept this agreement as the launch pad for new development”. Moreover, these great truths and values “arise from *ubuntu*” and are put “into secular expression by ordinary people in the daily life of home, work and play” (ANC 2007b:6). The RDP of the soul, in sum, the Document argues, is characterised by compassion, cooperation, and commitment; they are “the fruit of secular spirituality, the heartbeat of *ubuntu*, ... the essence of the RDP of the Soul” (ANC 2007b:6). In case the more traditionally religious might balk at this secular spirituality, the Document concludes this third section of the document by stating that “None of this denies the positive role that religion can play: the value of sacraments, the message of theology, the empowering experience of communities of faith, the role of history, the proclamation of the prophets, the lives of the saints: all feed the spirituality of the human world, the secular reality in which the soul of humanity has its being” (ANC 2007b:6-7).

### ***The Way of Transformation***

The fourth and final section of “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document charts “The Way of Transformation”. Returning to the economic RDP for the last time, the Document draws on the centrality of

the “concept of struggle” in the original RDP Base Document. Though “The RDP of Soul” does not acknowledge that the core of the struggle discussed in the RDP document is the economy (Terreblanche 2002:108; Seekings and Nattrass 2006:347; Saul 2005:206-207; Legassik 2007:456-457), it takes up the language of ‘the struggle’ to urge all South Africans to join the struggle, which in this case “demands a struggle to evolve a new society through compassion, cooperation and commitment, which includes an economy designed for people not for profit, and the release of spiritual values into secular life” (ANC 2007b:7). Again, the basic trajectory set by Mbeki is maintained, but broadened. The opportunity to take up a prophetic political-economic trajectory is declined.

In the first sub-section of this final section, “A site of struggle”, the Document returns to the seventh distinctive feature with respect to the analysis of religion in the public realm, namely that religion is itself “a site of struggle”. This was the case in the struggle against apartheid and it continues to be the case in the struggle for a new society (ANC 2007b:7). The incipient eighth distinctive feature mentioned briefly above now takes shape in the concluding part of this sub-section:

The ANC is not a religious organisation; it fully supports the Constitutional policy of freedom of religion; it has no policy of interference with those whose religious policies are not its own. But the ANC has a major responsibility to spell out the dangers when people promote organisations which are opposed to the spiritual or material development of our people, whatever religious credentials they may claim. ... The ANC is deeply involved in South Africa’s struggle to renew and develop her soul” (ANC 2007b:7).

In this Document the ANC reserves the right to talk back to religion. But does it accept the right of progressive prophet religion to talk back to the ANC and the state it governs on issues other than the moral, no matter how broadly defined? In other words, adopting the phrasing of this Document, may and should the “prophetic prophets”, particularly those promoting progressive economic policy, spell out the dangers to the ANC government when they promote economic policies which are opposed to the spiritual or material development of our people, whatever economic credentials they may claim? This is the crucial question from the perspective of a prophetic religion trajectory.

“The RDP of the Soul” Document concludes this section with some discussion of “ANC programmes”, arguing that in working for “South Africa’s struggle to renew and develop her soul”, the ANC is required “to devise policies and set out comprehensive programmes for secular

transformation by spiritual values, through public education and commitment in the branches, the religious bodies, the media, in branches of government, in the structures of the ANC, and wherever people are learning to transform human community together” (ANC 2007b:7).<sup>10</sup>

To what extent “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document has been taken up through ANC programmes is not clear, though discussions with Cedric Mayson, the past Coordinator of the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs, indicate that not much has been done about this Document. One imagines that much of what happened at Polokwane and in its aftermath, including the recall of President Thabo Mbeki and the ongoing legal struggles of the new ANC president, Jacob Zuma, has overshadowed not only this Policy Discussion Document but all the others as well. But whatever the formal status of this Document after Polokwane, there has been a marked shift in religion in the public realm since Polokwane. And this brings me to the third and final part of my essay.

### ***Jacob Zuma's deployment of religion***

Both the erudite and somewhat bookish religion of Thabo Mbeki and the ecumenical secular-spirituality of “The RDP of the Soul” have been relegated to the back seat since Polokwane. Popular religion is now firmly in the front seat. Though it is too early to tell the precise shape of post-Polokwane religion in the public realm there are already clear markers.

There is no evidence yet that my car-wash companion was right about Jacob Zuma knowing the Bible better than Mbeki, unless he was using the phrase “knows his Bible” to mean that Zuma is a more overtly religious person than Mbeki, in which case he is probably right. Zuma appears more comfortable and fluent in deploying religion in the public realm. Zuma clearly represents himself as a religious man, but in ways which are different from his predecessor and the religious policy document of his party. Zuma is in many ways quite different from Mbeki, the classically literate humanist with a feel for the language of the King James Version of the Bible and a preference for the Bible's wisdom

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<sup>10</sup> Three other areas are discussed in this fourth and final section, including the issue of religious “Public holidays”, “The Open Vote”, and the formation of a “CRA [Commission for Religious Affairs] Pastoral Committee” (ANC 2007b:7). There are also a number of “Questions for Discussion” (ANC 2007b:8).



tradition, and his spirituality is also quite different from the ecumenical and secular spirituality advocated by the ANC's "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document. Zuma is robustly Christian in his religious discourse, favouring the more Pentecostal and 'fundamentalist' (in terms of the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document) forms of Christianity, not the highly textual form of Mbeki or avant-garde secular-spirituality form of "The RDP of the Soul". But there are also areas of overlap with each of these in Zuma's deployment of religion.

Before I analyse Zuma's more considered statements and arguments about religion, I will briefly reflect on the media feeding frenzy that has erupted around Zuma's more off-the-cuff remarks. Though it is difficult to discern Zuma's precise claims about his likeness to Jesus amid the media reports such claims have generated, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Zuma has appropriated aspects of a likeness to Jesus. Some of it has been playful, as when he said in June 2003, having visited the Jordan River in Palestine, "where Jesus was baptised", that he "was around there.... So, if I look at anyone, he or she will be blessed" (DA 2008). Others have been more serious, as when in an interview with the *Sowetan* on the 24th March 2006 he said that he is "like Christ", that the media and his detractors wanted to nail him to the cross like Jesus, and that certain newspapers had sought to "crucify him" (DA 2008). Most recently, he implicitly associated himself with Jesus when he claimed that the ANC breakaway political party Cope (Congress of the People) is like Jesus' donkey. Referring explicitly to the biblical story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Zuma went on to say "The people were waiting for the Son of Man [Zuma/ANC] who was on the donkey [Cope]. The donkey did not understand it, and thought the songs of praise were for him" (du Plessis 2008).

Such remarks, however seriously intended, have led to a chorus of claims from supporters that Zuma is in various ways 'like Jesus' (Tromp and Nqiyaza 2008). Opposition parties (DA 2008; IOL 2008a), cartoonists (Zapiro 2008), churches (IOL 2008b), and ordinary South Africans of different persuasions have lent their voices to the apparent messianic pretensions of Jacob Zuma as well. So in this case Zuma and the media have succeeded admirably in returning religion to the public realm, albeit in a more popular form than the initiatives by Mbeki and the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document.

Zuma's comments about Jesus or God blessing those who vote for the ANC (Reporter 2006), about the ANC ruling until Jesus comes back (Reporter 2004), about the ANC being the only organisation which was blessed by pastors and heaven when it was formed (Reporter 2008), and about Jesus supporting and/or being a member of the ANC (Mbanjwa 2009) have generated similar responses and effects. As have Zuma's ordination as an Honorary Pastor by an independent charismatic church (Sapa 2007) and his recent visit to the Rhema Bible Church (Sapa 2009a).

The latter event is particularly significant because a careful reading of what Zuma said indicates that he is more nuanced about religion than the media acknowledges. Though not his dominant mode of discoursing about religion, it is in his more nuanced moments that Zuma overlaps with Mbeki and the ANC's "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document. Though visiting a church which the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document would consider 'fundamentalist', Zuma begins his speech on the 15th March 2009 by reminding the congregation that "Our Constitution enshrines the freedom of religion, belief and opinion. It allows religious diversity in our multicultural society" (Zuma 2009a:1). Though Zuma's focus in this speech is understandably on the Christian faith, and though he does continue his speech by saying that "The ANC has its roots in the Christian faith", he immediately adds that the ANC "celebrates and supports all beliefs in its broad membership and support base". He justifies his Christian emphasis by saying that "We recognise that while there is extensive religious diversity, the majority of South Africans are Christians" (Zuma 2009a:1).

Rather oddly he then states that one of his "favourite books in the Bible is the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament". This abrupt shift to the Bible, conjuring up the words of my car-wash companion, becomes clear when Zuma rather boldly, in this conservative right-wing church context, quotes from Exodus 3:

7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good

and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey [New International Version].<sup>11</sup>

Zuma follows this quotation by following the narrative in Exodus chapter 5 where Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh, saying in verse 1,

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" (Zuma 2009a:1)

With many members of the thoroughly "Church Theology" Rhema Bible Church probably squirming in their plush seats Zuma continues, saying that "The Exodus from Egypt has always symbolised the liberatory character of the church". Zuma elaborates on this line of argument, saying that the story of "Moses and his mission as a man of God inspired many an oppressed people and made them realise that indeed God is on the side of the poor and oppressed" (Zuma 2009a:1). Making his audience even more uncomfortable is Zuma's next move, in which he associates the ANC with Moses and his mission.

The call "Let My People Go" is not far removed from our organisation's vision. It is not surprising that the phrase is the title of a biography of our illustrious ANC former President, Inkosi Albert Luthuli. When our leaders in the ANC and the Church said to successive apartheid regimes: "Let My People Go", we knew that God would be on our side until our freedom was attained. Since its formation in 1912 the African National Congress understood this liberation mission of the Church and the word of God, and aligned itself with it (Zuma 2009a:1).

Oblivious to the theological history (in the prosperity theology of the United States of America) and orientation of his audience, it would seem, Zuma goes on to instruct them about history of the ANC's history relationship with the Church, citing Nelson Mandela who "traces the relationship between the ANC and the church to the 1870s when the Ethiopian Church Movement was formed as a response to the rapid land dispossession from the 1800s" (Zuma 2009a:1). The purpose of this theological history lesson becomes clear after Zuma has mentioned a number of examples "which illustrate that the historical association of the ANC and the Church cannot be doubted", when he states, "The ANC

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<sup>11</sup> Once again I have inserted the verse numbers for ease of reference. It is interesting to note the Zuma here uses the New International Version, a more modern translation than the version preferred by Mbeki. The New International Version is an overtly Evangelical translation, but whether this is a factor in Zuma's choice is difficult to determine without more examples.

practically derived its moral vision from the Church amongst other sources" (Zuma 2009a:1).

The "moral vision" of the Church, which according to Zuma's historical analysis includes a profoundly political dimension, not only explains the mission of the ANC but "also explains the key role played by the religious sector in the struggle for freedom in our country" (Zuma 2009a:1-2). And it is because of this relationship between the ANC and the Church that "the post-2009 election administration", continues Zuma, "will work for a continued partnership with the faith-based sector to give practical meaning to the ANC's moral vision, based on our country's Constitution". In sum, argues Zuma, "Our moral vision embodies the values of a just and caring society" (Zuma 2009a:2). In the remainder of his speech Zuma elaborates on ways in which the ANC needs "the support of the Church and all faith-based organisations, so that together we can release our people from the slavery of poverty and its manifestations" (Zuma 2009a:2).

In general, Zuma says, government "should open its doors to enable interaction with faith-based organisations on policy and implementation". Specifically, there are "many programmes that require collaboration with faith-based organisations" (Zuma 2009a:2). These include health, education, rural development, the fight against crime, and the creation of "decent jobs". The first two, Zuma argues, are domains in which the Church has a long history, and he commends Rhema Ministries for their support programmes for orphans and children living in the streets. The third, rural development, is important because churches "are the only institutions that are found in every corner of the country, even remote rural areas" and are therefore key partners in the ANC's proposed rural development initiative. The fourth programme, the "fight against crime is", says Zuma, "everybody's business" (Zuma 2009a:2). Significantly, Zuma says nothing more about the fifth programme, the creation of "decent jobs".

The phrase, "decent work", is derived from the work of the International Labour Organization, and is embedded within a careful socio-economic analysis (ILO 1999). Zuma invokes this phrase, but avoids its socio-economic implications by refusing to pursue it. Instead, he continues his speech by calling for "a more active role of the Church in strengthening and deepening democracy", including popularising the Constitution and Bill of Rights (Zuma 2009a:2). Zuma is aware that this kind of call

will cause some discomfort among his audience, for he goes on immediately to recognise that there will probably be “occasional friction between Church and State”, especially concerning “[s]ome laws considered to be progressive and necessary by politicians and administrators”, including “the termination of pregnancy legislation” or “legislation for civil unions by people of the same sex”. “The solution” to such conflict, he continues, “is to have open dialogue and discussion” (Zuma 2009a:2). Zuma correctly recognises that such ‘moral’ matters will be of particular concern to this congregation. But he refuses to concede too much to this kind of Christianity, accepting that “[w]here no common ground is found, we will be able to disagree without being disagreeable” (Zuma 2009a:2).

He concludes his speech by affirming that “[w]e believe in the power of prayer” and then urging “the church to pray for peaceful, free and fair elections and a smooth transition to the new administration after April 22”, as well as “for nation building”, working together with the ANC and government “to make all South Africans feel at home in their country, regardless of colour, language, gender or creed” (Zuma 2009a:2). “Working together”, he says, returning to where he began with an allusion to the Exodus biblical text, “we can definitely do more to make South Africa a land of milk and honey” (Zuma 2009a:3).

Like Mbeki, Zuma privileges the Christian faith, drawing on the Bible, but like “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, Zuma acknowledges the role of a plurality of religions in South Africa’s public realm. Rather surprisingly, given the politically conservative, historically right-wing ‘fundamentalist’, stance of the Rhema Bible Church, Zuma is overt about the prophetic liberation tradition within which the ANC stands. Unfortunately, however, he does not follow through on this trajectory, choosing to downplay the national priority for decent work and focussing instead on narrower moral dilemmas such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Such is the dominance of the moral-religion trajectory in our country since liberation (West 2008) that Zuma, like Mbeki and “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document cannot even imagine the religious sector talking back to the ANC or government about economic matters!

And though a few days later Zuma would again return to his more casual and robust religious discourse, when he would claim, while meeting with religious and traditional leaders in Mafikeng, that the church’s

support for the ANC was an “unequivocal biblical declaration that if God is for us who can be against us” (Sapa 2009b), there have been a number of occasions when Zuma has demonstrated this more nuanced approach to religion in the public realm, including when he addressed both the International Pentecost Church (Zuma 2009b)<sup>12</sup> and the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete (Zuma 2009c)<sup>13</sup> on the 12 April 2009, and the Indian Christian community in Phoenix on the 14th April 2009 (Zuma 2009d)<sup>14</sup>.

Jacob Zuma has clearly brought religion back into the public realm. And while his casual comments indicate a rather rough use of religion, his recent speeches as President of ANC demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in the public realm. Positioning the ANC more clearly within the prophetic liberation religious tradition than either Thabo Mbeki or “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, he nevertheless, like them, ends up envisaging a quite narrow role for religion in the public sphere of South African society.

### **Conclusion: post-Polekwane religion and the New Jerusalem**

My car-wash companion has proven to be an astute analyst; we are, indeed, entering a period after Polekwane when religion will be more evident in the public realm. Quite how religion will be deployed within the ANC and quite how the religious sector will be dealt with now that they have secured the 2009 elections remains to be seen.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress in December 2007 in Polekwane has ushered in more than a renewal of the alliance between the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. Just as the visit of ANC President Josiah Tshangana Gumedede to the Soviet Union in 1927 prompted both a vision for a united front of African nationalists, communists, and workers in South Africa, so too it prompted him to use religious imagery to imagine this alliance: “I have seen the world to come, where it has already begun. I have been to the new Jerusalem” (ANC 1982). Polekwane has prompted a new era, it would seem, in the ANC’s deployment of religion in the public realm,

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<sup>12</sup> On this occasion he quoted a number of texts from the Bible.

<sup>13</sup> On this occasion he quoted from the Holy Qur’an.

<sup>14</sup> On this occasion he referred extensively to Ghandi.

and though the general trajectory is clear, the breadth of the trajectory appears to have widened, providing space for prophetic elements to surface and perhaps even change the direction of the trajectory itself.

In his Nelson Mandela Lecture, Thabo Mbeki also alluded to the New Jerusalem, drawing on William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming". Mbeki appeals to his audience not to allow a "monstrous beast" to be born from South Africa's New Jerusalem (Mbeki 2006a:13). For our country not to "fall apart", he argues, "we must in the first instance, never allow that the market should be the principal determinant of the nature of our society" (Mbeki 2006a:14). Mbeki is right about the market, but he is wrong when he goes on to argue that it is the "Church Theology" trajectory within the Bible that is sufficient to direct the path of our nation. While it is true "that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that 'Man cannot live by bread alone' [Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4] and therefore that the mere pursuit of individual wealth can never satisfy the need immanent in all human beings to lead lives of happiness" (Mbeki 2006a:14), it is also true that Jesus imagined a society in which each citizen would have their "daily bread" and would be free from unjust economic systems (Matthew 6:11). An RDP of the soul without an RDP of the economy is nothing more than "Church Theology" at its worst.

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*Jephthah Kiara Gathaka*

***The Bible and Democracy in Africa:  
How Biblical Science can contribute towards the  
Establishment of Plurality and Democracy, the Bible as  
a relevant tool in the quest for engendering Plurality***

***Introduction***

This presentation examines how biblical science can contribute towards the establishment of plurality and democracy in Africa. We do not wish to indulge in theory but want to demonstrate how the bible has been used as a relevant tool in the quest for engendering plurality in Africa and especially in Kenya. We also want to demonstrate how it is being used not only for converting souls but also as sustaining the physical body by liberating humanity from those issues that make it not to have “life in its abundance.”<sup>1</sup> Further we want to demonstrate that despite the fact that Christianity and its scriptures are foreign religion in Africa they have been entrenched in the African soil to an extent that they have shaped the majority of lives in Africa and continues to influence and shape the socio-economic and political life in many African countries and especially Africa South of the Sahara.

Christianity having been embraced by Africans as Prof. John Mbiti points out

is not just statistics...It is a total way of life, a world view, a religious ideology (if one may phrase it that way), an existence and a commitment – by individuals, peoples, cultures and nations. It involves reflection and practice, institutions and attitudes; and the creation and adoption of traditions. It means an eventual domestication of the gospel, in its wider sense, within the total milieu of a people. The gospel grows into the people they grow into it. While the gospel is essentially constant and unchanging the people are constantly changing and transitory.<sup>2</sup>

We therefore understand why most people in Africa would be influenced by the bible in their total life. As Mbiti had argued in an earlier work,

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:10 quotations from the bible will be taken from the Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Mbiti, John S. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Nairobi, Oxford Univ. Press, 1986, p 7.

“For Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore when the African converts to Christianity it becomes his/her life style. It is not easy to distinguish the secular and the spiritual and the fact that a human being is a psychosomatic unit is very clear.

Mbiti explains how Christianity was brought to the African soil but laments that “along the way it has been wrapped up with many layers of cultures and histories and many layers of theologies and traditions. These layers have both riches and weaknesses in them.”<sup>4</sup> He however argues that “African religion has prepared the religious and spiritual ground for many of its adherents to listen carefully to the teachings of the Bible, to reflect seriously upon them, to find a high degree of credibility in them, to discover meaningfully parallels between their world and the world of the Bible, and in many cases to convert to the Christian faith without feeling a sense of spiritual loss but to the contrary thereby gaining a new outreach on their religious experience.”<sup>5</sup> He continues to tell us about the role of the Bible and asserts:

Now that (the Bible) is available in whole or in part, in both African and former colonial languages, it is exerting a tremendous impact on the religious scene in Africa. It is a major contribution to the spreading of Christian faith and in the building up of Christian presence and communities.

He adds that

African Christians use the Bible both in daily life and in the practical life of the church as well as in academic reflection on theological issues in the light of scriptures, the Bible links us with one another across the continent...At the same time we belong to history and history is not static – so we are in the process of change in which we are both active and passive. African Christianity is being formed within this framework of change.<sup>6</sup>

As Africans read or hear the bible read to them in their own languages they see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people. They identify themselves with the experiences in the Bible. They even see their colonization and liberation in the Jewish life. They relive the exodus experience. They then start

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<sup>3</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publ., 1969, p 15.

<sup>4</sup> Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p 7.

<sup>5</sup> Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in Africa Christianity*, p 11.

<sup>6</sup> Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p 12.

to demand both church independence and political independence as Mbiti explains,

The scriptures have therefore provided African Christians with indispensable guidance at a critical period at which they would otherwise have been inarticulate. So began the demand of African society for spiritual independence from the religious imperialism of Western extra-biblical ideas.<sup>7</sup>

To push this point further Mbiti quotes Barret,

The vernacular translation enables the ethnic group concerned to grasp the inner meanings of such profound and intricate biblical doctrines as the liberty of the Christian man...Further it is clear these vernacular translations...have contributed markedly to the recovery by Africans of their cultural identity of their tribe, later expressed in such bodies as tribal political parties, welfare societies and particularly tribal independent churches.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible is used to teach about the entire life, and integrated in the people's cultures and world view.

We are however aware how the Bible was used wrongly in Africa to support colonialism and racism especially in South Africa. The Africans were compelled in the colonies to work for the masters and implored to obey according to Romans 13:1-7.<sup>9</sup> We are aware that the apartheid policy was, for decades, justified on 'Christian' and 'moral' as a means to sustain so called 'Christian civilization.' The Dutch Reformed Church taught that the separation of races with all the hardship and discriminations against non-whites was in accordance with the scriptures.<sup>10</sup> Such misuse of scripture is evident during the forced labor period in Kenya and in post- independence period as one party dictatorship used the passage to force the people to obey bad laws. The Bible was in deed used even to punish innocent people by branding them dissidents. Ngugi wa Thiong'o implies how the bible as a literary material having been translated in his mother tongue, Gikuyu vernacular influenced the thinking of the people about liberation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p 30.

<sup>8</sup> Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p 31.

<sup>9</sup> Some translations of the Bible have inserted the title of this passage as 'Christian duty to the state' To me the title or the subject of the passage should be, 'The responsibilities of the citizens and the government in a state'.

<sup>10</sup> John S. Pobee, 'Theological Basis for Liberation and Human Rights' in Mugambi, J.N.K, *The Church and the Future in Africa – Problems and Promises, All Africa Conference of Churches*; Nairobi, 1997 p 141.

<sup>11</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind, the Politics of Language in African Literature*, Heinemann Kenya, Nairobi, 1981.

We want as a case study to closely examine the written work of Archbishop David Gitari, on how he used the Bible in his sermons to rebuke the authorities in Kenya on various socio-economic and political issues and thus contributed immensely to the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in Kenya. We will mainly look at some of his '25 prophetic sermons preached between 1975 and 1994' and later published in a book, *In Season and out of Season, sermons to a Nation*, published by Regnum publishers 1996.<sup>12</sup> We want to establish the fact that the Bible remains an influential material in shaping governance and contributes to the building and consolidating democracy. We will also briefly examine the works of Professor Jesse Mugambi and especially his three chapters on 'Foundations for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics; Africa and the Old Testament and Text and Context in Applied Christian Theology' in his book *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*<sup>13</sup>. Mugambi reiterates on how the Bible should be rightly used and applied. In consolidating democracy it is important to see how the Bible has been used to promote human rights and also addressing corruption in African regimes. Here we would want to illustrate by showing how in civic education bible studies are produced to be discussed by the masses. The author did design a programme known as '*Education for Participatory Democracy*' which was carried out through the country. We trained trainers who did pass the training to thousands of people in the country. The contents of the programme included topics like human rights and the role of the civil society in a democracy, responsible citizenship and leadership, voter education and based on the bible.<sup>14</sup>

Kenya being 80% Christian would find the bible relevant. The Church leaders and especially the Roman Catholic Church also prepared pastoral letters based on the biblical teachings and are read in all church congregations. This would then prompt us to examine the role of the church in democratization process as, "The Church, being the custodian of God's

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<sup>12</sup> I served as parish priest and later as his personal assistant for five years 1978 to 1983 and his director of communications in 1986 to 1988 in the then diocese of Mt. Kenya East.

<sup>13</sup> J.N.K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi, Acton Publ., 2003.

<sup>14</sup> See further description of the programme in, Gideon Gichuhi Githiga, *The Church as the bulwark against authoritarianism: Development of church and state relations in Kenya with particular reference to the years after political independence 1963 – 1992*. Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2001 109 – 119.

word, must be able to transmit the right knowledge that will liberate people and promote the common good of all, so that God's love, justice and righteousness can reign over the whole creation – even in the present world.<sup>15</sup> While myriads of publications have been produced on the subject a balanced summary could be found in Kwame Bendiako's chapter on 'Christian religion and African Social Norms, Authority, Desacralisation and Democracy, in *Christianity in Africa, the Renewal of a non-Western Religion*.<sup>16</sup> The work of Bishop Gideon Githiga, *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism* discusses in detail this subject, the contribution of the Church in Kenya in this field.<sup>17</sup>

We must acknowledge that the Church or the body of Christians is growing fast in Africa. In deed Christianity and Islam are two religions that are growing fast in Africa. There may even be more Christians in Africa than they are in the countries where missionaries came from. Both the political leaders and the citizens in these countries the majority are those who subscribe to Christianity. Therefore the Bible will continue to be relevant in promoting and as well as influencing good governance. Many people will appeal to its teachings on many social economic and political matters democracy being one. We agree with Aloo Osotsi Mojola that,

The Christian Bible is a complex text capable of being read, interpreted and used in any number of ways- for example as a master –text functioning to give base and support for apartheid, slavery, racism, colonialism or as the master text functioning to anchor and motivate liberation movements and struggles for anti - colonialism and anti-racism, for civil rights and human rights struggles, for anti-war and anti-poverty etc. Its message of the infinite value and dignity of all humans, our oneness, unity and brotherhood/ sisterhood, love and self-sacrifice for the other, are more often spoken about than lived out.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed it is true that the Bible is still a relevant tool in the quest for engendering plurality. Professor Mugambi rightly argues that:

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<sup>15</sup> Zablon Nthamburi, *Theology and Politics in Africa*, in L. Magesa and Z. Nthamburi, eds, *Democracy and Reconciliation, A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi, Acton Publ., 1999, p 137.

<sup>16</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa, The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Orbis Books, Edinburgh Univ. Press; 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop Gideon Githiga, *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism*, Oxford, Regnum, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Aloo Osotsi Mojola, *The Challenge of Ngugi wa Thing'o in African Bible Translators and Biblical Scholars' Biblical Texts and African Audiences*, Ed. by E.R. Wendland and Jean-Claude Loba- Mkolé, Nairobi, Acton Publ., 2004.

In the African religious heritage God is both transcendent and immanence. When the Bible becomes accessible to African converts to Christianity, it becomes a companion text in their daily lives, because they can identify themselves and resonate with the biblical rhythm of life, especially in the Old Testament and in the synoptic gospels

Owing to the convergence between African and biblical ontologies, African interpretations of the Bible often become preoccupied with the search for resonance, rather than a quest for dissonance. Thus a difference in emphasis is observable, between missionary and expatriate readings of the relationship between Africans and the Bible, and the African perception of that relationship. Whereas the modern missionary enterprise has brought the Bible as a condemnation of African culture, African converts have found in the Bible the affirmation of their dignity as human beings created in the image of God. With this affirmation, they have been able to resist the imposition of biblical hermeneutics which sought to fashion African converts in the image of their missionary mentors.<sup>19</sup>

### **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is broadly defined as ‘the science of interpretation’ or ‘the attempt to understand something that someone else has said or written.’ G. P. Benson informs that ‘In the field of biblical studies, hermeneutics defines the rules one uses when seeking out the meaning of the scriptures. It raises questions about the nature of knowledge, the use of language, and the scientific and ontological presupposition operative in the mind of the exegete.’<sup>20</sup> *The New International Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* defines hermeneutics as ‘the science or art of interpretation, especially of the scriptures.’<sup>21</sup> Interpretation represents either of two technical words, “exegesis” or “hermeneutics” which were originally synonyms but now are arbitrarily distinguished: exegesis, the detailed specific explication of a text; hermeneutics, the theory underlying such explication.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi, Acton Publ., 2003. p 118.

<sup>20</sup> G.P. Benson, Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics, Kenya’s Protestant Churches and the Nyayo State in H.B.Hansen and Michael Twaddle eds, *Religion and Politics in East Africa*, Nairobi, East African Educational Publ., 1995 p 188.

<sup>21</sup> *The New International Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, Trident Press International, 2003 edition, Columbia.

<sup>22</sup> Grobel, K. Interpretation, History and Principles of, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*; Volume 2, Abingdon Press, Nashville: 21st Printing 1996.

Time and space may not allow us to discuss theories of this science and the principles applied. However some assumptions will be made of how the Africans take the Bible and apply it to their lives as already stated above. The Bible is given a unique authority and importance by the Kenyan Christians who make the majority of the population.<sup>23</sup> The scriptures are seen as communication from the living God. Gitari argues that 'it is because it is inspired by God that the Bible is able to instruct us in the truth about God and therefore part of the hermeneutical task is to enable the text to make its intended appeal to the reader, and to identify the reader's appropriate response.'<sup>24</sup> African Christians believe about its inspiration though it was written by human beings who were moved by the spirit of God to write what they wrote. This does not however mean that they ignore the hermeneutical cycle which is in fact desirable.

In order to do justice to our discussion on hermeneutics I am tempted to extensively quote Mugambi,

It is interesting to trace the history of biblical hermeneutics throughout the history of Christianity. During the apostolic period oral tradition flourished, and it was not until several decades that the tradition was reduced to writing. In the following three centuries, church dogma was fixed in an effort to distinguish context interpretations of the Gospel from false ones. The famous theologians who have earned a place in the roll of honour were committed Christians who tried hard to defend the Christian faith against its enemies and opponents. Yet their defense of the faith was culturally conditioned since it was conducted within the Graeco-Roman setting.

In many parts of tropical Africa, Christianity is hardly a century old. Churches are still in the process of establishment within the local African culture. Theological training is still conducted in foreign languages – English, French, Portuguese and Arabic. Thus the language of ministerial formation is different from the language of ecclesial life.<sup>25</sup>

To illustrate his last sentence, I prepare my sermons in English but deliver them in Gikuyu, my mother tongue or Kiswahili, the national language. Sometimes I may be fortunate to deliver the sermon to an African congregation in English while I am actually thinking in my mother tongue! This discrepancy, as Mugambi observes causes much alienation on the part of pastors and theologians, because they have to continually translate their theological learning into their local setting and

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<sup>23</sup> The previous census gave the Christians 80 % of the population. The results for 2009 have not been published due to some political reasons.

<sup>24</sup> G.B.Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*, p 188.

<sup>25</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, p 121.



language. It is true that the Bible is available in local African languages, becoming an integral part of local literature, in very much the same way that it did in Europe during Reformation. The alienating role of Latin in western and northern Europe until modern times can be compared to the alienating role of foreign languages in the ministerial formation of African clergy and theologians today. Mugambi further argues that,

...It is paradoxical that African Christians accept the Bible as an affirmation of their humanity, while in most cases the missionary enterprise has presented the bible as a negation of African culture. This paradox has resulted in a discrepancy between missionary and African readings of the Bible. The discrepancy cannot be explained in terms of doctrine and theology. It is much more ideological than doctrinal. The negative attitude which pervades missionary and media portrayal of Africa in Europe and North America is cultivated ideologically through the process of socialization and education, long before the missionaries, tourists and journalists arrive in Africa...<sup>26</sup>

He further suggests that, hermeneutics, as a critical discipline, should help us to distinguish between the essential message of the Gospel and the cultural garb in which it must necessarily be clothed from time to time and from place to place. To confirm this he cites Rudolf Bultmann:

The cradle of primitive Christianity as an historical phenomenon was furnished by late Judaism, which in turn was a development from Hebrew religion as evidenced in the Old Testament and its writings. Yet, despite the predominance of the Old Testament and Jewish heritage, primitive Christianity remained a complete phenomenon. At a very early stage in its development it came into contact with Hellenistic paganism, a contact which was to exercise a profound influence on Christianity itself. This paganism was itself equally complex. Not only did it preserve the heritage of Greek culture, it was also enlivened and enriched by the influx from the Near East.<sup>27</sup>

As Mugambi points out when Christianity reached western and northern Europe, during the first Christian millennium, it took more and more cultural and religious baggage as it spread. By the time it reached tropical Africa through the modern missionary enterprise, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was so alienated from the original Hebrew and Jewish heritage that African Christians could identify themselves much more with biblical culture than with missionary norms. At this juncture we can only reiterate the position that 'when the Bible becomes accessible to African converts to Christianity it becomes a companion text in their daily lives, because they can identify themselves and resonate with the biblical

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<sup>26</sup> Mugambi J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, p 123.

<sup>27</sup> Mugambi J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, p 123.

rhythm of life especially in the Old Testament and in the synoptic gospels.<sup>28</sup>

However we should take caution when it comes to interpretation in as much as Africans may identify with the culture and stories in the Bible. Culture is the total manifestation of a people's self-understanding and self-expression, through politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion. Language, science and technology are the means through which this self-understanding and self-expression is communicated and appropriated<sup>29</sup> Goldingay cautions that the biblical characters and their stories were unique to them and the situations we might be in are quite different.<sup>30</sup> In as much as Africans can identify with the culture in the bible the bible characters and events are separated by geography, language, race or time. Goldingay thus advises, 'I have to cultivate both a sensitive and a critical discipline if I am to perceive where a narrative is setting an example before me and what that example is, and thus to go on to work out what significance that example has within the Bible as a whole and for the modern world.'<sup>31</sup> Here we are reminded of culture relativism but also note:

OT ethics thus comprise a response to the activity of the redeemer God. But they are also a response to the creator God, embody conformity to the pattern of natural order, and apply as much outside as inside Israel. They are standards on whose basis even God himself can be appealed to. Thus one's doctrine of creation will comprise an important aspect of the basic orientation which determines the framework of one's approach to ethical questions. Specific importance will attach to one's theological understanding of topics such as man, sexuality and other human relationships, land, the state, and the outworking of human history in general.<sup>32</sup>

Again Goldingay rightly points out that while the Christian ethicist is not going to take the Old Testament law as God's last word on behavior, it seems equally clear that it would be odd for him simply to ignore it as a possible source of guidance for decision-making over the way of life God expects of his people.<sup>33</sup> He goes further also to remind us that we cannot

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<sup>28</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, p 118.

<sup>29</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K. *Religion and Social Construction of Reality*, Nairobi; Nairobi Univ. Press, 1996, 31ff).

<sup>30</sup> John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1981, p 40.

<sup>31</sup> Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, p 41.

<sup>32</sup> Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, p 43.

<sup>33</sup> Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, p 51.

literary take the OT commands as they have their own specifics or particularity. 'They are not so much universal absolutes, designed to be applicable in any circumstances, as specific enactments made in particular historical, social, and cultural situations, and designed to function in those particular situations.'<sup>34</sup> These commands are not only independent of each other but they also directly address a historical and cultural situation which is very different from that of the African readers. Goldingay reiterates that we live in a particular historical situation which raises for us sharp ethical questions which the Bible does not directly address. He notes that 'It does not envisage the questions of a technological society, of a world that is becoming overcrowded and of life sciences which lay before men new possibilities of genetic decision-making. The specificity of biblical commands to their context raises the question of what guidance we have for the specific issues we have to face.'<sup>35</sup> This position may lead us not to listen to what the Bible may be speaking to us today. We must realize that God remains consistent and the conditions of human life today are not totally discontinuous with those of the biblical cultures. The problem of specificity and particularistic is followed by that of diversity in the OT standards. As Africans we will be guided by which issues are relevant to us and investigate what guidance the Bible offers.

The hermeneutical approach taken by most proponents of the Bible as a tool to advance pluralism and democracy in Kenya has been that of reading and interpreting the Bible as a whole following the canon. They see it as two testaments with one testimony. They believe that reading the testaments together involves taking hermeneutical as well as theological positions which means that 'the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt.'<sup>36</sup> This does not mean that they do not recognize the problem created by diversity of themes in the testaments as raised by Walter Brueggemann who holds that the canon represents a collection of such widely diverse ideas that all attempts to perceive a coherent theological message results in interpretative violence and reductionism (*Theology of the Old Testament, Dispute, Advocacy*; Minneapolis, 1997). Many proponents, in our case, as evident

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<sup>34</sup> Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, p 51.

<sup>35</sup> Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, p 52.

<sup>36</sup> K.J. Vanhoozer. Exegesis and Hermeneutics, in T.D.Alexander and Brian S. Rosner eds *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; InterVarsity Press, Leicester,2000. 52-64.

in their works follow what is described as Brevard Childs's canonical approach.

For Childs, canonization refers to the process by which the traditions of Israel and the early church came to be shaped in a way that enabled them to function authoritatively for future generations, much like a *regula fidei* (rule of faith). What Childs sets out to describe, then, is the way in which texts have been shaped in order to function authoritatively in the life of believing community.

In their final form, the Christian Scriptures include two Testaments, each of which is to be read in the light of the other. For Childs it is precisely this interdependence of OT and NT interpretation that constitutes the unique remit of biblical theology according to Childs, To interpret the OT as if it were an autonomous text is to misinterpret it; at the very least, it is to interpret it out of its proper (i.e. canonical) context. In speaking of a canonical context, Childs is referring both to the final form of each individual biblical book and to that on Childs's view, 'what it meant' (e.g. the servant songs of Isaiah) shades into 'what it means' (e.g. Jesus Christ as servant of the Lord), precisely because the final form in the canonical intention serves as a rule of faith- as Scripture – for past, present, and future church members. This is the canonical version of the hermeneutical circle: read intertextually, the old in light of the new and new in light of the old.<sup>37</sup>

We are convinced that this is the best approach to take for indeed to read the Bible as unified Scripture is not one interpretative interest among others, but the interpretative strategy that best corresponds to the nature of the text itself, given its divine inspiration.<sup>38</sup> We hold that the canon is a great hall of witnesses in which different voices all testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. Over and above the laws and stories and the songs, is an all-embracing act that of witnessing to what God was and is doing in Christ. When described at this higher level, the canon mediates the subject matter that unites Scripture and emerges from, but cannot be reduced to, the smaller, less complex speech acts that comprise both Testaments (e.g. telling a story, prophesying, promising, etc.). As pointed out above there are diversities because we know that communities of interpreters approach the Bible with diverse ideological interests. But since their aim is to understand it then they ought to receive the text on its own terms, not in terms of some method or scheme determined in advance and they must ensure that their interpretative interest corresponds to the communicative intent of the text. The text's interest is to

<sup>37</sup> Vanhoozer, *Exegesis and Hermeneutics*, p 60.

<sup>38</sup> See Childs's full work in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, SCSM Press Ltd. London, 1979, 28-106.

declare the knowledge of God and we believe the text itself to be the word of God. Benson reminds us that the interpreter must allow his own presupposition and his own understanding to be modified or even completely reshaped by the text itself and urges that there must be a constant dialogue between the interpreter and the text for the hermeneutical circle is not only unavoidable but desirable.<sup>39</sup> He rightly points out that cultural presuppositions explicitly affect Kenyan churchmen's understanding of the Bible. While discussing eschatology as a central hermeneutical concern he rightly concludes that 'the Bible's message, it was claimed, demand and immediate response to God in the choices of the moment.'<sup>40</sup> This is why we are at the moment looking on the subject at hand. Gitari whom we intend to see how he has used the Bible in order to agitate for political pluralism and democracy sees the Bible as the product of God's interaction with the ancient writers and their particular circumstances.<sup>41</sup> He therefore has the justification to touch on political issues returning repeatedly to the eschatological theme of judgment on those who reject justice.

### ***One Party System of Governance and Quest for Political Pluralism***

Most of the African governments attained their independence in the 60s. It was thought that after independence the African leaders would lead their countries guided by justice. Therefore there were great hopes that issues of human rights, equal distribution of wealth, good governance and elimination of all forms of discrimination would be things of the past. It was hoped that tribalism would not be practiced in the so called new nations as there was deep commitment to nationhood. Now that the colonialist had gone it was expected that Africans would respect one another. The economy was expected to grow and there were expectations of distribution of the resources to all. In fact there were feelings that all would be joyous in the countries. In Kenya the slogan was that independence would accelerate and bring to an end three enemies, namely, ignorance, disease and poverty. People expected that the rule of law would be adhered to. The leaders were expected ensure that disease, poverty and illiteracy was reduced. Many of these countries had started

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<sup>39</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*; p 189.

<sup>40</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*; p 190.

<sup>41</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*; p 189.

with democracy that embraced political pluralism. With many political parties in a country it was envisaged that the competing ideas would be allowed and would provide checks and balances on the Government. Most countries remained de facto one party state while they were supposed to be de jure multiparty states.<sup>42</sup>

Democracy which was supposed to have been the ideal government was not practiced. The people were not involved in governance as demanded by democracy. They were made spectators rather than participators in governance. Elections which were supposed to be enhancing democracy were not held in time. Where they were held they were filled with malpractices of rigging, intimidation and imposition of leaders. Systems of elections which were not free and fair were devised that abused democracy. It is known that all stable democracies employ an agreed and workable electoral system appropriate to the circumstances of a given nation.<sup>43</sup> In 1988 in Kenya a system was introduced for the voters to queue behind the candidate of their choice. This was described as open democracy. Consequently the long queues lost while the short queues won. Violence characterized the election campaigns. Democracy which in practical terms is a system of government in which political power is exercised by the people, through representative institution, to which these representatives are regularly elected was totally abused. Many of these countries turned into dictatorships. Corruption destroyed the moral fabric of the society. The economies of the countries deteriorated. The countries were unable to pay their foreign debts and stringent measures of structural adjustment policies were put in place by the Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The people became poor and social services like health and education were run down.

Human rights were violated. The political and fundamental freedoms of the individual were not guaranteed. There were arbitrary arrests and detentions without trials. Discrimination on the bases of race, ethnicity, gender and class dominated in the countries that had gained independ-

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<sup>42</sup> Such countries were like Kenya who from 1969 banned all opposition parties while the constitution remained allowing political pluralism. In 1982 the parliament entrenched section 2A in the Constitution which declared that there would only be one political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU).

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Kobia, *The Quest for Democracy in Africa*, National Council of Churches of Kenya, Nairobi: 1993, p 1.

ence in order to see that their people enjoyed these rights. Africa also entered into a new era in which military leaders converted themselves into politicians and legitimized their rule through elections making it difficult to conduct multi-party politics in such contexts.<sup>44</sup> The factors that facilitate democratic practice and culture as those described above were virtually ignored by the African leaders. Indeed, Pobeë summarizes the scene by rightly asserting that,

the first generation of African politicians who set out and did much to be liberators of their own people from foreign oppressors, have themselves become oppressors, to the extent that freedom of self-expression and human dignity are frequently denied African citizens by their own nations...In addition to these dehumanizing human acts, the 'acts of God' such as droughts and floods, have created pockets of in-between- peoples- refugees and peoples in distress.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The cry for new liberation and the role of the Church***

The quest for political pluralism began in the late 80s and the early 90s. This coincided with the breakup of the Soviet monolithic and the disintegration of socialism in Eastern Europe. The demand for pluralism in Africa is said to have been contributed by the failure of democracy by consensus, the failure of the one-party system, and the failure of the 'African ' conception of human rights.<sup>46</sup> Kobia declares that a multi-party system which is a movement from one party regime to a political dispensation in which there is an open, healthy, and disciplined contest for power and leadership in society are a necessary basis for democratic governance. He enumerates the advantages for the multi-party system as:

The general opening up of society as many parties give scope for the majority to begin to take an interest in politics. Multiple parties provide a wider choice and diversity of political representation, especially if the competing issues and policies are presented to the electorate in a language they can understand. Democracy must respect the multiplicity of interests and opin-

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<sup>44</sup> Mugambi, Religion in the Social Transformation of Africa, in Laurent Mages and Zablon Nthamburi, eds, *Democracy and Reconciliation, A Challenge for African Christianity*; Acton Publ., Nairobi; p 81.

<sup>45</sup> John Pobeë, Theological Basis for Liberation and Human Rights, in J.N.K. Mugambi ed. *The Church and the Future in Africa – Problems and Promises*; All Africa Conference of Churches, Nairobi:1997, p 137.

<sup>46</sup> Kobia, *The Quest for Democracy in Africa*, p 32.

ions, and since parties can be forced to form coalition governments now and again, this opens a way for consented politics.<sup>47</sup>

However he is quick to warn that multi-partism is not a panacea for political ills or a magic wand to introduce a new era of peace and stability.

While there were so many politicians that agitated for democracy did the Church involve itself in the midst of this fight? The church leaders were convinced that, the Church, being the bearer of the word of God, should exercise its prophetic role by calling upon the state to seek the will of God and to be obedient to God as it rules on God's behalf to establish law and justice as stipulated in Romans 13:1-7. Here the Bible explicitly enumerates the duties of the state the chief of which is to administer justice. Justice is the chief characteristic of God's intervention in the world. It entails actively promoting righteousness and human wellbeing. The Church is given courage to involve itself because it has the Bible which speaks of all issues that negate democracy as violations of human rights, inequality and all forms of injustices. Benson informs us that the evangelical mainstream Kenyan churches assign to the Bible a unique authority and importance. The scriptures are understood not merely as a product of long-dead human authors, but as a present communication from the living God.<sup>48</sup> The church, therefore, being the custodian of God's word, must be able to transmit the right knowledge that will liberate people and promote the common good of all, so that God's love, justice and righteousness can reign over the whole creation-even in the present world. The church's reading of the scriptures motivated and shaped their engagement with the state. The church leaders believe themselves obliged to measure any state's action by the standards of the scriptures and to compel the state to attend to the scriptures by lively preaching.<sup>49</sup> Benson further describes pragmatism of the church in this area. He points out that the churches, from their reading of the Bible, were committed to seeking justice and fair dealing (both economic and forensic) and freedom of expression, association and worship. The churches were agreed that the state has been established by God and de-

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<sup>47</sup> Kobia, *The Quest for Democracy in Africa*, p 33.

<sup>48</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*, p 188.

<sup>49</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*, p 191.



serves support and that the church has the duty of confronting it where it goes astray.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Archbishop Gitari: A Case Study of Biblical Hermeneutics in Support of Democracy and Political Pluralism.***

Benson believes that the Kenyan churches' vigorous involvement in politics is the result of a sustained hermeneutical enterprise. This is demonstrated by the preaching of Gitari as found in his book, *In Season and out of Season, Sermons to a Nation*.

#### ***May we dwell in Unity?***

This is a sermon he preached at Nairobi Baptist Church on 20th April, 1975. It followed a few days after the assassination of a prominent politician in Kenya, the Hon. Josiah Mwangi Kariuki popularly known for his generosity and spoke on behalf of the marginalized. He was therefore not favored by those in authority. Gitari was calling on the people of Kenya to remain united but at the same time demanded for justice. He based his sermon on the National Anthem and supported with the scriptures. At this period Gitari was the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya. It was broadcast live through the national radio.

After appealing to the Kenyans to live a holy life based on 1Peter 2:9 and to repent he called on the church to base their prayers on the first stanza of the National Anthem during the week. The stanza runs:

Oh God of all creation  
Bless this our land and nation  
Justice be our shield and defender  
May we dwell in unity  
Peace and liberty  
Plenty be found within our borders

Gitari observes that 'a national anthem is a hymn or song expressing the patriotic sentiments of a people. It is the *Magna Carta* of a people's personal and political freedom. 'Often when the music of the National Anthem is played, it captures my emotions so much that I am not shamed to stand to attention and concentrate wholly on the patriotic sentiments it embodies. What are these patriotic sentiments? They include the desire for blessing, justice, unity, peace, liberty and plenty to be bestowed

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<sup>50</sup> Benson, *Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics*, p 194.

on our nation. This is not mere sentimentalism. Rather, it is a prayer to God, the creator of all, to send his blessings on our nation.' He thanked Parliament for setting a probe to inquire and investigate the murder. He expressed his hope and that of the nation that the probe would be free of all hindrances. He expected that the truth would bring an end to bickering and rumor mongering.

Gitari warns that the nation cannot claim to be God fearing when some people are engaged in subversive activities like planting bombs which kill people as happened on 1st March 1975. He deplores the assassination of politicians like Gama Pinto and Joseph Thomas Mboya. He reminds the state that it must keep its word by disclosing its probe on the murder of Hon. J.M. Kariuki. We see in Gitari a bold prophetic ministry and applying the word of God to challenge those in authority. While explaining Matt.5:6 "*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*" Gitari does not mince his words. He elaborates that Jesus meant that we must 'have an intense longing for justice and righteousness in the world and in every aspect of our national life.' In the same vein as he expounds Prov.15:27 and 12:20, he calls upon the business community to avoid being tempted to make quick gain and involve themselves in smuggling of goods. During that time corruption and smuggling was the order of the day.

He also touches on the theme of peace and expounds Matt, 5:9. '*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.*' He calls upon all citizens to devote themselves to being peace makers rather than peace lovers. He also implores the government to protect its citizens as a duty in order that they may realize peace. In almost every sermon in this book he has come back to this theme. Finally, citing 1Tim.2:1-3, he calls upon the Christians to pray for peace in the world.

On unity he reminds the Christians that for a nation to be strong, unity is essential. Unity, he explains must be based on love and truth. He maintains that first there should be love for God and then love for the neighbour.

On the theme of freedom he reminds his listeners/readers that freedom does not mean one doing what he or she wishes to do but what one ought to do. Freedom therefore has limits. But he reminds them true freedom can only be found in Jesus (John 8:36)

He then moves to the concept of human rights and cites the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. He especially touches on the right

to life reminding his hearers that human beings are created in the image of God and no one has permission to take one's life. He cites the story Cain and Abel. He reminds that human beings are each ones' keeper.

For the nation to receive blessings of plenty he gives certain conditions as:

- a. People must till the land and exploit natural resources...people must work hard
- b. Everyone in the nation should be given the opportunity to promote their own well-being. As the universal Declaration of Human Rights says, a human being has the right to work under favourable conditions with equal pay for equal work
- c. When God created Adam and Eve he said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, till the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth' Genesis 1:28. Here humanity has the warranty to exploit natural resources responsibly. However he has no warranty to exploit his fellow human beings for his own benefit.
- d. A nation cannot be said to be enjoying the blessings of plenty if wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few people. The Old Testament prophets condemned vehemently the property grabbers of their day e.g. Micah 2:1-4.

For a nation to enjoy the blessing of plenty there should be:

1. Justice which involves the establishment of equal rights for all
2. Unity which removes all barriers to a true spirit of *harambee*. Such unity must have the basis of love and truth
3. Peace which creates the right conditions for enabling man to make full use of his talents
4. Liberty which grants a person their basic human rights to enable them to render true service to God and other people.<sup>51</sup>

These themes run through the sermons that the Archbishop has been preaching. The sermons demonstrate how he rightly interpreted the Bible and expounded it. Before making the application he always explained the meaning of the words and the terminologies which his congregation could not understand. He then shows the history of the passage and its context. He then appealed to his hearers.

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<sup>51</sup> Gitari, In Season and Out of Season, p 21,22.

What is clear is that he always set to challenge the things which would democracy demands and things that would reverse democracy.

### **Who knows...?**

In the sermon he preached two weeks after the attempted *coup d'etat* on 1st August 1982 he challenges those in authority to ensure that they exercise justice in order not to provoke chaos in the country. He appeals to those who have access to those in authority to give proper advice and not to fear to say the truth. The sermon is based in the story of Esther, from the book of Esther and entitled, **Who knows...?** (Esther 4:14b).<sup>52</sup> This was the challenge that Queen Esther was given by her cousin Mordecai when Herman the Prime Minister had planned to kill all the Jews. Gitari first shows how the emperor received the wrong advice and divorced his first queen Vashti. He later had been advised by Herman how the Jews were being disobedient to the emperor and therefore decided that they should all be killed because of their disloyalty to the emperor. Gitari narrates the story with the images that his hearers understood while at the same time being true to the text. Then he applies to the situation in Kenya. He decries the failure of the Parliament on 9th June 1982 to protect the ideals of democracy by agreeing to entrench section 2A which turned Kenya to a *de jure* one party country thus curtailing the freedom of association and in deed political freedom of choice. Gitari calls that bad advice.

In addition Gitari asked those who were in the cabinet also to give proper advise to the President. He made the same appeal to those in administrative position. Then he called on everyone who has some responsible position to exercise it well. He appealed to the patriotism of the citizens to report those who might be planning to change the government unconstitutionally. He however warns that the situation could be averted if Kenyans were willing to work for justice and peace and if they care the welfare of the poor and the disadvantaged. He calls on everyone to be an instrument of peace. Peace is a theme that runs through his sermons.

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<sup>52</sup> Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, 36-42.

### ***The Way of Peace***

On 28th July 1985 he preached a sermon entitled, *The Way of Peace* based on Philippians 4:1-9. Gitari starts by setting the context of the epistle of Philippians. Then he picks on the theme of joy which he says cannot be complete without peace. He elaborates on the two prominent women Eudia and Syntache who were stumbling block to the peace in the church. From there then Gitari expounds on how church leaders in all levels may fail to be foci for unity in their congregations. He advises them not to be identified with groups that would cause chaos. He further calls on them not to create factions in the church. Then he advises them not to join competing political parties as that would divide the congregation. They should be able to remain neutral so that they could be peace makers when the rivaling factions fight. They must exercise the ministry of reconciliation. He warns, 'But church leaders can never succeed in reconciling quarrelling groups if they are already prejudiced against one group or the other. In any kind of dispute, a reconciler must never be biased towards any group. His bias must be only on the side of truth.'<sup>53</sup> He concludes by asserting that justice and righteousness are conditions for peace. Then he says that peace is needed in every sphere of life. He urges for peace in Kenyan politics by holding fair grassroots party elections. He expressed unhappiness because in some areas of his diocese and the country there was violence and unfairness in the KANU elections. He noted:

The grassroots elections in which people lined up to vote enable wananchi to see and judge for themselves whether there was justice or none at all. By and large justice was done; but those pockets of injustice may have given some people leadership without authority of the people. It is possible to have power without authority. That is not justice, and it is not the way of peace.<sup>54</sup>

He called on those elected to work with the others they defeated for the welfare of the nation.

### ***Do not be conformed to this World***

On 27th July Gitari preached a sermon through the national state radio which despite being edited it was forth telling and foretelling. The country had asked her athletes not to participate in the Commonwealth

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<sup>53</sup> Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, p 50.

<sup>54</sup> Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, p 52.

Games in protest about apartheid in South Africa. Gitari had also turned the offer to be the official chaplain in the Games. The sermon was based on Roman 12:1-2 entitled, '*Do not be conformed to this world.*' Gitari gave the background of how emperor worship was live during the time of Paul's writing of the epistle. It was therefore a must that the citizens were required to say, 'Ceaser is Lord'. The Christians would find this to be hard as they confessed that 'Jesus is Lord.' There were many other ways that the Christians could be enticed to conform to the world standards. One of the vices that Gitari admonished his hearers was not to conform to corruption which was and is rife in the country. He especially appealed to the civil servant and the police in particular. He also called on the politicians in KANU not to condone the expulsion of errant members from the party as there was no other party to associate with.

### ***Duties of the State and Obligations of the Citizens***

On 30th April, 1989 at his St. Thomas Cathedral, Kerugoya he preached the sermon entitled, '*Duties of the State and Obligations of Citizens,*' based on 1Peter 2:13 -17. Gitari informed the congregation that God was a God of order and therefore had established the Government. He said those in authority must therefore be obeyed. He reminded the Christians that they were both citizens of heaven and earth. He disclosed that at the time Paul was writing the Roman Empire was being ruled by Nero who was a ruthless emperor especially towards Jews and Christians. Yet Paul was imploring them to obey him. In application the citizens must be obedient to the President and those who govern with him. He cited Romans 13:3-4 where the citizens are advised to do good in order to earn the praise of those in authority. The state in turn was to protect the citizens by punishing evil doers and praising those who do well. If the wrong doers were not punished then that was encouraging impunity. He described the situation as it was in the time of prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:2-4). Gitari decried the situation in his diocese and especially in Kirinyaga district where evil doers happened to be arrested but then released. It was also during this time that a political KANU activist had threatened to attack Gitari in the church. He had been apprehended but then released. Gitari had the opportunity to declare that he was not going to be intimidated. He declared, '...threats will neither frighten nor

silence me...I will continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.’<sup>55</sup>

The other problem facing the country was and is the grabbing of public land set apart for public use by people of influence in the country including the politicians. To address this situation which the church leaders in Kenya have always spoken against Gitari preached a sermon on 19th May, 1991 entitled, ‘*Was there not a Nabboth to say No?*’ The Kirinyaga County Council had allocated water catchment forest hill to a private developer to build a hotel. True to the text Gitari describes how King Ahab was interested in the land of one of his subjects Naboth and wanted to buy it. When he refused the queen Jezebel arranged how he would be killed and then they get the land for their ‘vegetable garden.’ Then Prophet Elijah appears in the scene to condemn King Ahab and his queen for their action.

With this story Gitari condemns both the Kirinyaga County Council and the private developer. Kirinyaga County council failed to protect the public land while the private developer is greedy to make profit while the masses suffer environmental degradation. Gitari deploras the idol worship practiced by Ahab and applied to how people worship wealth, lies, political power etc. He then points out how Ahab oppressed the poor which is quite evident in Kenya. He revealed how the prosperity of king and his high standard of living was achieved at the expense of the poor people because the system then as now tended to place the poor at the mercy of the rich and the influential. The poor were forced to borrow money from the rich, the rich would in turn charge very high interest rates and if they failed to pay in time, they faced either eviction from their land or slavery. Gitari cited so many places that had been grabbed by influential people in the district and yet no one was raising a finger. He blamed the local authority for allocating those public areas to these people and urged that public land be left untouched and only utilized for public purposes. He gave six cardinal principles to be observed:

1. Ensure that any land preserved for public utility is not interfered with.
2. There should be no delay in compensating individuals whose land has been taken for public utility with alternate land.

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<sup>55</sup> Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, p 95.

3. Individuals should pay their legal fees and land rates to the Council itself and not individual employees or councilors.
4. Individuals to use the land for the development which they had indicated when being allocated the land.
5. Any property identified for sale by the Council should be advertised for tendering and sold to the highest bidder.
6. Elected leaders and top civil servants should not be the main beneficiaries of the land entrusted to the Council.<sup>56</sup>

He called on the people to know their rights and demand them and learn to say No like Nabboth. Gitari pointed out that king Ahab called the prophet the trouble maker in Israel while in fact he was the minder of Israel. This is a clear demonstration of Gitari as an advocate for the poor and the welfare of the country that use the Bible to fight for those rights. Democracy is about the distribution of resources equitably. This is what Gitari indicates the Bible to advocate and challenges the authorities using it.

We have picked just a few of Gitari's published sermons. Since 20th July, 1975 when he was consecrated and enthroned as Bishop he has preached numerous sermons and presented unaccountable papers internationally and nationally. In these presentations he has always based them from the Bible. The themes of justice and peace, responsible governance and protection of the environment, promotion and protection of human rights and equal distribution of resources, respect for the poor and marginalized, transparency and integrity issues and all that pertains to democracy have been tackled in his speeches and sermons. Time and space does not allow us to enumerate his ministry as Bishop and Archbishop. He has been at the forefront in the struggle for democracy and political pluralism in Kenya. This has earned him both friends and enemies. He has been abused and attacked for his stand. He has remained steadfast and has not wavered in his commitment and love for Kenya which he says has been prompted by his love for God. In his use of the Bible he has followed what D.A. Carson advises

It is far better for all Christians to read every part of the Scripture, think it through on its own terms, discern, so far as possible, its contribution to the

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<sup>56</sup> Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, 107,108.



whole of the canon, and then ask how such truth applies to themselves and to the church and society of which they are a part.<sup>57</sup>

There are two other Biblical themes which would contribute towards engendering pluralism, that is, the Trinity and the image of the church as a body. In Genesis 1:26, we read God speaking in plural as He considers the creation of human beings. Without falling into the temptation of economic trinity, we find that the persons of the Godhead working together leading us to modalism or the idea that there really is only one divine nature which appears in three ‘modes of being’. That is, the various works of salvation are distributed to the three persons, so creation becomes solely the work of the Father; redemption is the work of the Son alone and sanctification the specific work of the Spirit.<sup>58</sup> It would be too much reading into the text if we said that there was a discussion in the Godhead as to how human beings would look like. Extrapolating on this biblical motif the bible offers a model for democracy and plurality in the sense that Christians as citizens of a country can contribute significantly to the development of their respective countries by harnessing their different and unique gifting and talents. The voices and opinions of the citizenry, though diverse, can be considered and brought to bear the challenge of developing their respective countries in their own individual and collective capacities. Perhaps this is why Edgar suggests that ‘the Trinity is also the christian’s paradigm for social and political life.’<sup>59</sup> St. Paul in 1Corinthians chapter 12 informs the church that each member has received a different spiritual gift from the same spirit but for the welfare of the whole body. He describes the church as a body with many different organs but working for welfare of the whole body. This image could well be used in the discussion about unity in diversity in a nation. The church also has people from different ethnic and racial groups and different social backgrounds and cultures. This multiculturalism should be used as a challenge for the country to have political pluralism. The only problem is that the church fails sometimes to be the role model of this unity and diversity thus losing its moral authority to challenge the politicians. The Church is depicted in the Acts of Apostles as a community of believers. People from different communities started a new life

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<sup>57</sup> D.A.Carson, *Approaching the Bible*, in *New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century Edition, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2002, p 18.

<sup>58</sup> Edgar, B. *The Message of the Trinity*; Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester: 2004, p 27.

<sup>59</sup> Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity*. p 29.

together. They were from different nationalities as described on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11). We see them forming communities where they really listened to one another and shared their resources 'to each as any had need' (Acts 4:35). Africans never think themselves as individuals. One belongs to a family, clan and ethnic community. Each family and clan have their own ideas and ways of doing things but all these contribute towards the welfare of the ethnic community. That is why the Biblical message of a community finds place in the African life. The community motif in the bible can be used to describe the country in its pluralism.

### **Civic Education**

In December 1991 the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCKK) decided to embark on a massive civic or political education through its programme of Justice Peace and Reconciliation of which the author was the senior director. This decision had been reached a few days before the repealing of section 2A of the constitution of Kenya. The project, *Education for Participatory Democracy*, and supported initially by the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany, was aimed at helping Kenyans to understand more about democracy and the need for political pluralism. Though it was a faith oriented project its benefits were for all Kenyan citizenry as the NCKK wished to transform them into responsible and informed citizens participating fully in the socio-economic and political activities of the country. The issues to be addressed included but not limited to:

- a. Democracy as a way of life
- b. Understanding multiparty politics
- c. The role of opposition in multiparty parliament
- d. Participation in elections

The project was implemented through workshops and seminars, publications of books and pamphlets.<sup>60</sup> The seminar and workshops were always having sessions of what the Bible said about the issues at hand. When addressing issues of elections the favorite Bible study was from Exodus 18:21 on the qualities and qualifications of the leaders to be elected. Discussions were held on what the Bible meant by, able, God fearing, trustworthy and incorruptible. The participants then would take

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<sup>60</sup> Githiga, *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism*, p 109.

the discussions in the grassroots advocating for what kind of people to be elected. The Bible presented the yardstick and these demands from the Bible were accepted by the electorate. The question of the time these words were written or to whom they were written did not arise. They applied and do still apply to us.

The need for good governance was based on Romans 13:1-7 where the responsibility of the state officials and the citizens were discussed. The need for Justice from the state was demanded and the need for citizens to pay taxes was spelt out. As far as obedience to the authorities was concerned the participants would point out that though this was important it was also limited for Ceaser could only receive what belonged to him but if he demands what belongs to God the citizens had to exercise creative disobedience. Passages as Exodus 1:15-22 where the Egyptian midwives refused to obey Pharaoh's directive to kill Hebrew babies because they feared God was cited as a reason to disobey bad laws. If at all one could obey then this is what Yoder calls subordination and is different from obedience and especially when a Christian refuses to worship Ceaser but still permits Ceaser to put him or her to death.<sup>61</sup>

Jesus' Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:16-20 was made the basis for the church to speak for the poor and the marginalized. The fact that Jesus understood the words spoken hundreds of years ago by Isa 61:1-2 to apply to him is enough to make the Christians today to apply it as their mandate to serve the marginalized and down trodden. The eight century prophets' demands for justice were studied in these seminars. The sermon on the mountain especially in Jesus declaring his hearer to be the light and salt of the earth gave the citizens and the church the mandate to be involved in political matters. Their interpretation was that Jesus did not only speak to his disciples then but also speaks to us today. In matters of protection and demand for the respect of human rights the bible was used in these seminars to address issues of rights as provided in all conventions and protocols be they civil and political rights and group rights. The right to demand human rights of the individual, for example, was taken from the creation story where human beings are said to be created in God's image, Genesis 1:26, 27. An example of boldness in demanding these rights is given of St. Paul in Acts 22:22-30 where he

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<sup>61</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus, Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb*; The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1994, p 209.

demanded whether Roman citizens were not innocent until proven guilty and therefore could not be whipped.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible continues to be used as a tool to advance democracy in Africa. It has been accepted part and parcel of instruction for the African way of life though it is alien in origin, geography, language and history. Its literary forms however are very much like many African forms. Its cultural background is so much what the African everyday life entails. There is still much study which needs to be done for most translations need to be polished. Translations themselves are interpretations<sup>62</sup> and therefore Africans scholars need to constantly review the translations made and revise them accordingly. The Bible hermeneutics as well as the church's prophetic ministry have been forth telling and foretelling. That is why in 1986, South African churches published the 'Kairos document,' which argued that critical moment had come for Christians to oppose the injustice of the apartheid state. In 1991 the NCKK published 'A kairos for Kenya' which addressed the unease over the Kenyan government increasing hostility to calls for a multiparty state. These two documents were based in the Bible.

Democracy and the multipartism which enhances it must be consolidated. With the advent of multiparty politics in many African countries it is becoming increasingly clear that the old order is being replaced by a new order. It is expected that the new order would invigorate the society in a way that would enhance human dignity, freedom of expression, conscience and association which are not easy in a one party system. As Nthamburi rightly observes 'citizens are looking for a government that will be accountable and transparent, utilizing human and material resources for the good of all.'<sup>63</sup>The church will continue to use the Bible to advocate and teach against those things that may reverse all the gains made. Such issues are ethnicity, corruption, environment degradation, and violation of human rights, unequal distribution of resources, gender imbalance, and marginalization of minorities, bad governance and electoral malpractices among myriads of others. As we conclude we must ponder these words by Ratzinger in his chapter on 'A Christian orienta-

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<sup>62</sup> K. Grobel, Interpretation, History and Principles of, in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon Press, Nashville: 21st printing, 1996, p 719.

<sup>63</sup> Nthamburi, Z. *Theology and Politics in Africa*, p 156.

tion in a pluralistic democracy?’ the indispensability of Christianity in the modern age;

...pluralist democracy is never simply made secure. It does not of itself remain the kind of thing that unifies its citizens in a fundamental assent to the state they have in common. Even when it is run fairly well, as despite everything has been the case with us over the past thirty years, it does not automatically bring forth the conviction that with all its shortcomings it is the best form of state. It is not only economic crises that can bring it to collapse; the pounding of intellectual waves can also wash away the ground on which it stands.<sup>64</sup>

For Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), democracy aims at perfection and such perfection does not exist and therefore a utopia! He points out that pluralist democracy remains a product of the fusion of the Greek and the Christian heritage and can therefore advise that

If we do not grasp this once again and learn in keeping with this to live democracy on the basis of Christianity and Christianity on the basis of the free democratic state we shall certainly gamble democracy away.<sup>65</sup>

This provokes the African mind to what the opponents of pluralism used to point out that democracy and especially pluralism was an alien ideology to Africa. It was argued that pluralism would only divide the people and bring chaos. It was claimed that people would be divided along ethnic groups. To a certain degree this may be true and especially when it is evident that most of political parties have no ideology or programmes different from the other one in their manifestoes. People follow their tribal leaders irrespective of absence of a national agenda. However we have witnessed countries like Somalia who have only one ethnic group and religion collapse. It is for that reason we would argue that the Bible still remains a tool to enhance democracy and pluralistic politics in Africa. At this juncture we also question the discriminative manner in which the Western countries demand democratic systems in the developing countries. Countries like the Kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries are encouraged to continue with their undemocratic ways and violations of human rights and remain the darlings of the Western governments. Some western governments also retain the monarchies and yet rebuke the African countries that have such systems. The difference however is that these western countries have put in

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<sup>64</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church Ecumenism and Politics*, St. Paul Publications; Middlegreen, 1988, p 205.

<sup>65</sup> Ratzinger, *Church Ecumenism and Politics*, p 215.

place working checks and balances. Mugambi has introduced the theology of reconstruction based especially in the book of Nehemiah as a paradigm that Biblical scholars must explore if Africa has to emerge and survive as a continent for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While doing this African Biblical scholars will not lose the principles that 'First, African biblical hermeneutics is predominantly interested in the historical and sociological dimension of the biblical text. Second, African life interests are consciously and explicitly a part of the interpretative process. Third, African biblical hermeneutics is always aware of the ambiguous history of the Bible's arrival in Africa, and so is constantly attempting to assert itself over against the dominant discourses of western, colonial and imperialistic forms of biblical scholarship.'<sup>66</sup>

Many African people will continue to look at the Bible as their guidance on political matters. Some will however see it as promoting the monarchical rather than the democratic system of governance. Such a movement is present in Swaziland. The author does not hold that democracy is the only ideal of governance, however comparing the other forms like monarchy or authoritarianism democracy seems to be best and should be promoted.

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<sup>66</sup> Gerald West, African Bible Hermeneutics and Bible Translation, in Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole and Ernst R. Wendland, *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa*; Acton Publ., Nairobi, 2005, p 11.

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## **SECTION 2:**

### **SOME READINGS OF THE BIBLE IN/ FOR POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN AFRICA**

Moji Ruele

**Contextual Theological Reading of the Bible with  
Indigenous communities:  
The Case of the Basarwa/San in Botswana.**

**Introduction**

To discern the role that the Bible plays, or can play in any political setup, particularly in an African contemporary context, it is necessary to reflect on a series of Christian moral beliefs in relation to the social and political needs of the day. The most fundamental discussion about the relationship between Bible and Politics results from how mankind reaches a point in history when problems such as oppression, violence, poverty, and HIV/AIDS threaten our very survival. It is because of the above topical issues that I want to root the discussion of this paper around Bible and politics in an African situation. In this case we must ground the concept of Bible and politics in the concrete lives of the people as they struggle with these challenges. And so we begin at the bottom with how the Bible relates to political issues or the other way round. This may call for an understanding of Christian's moral beliefs which are dependent not only on the Bible, but tradition and experience. In this paper an attempt is made to define Bible and politics before showing how the two concepts relates in the African context, the role of Jesus in the Bible and politics. The paper ends by making a contextual reading of Psalm 137:4 with Basarwa/San in Botswana as an exemplar of how Bible and politics relates.

**Defining Bible?**

In order for us to understand the relationship between the Bible and politics, it is important first and foremost to understand what we mean by the Bible. Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, has reminded us that the Bible is the sacred book of Christian church. It is the word of God which contains all that is necessary for the salvation of human kind (Ramsey, 1977:1-7). Etymologically the English word Bible derives from the word *biblion*, plural *biblia* "book" or "scroll" (Gringrith, 1958). The English word Bible comes from the Greek *ta biblia* which means the Books, a name well-chosen since the Bible is a collection of

many individual works, and not the product of a single person (Boadt, 1984:11). It refers to the sacred writings inspired by God (O'Collins, etal, 1991:25). Bible is above all Gods, revelation. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1943) the Bible is not only the literature of faith. It deals with how God revealed his works of creation, covenant and his promise to deliver the poor. The Bible is an important document that sees what happens to mankind in the light of God's nature. The Bible is not just a history in the ordinary sense, but an arrangement of remembered acts and sayings of Jesus retold to win faith in him. This is an example of God's intervention in human history (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1943). It is generally held by scholars that the Bible was written by men in their socio-economic, religious and political context-but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who prompted, inspired and directed their minds (Ramsey, 1977:1). In this context the Bible is basically a historical record entailing socio-economic, religious and political affairs that tell of the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. The Bible first gives us an image of contestation and liberation in the primary social relation of man and woman (Gen 1). As the foundation of all society, it manifests all the characteristic of any interhuman relationship. This is inclusive of the political relations. The Bible may also assist in justifying or confronting the established order. To study how it relates to politics, therefore, is particularly important and timely in Africa-a continent bedeviled by various social ills.

### ***What is Politics?***

Having discussed what the Bible is and its relationship to human socio-economic and cultural context I shall now define the term politics as understood by different scholars. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines politics as the science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organization and administration of a state. It is an activity concerned with decision making, power and authority. (Ball 1983). Political power is, then the capacity to affect another behavior by the threat of some form of sanction (Lasswell & Kaplan 1952:76). This is often usually accompanied by authority which which relate the basic welfare of the community. Political authority therefore, is the recognition of the right to rule irrespective of the sanction the ruler may possess. This view is also shared by Raymond Plant (1967:484-5) who notes that politics exists not only where laws and rules are enacted and implemented. Poli-

tics can only exist only where there is a demonstrable relation to the legally binding authority of the state in government. Politics is also about the exercise of power and the conflicts which arise from this. Politics occurs only where there is clear decision-making center and a clear conflict of interest (Paul 1986). Strictly speaking, the end of politics is to win and wield power. Politics consists in all those activities with this end in view, whether in conformity with the established order or in conflict with it (Bigo, S.J.1974:87). In religious and biblical sense, the term often preferred for the art of politics is theocracy whereby the political institution and agencies are controlled by Church officials. Thus the ruler may be obeyed because of the belief that he was chosen by the divine authority. Supporters of this theory seek verification in the New Testament which states:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom 13:1).

The above quotation clearly demonstrates how the Bible and politics relates as some earthly ruler's use it to argue that they are divinely chosen to exercise their political authority.

### ***What does the Bible say about politics?***

In an article entitled *what does the Bible say about politics*, Paul Woolley (2005) notes that there are many people who get nervous about talking about God in political discourse. Such people often forget that political division throughout the world are often exacerbated by religious divisions as evidenced in calls for holy wars where one religion, often from one sense of choosiness, label other people as "infidel", "heathen", and "pagan" Such acts are sometimes justified by holy scripture, including the Bible (Banana, 1993:28). Woolley gives an example from the Old Testament law on how the Israelites were required to "Love the LORD" (Deut 6:5), and their neighbors (Lev 19:18) as a sign of good governance. Unfortunately the Israelites singularly failed to obey the law and suffered both the rebuke of the prophets and the crisis of exile as a consequence. The prophet Isaiah said "Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa 1:14-17). Isaiah also warned Judah of impending judgment because of her covenant disloyalty, her rebellion against God. It was during this time that the wealthy were happy to stand by and exploit or ignore the

weakest members of society. In his Gospel, Matthew writes that Jesus taught people to 'Love God and their neighbours.' (Mat 22:33-28). In essence, says Jesus, true spirituality is all about love. Intimacy with God leads to involvement in his world. Expressed above is the whole faith of Israel: the most intimate revelation of how politics and religion relates in the Bible. I would argue that if we are serious about loving God and our neighbours, it makes sense to get involved in the institutions that have the greatest impact on the lives of our neighbours - especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Politics is one way to do that. According to Henderson, Charles (2010), the importance of political activism by individual Christians is therefore clear right at the start of the biblical narrative. Any politics that takes the Bible seriously must begin with the account of creation in the book of (Gen 1:26, 28). The 'image of God' status enjoyed by human beings confers on them some special privileges and responsibilities, some of which are political because, God created the world 'good' and his intention is that human beings should rule it accordingly. Genesis further assigns to humanity the task of caretaker or "steward" of creation which God calls "good." From a biblical perspective all people are created as equal in God's image. Further, the biblical mandate that humanity act as steward and caretaker of all creation suggests that government has a more positive political role to play in protecting all God's creation. In 1 Tim 2:1-4 the apostle Paul instructs his readers to pray for all people in positions of authority. Prayer is an important aspect of political activism. The fact that God created human beings to rule over planet Earth and exercise good governance indeed suggests that there is a relationship between word of God portrayed in the Bible and Politics (Woolley, 2005). To love your neighbours as instructed in the Bible by God compels us to take certain political actions and decisions. In the Old Testament law the Israelites are commanded not to rule "ruthlessly" but to "fear God as the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." (Lev 25:43; Prov 1:7). Thus, human government is a divine institution given by God after the flood (Gen 9) to assure order and prevent anarchy (see Judges 17:6)."If one were to construct contemporary politics based upon core principles of the Bible, it becomes clear that it has a lot to say about the relationship between the two. Whereas the New Testament at times provides a picture of believers uninvolved in the government of Imperial Rome, this reluctance to bring faith into politics bring a trap of complete separation between God and the world he created and loved so dearly. Infact, one of the core

principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the link between unjust treatments of another human being with a wrong committed against God. This is a central element in the prophetic teaching of Hebrew Bible prophets as well as Jesus. The Bible also expresses a special concern for the most vulnerable and powerless members of the human family (Sugitharajah 2002). Further, specific biblical laws provide for the liberation of prisoners, and the return of land to those who may have lost it. In other words, the Bible outlines specific means for redressing wrongs such that the disadvantaged members of society have an opportunity to regain their means of self-support and self-sufficiency. In addition to providing special protections for the poor and the marginalized members of a community, the Bible also imposes upon the powerful and the privileged leaders of the nation substantially greater obligation to maintain the general wellbeing of the community. Hebrew Bible prophets focus their harshest criticism against leaders who make decisions on the basis of mere expediency, rather than justice, or who exercise their authority by exploiting the poor or the marginalized. The nation is seen throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as having a political responsibility for the welfare of the entire population (Spencer 2004).

### ***Lessons from Jesus in his political context***

As already indicated the Bible constitutes a major factor in the theological formation of any group of people who believe in God at any given time in history (Barr 1973). It is the only source to which Christians can go in matters of faith and for dealing with the problems of their lives. According to Anthony Ceresko (1997:4), in addition to the political sphere, the Bible has an important role in other contexts such as the Church, the university and popular culture. As Lawrence Boadt (1984) notes the Bible is a treasure chest of the wisdom and the inspiration that guided the generations before us. Above all, it is the most complete history of the ancient past that we possess as human beings. There are a number of topics being debated in the politics of the nation where such biblical principles might be applied. Among the issues on which the wisdom of the Bible would clearly apply are the following. First, the Bible brought its view of God, the universe and mankind into all the leading western languages and thus into the intellectual process of African man. In each of them, questions of the meaning and the role of the

Bible, and conflict over that meaning and role play a part even in contemporary societies. The basic question relating to how the Bible and politics relate in Africa and many parts of the world can be seen in ways Jesus played a political role in his concrete life situation. This is the norm for a Christian living today. In seeking their situation in this changing world, Christians do so in the light of God's revelation as mirrored in Jesus. The starting point for Christian socio and political ethics therefore is the fact that God has revealed his purpose for human life in a unique man Jesus whose entire life is well documented in the Bible. Jesus lived and spoke in a time of political troubles, a fact that is without no doubt being addressed in this section of paper (Dodd 1970). Jesus death did not just represent God's atonement for our sins, but also came out as an act of liberation for the oppressed. The sight of Jesus concrete actions in history can never be lost as the environment in which he lived and preached makes us think of our own. During his time he identified with the poor and the oppressed. In other words, the historicity of Jesus as a prophet and political philosopher leaves enough room to show the relationship between the Bible and politics. All these images of Jesus in the Bible have generally defined Christian's thought and actions on politics. One can hardly exaggerate the urgency that relates to the questions of religious oppression, legalism, injustice, and poverty, wealth and power have for the mission of Church in the present context. For Christians to come to grips with political life, and to live their faith as a reality in today's world, they have to reflect anew to name God, confess Christ, and make critical decisions between politics and biblical message (Branson 1983:90). Drawing lessons from the Latin American experience, we learn that a fundamental premise of contemporary Christology is that the gospels/Bible are essentially reliable historical records of Jesus and his role in politics. This therefore provides a point of reference for Christian theologians to know whether or not to participate in politics. In Jon Sobrino's (1978) words Jesus political activities affirms not only of the political validity of the Gospel records, but also their relationship with the Bible. Rene Padilla, (1983) in an article *Toward a Contextual Christology from Latin America* observed that socio-economic and political life of Jesus who identified Himself with the poor and the oppressed is written in the Bible. Padilla has further argued that emphasis of the humanity of Jesus is in complete harmony with the biblical support of the poor as evident in the gospel when he attacked religious oppression and condemned wealth, greed and idolatry (Luke 4:18-19). He himself was poor

and lived poorly even though this was chosen but not imposed by the social conditions (John 1:6). In the New Testament, Jesus clearly identifies himself with this prophetic tradition. Indeed, in one of the few passages in which he speaks of a final judgment at the end of human history, he makes this identification explicit. And the principle is applied by Jesus to entire nations as well as individuals. The Church in Africa as in Latin America cannot claim to be rooted and built up in Christ unless it follows his teachings and actions. If the Latin American analysis of Jesus concern for the poor is correct, then the basis for the relations between the Bible and politics is clearly established. Those who confess Jesus Christ in Africa as the Lord cannot close eyes to the impoverished masses. In addition to affirming the ethical norms of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament explicitly forbids the economic oppression of the poor, weak, and the vulnerable.

My soul magnifies the Lord. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away [Luke 1:46-53, RSV].

Moreover, in his declaration that he has come “to preach good news to the poor” and “release the oppressed,” Jesus invoked the most basic prophetic principles, suggesting that changes in the basic structures of society would be required to advance God’s will for humanity. Clearly, anyone operating in a manner consistent with such biblical norms of fairness, justice, and equity cannot permit exploitation of the weak by the more powerful (Psalm 72:4). The use of power to privilege the rich and disadvantage the poor is, from a biblical perspective, an offense against the Creator. This is a political act which clearly relates to the Bible.

### ***Bible and its influences in African politics***

Biblical reading for political purposes, use and reflection in an African context and elsewhere are often done in the midst of people’s daily activities and struggle for life. It is from the Bible that people find God and discern their historical and political vocation (Banana 1993:27). It also contains some of the most profound insights into the meaning of human life; it is single most important source for African culture, and it has the most profound influence, not only in modern religious, but also in political thought. This process has been referred to by Kwesi Dickson (1984:8) as cultural continuity with the Bible because it calls for a



broader understanding of the people's culture. It is also important to realize that the Holy Spirit that has been at work since creation still works in all people's cultures today. In an attempt to capture the creative agency of how indigenous Africans transact with the Bible, I share Gerald West's (2004:2) view that, whether literate or not they hear, remember and retell and even remake biblical themes in their contest for political space. The Bible, written centuries ago, can still speak to our present life situation. The relationship between humanity and creation follows from the blessing of God and the command to subdue the earth and rule over every living creature (Gen.1.28). More so, the Bible has become decisively political, because as never before it deals with divinely power and the direction in which politics develops (Branson, 1983:83). This has become more evident that the impact of all our factors of life in Africa such as economic, political, and morals do affect human life and all Christians as individuals. Most African countries and some nation states of the West have accordingly found it possible to blend the scripture and politics. The great ethical challenge in the life of an individual African Christian is that there is no individual prospect except as incorporated in social and cultural structures of the day in which he or she lives. The Bible provides us with the ethical responsibilities in dealing with political issues. According to Patrick Kalilombe (1995:421-435), the Bible is the basic tool for human liberation as it strongly condemns those who use positions of power or privilege to take advantage of the poor, the marginalized, or the powerless. No doubt this is a political act which is clearly sanctioned from the Bible as in Col 3:11. His view is also shared by the Ecumenical Association for African Theologians in one of its inaugural declaration which states that:

The Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of Gods revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from scripture... Through a re-reading of the scripture in the social context of our struggle for our humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation and the Bible serves the purpose of liberation (Final Communiqué: Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, Dec 17-23, 1977).

The role of the Bible in African politics is however ambiguous as Mesters has reminded us it can be a force for liberation or a force for oppression. He warns that if it is treated as a finished document, that must be taken literally as it is, then it will be an oppressive document (Mesters 1983:124). In the past the Bible has often been invoked in such a way as

to legitimize the most obvious social, economic or political injustices, to discourage strings of revolt against oppressive or discriminatory practices, and to promote attitudes of resignation and compliance in the face of exploitative manipulation of power-holders. The theme of liberation as taught in the Bible has become very popular among African theologians, especially in Southern Africa.

### ***Contextual theological discussions and political analysis of reading Psalm 137:1-4 with Basarwa/San***

A good number of interpretation among scholars in third world countries have surfaced discussing the issue of Bible reading with marginalised communities as a political act in Africa and other parts of the third world. Leonardo Boff, (1986:1-11), for example, uses this approach through what is known as Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin American context. In a book, *Jesus is trick and God is Undemocratic: the kingdom in Amawoti*, Philpot Graham (1993) also conducted a Bible study among the Amawoti community near Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. He explains how by reading the Bible with this group of people from their context showed their understanding of the role of God in the situation of Apartheid. He also describes the political role of academic theologian and its significance in listening to communities in such a process. I also find support for this perspective in the writings of Itumeleng Mosala (1989), who in a *Black hermeneutics and Black theology in South Africa* views culture as an important resources for reading the Bible in context of the black. In undertaking a contextual reading and analysis of Psalm 137:1-4 with Basarwa, I recruited in a theological partner, Itumeleng Mosala, who uses a similar approach in reading the Bible to address the land question in Apartheid South Africa. In dealing with the issue of land and politics in the South African context Mosala (1989:5), also reads the Bible and approaches theology from a contextual viewpoint. He sees the Bible as a site, terrain or a weapon (tool) in the struggle for the liberation of the poor and exploited. The above named scholars did not only interpret their situation only from a theological perspective. Instead they used socio-political analysis which demonstrates clearly the relationship between Bible and politics. In the case of Botswana the essential restlessness of Basarwa/San as the most dispossessed group is in the demand for land which is precisely the echo of the biblical voice of the poor in Bible and politics as shown in Exod 2:23-25 and Psalm 137:1-4. When

reading Psalm 137:1-4 with Basarwa, I also followed methods used by Leonardo Boff where by communities are allowed to engage the text from their own situation. From my reading of the Bible with Basarwa, I am persuaded that this is the best way to involve indigenous communities in a contextual theological discourse because through it Basarwa were able to compare their present situation with the Jews in Babylonian captivity. I found Basarwa knowledge of the Bible no matter how little it might be, to be useful in reading Psalm 137:1-4 with them. Basarwa also believed that the Bible was somehow relevant to their political lives as indicated during Bible reading. The Judeo-Christian tradition of liberation from which both Psalm 137:1-4 is universally recognized, and therefore assists theological reflections on issues relating to Bible and politics. Both books talks to us explicitly about what it is like being in exile, but also points us to various ways in which people can be exiled other than through the usual physical form of exile which was experienced by the Israelites. They are also useful because they show how different forms of exile may bring about an indelible psychological scar, both on the victims and the perpetrators. In this regard, I can safely share Bruggeman, s (1984) view that Psalm 137:1-4 has provided communities beyond the Babylonian captivity with the Bible as a valuable resource for doing politics (Bruggeman 1984:15). Peter Sedgwick (1992) is even more direct on this issue as he argues that there is a clear relationship between the nature of society as represented in politics and nature of God in the Bible. According to him the Church by its actions in witness points to the political nature of the world that God has created and that this has profound implications for individual Christians in taking theo-political positions. Thus it becomes necessary for Christianity as an institution and a biblical religion play a role in politics. This is so because human freedom is one of the presuppositions of Christian understanding of God's relationship to the world and it is on that basis that Christian political ethic can be developed. In other words, political freedom is a critical term not only for the enterprise culture, but also for Christianity because God is just (Stout 2003). Coming back to the issue of contextual reading of the Bible with Basarwa, reading sessions were conducted as group discussions, facilitated either by myself, or by a member of the group who was willing to do so. The discussions of these groups were recorded in short-hand. I distributed Bibles and make an invitation to open them. (Realising that it takes long, I helped others) and ask for a volunteered to read. Nashadi (a literate Mosarwa participant with little

knowledge of Setswana language volunteered to read Psalm 137:1-4. as follows “*Re ne re ntse fa dinokeng tsa Babilone*” By the rivers of Babylon we sat down. From the discussion that followed the reading of this verse, it became clear that Basarwa understood this verse and that Bible is in many ways relevant to their lives in the Kgalagadi district of Botswana as respondents codenamed. Nkaletsang stated “*Batho ba mo bokgobeng jaaka Masarwa*” (using the word for Basarwa derogatorily): Indeed this people (referred to in the Bible) are in captivity just like Masarwa. His sentiments were also shared by Mphiri who also stated that “*Ehe!! ke a bona gore lokwalo le bua ka eng; ke gore dilotse mo Baebeleng di a diragala le gompieno ka gore batho ba ba lelela lefatshe la bone*”. Ok!! I can now see what this Psalm is saying, because these people are lamenting for their land and Ditshokolo who concluded the discussion as follows “*Ke moka lekwalo le le buwang ka rona Basarwa*”: It would be not far fetched to think that this Psalm is also talking about us Basarwa. The Bible study group of Basarwa continually interpreted and re-interpreted the book of Psalm 137 in the Bible in relation to their ongoing involvement in their life in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). Basarwa also compared the God they read about in the Bible with the God they had encountered in the conflicts and joys of their community. It was in this commitment to discerning God in the life of Basarwa as a community that is an essential feature of Contextual theological reading Psalm 137:1-4 with indigenous communities. What then is the content of this commitment within Basarwa as a community to God of the Psalms? What does it mean to them as a marginalized group in Botswana? Primarily, this commitment to read the Bible and to understand God of the Bible and relate and compare Him with God who is always with them in their struggle for recognition is in itself at the core of their contextual reading of the Bible. What is therefore fundamental in the Bible is the option of the poor for their own cause (A. Nolan, 1985:192). It must be mentioned here that Biblical faith means knowing history and believing in the God who reveals himself in it (G. Gutierrez, 1983). A commitment to discerning God in biblical history read from the perspective of the poor, as is the case with Basarwa leads on to a commitment to change the conditions which maintain poverty and powerlessness (Graham Philpot 1993: 108).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, an attempt is made to show that Bible and politics are closely related. This is done through a contextual theological reading of the Bible with indigenous communities in Botswana. Through this approach, Christians are reminded that they can no longer ignore the complexities of their societies, be they political, economic, or otherwise, but instead, they should collectively exercise moral responsibility to work with and through structures in their various countries, because, the Bible as a Christian document which also deals with political issues provides that forum. This means that Christians should join in an effort to articulate a political ethic for today's world and life situation in order to avoid a wrong politicization of their religion. As already indicated, an attempt is made in the paper to read Psalm 137:1-4 with Basarwa-an indigenous group in contemporary Botswana to show how their problems are similar to those of the biblical times. By reading Psalm 137:1-4, Basarwa also learn and draw inspiration that even during biblical time's people who have been politically marginalized and displaced from their ancestral lands have always turned to the Bible in order to seek God's intervention to bring justice. In conclusion, I would point that all these acts are useful for us today to understand clearly that the relationship between the Bible and politics is not something new.

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**BIAS 7 – The Bible and Politics in Africa**

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*Phillemon M. Chamburuka*

## ***A Theological reflection on Romans 13:1-7 in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zimbabwean Politics***

### ***Introduction***

This paper focuses mainly on how Rom 13:1-7 has been interpreted by the Zimbabwean government and how the so-called court prophets (religious leader who blindly support the regime because they benefit from it) have used this text to rubber-stamp political mishaps, mischief, exploitation of the public (poor), plunder of national resources, dictatorship, tyranny, racism, alleged vote buying and vote rigging, rape, torture, repressive laws, corruption, intimidation, murder, abductions, militarization of state institutions, bizarre taxation; the list is endless. Special reference will be on key topical events that took place in Zimbabwe with the eclipse and dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these include, the formation of a formidable opposition party (1999) in Zimbabwean politics, the historic referendum in the year 2000, sporadic and haphazard land invasion (the so-called fast track land reform programme), targeted sanctions on the heavy weights of the former ruling party Zimbabwe African National Party (ZANU PF), 2002 presidential elections, 2005 parliamentary elections, Operation Murambatsvina 2005, 29 March 2008 harmonised elections, 27 June 2008 runoff presidential elections, the signing of the Global Political Agreement of 15 September 2008 and the formation of the Government of National Unity in 13 February 2009. However, for purposes of clarity, it is important to briefly highlight the socio-historical context behind the writing of Rom 13:1-7 so as to avoid presupposed prejudice on the interpretation of this text in the Zimbabwean context.

### ***Factors that may have influenced Paul's message in writing Romans 13:1-7. Roman system of Governance***

A number of scholars have come up with different opinions based on Paul's view of Roman political system. The first hypothesis or theory is that Paul was seemingly benevolent to the governing structure of the Roman Empire which was characterised by justice, peace and tranquility. Foster (1990:17) asserts that the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) and communications were indeed a preparation of the gospel. Meeks (1985:17) also echoes this view in his assertion that the Roman power



made possible flourishing travel in two very practical ways: the brigandage on land piracy on sea at minimum, and the imperial government took responsibility for a road system throughout its regions. By the time of Claudius, the emperor was taking charge, through his procurators, of road repair throughout the empire, even in senatorial provinces and some of these roads were still used even in the 20th century. (Hawthorne 1993:722) There is no doubt that Paul benefited from the mobility which was facilitated by the Roman empire especially in his missionary endeavours in and around the Mediterranean world both on road and through his successful voyages. In which case therefore, he viewed the Roman government as ordained by God and not as a threat to humanity hence she has to be obeyed by all citizens (Rom 13:1ff). Furthermore, Paul enjoyed justice ushered by the Roman judicial system. For instance, Roman magistrates like Gallio protected him from riotous Jews who were after his life and ministry (Acts 18:12-17; 21:27-40; 23:12-24) Hence as he wrote Rom 13:1-7 he exonerated the state by prescribing Christians to unconditionally obey it.

Another school of thought suggests that Paul knew the ugly Jewish experience following the effects of the Claudius' edict of AD 49, hence he wrote this passage (Rom 13:1-7) to warn or correct an impression that Christians could have towards the government so that they would not be involved in a repetition of such insurrection (Buttrick 1954:599). Coupled with this past experience was an increased turmoil in Palestine over tax protests in AD 56 (Tacitus Ann. 13:50-51). Following this background Paul probably wrote this controversial passage to persuade Roman Christians not to be associated with these tax protests. Moreover, Paul may have had in mind the zealots of his own day and warns that any agitator who forgets that, those who resist will incur judgement. (Bornkamm 1986:212 )

### ***Apocalyptic notion behind Romans 13:1-7***

Bornkamm (:212) and others are of the opinion that Paul was apocalyptic inspired when he wrote Rom 13:1-7. He derived this view from Paul's statement in Rom 13:11 which states that: "For salvation is nearer than we first believed..." This verse shows that Paul's mind was highly apocalyptic in nature and perceived that the time and the hour of the approaching day (eschaton) is imminent. With this supposition Christians should not be preoccupied with the worldly matters but focus on the

second coming of Christ. Therefore, Paul being preoccupied by the eschaton he encouraged Christians to be good citizens and be subject to the present regime for the true kingdom was just but at the corner where they will reign together with Christ forever. However, this supposition remains speculative since Paul did not explicitly connected church and state relations with the eschaton. Be as it may, we cannot completely rule out its validity since it is evident that Paul was usually apocalyptic in most of his messages in his epistle to the Romans and elsewhere (Rom 13:11, 1Thess 5:1ff, 1Cor 7:8).

### ***The integrity of Romans 13:1-7 with the rest of the Epistle: Redaction critical analysis.***

Buttrick (1954:599) contends that, one wonders why this brief account (Rom 13:1-7) of the proper conduct of Christian attitude towards the state appears in this particular letter because nowhere else does Paul touches this subject. His observation has persuaded some scholars like O Michel (1986:651) to suggest that this passage is an interpolation. He contends that, there is no connection between this section and the immediate context; it interrupts the continuity between 12:21 and 13:8. The idea of state and its use of force is far removed from that of love which is the theme of 12:9-21 and 13:8-10. More so, Michel (:651) contends that this section is altogether non-Christological; reference is made only to God as creator.

However, Meeks (1985:106) and others assert that Rom 13:1-7 is not an interpolation but that Paul adopted a form of paraenesis that had been formulated by the diaspora Jewish communities. It was probably originally a traditional piece of paraenesis that was probably formed by the Greek synagogue, which was then taken over by Christians. Barrett (1987:245) argues that the term “every/one” (v.1) conceals a Semitic expression (every soul), and in what Paul expresses what is characteristically Jewish point of view. The statement “all should obey the authorities, for there is no authority that is not ordained by God, and the authorities which in fact exist have been appointed by God,” has many parallels that can be cited from Jewish authors, such as Wisdom 6:3, Josephus, Jewish War2:140 which states that no ruler attains his office save by the will of God. Barrett (:245) asserts that from the time of Pompey this attitude was given practical effect by offering of daily sacrifices on behalf of the Roman authorities. Its roots lie in the Old Testa-

ment conviction that God is the ruler of all nations and of all history, and it may be described as an aspect of the doctrine of providence, arrived by taking seriously the fact of God's lordship. In order to protect his creatures he provides them with civil rulers, just as he provides them with sun and rain. In which case, for Paul, the state has its appointed place in the providential order which God has established for the good of mankind. Isaiah clearly says that God is the one who will raise up and appoint Cyrus to the task of serving him, in order that YHWH's purposes with Israel might be served—that Israel would realize that there is only one true God and He is YHWH. (:246) We note in this passage that Isaiah is speaking proleptically and thus there is an eschatology inherent in God's dealings with nations as he raises up leaders and peoples according to his grand purposes. And 27:5-7 also declare God's sovereign, punitive purposes as he works through the Babylonian nation and King Nebuchadnezzar to bring judgement upon his people Israel. Moreover, Jeremiah is very conscious of God's sovereign control of people on the earth and the Jews knew what it was like to live under foreign domination. Though the church has a different commission than did Israel, the analogy carries over in that God's people in the world have always had to determine how they would relate to the worldly structures. In the same way as Jeremiah was able to discern the workings of God through the pagan nations, so Paul is able here to borrow on that precedent and declare that all authority on earth ultimately comes from God. There is an eschatology in Jeremiah that concerns the nations' dealings with Israel in that God is using them to bring about a purified people. He is using Babylon to bring about a nation obedient to him which will then fulfil his eschatological purposes promised in Gen 12:1-3 and 2 Sam 7:12-16. Basing on the above premises, we can assume that either a Hellenistic Jewish paraenesis or an Old Testament motif of providence probably influenced Paul, or a fusion of the two worldviews.

### ***Nature of the Authorities behind Paul's message***

Over and above the said hypotheses, scholars have grappled with the nature of the authorities that Paul made reference to in Rom 13:1-7, whether they are human or angelic. Barrett (1987) notes that it has been assumed the authorities Paul has in mind are human authorities, in particular the governing authority of the Roman Empire under which Paul and his authorities lived. However, this view has been refuted by

Cullmann (1955:26) who argues that, the word “authorities” (exousiai) refer not to the state itself, but also to the “invisible angelic powers that stand behind the state government”. This may appear a small distinction; in fact the difference is great, as appears if two questions are asked (a) must Christians be in subjection to the magistrates, or to angelic powers? (b) Are the angels or the magistrates of divine appointment? However, it is plausible to conclude that Paul is here referring to the state, or its administration rather than spiritual-angelic authorities.

The above delineation of the proposed possible factors that led Paul to write this controversial passage indicates that the message suffices the life setting of Paul’s audience. What baffles many scholars and some Christians in modern and post-modern times is that Paul did not augment this passage with the requisite ethical instructions that guide rulers or governments on how they should govern their citizens as the Old Testament clearly states in Deut 17-21. Moreover, this is exacerbated by the fact that he does not prescribe how Christians should react when faced with terror, dictatorship, totalitarianism and tyrannical governments. Judging from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, his message is one-sided, incomplete, subjective, biased, exploitative and imperialistic. In other words, Paul seemingly gave the Roman authorities and later generation of rulers a blank cheque, which is subject to gross abuse and manipulation.

History has it that the same government that Paul exonerated became a sponsor of persecution of innocent Christians. As alluded to above, Nero was the first to torture and persecute Christians and it is alleged that both Peter and Paul face martyrdom under him (Buttrick 1954: 599). Many commentators on Romans argue that, Rom 13:1-7 is detrimentally opposite to Revelation 13 which emphatically denounces the state or the rulers of the day as diabolic beast, a monster and anti-Christ (Bornkamm 1986:213). Others contend that if Paul had lived a little longer than the date of writing Romans (ca AD 56/58), could had probably regretted or revoked his prior “state theology” in Rom 13:1-7 because the same Nero who had appeared to be “politically friendly” to the Christians had become a terror and a persecutor of Christians as attested above.

### ***Manipulation of Romans 13:1-7 by selected “court” Prophets***

To start with, after the signing of the Unity Accord (22 Dec 1987) between Patriotic Front: Zimbabwe African People’s Unity (P.F. Z.A.P.U.),

and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Z.A.N.U. P.F.), that marked the birth of a one party state in Zimbabwe. That is, ZANU PF enjoyed monopoly because the opposition parties of the day prior to 1999/2000 such as Edgar Tekere's Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) did not pose serious threats to ZANU PF. During this period president Robert Mugabe was exonerated as an excellent leader whose charges were seemingly unquestionable. Even though the government had its own short comings such as the negative effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) most Zimbabweans still pasted their hopes on the government of the day. Both in religious and political circles Rom 13:1-7 was rarely quoted.

However, with the advent of a meaningful opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (M.D.C.) in 1998/9, this text started to be the talk of the day. Orthodox ZANU PF "faithfuls" reiterated that Mugabe and their party was ordained by God, therefore there was no room for any dissenting voices, every citizen was compelled to adhere to the status quo. These masqueraded as war veterans, patriotic Zimbabweans, nationalists and so forth. It is interesting to note that, most of these political cadres who used this passage do not even know "the door steps of any church," let alone the pages of the bible. They simply adopted the text from some eland church members or clergy who eisegete Paul's message.

This was the era of the so-called court prophets such as the self-proclaimed and illegitimate Anglican bishop Norbert Kunonga, Rev Utaunashe, Obadiah Musindo, Rev Andrew Malete and Elizabeth Chinnouriri, as well as the Johane Marange and Johane Masowe sects (who always throng national events such as heroes and independence commemorations in their church regalia). They demonised the MDC as a brainchild of the West and its allies targeting a regime change agenda in Zimbabwe. Whether such allegations were true or false but one can easily tell that such rhetoric was meant to authenticate the government of the day as ordained by God and the ancestors. It is common knowledge that many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are clamouring for a democratic society where everyone is free to express his or her democratic right that include political association. Therefore, to claim that one political party is sovereign and must not be challenged is deemed to be primitive and undemocratic. We cannot smoothly apply Paul's context as reflected in Rom 13:1-7 because the Roman government was not democratically

elected, it was an imperial government. Roy Musasiwa asserts that we now live in a “democracy,” and not as a theocracy, it is therefore, false to say that any party or any setoff rulers are given by God because we now choose or elect the leaders as the electorate (The Christian Voice 2009:2).

In the year 2000 the Zimbabwean government embarked on a national campaign to draft a home grown constitution (because the one that was operational was the Lancaster House Constitution). However, after a landslide vote against this draft in a referendum because it represented the interest of the ruling powers and not the wishes of the general populace, the government started to embark on enacting oppressive bills such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (A.I.P.P.A) and Public Order and Security Act (P.O.S.A.) that robbed people of their rights and freedoms especially as clearly outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. These bills were master minded by the then minister of information and publicity Jonathan Moyo. All such efforts were indirectly meant to safeguard the ouster of the ruling party under the disguise of the theory that the government is ordained by God and that anyone who oppose it or disobey will be punished. It is alleged that many innocent people suffered imprisonment and torture because they had uttered statements that were against the president or the presidium (African Identities VI 2 No. 2 :117). This forced the closure of independent media such as the Daily News and its Sunday edition. More so, treason charges were leveled against the leader of the opposition Morgan Tsvangirayi and his close lieutenants Roy Benett and Tendai Biti on allegations of plotting to assassinate the president. ([www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2004/01/10](http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2004/01/10)) The case is alleged to have cost our poor government billions of dollars in paying notorious Canadian conman Ari Ben Menashe. All these attempts were meant to protect the ailing or collapsing Mugabe regime. During this period we witnessed the mushrooming of a self-styled pastor without a “potfolio” (one who hardly had theological education, without a church or any parish) in the name of Obadiah Musindo who masqueraded as ministers of religion. Musindo blandly claimed that Mugabe should not be opposed because he was ordained by God hence his rule was immune and sovereign by quoting Rom 13 : 1-7 in the state media. During the 2002 Zimbabwean presidential elections, 2005 Parliamentary elections, 28 March 2008 harmonised elections and 27 June 2008 presi-

dential runoff elections, Musindo and bishop Kunonga openly supported the ruling party basing their claims on Rom 13:1-7. They urged the electorate to vote for Robert Mugabe and his party ZANU PF because he was chosen and ordained by God. For instance, Kunonga was quoted in the local Herald newspaper (Monday 10 March 2008) urging Zimbabweans to vote for Mugabe in the 29 March 2008 presidential elections because he was Zimbabwe's anointed leader. He reiterated that

“as a church we see the president with different eyes. To us he is a prophet of God who was sent to deliver the people of Zimbabwe from bondage. God raised him to acquire our land and distribute it to Zimbabweans; we call it democracy of the stomach....”

We wonder which church Kunonga was making reference to? A close analysis of his speech clearly stresses that he indirectly made reference to Rom 13:1-7 and Old Testament messianic texts such as Jer 23:5 and Zech 9:9ff. To him Mugabe has messianic qualities, that is, a prophet (a prototype of Moses) and an anointed leader. It is sad to note that the land that Kunonga claims that Mugabe distributed to the people through chaotic means and most deserving poor masses did not benefit. The process was haphazard, bloody and racist. This view is clearly attested in the ecumenical document entitled *The Zimbabwe We Want* (2005), where the Zimbabwean heads of churches lament that while land redistribution was noble, “but regrettably it was done in a haphazard manner.”

The submissions of the bishops were lambasted by political analysts who were rather sympathetic to ZANU PF. The trio, Dr C Mararike, Dr Chivaura, and Professor I Mupeperekwi, were on record denouncing the role of the church in politics and demonising “*The Zimbabwe We Want*” document in a televised program called *Dzimbabwe* (ZBCtv *Dzimbabwe-Sundays* 2005 18.30hrs) chaired by Mararike. In most of their state sponsored air space they underscored that the church was there to obey the government of the day because God instituted it (thus an indirect usage of Pauline state theology). It is important to note that, President Mugabe also gradually developed his own ‘theology of land’ in which he reiterated that God had set aside Zimbabwe as the sacred space for black people. Addressing a packed auditorium at the Harare International Conference Centre on the Day of National Prayer on 12 January 2002, Mugabe maintained that God had parcelled out the world according to racial origin. (Chitando 2005).

For Mararike and company the church should leave politics to politicians and concentrate on the pulpit. In a way, these political analysts were using the bible to quarantine the church from political affairs as if to suggest that she had no role or influence in such matters. Indeed they missed the mark because the church is a crucial partner in political affairs where she acted as the voice of the voiceless, advocate for democracy and democratic reforms without fear or favour, protect the rights of the poor and advocate for justice.

Furthermore, the Zimbabwean government tormented the lives of the poor masses when it embarked on a dubious and miscalculated operation called Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order or Clean up) between May and June 2005. In the Murambatsvina, people were deeply wounded and in fact dehumanized by being treated as synonymous with dirt or chaff. This touched the raw nerve of a people disenchanted by the powers that be. Some people, particularly in Hatcliffe and Whitecliffe areas, felt anger at being cheated by government ministers who in previous election campaigns had allocated them stands, and it was these very minister(s) who were now demolishing their houses and evicting them into the streets! They witnessed irresponsible schizophrenic behaviour on the part of the minister (Ignatius Chombo) spearheading the operation. In an election campaign gimmick, Chombo allocated stands to people who consequently put their hard-earned resources together and developed their properties according to their means. The same minister came a few years later with a different political agenda and wantonly destroyed these properties putting people into the streets. One picture (in *The Herald* of 6 June 2005) that remains fresh in the minds of many is of a child returning from school only to find the bulldozer breaking down the family house. Certainly this was a traumatic experience that will probably haunt the child for the rest of his life. This move by the government could have been better if clear plans were set in place to deal with the issue like financial resources and alternative housing for the displaced masses. The Zimbabwean Heads of Churches lament that the destruction of poor people's shelter and their means of livelihood before any alternatives were provided caused great suffering (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006). Hundreds of thousands of people, including women and children found themselves homeless in the middle of winter and later the onset of the rain season. Some victims of this operation were denied their right to access social services like education, health, water



and sanitary facilities. Indeed this was a national (man-made) disaster because most of these victims were already succumbing to economic hardships characterized by hyperinflation, intense poverty and unemployment.

To make matters worse, some that decided to return to their rural areas were either denied entry or forced to pay a token of money by alleged ZANU PF village leadership because these victims were believed to be linked with the opposition MDC. The government faced with the mess embarked on a housing project called Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle. Unfortunately this project lacked founding. But to be precise the houses that were built under this project were inhabitable, they were mere matchboxes way below the standard of the house that were now lying as rubble. Moreover most of the houses are still uncompleted three years down the line. Over and above that it is alleged that the beneficiaries of the project were supporter of the then ruling party (ZANU PF) (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006). When the UN envoy (Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka) came to assess the effects of operation Murambatsvina, her report (18 July 2005) was thorough and honest. The report influenced the United Nations Security Council to condemn and order an immediate stop to Operation Murambatsvina. Be as it may, the likes of Obadiah Musindo continued with their appraisal of the government policies which were detrimental to the lives of the poor populace. Instead of condemning the city fathers for their failure to allocate people adequate residential stands and constantly monitor the rise of the so-called illegal stands they spear-headed a scathing attack on the victims. The state media was litter by interviews and press statements geared at justifying the government policy. All these efforts rest upon the marshalling theories of sovereignty that are partially derived from Rom 13:1-7. The housing project was used as a campaigning gimmick in preceding elections. However, a critical analysis of Operation Murambatsvina is that it was a political move aimed at punishing the urban electorate for voting resoundingly for the opposition party in the just ended 2005 parliamentary elections. In which case therefore, Paul's claim in Rom 13:3 that the rulers are not a terror to the citizens becomes logically problematic in the Zimbabwean context.

It is important to note that, the history of Zimbabwean elections as from 2000 to date has been associated with regrettable and traumatic experiences that range from politically motivated violence, intimidation, tor-

ture, hate speech, abductions, rape, murder, vote buying and rigging. Paul's message in Rom 13:1-7 becomes controversial especially the notion that governments or state leaders are ordained by God when they assume office via undemocratic means. We are aware that the Roman government was not democratic elected but times have drastically changed such that democratic principles must be used as bench marks to ascertain whether a government is legitimate or illegitimate. We cannot have a blind eye on tyranny simply because the Roman empire during Paul's era was such, that is a fallacy of irrelevancy and pardoning of evil as well as blind nationalism, and therefore ungodly. It is sad to learn that many innocent people were killed, raped, lost their relatives and valuable goods, some suffered permanent injuries and others were displaced and left homeless in the name of politics especial before, during and after the 29 March harmonised elections and 27 June 2008 presidential runoff elections. (The Zimbabwean Newspaper 24-30 August, 2008:1). Of interest is how the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections were declared not free and fair by most national and international bodies that were monitoring the pre-election and post-election periods. These were preceded by the 27 June 2008 presidential runoff election which was a one man band, in which Robert Mugabe was the only candidate after his rival Morgan Tsvangirayi had withdrawn citing escalating political violence upon his supporters. Interestingly, Mugabe and the electoral commission went on with the election that was declared a sham by the international community. Mugabe was declared the winner in an uncontested election and the state media claimed that he had won the election resoundingly. In such a scenario Rom 13:1-7 becomes an open cheque which is subject to abuse. It does not need a rocket scientist to judge that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century era to discern that leaders who get into office through such means should be declared illegitimate and must not be condoned.

The condemnation of the 27 June presidential runoff by the international community (including Southern African Development Community, African Union and Pan African observer missions) left Mugabe with no option but to seek a political settlement with the opposition. This then culminated into political dialogue between ZANU PF and the two MDC factions led by Morgan Tsvangirayi and Arthur Mutambara respectively mediated by the then South African president Thabo Mbeki. The talks precipitated into the historic signing of the Global Political

Agreement on the 15th September 2008 by the principals of the three parties. Moreover, this paved way to the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on the 13th of February 2009 in which the president of the MDC-T Morgan Tsvangirayi assumed the office Prime Minister of Zimbabwe and president of MDC-M Professor Arthur Mutambara assumed the office of Deputy Prime Minister, while Robert Mugabe the president of ZANU PF was sworn in as the president of the Inclusive Government being deputized by Joice Mujuru and Joseph Musika respectively. The new political dispensation we witnessed a radical shift both in tone and deeds from ZANU PF court prophets. Most of them appraised the GNU as the will of God as well as the people of Zimbabwe, a total departure from the campaigning slogan flavored by Rom 13:1-7. One wonders why there was a seemingly change of heart among these staunch supporters of tyranny. Some political analysts contend that the shift is not genuine but just a temporary withdrawal because their dreams were thwarted and overtaken by the defeat of their icon in the March harmonized elections. They argue that such theorists will not easily give-up on their agenda because they always benefit from their support of the government, in other words they cannot afford to bite the hand that feeds them. For instance, the majority of them benefited from the fast-track land reform hence they seize to be objective in their analysis of government policies. A case in point is that of Bishop Kunonga (of what is now a faction of the Anglican Church), who apparently colluded with the land grab by occupying a farm about 10km from Harare, and also divided the Anglican Church, running it like a political party. He too, like the powers that be, holds on tenaciously to power. It is common knowledge that Kunonga is the closest ally of President Mugabe, he has been used as a religious practitioner at most state events such as independence and heroes holidays as well as on funerals at the national shrine. Of interest was his presence at the July 2008 presidential inauguration at the state house where he offered the opening prayer. The prayer was full of relics from Rom 13:1-7 and this baffled many because the election itself was one of the worst elections ever in the history of Zimbabwe. In simple terms by endorsing the results of a sham election he condoned the brutal acts that were associated with it. Thus is being heartless and worthless as a religious leader.

As observed above, Rom 13:1-7 has been grossly misinterpreted and at times controversially used to authenticate the status quo. Some religious leaders have interpreted the text out of context mainly because they are

beneficiaries of the state-sponsored programmes such as the land reform. Some of them masquerade as religious leaders yet they are political activists hence their assertions seek to foster a political agenda as opposed to a theological motive. This has misrepresented the church as whole and caused schism in many churches mainly on party grounds other than on theological grounds. Unfortunately, some of these religious leaders who become political activists forget that they are shepherds of people from different political persuasions. Therefore, church may have to review, reconstruct and reposition its role in political matters especially on how Rom 13:1-7 can be interpreted.

### ***A Contextual theological application of Romans 13:1-7 in the light of Church-State relations in Zimbabwe***

Church and state issues continue to be the source of many conflicts among Christians today, resulting in a massive confusion in what exactly a Biblical theology of the state and public policy entails. The confusion often prompts awkward answers to important questions regarding the relationship of Christians to government, such as "What kind of government should a Christian support?" "What public policy should be obeyed?," or "What does submission to government mean?" Most Christians attempt to justify their political philosophy Biblically with Rom 13 in some way, if they attempt at all. At first glance, this appears to be an acceptable solution – Paul seems to call for submission to government. But how do we reconcile this passage with the undeniable fact that individuals acting within the coercive machinations of states have been the greatest culprits of criminal action and violence in the history of mankind? For instance, in Germany during the 1930s and 40s, theologians used Rom 13 to encourage submission to the Nazi regime, especially since it was democratically elected. It only took the brevity of theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his friends to resist Naziism when he (Bonhoeffer) called for Christian action and self-sacrifice. In his earlier stages of his career, Bonhoeffer accepted the traditional Lutheran view that there was a sharp distinction between politics and religion (Bonhoeffer 1959:35). Gradually, however, he revised his opinion not because he was a politician or because he refused to give Caesar his due, but because he came to recognize that the political authority on Germany had become entirely corrupt and immoral and that a false faith is capable of terrible and monstrous things (:36). This gave rise to the famous

Barmen Declaration in May 1934 which equivocally reiterated that, “German Christians believed only in Jesus Christ as He is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is one word of God, whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death. We repudiate the false teaching that the church can and must recognize yet other happenings and powers, images and truths as divine revelation....” (Barmen Declaration May 1934). For Bonhoeffer (:36), Hitler was antichrist, the arch-destroyer of the world and its basic values, the antichrist who enjoys destruction, slavery, death and extinction for their own sake, the Antichrist who wants to pose the negative as positive and as creative. He was firmly and rightly convinced that it is not only a Christian right but a Christian duty towards god to oppose tyranny, that is, a government which is no longer based on natural law and the law of God.

We can draw a lot of lessons from this famous and renowned German theologian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Zimbabwean context. Clearly the church needs a better framework to evaluate the nature of the state and the consequences of public policy. The church must learn to be the voice of the voiceless and carry out a prophetic ministry. By implication being the voice of the voiceless entails speaking against the exploitation and potential exploitation of the poor, be it by an individual, rich or the state. However, that move alone is inadequate especially if it is confined in the pulpit alone that is what Bonhoeffer called cheap grace (:37).

Instead the church must stand up and seek a platform with the state or government without fear or favor. She must not be intimidated by political statements that are uttered by politicians such as the general rhetoric that the church must stick to the pulpit and pray for the leaders because they are ordained by God (Rom 13:1ff). The state must know that the church is not a threat but an advocate of peace and justice whose role must not be compromised by bribes or partisan politics. For instance, even if Christians benefited from a state sponsored policy when the same government fails to perform in other aspects the government must not use such benefit as a carrot to silence the church.

More so, the church must partner the state in paving way for the curbing of corruption in both the private and public sectors. As attested by church leaders in “The Zimbabwe We Want”, lack of accountability and corruption have gradually become endemic in the Zimbabwean society.<sup>1</sup> They stressed that the elite sought to gain and keep economic enrichment at the expense of the common good. Resources meant for the poor

or the common good have often been converted to the use of individuals in positions of trust (such as the privatization and exploitation of diamonds at Chiadzwa in Manicaland by few political heavy weights). Indeed these scandals have helped to derail our economic progress and produce social misery. It has to be acknowledged that the curbing of corruption is an uphill task mainly because for the past years there has been some form of lawlessness in the country. People who were supposed to be the custodians of the law were the chief perpetrators of corruption. There was a growing “myth” if not truth that everyone is corrupt, hence the transition back to civil order needs a collective effort among the Zimbabwean citizen for the good of the country. The church is mandated to stop this haemorrhage that has muddled the rights of the poor and stop errant and erroneous interpretation of Rom 13 :1-7. It is high time that the church must confront and reprimand court prophets who legitimize anarchy and diabolic practices of the state by falsely quoting Rom 13.

Currently the GNU is working on a draft constitution, which is a welcome gesture. However, the church has to be fully involved and make sure that the final draft embodies the will of the less privileged members of the society such as the disabled, women and children. Repressive laws such as AIPPA and POSA must be revised or removed from the constitution. All the parties must agree upon electoral laws and the public must be free to express their opinion. In other words the church must not leave the process of drafting the constitution to politicians but has to monitor and contribute meaningfully. The church must disseminate information to the general public and conscientise them of any mishaps within the process as well as equipping them with the requisite knowledge so that people can be part of the process from an informed position. Current alleged intimidation by the former ruling party ZANU PF in which they have launched operation Usataure or Chimumumu (Operation Don't Speak Out) has to be grossly condemned at all cost; because the operation is geared at preventing the Zimbabwean populace in the rural areas endorsing the wishes of the politicians and not to air their independent views freely. This shameful operation is allegedly spear-headed by ZANU PF youths and war veterans. Some analysts contend that, this move is meant to protect the interests of the former ruling party in the event of future elections (probably in 2011). They know that

if the constitution making goes uninterrupted then the future of ZANU PF is doomed.

In times of elections the church has to play a pivotal role before, during and after the elections to ensure free and fair elections. She must not be relegated to being a mere observer who is helpless. She has to also guard against supporting a given party because that will jeopardize her integrity. The church must find ways to engage all the parties involved in an election and urge them to shun aspects such as political violence, vote buying, intimidation, hate speech and victimization. Each political party must campaign freely and awarded equal campaigning space in both print and electronic media. The electorate must have freedom of association. They must be equipped with the knowledge that your vote is your secret especially in rural areas because in the past there were allegations that people were intimidated that the oppressors will know whom one has voted for. This whole process will help Christians to conclude whether a government is legitimate or illegitimate and likewise ordained by God (Rom 13:1ff).

With the complexity of the Zimbabwean politics, the church has to play a crucial role in advocating for truth and reconciliation after the sad experience of the March and June 2008 elections. Churches in Zimbabwe identified themselves with position taken by the authors of the Kairos Document in South Africa in the days of the apartheid when they attested that “ ... to be totally unchristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed since any such plea only plays into the hands of oppressors by trying to persuade those who are oppressed to try to accept (their) oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes committed against (them). This is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. No reconciliation is possible without justice.” It is therefore imperative for the law to take its course for those who committed crimes before, during and after 2008 elections. The current rhetoric in state controlled media that let by-gones be by-gones is tantamount to fueling of evil. If such people are not charged how will they refrain from such acts in future? The truth and reconciliation commission must execute its duties without impartiality. In as much as the church must preach about forgiveness, the law must take its course. This procedure is in tandem with Paul’s remarks that the state or rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad (Rom 13:3).

There are churches that seemingly exist as organs of the state, and these collude with the state in subtle or overt ways. A practical example is that of the Reverend Obadiah Musindo (African Independent Church) who was seen on the only TV channel to actively engage in political campaigning for ZANU-PF, even composing propaganda songs to the effect that the president is divinely given and that he should not be opposed (ZBCtv 20 March 2008). However, the church should not be used as a campaigning tool by the state. She must continue to be the watchdog of the state. Her integrity should not be compromised by any party so as to maintain objectivity at all cost. The sad part of the Zimbabwean history is that the majority of the people are fearful of the state machinery especially the army, police and the central intelligence unit possibly because of their ruthless lawlessness approach to the public. Be as it may, the church must be the source of the renaissance of democracy in our community. She must uphold Christ-like character by standing for the oppressed, the poor and foster better living conditions to the masses. In which case therefore, the church must be the source of hope to the hopeless, substitute hurt with love, strife with peace as well as pave way for freedom over against oppression and fear.

Many Christians have adopted a pacifist approach on various reasons. One of the reasons is that they lack a clear orientation on the role of the church in politics. On this note the blame can mainly levelled on the quality and relevance of theological training that the clergy receive in theological colleges and seminaries or lack of the ability to apply learnt theories and principles. In other words students may fail to bridge the gap between what they studied and the reality on the ground (parish or circuit). Secondly, the calibre of the bishops or heads of churches that are put into office needs to be critically assessed, to check whether they are the right people for the office or not. This high office demands sacrificial leadership and not mere placeholders. Judging from the crop of bishops that emerged from the early church, we notice that they were outstanding such that most of them were prepared to face martyrdom for the sake of the gospel and the defence of the faith of the people they led. However, such vibrant and robust leadership has diminished into seemingly selfish, worldliness, immoral and puppet oriented leadership. Therefore, the Zimbabwean church (and the whole of Africa) must reposition and reorient herself towards servant leadership as well as to prepare herself for the cost of discipleship.



According to Julius Mwalimu Nyerere, the late former president of Tanzania,

“unless the church participate actively in the rebellion against those social (and political) structures and economic organisations which condemn men to poverty, humiliation, and degradation, then the church will be irrelevant to man and the church will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted only by the fearful.” (Parrat 1992:111).

He reiterates that, unless the church, its members and its organisations, express God’s love for man by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present conditions of man, then it will die and, humanly speaking deserves to die because it will then have no purpose comprehensible to modern man.

These words were uttered by a politician but with a great deal of truth. Nyerere’s assertions must ring warning bells to the church in Zimbabwe if she is to continue to be relevant and compliant with the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. In Bonhoeffer’s (1959:35) words, the church must envy to offer costly grace as opposed to cheap grace. She must teach her members the rudiments of selfless-sacrificial service, which entails cost of discipleship. It must be emphasised that the church is there to serve the world and not vice versa. This must be key Christian virtue that must be imparted among every Christian adherent. If that objective is realised then the prophetic role of the church will be achieved, that is, being the voice of the voiceless, emancipate the poor and the oppressed, and advocating for democracy, justice and gender equality.

When faced with tyranny, dictatorship and totalitarianism, the church must come up with effective ways of harnessing such practices. At times when things go out of hand, peaceful demonstrations may be options such as the ones that were spearheaded by heroic figures like R Gadhi, Martin Luther King Junior and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in their respective countries. In serious cases the church may need to support revolutions in order to deliver the masses from alienation, oppression and exploitation. This stance may appear to be highly controversial but thus part of sacrificial leadership and cost of discipleship. In the Zimbabwean context some churches supported the liberation struggle prior to 1980. For example, bishop Donal Lamont of the diocese of Umtali was accused by the Smith regime for allegedly supporting the liberation war cadres. (*The Truth Will Make You Free* 2005:69) Moreover, other clergy members such as the late Rev Canaan Banana, Rev Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Tendekai Muzorewa were instrumental in imparting

liberation theology among the Zimbabwean masses during the same period. They were indeed nationalists in their own right who analysed Rom 13 critically.

Hence decisive action needs to be taken at whatever cost. However, this calls for a collective effort on the side of the church. The groundbreaking efforts must be vested upon teaching of member on their rights as Christian citizens, that is, teachings on church-state relations must be part of Christian catechism. This will demythologize the old conception that the church must not be involved in political affairs. Theological orientation drawn from the German church, Latin American and Asian experiences must act as a springboard to the new Christian era of Christian activism in the fight for a democratic society in Africa. Once Christians own their destiny all the fear and selfishness will be replaced by responsible and sacrificial ethical values. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programmes deemed to be just and opposing policies and programmes that are unjust. In the process the church should always realise that she should not seek to be masters of the state, or to be the servant of the state, neither should it be the instrument of the state. Instead she should be the conscience of the state. More so, the state should not attempt to control the church, nor should the church seek to dominate the state.

Nevertheless, the church must encourage constructive criticism as well as positive appreciation of the good that would have been achieved by the state. This therefore calls for freedom of expression, freedom of the press, as well as freedom of association in the Zimbabwean society. It is imperative to note that the church must not wait for bishops to take the leading role in all the above matters but these objectives can be championed by individuals, caucuses or pressure groups as well as theological colleges. These smaller groups can serve the nation from being manipulated by the government of the day. Until a time when the church or its organs become proactive, influential and prophetic in society tyrants, dictators, and illegitimate leaders will continue to oppress the masses. Zimbabwe will never be the same if the church rises above the shackles of quietism.

In conclusion Rom 13:1-7 should not be interpreted out of context because this text has been grossly abused world over. The Christian community must not be pacified or intimidated by political dictators who rubber-stamp political mishaps, mischief, exploitation of the public

(poor), plunder of national resources, dictatorship, tyranny, racism, alleged vote buying and vote rigging, rape, torture, repressive laws, corruption, intimidation, murder, abductions, militarization of state institutions and bizarre taxation basing their actions on propagandistic interpretation (eisegesis) of Rom 13:1-7. The church ought to be prophetic by being the voice of the voiceless, the home of the homeless, the hope of the hopeless and liberate the oppressed. Following the above discussion, it is imperative to have a paradigm shift in theological (or seminary) and Christian education (catechism) by encouraging the introduction and emphasis of topical and contextually relevant course like Religion and Governance, Democracy and human rights, as well as Bible and Politics in order to demystify or demythologize long standing political, cultural and religious presuppositions that may deter good or democratic governance in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

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Francis Machingura

## ***The Judas Iscariot episode in the Zimbabwean Religio-Political debate of “selling out”***

### ***Introduction***

The concept of “selling out”, although having its background in the world of the Bible, that is, the gospels, has created a fertile ground in the contemporary religious, social, economic and political environment of Zimbabwe. However, the vocabulary of ‘selling out’ (*Mutengesesi* in Shona or *Umthengisi* in Ndebele) dates back to the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe where the concept of ‘selling out’ was used and is still used for political mobilization as well as justification of politically motivated violence against opponents. This includes physically and psychologically “subtracting” opponents from either the religious or political scene. Besides the concept of ‘selling out’ having a political background, the present Zimbabwean political leadership has found the biblical character of Judas Iscariot, a willing pony in their fight and bid to close up any political space. People who politically do not subscribe to their ideas and policies are stereotyped as ‘sell outs’. Yet the role that was played by Judas Iscariot in the Messiahship of Jesus (Mk 14; Mat 26-27; Lk 22 and Acts 1:18-19) cannot be overlooked, considering that ‘had Judas not betrayed Jesus, all the volumes of heroic narratives, books and articles about Jesus would not have been there’. Jesus occupies a special and important place in the major religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam due to the facilitative role played by Judas. As much as Jesus is accorded that place the same must be done to Judas Iscariot as he fundamentally played a theological role in betraying Jesus. Even if Judas had not betrayed Jesus, someone still had to do it and in this case Judas was there to play the role of a facilitator in the Messiahship of Jesus.

Since Judas Iscariot did something so critical and necessary for Jesus’ mission, why is he reviled? Why isn’t he also a saint like the other disciples of Jesus?<sup>1</sup> If Judas was the disciple of Jesus, he could have loved Jesus as much as other disciples; so wasn’t his job as much harder than Peter and others considering that the power of prophecy was in support

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<sup>1</sup> A Cline, *Judas Iscariot: Profile and Biography of Judas Iscariot*, <http://atheism.about.com/od/bible/people/newtestament/p/JudasIscariot.htm>, accessed 21 March 2010.

of his actions as narrated by the gospels? (Mat 27:9; John 17:12). If Judas was really a traitor in the sense, how could Jesus deliberately choose him to be one of his disciples? Why didn't Jesus reform Judas when he became one of his followers? What motivated Judas to behave that way and what lessons can people learn in uniting contemporary societies basing on the figure of Judas? The gospels have come up with various reasons that led Judas to betray Jesus and one of the reasons (that Judas sold Jesus for love of money) have found meaning and relevance in the Zimbabwean situation especially when it comes to chastising those deemed disrespectful of the leadership or the popular view of the majority. That Judas played a commendable role in the sacrificial death of Jesus becomes secondary and what becomes primary is the fate that befell Judas when he hanged himself as reported by the gospel evangelists. Selling-out in the Zimbabwean context is negatively regarded and the characterisation of Judas is used to manufacture phobias that benefit those with levers of power. The political and religious metaphors that one gets in the daily discourses warn people against selling out. The life-threatening consequences that befell Judas are postulated as expected of those regarded as sell-outs. In order to get a clear and interesting analysis of the character, role and death of Judas Iscariot in the ministry of Jesus and the Zimbabwean social, religious, economic and political life; there is need to look at the gospel portrayal as well as the possible implications of such a portrayal in the Zimbabwean religio-political debate of 'selling out'.

### ***The Portrayal of Judas Iscariot in the Gospels***

The gospel narratives on the role played by Judas in the betrayal of Jesus are important in understanding the level at which this has developed some roots that characterize the violence witnessed in Zimbabwe, for example, political and religious ones. It is common to hear people at church or at public gatherings saying that 'he has the spirit of Judas' when somebody does not go by what the majority would be advocating for. In order to make sense of how each of the Gospel writers portrays Judas, it is important to understand more broadly how the evangelists portrayed Jesus and his disciples. Bart D Ehrman argues that:

The Gospel writers are not simply presenting us with historical facts. They are telling stories about Jesus, shaping the stories in such a way as to convey their own views about who he is and why he matters. This affects how they

portrayed secondary figures (Jesus disciples) like Judas Iscariot in relation to Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to find that, when one reads the gospels; of the twelve disciples, Peter and Judas seem to have received the most attention as the narrative of the historical life of Jesus unfolds. However, the two seem to portray two kinds of lives; where one (Peter) is shown in a positive light and the other one (Judas) in the negative perspective. This theological agenda then becomes imperative when analyzing the character and role of Judas Iscariot in the debate of selling out and related to the Zimbabwean religio-political, social and economic platform as shown above. For the most part in the gospels, the name Judas is equivalent to all the demonic forces, where Judas is presented as the epitome of evil or unparalleled evil, greediness, unfaithfulness, ingratitude and betrayal. Societies have not been spared in shunning the name of Judas<sup>3</sup>, for example, the German law forbids parents to give a child the name of Judas for the good of the child.<sup>4</sup> George Buttick says, 'We would not name a child, or even a dog, Judas'.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the writings have also followed the trend by sparing their effort in qualifying Judas as 'traitor' and his deeds are judged as standing unique in perversity in the annals of history.<sup>6</sup> R Guardini adds that 'Judas Iscariot was the most notorious criminal and personifies the most odious of traitors and the blackest of treachery in Christian history.'<sup>7</sup> What is interesting is that, Paul does not explicitly mention the name of Judas Iscariot even though his writings are the earliest. In fact, Paul pretends as if he knows nothing about the betrayer's name, only to choose statements like 'Jesus was handed over to death' (Rom 4:25, 8:32; Gal 2:20 and 1Cor 11:23).<sup>8</sup> This possibly leads some to raise questions

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<sup>2</sup> B D Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and betrayed*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006, 17.

<sup>3</sup> A Jewish family use the name today as Yehudah and is their source of pride, especially Israelis, because it is the founding name of Jews, linked to one of the Patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. But non-Jews would not think of naming a child Judas as shown in the text.

<sup>4</sup> W Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1996, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Klassen, *Judas*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Klassen, *Judas*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> R Guardini, *The Lord*, Chicago: Regnery, 1954, 348.

<sup>8</sup> K Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 1.

about the historicity of Judas leading to the claims that, its absence in the earliest manuscripts as confirmation of its fabrication or invention that creates historical and theological problems, though not part of the attention of this article. It is clear that, the problem in understanding the Judas story is not only caused by the evangelists' biases but the intense aversion to Judas that accumulated over the years in making him the scapegoat.<sup>9</sup> Mark accuses Judas of being motivated by greed (14:10-11). Matthew (26:14-16) agrees with Mark but Luke (22:3) claims that Judas was led astray by Satan. John (3:18, 8:44) on the other hand attributes the selling-out motivation to both Satan and a penchant for theft, when he is alleged to have stolen from the common funds.

The betrayal of Judas is linked to his gluttonous behaviour and this accusation finds platform in Zimbabwean politics where individuals with views that are contrary to the status quo, majority or those in power are deemed 'sell-outs'. The evangelists Luke and John are very similar in how they portray Judas as somebody who became an agent or instrument of Satan. The role of working as an agent of outside spiritual force is contextually interpreted by ZANU-PF as shown above to imply imperialist forces that take control of opposition parties so as to destabilize Zimbabwe. K Paffenroth adds that, in the gospel of John we have the most villainous, demonic depiction of Judas in the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> Why would Mark attribute the motive of greed to Judas when he isn't approached by the priests offering money? It's possible that, Judas assumed that betraying Jesus would be worth a lot of money. Some have speculated that Judas was actually betraying Jesus out of disappointed expectations that Jesus would lead an anti-Roman rebellion. Others have argued that Judas could have thought he was giving Jesus the "push" necessary to launch a rebellion against the Romans and their Jewish followers.<sup>11</sup> The complications become much deeper if one considers that Judas Iscariot's actions and death are interpreted as fulfillment of prophetic scriptures though it might have been prophecy after the event. Judas is presented in the gospels as having had the only mission of handing over Jesus to the authorities, an epitome of failure. It however, boggles the mind to regard Judas Iscariot as having been a failure when he managed to accomplish his mission. It is important to note that, had

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<sup>9</sup> Klassen, *Judas*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Paffenroth, *Judas*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Klassen, *Judas*, 17.



Zimbabwean politicians realised the important role that Judas played, it would unite Zimbabwean people with the realization that, opposition parties fulfill an important mission of instilling democracy, freedom of association and expression. In fact the way the Judas narrative is portrayed makes readers and believers not to feel for Judas but only feel more deeply the pain that Judas and the other disciples like Peter who disowned Jesus, a sign of failure and betrayal.

The nature of Judas' eventual death is also interesting as there are conflicting records about it. This also includes the 'bloody money' purported to have been given to Judas. Luke's version of Judas' death is completely different from Matthew's, on the following: who bought the field and whose blood lent its name? They only agree to the details about the Field of Blood. For Luke, in Acts 1: 18-19:

Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, the field of blood.'

In this case, it was Judas and not the Jewish authorities who used the reward of iniquity to purchase the farm. He fell headlong possibly during his time of inspecting the field. For Matthew, it was the chief priests who thought of any idea of buying the Porter's field as burial for strangers (Mat 27:6-8). Matthew narrates that: "But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day".<sup>12</sup> For Matthew, the chief priests also carry the guilt that was committed by Judas as shown by their symbolical acceptance of blood money.<sup>13</sup> The pieces of silver that Judas is purported to have received plays an important role to seal the alleged intention by Judas to sell Jesus. The thirty pieces of silver were important in the betrayal episode and also in sealing it. The purchasing of a field using the same money by priests helps to taint their cruel image and that of the broader Jewish family.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the chief priests are rendered guilty by the return of the 'blood money' and not the purchase of the field.

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<sup>12</sup> Paffenroth, *Judas*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> L Nortje, 'Matthew's Motive for the Composition of the Story of Judas's Suicide in Matthew 27: 1-10', *Neotestamentica* 28, 1994, 41-51.

<sup>14</sup> E Lohmeyer & W Schmauch, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958, 379.

Papias (ca 130 C.E) preserved another interesting tradition about Judas, that he died from neither hanging as reported in the gospels nor falling as in Acts but from a horrible, disfiguring and shameful disease. Papias claims that:

After many such tortures and punishments, they say that he died on his own property, and that on account of the stench the place is desolate and uninhabited even until now, and that even today no one can go through that place without stopping up his nose with his hands, because the stench of his flesh spread out over the land so much.<sup>15</sup>

All the above narratives about the actions of Judas Iscariot and his death have one important message that, Judas is an important lesson on the wages of sin. So punishments are deliberately heaped on him to drive the message to the audience that they must avoid sin like that of loving money to selling out thereby face similar consequences that befell Judas.<sup>16</sup> For Luke, that is the kind of death that befall wicked people, which is similar to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11) and Herod Agrippa (Acts 12: 20-23). Luke, like his contemporaries, and generation of story tellers, saw deaths like that of Judas as direct and necessary punishments from God, who shows how ‘those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies’ (Tob 12:10).<sup>17</sup> Such kinds of death are then viewed as meant to put the wheels of justice in place as well as to promote its future existence for those who dare stray in the first place. It is not surprising that, ZANU-PF finds it much easier to incorporate the Judas character as a ‘willing and suggestive label’ for opposition groupings in a bid to convey a clear message that “those who engage in opposition politics” are engaging in sin and wishing for a chaotic society as done by Judas Iscariot. The consequences that befell Judas are then deemed as justifiable when they befall on opposition groupings and those who then commit violence against them are taken as agents putting the wheels of justice in place. The hands of Satan in fuelling discontentment through violence are then overlooked in such circumstances where certain people because of their privileged political orientation commit crimes and not held accountable.

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<sup>15</sup> J Kürzinger, *Papias von Hierapolis und Evangelien des Neuen Testaments*, Regensburg: Pustet, 1983, 104.

<sup>16</sup> S R Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Paffenroth, *Judas, 22*; See A W Zwiep, *Judas and the Choice of Mathias: A Study on the Context and Concern of Acts 1:15-26*, Tübingen: Siebeck Mohr, 2004, 42.

For Luke, Satan takes a leading role in transforming an apostle like Judas into a shameful enemy of Jesus and the noble movement. Luke 23: 34 report that, Jesus continued to exude love despite such open betrayal as shown by his table fellowship with all his disciples. The contradiction comes when it is reported that, Judas' death was a fulfillment of scripture and at the same time the just punishment of God for his terrible act of betrayal. The gruesome death is stereotypically presented as something that was deservedly expected to fall on Judas. Kim Paffenroth dismisses all the negatives about Judas Iscariot as an attempt by evangelists to render their narratives more believable and have a tragic impact in the rhetoric of Christian anti-Semitic stereotyping.<sup>18</sup> Judas was a Jew which would imply that, the depiction is meant to put all the Jews in bad light in terms of their contact with Jesus. The role that Judas Iscariot played is something that H J Klauck regards as worthy for Judas to be thanked for than blamed as done by the New Testament writers. The gospels try to exonerate the Romans (represented by Pilate who washed his hands symbolizing innocence on Jesus- Mat 27:25) as having not been responsible for the death of Jesus and conveniently placing the blame on Judas. Judas could have truly handed over Jesus to the high priest, but now with the change of venue to Pilate, we find a different scenario altogether.

According to A Harvey, Jewish sources are clear about when and under what circumstances Jews are in a position to hand over fellow Jews to pagan authorities.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the form of punishment (crucifixion) meted on Jesus was Roman and not Jewish. This was meant to court the friendship of the Romans by shunning and stereotyping the Jews. The blame put on Judas and the Jewish opposition of Jesus sealed the fate of the Jews as having killed or led to the death of the son of God.<sup>20</sup> In the Zimbabwean context, the labelling of those engaging opposition politics as “sell-out” puts away the blame on perpetrators of violence on innocent victims and forcefully makes victims of violence accept being violated against. The statement purported to have been said by the Jews accept-

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<sup>18</sup> Paffenroth, *Judas*, 37; See J D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, San Francisco: Harper, 1995, 71.

<sup>19</sup> A E Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982, 25.

<sup>20</sup> J S Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love*, New York: HarperCollins, 2005, 204; J S Spong, *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes; Freeing Jesus from 200 Years of Misunderstanding*, San Francis: HarperCollins, 1996, 258.

ing blame seals the blame deal when they said that: “And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children’” (Mat 27:25). The above statement by Jews overlooks the Deuteronomistic (Deut 21:23) ideology against the one who commits suicide, ‘Cursed by God is everyone who is hanged’. Matthew puts the blame on all the Jews. The problem as already raised in the introduction is centred on the deliberate scriptural allusion intended to explain the money aspect and not the role played by Judas in the salvation economy.<sup>21</sup> When taken in the Zimbabwean context, the role of opposition politics in Zimbabwean politics is then belittled and the image given is that of individuals sell their souls on the altar of financial expedience. As a result of admission for wrong doing by the Jews, it then implied that Christians could justifiably hate Jews with impunity and persecute them with a clear conscience. They could make their self-centered quest for survival appear to be an act of morality and virtue.<sup>22</sup> The argument by some Christians is that, the Jews acknowledged and asked for trouble to generations to come as shown in Mat 27:25. The passion narratives and Easter celebrations by Christians usually read anew the experience surrounding the betrayal by Judas and death of Jesus. Mostly the celebrations are coated with emotions and some to the extent of open and intolerable hostility against the Jews.<sup>23</sup> It is the same context in the Zimbabwean politics where the Bible and certain biblical characters are used as justification for violence, hatred and denigration against opponents.

Judas Iscariot was the necessary figure who must be applauded in the equation of the salvation of humanity even though it is something difficult for Christian theologians to acknowledge, but good for any biblical scholar worthy of his/her salt. If democratic principles where freedom of assembly and association are going to be appreciated in Zimbabwe, the Judas character is an important character. Opposition politics act as a catalyst of democracy just as Judas acted as a catalyst to the present salvation that Christians pride themselves in. Karl Barth is right to argue that, Judas’ election as an apostle cannot be rejected or reversed. Judas and the other apostles belong together as closely as possible such that what Judas did affects them also. The point being that, what was done by

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<sup>21</sup> Klassen, *Judas*, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Spong, *The Sins of Scripture*, 209.

<sup>23</sup> Spong, *The Sins of Scripture*, 209.

Judas, could have been done by any of the disciples.<sup>24</sup> The figure of Judas is important in the salvation history, although, the gospel evangelists invite condemnation of him instead of praising him for what he did in making an unimaginable choice based on the prophecy of God. Judas' action led to the union between God, Christ and humanity; something that can be used in applauding the existence of multi-party democracy. If Zimbabwe prides herself in multiple politics democracy, then oppositional politics and this kind of democracy belong together. People must be careful when reading the gospels about Judas especially on the issue of suicide, which must not be used to make judgmental statements about Judas let alone those engaging in opposition politics. This is important in analyzing the political landscape of Zimbabwe where the figure of Judas features mostly in describing opponents.

### ***The Place of the Bible in the Zimbabwean Public Space***

The role that characters found in the Bible play in the lives of Zimbabweans is not surprising considering the place that the Bible has taken since the coming of missionaries in the 16th century. The Bible has socially occupied an uncontested place in the hearts and minds of many Zimbabweans; making Zimbabwe a *de facto* Christian state. It has not spared even non-Christian believers as it is always quoted on issues of life especially at peaceful and sorrowful gatherings like weddings, political rallies and funerals. It is a common thing to find Bibles of different sizes, versions and covers with different colours in most of the places that one can think of; a pointer to the importance that the Bible is accorded in Zimbabwean social, economic, political and religious life. Businesspersons as well as politicians have not fallen behind in the incorporation of biblical figures and ideas so as to have an appeal to the broader audience. It is common in Zimbabwe to find business institutions with biblical names even though the owners are not believers.

The influence of Christianity in the Zimbabwean world of business dawned clearly on my mind during the 16<sup>th</sup> of March to the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 during my PhD research, when I realised that a sizable number of the public transport (kombis and taxis) had biblical verses/texts and statements inscribed on them. The popular biblical inscriptions are: Hebr 11:1, 1Petr 5:10; Psa 23:1, Isa 54: 17 and Prov 10:22. Some of the

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<sup>24</sup> K Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957, 471.

statements I found interesting were inscribed on taxis, mini-buses and buses were as follows: 1) “His Name is Jesus”; 2) “Try Jesus and you will never fail”; 3) “Rich and Famous because of Jesus”; and 4) “Only the Blood of Jesus and Resurrection Power can make you rich”. These inscriptions are found on public transport that service people of different religious persuasions and not only Christian believers at all. Besides Christianity taking the largest share of believers in Zimbabwe, it is clear that Christianity has become part of marketing and the language of business. It is interesting and not surprising that, some of the owners of the transport business that invoke Christian inscriptions might not be Christians at all. This is the same with politicians who quote the Bible at their political gatherings despite not being believers. It is also common to find that in Zimbabwe, many people have biblical names such as: Peter, John, James, Paul, Samuel, Elisha, Elijah and Moses; but it is rare to find people or institutions with names positively coined after Judas Iscariot. The Judas character only manifests negatively and the assumption is that, no serious business persons can afford to name their businesses after Judas Iscariot and at the same time expecting their businesses to flourish. Surprisingly the Judas character finds a fertile platform in Zimbabwean politics, courting the attention of this paper.

The use of Judas Iscariot character in stigmatizing opponents in Zimbabwe has tended to bear fruits for liberation parties like ZANU-PF in conscientising people about the consequences of holding a different political view. It is like the *Animal Farm* episode<sup>25</sup> that ‘you are either with us or against us where other more equal than others’, which sometimes lead to violent political tendencies. Instead of celebrating the power of holding different views in society for building societies, victims of violence are labelled as deserving to be punished and not eligible for sympathy like what happened to Judas Iscariot, hence self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>26</sup> Instead of realizing that it is the constitutional right of peo-

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<sup>25</sup> G Orwell, *Animal Farm*, Florida: Harcourt Brace, 1945.

<sup>26</sup> *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* is a prediction that, purely as a result of having been made or causes the expected event to occur and thus confirms the prophecy’s own ‘accuracy’. It influences peoples’ social interaction based on initial beliefs about certain people leading them to behave in a certain manner. It is a powerful tool that can affect people physically, psychologically when it becomes an element of social, political and religious institutions. In social institutions like schools and universities, teachers can subtly and unconsciously encourage the performance they expect to see in their students, for example, if they believe their students to be intelligent, they spend more time with them

ple to hold a different political opinion and inalienable view on issues, victims of violence usually accept their predicament as having erred and perpetrators as having a mandate to administer discipline on them, when the Judas figure is roped in to justify such actions. It is in the best interest of this paper that, the Judas Iscariot character can be used to serve a moral purpose to positively shape the actions of the Zimbabwean community.

### ***The Colonial Use of the term ‘Sell Out’ and its’ Adoption on the Zimbabwean Political Space***

It is generally agreed across the political and religious divide as already shown that, the coinage of the term ‘sell out’ was popular during the fight for the liberation of Zimbabwe. It was commonly used by nationalists<sup>27</sup> and then adopted by respective Zimbabwean societies to refer to people that were deemed friendly to the Rhodesian colonial forces. For Blessing-Miles Tendi, the genesis of ‘patriots and sell-outs’ complemented with violence, has its beginnings in 1950s urban politics<sup>28</sup> though it has been a constant theme in Zimbabwean national politics since that time as seen by the essential part it plays in ZANU-PF’s politi-

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or unintentionally show more enthusiasm when working with them. As a result, these students come to feel more capable and intelligent and perform better. The same with politicians instilling a certain attitude towards certain people who hold different views but labeled as bad elements in society; whatever fate that befall them will be interpreted as positive and justifiably good for the well-being of society, See R A Jones, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Social, Psychological and Physiological effects of Expectancies*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977, 139; D M Newman, *Sociology: Exploring the architecture of Everyday Life*, London: Pine Forge Press, 2009, 59.

<sup>27</sup> The ‘nationalist forces’ point to the military wings of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The military wing of ZAPU was known ZIPRA and that for ZANU as ZANLA. The ZANLA military wing was popularly referred to as ‘*Vakomana neVasikana veRusununguko*’ literally, the ‘boys and girls fighting for the freedom of the majority’.

<sup>28</sup> Urban Politics was characterised by boycotts against high bus fares and the increasing prices of basic commodities, for example, on 17 September 1956 Salisbury Bus Boycott. The protest degenerated into violence, theft and the raping of women in the Girls Hostel by young men. Women who were raped during the boycott were presented as ‘sell-outs who deserved to be raped’ because they did not take part in the boycott, T Scarnecchia, *Fighting for the Underdog: Rhetoric, Violence and Gender in Zimbabwean Nationalism, 1940-1964*, New York: Rochester Univ. Press, 2008, 4.

cal discourse and Patriotic History.<sup>29</sup> The label was associated with people who were regarded as bend on forestalling the independence of Zimbabwe by supplying the Rhodesian forces and regime with the vital information that would be used against the nationalists and the eventual independence of Zimbabweans from colonialism. Such people would then be given money in the Judas style (as well as food, clothing and other materials) for personal use. The term 'sell out' was then used to describe their actions and the consequences that befell them were then regarded as highly justifiable. Rhodesian forces also used the term against civilians and those who supplied the nationalists with information about their movements but the 'sell-out' vocabulary usage was dominant in the nationalists' circles. The term 'sell out' had a lot of impact on the civilian mindset and this included what the civilians were expected of when they met the nationalists as well as the Rhodesian forces. The escalation of war in 1970s resulted in the infamous Selous Scouts<sup>30</sup> (a highly trained specialist unit which was given the most secretive tasks and was known for using dirty tactics for interrogation), the Police Anti-terrorist Unit (PATU) and the Grey Scouts (a mounted unit which moved both on horseback and in armored cars) which were known for prosecuting the war vigorously. The plight of the ordinary

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<sup>29</sup> B-M Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, 144.

<sup>30</sup> In 1973 a regiment was commissioned called the Selous Scouts (accounted for 68% of confirmed terrorist kills) and were referred to as a pseudo gang and were deployed in the bush faking as liberation war fighters so as to capture guerrilla fighters as well as civilians who supported them with food, clothing and housing. The Selous Scouts were a mixed race force and had many black Rhodesians in its ranks including the first African commissioned officers in the Rhodesian Army. The Selous Scouts acted as a combat reconnaissance force, its mission was to infiltrate Rhodesia's black population and guerrilla networks, pinpoint rebel groups and relay vital information back to the conventional forces earmarked to carry out the actual attacks. Scouts were trained to operate in small under-cover teams capable of working independently in the bush for weeks on end. Most of the African members (would kill their kith and kin for supporting guerrillas) of the Selous Scouts regiment were recruited from captured terrorists who switched sides when given an offer of money they couldn't refuse (*Black personnel had their immediate families provided for with housing and medical care*), hence the evoking of the Judas character to describe their actions as 'sell-outs', D Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia: The Extraordinary Combat Memoir of a Rhodesian Reconnaissance Specialist*, USA: Paladin Press, 2007, 167-186; See J H Thompson, *Voices of the South African National Servicemen: An Unpopular War*, Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006, 63-69; P L Moorcraft, *'a tour de force': Fireforce: One Man's War in the Rhodesian Light Infantry*, Canada: Trafford Publ., 2006, 23-25.



people placed them literally in the middle, between the security forces and liberation forces.<sup>31</sup> In order to win the minds and the hearts of the civilians; unorthodoxy means were used especially by liberation forces like terror tactics that included: raiding civilian homes, forcing civilians to attend clandestine ‘all-night’ meetings (pungwes)<sup>32</sup>, attacked women and children, committed horrendous acts against innocent people especially civilians considered to be ‘sell outs’.<sup>33</sup> People would settle personal scores (possibly jealous neighbors) by labelling innocent persons as ‘sell outs’ and reporting them to ‘*Vakomana*’ or liberation fighters. The labeled victims ended up being killed, disabled, losing their homes, broken limbs simply because they were suspected of being ‘sell outs’. In most cases, a Kangaroo court was set by the guerillas and not chiefs, where the accused would not stand a chance. Edgar Tekere rightly admits that, ‘if you were an opponent or perceived rival, you were simply labeled a ‘sell-out’.<sup>34</sup> There could be no worse accusation in a struggle because of the ruthless manner in which the so-called sell-outs were treated. There could have indeed been sell-outs, as happens in war situations, but it is fair to say the label was also misused and abused to settle personal scores or simply endear themselves to the leaders’.<sup>35</sup> The orgy of violence also included the indiscriminate use of landmines and murdering of unprotected missionaries. The same madness was seen on the part of Rhodesian security forces that also used terrorist tactics against the civilians. Yet the Rhodesian forces were expected to protect the people and maintain order in society. Civilians saw helicopters gunships firing incendiary bullets into the roofs of their huts and thousands of innocent civilians were indiscriminately killed.<sup>36</sup> The trauma against civilians included interrogative questionings, use of bayonets to stab peoples’ feet, putting electric wires to instill electronic shocks on civil-

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<sup>31</sup> M Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator: An Insider's Account of Robert Mugabe's Descent to Tyranny*, South Africa: New Africa Books, 2009, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Pungwes or all night meetings were clandestinely carried out by the guerrilla fighters. There was no excuse for not attending such meetings. It is such meetings that people got indoctrinated about the moral importance of supporting the liberation struggle against the colonial totalitarian regime of Ian Smith. People who were not supportive or critical of nationalists fighters were labelled as ‘sell outs’.

<sup>33</sup> Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> Tekere, *A Lifetime Struggle*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Tekere, *A Lifetime Struggle*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator*, 33.

ians' bodies until they fell unconscious, intermittent arrests, torture of civilians and systematic rape of young girls and older women. Some marriages broke as a result of the rapes. Personal and ethnic differences were also expressed in 'patriots' and 'sell-outs' discourse, and nationalist guerrillas' summary executions of rural peasants regarded as 'sell-outs' informants of Rhodesian troops. Both sides used violent tactics against the civilians.<sup>37</sup> It is, however, clear that, violence was the only justifiable and liberative means for blacks to achieve independence and peace.

It is in this light that, labelling as an exclusionary tool is unfortunately still being used in the present Zimbabwean national politics; causing a lot of people particularly women labelled to withdraw and go underground politically. Common labels still being used against opponents are: 'sell-out or being categorized as Central Intelligence Officer (CIO)'.<sup>38</sup> The 'sell out' label is commonly used by all political parties against opponents within or without the party to silence people or bully them into submission.<sup>39</sup> The label 'sell out' can be likened to someone who has been labelled a witch or wizard and the label usually sticks for the worst. T O Ranger notes that,

The Africans began to search for 'sell-outs', those who had taken sides with the whites. The confrontation between black and white had been diverted into a search for the enemy within.....the search for 'informers' and 'sell-outs' was accompanied in the religious sphere by a preoccupation with

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<sup>37</sup> N Kriger, 'The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles Within Struggle', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 14, Number 2, 1988, 304-322.

<sup>38</sup> These common stereotypical labels used in the Zimbabwe religio-political dimension also include party acronyms like 'He/she is Racist, ZANU-PF or MDC'. If one is labeled as ZANU-PF when in actual fact is MDC, it becomes a label with consequences from the grassroots support. Usually the option for the labeled person is withdrawing or choosing to lie dormant on critical issues. The mentioning of somebody as 'CIO agent' sends shivers and sweating to whoever is around. The CIO agents are alleged to be ruthless with opponents or critics of President Robert Mugabe. The giving of such a label on somebody conjures up bad memories, hatred and images of men in dark glasses driving cars with tinted glasses and wearing dark suits. The interesting thing is that, whether or not this is true or a false representation is left to a 'Sangoma/ Tsikamutanda/ N'anga/ Prophet/ Prophetess/ man or woman of God'. It is neither here nor there, but the obvious implication is that one's credibility in the society at large or party is politically or socially undermined and compromised. The politics of labeling across political parties sadly breeds a retrogressive political culture and an intolerant environment leading to conflicts, wars, brutal violence and permanent scars.

<sup>39</sup> A Magaisa, Using Politics of Labelling to undermine Opponents, *The Standard*, 27 February 2010.

witches and sorcerers.....The conflict between white and black had been transmuted into a conflict between the ancestors and witchcraft.<sup>40</sup>

In the African mind, 'sell-out' also conjures up memories of many African chiefs and kings who facilitated slavery as agents of imperialism. In this case, they were viewed as 'sell-outs' by their community members, something much similar to what was done by African Selous Scouts agents. 'Sell Out or *Mutengesi*' as already hinted is the most common label used in Zimbabwe national politics and the consequences of using such a label on those otherwise differing from the majority or senior leadership cannot be under-estimated. It is an easy weapon ready for use especially with ruling African liberation parties like ZANU-PF and African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa against political rivals sometimes with tragic consequences. Most opposition parties to ZANU-PF have always been stereotyped as 'fronts or agents' of the enemy or imperialist forces. Blessing Miles Tendi argues that

The 'patriots and sell outs' distinction can be fluid over time but also markedly inflexible at any particular point in time. The meaning of 'sell-out' changes in due course depending on the character of the rival. The distinction has made active politics unattractive to Zimbabweans and partly made the country's politics shallow-that is, it sometimes does not deal with substantive issues.<sup>41</sup>

The accusations are consistently levelled against leaders of opposition parties for allegedly planning to overthrow President Mugabe's government. They are alleged as being helped by foreign forces, for example, Joshua Nkomo, Ndabaningi Sithole, and Morgan Tsvangirai. The label is put on the top leadership of opposition parties as happened to Welshman Ncube (Secretary General of original MDC) and Tendai Biti. The Non-Governmental, Civic Organizations and journalists from independent papers are also put on the fry as 'sell-outs' bent on reversing the gains of the liberation struggle.<sup>42</sup> The loss of support by ZANU-PF and Mugabe is regarded as not a result of corruption, economic meltdown and populist policies resulting in hunger and poverty. The argument by ZANU-PF is that, imperialist forces use money to buy the souls and

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<sup>40</sup> T O Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative*, London: Univ. of California Press, 1985, 188; See also D Smith & C Simpson, *Mugabe*, London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1989,169.

<sup>41</sup> Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> T Maodza, Respect Unity Accord: Mujuru, *The Herald*, 23 December, 2009; Sibanda dismisses journalists as sell outs, *The Zimbabwe Times*, 11 March 2010.

bodies of opposition parties and their followers in order to continue exploiting the Zimbabwean resources.

Therefore opposition parties are alleged as pretending to be genuine African parties run by local Zimbabweans. Yet they 'sell out' to foreigners so as to get some money in return. In retaliation, ZANU-PF is portrayed as justified in using violence to protect the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the country. B M Tendi notes that:

The Second *Chimurenga* political culture of intolerance, labelling and delegitimisation, violence, and military commandism carried into the post-colonial period. These wartime political values were not transformed into democratic values at independence.<sup>43</sup>

The same violent tactics were incorporated against ZAPU leadership and followers. The '*Gukurahundi*' era heavily affected Matebeleland where Mugabe had failed to get political support. However, the military action in Matebeleland was said to have been aimed at 'dissidents' but the civilian onslaught proved otherwise. Michael Auret adds that, 'at first I believed that the Zimbabwe military were combating dissidents, albeit with extraordinary and unnecessary violence and indiscriminate killings of many civilians',<sup>44</sup> which changed his perspective about the government. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace observed that, innocent villagers who had not been killed or abducted were frequently forced to watch their relatives and friends dying from beatings, burnings, shooting or bayoneting by the Fifth Brigade. To make matters worse, the injured were not allowed to seek medical attention and risked being shot. The villagers mostly from Matebeleland lost homes and granaries which stored their food. According M Auret, ZANU-PF and Mugabe used hunger as a political weapon and a weapon of war against people in Matebeleland.<sup>45</sup> The violent culture has characterised the present polarization in the Zimbabwean society, making it difficult to produce a proper ideology in the successful development and unity of the Zimbabwean nation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe*, 151.

<sup>44</sup> Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator*, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator*, 82.

<sup>46</sup> F Machingura, "The Reading and Interpretation of Matthew 18:21-22 in Relation to Multiple Reconciliations: The Zimbabwean Experience," *Exchange* 39, 2010, 331-354; See E Chitando, 'Down with the Devil, Forward with Christ! A Study of the interface between religious and political discourses in Zimbabwe', *African Sociological Review*, 6

As testimony to a divided and polarized nation, the stereotypical terms like: ‘sell out, white minded, saboteurs of the economy, foreign sponsored, stooges, puppets, un-African, illegitimate, un-cultured, anti-African, pro-neocolonialism’ are mostly applied against opposition parties and their supporters. The meaning of the labels changes overtime. It is only the meaning and positive label of ZANU-PF and its followers as patriotic, revolutionary, indigenous and pan-African that is fixed. It is true that, some opposition politicians get into politics to get money and not to serve the nation hence becoming stooges or sell-outs so as to get money. The truth of the matter is that, selling-out though not to be encouraged happens across the political divide, for example, Philip Chiyanwa, Godfrey Dzvairo and Kenny Karidza, all ZANU-PF members were once arrested and detained on similar charges of allegedly breaching the Official Secrets Act by selling State secrets to Western governments.<sup>47</sup> However, the coming of MDC and its subsequent labeling as a ‘party of sell-outs’ was not surprising. In African politics, most of the negative labels against opposition parties derive from this political contest for power. However, it is mostly the ruling parties that have the state machinery, for example, media repeatedly used to remind the populace that opposition politics is criminal.

For the common Zimbabweans, the label ‘sell-out’ to refer to MDC is a commonly sung hymn in Zimbabwean contemporary politics. Yet it was clear to everybody, even the mentally challenged persons that, the economy was no longer performing well resulting in food riots and successful job stayaways. Mugabe and his henchmen must have been concerned about the formation of the MDC as its followers were exclusively from the labour movements and civic society (churches, legal profession, human rights groups, business and agriculture) clamoring for a meaningful change of government. The grassroots support for MDC grew enormously in both rural and urban areas. The popularity of MDC came on the bedrock of the anger that Zimbabweans had developed against ZANU-PF in general and Mugabe in particular. This was as the result of:

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(1), 2002, 1-16; M R Gunda, African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options!, *Exchange* 38, 2009, 84-102.

<sup>47</sup> F Dongozi, Lawyers slam espionage trial, *The Standard*, 13 February 2005; Ministers Chombo, Goche caught in spy ring, *newzimbabwe.com*, accessed, 10 January 2012; D Muleya, Mugabe’s nephew held for espionage in Zim, *newzimbabwe.com*, accessed, 10 January 2012.

the ESAP (Economic Structural Adjustment Programme),<sup>48</sup> awarding of unbudgeted payouts to War veterans, unplanned sending of troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the massive corruption in the state parastatals (culprits were known but nothing was done to them as long as they were ZANU-PF officials or had ZANU-PF connections). All these factors fueled the unpopularity that later characterised ZANU-PF and Mugabe. ZANU-PF in general and Mugabe in particular responded by calling MDC leadership and its followers as traitors and stooges of Western states.

Clips were shown of the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai receiving cheques from the Zimbabwe Commercial white farmers on the formation of the party. It is clear that, outside forces were heavily involved in the political battles in Zimbabwe, both in ZANU-PF and MDC. This was shown by the eastern bloc led by China and Russia openly supporting ZANU-PF as they traditionally did in the fight for the liberation of Zimbabwe. The western bloc led by most of the European countries and the United States of America openly supported the MDC. The political atmosphere was so dirty and it has remained so today, as the two major political parties contest to take control of the levers of power. It became dangerous and risky to be an opposition supporter let alone the MDC, the purported party of 'sell outs'. ZANU-PF deliberately exaggerated their characterization of MDC as a 'sell out' party suggesting that violence against such people was justified. For the ordinary people, it brought painful memories of colonialism and the 'bloody' long fight for the liberation of Zimbabwe. In most cases, the national communication industry/media (electronic and print, public and private) were roped in to churn out hate speech against the labelled 'sell-outs'. Webster Shamu,

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<sup>48</sup> ESAP caused social and economic dislocation on many families. It gave birth to many NGOs that engaged in feeding schemes to hungry families. There was an increased growth of poverty in rural areas and the low earners in urban areas. ESAP led to a sharp decline in Mugabe's popularity and people started to question the Messiahship once attributed to Mugabe in relation to the suffering people experienced. Members of the ruling elite *had become to enrich themselves in earnest and they lost touch with their traditional basis of support, the peasantry and the working class*, H S Dashwood, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transformation*, London: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000, 193; See L M Sachikonye, *Industrial Restructuring and Labour Relations under ESAP in Zimbabwe*, in P Gibbon (ed), *Structural Adjustment and the Working Poor in Zimbabwe*, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1995, 38; F Machingura, *The Messianic Feeding of the Masses: An Analysis of John 6 in the context of messianic leadership in post-colonial Zimbabwe*, (BiAS 8), 2012, 242.

Media, Information and Publicity minister decried the danger of politically polarized media if used in carrying hate messages regardless of who owns them.<sup>49</sup> The foreign and independent media deliberately put ZANU-PF and Mugabe in bad light at the same time proffering the good image of MDC. On the other hand, the state owned media takes the leading role in putting labelling opposition movements. In most cases, opposition supporters become open targets of violence as they are likened to people possessed by the spirit of Judas Iscariot. The death of Judas Iscariot after handing over Jesus is interpreted as justified as it symbolized the payment for his sins. Mugabe's speeches featured repeatedly in the broadcast media and the government press labeling the MDC as a party of 'sell outs' who were not supposed to be ever allowed to be political leaders of Zimbabwe. Even though at first, the MDC used the non-violent electoral campaign; ZANU-PF and Mugabe resorted to their tried and tested campaigns of violence, intimidation and propaganda.

The coming of Professor Jonathan Moyo as Minister of Information paved way for ZANU-PF political and propagandistic jingles that were meant to persuade people to rally behind ZANU-PF and its leader Robert Mugabe. Political posters and T-Shirts were printed out with messages like 'Zimbabwe is not for Sale; Sell Outs will Never Rule This Country; Zimbabwe will Never be a Colony Again; Sell Outs Beware'. Eliot Manyika (ZANU-PF political commissar)'s '*Norah*' political song clearly labels opposition parties especially the MDC as a 'sell out' party and laments the need to help such people back to their minds by engaging in ZANU-PF political re-orientation. In the song, Manyika regards Mugabe as a strong man; even though there are some Zimbabweans who have betrayed him as a result of the love for money and ignorance. Manyika laments in that song that, such people needed to be shown the way of 'light and truth' which is only found in ZANU-PF under Mugabe's leadership.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that, the label 'sell-out' is prevalent across political parties. It is timeously evoked to create an exclusionary effect against certain individuals or groups so as to deliberately undermine their credibility and legitimacy resulting in the stifling of useful debate and the democratic participation of the ordinary people. This has

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<sup>49</sup> Proposed Media Reforms Illegal, *The Herald*, 29 April 2011

<sup>50</sup> E Manyika, *Norah*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yixp4O29iY>, accessed, 26 July 2010.

been the trend in both ZANU-PF and the MDC in relation to the succession issue<sup>51</sup> or factions in these parties where the label is generally applied against those with different views in their respective parties. Of notable observation is that the label 'sell out' has consistently been used against the opposition leaders and their supporters who are regarded as enemies of the state and nation. The Zimbabwean public and independent media have played a critical role in promoting hate speech and intolerance. The public media are notable for using words like: 'sell outs, puppets and traitors' in reference to opposition parties. The members of the presidium (President Mugabe, Joyce Mujuru and late Vice President Joseph Msika) were quoted by the public media fanning violence. Joseph Msika said 'if you vote for Tsvangirai on June 27, 2008, you are voting for the former Rhodesians and you are voting for war'.<sup>52</sup> President Mugabe is reported saying, '*Kutengeswa kwakaitwa gore rakapera hatidi kukuona*-let there be no selling out as happened in 2008. The two wings, youth and women's league; it is youth league we rely on. They are full of blood, full of vigor. There should be no reversal of our sovereignty'.<sup>53</sup> It is in such circumstances where Zimbabwe's sovereignty is linked to ZANU-PF that, violence against other political groupings becomes the order of the day. The public media gave the impression to the public that ZANU-PF was the only legitimate political grouping destined to rule in Zimbabwe; any other political grouping was criminal or witchcraft. There were reports by the foreign and independent media of MDC supporters being killed, abducted, tortured, and raped for the only reason of belonging to another party which is not ZANU-PF. Several villagers in the rural areas were forced to surrender their livestock, grain and other belongings to ZANU-PF structures as payment for 'selling-out'.<sup>54</sup> This was clearly stated by ZANU-PF Makoni South aspiring candidate, Nathaniel Mhiripiri, that 'it's either you are ZANU-PF or an enemy. We will deal with sell outs. I will kill anyone who defects from ZANU-PF to MDC'.<sup>55</sup> The use of the label 'sell out' is

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<sup>51</sup> 'Succession Clique a bunch of Sell-Outs', <http://www.zicora.com>, accessed, 18 March 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Report Exposes Culture of hate and intolerance in State Media, <http://www.swradioafrica.com/news211209/report211209.htm>, accessed, 22 July 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Report Exposes Culture of hate and intolerance in State Media.

<sup>54</sup> ZANU-PF 'thugs' Evicted, *The Zimbabwean*, 24 February 2010.

<sup>55</sup> T Sibanda, ZANU-PF official boasts he has authority to kill MDC activists, *SW Radio Africa News*, 25 January 2010.



based on the implicit understanding of Zimbabwe as under one-party (ZANU-PF) state under the leadership of Mugabe. Any party that seeks to electorally win power from Mugabe is criminalized and its supporters face the consequences of ‘selling out’. President Mugabe in one incidence described opposition parties and their supporters as ‘demon-possessed sell-outs’.<sup>56</sup> This was clearly shown in the 2008 March elections that led to Mugabe losing for the first time to Morgan Tsvangirai. The June 27 run-off between Mugabe and Tsvangirai was characterised by naked violence. Obvious Vengeyi observed that, in the majority of cases, opposition supporters were targets of the violence where soldiers, police officers, ZANU PF militia and activists of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) have been positively identified as perpetrators almost justifying accusations by the opposition that the government directly orchestrated the violence.<sup>57</sup> The power of rape in some cases was used as a tool of strategy to control civilian populations and maintaining of power. A report based on testimonies was made on 70 survivors of orchestrated campaign of rape and torture. Women affiliated with MDC are reported as having been abducted at night (the assailants shouting ‘come out sell outs’), beaten (with fists, logs, electric cords or metal rods), gang-raped and being told exactly why it was happening to them. Some women allegedly forced to watch their daughters being raped.<sup>58</sup> The case in mind is that of Rutendo Munengami (wife of MDC-T legislator for Glen View North Fani Munengami) who claims to have been raped by one of the soldiers that stormed her house. Another victim had a thick tree stump forced into her private parts, tearing off part of it. The motive was to prevent her from giving birth to sell-outs children.<sup>59</sup> It is common to find opposition members being denied food, farm inputs and medication for their political orientation deemed criminal. The portrayal of people with different views with ‘sell-out’ labels resonates very well with the character that ZANU-PF finds in Judas Iscariot. Any allegiance to other parties is portrayed as

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<sup>56</sup> Gillian Gotora, Opposition demon-possessed sell-outs: Mugabe, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-5767-Opposition+demon+possessed+Mugabe/news.aspx>.

<sup>57</sup> O Vengeyi, Israelite Prophetic Marks among Zimbabwean men of God: An Evaluation of the Conduct of selected Zimbabwean Church Leaders in Recent Politics, *Exchange* 39, 2010, 159-178.

<sup>58</sup> S Edwards, Mugabe ‘The diabolical masterminds of sexual terror’, <http://www.zimdaily.com/news/mugabe27.7556.html>, accessed, 10 December 2009.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Raped by Mugabe’s Thugs’, *The Standard*, 13 March 2010.

betrayal at its highest order with consequences as happened to Judas Iscariot.

## **Conclusion**

The paper attempted to look at the figure of Judas Iscariot in relation to Zimbabwean politics. The Judas Iscariot figure has been used for exclusivist purposes against opposition groupings. However, the role that was played by Judas Iscariot in the salvation economy should help political parties in Zimbabwe on the important role that different perspectives can play in the lives of the people. Instead of viewing the Judas figure as a retrogressive figure as done by some Zimbabwean politicians in general in justifying the messianic selection of certain individuals as predestined leaders, Judas can be used as a catalyst in upholding diversity of opinions and curbing resultant consequences of violence as happened to Judas. Oppositional politics must in fact be encouraged if the Zimbabwean society is to move forward without the present intermittent cancerous disease of violence that has characterised the Zimbabwean religio-political socialization.

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## ***Inspiring for Liberation – Legitimizing for Occupation. Interpretations of the Exodus from Southern Africa***<sup>1</sup>

### ***Introduction***

“Its [the Exodus’] enduring appeal is shown by the way it has been appropriated again and again over the centuries, by Puritans and Boers, Zionists and black South Africans,” writes John Collins (Collins 2005:53) in *The Bible after Babel*. The reading of the Exodus by a Boer in 1900 diametrically opposes the reading of the same text by members of Zionist/Messianic churches at the same time. In this paper I focus on these opposing hermeneutics. To do this I will use examples from Southern Africa which I will present in a chronological order. While focusing on the Exodus, I want to bring out the political implications of the Exodus for those who appropriated the narrative to their purposes.

Firstly, I will analyze three examples using a reception-history point of view. To do this, I will compare three different readings of the Exodus: a dispatch from the Boer Paul Kruger in 1900, the person Isaiah Shembe, his founding of the amaNazaretha church and his effect on his followers (around 1930), and Musa Dube and her postcolonial reading of Exodus and Joshua (around 1990). The analysis will focus on rhetorical aspects paying special attention to the way the Exodus is used within the examples. Then, I will evaluate these approaches and try to figure out how the reception history can help to shed light on the ethics of biblical interpretation since the ethics do not lie in the biblical text itself.

The examples I will present differ in quality and in genre. In these examples, the Exodus is usually not referred to as a consistent narrative but as a motif, which alludes to different incidents within the Exodus narrative. However, the intensity and frequency of using the motif and its interpretation need to be distinguished. I will sometimes refer to the Exodus motif in connection to a specific incident from the Book of Exodus. Other times, I will refer to aspects which are somehow linked with the Exodus motif but are never mentioned in the Book of Exodus; the idea of the ‘promised land’ belongs in this category.

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Duke Grounds who revised this essay.

Reception history does not pay attention to the fact that the Book of Exodus contains different, sometimes competing, theological concepts. The combination of other biblical books like Deuteronomy and Joshua with the Book of Exodus is an even greater challenge since the theological concepts are multifaceted and the composition of the texts are so different that they actually cannot be mingled with each other. Reception history, however, neglects this aspect.

For the analyses I will concentrate on terms like 'liberation,' 'slavery,' 'promised land,' 'red sea,' 'Pharaoh,' and 'chosen people' which can be seen as terms indicating the Exodus motif. Additionally, I will look at analogies that refer to the Book of Exodus, e.g. Moses as a leader-figure and other incidents that hint toward the life of Moses as told in the Pentateuch.

### **1) Paul Kruger and the Boers (1900)**

"They were followed by the British army, like that of a Pharaoh [sic], and everywhere were beset by the unbelieving black 'Canaanites.' Yet because God's people acted according to His will, He delivered them out of the hands of their enemies and gave them the freedom in the Promised Land." (Moodie 1975:5). This quotation is from Moodie in his book *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*. It summarizes the perspectives of the Afrikaner who left the Cape Colony and went north in order to found their own independent nation. This event which took place in the 1830s and 1840s is called the Great Trek. The quotation contains allusion to the Exodus motif. Although the quotation is not from a Boer, the author Moodie adopted the images and language used by the Boers. More direct examples can be given from Paul Kruger who was the first president of Transvaal and, by the way, a strong follower of Dutch Calvinism. In his memoirs, many allusions to the Exodus can be found. I want to present one circular dispatch from Kruger from 1900 in order to show how Kruger mixed religious language, biblical metaphors, and political intentions. Here, the Exodus plays an important role.

Kruger wrote the Circular Dispatch on June 20th in 1900. This was just four months before the war between the British and the Boers (the so called Anglo-Boer War) broke out. Kruger needed to leave the capital Pretoria because the British troops were right at the edge of the town. The dispatch was written in Machadodorp where Kruger had a railway carriage in which he lived. The threat from the British was serious. In

this situation he wrote a dispatch for his commandants and officers. It is four pages long and can be divided into four parts. The first part is an introduction, but, nevertheless, Kruger got directly to the point. The main theme is the fight against the British. The last part is a small conclusion referring to the most important points of the dispatch. In between are two parts which are introduced by the phrase: “Brothers, I beseech you abandon not your faith” (Kruger 1902:399). In the second part rhetorical questions are used. Some of them are combined with an anaphora: “Is not our God the same God” (Kruger 1902:399f). Then Kruger alluded to certain biblical stories. He referred three times to the Exodus, once to the story of Daniel, and to the Gideon narrative. But the anaphora and the rhetorical questions are also related to stories from the New Testament, like Peter walking on the water, healing people from leprosy, and even Christ’s rising from the dead. Kruger did not choose biblical stories by chance. He used stories which illustrated miracles and showed how God saved his people through unexpected miracles in situations where nothing but miracles could help.

The scheme of rhetorical questions is interrupted on page 401 where Kruger referred to the actual situation. Here is no longer the question “Is not our God the same God” (Kruger 1902:399) but the answer linked with the rhetorical question: “And this same God our Lord and Saviour”. The events of the last months are referred to and are described as the actions of God. The sentence which started as an answer becomes a question in the end: “dare we doubt that He who commenced his work will finish it?” (Kruger 1902:401). The miraculous God is not only the biblical God – he is the God who is responsible for the situation the Boers are in, and they hope that he will save them as God did with the people referred to in the biblical stories. After this short interruption, Kruger continued in his scheme of rhetorical questions.

The third part gives direct advice on what to do and what not to do. Here, Kruger alluded to actual political situations and calls upon the intuition of his officers and commandants to do the right thing.

When analyzing the dispatch it becomes obvious that there is a massive usage of the word ‘fight’. Within four pages the word is used eight times. Another word field which attracts attention is ‘belief’. Words like ‘belief’, ‘unbelief’, ‘faith’, ‘trust’ are used all over the dispatch. This leads to the main point of the text: Kruger tried to appeal to the faith of his officers so that they feel religiously committed to stay with Kruger and

the Boers and not to surrender to the British. Clearly, Kruger worked with the scheme of reward – when believing in God – and with punishment – when losing faith. The word ‘fight’ shows that Kruger expected his officers to fight for the Boers’ concerns and that his main wish was to motivate his officers not to give up. The linkage of ‘fight’ and ‘faith’ demonstrates Kruger’s attempt to relate two themes which do not belong together per se. In his dispatch it becomes obvious that you must believe and that you must fight. Not fighting means to lose faith and to not “enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Kruger 1902:399).

Most interesting is the usage of the Exodus motif. Kruger referred to it three times: “Is not our God the same God who led Israel under the power of His miracles out of the land of Pharaoh? Did He not lead them safely through the Red Sea? Did He not hide them in the thick cloud which was darkness to the enemy, but light to His children” (Kruger 1902:399f). “Is not our God the same God who made fresh water flow from a rock, refreshing all Israel?” (Kruger 1902:400) “He often leads His children through the barren desert, where it seems as if they could never get through” (Kruger 1902:402).

Of the biblical stories mentioned by Kruger in this dispatch, the Exodus is the most frequent. The examples given from the Exodus are interesting since they refer to different aspects. Firstly, Kruger wanted to highlight the miraculous power of God. That is why he probably referred to the story of water flowing from the rock (Ex. 17:1-7). This story could also be seen as a reference to a God who provides his people with all that is necessary. Secondly, as in the metaphor of the barren desert, he used strong images from biblical texts to show the despair of the Israelites. The officers and commandants were probably in a similar kind of despair and a reference to a biblical story like the Exodus could motivate them to keep going. The first quotation from the dispatch is interesting since the Red Sea, the most common metaphor from the Exodus, is mentioned. Although Kruger is again concerned with miracles, he was also using the cloud as a double image. On one hand, it reminds the readers of the dispatch of a sign giving orientation. On the other, Kruger converted the images of the cloud into a negative image for the unbelievers. The metaphors used point directly towards the Book of Exodus but were transformed into other images which were more significant to the situation the Boers were in.



Interestingly, Kruger did not refer to the promised-land metaphor. Although he applied this in other texts and speeches<sup>2</sup>, he did not justify the fight against the British with the promised-land argument as is common in South African history.<sup>3</sup>

This short analysis of the dispatch has shown that Kruger used religious language and biblical metaphors to strengthen his message. By linking the situation of the Israelites with the situation of the Boers, he could convince the readers to continue fighting. Although the situation of the Boers was probably a very difficult one, Kruger used biblical miracles in order to motivate his troops not to give up.

In *The Memories of Paul Kruger*, many biblical references can be found including many examples of the Exodus motif. However, this single example gives an impression of how Kruger used biblical allusions. Concerning the dispatch presented here, Kruger's aim was to link the needs of his officers with those of the Israelites. This identification leads to implicit normativity. The Boers' actions are legitimized because of their linkage with biblical texts. The Bible is used as book for motivation without reflecting on the negative effects a usage like this can have on marginalized groups such as the indigenous Africans in South Africa.

## **2) *Isaiah Shembe (around 1930)***

Another example from nearly the same time is that of Isaiah Shembe who used the Exodus and especially the figure of Moses. Although the biblical text remained the same, the results and the political intention for which Shembe used the text were totally opposed to those of the Boers. Intensive research has been done on Shembe, his life, and his use of the Bible, but the research results are disparate and some books are not available in Germany. Since Shembe was Zulu, some hymns, articles, and his biography were written in Zulu and are not yet translated. This is why not all of his work can be regarded for this article.

Isaiah Shembe was born around 1870 in the Orange Free State (Mzizi 2004:191). The exact date is unknown. In 1906, he was baptized; afterwards he was introduced to the Wesleyan and Zionist church traditions

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<sup>2</sup> See Speech to the commencement of the Sitting, October, 2nd 1899; Kruger 1902:376.

<sup>3</sup> See Deist, Ferdinand E.: "The dangers of Deuteronomy. A page from the reception history of the book." Pages 13-29 in *Studies in Deuteronomy* (FS C.J. Labuschagne). Ed. by García Martínez et al.

(cf. West 2007:490). He then reported having visions and dreams. Since he also realized that he was meant to be a healer, he started wandering around the country healing people. Although he originally had no interest in founding his own church, the Native Land Act of 1913 encouraged Shembe to buy land which was supposed to be sold to white farmers and found his own church on the new bought ground. He rented this fertile land to fellows of his community who could not afford to buy land (Heuser 2003:128-130). The amaNazaretha church founded by Shembe survives until today.

When Isaiah Shembe died in 1935, his son Johannes Galilee became his successor. In 1975, the amaNazaretha Church split into two strands: one led by the older son Amos Shembe and the other by Isaiah's grand-son Londa Shembe. The amaNazaretha Church has today more than 500,000 members (Hexham 1997:220). Gerald West even assumes that it could be more than one million members (West 2006:157).

Isaiah Shembe probably knew the Bible very well, although it is quite likely that he was illiterate. Studies, such as the one by West (West 2007), show that Isaiah Shembe used biblical stories (e.g. Jephtha's daughter) together with other narratives to form a new text. How could he have known the biblical text without having read it? The New Testament scholar Maarman Samuel Tshehla presumes that Shembe used "Bible literacy" which is a "form of literacy... characterized by functionally non-literate people who 'spell-read' the Bible" (West 2007:492). Tshehla explains: "They combine their knowledge of biblical tradition, collected over the years from sermons and/or public readings of the Bible, with patient identification of each letter and syllable until each word, phrase or sentence rings familiar" (Tshehla 2004:184).

This hermeneutical presupposition will shape the following analysis of some texts or phenomenon related to the Exodus.

Moses is often regarded as a figure of identification for Isaiah Shembe (Vilakazi, Mthethwa, and Mpanza 1986:39-40; Berner 2006:149; Sundkler 1948:277). Therefore, I will trace the Moses-figure within the texts and oral traditions left by Isaiah Shembe.

Gerhardus Oosthuizen wrote in his monograph *The Theology of Southern African Messiah*, which mainly contains the hymns of Isaiah Shembe, that he is "the Moses not only of the Zulu nation but of Africa" (Oosthuizen 1967:45). There is a chain of argument which has to be followed: firstly, Oosthuizen explains that in Zulu tradition there is a person called

nceku who is the chief's or king's assistant. The nceku is responsible for important business undertaken by the chief or king. This shows the importance of a person like the nceku; the nceku has a high status in society. The Zulu Bible also uses the word nceku. In Numbers 12:7 there is the phrase that Moses is a servant. In the Zulu Bible the word nceku is used for servant. This vocabulary, then, points directly to Moses (although there are also other persons in the Bible for whom this word is used, e.g. Jesus, Paul, and the prophets in general). Secondly, Oosthuizen presents hymns composed by the amaNazaretha church in which Isaiah Shembe is called a nceku:

“He remembered Africa  
because He is righteous,  
He did not forget his people  
because He is righteous” (Oosthuizen 1967:164).  
“He remembered his people  
whose hips are naked  
You sent them Isaiah your iNceku  
because he is righteous” (Oosthuizen 1967:45).

Oosthuizen argues, as I said before, that “Isaiah Shembe is here the Moses not only of the Zulu nation but of Africa” (Oosthuizen 1967:45). Oosthuizen continues: “Although Shembe refers only once to Moses [...] in the ‘Prayer for the Sabbath’, Section 3, 16, where he states that Jehova has written the law through Moses, his iNceku, Shembe also usurped his position” (Oosthuizen 1967:46).

There are more hints of Shembe as Moses. The Swedish missionary and professor for church history Bengt Sundkler, for example, cites from Johannes Galilee's sermon in 1958 where he said: “[Isaiah] Shembe was just like Moses who was God's great servant. [...] Our Moses brought us God among us Zulus” (Sundkler 1961:334). Here, the motif of the servant is used again. Furthermore, Shembe's son clearly links Isaiah Shembe with Moses. Sundkler also uses a hymn in order to underpin his thesis of Shembe as Moses. The hymn is as follows:

“To-day you are the laughing-stock  
Of all the Nations.  
So wake up Africa  
Seek thy Saviour.  
To-day our men and women  
Are slaves” (Hymn No. 46).  
“We ourselves are saved,  
We all Nazaretha

We shall drink at that rock  
Of Sinai's mountain" (Hymn No. 83) (Sundkler 1961:334).

The words "slaves" and the phrase "We shall drink at the rock of Sinai's mountain" are strongly linked to the Exodus. "Slaves" and "Sinai" are self-explanatory, and "to drink from a rock" also brings the story of Moses causing water to flow from the rock (Ex. 17:1-7) to mind.

Sundkler also found other traces of Shembe as Moses which he included in his book *Zulu Zions and some Swazi Zionists*. Here he does not follow the identification of Shembe as Moses, but rather, looks for motifs within his biography which can be interpreted as hints towards Moses' life. Sundkler writes:

"It was on a mountain that Shembe as a young man had his first vision. When he returned from that experience, he did not work for a time. He said 'I have seen Jehova'. As a Moses, he came to another mountain, inhlangukazi, where he had strange visions. When he returned, he was a 'different man'" (Sundkler 1976:314).

Shembe's experience brings Moses' encounter with God on Sinai to mind (cf. Ex. 19). Moreover, the mountain has a special meaning in the amaNazaretha church until today. Sundkler makes the following comparison: "Just as Moses had gone to the Mountain in order to praise God, so he [Shembe] must go to the Mountain, with his congregation, to bring praises to God" (Sundkler 1976:167).

It is not difficult to show these parallels, but it is hard to see the intentions behind them. Written texts from the amaNazaretha church show that Shembe was a kind of liberator. This can also be derived from Shembe's biography written by John L. Dube. But how far can this liberation motif be linked with specific political issues?

It must be recognized that Shembe was politically active and that his fight for land (cf. Heuser 2003:124-127) and his caring for his followers (cf. Heuser 2003:128-134) are only understandable in relation to his theology. The Zulu anthropologist Vilakazi summarizes it like this:

"Shembe was both a religious and political leader; for he was concerned with establishing a new social order among the Zulu people. In this, he could be compared to Moses of the Old Testament. Perhaps the suggested parallel with Moses will surprise some people [...]. Shembe, like Moses, aimed to establish a new social order and one which religious and political elements would be closely interwoven. [...] He had a clear, divine mission to liberate his people from servitude in Egypt; and to lead them to the promised land." (Vilakazi, Mthethwa, and Mpanza 1986:39-40)

Although the linkage of Shembe and Moses and the Exodus is vague, it illustrates how important the story of the Exodus and the figure of Moses as the liberator from slavery are for the amaNazaretha and for Shembe. Interestingly, the Boers used the same texts as Shembe and his followers. Their aim – liberation – was the same, but their oppressors were different, and their yearning for freedom was of a contrary quality.

### 3) *Musa W. Dube (1990s)*

Besides those readings which mainly identify with the Israelites' perspective, there are other readings – the so called postcolonial readings – which emerged in the 1980s. The Palestinian Edward Said is one of the founders of postcolonial theory. In 1986, he wrote a review of Michael Walzer's book *Exodus and Revolution*. In a following discussion between Said and Walzer in the journal *Grand Street*, Said wrote: "There is no Israel without the conquest of Canaan and the expulsion or inferior status of Canaanites – then as now" (Walzer and Said 1986:255). The perspective taken by Said – the Canaanite one – is also taken by Musa Dube, Professor for New Testament at the University of Botswana.<sup>4</sup>

Dube's dissertation has the title *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. It has become a standard work for postcolonial and feminist readings of the Bible. In chapter 4, Dube develops a postcolonial reading of the Exodus and Joshua; this will serve as our third example.

Dube's reading is very close to the text and, because she is a biblical scholar, her reading is "critical"<sup>5</sup>. This distinguishes her readings from the readings of Paul Kruger and Isaiah Shembe.

Chapter 4 of Dube's dissertation is titled "Method in Ancient Imperializing Texts" (Dube 2004:57). Her aim is to analyze imperializing literature in order to show how imperialism is literarily-rhetorically legitimized. The chapter is organized according to four questions presented in the introduction:

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<sup>4</sup> This perspective was also taken by scholars from other continents. One article strongly referring to the Exodus was written by the Native American Robert Allen Warrior (Warrior, Robert A, "A Native American Perspective. Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians." Pages 277–85 in *Voices from the margin. Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Ed. by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997.)

<sup>5</sup> "Critical" is meant here according to the distinction "ordinary" and "critical" readers as it is used by Dube herself and other scholars like Gerald West. Cf. Dube, Musa W. and Gerald O. West, "An introduction. How we have come to 'read with.'" *Semeia* 73 (1996): 7–17.

“1. Does the text have a clear stance against the political imperialism of its time? 2. Does this text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands, and if so, how does it justify itself? 3. How does this text construct difference: Is there a dialogue and mutual interdependence, or condemnation and replacement for all that is foreign? 4. Does this text employ gender representations to construct relationships of subordination and domination?” (Dube 2004:57).

Before going deeper into detail, Dube explains why she refers to the Exodus and to Joshua. She writes: “The choice to focus on Exodus and Joshua 1-12, therefore, only serves to highlight the point of departure from one land, Egypt, mainly covered by Exodus, and the arrival in and possession of a foreign land, Canaan, vividly idealized and dramatized in Joshua” (Dube 2004:58). Furthermore, Dube states that the question of the historicity of the Book of Exodus and Joshua is of no concern for her literary-rhetorical analysis.

After these introductory remarks, Dube answers the first question mentioned above and concludes that slavery hints to imperialistic tendencies. Although, the story of the Exodus seems to be closely connected to liberation, this liberation is “twined with God’s promise to give them the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites [...] – an inhabited land!” (Dube 2004:60).

Questions 2 to 4 are discussed in the following paragraph called “Anti-conquest Ideology in Exodus.” The anti-conquest ideology that Dube refers to intends to disclose the exploitive act of colonization. It concerns the question of whether or not traveling from one land to another is authorized (cf. Dube 2004:60). Furthermore, it calls for an analysis of how the image of the targeted land and its people and the identity of the colonizers are constructed (cf. Dube 2004:60). Lastly, it suggests the investigation of “employing of female gender to articulate relations of subjugation and domination” (Dube 2004:60f).

Referring to the question if and how traveling is authorized, Dube points out that “traveling is central to the book of Exodus” (Dube 2004:61). There is: a) the title of the Book which means “going out”; b) the fact that at the end of the book the people is still trekking and the targeted land is not yet reached; and c) several literary-rhetorical hints, like God’s often repeated order to “Let my people go,” in direct and reported speech. All of this shows that traveling is one of the main themes of the Book of Exodus. Traveling to an inhabited land which is meant to be the land for the Israelites is justified by God himself, since he is the main

character of the story giving advices to the people and to Pharaoh. Furthermore, he is the giver of the land. In order to legitimize traveling to and conquering of the land of Canaan, the introduction of the Exodus is rhetorically used to arouse the reader's sympathy with the Israelites.

The characterization of the targeted land, Dube points out, is positive. The labeling of the land as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (e.g. Ex. 33:3) demonstrates the economic interests of the Israelites. Dube shows that the targeted land is repeatedly described as an inhabited land. Even the peoples living in the land are known. Though the land itself is positively characterized, the inhabitants of the land are not. There is the typical opposition of colonizer and colonized: The colonized are described negatively, especially regarding their religious practices. The Israelites construct their own identity in opposition to the Canaanites; by degrading the Canaanites, the Israelites become the holy and chosen people of God (cf. Dube 2004:66).

The contrasting description of the Israelites and the Canaanites becomes clearer when referring to the "contact zone." Dube analyzes the quality of the contact between the different cultures, and she observes that the contact between the Israelites and the Canaanites is imagined in the book of Exodus using verbs of destruction like "melt, blot out, drive out, hand over" (Dube 2004:68). The "realization" of the contact as described in the book of Joshua fits the images of contact as presented in the book of Exodus; it is characterized by annihilation of the Canaanites.

Dube pays special attention to the gender aspect and links it with post-colonial interests. As Dube shows, western feminist interpreters point out patriarchal oppression in biblical texts but they do not take imperialistic structures into account. Therefore, Dube shows how the colonized and the colonizing women are presented in the book of Exodus and in the book of Joshua. In the first chapters of Exodus the situation of the Israelites in Egypt is that of a colonized people. Interestingly, there are several women presented who do not give in to the imperializing actions of Pharaoh but who fight against imperialism and patriarchy. During the trek up to the conquest of Canaan, the women change from the colonized to the colonizing but the "the women's role as the colonizer is almost nonexistent" (Dube 2004:75). Once again, the focus is put on colonized women: in the book of Joshua the focus is on Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute.

There is a short episode in the book of Joshua (Jos. 2) where her story is told: two Israelites are sent by Joshua in order to spy on Jericho and its inhabitants so that the capture of Jericho will be successful. The two spies come into the house of the prostitute Rahab who hides them from the King of Jericho. After Rahab asks to be saved along with her family when Jericho is captured, the spies agree and make the deal that Rahab should hang out the red ribbon through which the spies had been saved when they left the house of Rahab.

There are five crucial aspects to Dube's analysis of the Rahab story: 1) although the two Israelites' job is to spy out the Canaanite land, they only spy at Rahab's house. No further Canaanite land is visited or spied upon. The only contact the Israelites have is Rahab – a prostitute. Therefore, it is evident that Rahab can be seen as a representation of the whole Canaanite people. 2) Rahab is a prostitute, who can be taken by every man. This reflects the "colonizer's desire to enter and domesticate the land of Canaan." (Dube 2004:77) 3) that Rahab is a prostitute points to the aspect of wilderness and the superior moral status of the colonizers. 4) Rahab's voice is like the voice of the colonizers: "she is the mouthpiece of their agendas" (Dube 2004:78). Her spoken words reflect the colonizers' desires: if the people just accept the colonization it will be good and life bringing for them. Dube interprets Rahab's actions as collaboration: she acts on the side of the colonizers. Since her life and the life of her family seem to be the only ones to be rescued by the invaders, it seems that she gave up her own people, having no trust in them. 5) Rahab represents the Canaanites. With her behavior and her speech she incorporates the Canaanite people which wants to be dominated by the Israelites. Rahab therefore becomes a "cultural bomb" (Dube 2004:80, based on Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986:3) since she is asking for the annihilation of her people in their names (cf. Dube 2004:80).

In other articles like "Rahab says Hello to Judith" (Dube 2003) or "Rahab is Hanging out a Red Ribbon" (Dube 2005) Dube uses the Rahab story for different aims. Interestingly, she evolves the Rahab reading prisma which means that imperialism and patriarchy have to be recognized and to be fought against. The problem for western readers of this story (and of other stories, too) is that the oppression through patriarchy is seen by the readers. The imperialistic structures, however, are ignored and therefore are not discussed so that there is the risk of harmonizing the text and sticking to its imperialistic perspective.



In conclusion, Dube's perspective on the Exodus is very different from the other examples presented since her reading joins the Canaanite side. Her reading is influenced by her experience of (neo-) colonization and globalization. Within the interpretation a political message is implemented: those who belong to the 'colonizers' are not sensitive to the imperializing structures of the text. The experience of being colonized, of living in structures of colonization, shapes the interpretation of the texts. Therefore, Dube's reading has political intentions when she tries to read the text against the grain, to listen to the silenced voices, and to shift the point of view.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning I stated that ethics is not implemented in biblical texts. This becomes obvious in the three examples presented which show the wide range of possible interpretations and applications.

But how can we figure out what the intention of the biblical text really is and which interpretations are right? To answer this question I want to highlight four main aspects which can be regarded as a conclusion:

1) The redaction history (which is very complex and is discussed very contradictorily) shows that the text, especially Ex. 13 and 14, was not written as a historical report but as a vision of how the God of Israel should liberate his people from severe forms of oppression by the Assyrians and the Babylonians (cf. Bieberstein 2007). If the text is understood from its original intention, it cannot be seen as an encouragement to do as the text says since the text is a visionary reflection, a positive and biased answer on what have happened.

2) The Native American Robert Warrior wrote a postcolonial interpretation on the Exodus, too. Like Dube, he identifies with the Canaanites. In liberation theology for which the Exodus is the most central text, he explains that "the Canaanites should be the center of Christian theological reflection and political action. They are the last remaining voice in the text" (Warrior 1997:283). Only when the Canaanites are at the center of biblical interpretation can it be guaranteed that all parts of the Bible are read, "not just the part that inspires and justifies them [the readers]." (Warrior 1997:283). The Canaanites remind us of the other side of the biblical text which is most of the time silent. By not taking the most attractive aspects of the biblical narrative but by reading the whole story, by trying to read it against the grain, and by avoiding giving in to the

rhetoric of the text, the danger of “wrong” interpretation is not banished but at least diminished.

3) Reception history is not just an interesting method. Regarding the history of the interpretation of a biblical text can teach us which interpretation was good and which was fairly good. By looking back, it is easier to decide if an interpretation of a text was right or wrong. The reception history should have an impact on our reading nowadays. Whenever there was a “wrong” interpretation, it should not be repeated again. Moreover, interpretation is never completed. There will be new methods and new readings; and, by taking all these methods and approaches responsibly into account, mistakes will be made but just interpretations will also be found.

4) Ferdinand Deist worked on the Book of Deuteronomy and called it a “dangerous book” (Deist 1994:28). He also referred to the Boers and the Great Trek and how they used Deuteronomy to legitimize their actions. At the end of his article, he states that not the Book of Deuteronomy is the danger but the “uncritical readers” (Deist 1994:29). That does not mean that everyone needs to be a biblical scholar or that biblical interpretation should only be done by biblical scholars but that contact with biblical narratives should base on reflected, detailed reading while trying to internalize as many interpretations as possible and available. Without doing this, one’s own perspective on the Bible could become a dangerous one.

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*Joachim Kügler*

## ***Politics of Feeding: Reading John 6 (and 1 Cor 11) as Documents of Socio-political conflicts***

### ***Introduction***

The Gospel of John is traditionally seen as the most “spiritual” gospel without any political dimension. In antiquity, however, there is no kind of religion without political dimension and I even dare to doubt that a non-political religion exists today. In some of my former publications, I have already tried to show the political dimension of Johannine Christology which, by claiming that Jesus is the real and only king, disenfranchises the political religious basis of the Roman Empire. Jesus, of course, is not competing with the emperor’s power as Christ’s divine kingship is far beyond any earthly power. By stressing the exclusivity of Jesus’ kingship, the Gospel of John, however, excludes any religious interpretation of the ruler as “son of god” (*Divi filius*) and vice-regent of the gods (*Deorum vice*).<sup>1</sup> Therefore it should be quite clear that reading the gospel of John from a political perspective in the context of Africa, i.e. in the context of harsh socio-political conflicts, does not mean putting the gospel into a context into which it does not belong. On the contrary, a political interpretation of John leads the gospel back to its original context and lets John be John. When it comes to the question of poverty and hunger, the Gospel of John is not foreign to that field of political and social conflict, but actually belongs to it.

### ***1. Early Christians’ Celebrating Eucharist***

#### ***1.1 They really did eat at the Lord’s Supper!***

Today’s Christianities are used to NOT eating at the “table of the Lord.” When the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, it is usually done in an extremely

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<sup>1</sup> See my studies in: J. KÜGLER, *Der andere König. Religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Christologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 178), Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 1999; M. LABAHN, ‘Heiland der Welt’. Der gesandte Gottessohn und der römische Kaiser – ein Thema johanneischer Christologie?, in: id./ J. Zangenberg (Eds.), *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (TANZ 36), Tübingen: Francke 2002, 147-173; and now also: T.D. TROST, *Who should be king in Israel? A study on Roman imperial politics, the Dead Sea scrolls, and the Fourth Gospel*, New York [u.a.]: Lang 2010.

reduced and merely symbolic form which has nothing to do with filling one's stomach. We have to imagine that this was perfectly different in Ancient Christianity. Early Christians really did eat when they came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is clearly documented by the problems Paul is dealing with in 1. Cor 11. Obviously, the Christians in Corinth had a big problem with the Eucharist as some members of the community did not want to share. They enjoyed food and wine and left nothing for others. This meant that some participants had nothing to eat while others were not only filled up with food but even already drunk. This conflict could not have arisen if the Christians in Corinth would have celebrated Eucharist in the reduced way we are used to today. We have to imagine that in the early times of our Church, the Lord's Supper was a real banquet where not only bread and wine but also other food like fish was consumed. Celebrating the sacrament really meant eating, and filling one's stomach, although not the main purpose of this meeting, it was an absolutely normal part of it.

Even in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, the Eucharist was still a real meal which was both spiritually and physically satisfying. This is made clear by the *Didache*, a ritual book which dates around 150 CE.<sup>2</sup> Among the texts referring to the Eucharist, one can find a recommended prayer after repletion, the first part of which is cited here:

<sup>1</sup> But after being filled, give thanks thus: <sup>2</sup> 'We thank you, Holy Father, for your holy name, which you made dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known to us through Jesus, your son; yours (be) the glory into eternity. <sup>3</sup> You, Allruling Master, created all things on behalf of your name, and you give food and drink to humans to enjoy that they may give thanks to you but to us you give spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your son. (*Didache* 10:1-3)

As can be seen from this text of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, it took quite a long time until the Eucharist was transformed into merely symbolic eating which only satisfies spiritually.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the Eucharist was origi-

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<sup>2</sup> The *Διδαχή* or "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" is an early Christian text, dated by most scholars to the late first or early 2nd century CE. For first introductory information cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache>. My translation is based on the edition of K. WENGST (Ed.), *Didache (Apostellehre) – Barnabasbrief – Zweiter Klemensbrief – Schrift an Diognet (Schriften des Urchristentums, Bd. 2)*, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges. 1984, 1-100: 80. It can be compared with quite a lot of English versions accessible online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. KÜGLER, *Hungrig bleiben!? Warum das Mahlsakrament trennt und wie man die Trennung überwinden könnte*, Würzburg: Echter 2010, 44;64-66.

nally a meeting which, besides its spiritual effects, was also meant to fill the stomach of the participants, automatically adds a socio-political dimension.

## **1.2 Beyond hunger: The Eucharist as New Creation happening**

As ancient societies must be described as societies in which the food supply was always a precarious topic for the majority of the population, feeding was always a political topic as well. That is why giving bread and entertainment (*panem et circenses*) to the masses is one of the most important political acts of the ruler.<sup>4</sup> Not only in Roman time, but already in Hellenistic monarchies and in the ancient Near East in general, feeding his people was a basic function of the king; we will revisit this topic when we speak about John 6:15. The background of this was the fact that most people experienced conditions of life characterised by a shortage of food. Filling one's stomach was not something that could be taken for granted. In this regard, the situation of the majority in antiquity was the same as that of the global majority today. Taking into account the precarious situation of the food supply, it is not very surprising that in the younger texts of the Old Testament, the opulent banquet is a very convincing rendering of the perfect life in the Kingdom of God as can be seen from Isa 25:6:

On this mountain, Yahweh Sabaoth for all peoples is preparing a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of succulent food, of well-strained wines.

This topic was taken up a lot by Jesus and the early Christian tradition, as can be seen from many texts in the synoptic gospels. Jesus was called “a glutton and drunkard” (Mat 11:19) by his opponents and we can imagine that his love for food and wine was not only a personal weakness, but an important part of Jesus' prophetic behaviour. As the kingdom of God is already about to begin here and now, fasting no longer makes sense. This aspect of Jesus' mission is carried on by post-Easter tradition through many texts, for example the narratives of the Lord feeding thousands (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mat 14:13-21; 15,32-39; Luke 9:11-17; John 6,1-15). These miracle stories may be mere fiction, but in any case they document an important aspect of Jesus' understanding of God's kingdom: There will no longer be any more hunger. All people are able to

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. VEYNE, *Bread and circuses. Historical sociology and political pluralism*, London: Lane 1990 [= *Le pain et le cirque : sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris : Éd. du Seuil 1976].

not only fill their stomachs but furthermore enjoy best food and best wine in abundance. Those who are tortured by hunger can be called happy as God himself is about to change their situation: “Happy are they/you who hunger, for they/you shall be satisfied!” (Q 6:21)<sup>5</sup>.

When early Christians gathered for the Lord’s Supper, they remembered Jesus’ salvific death and looked forward to a new world, God’s new creation. This future world was already present in their community. As Paul puts it in 2.Cor 5:17, “anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see” (cf. Gal 6:15). As this new order is represented by the Christian community as body of Christ, the structure of the Church must be an adequate expression of the new world. The common hierarchies and frictions of the old, sinful world are overcome. Therefore Jews “in Christ” no longer rank higher than pagans, slaves are not less than their masters, and male prevalence over females cannot be tolerated any longer (Gal 3:26-28).<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3 The Lord’s Supper needs sharing (1.Cor 11)**

The egalitarian structure of early Christian communities is an indispensable expression of God’s new world order, and therefore early Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a different way from the banquets of the old world. The hierarchical order of the pagan banquets shows the free rich man as the highest top of the pyramid of honor<sup>7</sup>, while the poor enslaved woman marks the lowest end of the societal hierarchy. In the same way, the Christian community banquet should express the faith

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<sup>5</sup> For the reconstruction of the Sayings Source’s text of the beatitude of the hungry cf. J.M. ROBINSON/ P. HOFFMANN/ J.S. KLOPPENBORG (Eds.). *The critical edition of Q. Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French translations of Q and Thomas*. Leuven: Peeters 2000, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. KÜGLER, *Gal 3,26-28 und die vielen Geschlechter der Glaubenden. Impuls für eine christliche Geschlechtsrollenpastoral jenseits von „Sex and Gender“*, in: M. E. Aigner/ J. Pock (Eds.), *Geschlecht quer gedacht. Widerstandspotenziale und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in kirchlicher Praxis (Werkstatt Theologie 13)*, Münster: Lit 2009, 53-70.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R.M. MCRAE, *Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord’s Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices*, in: *Journal for Biblical Literature* 130 (2011) 165-181. I would, however, insist that for Paul the main contrast was between the meal practices at home and the community meal. That is why he mentions houses (οικίαις) in 1.Cor 11:22, which also is a clear indication that the problem focused on the behavior of wealthy Christians, who would be the only Christians to actually own houses.

based structure of this special community. If all are “one in Christ,” (Gal 3:28) there cannot be any hierarchy at the Lord’s Supper. We do not know who, for example, served the meal, who washed the feet of the participants, and who headed the ceremony as symposiarch. As presiding the Lord’s Supper is never connected in the New Testament texts with the official church structure coming up in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, it is highly probable that the Christian communities did not know the office of a symposiarch, but celebrated the meal as a community of “brothers”.<sup>8</sup> As female Christians were also labeled as “sons of God” (Gal 3,26)<sup>9</sup> and the difference between male and female was seen as having lost any significance, it is highly probable that there was no longer any female-specific work which the “sisters” were automatically obliged to do. A female slave was certainly no longer obligated to wash the feet of all other Christians, but could instead be called by the Spirit to manage community affairs as Tryphaena and Tryphosa did in Rome (Rom 16:12)<sup>10</sup> For rich free men, becoming Christians and taking part in the Lord’s Supper meant quite a big challenge: They had to accept women as equal members of the banquet community as well as enslaved persons and poor ones. The social order that privileged them outside the Christian community was part of the old sinful world and lost its power when they entered the new creation which the Spirit constituted in the midst of the old one. The privileged were challenged to renounce their social status when they became members of the body of Christ. This challenge was especially clear and concrete when Christians came together to the Lord’s Supper, which has to be understood as the manifes-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. H.J. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern. Ihre Gestalt und Bedeutung nach der neutestamentlichen Briefliteratur und der Johannesoffenbarung* (WUNT 2/255), Tübingen: Mohr 2008, 133 f.

<sup>9</sup> In the patriarchal context of his time, Paul had to call female Christians “sons of God”. “Daughters of God” would have meant something inferior. Sisters usually were expected to be submissive to their brothers; female equality in Christ therefore had to be expressed by the metaphor of sonship. Cf. J. KÜGLER, Gal 3,26-28 und die vielen Geschlechter der Glaubenden. Impuls für eine christliche Geschlechtsrollenpastoral jenseits von „Sex and Gender“, in: M. E. Aigner/ J. Pock (Eds.), *Geschlecht quer gedacht. Widerstandspotenziale und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in kirchlicher Praxis* (Werkstatt Theologie 13), Münster: Lit 2009, 53-70: 56-62.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. SCHREIBER [Arbeit mit der Gemeinde (Röm 16:6,12)]. Zur versunkenen Möglichkeit der Gemeindeleitung durch Frauen, in: *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000) 204-226], who convincingly points out that the four women mentioned by Paul in Rom 16:12 held leading functions in the Roman community.



tation of the Christian community's identity as united body of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Not all of the community members were up to this challenge.

We can see this quite clearly from 1. Cor 11:18-21 in which Paul criticises Corinthian Christians for not celebrating the Lord's Supper properly.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Christians used to bring food from home to eat it in community. Of course, wealthy members could bring more and better food with them than those who were poor, and perhaps some poor and enslaved members could not bring any food at all. Influenced by their pre-Christian customs, Corinthian Christians tended to take their meals separately, i.e. according to the societal hierarchies and the honor codes they lived by and which separated them. Those who could bring more consumed their own food, perhaps even in a special place at the assembly.<sup>13</sup> They could even enjoy wine while poor members could not even eat anything but were left hungry. Paul, however, criticises this practice heavily and tells the Corinthians that eating in separation does not constitute celebrating the Lord's Supper. Those who eat in such a way disregard the "body of Christ" (i.e. the community of believers eating together). If they wanted to continue in this manner, they had better eat at home. Paul does not eliminate filling the stomach from the Lord's Supper,<sup>14</sup> but tells the wealthy Christians who have houses that eating in separation is celebrating the order of the old sinful world whereas eating the Lord's Supper means celebrating the divine order of the new world of redemption, i.e. the unity of Christ's body. That explains why Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of Jesus' words at his last supper. The Lord's Supper celebrates the new status with which the believers were endowed by the salvific death of Jesus Christ. They all are one in Jesus Christ because he died for them all and redeemed all of them from sin. Being baptized on the salvific death of Christ, they are integrated into his sonship and are equal in the Holy Spirit. This new status of the believers does not allow separation at the Lord's Supper, but urges the organization of an egalitarian banquet which is a true representation of the new world order in Christ, in which the primary value is love and the basic

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 105-110.

<sup>12</sup> For a convincing reconstruction of the Corinthian conflict cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 134-136.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MCRAE, *Eating with Honor*, 175-177.

<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately STEIN [*Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 146-150] tends to misunderstand Paul in that point.

structure is sharing. Only if those who are dispossessed and without honor in the world are honored and fed well by sharing, the “body of Christ” really is respected. Eating in separation, i.e. eating according to the old world order, means disregarding the “body of Christ” and eating and drinking in “judgment”.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. *Johannine Eucharistic Theology and its socio-political background***

Although my reading of John 6 developed here is very much a synchronic reading on the level of the final redactional text, before starting I should give a brief overview on how I see this chapter’s redaction history, which is one of the most debated problems in Johannine exegesis. The model on which I base my reading is in the tradition of modern Literarkritik, which understands the exploration of the different layers of a text as an exploration of the repertoire of the text, i.e. of the tradition a text is working with. Here, John 6 is understood as the work of the final redactor of John, who is not only responsible for chapter 21, but for the final state of the Fourth Gospel in general. For the bread of life discourse, the redaction used material coming from the Johannine community tradition. This material can be found mostly in John 6:28-30-32.35.37-38.40-44.47.59. For other parts of chapter 6, the Johannine redaction rather freely used the gospel of Mark as source: John 6:1-21 and 6:60-71 are based on Mark 6:30-52 and 8:27-33.<sup>16</sup> John 6:22-25 and 6:48-58 are redactional products, which means that the final redaction displays a specific interest in the topic of the Eucharist.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Older interpretation often understood Paul’s critique of “not distinguishing the body” (1.Cor 11:29), as a warning about the proper treatment of the consecrated Eucharistic bread. But Paul is not dealing with sacred food here. The “body” of Christ is the Christian community celebrating Lord’s Supper. Not making a difference between this body as presence of new creation with a new divine order, therefore means eating in the fashion of the old world and by that falling back into the state of unredeemed sinners who deserve God’s wrath and condemnation. Whoever eats in the fashion of the old world eats “judgment”. Those, however, who eat in the proper Christian way, respecting the others and sharing with them, transcend the rules of the old world and eat a spiritual food, which is “a sharing in the body of Christ” (1.Cor 10:16).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. I. DUNDERBERG, *Johannes und die Synoptiker*. Studien zu Joh 1-9, Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica 1994, 127-174.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed arguments for this literarkritische model cannot be given here, but are to be found in: J. KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*. Literarische, theologische und

## 2.1 *The Johannine feeding narrative:*

### *Why Christ does not want to be king in this world*

If the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel knew the synoptic Gospels and used them as sources in a rather free manner, then the completion of the Gospel of John quite probably must be dated towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE or even later.<sup>18</sup> There are some details that might indicate that the gospel was written in the time of the Roman emperor Domitian.<sup>19</sup> In that case, the Fourth Gospel originated in a time of intensified imperial ideology and cult, which included the ruler's being hailed as breadwinner. For Domitian, this special aspect of his divine authority can be found in the inscription of an obelisque which he erected to celebrate the divinity of his family. Domitian is hailed as "visible god" (ntr nfr) and "the heir of the father of gods, sitting on the throne of Horus". Of course, the emperor is also said to be the supreme breadwinner who provides food in abundance for the people:

He filled the land with his food;  
And the being and not-being [= this life and hereafter?]  
Is flooded with his nourishment

This kind of royal propaganda is part of a broad stream of ruler's ideology which can be traced back to old Egyptian times and is also documented in almost all royal traditions of the ancient Near East. Feeding his people is one of the most important functions of the king and if he plays the role of breadwinner successfully, he displays the divine legitimation of his rule in a most convincing way. In some cases, for example when the royal administration in early Egypt organised an intelligent system of watering the fields so that more and better harvesting was possible, the image of the king as breadwinner was not merely ideological. In other cases, "feeding the masses" was pure ideology, especially when the royal tax system was a brutal method of exploitation which first

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historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte (SBB 16), Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 1988, 186-196.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. my introduction to the Fourth Gospel: J. KÜGLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, in: M. Ebner/ S. Schreiber (Eds.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008, 208-228: 218-219.

<sup>19</sup> In John 20:28 e.g. Thomas confesses Jesus as "my Lord and my God", which could be a kind of Christian counter-gospel to the imperial ideology of Domitian (Roman Emperor from 81 to 96 CE) who is reported to have introduced the same title (*Dominus et deus noster*; cf. Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13:2) as the proper way of addressing himself. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 156-164.

generated the very poverty which it later claimed to “heal,” more or less symbolically, by acts of royal charity. In Roman imperialism, the latter case was the norm. Exploitation of the masses through a harsh system of direct and indirect taxes allowed a small upper class to get rich. At the same time, the majority of the population became increasingly impoverished. If the emperors propagated themselves as breadwinners by public acts of feeding the masses,<sup>20</sup> they only gave back a small portion of what they had stolen before.

Thus it is not at all surprising that local rebellious movements against the Roman Empire tried to satisfy the needs of the people in a more effective way than the emperor and his local representatives did. More often than not, the anti-imperial movements, however, also failed to improve the living conditions of the majority and feeding people remained mere ideology. The anti-imperial prophetic movements during the time of the Second Temple never stood the slightest chance of politically organising an improvement of the food supply for Jewish people, but most likely<sup>21</sup> also claimed to be breadwinners according to biblical traditions, heirs of David (2.Sam 6:19; Psa 72:16), Elisha (2.Kings 4:42-44) and especially Moses, the prototype of a prophet-king<sup>22</sup> whom God elected as agent to nourish his beloved people (Exo 16).

In front of this background, it can easily be understood why the masses wanted Jesus to be their prophet-king (John 6:14-15). They had just experienced someone feeding them in a miraculous and abundant way

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 76-86.

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately Josephus Flavius, our main source for political messianism in early Jewish times, is most skeptical about these movements and therefore does not give much detail on what they did to improve the situation of the population. We can, however, conclude from Josephus's depiction that at least some prophets tried to repeat Israel's exodus from Egypt. If that is true, the “signs of liberation” (σημεῖα ἐλευθερίας, bell. 2:259) they expected from God, would definitely have included manna as bread from heaven. That breadwinning still is a royal topic in early Judaism can, however, more clearly be learned from the Jewish conversion novel “Joseph and Aseneth”. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 80 f. – For the popular messianic movements in early Judaism cf. K.E. POMYKALA, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism. Its History and Significance for Messianism*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995, 258-264; and also J.J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature*, New York: Doubleday 1995, 195-200.

<sup>22</sup> For the combination of king and prophet cf. Philo, who writes about Moses, that “in accordance with the providential will of God he was both a king and a lawgiver, and a high priest and a prophet”, who in each of his offices “displayed the most eminent wisdom and virtue” (Mos 2:3).

(6:13) and thus fulfilling the expectations connected with a royal prophet like Moses (Dtn 18:15.18). They understood the feeding as a sign: This man really is the one who can feed us. He is sent by God to deliver us from hunger. He is the one given by God to his people. Jesus, however, reacts in a negative way to this interpretation of his sign. He withdraws from the masses in order to prevent them from making him their king. Obviously, the Johannine Christ does not want to play the role of a popular Jewish counter-king in opposition to the pagan emperor. Jesus truly is a king in the Gospel of John (1:49), but his kingship lies far beyond the categories of earthly rulers. Understanding him as one of the political leaders who claim to feed people but only try to stabilise their own power by symbolic acts of charity clearly is a misunderstanding. Jesus is king in a most different way. His feeding transcends royal charity which always meant a legitimation of the Status quo of power. Christ's reign is completed by sacrificing himself and thereby reversing the common hierarchy of ruler and powerless subjects. While an ordinary king makes people die for him, King Jesus himself dies for his people. Rising over others in his case means being lifted up in crucifixion; therefore, his throne is the cross.<sup>23</sup> His salvific death is the perfection of his royal glory and powerful reign (John 10:18), the utmost expression of his love (13:1) to his friends – no longer slaves/ δούλοι (John 15:15)!<sup>24</sup>

## **2.2 Eating the bread of life means believing in Christ**

As John 6:14-15 has it made clear that Christ is a perfectly different king who cannot be understood in the categories of ordinary kings, it is now time for the Johannine narrative to define Jesus' kingship more precisely. This is done first by the short text 6:16-21, which links the bread

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<sup>23</sup> That is why the title "King" is mostly used in the Johannine passion narrative. The lemma βασιλεύς accumulates in John 18-19 (12 out of 16 occurrences).

<sup>24</sup> This revolution of power structure is already indicated in John 1, in which the supreme status of the believers is stressed. They share in the sonship of Christ (1:12) and even the concept of divine origin is transferred to them (1:13). The relation between Christ and his community is not modeled by the line of a king who dominates subjugated masses, but by the line of a court society in which the king lives with his friends as the first among equals. Cf. J. KÜGLER, „Denen aber, die ihn aufnahmen, ...“(Joh 1,12). Die Würde der Gotteskinder in der johanneischen Theologie, in: Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 17 (2002) 163-179.

miracle (6:1-15) with the following Bread of Life Discourse (6:22-59) and reveals Jesus as a cosmic king who dominates the elements.<sup>25</sup>

The next step in explaining the alternative character of Christ's feeding kingship is then taken by 6:22-47, the first part of the bread of life discourse. While the masses only felt that there was someone who filled their stomach for a moment, Jesus now tells them (and the reader) that his mission is about a kind of nourishment that satisfies forever and changes their situation completely by giving them "eternal life." This alternative nourishment is the bread of life given by the Father. And Jesus, being the incarnation of the divine Logos himself, is the bread of life (6:35). Here, Christ is understood very much in the line of divine wisdom- logos which in Hellenistic Judaism (e.g. in the writings of Philo Alexandrinus) was often understood to mean "bread from heaven," a spiritual nourishment of the soul.<sup>26</sup> The way to "eat" this bread of life is to believe in Christ. Believing in Christ is very much defined as acknowledging his divine origin (6:41-42) and his status as representative of the Father (6:37-39). "Coming" to Jesus is also an important metaphor for believing (6:35.44). Believing in Jesus is tantamount to "eating" heavenly bread which offers eternal life here and now. Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life and are not lacking anything. This realized eschatology which is clearly expressed by 6:35 and 6:47 is a clear alternative to all royal feeding ideology, be it Roman or Jewish. The bread of life, which is consumed by believing in Christ, clearly transcends all earthly food which can only fill one's stomach for a while but cannot prevent the consumer from getting hungry again. The bread of life,

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<sup>25</sup> The cosmological dimension of Christ's kingship can be understood in the light of the Johannine prologue: Jesus is the incarnation of the divine λόγος, by whom the cosmos was created (John 1:3.10). Thus the whole world is his property (1:11). The Jewish theologian Philo says similar things about Moses: As friend of God he shared in his rule over all elements (Mos 1:156: "therefore, every one of the elements obeyed him as its master, changing the power which it had by nature and submitting to his commands. And perhaps there was nothing wonderful in this; for if it be true according to the proverb,- 'That all the property of friends is common;' and if the prophet was truly called the friend of God, then it follows that he would naturally partake of God himself and of all his possessions as far as he had need"). If already the greatest prophet is master over the elements, than the Son will be so even more – this might be the Johannine message in this context.

<sup>26</sup> For the background of the Johannine logos-bread-christology cf. T.H. TOBIN, *Logos*, in: *Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV, 348-356: 348-351; and also KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 94-97.

which is Jesus himself (as Logos incarnated), satisfies forever and does not allow hunger to come back. Therefore, it renders the believers independent of the charity of a royal breadwinner who displays his charity from time to time to stabilize his reign, but will not really change the situation of his subjects.

As royal charity has nothing to do with eradication of poverty (as might be done e.g. by implementing economic justice), it keeps the hungry subjects permanently dependent on the king, demonstrating to them that they need him to survive. What the believer in Jesus consumes by his/her faith, however, is not concerned with surviving but with living. The divine Logos is bread from heaven and thus offers eternal life, life in abundance. The wisdom-logos truly is life in itself. Those who consume this nourishment are liberated from earthly needs and earthly breadwinners forever and ever.

When read against the backdrop of permanent colonization of the people by their royal exploiter/ breadwinner, the Johannine theology of heavenly bread really constitutes an ancient version of liberation theology – not post-colonial, but clearly trans-colonial.

There is, however, a severe problem with this kind of theology: its tendency toward extreme spiritualization. One can only claim that those who are redeemed here and now have everything and are not lacking anything if the fruits of redemption are consequently spiritualized. Those who are said to be fed forever and to never thirst again will inevitably fall back into hunger and thirst. And those who are said to have conquered death and to never die, inevitably will die. The solution to this conflict is to declare biological hunger, thirst, and death irrelevant. Eternal spiritual life, spiritual food and drink are the only things that matter. The spiritual world is all, the physical world is nothing. This theological program is well expressed in a slogan which was coined in the Johannine community: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (6:63: τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν).

### **2.3 *Believing in Christ means taking part in the Eucharist***

Following the narrative line of John 6, we find in 6:48-58 the reaction of the Johannine redaction to the risks of the radical spiritualization inherent in the realized eschatology. The redactional part begins with the identical repetition of the central sentence of the first part of the bread of

life discourse: “I am the bread of life!” (6:48: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς || 6:35a). By establishing such a close connection to the first part, the redaction makes clear that it wants its message to be seen as a rewriting of Johannine community tradition and not as an abolishment of it. This is also indicated by the redactional amendments in some verses of the first part which bring in the old eschatology of future perfection.<sup>27</sup> This corrects the realized eschatology and opens it again to traditional hope, which allows for taking the imperfections of present earthly life a bit more serious. If one can expect the ultimate perfection in God’s world to come, it is not necessary, according to Old Testament tradition, to spiritualize soteriology completely. Old Testament/early Jewish eschatology always allowed earthly things to keep their importance, and the concept of bodily resurrection is the clearest expression of hoping that God, in the end, takes our flesh as seriously as our spiritual dimension. In this way, the final redaction of John takes the chance to return to a more positive meaning of flesh/σὰρξ. This is done in a Eucharistic way, i.e. by referring to the flesh of Christ. As he is the incarnation of God’s wisdom-word, his flesh is also united with the divine logos (John 1:14: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο). Christ is the personified bread of life; therefore, his flesh can also give life. Jesus’ death signifies giving his flesh for the life of the world (6:51) ,and according to the salvific power of this giving of his flesh, the eating of his flesh in the Eucharistic meal also gives life. That is why the redaction stresses that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man is necessary for salvation 6:54.56-58. Those who do not eat and drink in the Eucharist cannot have eternal life (6:53).

If we ask for the pragmatic intention of this Eucharistic part of the bread of life discourse, the answer seems quite difficult. Does the author want to invite Jews to the Lord’s Supper? Even after they seem to refuse to believe in the divine origin of Christ? That seems rather improbable to me, although on the level of the text, Jews are the addressees of Christ’s teaching in both parts of the discourse (6:41.52). A more realistic answer can be given if we look to John 6:60-71, in which Jesus’ disciples are debating about his harsh words. The narrative strategy consists of telling the readers that those disciples who do not accept the Eucharistic teaching are equal to the Jews who do not even believe in Christ at all. Some of the disciples even leave Jesus. Thus, they behave like the Jews; more-

<sup>27</sup> Cf. 6:40: “and I will raise him up in the last day” (καὶ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐγὼ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ). See also ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ in 6:39.44.



over, the narrator does not forget to mention Judas so that the reader can understand that those who do not accept the Eucharistic relecture of the bread of life discourse are no better than Judas. Like him, they betray Jesus. Linking those who do not accept eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood in the Eucharist to the Jews who never believed in Christ and to Judas who betrayed him provides a strong incentive to accept the Eucharist. Believing in Christ without taking part in the Eucharistic meal is tantamount to not believing in Christ at all. Those who think that they can consume the bread of life just through faith without actually eating it<sup>28</sup> (6:55) are told that this is not possible.

In this manner, the text makes quite clear that its background is a problem with the Eucharist in Johannine Christianity. Apparently, there were some (or many?) who did not want to take part in the Eucharistic meetings. But why was it necessary to put such a great amount of theological pressure on certain members of the community? Are we supposed to imagine that the Johannine community had a major problem with people who have been baptized but do not share in the life of the Christian community? We know this problem from secular western Christianities; but did this problem of tepid Christians (or even baptized non-believers) already exist in New Testament times, when a person did not become a Christian by being baptized as an infant, but by a conscious decision to convert as an adult? Being Christian did not involve any societal benefit but quite on the contrary aroused suspicions and was sometimes even dangerous. Why then would someone become a member of the church without sharing in the life of the community?

The text does not give a clear answer to these difficult questions, but it gives some hints that allow for conclusions that are not too speculative. If the problems with the Eucharist have to do with the theological tradition that believes Jesus is the bread of life which is consumed through faith, then perhaps those who did not take part in the Eucharist were mostly upper class Christians. At least, this theology with its realized eschatology is very much linked to Jewish Hellenistic upper class theology documented in the writings of Philo Alexandrinus. Of course, even lowest class people like slaves can develop escapist realized eschatology, but the links to Philo and the wealthy Judaism he belongs to are just too

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<sup>28</sup> The Johannine redaction lays specific stress on the realism of eating. That's why they use several times the word *τρώγω* = gnaw/crunch (6:54.56.57.58), which is quite unusual in the Eucharistic context.

strong. In any case, it is easier for those who have a lot of material goods to say that they are not lacking anything at all as long as they have found spiritual satisfaction. Eternal life combined with earthly wealth constitutes a mixture that makes the feeling of lacking nothing quite plausible. That is why I think the message that those who believe in Christ will never be hungry or thirsty again (6:35) but have eternal life now and here (6:47) is simply more convincing to people who are well off. It is simply much easier to ignore bodily hunger if you are not feeling it in the first place. If this is true, then not only wealthy Christians in Corinth would have had problems with the Lord's Supper, but also wealthy members of Johannine community. However, we have to be very careful about equating Paul's problem with the Corinthians directly with the problem which the Johannine redaction is dealing with. Perhaps the only similarity is the higher social status of those causing problems. The wealth of those causing the problems the redaction wants to solve can also be seen from 1.John which is closely connected to the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>29</sup> The letter deals with people who believe they are in a close love relationship with God without showing much love toward their Christian "brothers".<sup>30</sup> This problem of merely theoretical love without practical love (1.John 3:18) is clearly linked to the problem of wealth (2:16; 3,17); obviously, the letter addresses people who are well off but do not want to share. These Christians are harshly criticized. The author tells them that they are no children of God. He<sup>31</sup> can make this claim because God is love. This divine love is not mere theory, but was acted out by giving the Son who died at the cross in perfection of his love. Those who show no love in practice cannot have anything to do with the Father, nor with the Son. They are classified as persons who may think that they are children of God and have divine life (ζωή), but are in reality only children of the old world of sin. Therefore, they are sticking to earthly life

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29 I do not think that 1.John was written by the same person who did the final redaction of the gospel, but the pragmatic intention of both texts seems to be very similar. The same can be said about the problem which is addressed and the theological means that are used to solve it. Cf. J. KÜGLER, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, in: M. Ebner / S. Schreiber (Eds.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008, 530-542: 532-534.

<sup>30</sup> For the problem 1.John is dealing with cf. J. KÜGLER, *In Tat und Wahrheit. Zur Problemlage des Ersten Johannesbriefes*, in: *Biblische Notizen* 48 (1989) 61-88.

<sup>31</sup> I really think that the author of 1.John was male, as well as that the final redactor of the gospel was so. For the gender aspects of the conflict see below.

(βίος τοῦ κόσμου). In a very tricky way, the author in 3:17 uses βίος for wealth/richness and thus indicates that his opponents only say that ζωή is most important, but in fact βίος is much more important to them; otherwise, they would readily give their earthly goods away and help the poor. As clear as the socio-political conflict in 1.John is, it can only help to strengthen the idea that the opponents of the final redactor also belong to the upper class. 1.John does not explain why these people do not participate in the Eucharist; the lack of love is never explicitly linked to the Eucharistic meeting of the community. Perhaps the Johannine narrative of Jesus' last supper may give some hints.

#### **2.4 *Why footwashing is the central part of the Johannine Last Supper narrative (John 13)***

As it is highly probable that the final redaction knew the synoptic gospels, it is very surprising that the institution of the Eucharist is left out in the narration of the Last Supper in John 13. This is even more surprising if we realize that the redactor has a special interest in the Eucharist, as we can learn from John 6.

One reason for that might be that the Johannine community celebrated the Eucharist without citing the institution words, and perhaps the Johannine tradition did not even know them before entering into contact with the synoptic gospels. While the latter is rather speculative, there is some probability of the former. From the Didache – already mentioned above – we can learn that certain Christian communities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE still celebrated the Eucharist without quoting the institution narrative. The Lord's Supper was not an imitation of what Jesus did at his Last Supper. Even for Paul's community in Corinth, it is highly probable that the Last Supper tradition which Paul quotes in 1.Cor 11:23-25 was not a part of the community's liturgy. The institution words were a background text which gave a special meaning to what the community celebrated, but they were not cited each time the Lord's Supper was celebrated.<sup>32</sup>

This, however, can only explain why the redaction left out the institutional words; it cannot explain why the footwashing became the central part of the Johannine Last Supper narrative. One reason may be that this symbolic act had a strong presence in Johannine tradition – probably in

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 143-146.

a spiritual interpretation. The other reason most certainly is that foot-washing was linked to the Eucharist conflicts the redactor wanted to react to. Footwashing in antiquity was the lowest work a person could be made to do. Usually, slaves were used to perform this act or individuals washed their own feet. Inviting guests to a banquet usually meant having a servant deliver this service to arriving guests. How did Christian communities solve this problem? Did they also use slaves? Did the most humble members of the community serve higher ranking Christians? Or did everybody wash his or her own feet before the meal began? We do not really know, but as the Johannine community is usually seen as an egalitarian association without much hierarchy,<sup>33</sup> they definitely practiced footwashing in a way that did not display or produce any hierarchical order within the community. As already indicated above (see footnote 25), the social model for the Johannine community was obviously the peer group of the Hellenistic king. This elitist group of „friends“ who were at court with the king shared entertainment as well as cultural and political life with him and could talk freely to him. As Philo calls Moses a “friend of God,” (Mos 1:156) the religious use of this topic seems to be quite closely related to upper class theology. It is rather improbable that the Johannine community as a whole was ever socially located in the upper class.<sup>34</sup> But perhaps we have to imagine the group, which is criticised by the Johannine redactor as a rather small, elitist group of peers, as belonging more or less to the same social stratum. This group within the community might have had problems integrating fully into a socially mixed community. Perhaps they did not have the slightest problem with accepting their social peers as theologically equal, but the challenge to accept persons of lower social status as equals would have been too great for them.

As the Eucharistic meeting was the most concrete manifestation of Christians' corporate identity, it was also the biggest challenge for the rich, mighty, and noble. As we learned from 1.Cor, they had to share their food with the poor and came into contact with the needs of their poorer fellow Christians in general. These problems may have been aggravated even more by the problem of footwashing. This was certainly

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. H.-J. KLAUCK, *Gemeinde ohne Amt? Erfahrungen mit der Kirche in den johanneischen Schriften*, in: BZ 29 (1985) 193-220.

<sup>34</sup> Under the influence of 1.Cor 1:26 (“not many mighty, not many noble”) early Christianity is conceived as dominantly lower class phenomenon by most scholars.

a big problem for upper class Christians who were neither used to washing their own feet themselves nor to washing the feet of others. They never did this shameful work at home. If they could not accept this loss of honor, the egalitarian structure of Johannine community expressed at the Eucharistic meetings was certainly a good reason to stay away. It was certainly easier to stay at home consuming the bread of life by simply believing in Christ. Why should they bother with the earthly needs of their fellow Christians if the only relevant issue was eternal life? Why should they torture themselves with shameful acts if, by virtue of their faith, they were already children of God, friends of Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit, i.e. already had everything that mattered? That is why the redactor made footwashing the central part of the Last Supper. If Jesus himself washed the feet of his disciples, then nobody has a valid reason to refuse this service to fellow Christians. As no disciple can claim to have a higher rank than his master (John 13:16), all Christians are obliged to wash each others' feet: "If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you owe to each other (ἀλλήλων) washing the feet" (John 13:14). This commandment refers quite directly to the footwashing service at the Eucharist, but is also a general symbol for the love Christians owe to each other (13:34).<sup>35</sup> This love must be a practical one and cannot be reduced to mere words. Only those who love "in deed and truth" (1.John 3:18) carry God's love in themselves. Jesus not only washed the feet of his friends, but he even gave his life for them; therefore, Christians should at least share their earthly life with their brothers (1.John 3:16-17).

### **2.5. Gender troubles in John?**

It is highly probable that the whole conflict surrounding the Eucharist was a clearly gendered problem. As upper class men were much involved in state religion, it was difficult for them to be members of a religious association which did not tolerate other religious activity – and it is exactly this exclusivity that was claimed by Jews and Christians. This meant that in the first century, most upper class Christians were women

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<sup>35</sup> John 13:4 tells the reader that Jesus gets up during the meal. That is not the ordinary time for footwashing which should take place before starting the meal. This extraordinary timing calls attention to the extraordinary importance of Jesus' act. It is not only a hygienic service but a sign for his love and for the love the Christians owe to each other.

as they were less involved in state religion duties and therefore had much more freedom to engage in private religious affairs. This sociological effect of patriarchal Roman state religion resulted in a certain gendering of social conflicts in Christian communities: Conflicts between rich and poor were often at the same time conflicts between (mostly) females and (mostly) males. This special gender bias can also be seen in the final Johannine redactor, who is obviously an advocate of the poor, but at the same time promotes a male-centered gender policy. He tries to implement a church structure which gets its bearings from two male prototypes, namely Peter (the pastor-leader) and the Beloved Disciple (the witness-teacher).<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the authority of Mary Magdalene as first witness of the resurrection and apostola apostolorum is downplayed.<sup>37</sup>

If the group which the final redactor criticizes for not taking part in the Eucharist – and thereby showing a lack of love towards their fellow Christians – was female in majority, the problem with footwashing had a special aspect for them as this topic clearly was a gendered one. Feminist scholar Habermann writes on John 13:

In der Fußwaschung spiegelte sich die hierarchische Gliederung der patriarchalen Gesellschaft wider. Am untersten Ende der Hierarchie standen die Sklavinnen; sie mußten ihren Herren und deren männlichen Gästen die Füße waschen. Die nächste Stufe bildeten die Sklaven. In Israel allerdings bildeten die jüdischen Sklaven noch einmal eine Ausnahme: Weil alles persönlich Entehrende von ihnen ferngehalten werden mußte, waren sie zu solchen Diensten nicht verpflichtet. Eine Anspielung auf diesen allerniedrigsten Dienst ist in Psalm 60,10 zu finden, wenn Gott Moab zum Waschbecken für seine Füße machen will. Zu den unerläßlichen Pflichten der Ehefrau gehörte es, ihrem Mann die Füße zu waschen. Diese Pflicht durfte sie nicht - wie andere - an Sklavinnen delegieren. Im Talmud wird argumentiert, diese Verrichtungen seien Ausdruck von besonderer ehelicher Intimität und Liebe. Dennoch handelte es sich um ein Machtgefälle, denn der Ehemann war zu solchen Liebesdiensten nicht verpflichtet. In der Diskussion im Talmud wird deutlich, daß die Fußwaschung durchaus einen erotischen Beigeschmack hatte. Festzuhalten bleibt eine Koppelung von Dienstleistung, Abhängigkeit und Sexualität. Die Fußwaschung in der Antike war ein Akt der Gastfreundschaft, der Verehrung und der Liebe und zugleich ein eindeutiges Signal hierarchischer Machtverhältnisse. Niemaals

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. KÜGLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 224 f.

<sup>37</sup> By inserting 20:2-10, the Beloved Disciple is made the first to know about the resurrection. Mary no longer has this privilege although she is still the first to encounter the risen Christ. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 314-349.

würde ein freier Mann einem anderen die Füße waschen. Genau dies aber berichtet der Text.<sup>38</sup>

Footwashing is a mirror of patriarchal society's hierarchical order. The lowest place in this hierarchy was held by female slaves; they had to wash the feet of their masters and those of their masters' male guests. [Male] slaves were on the next level. In Israel, however, Jewish [male] slaves were an exception: Because anything that could cause personal dishonor to them had to be avoided, they were not obligated to perform this service. An allusion to this most humble service can be found in Psalm 60:10 [= 60:8 in most English versions] in which God wants to use Moab as a washbasin for his feet. Washing the feet of her husband is part of the indispensable duties of a married woman. This duty could not be delegated to female slaves. The Talmud explains this by interpreting this service as an expression of special marital intimacy and love. Nevertheless, a hierarchy of power was implied in this act as the husband was not obligated to such services of love. Discussion in the Talmud point out that footwashing also had erotic connotations. To be noted is that footwashing couples service, dependency and sexuality. In antiquity, footwashing was an act of hospitality, respect and love and simultaneously a clear signal of hierarchical power structure. Never would a free man wash the feet of anybody else. But that is exactly what the text reports.<sup>39</sup>

As footwashing is clearly gendered<sup>40</sup> and labeled as a typically female service – males who delivered this service were not considered real men –, Christian ladies could interpret footwashing as an attack on their honor in two ways: Firstly, as an attack on their honorable status as a noble female who never washed her own feet, let alone those of anyone else, but used slaves for that purpose. Secondly, they were set back into the status of being “just a woman” which meant an annihilation of the emancipation process they experienced by becoming Christians. It must be clear that taking part in this kind of celebration of the Eucharist was twice the demand, and a quite unacceptable one at that, for Christian ladies. On the other hand, the community could not easily renounce the demand that the egalitarian tradition of early Christianity be applied to

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<sup>38</sup> R. HABERMANN, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Orte der Frauen*, in: L. Schottroff/M.-Th. Wacker (Hg.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, Gütersloh: Kaiser 1998, 527-541: 536.

<sup>39</sup> The English translation of Ruth Habermann's text is my own.

<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately the “feminist” commentary of A. Reinhartz [The Gospel of John, in: E. Schüssler Fiorenza (Ed.), *Searching the Scriptures II: A Feminist Commentary*, New York: Crossroad 1994, 561-600: 585] does not even mention the gender aspect of footwashing!

all members of the community. Accepting that female nobles rank higher than e.g. male slaves could not be accepted, especially when there were poor Christians who urgently needed help. In the end, the social argument was stronger than the aspect of gender equality, and that is why the adaptation of Christian community structures to pagan patriarchal structures from the end of the first century on was successful and managed to dominate the history of the Christian Church up to now.

### **3. Summary:**

#### ***Johannine theology and recent politics of feeding***

In John 6, the final redaction develops in three steps a dialectic teaching to present Jesus as bread of life and breadwinner of his people.

The first step is the story of the feeding miracle, which on the one hand shows that Jesus can actually feed the people, but makes clear in the end that he is not an ordinary king who stabilises his reign through charity.

The second step is the first part of the bread of life discourse which tells the reader that Jesus is far beyond earthly kings. He not only gives bread, but is himself the bread from heaven which gives eternal life. This divine bread is consumed by believing in Jesus. Jesus as personified bread of life offers much more than filling one's stomach. He satisfies all spiritual needs and does so forever.

The third step goes back to earth. Those who believe in Jesus believe in a king who gives his life as the ultimate sign of love. His crucified flesh and the blood he shed for his friends are consumed in the Eucharist. As this is the meal that manifests the love of Christ, it has to be celebrated in a way that means sharing his love with others. Simply believing is not enough. Faith must have consequences: loving in practice, eating together, caring for others, serving each other. Faith without these fruits is no faith at all. Church is not only a community of faith but also a community which practices love, integrates people from different social levels, and invites to share. Especially because the spiritual good of eternal life is the only thing that really matters, sharing all earthly goods should be no problem at all for those who carry the love of God within them.

If we look for perspectives for recent politics of feeding, we have to understand that biblical texts are not manuals for modern life. We experience so many problems ancient Christians could never have imagined.



Biblical texts, however, can give a specific stimulus for a new understanding of our problems today. Some aspects of this impetus are:

1. Do not trust royal breadwinners. Neither a colonial king nor a post-colonial leader will readily die for his people. Leaders usually make people die for them. The leaders' public charity first and foremost stabilises their reign and keeps the poor dependent on the leader. They only offer temporary satisfaction and the price which they exalt for their (only earthly) feeding is too high.
2. Trust the one and selfless King. Jesus gives himself. He does not only fill your stomach. He elevates his people to the dignity of his own level of honor. Slavery comes to an end and friendship begins. To those who believe in him, the Son gives the power to become children of God. Nobody can ever take this dignity away. Even the poorest member of a Christian community is equal to the son of God.
3. The new world will not be brought about by a royal figure, neither by a new David nor by a second Jesus. The care for earthly and eternal life has to be taken by the community of God's children. They have to share and serve each other in a selfless way – ignoring the traditional hierarchies of society. As the status of being Child of God is the only thing that matters, all forms of traditional societal hierarchy should be forgotten and earthly goods are only of value if they are used to help others in need.
4. Do not trust people who only talk about heavenly things and by doing so get richer and richer. Those who really are connected to God are those who do not cling to their property, but rather concentrate on showing in their practice of sharing how much love God has given them.
5. Be sceptical of great leaders in general – also in the realm of religion. One of the most important yet often overseen details in the Johannine version of the Last Supper is the commandment that states that footwashing is a duty Christians owe to each other. There should be no hierarchy, neither in helping nor in love, nor in feeding. The Johannine ideal is a Christian community of mutual respect and solidarity. It may sometimes be necessary for one person to take on the role of Jesus, but in general, Jesus should be represented by all Christians together. In a time in which the religious market is full of

- prophets, in which popes and bishops organise the Church as a one-man-show, this might be a quite important critical message.
6. Social justice and gender equality belong together. The Church should understand itself as a social room which already belongs to the new world of God. In this divine world, death no longer has any power and love “in deed and truth” (1.John 3:18) shows the presence of God. The kind of love appropriate for the new world is much more than the charity kings, emperors, revolution leaders or upper class people usually offer. Real divine love is about justice and accepting the poor as equals. Therefore, the struggle for social justice is a key task for any church which strives to be truly Christian. And social justice should not be separated from gender fairness. The history of social conflicts in early Christianity shows that the cross-conflict (poor men versus wealthy women) only results in a denial of women’s human and Christian dignity for which not only rich women have to pay in the end, but poor women as well, and perhaps even more.
  7. The Eucharist should be rediscovered as an actual meal based on solidarity between men and women, between young and old, between rich and poor. Most churches in Africa tend to avoid actual eating at the Lord’s Supper. This is simply bad colonial heritage from Western churches which should be overcome. The early Christian tradition of the Eucharist as an actual meal in universal solidarity should be joined with old African traditions of common meals. Such a sharing of a meal in real communion could bring the African church into the role of prophetic Christian teacher. It would serve as a prophetic-critical sign to African politicians as well as to global Christianity: It would tell the political sphere that social justice is the best way to enable people to feed each other. To Christianity (especially in the West), it would communicate an invitation to return to Christian origins. This really would bring *post-colonial* Christianity into being: The African church would no longer be in the passive role of victim, but in the active role of evangelising itself as well as re-evangelising the colonial churches in the West.

Ezra Chitando

## ***“If My People ...” A Critical Analysis of the Deployment of 2 Chronicles 7:14 during the Zimbabwean Crisis***

### ***Introduction***

Scholarly reflections on the bible in African Christianity have grown appreciably (see for example, Mbiti 1987; Kinoti and Waliggo 1997; West and Dube 2000; and Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004). It is becoming increasingly clear that if previously the bible was regarded as a “white man’s book” or a “foreign oracle”, it has gradually become an “African text.” James N Amanze (2010a: 116) contends that, “its centrality in African Christianity is beyond dispute.” Africans no longer engage in transactions with the bible as an alien document: they have warmed up to it, owned it and read into it too! In the words of Nthamburi and Waruta (1997: 40), the bible gradually gained prominence as its message reached the people “who found it to be their own message, a message to and for them” (1997: 52). The irruption of biblical names, the presence of car stickers with biblical verses, swearing by the bible (“*bhaibheri kudai*” in Shona) and the use of the bible as a protective charm all confirm the centrality of the bible to the lives of many Africans.

In this chapter, I focus on the appropriation of the bible during “the crisis years” in Zimbabwe (2000-2008). In particular, I concentrate on the popularity of a specific passage, namely, 2 Chron 7:14. I argue that the reading of this passage during the Zimbabwean crisis had some positive dimensions. However, the appropriation of the passage also had the effect of shifting blame from politicians tasked with guiding the country to citizens. It also tended to suggest that the country’s failure had a spiritual origin, thereby glossing over failed policies and other factors.

From the onset, I should state that this chapter does not undertake an exegesis of the passage under review. Rather, it is concerned with establishing how Zimbabwean Christians read the passage during the crisis. In the sections that follow, I seek to characterise the Zimbabwean crisis in a few broad strokes. I use both the past and the present tenses as in many respects the effects of the crisis continue to be felt (at the time of writing, 2012). I also endeavour to highlight the popularity of the specific passage as well as to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of de-

ploying 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis. Towards the conclusion, I focus on how the exercise undertaken herein has implications for the Africanization of biblical studies agenda.

### ***"Do not Hide your Face, Lord!"***

#### ***An Overview of the Zimbabwean Crisis***

In order to appreciate the popularity of 2 Chron 7:14, it is important to provide a historical overview of the Zimbabwean crisis. Zimbabwe's armed struggle in the 1970s captured popular imagination, especially in the global South. Here were black people who decided to challenge racial oppression and to fight for their liberation and dignity. Bob Marley, an international music icon, identified with the liberation struggle and dedicated the song, "Zimbabwe" to this heroic effort. When finally the country attained independence on 18 April 1980, there was a lot of excitement. Bob Marley performed at the celebrations and the future looked bright as Robert Mugabe, one of the leaders of the Patriotic Front that had led the struggle, proclaimed a policy of national reconciliation.

Apart from the massacres in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces, Zimbabwe's first decade of independence was full of promise. Mugabe's government invested heavily in education, health and other social services. This was strategic as blacks had been marginalised in the country during the years of racial segregation. Although Mugabe was keen to promote a "one-party state," this was resisted by the citizens. Generally, there was the feeling that the fruits of independence were being tasted by the majority. At the same time, Zimbabwe played a key role in the region, isolating apartheid-ruled South Africa and South West Africa (Namibia). Zimbabwe enjoyed food security and could afford to export maize. Mugabe was feted in Western capitals for his achievements.

In the early 1990s, the government introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The idea was to cut on government spending and to stimulate economic growth. However, as was the case elsewhere on the continent, the results were painful. Many workers were retrenched and the number of the working poor increased. By the mid to late 1990s, the seeds to discontent had been sown. Prices of basic commodities increased and there was general frustration. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), became more confronta-

tional. On its part, the state became more militant. By the late 1990s, Zimbabwe was a nation at the crossroads.

The new millennium did not bring new fortunes to Zimbabwe. On the political front, Mugabe faced his biggest threat in Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). According to one of his critics, Mugabe transformed from being a liberator to a dictator (Auret 2009). On the social front, the HIV and AIDS epidemic's full effects began to be felt in the high death rate. On the economic front, Zimbabwe registered astronomical figures for inflation. Below, I shall highlight each of these dimensions. Given the rapid deterioration that the country experienced, it is not possible to do justice to these dimensions within the confines of this narrative.

The emergence of the MDC in 1999 and the fast-track land resettlement programme of 2000 generated a lot of social strife. Mugabe sought to consolidate his grip on power, while mobilising the global South to rally against “the morally decadent and oppressive West.” In particular, Mugabe positioned himself as the “Suffering Servant” who was being sacrificed for his principles. His rhetoric was as impressive as it was urgent: the global South had to stop the “axis of evil” represented by “Bush and Blair.” He lambasted the MDC as “puppets of the West” and suggested that the leaders of the opposition had succumbed to “sweets” that were being handed out by the oppressors (Chitando 2011: 44).

Amidst the strife, Zimbabwe's economy simply imploded. Inflation soared to astronomical figures. Consumers were introduced to hitherto unknown figures such as quintillions and sextillions of Zimbabwe dollars. In many instances, prices could be changed three times in a single day. Unemployment reached new depths, retrenchments worsened and life became a hard grim struggle for survival. Many citizens took up the exit option, thereby contributing to the ballooning of the Zimbabwean Diaspora. Many professionals sought menial jobs in Europe and North America, earning a sharp rebuke from Mugabe. He sarcastically charged they were wearing themselves out by “scrubbing the backs of elderly white women.” Many sought to recharge their batteries, working to support families back home or sought to advance their qualifications in the hope that one fine day, they would return to the “promised land” (Muzondidya 2011).

The crisis was compounded by the high death rate due to HIV and AIDS. As the economically active population was being decimated, the

number of orphans and vulnerable children increased significantly. Grandmothers were called upon to parent one more time. As death became an integral part of life, with urban cemeteries filling up at an alarming rate, many wondered whether in fact the crisis represented "the last of days." Undoubtedly, there was a catastrophe (Bourne 2011). In particular, preachers seized on the crisis and proclaimed the need for immediate repentance. Only this, they suggested, would lead to restoration.

### **"If My People..." The Reading of 2 Chronicles 7:14 during the Zimbabwean Crisis**

As Zimbabweans sought to come to terms with the crisis, the bible served as a powerful resource. The bible was resorted to in the quest to find meaning. It was widely read in the search for answers in a stifling environment. Suffocating and gasping for breath, many Zimbabweans found respite in the bible. The promises that God issued to the Israelites a long time found immediate relevance. In particular, the following verse ignited a lot of interest:

If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chron 7: 14).

To a very large extent, 2 Chron 7:14 became one of the most popular biblical texts during the Zimbabwean crisis. If national jingles called upon citizens to remain steadfast, ("*Rambai Makashinga*"), 2 Chron 7: 14 enjoined the Christian faithful to remember the divine promise. A lot of emphasis was put on the condition set by God, "if..." Socio-economic salvation would only be experienced if Zimbabweans would "humble themselves and pray and seek" God's face, as well as "turn from their wicked ways." This confirms the observation made by Gerald West, a leading South African biblical scholar, that readers of the bible bring interpretive interests and life interests. It is necessary to cite him at considerable length:

Interpretive interests are those dimensions of text that are of interest to the interpreter, while life interests are those concerns and commitments that drive or motivate the interpreter to come to the text. Life interests shape the questions which we bring to the biblical text. Prevalent life interests in Africa have been and are religious and cultural concerns, socio-political commitments, and questions about race, class, gender, healing, protection and HIV and AIDS. Life interests come from our experience of the world and

from our commitments to the world. With such interests African Christians come to the bible to hear what it has to say concerning these things (West 2009: 38).

The verse under analysis served both to explain the crisis and to offer hope for the future. Why did Zimbabwe find itself in such a terrible situation? The dominant response from all the strands of Zimbabwean Christianity (mainline, African Independent/ Indigenous/ Initiated/ Instituted Churches and Pentecostal; see Verstraelen 1998) was: “because Zimbabweans have not humbled themselves, prayed and sought the face of God.” They have remained trapped in “their wicked ways.” Consequently, the country continued to experience massive socio-economic and political challenges. Street preachers in Harare’s First Street, young Pentecostal pastors with booming voices and serene “reverends” from mainline churches expounded these “wicked ways”: rampant corruption by those in public office, laxity in sexual morality, the thriving black market for foreign exchange as well as for basic commodities, as well as other vices as they saw them.

Gospel musician Charles Charamba helped to popularise the verse when he recorded a song that was made up predominantly of words in the verse. Accompanying the song was a well choreographed video. As Charamba has remained one of Zimbabwe’s leading gospel musicians, his appropriation of the verse ensured that it gained a lot of influence in the country. It was played regularly on radio and television, thereby enabling many Zimbabweans to become more familiar with it. Furthermore, the performance of the song in Shona, the language spoken by the majority of the people in Zimbabwe, enhanced the popularity of the verse.

It is fair to say that prior to the Zimbabwean crisis; 2 Chron did not feature in public discourses in the country. This is consistent with the observation made by Nupanga Weanzana when writing in the *Africa Bible Commentary* that, “this book is among the most neglected in the Bible”(Weanzana 2006: 467). The specific text was not prominent prior to the crisis. This suggests that the lived realities of individuals and communities largely influence which biblical texts become popular during particular historical periods. In the face of a crisis of massive proportions, a text that was seen as explaining the crisis and as generating hope gained a lot of popularity.

That 2 Chron 7:14 became one of the key biblical texts during the days of hyperinflation and uncertainty can also be seen from “sacred advertise-

ments" from this era. Invitations to "Days of National Prayer" had this verse displayed in a very prominent position. Many posters promoting ecumenical gatherings and gospel music concerts also used the verse. In addition, as I have noted above, the text was popular with street preachers. A form-critical analysis of sermons that the author listened to in Harare's First Street, especially in 2007 and 2008, shows that the verse features prominently.

## **2 Chronicles 7:14 as "Diagnosis and Therapy"**

As I have alluded to in the foregoing section, many people read the bible in an effort to find answers to vexing existential questions. Why had the "Zimbabwean project" that had promised so much delivered so little? When would the suffering end? Who was responsible for the suffering? What would the future look like? Readers grappled with 2 Chron 7:14 in an endeavour to understand their national and personal fortunes. The book of Chronicles, with the original author's "confidence in divine power and favor" (Ackroyd 1962: 158), proved to be particularly attractive. There are a number of dimensions that emerge from the deployment of 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis. First, one witnesses a conflation between the Israel of the bible and Zimbabwe. Yahweh's declaration relating to people called by his<sup>1</sup> name and the attendant promise to "heal their land" is appropriated by contemporary Zimbabweans. The message does not refer to the past: it refers to Zimbabwe(ans) today! There is therefore a sense of immediacy and direct relevance that one deduces from the interpretation of the text. In this sense therefore, the biblical text becomes a Zimbabwean text: it speaks to Zimbabwean realities and addresses Zimbabwean concerns. The bible therefore ceases to be "their text" (Israelites, Europeans, missionaries, etc), but becomes "our text."

Second, and emerging from the foregoing, the biblical text is used to create and enhance identity. "My people" is read as referring to Zimbabwean Christians. Zimbabwean Christians have therefore "read themselves into the text." This gives them an acute sense of identity. They cease to be ordinary citizens who are grappling with hyperinflation,

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<sup>1</sup> The author is aware of the politics of using the masculine or feminine for God. In this narrative, he has chosen to retain the conventional use, since the community in which the concept emerges was patriarchal.



unemployment, HIV and a myriad of problems. They graduate into “the people of God” called by God’s very own name! David Maxwell, writing on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), puts it across very well when saying:

Numerous Zimbabweans enter ZAOGA assemblies with low self-esteem, feeling wretched, despised and abused. But within the safe confines of the Pentecostal community they experience a revelation. They learn that they are not a ‘nobody but a somebody’. Even though they may not have ‘big things’ they are nevertheless ‘special’. They are no longer just citizens of a state that has broken its promises and increasingly resorts to surveillance and control; they have a new royal identity as members of the Kingdom of God. And this new identity is not ascribed by means of a flimsy ID card that can be lost. Pentecostals are chosen people, called by name. More than that, they are now holy, set apart, and clean (Maxwell 2006: 193).

Third, there is a communal acceptance of culpability. The problems that have visited the people are not due to the transgressions of a chosen few. No. They have been caused by the whole people of God failing to “humble themselves and pray and seek God’s face and turn from their wicked ways.” The Zimbabwean crisis is not of Mugabe’s doing. Neither has it been authored by the ruling elite. Not even the MDC and its Western sponsors could have sponsored the crisis. No. This crisis is down to the failure by Christians to pray fervently and to uphold God’s directives.

Fourth, there is an anticipation of the situation being reversed in the immediate future. Once Zimbabwean Christians turn from their wicked ways, God in heaven will hear and will forgive their sins and heal their land. This “healing of the land” gained prominence within theological discourses, especially within Pentecostalism, during the period under review. Although a detailed discussion of the theme of prosperity lies outside the scope of this chapter, it is important to make reference to it. The prosperity message holds that God intends that those who are faithful to God will receive health and material prosperity. In particular, those who resist “wicked ways” will prosper in this life, as well as in heaven. While the term “prosperity gospel” remains controversial (Folarin 2006), it captures the key concerns accurately.

Fifth, one could discern the influence of Pentecostal formulations on prosperity within the larger Zimbabwean Christianity. References to 2 Chron 7:14 began initially within Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. However, they gradually circulated across the denominational divide and began to have influence across Zimbabwean Christianity. One can argue that the passage served as both a diagnosis in terms of establishing what

was wrong with Zimbabwe, as well as a therapy by way of promising a prosperous future. In a real sense, the passage sought to empower Zimbabwean Christians to survive the crisis by anticipating a prosperous future wherein God would heal their land.

## **2 Chronicles 7:14 during the Zimbabwean Crisis: The Positive Dimension**

Earlier writings on the appropriation of the bible during the Zimbabwean crisis have brought out the extent to which contesting political positions could deploy the bible in their favour. For example, Togarasei (2009) has shown how the call to respect authorities elicited different responses. Similarly, Gunda (2010) has demonstrated how the bible has been used to oppose and to defend homosexuality in Zimbabwe. In this section, I focus on the positive aspects that emerged from the reading of 2 Chron 7:14. I am principally informed by the standpoint that no reading of scripture is neutral. One always reads from a specific place. I shall return to this theme below.

There are a number of positive outcomes from the reading of 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis. First, the text reminds Christians of their civic duties and responsibilities. People who are called by God's name are not distant onlookers. They are deeply implicated in the crisis. This was critical as a passive, pacifist and other-worldly strand of Christianity threatened to have an upper hand. In the face of an increasingly intolerant and brutal state that thrived on violence, some Christians sought to retreat from the struggle. They justified such a stance by arguing that it was "neither by might nor by power, but by God's Spirit" (Zecharia 4: 6) that the situation would improve. Such a theology placed emphasis on Christians not being of this world and concentrated on getting people to heaven.

When Zimbabwean Christians sought to uphold their civic responsibilities, they brought about change in the socio-political context. They challenged corruption, opposed violent state programmes such as Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order that led to the loss of livelihoods in 2005 and they also promoted political literacy (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011). Activist Christian organisations such as Christian Alliance and Churches in Manicaland appealed to 2 Chron 7:14 to mobilise Christians to participate in political activities. The passage was read as suggesting

that Christians had a major role to play in changing the country's fortunes.

Second, the passage undermined the official denial that Zimbabwe was experiencing a momentous crisis. It also problematised the official narrative that, if there was a crisis, it was due to "sanctions" or "meddling by the West and its allies." As I have indicated in foregoing sections, the passage puts the blame squarely on the "wicked ways" that had come to characterise nearly all dealings in the country. Preachers therefore countered the official narrative by cataloguing the various manifestations of "wickedness" in the country: pillaging of national resources by the ruling elite, the building of mansions by civil servants in the midst of extreme suffering, the "burning" of foreign currency (where a few US dollars would trade for large amounts of the Zimbabwe dollar) and so on. 2 Chron 7:14 therefore opened avenues for verbalising the country's socio-economic ills.

Third, 2 Chron 7:14 helped to undercut the doom and gloom that had enveloped most Zimbabweans during the crisis. Although below I question the uncritical hope for prosperity, I do concede that the passage infused a sense of hope in a context that threatened to generate total hopelessness and despair. The passage gave Christians something to hold on to amidst uncertainty. Especially in 2008 and the early months of 2009 prior to the formation of the government of national unity/inclusive government, Zimbabwean citizens desperately needed something to hold on to. In this regard, 2 Chron 7:14 inspired some people to anticipate a more prosperous future.

Fourth, the passage sought to transcend political divisions by positing an inclusive understanding of Zimbabwe. It created a sense of, "we are in this together" in an environment that had become heavily polarised along political and ideological lines. Due to political manipulation, even the church had been torn asunder. Zimbabweans were divided into "dedicated cadres, patriots and sons of the soil" (ZANU-PF supporters) or, "sell-outs, puppets of the West" (MDC supporters) on the other. MDC supporters were not saints either: "MaZANU" in their parlance sought to demonize and dehumanize ZANU-PF supporters. 2 Chron 7:14 sought to overcome this by suggesting that in fact, Christians are all those who are called by God's name. There was one Zimbabwe and the fate of this one Zimbabwe depended on what Christians, irrespective of political allegiance, would do.

### **Critical Comments on the Deployment of 2 Chronicles 7:14 during the Zimbabwean Crisis**

Despite having had some positive dimensions, the deployment of 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis had considerable problematic aspects.

First, many readers tended to adopt a spiritual, other-worldly interpretation of Zimbabwe's problems. They sought to understand the implosion of Zimbabwe's economy in terms of the "principalities and powers" that seek to control the world. As a result, there was greater investment in the emergence of "prayer warriors" and intercessors to transform the country's fortunes. Especially within the Pentecostal fold, this tended to remove Christians from directly participating in political processes.

Second, and deriving immediately from the foregoing, an overly spiritual interpretation of Zimbabwe's crisis had the effect of minimising the role of human beings in both its emergence as well as its resolution. From a sociological perspective, human beings were behind the catastrophe in Zimbabwe. Yes, there were seasonal droughts that threatened the country's capacity to feed itself. Indeed, human beings from Europe and North America meddled in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. That they imposed illegal sanctions on the country should not be denied. However, a combination of factors brought Zimbabwe down to its knees. Military adventures in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, policy inconsistency, corruption, maladministration, nepotism, and other factors had a negative effect on Zimbabwe's economy. The coalescence of a kleptocracy with a gerontocracy yielded a highly intolerant state. While the *jam-banja*/ Third Chimurenga/ fast-track land reform programme was an ethical necessity, it was carried out in a chaotic and inconsistent manner. Politicians, that is, flesh and blood human beings, were therefore guilty of leading Zimbabwe down the abyss.

There is no need to look for goblins (*zvikwambo*) or to ascribe misfortunes to evil spirits when it is clear that the government of the day continues to run the country into the ground. No spiritual cleansing was needed when the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe continued to print the Zimbabwe dollar amidst galloping inflation and incessant devaluation. No deliverance session was required when state enterprises paid their executives "the salary of angels" when the same enterprises were making mega losses. No "man of God" should have been asked to give a

prophecy when the extent of looting of national resources showed only one possible outcome: increasing decline! To blame “spirits and demons” in such instances was to refuse to accept that flesh and blood humans were behind the demise of the Zimbabwean dream. Indeed, a quick appeal to Jeremiah 4:18 would have been highly informative: “your ways and your doings have brought this upon you.”

Third, 2 Chron 7:14 had the unintended consequence of singling out Christians as the only ones who were “called by God’s name.” This challenge does not lie in the text itself. It was an outcome of the preferred interpretation of the passage by most of the Christian readers. In foregoing sections I indicated that the passage served to invite Christians to forge a common identity and to contribute to political activism. However, the Christian community in Zimbabwe tended to operate as if Christianity was the only player on the religious market. It overlooked the presence of other communities of faith that also sought to address the Zimbabwean crisis. Greater collaboration with other communities of faith would have given the voices from the faith community greater urgency and appeal. Thus:

To a very large extent, church leaders have not sought to interact with leaders from the Muslim and other communities. Perhaps due to the higher percentage of Christians in the country, the church has not cooperated with other religions. However, this domineering approach is counterproductive.

There is so much to learn from other communities of faith. Furthermore, joint action is more effective (Chitando and Manyonganise 2011: 100).

Fourth, many readings of the passage suggested that a utopian era would descend upon Zimbabwe the moment Christians “turned from their wicked ways” and God began to “heal their land.” This confirms the underlying tension brought about by a simplistic appeal to the gospel of prosperity. Instead of interrogating systems of death, it tends to preach a “pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye” message. While I have acknowledged the role of such a message in mitigating the crisis by instilling a sense of hope, ultimately this can a dangerous form of hope. Hope that is not built on transforming systems of death to systems of life is hopeless hope!

Fifth, some readings of 2 Chron 7:14 had the effect of blaming the victims. When emphasis is placed on the need for believers to “turn from their wicked ways,” there is a tendency to suggest that they are as responsible for their suffering as those who are at the helm of the apparatus of the state. This is an unfair interpretation. Law-abiding citizens

who resort to questionable survival strategies due to the failures of the state should not be condemned. As I have noted above, by far the largest portion of the blame should be shouldered by those who had the mandate to guide the nation to prosperity. As the musician Andy Brown observed cynically, Zimbabwe had degenerated into, "*nyika yematsotsi*" (a country of crooks) due to government's very own tendency of resorting to unorthodox means to run the economy.

### **Popular Readings of 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the Challenge of Africanizing Biblical Studies**

In the foregoing sections, I have outlined the deployment of 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis. I have drawn attention to the socio-economic and political contexts in which the passage was asked to "speak." I have also examined the positive and problematic deployments of the passage. At this stage, one would be forgiven for asking two related questions. First, is it within the mandate of a scholar to judge whether a biblical passage is read positively or negatively? Second, even if a scholar were to undertake such a task, how does s/he reach such conclusions?

The questions raised above are critical as they have a bearing on the character of biblical studies in Africa. The dominant, Western paradigm is that basically the scholar of the bible has the task of understanding the original context in which the specific biblical passage emerged. In this regard, this chapter would have concentrated exclusively on the interpretative interests (as opposed to the life interests, as I have done herein). Emphasis would have been placed on issues relating to the historical context in which 2 Chron emerged, its authorship, theology and so on. These are quite valid scholarly pursuits. However, I am convinced that African biblical studies must place more emphasis on the life interests as these emerged directly from African existential realities. At any rate, there is a growing realisation that what has been accepted as "universal and standard models of biblical interpretation" are in fact partisan and parochial. Cheryl B. Anderson, an African American woman biblical scholar, has put this across lucidly:

Until recently, the leadership circles in both the church and the academy were able to distance themselves from their readings of the Bible by contending that they were merely following divine mandate or scholarly methods. Now, however, there is a sense that the few cannot arrogate to themselves the power to speak for all humanity – and for God. The particularity

of one small segment of humanity – the privileged white Western, heterosexual male – can no longer masquerade as representing the diversity and fullness of God’s creation. Through the tidal wave of publications from “the Other” – those who are different by virtue of race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and hemisphere – God is indeed “troubling the waters” (Anderson 2009: 28).

I am arguing that the Africanization of biblical studies in Africa (cf Abognurin 2005) should be informed by the lived realities of Africans and how these interact with biblical texts. African raw materials, African frustrations and hopes must be the “raw stuff” that is at the heart of African biblical studies. African biblical studies must not begin from lofty theories coined by scholars in Europe and North America. African biblical studies must not be galvanized by what a specific passage might have meant initially to its readers many years ago. No. African biblical studies must grapple with what a specific passage says to contemporary Africans in the era of globalization, HIV, gender and political oppression and other challenges. This, then, will be relevant biblical studies for Africa.

The myth of a neutral biblical scholar has been exploded. At any rate, trying to remain neutral while dealing with a “dangerously loaded text” is naïve. Hans de Wit has acknowledged that the bible is a “double edged sword” when arguing that, “[I]ndeed, many readings of the old book have led to death, exclusion, colonialism, discrimination and slavery. But others have led to freedom, salvation, conversion and new life” (2009:28). Similarly, in relation to HIV, Gerald West says that sacred texts have been quite strategic. He says, “[T]hey have the capacity to stigmatise, discriminate and bring death; and they have the capacity to embrace, affirm and bring life” (2011: 159)

Against this background, it is therefore important for an African biblical scholar to discern which readings lead to death and which ones lead to life. To shirk this responsibility in the name of “protecting scholarship and maintaining high standards,” is, I am afraid, simply a failure of nerve. Why should a biblical studies scholar in a publicly funded African university refuse to distinguish between death dealing and life giving interpretations of the bible? Why should s/he hesitate to contribute towards liberating readings of the bible in the face of debilitating readings of the same?

The Africanization of biblical studies will entail African scholars giving primacy to African religio-cultural realities in the process of interpreta-

tion. In the case of 2 Chron 7:14 for example, there would be need to interrogate whether the indigenous understanding of reward and punishment provided a fertile background for the reception of the passage. Could it be that there is already an appreciation that ancestors operate a system of reward and punishment for obedience and disobedience therefore there is a ready acceptance of "if...then..." Such an approach will enhance contextual biblical hermeneutics. In the words Adenkunle Dada:

Contextual [B]iblical hermeneutics in Africa is the [B]iblical interpretation that makes African social, cultural, political and economic contexts a subject of interpretation. Specifically, it means that an analysis of the text is done from the perspective of African worldview and culture (2007: 6).

In order for African traditions to emerge within the biblical studies in Africa, it is imperative that African scholars take the task of researching and publishing seriously. Moaning about the hegemony of Euro-American scholars will not do. Neither will it be adequate to continue to lash out at the negative impact of colonialism and globalization. Yes, these factors have left African scholars on the periphery of the global academy. However, the onus remains on the African scholar to defy these negative forces and to contribute meaningfully to research and publication within the African context. One must therefore commend initiatives such as James N. Amanze's, *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities* (Amanze 2010b). It is only when African scholars publish consistently that they can be taken seriously. African scholars therefore have the responsibility to address African concerns in their research and publication.

Finally, the foregoing analysis of 2 Chron 7:14 during the Zimbabwean crisis confirms the need for biblical studies scholars to prioritise biblical hermeneutics of liberation (West 1995). As we saw above, not all readings of the bible promote wholeness of life to citizens. Some interpretations of the passage induced passivity amongst the citizens of Zimbabwe. Other readings created an artificial spirituality that prevented citizens from challenging an oppressive political system. The challenge for the biblical scholar is to always promote liberating readings of the bible. African biblical scholars have the responsibility to promote what West (2011: 138) calls "redemptive readings." Such readings challenge oppressive ideologies, confront stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV and promote the liberation of all.



## Conclusion

As the Zimbabwean crisis threatened to spiral out of control, many citizens turned to the bible for answers. Calls for national days of prayer in newspapers and on television cited biblical texts. Political parties borrowed heavily from the bible. Commuter omnibuses (**makombi**) had biblical verses inscribed on them, promising beleaguered citizens “a future and a hope.” Gospel musicians retrieved biblical texts, infused a fast beat and invited those who were weary and heavy-laden to loosen up. Struck down by inflation, paralysed by uncertainty and intimidated by violence, millions of Zimbabweans pondered over this particular passage:

If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chron 7: 14).

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*Canisius Mwandayi*

## ***Towards a new reading of the Bible in Africa***

### ***– spy exegesis***

#### ***Introduction***

Though some modern critical methods have almost managed to reduce the Bible to mere rabble, it is indubitably true that the Bible remains influential and it continues to impact the lives of millions in Africa, in particular. As observed by R. M. Gunda, its circulation in Africa has been on the rise and it remains a central and critical manual for daily living to multitudes of people.<sup>1</sup> The daily contact of Africans with the Bible is not just limited to church services but there is a daily interaction with it also in academic, social, economic and political circles, and at times for ends better known to the ones using it. It is its use in the political sphere that this paper is interested in as it seeks to expose how the Bible has been used as one of the sources of intelligence by intelligence organisations to outwit enemies. An interesting scenario is that the Bible itself is full of exemplary incidences which show the use of espionage tactics to outclass enemies. Both the Old and New Testaments abound with such examples. What is of particular interest, however, to this study is the use of Scriptures and other espionage tactics also by the Jesus movement to defeat the plans of the enemy. Faced with the countless challenges that Africa is experiencing especially as a result of its enemies I feel there is need for Africans to show the manner in which intelligence organisations and the Jesus movement have appropriated the Bible to successfully outwit their enemies. It is my belief and hope that through the use of the Bible as a source of intelligence and the identification of some espionage tactics in it, which I would like to term here 'spy exegesis', Africans can liberate themselves from foes who are after their downfall. The use of the Bible as a source of intelligence will not be looked at in isolation but shall rather be discussed within the broad context of other methods used in the world of espionage to gather information.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R.M. Gunda, Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos in the quest for a just society in contemporary Zimbabwe, <http://www.mhs.no/aotp?96> (accessed 03/02/2012).

## ***The piracy of African resources***

The continent of Africa is a mixed bag. It has its joys and sorrows. The greater part of the journey which Africa has travelled is, however, marked with tears. For so many years now Africa has not been able to free itself from abject poverty, hunger, ethnic tensions, corrupt leadership, different kinds of illnesses and all sorts of unpleasant realities. Almost each family in Africa has lost a loved one to poverty, hunger, war and disease. What is more worrying, however, is that most of Africa's problems are initiated by foreign wolves who come wearing sheep's skin. They come to milk Africa of its resources in the name of offering help. The conversation of Field Ruwe with an unidentified man speaks for itself who the real enemies of Africa are. An excerpt of the conversation reads:

You guys are as stagnant as the water in the lake. We come in with our large boats and fish your minerals and your wildlife and leave morsels—crumbs. That's your staple food, crumbs. That corn-meal you eat, that's crumbs, the small Tilapia fish you call Kapenta is crumbs. We the Bwanas (whites) take the cat fish. I am the Bwana and you are the Muntu. I get what I want and you get what you deserve, crumbs. That's what lazy people get—Zambians, Africans, the entire Third World.<sup>2</sup>

While the unidentified man would find problems with the lack of innovativeness by Africans he failed to see that Africa's greatest failure is due to political circumstances over which Africans have had and continue to have little control over. They are being remote controlled by those who pretend to offer aid to Africa but get away with fatty pockets. While in principle, imperialism and colonization are evils which have been fought off from the African soil, the underground usurping of African resources that is still going on shows that the evil forces of imperialism and colonization are still with us. At least there are some grains of truth in Robert Mugabe's speech which he delivered at the meeting of the African Union on 01 February 2012. He noted: "They have an economic crisis in Europe, they have exhausted their resources [...] Africa still has plenty. We are discovering more [...] so another recolonisation might take place. Let us take care, all of us [...] America will need more oil,

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<sup>2</sup> F. Ruwe, 'You lazy, intellectual African scum' in New Zimbabwe, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-7044-Lazy,+intellectual+African+scum!/opinion.aspx> (accessed 28/01/2012).

Europe needs more oil.”<sup>3</sup> While Africa may never experience colonization the way it experienced it before, the continual presence of foreigners on the African soil seeking its resources by hook and crock and at times even by the use of force shows that Africa remains at a high risk of losing almost everything to the bogus Samaritans. What remains questionable, however, is the innocence of those countries covered under Mugabe’s look east policy. They too seem to have exhausted their resources and are busy ripping off Africa of its resources. To come out of this messy scenario there is need for Africa to come up with ways of outwitting its enemies.

Since the Bible has become almost an African book due to its popularity on the African continent and has on more than one occasion proved a reliable source of intelligence it looks fitting that the manner in which intelligence organisations and the Jesus movement appropriated the Bible as a source of intelligence be developed into a full-fledged method of reading the Bible which would help Africans defeat the plans of the enemy. Paying due respect to the circumstances in which it arose, I would term such a method as spy reading of the Bible or simply spy exegesis. The term ‘spy’ should not be used here in its noun form but as an adverb describing the kind of exegesis. The term ‘spy’ actually has its roots from various older verbs such as the Latin “specere” or the Anglo-Norman “espier” meaning “to look at or watch.”<sup>4</sup>

As a method of approaching the Bible spy exegesis begins with the assumption or the actual existence of a problem or threat in the world of the reader and one engages the Biblical text to acquire intelligence and after carefully analysing that data vis-à-vis the problem at hand one comes up with a decision on how to overcome such a threat. Part of the exegesis involves the identification of some espionage tactics which were used by some biblical characters to defeat the plans of their own enemies. The Bible is looked at here in its canonical form. Spy exegesis is actually the Jesus method of engaging the Scriptures. He employed it during his fight with the Devil in the wilderness (Mt.4:1-11; Mk.1:12f; Lk.4:1-13), at the start of his ministry (Lk.4:16-19) and continued to use it

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<sup>3</sup> R.G. Mugabe cited by M. Huni, Mugabe at African Union: Let us stand up to the West, <http://www.nairaland.com/nigeria/topic-860453.0.html#msg10096476> (accessed 03/02/2012).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, How Spies Work, <http://people.howstuffworks.com/spy.htm> (accessed 17/07/11).

on various other occasions to outmatch his enemies (Mt.5:20-48; 13:10-15; Mk.2:23-26; 7:1-7). While also the battle with the Devil and his allies personified in those who continue to rob Africa of its riches has not ceased, engaging such a method will enable modern day African followers of Jesus to uncover the Devil's tactics and which in turn will help them deal with the threat that the Devil and his agents ever pose.

### ***The work of Intelligence***

One common thing the world over is that world leaders and influential people since time immemorial are faced with the task of making important decisions every day, and information (known as intelligence) is the key to making the right decision. Though there is no universally accepted definition of intelligence, a working definition I shall employ in this paper is that intelligence is "Information and knowledge about an adversary obtained through observation, investigation, analysis, or understanding."<sup>5</sup> Such information, usually not available in the public domain, is key in outmatching one's perceived and imagined enemies, thus safeguarding a group's vital interests or the welfare of a nation. A look at world history shows that the successes and failures in gathering such secret information have helped shape the foreign policy of many nations, altered the course of wars and often left a deep (though usually hidden) impression on world history. This finds echo in the words of Richard Dunlop, a former agent of OSS (Office of Strategic Services), America's first effective intelligence organization who says:

In all countries, winning diplomacy and national strategy must depend upon how effectively intelligence concerning other nations' capabilities and intentions is collected. This means that today shadow armies of secret agents are contending for the future of mankind.<sup>6</sup>

To get the best of the desired information, governments or concerned organisations operate with a structured board. At the head of the board is usually the President himself/ herself or a Head Chef if it is an organisation. Working in close association with the Presidential Office is

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<sup>5</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms cited in M. Warner, *Wanted: A Definition of "Intelligence": Understanding our Craft*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no3/article02.html> (accessed 15/07/11).

<sup>6</sup> R. Dunlop, *This Business of Spying* in R. M. Grant (ed), *Popular Mechanics*, Vol. 114, Chicago: Hearst Magazines, 1960, 95.

usually a Director who heads the command center of this organization. Assisting the Director are usually Deputy Directors and then comes various other high-ranking offices to minor ones. Depending with one's background and the training one got, each secret agent is assigned to a particular task within the agency. The spy, as argued by Ed Grabianowski, is usually not in contact with anyone else except with the controller. He/she may thus never come to learn the names of any other spies or officials and this is known as compartmentalization. The purpose of such compartmentalization is that if he/ she is captured and interrogated, he/ she cannot reveal vital information or the identities of other spies.<sup>7</sup> Those specialized in certain fields may be sent abroad and operate from there. In these foreign missions such spy agents usually take on a cover identity so that the countries they would be spying may not know the secret work they would be doing.

## ***Information gathering technics and the execution of missions***

### ***1. Spy Planes and Satellites***

Before the advancement of technology countries had to resort to spy planes equipped with cameras in spying each other. Such surveillance planes were often exposed to danger for they were made to fly directly over the enemy. Grabianowski reports of a U-2 spy plane which the U.S. President Eisenhower authorized in 1960 to fly over the Soviet Union. The plane was, however, shot down by a Soviet missile and the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, parachuted to safety. While the U.S. President had first argued that it was a weather research mission gone astray, the United States was forced into admitting that it was indeed a spying plane when the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev revealed the pilot's capture and the cameras recovered from the plane.<sup>8</sup> Now with modern advanced technology countries are relying on Satellites equipped with cameras and modern day spy satellites are able to take photographs with a high precision even enough to read the headline on a newspaper.

### ***2. Small technological devices***

On surface to surface missions spies rely on a wide assortment of technological devices. Among them we find the use of super-sensitive mi-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

crophones which send information to a recorder or to a listening spy agent. While the perceived enemy would be busy thinking that he/she is delivering sensitive information to his/her group of confidants he/she may not be aware that the speech is being tapped or listened to.

Another form of device known to the spy world is the use of a wiretap. One easiest thing a wiretapper does is to expose the red and green wires of the line that runs into the house of the person he/she would be spying. He/she then plugs the other end of the wire into the phone and attaches the exposed wires to an accessible, exposed point on the outside phone line. By so doing he/she is thus able to hear all the communications of the spied target. Since, however, the spy should guard against exposing himself/herself the tap's microphone is removed so that it simply remains a listening device. To avoid also the bother of having to sit for twenty-four hours listening since he/she would not know when the target would make calls, the spy may have to rely on a tape recorder which too has its own limitations since it cannot run for twenty-four hours without having to change the cassettes. These huddles are usually solved by installing a more sophisticated technology called a bug. A bug is a device that receives audio information and broadcasts it through the air, usually via radio waves. Since people hardly have a tendency of looking inside their phone receivers a spy, once he/she gets access to the house as a phone technician at most, inserts the bug in that receiver and sets up a nearby radio receiver that picks up this signal and sends it to a speaker or encodes it on a tape.<sup>9</sup>

Yet another form of technology used to get information from one's enemies is the use of radio frequency scanners. Since such scanners are receivers that have extremely wide frequency ranges capable of capturing all kinds of radio signals it means a spy can record and analyse an enemy's radio. As with written documents of an enemy, since stealing original documents could expose the spy, a wide assortment of miniature cameras hidden in unsuspecting objects are used for the job. There are other lots of gadgets used in the spy business, what I have just highlighted are just some of the common gadgets used in the spying field.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.



### **3. Cover and creation of a legend**

On foreign missions spies usually resort to the use of a cover and the creation of a legend. By cover is meant the creation of a secret identity, and a legend is the background story and documents that support the cover. To make the cover seem more realistic, the legend, as noted by Grabianowski, must be very thorough. The spy will have to come up with a fake life history which he/she must memorize. He/she, for example, will have to memorize where he/she went to school, produce a diploma to prove it, know where he purportedly was born, who his ex-wife was and also the hobbies he/she enjoys most. If the legend states that the spy enjoys fishing, he would see to it that he has some fishing gear in his house.<sup>10</sup> To make the legend look more authentic also, the spy is bound to know and speak fluently the language of the country he/she would be spying and should be thoroughly informed as much as he/she can of the intricacies of the area he/she would be claiming expertise in and in accordance with the laws of that country. A Zimbabwean spy, for example, whose cover identity is a Mozambican immigration officer would need to speak Portuguese and know a great deal about Mozambican immigration laws. Since the target would be to get access to vital information spies on foreign missions usually do not rush to carry out their missions but may work for quite a lengthy period of time and it is only when they would have established trust and in close contact with key persons that the real mission begins. To avoid being caught, the use of highly sophisticated technology becomes the best means to maintain contact with controllers in their home countries. Tracking such spies is actually a surmountable task which in most cases results even in more questions than answers.

### **4. Assassination**

In the process of trying to gather information it may occur to spies that they have to use their skills to kill potential threats. If a spy, in other words, is convinced that leaving his/her target go free would jeopardize the mission he/she was tasked to carry out then it could be a sufficient ground to eliminate that person. The fear, for example, that the person could reveal vital information and hence endanger the spy's cover as well as the security of the state pushes for assassination to be called for as the

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

best solution. Assassination could be applied also as way of punishing someone who would have switched sides and this usually sends a cold chill running down the spine of those who could be contemplating helping the enemy.

In carrying out an assassination mission, spies usually favor small-caliber handguns because they are easy to conceal and the Walther PPK has remained one of the most favoured handguns in the spy world.<sup>11</sup> If the target, however, is had to get by the use of a shotgun due to distance or tricky circumstances which need greater accuracy, special rifles or machine guns which can be folded easily or disassembled into smaller disguisable components are used. To avoid loud explosions such guns are usually equipped with silencers, that is, metal cylinders that baffle the rapid expansion of gases and greatly reduce the sound a gun makes when it fires. Assassination devices can also be disguised in a pack of cigarettes and an umbrella. As testified by Grabianowski, a cigarette pack with devices is offered to the victim, aimed near his face as if to let him/her draw a cigarette out with his/her teeth. Once the device is triggered, it ejects a cloud of cyanide vapor into the victim's face killing him/her straight away and with almost no trace evidence. Recalling a successful assassination plot using an umbrella with a pneumatic firing mechanism and a small poison pellet, Grabianowski narrates how a Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov was assassinated using such a device. The assassin shot Markov with the poison pellet while he stood on a bridge. As intended, Markov grew sick and died days after and the incident was covered off as an accidental bump with a pointy umbrella.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Misinformation

Driven by the same goal of trying to outwit one's enemies through acquiring as much information as possible from the enemy, governments or concerned organisations spend days and nights also concealing their activities through dishing out false information to potential enemies for they know that they too are engaged in acts of espionage on them. The advantage of such a move is that it keeps the enemy guessing leading thus to costly miscalculations at times and a steady stream of misinfor-

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Grabianowski, *How Spy Gadgets Work*, <http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/spy-gadget2.htm> (accessed 20/07/11).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spy Gadgets Work*.

mation could result even in the enemy beginning to doubt the authenticity of its own intelligence agents.

One way to achieve the desired result would be to employ the services of a double agent. While there are various factors leading one to join the spy world, for example, ideological differences with one's home country, desire to be 'important', money or as a result of blackmail, one may end up functioning as a double agent as a result of having been caught spying. While the agent may not know that his/her activities have been uncovered, he/she is left to carry on with that work but it is ensured that he/she gets access to false information and it is this false information that he/she keeps feeding his/her controllers, being used thus by both sides at the end. Others may actually know that their hidden activities were uncovered but as a result of being threatened with a death sentence or life imprisonment they may agree to turn into double agents. The risk, however, of such people turning into triple agents remains high for they may easily inform their controllers that they were caught and so the controllers may task them to in turn supply misinformation back to the hosts.

One of the most successful and recorded cases of deception operation in world history which involved the use of double agents was the one code-named Operation Fortitude. Operation Fortitude was conducted by Allied forces to mislead the Germans regarding the date and place of the invasion which took place at Normandy in 1944. As reported by Grabinowski:

Wooden and cardboard airplanes, fake fuel depots and even dummy troops were massed in southern England to make the Germans think the attack would come from there, rather than at Normandy in the north. A completely fictional U.S. Army group was created: FUSAG (First U.S. Army Group), which even had General George Patton leading it. False radio traffic supplemented the deception. The most important element, however, was the misinformation provided to the Germans by double agents. Information supplied by a double agent code-named Garbo convinced Hitler that the attack would come from the south. To keep up the pretense and delay the arrival of German reinforcements in Normandy as long as possible, the day of the invasion even featured a fake landing force with loudspeakers playing the sounds of a giant fleet moving across the English Channel, with radar-reflecting balloons and metal strips dropped by planes creating the radar signature of a large invasion. Once the attack at Normandy was underway,

Garbo told his German handlers that it was just a feint meant to draw German troops away from the "real" attack to the south.<sup>13</sup>

## **6. Study of the Media**

The work inside intelligence agencies is so diversified, while some would be busy collecting information from local citizens or from foreign countries where they would be operating from, others would be sitting in offices and busy studying scientific journals, newspapers, corporation annual reports, yearbooks or any other publications that touch on political, economic, technical, social or scientific matters. Such information is classified as open intelligence and specialists trained in this area are assigned to such work. While ordinary readers are at most not able to read between the lines of a newspaper or a book, these specialists are able to decipher a lot of information. Others would be busy listening to the radio or watching TV to acquire intelligence.

## **7. The Bible as a source of intelligence**

While vital information is often sourced from secular sources, the Bible too has not been spared as a source of intelligence. Dunlop captures an incident in 1918 when British forces wanted to take Jericho which was in the hands of the Turks. A stumbling block, however, to such a move was a village called Michmash which acted as defence centre protecting Jericho for it was situated on a high hill and heavily fortified. It occurred to one young officer that Michmash was a familiar name in the Bible and so he searched for it. In opening 1 Samuel 13-14 he realized that the Israelites had surprised the Philistines by making use of a hidden pass. Since the Bible stated further on how to find this hidden pass, the young officer made use of this age-old intelligence report to lead his fellow comrades in the surprise attack against the Turks and indeed the Turks were defeated.<sup>14</sup>

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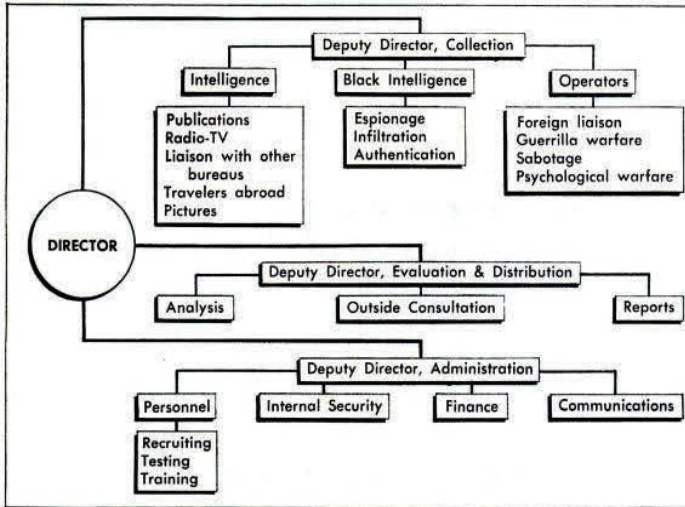
<sup>13</sup> Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dunlop, *This Business of Spying*, 96.

### Passing and analysis of information

As regards the way in which information is passed and analysed by these intelligence organisations, a diagrammatical presentation by Dunlop

Typical agency has three divisions for collecting information, evaluating it, and managing the business:



100

POPULAR MECHANICS

helps explain better the process. He presents it as seen above.<sup>15</sup>

As shown by Dunlop, there are at least three divisions in intelligence organisations: the Administration department, Evaluation and Distribution department, and the Collection department and all these departments fall within the armpit of the Director. While the above structured outline may possibly not be taken as representative of all intelligence organisations in the world, it summarises at least the general operating structure of these organisations. Information received from field agents is first received by controllers who in turn pass it to Deputy Directors and if it is deemed so vital it is then passed on to the Director.

While most field agents just mingle with the general public in everyday life, it is vital that they hide the information they collect so that the enemy does not suspect anything sinister otherwise it may jeopardize their

<sup>15</sup> Dunlop, *This Business of Spying*, 100.

missions. Great caution is needed also when it comes to the passing of this information to the controllers. Until the early 20th century, as observed by Grabianowski, some spies relied on invisible inks to hide messages between the lines of newspapers or on the back of non-suspicious correspondence. In use also was sugar solution or lemon juice which is invisible until heated. Equally effective were some chemicals which don't appear until the paper is painted with a specific reagent.<sup>16</sup>

Grabianowski goes on to give testimony to another once used method termed 'dead drop' in conveying information to the controllers. According to him, a dead drop is practically a secret hiding place somewhere in public where a spy during his/her daily errands casually deposits the message without arousing any suspicion. Such a point could be behind a loose brick in a wall at the city park, or in a plant at a certain street corner. Having deposited the message, the spy then gives signal to his/her controllers so that they know that there is a message to be retrieved and such a signal could be a chalk mark on a lamppost, a certain color of sheet on a clothes line or even a cryptic message in the classified section of a newspaper.<sup>17</sup> The afore-mentioned methods cannot be completely ruled out as no longer in use in this modern world. According to Jean Stein, court papers, for example, which were filed in 2010 in support of the FBI's arrest of 10 alleged "deep cover" Russian spies bring to light that while Moscow Center has added internet technology to its bag of tricks; "Russian intelligence evidently still relies on espionage methods – "tradecraft," in spy lingo – as old as the Rome hills."<sup>18</sup> In addition to that, an FBI affidavit to this case confirmed that while the suspected Russian agents it rounded up sometimes communicated with Moscow via secret messages hidden in web pages, they still, for the most part, contact each other the old-fashioned way, through furtive exchanges in city parks, or with bags of cash hidden along country roads, and even by radio with Morse code.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on the difficulties the FBI has in trying to identify some of these suspected Russian spies, Stein says:

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

<sup>18</sup> J. Stein, 'Russian Spy Case reveals old espionage tricks,' in *The Washington Post*, [http://blog.washingtonpost.com/spy-talk/2010/06/russian\\_spy\\_case\\_shows\\_things.html?hpid=topnews](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/spy-talk/2010/06/russian_spy_case_shows_things.html?hpid=topnews) (accessed 30/07/11).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stein, 'Russian Spy Case reveals old espionage tricks.'

[...] the FBI may never find out who they really are, because of another tried and true technique Moscow Center uses, according to the affidavit: obtaining the birth certificates of dead Canadians and Americans, with which they can build a whole new, false “legend” for their spies.<sup>20</sup>

In this modern world the use of diplomatic bags which are immune from searches while on transit has become a more reliable means. Airlines too are playing a major role in the transportation of secret documents.

When information reaches the hands of controllers it is passed to the map room or situation room where data analysts, like in a crossword puzzle, join together the various pieces to make a complete whole. An overall picture of the enemy’s strategies and policies cannot be obtained from a single source hence the need to consider information from other sources. The importance of looking at information from one source against other sources is well illustrated in a historical case captured by Grabianowski. During World War II, American code breakers are said to have had partially cracked a Japanese Purple code and they were fairly certain that Japan was planning an attack at Midway Island which the Japanese had coded as AF. What was mind boggling, however, was whether or not they were reading correctly Japan’s code word for the island (AF). To test their suspicions, the Americans stationed troops at Midway who then issued a radio alert saying that they were running short on fresh water. It was in no time that Japanese communications were intercepted reporting that AF was low on fresh water and thus confirming American suspicions.<sup>21</sup> When data analysts are done with their work, it is then compiled into reports which are then handed over to the leader of the nation or the interested group.

What the fore-going sections and paragraphs show is that intelligence serves to inform policy-makers of nations or interested groups of the secret plans and strength of their potential enemies. While in some cases such information is vital for the defeat of one’s enemies in other cases it can actually be used to evade clashes. On a daily basis, the shadow armies of secret agents contend for domination and control for the future of humanity. This often turns to reach higher levels or even deadly at times when the ideological and political differences among nations or groups become so tensed up and reach a stalemate. How such

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<sup>20</sup> Stein, ‘Russian Spy Case reveals old espionage tricks.’

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Grabianowski, *How Spies Work*.

a contending for domination and control for the future of humanity is mirrored also in the Jesus movement is what I am turning to now.

### ***Espionage and the Jesus Movement***

For practical reasons, the term 'Jesus movement' is used here in reference to "the group connected with Jesus during his lifetime, to whose members of the Gospels usually applied the term disciple (Gk. *mathetes*, a grammatically masculine term that is somewhat misleading, since the group also included women)."<sup>22</sup> After this group, one finds later followers of Jesus being described historically as well as sociologically as the Jerusalem early church or the 'churches of Judea' as Paul names them (Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14), and as the messianic churches, that is, those churches which rose after 70 AD and reflected in the Gospels of Matthew and John.

To understand espionage tendencies in the Jesus movement one needs first to understand the environment from which this movement arose as well as the spiritual battle that defined Jesus' mission. Jesus actually was born and grew up when there was so much hostility in Galilee towards the Romans and in particular towards Herod Antipas, the puppet governor of Galilee. Jesus' maturation and career coincided, in other words, with the emergence of Antipas whose reign was symbolized in the emergence of Sepphoris and Tiberias as administrative centres in Lower Galilee.<sup>23</sup> Even though the Galilean Jews participated in some aspects of an urbanized world that was now in their midst, such as trade and commerce, they still regarded themselves as a distinct group whose values differed from those of the urbanized centres: Sepphoris and Tiberias. What angered them most was when Herod took away the patrimonial land from most of them and forced them to pay taxes and rents to the new Herodian rulers based at Sepphoris and Tiberias. Antipas' reign, as rightly noted by Sean Freyne, had marked the rapid development of an agrarian economy along lines that were directly opposed to the Jewish patrimonial ideal enshrined in the Pentateuch, an ideal that

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<sup>22</sup> E. Stegemann & W. Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: a social history of its first century*, Scotland: Augsburg Fortress, 1999, 187.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S. Freyne, 'Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus' in W. E. Arnal & M. Desjardins (eds), *Whose Historical Jesus? : Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7*, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1997, 68.



had been upheld by the prophets and re-enacted by such reformers like Nehemiah (Neh 5:1-11).<sup>24</sup>

What remained clear also to Galilean Jews was the fact that Antipas could be ruthless as had been displayed in his beheading of John the Baptist and this was a clear message that no one could hide forever from him. The manner in which Jesus refrained from open confrontation with him shows how he could have avoided a similar fate. Even though Jesus appears to have avoided him, his activities from a Roman point of view posed an internal security problem. His choice of disciples also could have added to him being seen as a real threat. Apart from the known Simon the Zealot or 'Simon the Patriot' he had Judas son of Simon the Iscariot and the term Iscariot is believed to be a cognate with the Greek word *sikarios* meaning 'a dagger-wielding assassin.' Added to these were James and John Boanerges which meant 'sons of thunder.'<sup>25</sup> With the help of their own intelligence, the Romans could have actually followed Jesus closely so as to know their target and a hypothetical 'Jesus File' they possibly opened gave a detailed account of him as they saw him and which eventually led to him being crucified.

Not all Jews, however, resented Antipas' reign. The religious establishment among the Jews had far to benefit from the system and this explains why they were not comfortable with Jesus' challenging of the status quo. Jesus' opponents therefore were not only from the Herodian elite but also from the leading religious elements. Freyne makes an equally good observation when he notes: "The role of a popular healer/exorcist/teacher authority was inevitably viewed with suspicion, especially in a climate in which religious authority was highly structured, exclusively patriarchal and centralized."<sup>26</sup>

Jesus' battle with opponents, it appears, was not just limited to the struggle with human forces but was a battle also with the Prince of the Dark World, Satan. The moment, however, when one thinks of a proof for the reality of Satan, then dawns the realization that one is walking on troubled waters. Even though there is the mention of the name Satan in many passages of the Old and New Testaments, no full and clear account of him is given in any one place. How too he came into existence

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. S. Freyne, 'Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus', 80.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R.M. Sheldon, *Spies of the Bible: espionage in Israel from the Exodus to the Bar Kokhba Revolt*, London: Greenhill Books, 2007, 154

<sup>26</sup> Freyne, 'Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus', 89.

is a mind boggling puzzle that possibly may never have a concrete answer. The language of the prophets (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28) would seem to show that Lucifer held a very high rank in the heavenly hierarchy. Taking a similar stand is the Fourth Lateran Council of the Catholic Church which taught:

"Diabolus enim et alii dæmones a Deo quidem naturâ creati sunt boni, sed ipsi per se facti sunt mali." ("the Devil and the other demons were created by God good in their nature but they by themselves have made themselves evil").<sup>27</sup>

A Scriptural explanation on who the Devil is can only be ascertained by combining a number of scattered references from Genesis to Apocalypse. Throughout the Old Testament he is presented as the adversary, standing in opposition to God's people, whether that is the nation of Israel as a whole (1Ch 21:1), their priestly representatives (e.g, Zech 3:1-2), or the single, righteous man within Israel (Job 1-2). In the New Testament, he is presented as the enemy of the church, attacking God's people (1 Pet 5:8; Jam 4:7) and opposing the redemptive work of God in and through them (Mt 13:19,39). Taking a canonical approach, one finds that from Jesus' time of birth till he resurrected from the dead it was actually a process of who would outmatch who in his fight with the Devil.

From the working definition of intelligence as information and knowledge about an adversary obtained through observation, investigation, analysis, or understanding and the use of that information to make important decisions, one finds that the first instance in which Jesus employed espionage tactics is when he first stood up to read from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:16-19).

Such a manifesto at the beginning of his ministry was addressed directly to his opponents and we find here Jesus using the Bible (Isaiah) as a source of intelligence. In announcing that he had come to preach the gospel to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted Jesus had in mind the

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<sup>27</sup> *Catholic encyclopedia*: Devil, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm> (accessed 24/ 07/ 11).

social situation of his people who had lost their patrimonial land to the Herodian elites. The poor were those who had been deprived and were powerless, and the reason for his preaching was to give them vision and hope. What was going on in Jesus' mind and other devotees of the Jewish law of that time was that God was up to something very special, to do something which men could not do for themselves and they actually believed that the climax of history was really at hand. As aptly put by E.P. Sanders,

What was really going on, they thought, was that God was up to something very special. The God they believed in was the God of Israel, the God who called Abraham, gave the law to Moses and elevated David to kingship. That God would now bring his work to fruition.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time Jesus knew also that some had been captives of his greatest opponent, the Devil, hence the message that he had come to set them at liberty by forgiving them of their sins and keep them free. He knew quite well that if a soul is under Satan's power, and led captive by him then it sees nothing, it becomes blind to the things of God. Intelligence enabled him know that Satan blinds the eyes by unbelief. In setting people free therefore from their sins, Jesus was actually contending for the future of humanity, thus safeguarding the vital interests of his group of followers.

The presence of spy-like agents in Jesus' group of followers and Jesus' use of intelligence can also be deduced from the repeated use of a phrase 'Jesus knew' by the evangelists in relation to what his opponents were planning against him. A few examples perhaps could help illustrate my argument here. Following a controversy over a man with a withered hand we hear: "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when **Jesus knew it**, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all" (Mt 12:14-15). In the same chapter of Matthew we find the Pharisees trying to lay a charge against Jesus that he was possessed by the Beelzebub and again we hear: "And **Jesus knew their thoughts**, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand [...] (Mt 12:22-28). In the Gospel of John we find Jesus withdrawing from Judea and departing to Galilee and the reason which is presented for him taking such a move is: "[...] the **Lord knew how** the Pharisees had

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<sup>28</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: The Penguin Press, 1993, 96.

heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, [...] He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee” (John 4:1-3). Acknowledging the tension that had arisen between Jesus and his opponents the Synoptics say that he left because Herod Antipas had arrested John the Baptist (cf. Mat 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:20). Introducing the passion narrative we again hear John say: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when **Jesus knew that his hour was come** that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end [...] (John 13:1f). In all the given examples, no one is really able to tell the source of Jesus’ awareness of what his opponents were planning, the evangelists do not elaborate on that. Fired by the desire to show that Jesus was the son of God the evangelists could have intentionally wanted to create a picture whereby Jesus is seen to know everything, even that which lay inside a person’s heart as well as forthcoming events. However, it cannot be totally dismissed that he had some informers who were relaying to him intelligence concerning the activities of his rivals. Jesus surely had a lot of sympathizers even outside the circle of his close followers and some of these sympathizers could actually have been related to his opponents. An attested case of such bonds of relationships with some Jewish authorities, for example, is that of a disciple who was known to the high priest (John 18:15-16). Barrett argues that the term *gnwstov* V (known to) is used in the LXX to refer to a close friend.<sup>29</sup> It is such people who possibly spied on Jesus’ behalf out of their love for him. They gathered intelligence not only from the ordinary talk with the high officials but could possibly have had access also to minutes of the Senatorial Meetings of the Sanhedrin in the homes of these officials.

Apart from the ‘Jesus knew’ passages we also find incidences where unnamed informers brought word to him. In Luke, for example, we hear, “Now there were **some** present at that time **who told Jesus** about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices” (Lk 13:1). We are not told whether those who came bearing this account were Galileans themselves or not and why exactly Pilate had killed them. It could have been that Pilate felt that they were a threat to his internal security requirements. Pilate, as argued by Rose Mary Sheldon, probably served as his own intelligence chief and had informers who helped him

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<sup>29</sup> Barrett cited in W. Hall Harris III, *Exegetical Commentary on John 18*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-john-18> (accessed 25/07/ 11).

see to it that Rome had eyes and ears almost everywhere to guard against the hatching of any rebellions. Actually there were five rebellions during his tenure which he succeeded in thwarting and such efficiency could not have happened without reliable intelligence resources.<sup>30</sup> Though Jesus is presented as having differed from the implicit conclusions of those who told him about the Galileans, evident from his remark: “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! [...] (v.2-3a), what is evidently clear is that they had carried the sad news to him. They knew of course that Jesus had no bonds of friendship with Pilate and their message could have served as a warning to Jesus also. It is actually difficult to imagine that they had simply come to prove their innocence before Jesus and compare themselves as better off than those Galileans who had been killed. What is more interesting also is that their names were not mentioned and from the fore-going analysis on the operating nature of spies we saw that it is exactly the nature of spies of not wanting to be known by names. Even though there is no explicit mention that these people were part of Jesus’ followers there is certainly every reason to suggest that they had some kind of sympathy towards him and it remains an open possibility that they could have been his secret followers.

Yet another spy tactic we find being employed by the Jesus movement is that of field agents who are sent into the public to carry out specified missions against the enemy and come back to report to the command center. In the two related incidences where Jesus first sends out the twelve (Mk 6:7-13) and then the seventy more (Lk 10:1-12, 17-20) we find Jesus targeting his main opponent, the Devil, in an effort to weaken him and put his house in disarray. When those who had been sent out came back to report to the command center on the success of their missions, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us” we find Jesus too rejoicing on the accomplished mission saying: “I saw Satan having fallen like lightning from heaven [...]” Lk 10:18). In the success story of his disciples, Jesus saw already the demise of his opponent. This finds echo in the words of Bob Deffinbaugh who says:

If they saw the demons as subject to them, Jesus saw Satan in the beginnings of his demise. Satan was, like lightning, falling from heaven. That is,

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. R.M. Sheldon, *Spies of the Bible: espionage in Israel from the Exodus to the Bar Kokhba Revolt*, 153.

he was falling down, and he was falling “lightning” fast. The coming of Christ and more specifically the cross of Christ was Satan’s defeat, and the mission of the seventy was but a preview of what was to come.<sup>31</sup>

Bearing in mind that Jesus’ battle with opponents was not just limited to the struggle with human forces but was a battle also with the Prince of the Dark World, Satan, it sounds reasonable to suggest that Jesus conceived of the Devil as a real force and not just some personifications of the Roman Empire. Logically also, the very fact that the disciples came back rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them shows that their mission was more spiritual than an attempt to deal with opposing human forces.

In demanding circumstances Jesus himself would not hesitate to employ what we saw as another method used in the spying field, namely; that of assassinating one’s target once it has been proved beyond doubt that only doing so would serve the vital interest of the group or organisation. Cases abound in the Gospels where Jesus would ‘assassinate’ demons, which actually left his followers giving glory to God and increasing in number. In the Gospel of Mark, for example, we find him in the region of the Gerasenes where he meets a man with an impure spirit from the tombs and he casts out that spirit (Mk 5:1-20; Mt 8:28-33). In another incident in Luke, a story carried also in Matthew, we find him ‘assassinating’ a demon from a man who was mute (Lk 11:14-20; Mt 32-33). When also a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, was brought to Jesus, we find him ‘assassinating’ that demon resulting thus in the man being able to talk and see (Mt 12:22-30).

Further, the espionage tactic of misinformation proved a valuable tool also in the activities of the Jesus movement. The Gospel of John recounts an incident where Jesus’ brothers, possibly as a result of infiltration by Jewish authorities who were looking for a way to kill Jesus, sarcastically encourage him, “Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world” (Jn 7:3-4). Sensing that something was fishy in their push that he goes up to Judea, Jesus conceals his plans: “You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come” (Jn 7:8). When, however, his brothers had left for the

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<sup>31</sup> B. Deffinbaugh, *The True Source of Joy (Luke 10:17-24)*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/true-source-joy-luke-1017-24> (accessed 27/07/11).

festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. While various explanations have been offered to reconcile Jesus' statement to his brothers with his later action, for example, that (1) the use of the present tense does not exclude later action of a different kind (It does not say anything about the future); (2) Jesus is really denying his brothers' request to perform signs. He will go up to the feast, but not in their way, openly and that (3) Jesus did not travel up to Jerusalem with the other pilgrims to the feast, an act which would have been conspicuously public, and would have drawn undue attention to himself but rather chose to travel to Jerusalem by himself, privately,<sup>32</sup> what is apparently clear is that Jesus misinformed his brothers and indirectly possibly those also who had sent them. As proof that Jesus' opponents often relied also on spies to trap him we hear in the Gospel of Matthew that the Pharisees [...] went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" [...] (Mt 22:15-22). In the Gospel of Luke these people who were sent are openly characterised as spies (Lk 20:19-26) and knowing their duplicity, Jesus outwitted them. Within the Jesus movement itself, Judas Iscariot could actually have played the role of a double agent. Yet another incident which shows that Jesus kept his enemies guessing who he was is when the Jews gathered around him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly?" (Jn 10:24). While ordinary people, as noted by Dunlop, would like to be open about their words and actions, a spy cannot afford that.<sup>33</sup> In Jesus' case, what kept the Jews in a state of guessing, as averred by Bob Utley, is that first, Jesus taught in parables, figurative language, and ambiguous dualistic statements and so the Jews wanted him to express himself clearly. It is not that the use of parables was new and surprising to his hearers but it was because it was not easily understood without an explanation. Even his disciples too at times did not understand what he was saying hence the resort to ask him in private what he meant (Lk 8:4-10).

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<sup>32</sup> W. Hall Harris III, Exegetical Commentary on John 7, <http://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-john-18> (accessed 25/07/11).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Dunlop, *This Business of Spying*, 231.

The second reason, as noted by Utley, which kept the Jews in a state of confusion, is that they did not expect the Messiah to be deity incarnate. From their memory of Jesus' teachings, however, they had heard him allude to his oneness with God on several occasions (cf. Jn 8:56-59). While also they had expected the Messiah to act like Moses (cf. Deut 18:15,19), the problem was that Jesus did not fit their traditional military, nationalistic expectations of the Messiah.<sup>34</sup> Given such a scenario it would have been so difficult of course for the Jews to comprehend the claims of a person who came from the fringes of the Jewish society and Jesus purposefully appears to have wanted it so also. Asked why he chose the mode of speaking to people in parables he responded: "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" (Mk 4:11-12). Jesus is here presented as citing a passage from the book of Isaiah (6:9) and the source which Mark uses here is the Aramaic Targum. The Matthean parallel (Mt 13:13-15), however, is from the Septuagint and Matthew quotes both Is 6:9 and 10. Both evangelists draw a parallel that just as Isaiah's preaching was rejected by the hard-headed Israelites he addressed in the eighth century BC Jesus' teaching similarly was rejected by his hearers in the first century A.D. While the whole passage (Mk 4:11-12) presents Jesus as intentionally misleading the Jews, Bill Lawrence, however, suggests that this whole issue of special instruction for the Twelve could actually have functioned in the early church as a way of accentuating Apostolic authority. The picture they wanted to create was that they, and they alone, knew the "true" interpretation of Jesus' words and that all revelation comes through these chosen and inspired disciples.<sup>35</sup> A similar passage which also could have been a creation of the early Church needing to assert Apostolic authority is when Jesus exclaimed: "I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children." (Mt 11:25). There could indeed have been some in the early Church who were trying to denigrate the work of the Apostles as that of unlearned men and hence not worth of attention.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. B. Utley, *John 10*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/john-10> (accessed 28/07/11).

<sup>35</sup> Cf B. Lawrence, *Mark 4*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/mark-4> (accessed 28/07/ 11).



Describing the character required of a spy, Dunlop says, “He must be capable of withstanding intense loneliness and the unnerving threat of hidden dangers [...] must remain cool in a crisis [...]”<sup>36</sup> Making reference to Elsbeth Schragmuller, a once prominent German instructor in black intelligence and sabotage, Dunlop says that when a neophyte was brought to her, she would lock up that person for days on end and with no one interrupting that person’s loneliness. Regular surveillance, however, would be made and by the time that candidate was set free almost everything about him/her was known by the instructor.<sup>37</sup> While so much could possibly have changed now in the training of spies what remains true is that they undergo exhaustive training and testing. One could of course then ask: is this not what we find in the character of Jesus also as portrayed in the Gospels? If we look at the temptations of Jesus (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12f; Lk 4:1-13), the character which we indeed see of Jesus as presented by the evangelists is that of one who was capable of withstanding intense loneliness. Such an exhaustive training and testing which Jesus underwent and which spies too undergo, is meant to strengthen one’s character for the job ahead. Apart from time he spent in the wilderness before the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had periods in his ministry when he preferred just to be all by himself (Mk 1:35; 6:45-46; Lk 4:42: 6:12). Such moments should have enabled him to analyze the intelligence data he was acquiring during the active parts of his ministry and thus helped him make important decisions in regard to the direction of his ministry. Acting almost as the director of operations he knew the task fell upon him to come up with crucial decisions in consultation with his Father (God) through prayer and by so doing safeguarding the vital interests of his group.

To sum up, what the fore-going paragraphs in this paper show is that intelligence need not always be interpreted negatively as just the cause of the mysterious disappearance of some people or the cause of wars. In the recent centuries spying has actually rose to become one of the most recognised professions and has started to lose its stigma as a dishonest and disreputable way of making a living. There is more and more recognition of it as a legitimate way of collecting military intelligence.<sup>38</sup> From

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<sup>36</sup> Dunlop, *This Business of Spying*, 231.

<sup>37</sup> Dunlop, *This Business of Spying*, 231, 248.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Spies, *The National Archives: Research and learning, Exhibitions and Secrets and Spies*, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/spies/spies/default.htm> (accessed 29/07/11).

the analysis of both the secular world and that of the Jesus movement what is undeniably clear is that intelligence helps leaders come up with important decisions, decisions which more often than not help shape the future of humanity.

Since the Bible has on more than one occasion been used to defeat the plans of the enemy and is full of exemplary cases from which to learn, it looks really fitting that Africans appropriate it to counteract the unending siphoning of their resources by greedy elements of this world. The use of the Bible as a source of intelligence will also help influence the process of decision making that will impact Africa for the good. Africa surely deserves its rightful place in the world of humanity and not it just being known as the land of tears, hunger, wars, diseases and a host of other life misfortunes.

Pieter Verster

**Empowering the poor:  
The Bible and the poor in informal settlements in  
Africa with reference to Mangaung, South Africa.<sup>1</sup>**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Stories from Africa are often stories of despair. Social, economic and political problems are challenging the search for a better life for many in Africa. Signs of a new and better future are sometimes overshadowed by news of wars, droughts, floods, epidemics and political upheaval.

It is as if the seriousness of the situation is too overwhelming for a positive solution. However, a Christian response to the challenges must not be and is not lacking. All over Africa, Christian churches, theologians and church members are involved in discussion and active involvement in the situation in Africa. A new dawn is also visible in many instances.

The Bible is not silent on the issue of the human predicament and a reply from Scripture is needed to the challenges of Africa. In informal settlements all over Africa and also in South Africa, the church's presence is of utmost importance. Taking her cue from the Bible, the Church should reply in an active and radical way. The church should respond to the challenges in these situations. The churches' reply can only be beneficial to the people themselves if the church itself is prepared to link the message of the Bible to the needs of the people. The message of the Bible has definite implications for the needs of the people. Looking at the message of the Bible, the church can reply to the needs of the people and bring about a new situation in which new possibilities can be found.

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## **2. THE CHALLENGE OF POVERTY IN AFRICA**

### **2.1 *The challenge of poverty***

Poverty is a serious challenge. Effah (2006:71) explains that the definition of poverty should be made much broader. He refers to the fact that a human development perspective further expands the concept of poverty to include poor health, lack of good education, lack of a decent standard of living, denial of political freedom, lack of human rights, vulnerability, exposure to risk, powerlessness and voicelessness. He is of the opinion that to tackle poverty, these dimensions of poverty are interrelated and governments have to tackle poverty from different fronts. Van der Walt (2003:40) also mentions that all aspects of human life are touched by poverty such as the economic, spiritual, judicial and ethical life. Coetzee (2002:5) prefers the word “vulnerability” to poverty because it allows for a larger framework and goes beyond the particular situational conditions: “It recognises the processes involved in the construction of well-being”.

Poverty in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, is endemic. Wood (2007:5) mentions that in 1998, the World Bank estimated that 291 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were living in absolute poverty. These people were trying to survive on less than US\$1 per day, a total of US\$365 for an entire year. He explains that significantly, this was an increase from 217 million people just ten years prior, representing an increase of more than 34 %. He mentions that by 1998 half of the people living south of the Sahara Desert in Africa were living in extreme poverty. More than ten years later, the picture is still dire. The Africa Progress Report (2010:23) explains that to the detriment of hundreds of millions of Africans, the continent’s strong economic growth over the past five years has not translated into social protection or widespread poverty reduction. The report continues that while there is controversy around both the method of computation and the actual level of Africa’s poverty rate, most African countries will not reach their poverty-reduction goals by 2015 and that the global economic crisis is expected to add millions to the ranks of the working poor, with the International Labour Office (ILO) estimating that the rate of working poverty in sub-Saharan Africa has already increased from 58.9 % in 2007 to as much as 67.9 % in late 2009.

## **2.2 Poverty and governance in Africa**

Due to problems in the political dispensation in Africa, the challenge still remains to find a way in which Africa can become truly democratic. At the moment, the challenge is to respond to the poverty of Africa by democratic governments who are determined to benefit and to uplift their people. In Africa itself, there are many serious challenges concerning poverty and epidemic illnesses.

Poverty in Africa in itself challenges the government and the church to respond to the issues at hand. Many issues are still unresolved. Sometimes the geographical impact and also the situation on the level of agriculture lead to definite challenges in poverty alleviation. Droughts, lack of infrastructure and lack of developmental aid are often the reasons for poverty in Africa. It must also be mentioned that globalisation offers no viable solution to the problems of poverty in Africa. Although many of the problems of poverty can be laid before the global north or the past colonial governments it is not necessarily the only cause of poverty in Africa. Carnes (2005:38) views corruption as a serious problem and explains that the tragic reality of Africa's history is that help from the outside often doesn't help and that billions of dollars of new help, promised by the world's wealthiest nations, makes little difference and even makes things worse.

Colonialism, however, did much to plunder Africa and also did much to take away from Africa's own possibilities to feed its own people. It is therefore very important that not only the church but also the governments in Africa tackle these serious problems and seek solutions. Africa also needs to attend to the problems of government. The Africa Progress Report (2010:18) refers to the issue:

“But much of this progress has been overshadowed by recent setbacks and disconcerting trends. Chronic problems remain, including state fragility, corruption and widespread lack of basic freedoms. The most high-profile setback is the return of coups d'état – the last five years have seen violent and unconstitutional changes of government in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritania, and Niger – despite the professed zero-tolerance policy of the African Union. This period has also seen the enforcement of shaky power-sharing deals in Kenya, Niger, Sudan and Zimbabwe, and the refusal of many African states to support the indictment of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court”.

Often in Africa the rising shine of democratisation is blinded by the serious problem of military rule, one party states and dictatorships. To look at the problems of Africa from a clear perspective, it should be

taken into account that these challenges should be met to come to a better solution. The Africa Progress Report (2010:6) refers to the fact that good governance and accountability will determine Africa's future because the quality of governance is a key determinant in political and social stability, equitable economic growth and poverty reduction (see also Meredith 2006:678ff).

### **2.3 Poverty and development in Africa**

Speckman (2007:16) is very critical towards aid towards African development from the global north. He is of the opinion that foreign aid is not helping countries because it does not help them to become economically independent. He is of the opinion that Africa should take hold of its own possibilities and advantages to progress (Speckman 2007:280-282).

Effah (2006:66) also refers to the challenges in this regard and to the fact that the belief that Africa's development will bring about a positive human factor on the continent failed and that on the contrary corruption costs Africa about US\$200 billion a year. He explains that this amount is equivalent to the total value of Africa's external debt and that corruption and mismanagement are very pervasive in Africa.

### **2.4 Poverty and HIV/AIDS in Africa**

Concerning the illnesses and epidemics in Africa, there is a serious challenge on meeting these problems and responding to it. HIV/AIDS is a terrible illness and the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Africa sees no end. The Africa Progress Report (2010:28) describes the situation as follows:

“Despite a decline in the number of new HIV infections, from 2.3 million to 1.9 million between 2001 and 2008, sub-Saharan Africa also remains the region by far most heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, accounting for 71 % of all new infections in 2008” (also see Meredith 2006:682).

### **2.5 Poverty and the economies of Africa**

The Africa Progress Report (2010:13-15) explains that Africa's economies are far from trouble-free and remain burdened by enormous structural impediments, both domestically and internationally, that constrain productive potential and the scope for job creation and lifting of living standards. The report views the fact that the private sector continues to face greater regulatory and administrative burdens, and less protection

of property and investor rights, than in other regions as a serious challenge. It states:

“Despite sharp improvements in revenue collection, 11 governments in Sub-Saharan Africa still collect less than 15 per cent of GDP in the form of public revenue, a level considered as a minimum needed to cover the state’s basic functions”.

Also in Africa, the needs of people without a voice are important. There are many people in Africa who do not have the ability to speak for themselves; the widows, the orphans, the children on the streets, the elderly, women in many instances and it is therefore a severe challenge to help these people to gain a voice.

## **2.6 Poverty, women and children**

The Africa Progress Report (2010:25) emphasises the needs of women and states that awareness has grown over the last decade of the importance of women’s empowerment. There are positive signs, e.g. new national laws ranging from tackling violence against women to equal pay and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia as well as Rwanda’s parliament who was the first in the world in which women took over half the seats (56 % including the speaker); two African countries (South Africa and Lesotho) feature in the top ten of the World Economic Forum’s 2009 Global Gender Gap Index; both are sources of pride. The challenges however remain immense.

## **2.7 Why is Africa poor?**

There can be no doubt that colonialism played an important role in the challenges facing Africa. Therefore there can be two aspects to the problem of poverty facing Africa. One is the colonial past and the present inequalities stemming from that past. The other is the present leadership in Africa.

Colonialism in some instances led to the destruction of the African community. Any community suffering such a total onslaught struggles to heal from the problems brought about by these influences. Van der Walt (2003:10 in reference to Khapoya (1994:145-147)) refers to issues in the colonial rule that led to the destruction of the community. In many instances there were massive exploitation of labour and resources while prohibition on inter-Africa trade also led to many negative aspects. Ethnic rivalries were often misused by colonial powers for their own benefit.

The authority of the African communal system was also broken. Artificial boundaries broke the relation between many people and the destruction of culture was also detrimental to the wellbeing of the people. The denial of political participation was carried over to the post-colonial period. It is therefore no wonder that many African countries still struggle with the legacy of the past.

In the book “Why Africa is poor, and what Africans can do about it.” by Greg Mills (2010:1), another aspect is also mentioned. He is of the opinion that the main reason why Africa’s people are poor is because the leaders have made this choice. Mills continues to say that the record shows that countries can grow their economies and develop faster if leaders take sound decisions in the national interest. Mills (2010:2) is of the opinion that this should also have been Africa’s time. What is then the problem? Why is it so that so many countries in Africa do not progress in a positive way? The reason for this, according to Mills (2010:10) is that Africa’s leaders made bad choices.

Mills (2010:12) explains:

“That African leaders have been permitted to get away with ruinous, self-interested decisions can be attributed in large part to a relative lack of democracy (or to single-party dominance) in Africa. There has been little bottom-up pressure on leadership to make better choices, notwithstanding the encouraging growth of civil society in parts of the continent over the past two decades.”

Africa’s leadership is thus also partly to be blamed and the problem of development in Africa lies also partly before the bad choices of the leaders of Africa.

## **2.8 The need for solutions**

The problems of Africa are deep and serious and cannot be met unless a clear picture of all the different challenges are put forward and there are, from this perspective, the possible interaction with these problems to bring about new solutions. The Africa Progress Report (2010:4) views Africa’s land and natural wealth as immense and increasing in value and it calls on governments to use revenues to promote sustainable and equitable development.

Bisoux (2008:42) mentions that foreign investment may not be the only, or even the best solution to the seemingly intractable problems that African countries face. The widespread availability of quality manage-



ment education could be the key to ending years of political instability, poverty and pandemics.

Jones (2005:999) is of the opinion that Africa is at the receiving end of much oppression and that while the poor know that they are poor, and can describe their daily suffering, they will not necessarily be able to provide a fully adequate account of the causes of their poverty. He is of the opinion that this is especially so in the era of global capitalism, when conditions of local poverty in Africa and elsewhere are rooted in and reproduced by social relations which are globally extended.

### **3. THE CHALLENGE OF THE CITY**

#### **3.1 *The creative city***

The city has many challenges but also has much to offer. Landry (2008: xxxiii) emphasises the creative aspects of the city and its inhabitants. The best should be made of urban assets.

The city can also be an urban success due to:

- talent churn,
- creativity and innovation potential,
- connectivity and
- distinctiveness,

which opens up the possibilities of life in the city (Landry 2008: xxxvi).

Creativity in the city is very important and the cycle of creativity should be inspired by:

1. helping people generate ideas,
2. turning ideas into reality,
3. networking and marketing ideas,
4. delivering mechanisms such as cheap space and
5. disseminating results (Landry 2008:224).

Wood and Landry (2008:324ff.) emphasise that the intercultural city is positive and should be developed. In the development thereof cultural diversity should not be shunned but encouraged and intercultural help and development should be given. Successful cities often have a rich diversity of peoples.

The city is therefore not all gloom. Many challenges exist, but the city also offers new possibilities of hope and innovation.

### **3.2 The informal settlement city**

Informal settlements are a well known sight near cities and towns in the developing world. Many people flock to the cities to obtain an income. There are usually push and pull factors. Push factors include situations where living becomes more and more unacceptable, e.g. due to droughts, mechanisation on farms, overpopulation of areas where it is not viable to farm on small scale, lack of prospects of education for children and other factors making it worthwhile to leave the rural areas. Pull factors include factors like the availability of work in urban areas, better educational prospects and medical facilities and financial institutions. People are prepared to leave behind their ancestral land to live in cities and towns, often in very poor circumstances (and sometimes illegally) on other people's land. At present in many areas there is an increasing number of legalised informal settlement areas.

The informal settlement city is however vibrant and lively. Cultures mix and people live on the edge. Poverty is often rampant. The struggle to survive is also immanent. Simone (2005:9) refers to the fact that cities are the conjunction of seemingly endless possibilities of remaking. Even the depleted structures open up to somewhere and the residents continuously resituate themselves.

The structures are not permanent but the people try to establish the best possible homes in difficult circumstances. The question is whether it is possible to generate a community of hope and wellbeing, especially by the involvement of the church.

The way forward for the peri-urban interface is important according to McGregor et al. (2006:318) who state that strategies for development of the peri-urban interface should be community focused and informed, where practical, by Participatory Action Research (PAR). Strategies at community level should be affordable and based, where practicable, upon self-help. The concept of self-improvement and self-involvement is a positive contribution which also plays an important role in assessing the influence of the church.

### **3.3 Informal settlements near Mangaung**

Bloemfontein is the capital of the Free State Province in South Africa. Mangaung is the name given to the local municipality. East of Bloemfontein, many informal areas are sprouting up like mushrooms. The municipality accepts that informal settlements will continue to provide

shelter for the poor for the foreseeable future (Mokoena & Marais 2008:109). 32,263 erven in newly formalised areas have been created over the past ten years. Bringing informal settlements into the orbit of formal planning is essential and the municipality tries to develop the areas in such a way that structure is given to these areas Mokoena and Marais (2008:109). People are flocking in from farms all over the Free State but also from depleted mining towns and other African countries. The challenges in these informal settlement areas are vast. However, the church is present in many ways. Mainline churches erect more permanent structures while independent and initiated churches erect temporary structures. The challenge for the church is to bring about new hope in the informal settlement city.

#### **4. THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE OF BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD IN CRISIS**

The Biblical message on the needs of Africa is clear. The Bible speaks of the message of God in a world of need. Humans rejected God, but God does not reject humans. In his turn towards human beings, God reaches out to bring about a new dispensation. The churches are the messengers of God in this world and they need to take hands with one another to bring about a community of brotherhood and sisterhood. With brotherhood and sisterhood the church can challenge the grave situation and also the problems of Africa. The church is the community that can reach out to the poorest of the poor by being present in their circumstances so as to help and be there for them. The church is a community of faith reaching out to the poor in a community through the message of love which is clear in the Bible. A specific aspect of the church's role among the poor and ill is to be a community of love. This community of love and faith is a community of brotherhood and sisterhood. There are other aspects of the Bible such as the call to justice and judgement but this specific aspect is highlighted here because it is present among the people of God and the Church under difficult circumstances when God shows his love..

##### **4.1 Brotherhood and sisterhood in the Old Testament**

If we turn to the Old Testament, we can see that the community of God, the people of Israel, had to look after the voiceless people. The main thrust remains that the community of people of God had to live in faith

in narrow relation with God but also with their compatriots. They were the people of God and had to look after fellow Israelites with compassion and love. In evaluating the implications of brotherhood and sisterhood, the role of the actors in the Biblical stories are important. How the people interact with one another is important in establishing the implications of the story for the theme under discussion.

In the story of Cain and Abel, it is made clear that God wishes brotherhood and sisterhood to be complete in honouring the relation among people. Van Wolde (1991:39) is of the opinion that God called the brothers to live in harmony, especially in the sense that the needs of the struggling one should be attended to: "YHWH does give attention to this so-called worthless one: he looks at his offering and he repeatedly confronts Cain with his failing to be a (good) brother. In this way, he implicitly expresses the value that Abel has for him. In this way, he also confronts the reader with the value of the human being who is written off by fellow human beings as being worthless. YHWH, in his autonomous acting, looks at the weak brother but not at the strong brother who fails to be a brother. He is very consistent in this, because, at the very end of the story, when Cain himself has become an underdog and a fugitive, YHWH offers Cain, too, his support in the shape of a mark of protection". It may well be that Van Wolde stretches the implications too far and that the relation of the two brothers must rather be evaluated from their relationship to God, but essentially the fact that God expects brotherhood, should be emphasized. Wenham (1987:117) emphasises the relation with God as the main aspect. He is of the opinion that the blood of the innocent victim pollutes the land (see his references to Gen. 6:11-12; 18:20 1 Kings 21, Ex. 20:13, Num. 35:9-34, Ps. 37, Is. 5:7 Luk. 18:7-8 & Rom. 6:9-10). The sacrifice towards God is, according to him, the main issue, but brotherhood also needed to honour God in this regard.

The story of Joseph relates how brotherhood is reaffirmed after a time of serious strain on relations. Joseph is rejected by his brothers, not in the least because of his own actions. However, they do the unspeakable to their own brother by wanting to kill him and then selling him as slave. The turning point comes when Joseph in Genesis 45 by the grace of God forgives his brothers and turns the relation around to one of brotherhood and compassion. This new relation teaches us that the community

of brothers and sisters can be a new community in faith. This new relation can lead to a confession of the truth of God and his salvation.<sup>2</sup>

In the Torah the relation of brothers and sisters is mentioned as the cornerstone of the covenant. The true Israelite should at all times honour brothers and sisters in faith. In Exodus 22:16-31, 22-25, the widow and orphan is helped by the Lord and should at all times be honoured. No rent should be taken from the fellow Israelite in difficulties. The community should look after the most vulnerable individuals at all times. In Lev 19:13-17<sup>3</sup> and 25:39-46 this principle of brotherhood is again emphasised. The negative reactions of Edom towards their own brothers in Numbers 20:14-21 again stress the need to live as brothers and not to despise one another.

In Number 27:1-10 the story of Zelophehad's daughters is told and again it is emphasised that God's righteousness include women and that they should also be honoured as family in the household of God.<sup>4</sup> Bordereau et al. (1998:12) emphasise the element of justice in the story.

In Deut 24:5-25, the concept of brotherhood and sisterhood includes the alien and the slave. The community of faith should always be the community of love. Within this community there had to be a very serious link between their worship of God and their provision for the needs of people amongst themselves.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wenham (1994:433) explains the implications of the Joseph story: "Thus, not only does the story of Joseph offer just models of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation and illustrate the working of divine providence in human affairs, but it reports yet another stage in the story of God's saving purpose for the whole world".

<sup>3</sup> Hartley (1992:315) refers to Lev. 19:14 and the fact that those who fear God seek justice: "Everyone needs to keep in mind the fact that God looks after the disadvantaged and holds accountable anyone who takes advantage of them".

<sup>4</sup> Budd (1984:302-303) explains the implications of the justice sought by Zelophehad's daughters: "Theologically the section presses the rights of women to a clear and recognized legal position within the sphere of property law... The section also affirms the fundamental jubilee principle that the unregulated appropriation of landed property is harmful to the well-being of the community". Olson (1996:167) also affirms the implications of the story: "They may provide encouragement and direction for those in our own time concerned about issues of justice and gender".

<sup>5</sup> Kalland (1992:147) emphasises the corporate solidarity of the people of Israel in their relationship with one another. Lohfink (1991:47) emphasises the biblical task: "But poverty, which rises again and again, stimulates all brothers and sisters to react against it and eradicate it immediately. Because of this reaction, which always calls forth divine blessing, and because of the functioning system of provisions for the different groups in Israel, what we read in Deut 15:4 also remains true: "There will be no poor

The story of Ruth explains also the family values even to the foreigner and emphasises God's provision through the community of the destitute.<sup>6</sup>

Masenyana (2004:59) writes: "A sense of maintaining human integrity and self-worth in our view enables victims of harsh circumstances not to give up, but to continue to struggle as agents of change even in the face of life-denying circumstances. The story of Ruth and Naomi in the Old Testament has reminded us that the powerless have a way of coping with hostile circumstances. The powerless however need to be reminded that in our struggle to maintain our integrity motivated by our sense of agency, we need to fight in such a way that our integrity as persons in our own right is not tampered with negatively either by circumstances or by those more powerful than us".

The people of Israel had to look after one another. Especially the widows and the orphans had to be the centre of the help that should have been given by the people. It is clear in the Torah that God expected of his people to show mercy and to help others. Very important is that this mercy and help for the people had to be from the perspective of brotherhood and sisterhood. Being the people of Israel, being the people of God, they had to look after one another and seek the benefit of one another because of the presence of God in their midst. Looking at one another, they, from the perspective of brotherhood and sisterhood, had to link the power of salvation in God to helping one another and helping the community in that sense. Therefore it was not possible to leave aside the challenge to come together and be a brother and a sister for the other person.

Gowan (1987:353) explains: "Obviously, then, what the Old Testament says about wealth and poverty cannot be taken as prescriptive for any modern society. Precisely because of its emphasis on the widow, orphan, and immigrant as the classic examples of the powerless. The Old Testa-

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among you." Calvin was of the opinion that the generosity of God to the people of Israel also had to be bestowed by them on the stranger and widow and orphan. The stranger was thus an important motif in Calvin's commentaries in which he emphasised the grace of God but also the command to do justice and reach out to the people in need (Jacob 2008:152).

<sup>6</sup> See Campbell (1975:138) where God is presented in the story where responsible people are seen as acting "as God to one another." The restoration of the fullness of life to Naomi by the son as guardian also emphasizes the role of the family (Bush 1996:264-265).

ment material however, has enduring value for descriptive purposes. The Old Testament's final criterion for determining how adequately wealth was distributed in the land and how much opportunity was offered the poor to better their position was diagnostic, and it can still be used that way. That is, no matter what the economic system may be, no matter whether the region is relatively poor or relatively prosperous, one can judge how good that system is and how well it is administered, by considering what becomes of people like the widow, people who experience a sudden, involuntary change of fortune for the worse. One can observe what happens to people like the orphan, physically and mentally unable to take care of themselves and dependent on others for all their needs. One can study what it is like to be a foreigner in that society, how many opportunities there are, and just how unpleasant it may be to be foreign”.

#### **4.2 *Brotherhood and sisterhood in the New Testament***

In the New Testament, brotherhood and sisterhood is also very important and mentioned in many instances. It is clear from the gospels, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, that God expected of his people, the disciples of Jesus, to look after one another. Therefore, people who brought peace, love and mercy are the people that will benefit in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not something far away, but something near to the people living in a special sense of unity with one another and linking one another to the glorious salvation in God which he brought about. Brotherhood and sisterhood is then very important for living with God and living with one another. There are many references in the synoptic gospels to this kind of life with one another. It is clear that it should be accepted and that one should live in this very near relation with one another. Again, those people on the fringes of the community are welcomed to become brothers and sisters in the new community of God. Tax collectors and prostitutes are invited to become part of this community. This community should also reach out to these people and help them to become new, so they live as new people in God's new community. This means that people in the New Testament and that the church in the New Testament should look after the needs of other people in the community and that the church should be there to look after the needs of those who have very little. The gifts in the church community should be to the benefit of the whole community, (1 Cor.

chapter: 12-14).<sup>7</sup> A very clear example of this is that a church should also take responsibility for those in need. Paul listens to the call of the church from Judea where there was poverty and need and he made a collection to help them as brothers and sisters. In 2 Corinthians 9,<sup>8</sup> the church in this sense has the opportunity to become involved in the deepest need of the community and of people in the community. The church should look after the people in need in the community so as to help the community to be free of want.

Nowhere is the positive relation of the community of love clearer than in 1 John 2:7-11, 3:11-17 and 4:7-20.<sup>9</sup> God is the God of love and should always be honoured for that. He expects love from his community and of the community of faith. Brotherhood and sisterhood in faith is therefore of utmost importance. The community of John should be acknowledged by their sense of belonging.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.3 Koinonia in the church**

To understand this, we should look at what the church in more depth. Who is the church? First of all, it should be mentioned that a church is the people of God in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus himself, by giving himself up as the true salvation of people, who calls together a church to be his followers. The church lives by the one and only proclamation and that is

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<sup>7</sup> The importance of mutual dependence and the concern of the various members of the body are emphasized (Mare 1980:265). The interdependence of the members of the body is also explained by Hays (1997:215).

<sup>8</sup> Martin (1986:288) writes: "Then, as a second motif, the collection is shown to fit in to Paul's exposition of the Christian life which falls into the pattern of "grace/gratitude", a nexus that characterizes biblical religion. God's gift (Gabe) is received by our giving back to God (Aufgabe) in the delightful duty of thanksgiving".

<sup>9</sup> Brown (1982:554) refers to the love that comes from God: "The love of God incarnate in Jesus must become incarnate in Christians; and love, which is received in and with divine life, must, like that life, be active. One might have expected the author to say, 'If God so loved us, we in turn ought to love God.'" But while divine love has an element of reciprocity (which the author may be assuming), it is primarily outgoing to others, in imitation of God Himself".

<sup>10</sup> Smalley (1984:213) mentions the relation with God and the community: "He does this also by associating the life of faith and love with the reciprocal relationship between the Christian believer and the Father in the Spirit (v 24). If this interpretation is correct, it draws attention to the importance and significance of the 'togetherness' which should characterize God's covenant people, and thus may have acted as a rebuke to those who were attempting to introduce division into the Johannine community (cf 2:18-19, 4:1, 2 John 7)".



that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords of the church. The church lives from the power of Jesus Christ.

The second important thing is that the church is the people linked to one another through the Holy Spirit in faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the church is a community of people in a special sense and in special relation with one another. A church is this new community of people linked to one another. The church is the community of God being in a wonderful presence with one another in this wonderful new community.<sup>11</sup> It is then also expected of the church in this community to reach out to one another and to be a community of love. 1 John explains very clearly how the church should be a community of love and reach out to one another. The third aspect of brotherhood and sisterhood in the church is that the church should also be an example of love and kindness to one another to the world around them. Therefore, the church should reach out not only to the brothers and sisters within the community but also to the brothers and sisters in the world outside the community. This means that a church should proclaim a new life and a new way of leading a life with God, reaching out to one another and alleviating poverty in that sense. Poverty should be alleviated because they are listening to the word of God and the message of God.

## **5. THE POOR REACHING OUT TO ONE ANOTHER**

It is an interesting phenomenon that it is often possible for the poor to reach out to one another in a way in which the rich and the mighty do not reach out to others. The poor are often the people helping one another and building up a new community and proclaiming the word of God in the new community. The poor are often the people who are willing to use the little means that they have and distribute it amongst themselves, while they have many larger needs themselves. It is an interesting phenomenon that the poor does not keep to themselves what can be distributed to others.

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<sup>11</sup> Waltner (2003:241) writes: "In becoming the kind of Christian community 1 Peter envisions, the church is both witness and servant in the world. It becomes the sign of the reign of God. It speaks of what can be, of what God intended to be, and of what God, by grace has made possible".

### **5.1 The presence of the church in informal settlements**

First of all, there are the challenges of informal settlements. It is clear that informal settlements pose very serious challenges for the people living there and for the community at large. In informal settlements, there are few permanent structures, there are often no proper services, few tarred roads and therefore the people live on the fringe of the community. They have very little and very often they need jobs and money.

Secondly, the churches' challenges in these informal settlements are immense. The church has to get involved to help people with very little to look after themselves. The church needs to become involved. The church needs to be there for the people in the informal settlements.

## **6. EMPIRICAL DATA:**

### **THE CHURCH IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS**

In research in the informal settlements near Bloemfontein in the Free State Province in South Africa, it was found that the people in need also needed to understand how to reach out to one another. The dire situation in the informal settlements in research conducted in the Mangaung area, however also highlighted the positive involvement of the church at grassroots level.<sup>12</sup>

In interviews conducted in 2009, the concerns of the interviewees on the situation in the informal settlements were stated.<sup>13</sup> One interviewee explains:

Most of the people are not working, we don't have money to buy food and clothes, and you can't work with an empty stomach. Because of the dust, we cannot have a healthy life; there are a lot of germs and bacteria. Our toilets are not in a good condition. This situation is there because of poverty. Even the school is too far from our houses.

Where do people obtain their food from in the informal areas: In the research most people referred to governmental grants as the way in which they survive. Some sell biscuits or receive help from the church or have small income jobs.

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<sup>12</sup> This research was also reported in a paper *Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Poverty Alleviation: The church in informal settlements* at the 6th International Conference: Entrepreneurship and Innovation 5-6 Nov. Maputo, Mozambique.

<sup>13</sup> This research was also reported in a paper: *The Christian Church and the Alleviation of Poverty: New Challenges in Informal Areas. The International Journal of the Humanities. 7(5):91-104.*

It is clear that governmental grants are the most important source of income. This is an unhealthy situation, because the self respect gained from work is lacking.

According to the subjects, the church should be involved in the community:

- “It should try to teach its members how to give and receive.”
- “Yes, the church helps a lot, we as the youth of the church have projects which we are running. ‘Adopt a child’ is the name of our current project; we want to show the community that we as the youth church want to join hands in alleviating poverty. We adopt a child at Mafora, taking full responsibility in making sure that he/she gets everything, especially a school uniform and money for transport. If the school requires a journey, we pay the fare.”
- “Yes, it helps; specifically my church (ZCC) has prayer meetings every day. Those who are not working, always attend these prayer meetings, even those who are sick. The services start from 09:00 am in the morning to 12:00 am. There is also another session for those who are working in the evenings from 16:00 pm until 19:00 pm. But with other projects, our church is not doing that. Normally our church just encourages people to work for themselves, doing small jobs. They can even start to sell their products or food at the church. I think that is the way that our church helps.”

In the research most people replied that the church teaches to give and receive. Some projects are also helping the community. There is generally a positive view of the church’s role:

- “I think the church should go back to the book of Acts, and study it thoroughly in order to understand the work of the church. The work of the church is to bring the good News to the poor, it is to bring good support to those who are in need, it is to bring peace to their families who are in need. Oh yes, Reverend, a good church, is a church that cares for the poor, pregnant women, orphans and widows.”
- “The Church should preach a spirit of sharing and caring. People should know how to give. They should give others jobs, food and clothes.”
- “The church should also preach that people must be one as the body of Christ, to feel sorry for one another and remember them in your prayers.”

Concerning the future role of the church most people said that preaching must address the plight of the people. Many also said that the church should help the poor by direct involvement. The subjects clearly saw a new future:

- “Yes, only if the church can do pastoral work, they will understand the needs of the people.”
- “The church of Christ, regardless of denomination or ethnicity, should work together. They should have debates on this issue and the government should be invited to these debates, then we can get a better perspective.”

- “I think we expect to see the church caring and loving. The church should start or develop projects that can help members of the church, especially those who are poor or in need. We have talents; they can ask us what we can do. Churches must try to communicate with their members and society in order to hear their problems. They should provide us with money to buy food, or they can buy food parcels, blankets and deliver it to their members, especially those who are in need.”
- Unity was regarded as essential by many to reach a new future.
- The research was continued by asking people on the streets randomly about the church’s role and the implications of the involvement of the church in the community.
- People on the streets’ view of the surviving: Where do they get their food from? Most have to buy their food, but some cultivate food gardens. A very high percentage of reviewees had no jobs or only part time jobs. Most people reviewed belonged to a church but many said that the problem is that they have no buildings. A very high percentage referred to the fact that the church does help them in their need.
- The church helps with food, spiritual involvement and transport. Regarding the future many said that projects can be beneficial, but also care groups will of help. They expect the future to be better if more projects could be started, as well as helping people to find unity and love.

Brother- and sisterhood in the informal areas are very important. In the empirical data, it was found that people often said that it was the people themselves, the poor that looked after one another and looked after one another’s needs. The poor in the informal settlements have certain structures in which they deal with the needs of people. For instance: The Bishop of a very small independent church in Mangaung’s informal settlement has a ministry of healing and of helping the poor. Having a brick making business, she tends to look after the poor in that way. Linked with her healing ministry, she deals with the poor in different ways. People come to her to be healed and to be helped, and she helps them. Brother- and sisterhood are practiced in a new way in this situation.

New hope can only come about in such a situation in informal settlements if it is possible to inspire people to look beyond their present situation and to look to another situation in which it can be improved. It is not easy to come from outside. Often people expect government to bring about a new situation, but on the streets in the community of the church, the church is present among the people and the church, by being present, can help the people to get enough to feed themselves from the little means that they have by sharing with one another.

## **7. POVERTY AND THE BIBLE: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR AFRICA**

Poverty and the Bible mean that we should look to people in the poorest areas from the perspective of the church being present there. In those very poor areas, the church is always present. The presence of the church in reaching out to one another in brotherhood and sisterhood can become the frontline of poverty alleviation. Jayakumar (2009:157) explains this fully: “We have drawn some specific lessons from the mission history. We have noted that the missionaries considered that ministry to the poor and the oppressed was not an option but an imperative. They served the poor with the vision and hope of bringing change. The poor shared their vision and worked alongside and changes were taking place in front of their eyes. In the past, the approach of certain missionaries to the culture in which they worked, helped the poor to overcome poverty and oppression.”

Where the church is present, they should look after one another in brotherhood and sisterhood. The church should be present in looking after the poor and the ill. This does not mean that the responsibility of those churches that has much and can help those in need should not also be proclaimed. Concerning Mangaung, Krige (2008:166-178) makes the very important observation that churches should transform from local congregations into community based resource centres: “It is obvious that to change the mindset of church leadership, development practitioners and volunteers from both the poor and rich churches towards adopting a transformational-servant-community-outreach model will need an extra injection of grace and commitment.”

Bediako (1996:187) calls for a holistic approach wherein the church as primary agent of God’s activity in the world is dealing with issues of faith and social questions with integrity. The churches living outside of the informal settlements, usually mainline churches, with a lot of means, should be very interested in helping the people in the informal settlements with all that they can do.

Majawa (1998:269-270) proposes ten recommendations for the church to get involved in Africa’s poverty:

- i. campaign against poverty and unemployment,
- ii. create awareness about neo-colonialism,
- iii. denounce dictatorial regimes,
- iv. spearhead integral development,

- v. inculturate Christianity,
- vi. develop a culture of morality among the people,
- vii. uphold Christian values to the youth,
- viii. initiate education programmes for all people,
- ix. create a spirit of fellowship among people, and
- x. press for the cancellation of the foreign debts to Africa.

Although it must be said that not all of these is possible or acceptable, such as the cancellation of debt, the church's involvement should be to bring about a new perspective on the challenges of poverty in Africa. Mills (2010:30) writes: "What countries need to do to be competitive, however, does not demand technological or policy rocket science. East Asia, in an earlier era, had managed a similar economic and social revolution. A basic formula worked there: good, efficient government committed to popular welfare coupled with a hard-working, increasingly skilled and educated labour force." Therefore to develop Africa it is absolutely necessary to understand that sustainable enhancement of the material wellbeing of people can only be achieved if there is productive investment in productive capacity. The private sector has to play a very important role in this, includes ensuring the effective functioning of all government at all levels, across all agencies (Mills 2010: 32). Mills (2010:32) refers to the difference between Africa's economies, where there is a lack of development and positive growth, and he also refers to China and India where the opposite is taking place at the moment. China and India opened up to the global world, they made it possible for many people to invest, they continued to develop their own people and they chose policies in which capital could be used to enhance the lives of their people. In Africa, due to the policies of the leaders, it is very difficult to develop the people in such a way that they can become partners of their own future. There are many instances in Africa where the development of the people and the development of the country are hampered by the government policies and also by corruption and other problems.

The church can be instrumental in helping with small business enterprises helping people to provide for themselves. They can help by inspiring people in the community to start with jobs. They can be present in the informal settlement communities by sending out teams to help the churches in the informal settlements and building them up. Africa has a serious challenge. The challenge can only be met if the church, in dealing with these challenges, is present and are willing to be involved with

the people on the street. Concern for the weak and vulnerable is all important and should receive full attention. Swart (2008:119) refers to the fact that the churches, acting as a catalyst for people-centred development, should initiate a prolonged process comprised of a complex and interrelated set of dimensions or components including a far more careful phase of collective planning prior to any form of engagement. Introspection into our motives, a more deeply grounded reflection on the complexities of poverty, a biblical understanding of poverty and an identification of the role-players and potential partners in the community.

In general the influence of the church should lead to a better dispensation in Africa.

Nürnbergger (1999:382) writes that human motivation must change to bring about a just and empowering society. Change from concern for justice to concern for the weak and vulnerable is necessary. Effah (2006:90) explains that human capital should be developed.” The sub-Saharan African region needs to address the human factor decay, improve health and education, and tackle economic issues to make progress in the effort to minimize poverty.” Carnes (2005:40) sees some hope, though not optimism: “Despite their massive problems, African nations are growing economically. Urban Africa is sprouting skylines like never before. Overall growth of gross national income for 2005 is expected to be 5.4 %. In addition, African Christians are integrating faith and politics in new ways. Thirty years ago, Africa had only three elected heads of state. Today there are 30. In democratic states like Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Zambia, corrupt officials are thrown out, often after massive church agitation”.

Van Niekerk (2002:123) emphasises the importance of the household in combating poverty in Africa. He is of the opinion that the household should be re-established and strengthened to have a nucleus of sound and healthy relations and that the church should help in this regard. Slum upgrading may be a positive incentive for helping the poor in informal areas. Van Dijk (2006:196) is of the opinion that it helps the poor directly. In many instances, the poor are forcibly removed instead of being helped to upgrade their environments. The inclusion of the very poor in the upgrading of their areas is necessary for the improving of their living standards (Van Dijk 2006:196). The future of Africa hinges on the alleviation of poverty and, especially so, in the informal settlement areas. All possible interventions are needed, also from the church.

Being present on ground level the church can and should make a difference. This difference should help the poor to live a more complete life. Love in the community with brotherhood and sisterhood can lead the church to new engagements with the poor. The simple message of the Bible of looking after each other is often more meaningful than large interventions. Reaching out to one another in the informal settlements can build a community of love and respect. This can lead to a more meaningful life of hope.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The church in Africa, South of the Sahara is present in the villages and towns, in the informal settlements and cities, in the rural areas and slums. The church can play an influential role in the alleviation of poverty. Being the church, it can, by brotherhood and sisterhood, in the most poor areas help to bridge the abyss of absolute poverty. The start is always to reach out to one another, then to those in the community and also prophetically to the church and community at large. In Jesus Christ the community of hope generates hope.

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## **SECTION 3:**

# **THE BIBLE, GENDER AND POLITICS IN AFRICA**

Adriaan S. van Klinken

**The Politics of “Biblical Manhood”:  
A Critical Study of Masculinity Politics and Biblical  
Hermeneutics in a Zambian Pentecostal Church**

*‘We, men, are the head, but you have to live up to it!  
We like to be the head, but we don’t like to live up to the responsibility.  
That’s our problem!’  
Joshua H.K. Banda*

**Introduction**

The above quotation is a statement made by Bishop Joshua H.K. Banda, who is a prominent Zambian Christian leader and the senior pastor of Northmead Assembly of God (NAOG), a Pentecostal church in Lusaka (Zambia). It expresses Banda’s concern about men and the way men perform their roles, and it shows how he employs the notion of male headship to remind men of the related responsibilities. The statement is an illustration of the way Banda and his church seek to realise change in men and to transform masculinities. The quotation is from one of the sermons in the series *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In this series, delivered in 2008, Banda explores the vision of what he calls “biblical fatherhood” or “biblical manhood”. The series demonstrate an enormous concern about the “distortion” of manhood perceived in society, for example in phenomena such as violence against women, men’s sexual performances, homosexuality, alcoholism, and an overall irresponsibility of men in matters concerning marriage and family life. Referring to these realities, Banda says: ‘We have to restore a vision of biblical manhood.’<sup>1</sup> What, then, is the meaning of this vision? How does “biblical manhood” according to Banda look like and how does he use the Bible to develop this ideal? What is the political agenda of the efforts to restore this vision?

My interest in these questions is informed by the debate on religion and masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa. The transformation of socially dominant forms of masculinity is widely considered an urgent issue for

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<sup>1</sup> J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

African societies today. These masculinities are associated with issues such as HIV and AIDS, sexual abuse, conflict and war, violence against women and children, etcetera.<sup>2</sup> Against this background UNAIDS, the United Nations programme on HIV and AIDS, has underlined the need ‘to challenge harmful concepts of masculinity’ and that socially engaged scholars have called to ‘target men for a change.’<sup>3</sup> This illustrates the widely recognised urgency of the transformation of masculinities in contemporary Africa.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the HIV epidemic and other social and development issues have given rise to masculinity politics: efforts to actively change perceptions of masculinity and men’s position in gender relations.<sup>5</sup> In present day Africa, numerous development agencies and faith-based organisations do not only have programmes for women’s empowerment, but increasingly also do work with men to sensitise them and change popular attitudes and perceptions. Against this background, Robert Morrell, a prominent scholar of African masculinities, has emphasised the analytical task of scholars ‘to identify what forces operate to effect change in masculinities, when, where and how

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<sup>2</sup> The relation between men and masculinities and these social issues is explored in a growing body of literature. For example, see A. Simpson, *Boys to Men in the Shadow of AIDS. Masculinities and HIV Risk in Zambia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009; E. Uchendu (ed.), *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, Dakar: Codesria 2008; T. Shefer and others (eds.), *From Boys to Men. Social Constructions of Masculinity in Contemporary Society*, Lansdowne: UCT Press 2007; G. Barker and C. Ricardo, *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence*, Washington: World Bank 2005; D. Gibson and A. Hardon (eds.), *Rethinking Masculinities, Violence and AIDS*, Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis 2005; L. Ouzgane and R. Morrell (eds.), *African Masculinities. Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005; R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg and London: Univ. of Natal Press and Zed Books 2001.

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS, *Men and AIDS: A Gendered Approach*, Geneva: UNAIDS 2000; J. Bujra, ‘Targeting Men for a Change: AIDS Discourse and Activism in Africa’ in F. Cleaver (ed.), *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, London: Zed Books 2002, 209-234.

<sup>4</sup> To be clear, I use the terms ‘political’ and ‘politics’ in the broad sense of the words. It does not refer to civil governments but to the processes initiated by all kind of organized groups of people in order to achieve certain goals in society.

<sup>5</sup> Connell describes masculinity politics as ‘those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue, and, with it, men’s position in gender relations. In such politics masculinity is made a principal theme, not taken for granted as background.’ (R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (2 ed.), Berkely/Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press 2005, 205.)

such changes occur, and what their effects are.<sup>6</sup> In the present article I engage with this task, focusing on the role of religion, particularly Christianity, as a force to operate change in masculinities. I will not explore this in general, but drawing from a specific case study conducted in NAOG in 2008 and 2009. How does this church address, redefine and seek to transform masculinities, and how the Bible is used in this transformation process?

By presenting a case study on the masculinity politics in a local Zambian Pentecostal church, the present article hopes to contribute to the debate on masculinities in the context of African Christianity. A number of African scholars in religion and theology, Ezra Chitando being the most prominent one, have recently engaged with issues concerning masculinity, specifically in relation to the HIV epidemic.<sup>7</sup> They critically analyse the effects of dominant versions of masculinity in African societies and their effects on the well-being of women and children. They also provide visions for alternative masculinities. Though Chitando has underlined the need for African churches 'to rethink their mission towards men' and has raised the question whether churches are 'challenging conventional forms of masculinity'<sup>8</sup>, as far as I know detailed studies on masculinities in local churches have hardly been conducted. I hope that this article, written by a European researcher trained in the cross-cultural study of world Christianity, may help to fill this gap. Drawing from the case study I will also raise some fundamental questions to the further

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<sup>6</sup> R. Morrell, 'The Times of Change. Men and Masculinity in South Africa' in R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg and London: Univ. of Natal Press and Zed Books Ltd 2001, 7.

<sup>7</sup> See E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications (forthcoming); E. Chitando, 'Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa' in R. Nicolson (ed.), *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, Scottsville: Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2008, 45-63; E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, 'Challenging Masculinities: Religious Studies, Men and HIV in Africa' in *Journal of Constructive Theology* 14:1 (2008), 55-69; E. Chitando, 'A New Man for a New Era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic' in *Missionalia* 35:3 (2007). For a discussion of this development, see A. S. Van Klinken, 'Transforming Masculinities Towards Gender Justice in an Era of HIV and AIDS: Charting the Pathways' in B. Haddad (ed.), *A Cartography of HIV and AIDS in Religion and Theology*, Pietermaritzburg: Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2011 (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> E. Chitando, *Acting in Hope. African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, Geneva: WCC 2007, 40-41.



study of, and scholarly engagement with, masculinities in African Christian contexts.

Theoretically, my framework is based on some of the basic insights in the emerging sub-discipline of the study of men, masculinities and religion. These are that masculinity is a category of gender and thus is socially constructed, that masculinity is constructed in various forms (hence the plural masculinities), and that masculinities are involved in ongoing processes of change and therefore can also be actively transformed.<sup>9</sup> My analysis is informed by the understanding of men's studies in religion as a critical activity. This means, in the words of Björn Krondorfer, that 'bringing gender consciousness to the analysis and interpretation of men in relation to all aspects of religion is indispensable' and that there must be 'critical sensitivity and scholarly discipline in the context of gender-unjust systems.'<sup>10</sup> With gender-unjust systems Krondorfer refers, among others, to patriarchy, androcentrism, heterosexism and homophobia. In my understanding, the critical edge implies that the study of men, masculinities and religion has a particular analytical sensitivity to the gender and sexual politics of religious discourses on men and masculinity, i.e. to the way men and masculinity are defined in relation to women and femininity and in terms of sexuality. In the context of the present article, the specific interest is how the Bible is used in these discursive politics on masculinity.

The article starts with a brief introduction to NAOG Church. Then it outlines some of the concerns about men and popular male behaviours in the church, as these inform the church's efforts to transform masculinities. This is followed by a section on the alternative masculinity that is promoted in the church, the ideal of "biblical manhood". The next section draws attention to the role of the Bible in the definition of this ideal. After that, the major political objectives of the promotion of "biblical manhood" are identified. The article concludes with some critical

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<sup>9</sup> For an introduction to these insights and the sub-discipline in general, see B. Krondorfer, 'Introduction' in B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism. A Critical Reader*, London: SCM Press 2009, xi-xxi; S. B. Boyd, 'Trajectories in Men's Studies in Religion: Theories, Methodologies, and Issues' in *Journal of Men's Studies* 7:2 (1999), 265-268; S. B. Boyd, W. M. Longwood and M. W. Muesse, 'Men, Masculinity and the Study of Religion' in S. B. Boyd, W. M. Longwood and M. W. Muesse (eds.), *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 1996, xviii-xxii.

<sup>10</sup> Krondorfer, *Introduction*, xvii.

questions concerning (the study of) masculinity politics in African Christianity that appear from the case study.

### ***The Case of Northmead Assembly of God Church***

NAOG Church is one of the most prominent Pentecostal churches in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. The congregation has about two thousand members, with the majority being young, relatively highly educated and middle class. The church is associated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Zambia, which is a fellowship of classic Pentecostal churches originating from North American Assemblies of God missions.<sup>11</sup> The church's senior pastor is Bishop Joshua H.K. Banda, who is reckoned among the most prominent Christian leaders of the country.<sup>12</sup> Through the TV program *The Liberating Truth* which broadcasts his weekly sermons, Banda reaches people all over Zambia and in the wider region. As the charismatic leader of the church, Banda sets the vision and strategy of the church.

One of the issues Banda is passionate about is the topic of fatherhood or manhood. This is demonstrated, for example, in the series of sermons entitled *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* that was delivered in 2008. However, Banda not only preaches on this topic but actively works with men in the church to raise them in what he calls "biblical manhood". This is done through the church's men's ministry called *Men of Truth*, but also through the ministries targeting youths, singles and married couples. Also the premarital counselling is a crucial instrument to teach men (and women) on their specific roles in marriage, the family, the church and the community. In the present article, I focus on the above mentioned series of sermons, specifically on its concept of "biblical manhood". A preliminary remark concerns the terminology of fatherhood and manhood. The term 'fatherhood' is used in the title of the series. In the sermons itself Banda tends to use the concepts of fatherhood and manhood interchangeably, though he considers the latter to be more comprehensive and to include the former. He frequently states that 'fatherhood is rooted in biblical manhood'. Therefore I take the term

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press 2001, 169.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. M. Cheyeka, 'Towards a History of the Charismatic Churches in Post-Colonial Zambia' in J. B. Gewald, M. Hinfelaar and G. Macola (eds.), *One Zambia, Many Histories. Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, Leiden: Brill 2008, 150.

“biblical manhood” as the central concept, though taking into account that apparently manhood in this perception is directly associated with fatherhood. Focussing now on the sermon series, first I will explore the reason for Banda to preach so explicitly on this theme. Why he is so passionate about this topic and what is his concern?

### ***The Concern: A “Distortion” of Manhood in Society***

In the first sermon of the series, Banda states that he wants ‘to discuss afresh from a biblical angle what fatherhood really means in our society.’<sup>13</sup> This is needed because of the ‘violation of Gods order’ and the ‘abdication of [men’s] leadership’<sup>14</sup> he observes in society.<sup>15</sup> According to Banda, the true meaning of manhood has been distorted as a result of certain developments and perceptions. What are these misperceptions and realities? Several specific issues are mentioned in the sermons.

A first major issue addressed in the sermons is men’s sexual behaviour. According to Banda, in Zambian society today ‘manhood is defined in sexual terms. ... The term “manhood” is equivalent to describing the male sexual organ.’<sup>16</sup> Consequently men think that they are unable to control their sexual desires and tend to view women primarily as sexual objects. In the sermons Banda seeks to correct this, referring to the Christian moral values concerning sexuality and to the reality of HIV and AIDS. Therefore he preaches that ‘manhood is not just defining yourself as a sex machine.’<sup>17</sup>

A second issue frequently mentioned in the sermons to illustrate the “distortion of manhood” is violence against women. Referring to the statistics of domestic violence Banda points out that the majority of perpetrators are men and he states that ‘this is a very serious issue.’<sup>18</sup> Elaborating on this issue in another sermon, he says: ‘Men beat their wives while the biblical order says us to protect them.’<sup>19</sup> This comment already illustrates how the Bible is used: there is appealed to the Bible, in

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<sup>13</sup> J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 1* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

<sup>14</sup> J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

<sup>15</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 1*.

<sup>16</sup> J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

<sup>17</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

<sup>18</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 1*.

<sup>19</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

this case a so-called "biblical order", to correct certain wrongs and to provide an alternative ideal.

Related to men's violence against women is a third issue, which concerns the more general tendency of men to dominate over women. Banda critically addresses this 'pattern of male domination' that in his opinion is characteristic of Zambian traditional cultures and is still common in society today. Though he upholds the idea of male headship in marriage, he emphasizes that this should not be understood in terms of domination. According to Banda, male domination 'stinks in the nostrils of God. It is a distortion of Gods order. It implies that the woman is less than the man, but that's not biblical.'<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, homosexuality is explicitly discussed and is considered symbolic of the serious distortion of manhood in modern days. Banda refers to homosexuality as a subversive and perverting phenomenon that is 'a diversion from the role that God has presented to men.'<sup>21</sup> The attention paid to this subject was informed by the international news bulletins of these days that were filled with items such as the possible legalization of same-sex marriages in the USA and the attendance of American gay bishop Gene Robinson at the Anglican Lambeth conference. However, Banda's concern with the issue of homosexuality is also informed by local developments, as he observes a gay and lesbian rights lobby in the Zambian media.<sup>22</sup>

Fifth, in the sermon series a more general issue is addressed, being men's irresponsibility in several areas of life. According to Banda, 'men misapply the role of fatherhood in our society.'<sup>23</sup> He speaks of an "immature masculinity" in the sense that men do not take the responsibilities that come with manhood, for example the responsibility to provide for the family.<sup>24</sup>

An issue that is not mentioned in the series *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* but that certainly is a major concern in the church is alcoholism. It was frequently addressed in another series, entitled *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth*. Saying that 'the majority of our men spend their time on

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<sup>20</sup> J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 6* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

<sup>21</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2*.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with J. H.K. Banda, Lusaka: November 6, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

<sup>24</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

the bottle', Banda here calls upon the 'men of Africa' to leave 'the days of drunkenness' behind and to 'restore the dignity in the African home'.<sup>25</sup> The issues mentioned above are referred to as illustrations and indications of the "distortion of manhood" that Banda observes in Zambian society. He relates the misbehaviors of men and the misperceptions of masculinity to some of the major problems postcolonial Zambia is faced with, such as the HIV epidemic and high poverty levels. How, then, Banda seeks to "restore" manhood in order to overcome the negative aspects and consequences of dominant forms of masculinity?

### ***The Alternative Ideal: "Biblical Manhood"***

In the sermons, Banda not only addresses all kind of critical issues related to men and masculinity, but also presents an alternative ideal of "biblical manhood". To define this ideal he makes use of the definition provided by the North American Baptist author John Piper. In the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Piper defines "biblical manhood" as follows: 'At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.'<sup>26</sup> Quoting this, Banda says that he found it 'a powerful definition' of what fatherhood and manhood should be.<sup>27</sup> In his sermons he elaborates on the definition in a detailed way, by discussing its major notions in relation to the Bible and actual realities. This illustrates that local discourses on gender, in this case sermons on masculinity delivered in a Zambian Pentecostal church, in our current era of globalisation and world Christianity, are related to and influenced by discourses from other regions and other confessional backgrounds and thus become increasingly hybrid. However, taking into account that Banda translates and applies the definition of Piper vis-à-vis African realities, it is also clear that his talk about bibli-

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<sup>25</sup> Banda, *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth – part 3*.

<sup>26</sup> J. Piper, 'A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible' in J. Piper and W. Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton: Crossway Books 1991, 36. Corresponding to this is Piper's definition of "biblical womanhood": 'At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to women's differing relationships.'

<sup>27</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

cal manhood is a context-specific African Christian discourse on masculinity.

According to the definition of Piper cited by Banda, manhood is defined by a sense of responsibility. In his sermons Banda expands on this notion, presenting it as a primary characteristic of "biblical manhood". More specifically, this responsibility of men is said to be a primary responsibility: it does not exclude the responsibility of women in certain areas, but men have a unique and principal responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Banda's argument here is based theologically on his understanding of the figures of Adam and Jesus Christ. Referring to Adam who was put by God in the garden to cultivate it (Gen. 2,15), he says: 'What we see in the Bible is that the perfect man, Adam, prior to the fall, was placed at a location where he had to be responsible.'<sup>29</sup> That men have a primary responsibility is further underlined, according to Banda, by the fact that God calls Adam to account after "the Fall" (Gen. 3,9). God's question to Adam, 'Where are you?' is generalised in one of the sermons and applied to all men, when it is said: 'In God's economy question number one is: Men, where are you?'<sup>30</sup> In Banda's theological argument, the responsibility put by God on Adam has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who answered God's question, 'Adam, where are you?'<sup>31</sup> Explaining this, Banda says: 'Jesus Christ, when it was time to take his responsibility, he took responsibility. Then he said to his parents: I have a task. ... Being a man is about taking up your responsibility, and that is what Christ did.'<sup>32</sup>

The notion of male responsibility is applied to several areas of men's life. In the definition of Piper cited by Banda, it concerns the responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women. In the sermons, these male roles of leadership, providing and protection in the marital and family setting are

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<sup>28</sup> See J.H.K. Banda, *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth – part 5* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka. Cf. J. Piper and W. Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton: Crossway Books 1991: "The word "responsibility" is chosen to imply that man will be uniquely called to account for his leadership, provision and protection in relation to women. (...) This does not mean the woman has no responsibility, as we will see. It simply means that man bears a unique and primary one.'

<sup>29</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

<sup>30</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2*.

<sup>31</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 1*.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with J.H.K. Banda, Lusaka: July 28, 2009.

strongly underlined. Addressing men who hang around in bars while their wives are working, Banda declares that ‘it is a shame’ because a man has the responsibility to provide. ‘It is not just African, it is a biblical view: the principal income is for the man. That’s the biblical order. He is the provider and protector of the homestead.’<sup>33</sup> However, Banda does not limit male responsibility to the context of marriage. At the individual level, Banda applies it to the way men deal with sexuality. Preaching about HIV and sexuality, he emphasizes the need of self-control, stating: ‘We men need to keep our boundaries, our responsibilities.’<sup>34</sup> With regard to the level of the community and society, in a meeting of the men’s ministry I found men being called ‘to commit their manhood to society’.<sup>35</sup> In line with this, Banda calls men to take responsibility for “the mess” in which the country is and to show leadership.<sup>36</sup> He further defines this leadership by making clear that according to the “biblical order”, male leadership is not authority oriented or autocratic. ‘It is to serve rather than to dictate’, Banda says, and it ‘mobilizes the strength of others.’<sup>37</sup>

Another central concept that appears to be crucial in Banda’s definition of “biblical manhood” is the notion of headship. Where responsibility is a general concept applied to all areas of men’s lives, headship specifically applies to men’s position and roles in marriage and the family. Again, the teaching on male headship is informed by the Bible. At every wedding ceremony in the church, Ephesians 5 is read: ‘Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.’ (Eph. 5,22-23, NIV). In his sermons on Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Banda refers to this verse and then concludes that ‘biblical manhood clearly shows that the role of headship has been given to men.’<sup>38</sup> In his opinion, this “principle of male headship” is also indicated in Genesis 2, because in this story Adam is created first and receives the instructions for life while Eve is given to him as a helper.<sup>39</sup> Concretely, headship is understood by Banda in terms of men

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<sup>33</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting of *Men of Truth*, NAOG, Lusaka: November 9, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2*.

<sup>37</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

<sup>38</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 5*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2*.

having the responsibility to provide leadership in their marriage and family, to provide in the income of the home and to guide their family spiritually. In other words, it refers to men's roles as the provider, the prophet, the priest and the protector of the family.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned above, Banda emphasizes that headship should not be understood in terms of domination, as would be the case in Zambian traditional culture. Biblically, he says, male headship needs to be reconciled and balanced with the notion of the equality of men and women. The notion of equality is derived from Genesis 1,26-27, reading that God created humankind as male and female in God's image.<sup>41</sup> In two sermons in the series, Banda elaborates on the relation between the principle of male headship and the notion of equality of men and women. He "balances" both notions a) by applying the notion of headship strictly to the context of marriage: in the public sphere women and men are equal, but in marriage women have to submit to their husbands; b) by redefining the meaning of headship from domination and superiority to love, service and sacrifice. The latter is done by qualifying headship christologically, in line with the above verse in Ephesians where the relation of the husband-head to his wife is understood in analogy to the love of Christ for the church. Hence, Banda preaches that men should model their headship after Christ and thus must love, protect and take care of their wives.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, male leadership is defined in terms of service and sacrifice to the benefit of others.

With the major concepts of responsibility and headship, and the related notions such as leadership, protection, providing and self-control that have been touched on above, the contours of the ideal of "biblical man-

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Premarital Counselling General Guide*, Marriage Ministry NAOG (unpublished material).

<sup>41</sup> Banda understands this equality as an 'equality of personhood'. Cf. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

<sup>42</sup> See *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4* and part 6. South African biblical scholar Madipoane Masenya observes with regard to "African – South African Pentecostal hermeneutics", that it emphasizes the headship of the husband over his wife without relating this with the husband's responsibility to love his wife just as his own body (see M. Masenya, 'Trapped between Two "Canons": African-South African Christian Women in the HIV/AIDS Era' in I. A. Phiri, B. Haddad and M. Masenya (eds.), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2003, 120). Evidently, this argument does not apply for the Pentecostal hermeneutics of NAOG. In this church, the notion of headship is clearly related with responsibilities and with the command of love.



hood” are outlined. Evidently, this ideal aims to raise men who behave morally upright, are accountable and take responsibility for themselves and for others, and who use their power constructively to the benefit of their wives, families, the community and society at large. The claim that this is the “biblical” ideal of manhood is made, of course, to legitimate it. But how precisely the Bible is used by Banda in his definition of this alternative masculinity?

### ***The Use of the Bible in the Ideal of “Biblical Manhood”***

It is significant that Banda, expanding on his ideal of “biblical manhood”, hardly refers to prominent male figures in the Bible. The powerful Samson nor the wise Solomon, prophets such as Elijah and Elisha nor disciples as Peter and John, the adulterous David nor the faithfully committed Joseph are referred to as examples or contra-examples of manhood. Apparently, the concept of “biblical manhood” does not refer to the lives of men with all their complexities, vulnerabilities and ambiguities, as they are described in biblical stories. When this strategy would have been followed, it would appear that actually there is a wide variety of masculinities in the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Banda opts for a different strategy when he engages the Bible in his quest for a vision of manhood. He presents a normative and monolithic ideal of what manhood should be. Though he calls this ideal “biblical manhood” it is derived from only a few parts of the Bible: Genesis 1-3 and some of the Pauline epistles. Rather than focusing on the many male figures in the Bible, he has selected two biblical archetypes of manhood: Adam and Jesus Christ. And when he talks about Jesus Christ in the sermons under discussion, is it not so much about the life of the male figure Jesus of Nazareth as narrated in the Gospels but about the theological concept of Christ as the second Adam as introduced by Paul. The theme of the first and the second Adam is employed by Banda to build a biblical-theological framework in which the “restoration of manhood” is envisioned and can take place.

From the previous section, it has already become clear that Banda’s ideal of “biblical manhood” is strongly informed by an ideology of gender based at the theological account of creation. He derives the idea of men’s primary responsibility, leadership and headship, as well as the idea of

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<sup>43</sup> For example, see S.D. Moore and J.C. Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2003.

male and female equality, from the creation stories in Genesis 1-3. Furthermore, in the sermons, Banda repeatedly states that 'biblical manhood is rooted in creation'. "Creation" here refers to the original state of humankind as intended by God; it is the 'order of God' that has been distorted and violated by human beings and which, therefore, has to be restored. This is expressed, for example, in the following quotation:

Biblical manhood is deeply rooted in God's creation. Now creation, the way it was prior to the fall, was a perfect order which has become violated. Where we are struggling with is the state of men after the fall into an Adamic nature. If we want to recapture a vision of true biblical manhood, we must not look to Adam after the fall but we must look at the picture prior.<sup>44</sup>

According to Banda, creation before "the fall" provides us with a vision, a blueprint, of "true biblical manhood". The pre-fall figure of Adam is the embodiment of this manhood: he was assigned with a primary responsibility and put in a position of leadership and headship. However, according to Banda's theology, the "perfect order" of creation has been violated and distorted in "the Fall" that is described in Genesis 3. Significantly, the Fall is explained as a failure of Adam's leadership role.<sup>45</sup> In Banda's opinion, this failure is paradigmatic for mankind in general, meaning that manhood has become fundamentally distorted and men generally struggle with their "Adamic nature". To overcome this reality, according to Banda we have to look back at the picture prior to the fall. This provides him with a vision of "biblical manhood".

Banda realises that this vision can be recaptured but not simply can be realised by men. To solve this problem he employs the Pauline notion of Jesus Christ as the Second Adam (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). From this notion he argues that Christ is the one who has restored manhood as intended by God. As mentioned above, Christ is considered the one who answered God's question to Adam, 'Where are you?' According to Banda, in Christ God has realised a 're-innovation of masculinity', mean-

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<sup>44</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 3*.

<sup>45</sup> In contrast with traditional Christian interpretations for "the fall", Banda does not blame Eve but Adam for what happened in the Paradise as described in Genesis 3. According to Banda, it was Adam's failure because he should have prevented Eve from taking the fruit. In his opinion, God's question 'Adam, where are you' indicates that God holds Adam accountable for what happened. The fact that God calls Adam to account is interpreted as an indication of the leadership role that God had given to him. (Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 2*).

ing that ‘what God desires in fatherhood is truly restored’.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, apart from the pre-fall Adam, also Jesus Christ is presented by Banda as a model or archetype of “biblical manhood”. Jesus Christ is considered exemplary to men because of his servant leadership and sacrificial love. In the sermons, Christ is not only presented as the one who has restored the ideal of manhood, but also as the one who liberates men from their “Adamic nature” and transforms them into “biblical manhood”. For example, see this quotation:

The second Adam can break the mindset and that curse that makes men think that they must act like animals out there, unable to control their sexual desires. We are better than that, we are higher than that, and we are more elevated than that because God gave us a provision in the second Adam. I want men here today to agree in their hearts and to understand that this Jesus can set you free!<sup>47</sup>

With his application of the Pauline theme of the first and the second Adam, Banda stands in the tradition of Pentecostal theology.<sup>48</sup> However, he further develops this theme in a highly innovative way. Classically, the Adam-symbolism frames the creation, fall and redemption or re-creation of humankind in general, but Banda applies it to mankind in particular. He develops the theme into a theological framework for the “restoration” of manhood or, in more academic terms, the transformation of masculinities.

The fact that “biblical manhood” is defined within such a framework demonstrates how the Bible functions in the definition of an alternative masculinity in the church. A normative theological frame is built from a literal, uncritical reading of the creation stories and a systematic interpretation of some New Testament texts. In this frame the “true” meaning of manhood (as well as womanhood) is fixed in the “order of crea-

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<sup>46</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

<sup>47</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 1*.

<sup>48</sup> According to Ogbu Kalu, in African Pentecostalism the figures of the first and the second Adam have ‘enormous spiritual and political powers.’ (see O. U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism. an Introduction*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press 2008, 221.) Elaborating this theological perception, Kalu says: ‘He [Adam] had the authority to name all of God’s creation and govern the garden. But he lost all of his authority. God sent a second Adam through Jesus Christ, and Christians, as his disciples, have a divine mandate to work with the triune God to recover the chair that Adam lost.’ This theological line of thought is similar to what is preached by Banda. However, there is one crucial difference: Banda does not apply it generally to Christians as the disciples of Jesus Christ, but specifically to men who want to recover “the chair” of Adam’s manhood.

tion".<sup>49</sup> It is for this reason that Banda does not speak of a transformation but a restoration of manhood. Transformation would be open-ended, but restoration suggests that there is already a blueprint which only needs to be recaptured. In spite of this rhetoric strategy, it is clear that Banda has a political aim with the promotion of "biblical manhood" and, indeed, seeks to transform masculinities in order to overcome certain problems and challenges.

### ***The Politics of "Biblical Manhood"***

The case of NAOG is presented in this paper as a case of masculinity politics in a religious community. Evidently, the sermon series *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is part of the masculinity politics developed in the church under the visionary leadership of Banda. But what, exactly, is the political agenda behind the above outlined ideal of "biblical manhood"? In my opinion, this agenda includes several objectives, some of them being progressive – as they want to effect change in masculinities – and some of them being rather conservative – as they seek to maintain the current order.

A major objective of the church's propagation of "biblical manhood" is to overcome some of the biggest problems Zambian society is faced with. These are, for example, the devastating HIV epidemic, the high poverty levels, the many cases of domestic and sexual violence against women, the growing number of street kids, and alcoholism. As outlined above, in his sermons Banda frequently expresses his concern about these issues. Even more, he explains these phenomena from the "distortion of manhood" and the overall irresponsibility of men that he observes in society. According to Banda, if men would take up their responsibilities as heads of the home and leaders in the nation, things would be different. Therefore, he critically addresses popular attitudes and perceptions among men. And for that reason he presents an alternative ideal of masculinity, characterised by responsibility, leadership, service and self-control. Ezra Chitando has emphasized the need for African churches, especially in view of HIV and AIDS, to target men and to challenge dominant masculinities. In his opinion, 'Churches need to engage with men in order to transform dangerous ideas about manhood in Africa', and he suggests that the pulpit should be appropriated in this

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<sup>49</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* – part 3.

struggle to transform masculinities.<sup>50</sup> As far as this engagement is concerned, NAOG meets the criterion of what Chitando calls “AIDS competent churches”. The church engages in a transformation of masculinities, and the promoted ideal certainly makes a difference in view of the HIV epidemic and other critical social problems. With regard to these issues, the masculinity politics of the church can be considered as progressive and constructive, as it aims to change men and masculinities for the better of men themselves but also for women, children, families, communities and for society at large.

The concept of “biblical manhood” is also promoted in the church to play gender politics, i.e. to effect the configuration of gender relations in Zambian society today. These gender politics, however, are rather ambiguous. The sermons frequently refer to the changes in gender relations that occur in society, for instance the increasing level of women’s education and women’s formal employment. Indeed, in NAOG, being a middle-class church, I found many women to be relatively highly educated and pursuing a professional career. Marital counsellors told me that this raises problems in marriages: the wife may be higher educated and may earn a larger income than the husband, and hence they sometimes begin to question and challenge the roles of the husband as the head and leader of the home. In his preaching on “biblical manhood”, Banda deals with these issues. On the one hand, he emphasizes the equality of men and women. Hence he underlines the importance of women’s education and employment and of women’s contribution to the income of the home. On the other hand, however, he underlines the “biblical order” that the man is the head of the home. Hence he strongly denounces the ‘extreme feminist views’ that reject the “principle of male headship” and thus oppose God’s order.<sup>51</sup> Two complete sermons are devoted to balancing and reconciling the modern (but according to Banda, biblical) notion of gender equality with the traditional (but according to Banda, biblical) idea of male headship. As outlined above, he does so by redefining headship from domination and superiority into responsibility, leadership, and service. Furthermore, he insists on partnership, companionship and love in the marital relationship. Thus, Banda reaffirms but softens the patriarchal notion of male headship while at the same time allowing for a greater equality between men and

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Chitando, *Acting in Hope. African Churches and HIV/AIDS* 2, 46-47.

<sup>51</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 6*.

women. Talking about masculinities and globalization, R.W. Connell says that men, in response to global discourses on feminism, women's rights and gender equality, respond, among others, by reaffirming the local gender hierarchy. In his opinion, 'a kind of masculine "fundamentalism" is a common pattern in gender politics.'<sup>52</sup> Indeed, this conservative "fundamentalism" can be observed in Banda's rhetoric on male headship. However, the politics of "biblical manhood" is not just to reaffirm the local gender hierarchy. In my opinion it is more ambiguous, as this hierarchy is reaffirmed and challenged and undermined by Banda at the same time. It is reaffirmed by the talk about male headship, it is challenged by redefining headship from domination to responsibility, and it is undermined by the recognition of (a sense of) gender equality. As a result, the gender politics of "biblical manhood", which wants to respect a fixed "biblical order" and to allow for change, appears to be rather ambiguous and complex.

Apart from gender politics, also sexual politics is played with the concept of "biblical manhood". With this I mean that Banda in the sermons reaffirms the heterosexual standard and plays an anti-homosexual politics. As much as his talk about gender equality is a response to modern feminist discourses, his discussion of homosexuality is a response to globalising liberal discourses on sexuality as a human rights issue. In a sermon, Banda explicitly interferes with state politics when he argues that the legal ban on homosexuality in Zambian law should remain in force. With his anti-homosexual rhetoric Banda joins the choir of African religious leaders who have taken up the cudgels against gay and lesbian rights in order to address corrupting Western moral influences.<sup>53</sup> Banda's theological argument against homosexuality is derived from his framework of creation. Homosexuality is incompatible with biblical manhood as it is rooted in creation, he says, because 'in creation God made them male and female. It is Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. In creation we see a man and a woman in their respective roles.'<sup>54</sup> The latter comment on man's role serves Banda's agenda to

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<sup>52</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities and Masculinity Politics in World Society*, Lecture delivered at the Institute for Research on Women (Rutgers University). November 25, 2003. See <http://irw.rutgers.edu/lectures/connellecture.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> See for example M. Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*, Scottsville: Univ. of KwazuluNatal Press 2008, 32 & 161.

<sup>54</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 4*.

remind men in the church of their “God-given” responsibilities. What matters here is that these apparently can only be fulfilled in a heterosexual relationship. While arguing that homosexuals are opposing God’s order, Banda calls upon men in the church to ‘find joy and gladness and fulfilment in maintaining this order’ by accepting the roles and position God intends for them.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, Banda’s concept of “biblical manhood” is a heteronormative ideal, reaffirms the heterosexual standard and refuses to recognize any right of sexual minorities. Where a scholar as Musa Dube has underlined the need to break the taboo on homosexuality in African religious contexts<sup>56</sup>, especially in view of HIV and AIDS, Banda (who in his sermons breaks many taboos) does not only leave this taboo but even reinforces it.

It can be concluded that Northmead Assemblies of God engages in a transformation of masculinities in order to overcome several critical social problems Zambia is faced with. The church aims to raise “a new generation of men” that make a positive difference in the family, the community and the country at large.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, an alternative ideal of masculinity is defined that is nuanced patriarchal and unequivocally heteronormative. In this ideal, men are the responsible heads in their heterosexual marriages, loving and faithful husbands to their wives, and servant leaders in their families and in society. The gender ideology behind this ideal of masculinity is based biblically on an uncritical and normative reading of the Genesis account of creation.

### ***Masculinity Politics and the Bible: Some Concluding Questions***

As indicated in the introduction, some questions arise from this case study that are critical to the further study of, and engagement with masculinities in African Christianity. The issue of African Christian masculinities has recently been explored by a number of African theologians and scholars of religion. The initiative came from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which invited a number of male

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<sup>55</sup> Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – part 6*.

<sup>56</sup> See M. W. Dube, ‘Service for/on Homosexuals’ in M. W. Dube (ed.), *Africa Praying. A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*, Geneva: WCC 2003, 210. See also M. W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*, Scranton and London: Univ. of Scranton Press 2008, 33, 47.

<sup>57</sup> The phrase of ‘a new generation of men’ was used at a youth meeting in the church.

scholars for its 2007 continental conference to dialogue about the quest for "Liberating Masculinities".<sup>58</sup> This quest has emerged from the work of African women theologians in the area of gender and HIV.<sup>59</sup> It is informed, however, by the longer engagement of women theologians with issues of gender, their opposition to patriarchy and their struggle for gender equality.<sup>60</sup> This tradition directly impacts on the way the current issue of masculinity is approached: the problems concerning masculinities are analysed in terms of patriarchy, and alternative visions for masculinity are defined in terms of gender equality. The political strategy is to 'liberate men from patriarchy' and to transform masculinities towards gender justice.<sup>61</sup> A church as NAOG engages with masculinities in a completely different way, and in my opinion it is from the differences between these two approaches that some critical questions emerge. I will illustrate this with a publication of Ezra Chitando on masculinities and HIV in the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe.

In his article Chitando first praises the Pentecostal movement for its effort to transform masculinities. According to his assessment, the movement is successful in promoting responsibility among men and in

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. I. A. Phiri, 'Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)', *International Review of Mission* 98/1 (2009), 116.

<sup>59</sup> African women theologians, organized in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have made issues of gender and HIV a priority topic. See I. A. Phiri, 'African Women of Faith Speak Out in an HIV/AIDS Era' in I. A. Phiri, B. Haddad and M. Masenya (eds.), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2003, 3-22. For a discussion of their work, see M. W. Dube, 'HIV and AIDS Research and Writing in the Circle of African Concerned African Women Theologians 2002-2006' in E. Chitando and N. Hadebe (eds.), *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 173-196; M. W. Dube, 'In the Circle of Life: African Women Theologians' Engagement with HIV and AIDS' in E. Chitando and N. Hadebe (eds.), *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 197-236.

<sup>60</sup> For an introduction to African women's theology, for example see P. N. Mwaura, 'Gender Mainstreaming in African Theology. an African Women's Perspective' in *Voices from the Third World* 24:1 (2001), 165-179; N. J. Njoroge and M. W. Dube (eds.), *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2001; M. A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press 2001; M. A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1995.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. E. Chitando, *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 92-93, 96-97; Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*, 139-140; M. A. Oduyoye, 'Acting to Construct Africa: The Agency by Women' in R. Van Eijk and J. Van Lin (eds.), *Africans Reconstructing Africa*, Nijmegen: Theologische Faculteit KU-Nijmegen 1997, 38.



encouraging men to become “a new creation”. This ‘offers a lot of promise in the struggle against the HIV epidemic’ and it results in ‘masculinities that do not threaten the wellbeing of women, children and men’.<sup>62</sup> As appears from the above sections, this praise can also be attributed to NAOG. The ideal of “biblical manhood” certainly seeks to promote responsibility and encourages men to change. Having acknowledged these positive aspects, however, Chitando becomes far more critical. He criticises the Pentecostal strategy to transform masculinities because it ‘is still rooted in the paradigm of the male as the leader’ and does not challenge ‘the myth of male headship’.<sup>63</sup> According to Chitando, Pentecostalism reinforces patriarchal masculinity rather than that it promotes gender equality, while the latter in his opinion is a precondition to combat HIV as well as violence against women. Indeed, the case of NAOG supports Chitando’s observation that the Pentecostal movement upholds patriarchal notions of masculinity, such as male headship and leadership. However, Chitando does not acknowledge that the Pentecostal success in promoting responsibility among men may be closely related with these notions of headship and leadership. The sermons of Banda show that male responsibility is considered so crucial precisely because men, in this ideology, are assigned with a special role in “God’s order”, that is the role to be responsible heads in their families and servant leaders in society. Where Chitando underlines the need to give up “the myth of male headship” and to leave the paradigm of the male as the leader, the ideal of “biblical manhood” and its potential to constructively transform masculinities in view of HIV and gender-based violence etcetera, is based exactly on this patriarchal basis. When this is true, the question to Chitando and other scholars is, whether it is politically effective and necessary to envision a transformation of masculinities beyond patriarchy. Notions such as male headship and leadership may empower men for domination over women – and therefore a critical sensitivity is required –, but they also may motivate men to change and thus enable a transformation of masculinities. Within religious contexts that uphold a patriarchal gender ideology, it could be politically effective to employ these notions constructively rather than simply viewing them as part of the problem.

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<sup>62</sup> Chitando, *A New Man for a New Era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic*, 121, 124.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 122 and 124.

Some of the scholars may respond to this, saying it is necessary to reject patriarchal notions of masculinity like these, because gender equality is a biblical, theological or human rights demand. According to Sarojini Nadar, for example, 'a theology of headship and submission is simply yet another way of promoting violence (in its varied forms) through the insidious myth that men as the stronger sex need to protect women.'<sup>64</sup> In line with other African women theologians she argues that the concept of male headship does not respect the notion that man and woman are equally created in the image of God.<sup>65</sup> This raises the question, however, how scholars should deal with churches and church leaders such as Banda, who have a different understanding of the notion of gender equality, and who want to uphold "the principle of male headship" because they consider it as biblical. African women theologians have developed a critical biblical hermeneutics, from which they re-read the Genesis creation stories and engage critically with Pauline texts on female submission and male headship.<sup>66</sup> Engaging with this tradition, Chitando is able to call male headship a myth that is to be rejected. But Banda, like many other African church leaders, is hardly able to do so, because his hermeneutics does not allow for such a critical way of dealing with the Bible. He, at best, is able to re-interpret the notion, dissociating it from its connotation of power and domination and redefining it

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<sup>64</sup> S. Nadar, 'Who's Afraid of the Mighty Men's Conference? Palatable Patriarchy and Violence Against Wo/men in South Africa' in E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2010 (forthcoming).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. F. L. Moyo, 'Sex, Gender, Power and HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Threats and Challenges to Women being Church' in I. A. Phiri and S. Nadar (eds.), *On being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, Geneva: WCC 2005, 133. Mercy Oduoye underlined the need of a feminist deconstruction of male headship as early as 1979 (cf. M. A. Oduoye, 'The Roots of African Christian Feminism' in J. S. Pobee and C. F. Hallencreutz (eds.), *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima Press 1979, 42).

<sup>66</sup> E.g. A. Nasimiyyu-Wasike, 'Genesis 1-2 and some Elements of Diversion from the Original Meaning of the Creation of Man and Woman' in M. N. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratire (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton Publ. 2001, 175-180; R. N. Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination. an Igbo African and Christian Perspective: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with Reference to Women*, Enugu: Snaap Press 2001, 172-190; I. A. Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM 1997, 155; B. J. Ekeya, 'Woman's Place in Creation' in M. A. Oduoye and M. R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *Talitha, Qumi! Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians*, Ibadan: Daystar Press 1990, 89-103

in terms of responsibility, service and love. Because of a different understanding of the Bible, he develops a different politics to transform masculinities. Is there a way for scholars to acknowledge and appreciate such an effort to transform masculinities within an ideological framework of patriarchy? It is easy to criticise churches for their ‘hermeneutical immobility’<sup>67</sup>, but the case of NAOG shows that churches can be creative even though they maintain a rather traditional and normative reading of the Bible.

To be clear, I do not raise these questions in order to defend the patriarchal and heteronormative ideal of masculinity as promoted by Banda in NAOG. During the case study, especially when listening to and re-reading the sermons, I have often felt discomfort with the rhetoric on male headship as well as with the verbal bashing of homosexuals. However, as mentioned in the introduction, I consider it an urgent analytical task to identify what forces operate to effect change in masculinities and to evaluate these forces and their effects in a nuanced way. The findings of the case study presented in this article indicate that the concept of “biblical manhood” has the potential to change men and transform masculinities in a way that is helpful in view of HIV and issues as gender violence. Indeed, the appearance and effects of this alternative masculinity are ambiguous. But exactly in its ambiguity, the presented case raises some critical questions about our understanding and evaluation of religious masculinity politics and about our theological and political vision for the transformation of masculinities in the context of African Christianity and beyond.

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<sup>67</sup> S. Nadar, ‘On being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions’ in I. A. Phiri and S. Nadar (eds.), *On being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*, Geneva: World Council of Churches 2005, 21-22.

*Elizabeth Vengeyi*

## ***The Bible as a source of strength among Zimbabwean women during socio-economic and political crises***

### ***Introduction***

In Zimbabwe, the Bible plays a very crucial role, not only in church but in socio-economic and political matters as well. It is a vital tool in providing hope, courage and comfort during times of distress. It has therefore been turned to by various social, economic and political persons at crucial moments either to rally people against or toward certain programmes. Ordinary people have also turned to it (Bible) more and more during socio-economic and political trials and tribulations. The intention of this chapter is to demonstrate this reality by analyzing how Zimbabwean women (church and political leaders and ordinary) turned to reading and interpreting the Bible (and of course to the Church) for strength to confront the social, economic and political crises that Zimbabwe experienced from 2000 to 2010.

### ***Background to the position of the Bible in Zimbabwe***

Due to colonial and contemporary factors especially the emergent Pentecostalism that has dominated Zimbabwe, which views the Bible as so central to daily living that it is consulted on every subject of life and treated as fetish by the members,<sup>1</sup> the Bible has become crucial in socio-economic and political discourses. How it is engaged in these discourses is however dependent on the social, economic and political position of the reader. The elite, in order to spread their socio-economic and political agendas have almost found a ready resource in the Bible. The common people have also on the other hand turned to the Bible aiming to both encourage each other to be strong and to explain socio-economic and political realities. Thus, the role of the Bible in Africa, Zimbabwe in this case has always been ambiguous. Since the colonial era, the Bible is used as a weapon to suppress and oppress as well as a weapon to liberate.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Obvious Vengeyi, 'Gona and the Bible among Indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe: A Comparative analysis', in Masiwa Ragies Gunda, (ed.), *From Text to Practice: The Role of the Bible in Daily Living of African People Today* (BiAS 4), 2011, 95-129.

From this perspective, the privileged role of the Bible in the Zimbabwean society is easy to explain; about 80% of the population in Zimbabwe claim to be Christians, of which a majority of them are women, given that women comprise about 52% of the total Zimbabwean population. With these statistics, it is no surprise therefore that it is mostly women who are the worst affected by political and socio-economic distresses that Zimbabwe faced. This Christian/demographic factor has seen, those with political ambitions having to target the church for support. Since women are the majority in almost all Christian denominations, shrewd politicians have thus interpreted the Bible to be appealing to women.

### ***Brief history***

#### ***to Zimbabwe's post-2000 socio-economic and political crises***

As it is not possible to accurately understand the political role of the Bible as well as socio-economic and political crises of 2000-2010 in Zimbabwe independent of the colonial history, I will give here a brief background of colonisation. Zimbabwe became a British colony in 1890, under Cecil John Rhodes, with the help of Christian missionaries,<sup>2</sup> who successively through biblical interpretation among other strategies, continued to serve the social, economic and political interests of the colonisers. They took almost all of the fertile land from the black people without compensation and confined them to 'reserves' with unproductive soils,<sup>3</sup> where again they were subjected to many taxes. The first attempt by the colonized Zimbabweans to liberate themselves from colonization from 1896 to 1897,<sup>4</sup> ended in a failure until the Second Chimurenga of the 1960s which ended in independence in 1980.<sup>5</sup>

While the first decade of Independence brought many positive changes to the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, the main issues: economic redistribution especially land and mineral resources were not satisfactorily

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Lapsley, *Neutrality or Co-optation: Anglican Church and State from 1964 until the Independence of Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986, 9.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*. Harare: Department of Information and Publicity, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Leda Stott, *Women and the Armed Struggle for Independence in Zimbabwe (1964-1979)*. Edinburgh Univ.: Centre of African Studies, 1989 8.

<sup>5</sup> David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. London: James Curry Ltd, 1985.

resolved. Very few families got settled and basically the whole economy continued to be run by former colonisers. As reported by the Human Rights Watch, by 1999, some 11 million hectares (27 million acres) of the best lands were still in the hands of only about 4,500 white commercial farmers,<sup>6</sup> yet more than ten million had no land, hence continued to suffer in poverty.

Compounding the situation is the fact that from 1995 to 1999, the government was forced by the IMF and World Bank to accept Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes, (ESAP) that among other demands, protected corporate companies against the people-driven policies and compelled the government to privatize its companies, educational institutions and remove price controls on basic commodities. Since then Zimbabwe experienced a series of economic challenges such as massive retrenchments, resulting in high levels of unemployment.

These economic problems gave birth to a political party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. Since then, political violence became the order of the day as Zimbabwe African National Unity (ZANU-PF) and MDC (main political parties) competed for political power. Contrary to political statements from the MDC, some academics have accused MDC of being a shadow of ZANU-PF in matters of violence.<sup>7</sup> While MDC gained support in the urban areas where a significant number of workers, students and intellectuals who had been hit directly by these economic programmes reside, ZANU PF gained the rural support where people rely on the land for survival. So as ZANU-PF activists targeted MDC supporters especially in farms and rural areas, MDC loyalists on the other hand targeted ZANU-PF supporters in urban areas where they (MDC) had a strong presence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'Zimbabwe', <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/112239842449.htm>, accessed 14 July 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Blessing-Miles Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media*, Oxford et al.: Peter Lang, 2010. Cf. 'Preying on the 'Weaker' Sex: Political Violence Against Women in Zimbabwe', Report produced by IDASA (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ] and the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU], November 2010, accessed 02 July 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vengeyi, 'Mapositori Churches and Politics in Zimbabwe: Political dramas to win the support of Mapositori churches', *Exchange*: Vol. 40 (4), 2011, 351-368.

### **Women on the receiving end of political and socio-economic upheavals**

Since the launch of the land reform in 2000, which President Robert Mugabe justified as an economic ‘war to redress an enduring colonial land imbalance between the black majority and white minority commercial farmers, who were supported by Western imperialism,’<sup>9</sup> the national economy dropped to unimaginable levels, leading some critics to dismiss the whole land reform programme as a failure, contrary to government<sup>10</sup> and other scholarly claims that it was definitely successful.<sup>11</sup>

Political violence that marked the land reform programme badly affected women. Apart from the fact that women who had been working as farm workers were left without jobs, accommodation and sustenance, there are several reports of rape, torture and intimidation. Although those who invaded farms deny responsibility for the rapes and torture blaming it on some criminal elements,<sup>12</sup> there are some sections of the Zimbabwean society that point at war veterans and militia as perpetrators.<sup>13</sup>

Be that as it may, the use of rape as a political weapon to intimidate and suppress women across the political divide was so common that an anonymous woman in an interview with Alex Magaisa noted that,

When a male victim is attacked, the weapon of choice is the stick but when a female victim suffers, the weapon of choice is the reproductive organ. The man is beaten hard; the woman, often, is raped and sexually violated. This

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<sup>9</sup> Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Zimbabwe: Church makes strange fellows’, available online, <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/112239842449.htm>, accessed 14 July 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Scoones, et al, *Zimbabwe’s Land Reform: Myths and Realities*. Harare: Weaver Press, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lovemore Togarasei, ‘Reading and Interpreting the Bible during Zimbabwe’s 2000 Fast Track Land Reform Programme’ in Katharina Kunter and Jens Holger Schjorring, *Changing Relations between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008, 188.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mary J. Osirim, “Crisis in the State and the Family: Violence Against Women in Zimbabwe” *African Studies Quarterly* 7, no.2&3: [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a8.htm>, accessed on 01 Aug 2010; Cf. M. Osirim, ‘Women, Domestic Violence and Rape in Southern Africa,’ *African Studies Quarterly*, 2 and 3, 2003; Cf. Report produced by IDASA (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ] and the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU], ‘Preying on the ‘Weaker’ Sex: Political Violence Against Women in Zimbabwe, November 2010, accessed 02 July 2011.

most horrifying of physical violence, in many ways, is a manifestation of the kind of language and approach that women face in everyday public life.<sup>14</sup>

Because of fear of dishonour associated with being raped, most of the women do not report or speak about it. They suffer in silence. As research has indicated, in most cases, women who claimed to have witnessed rape were actually the ones raped. For most women, it is easier to talk about rape that happened to another woman than to actually say 'I was raped'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the statistics of reported cases of rape do not represent the actual occurrences of rape.

Violence intensified over the years since 2000 until 2009, and men as both perpetrators and prime targets of political violence, left their families into hiding leading to serious economic stress on the wives. In most cases therefore, it was women who nursed brutalized husbands and taking care of families and property in the rural areas.<sup>16</sup> It was their responsibility as Musimbi Kanyoro puts it: 'to deal with daily survival issues of the family'.<sup>17</sup>

The burden became even heavier for women who happened to be mothers, daughters and wives of political activists or activists themselves who were constant targets for retribution,<sup>18</sup> especially in the rural areas than in cities. Reports show that rural women were more likely than urban women to report property destruction, displacement, rape, and torture, whilst urban women reported assault, unlawful detention, and death threats more frequently.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Alex Magaisa, 'Politics and prejudice: plight of Zimbabwean women', *newzimbabwe.com*, accessed on 24 June 2010.

<sup>15</sup> 'When the going gets tough the man gets going!' Zimbabwean Women's views on Politics, Governance, Political Violence, and Transitional Justice. Report produced by the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU], Idasa [Institute for Democracy in Africa], and the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ]. November 2010 15, accessed on 02 July 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Preying on the 'Weaker' Sex: Political Violence Against Women in Zimbabwe, Report produced by IDASA.

<sup>17</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, 'Not Without Struggle: Changing Roles of African Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' in Katharina Kunter and Jens Holger Schjorring, *Changing Relations between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century*, Wiesbaden: Harrasaowitz Verlag, 2008, 219

<sup>18</sup> 'When the going gets tough the man gets going!' Zimbabwean Women's views on Politics, Governance, Political Violence, and Transitional Justice.

<sup>19</sup> Preying on the 'Weaker' Sex: Political Violence against Women in Zimbabwe, Report produced by IDASA; Kudzai Makombe, 'Towards Parity for Women in Politics', 23 August 2008. <http://ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=43644>; 'Growing violence in



Some women and children, whose homes were burnt down hence displaced as political violence and intimidation increased, sought refuge in organizations such as Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The organization reported in 2008 that more than 100 women and at least 40 children were taking refuge at the YWCA in Harare.<sup>20</sup>

The ugly political scene as described above had negative impact on economy which again affected women most. Since the introduction of the land reform in 2000, the economy of Zimbabwe deteriorated badly resulting in high inflation, food shortages, poor health facilities and poor working conditions. Many suburbs went for months without getting running water and electricity daily. These economic problems led to civil strife, including strikes by students, 'stay aways' by workers among others.<sup>21</sup> Some schools and tertiary institutions (colleges and universities) closed due to massive strikes by teachers and lecturers. While the government blames economic sanctions by Europe and America as the source of these economic woes in Zimbabwe,<sup>22</sup> corruption and mismanagement in government has been noted to have contributed greatly to the economic melt down.<sup>23</sup>

Since women bear the burden of ensuring the survival of their families, they were the hardest hit by the country's economic crisis, where basic social services and goods were limited or and where incomes were consistently eroded by spiraling inflation. Although most of the women had to embark on very long trips to neighboring countries such as Botswana, South Africa, and Mozambique among others to buy groceries for the families, a sizeable number had no option but to trust in God for sustenance as they faced starvation of their children. The period was just a hopeless one.

It was in the midst of such political and socio-economic crises that the Bible was used by various levels of the society to give explanation, en-

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Zimbabwe threatens security of women and girls, YWCA News, 14 May 2008, available online <http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/News-Archive-2008-2005/YWCA-of-Zimbabwe-Action-Alert>.

<sup>20</sup> Makombe, 'Towards Parity for Women in Politics'.

<sup>21</sup> Gadziro Gwekwerere, 'Gospel Music as a Mirror of the Political and Socio-Economic Developments in Zimbabwe, 1980-2007', *Exchange* (35), 2009, 335.

<sup>22</sup> Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*.

<sup>23</sup> Masiwa Ragies Gunda, 'Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos in the quest for a just society in contemporary Zimbabwe', *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa*, 2010.

couragement and direction to the nation. Women were not to lose hope in this struggle as during this time of crises Zimbabwean women, both church and public leaders and ordinary women turned to the Bible for counseling, comfort, encouragement and hope.

### ***The Reading and Interpretation of the Bible by Zimbabwean women***

It is important to note that generally the process of Bible reading and interpretation is dependent very much on the life circumstances of the readers.<sup>24</sup> As such, the Zimbabwean women's biblical interpretation was a result of their existential situation of a non-peaceful life due to the above described socio-economic and political situation. This context influenced the identification of Jesus in their biblical exegesis as a companion and a reliable friend. As Lovemore Togarasei deduced from the many interviews he conducted with several women, in 2005 when the economic situation became unbearable, a sizeable number of women in Harare, citing Matthew 11:28 which reads, 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest', regarded Jesus as a true friend, one who could bear their socio-economic burdens.<sup>25</sup>

In the whole socio-economic and political chaos that characterised Zimbabwe from 2000, there was a constant trading of blame, between political parties within the country and nation states as regarding the source of problems. Women as the ones at the mercy of the ever-deteriorating economic situation decoded rather not to immediately point blame; rather they understood the troubles as an opportunity to work hard and focus on individual production rather than complaining and blaming others, either political leaders or other nations. For most of them, 1 Thess. 4:11, which suggests that 'that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you', was relevant to Zimbabwe. Thus, many women in Harare testified the intervention of Jesus in their dire economic situations. They mentioned how Jesus provided them with jobs, education and self-employment for them and their children despite the high rates

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<sup>24</sup> Togarasei, 'Reading and Interpreting the Bible during Zimbabwe's 2000 Fast Track Land Reform Programme', in Katharina Kunter and Jens Holger Schjorring (eds.), *Changing Relations between Churches in Europe and Africa*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008, 189.

<sup>25</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, *Bible in Context: Essay Collection* (BiAS 1), 2009, 65-66.

of unemployment that the country experienced.<sup>26</sup> This is the reason why several women regarded Jesus as their provider.

Women of Zimbabwe therefore considered it their duty to pray for the nation instead of blaming leadership as was the habit in the society. For them the socio-economic and political turmoil was not a result of leadership but it was God's punishment in response to the sins of the people. In other words, the ordinary people of Zimbabwe and not the leadership were responsible for the challenges. Hence the solution was going to come only from the generality of the people of Zimbabwe. To convey this message to the people, women of Zimbabwe organized interdenominational vigils that culminated into National Days of Prayer rallies. Since 2002, when they started, the prayer rallies were predominantly attended and led by women and were conducted countrywide. In such prayer vigils and during national prayer days, biblical texts such as 2 Chronicles 7:14-15 were often read.<sup>27</sup> It says;

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

Because of emphasis on prayer and individual examination, rather than taking the political course of demonstrations against the government, politicians especially from ZANU-PF who had been subjected to blame for the economic melt down quickly moved in to support the holding of these prayer rallies countrywide. In most cases, government leadership attended the rallies and addressed the gatherings. Thus, although prayer rallies were received by ordinary people as a source of hope in a hopeless situation, politicians found cover in them. In the end the prayer rallies ended up being an instrument of the government. *The Sunday Mail* of 13 January 2002, for instance, reports that churches from different walks of life gathered in the Harare International Conference Centre, in which several pastors took turns to attack the West (following the government transcript) for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe, so as to fan the flames of disunity, civil unrest and poverty.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Togarasei, *Bible in Context*, 70-71.

<sup>27</sup> Ezra Chitando, 'Down with the Devil, Forward with Christ!' A study of the interface between religious and political discourses in Zimbabwe'. *African Sociological Review*, No. 6 (1), 2002, 1-16.

<sup>28</sup> Obvious Vengayi, *Prophetic Clash: A Replay of the Judean Drama (Jer. 28) on the Zimbabwean Stage*, from 1999-2003, unpubl., BA Diss., Univ. of Zimbabwe. 2004.

Prayer rallies seems to have been paying dividends for ZANU-PF politicians, for, in no time, some women in Zimbabwe who are directly linked to national politics such as Women of Zimbabwe Arise, (WOZA) which is aligned to MDC began to also organize prayer vigils to protest the harsh economic and political environment.<sup>29</sup> On 31 March 2005, for instance, WOZA organized a prayer vigil at Africa Unity Square in Harare, to pray for peace as political violence was soared. On another separate incident, in Bulawayo police are alleged to have attacked about 400 (WOZA) women who had gathered for an all-night prayer meeting on the eve of Election Day and severely assaulted them. The focus of the women's prayer meeting was to pray for peace before and after the elections.<sup>30</sup>

The ending of political violence at the inauguration of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009 saw women of Zimbabwe gear themselves more toward the promotion of national reconciliation. Again, the Bible is taken as a source of directions regarding forgiveness and reconciliation. At a conference held in April 2009, (two months after the formation of Government of National Unity with the aim of promoting reconciliation following a decade of political violence) whose theme was 'Bringing Zimbabwean women to the centre of the transition,' Reverend Regina Katsande 'referred to the Pauline writings and encouraged all women present to undertake the day's deliberations in love, peace and oneness, all as beings created by one God. She urged participants to stand united and put aside all that had been dividing them, clothed with the 'forward ever and backward never' spirit.'<sup>31</sup>

The same message was echoed by the chairperson for Women Coalition of Zimbabwe, Ms Emilia Muchawa who cited from Isaiah 32 verses 9-13. Ms Muchawa urged 'the daughters of Zimbabwe to rise up and claim [their] space,' end complacency and stop agonizing but participate in nation building.'<sup>32</sup> Apostle Eunor Guti, a renowned gospel preacher and

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<sup>29</sup> It is disguised as a movement which was formed to providewomen from all walks of life with a united voice to speak out on issues which affect them in their daily lives, but in reality, they will never speak in support of ZANU-PF women.

<sup>30</sup> 'Torture and murder in Zimbabwe as prayer rally is attacked', available online, <http://www.zimbabwehope.org/articles/art004.html> .

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Report of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe National Conference on 'Zimbabwe Women in Transition', 7 April 2009, Crowne Plaza, Monomotapa Hotel-Great Indaba Room.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Report of the Women's Coalition.

wife of Apostle Ezekiel H. Guti founder of ZAOGA (Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa) echoed the same sentiments as she encouraged women gathered at the Women International Conference held in Harare to take a decisive stance in all spheres of life, citing her message from Genesis 1:26-27. As the theme of the conference was: 'Vision of today's Woman' hence attended by women from all walks of life, she emphasised that her words were not confined to ZAOGA women only, but were meant to help every Zimbabwean Christian woman.<sup>33</sup>

According to Guti, women of Zimbabwe had a special task to turn around the socio-economic and political situation. Instead of complaining and blaming leadership, she said that even though there was intense socio-economic and political instability, God wanted to speak something through women. For her, it was time for women to know their stand (special status) in God. She encouraged women to call upon and to trust God first in everything. To affirm the worthiness of women, Guti argued that Genesis 1:26-27, which reads: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them', clearly shows women like men were created in the image of God. As such, women were (also) created to subdue and to dominate whatever comes their way, through Jesus Christ. According to her, instead of being dominated by economic hardships, women are supposed to dominate economic hardships.<sup>34</sup>

Apostle Guti emphasised over and over again that women are powerful instruments; hence they can assist to make change where they seek change. Understanding that women are the majority in Zimbabwe, Guti argues that women were going to change the challenging socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe through the positions they hold in society. Unlike many, she encouraged women to participate or to be proactive in politics, to hold political positions, a domain considered to be a male province. She noted that women politicians, for instance, who are Christians, who fear God, can assist to shun political violence that we have noted is predominantly perpetrated by men. For her, women make better leaders and can heal the society of many 'diseases' such as corruption. Thus she argues that professional women, who work in various sectors, can help to uproot corruption in their workplaces.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Eunor Guti, address to 'Today's Woman International Conference'. <http://vimeo.com/3207849>.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Eunor Guti, address to 'Today's Woman'.

They can turn around bad practices into good.<sup>35</sup> Her message basically was full of hope for the nation through women if they know their stand before God.

While it is true that all the churches in Zimbabwe took sides with one political party or the other, during the course of the political crisis, the Anglican Church paid more than the rest. The Church split into two: pro-ZANU-PF faction of Bishop Nolbert Kunonga and the pro-MDC faction of Bishop Sebastian Bakare. During the factional infighting Kunonga is accused of having the support of the police and military who helped him consolidate his power as his supporters locked doors and gates to the St. Mary's Anglican Cathedral in Harare so that the other faction would have no access to the premises.<sup>36</sup>

Since the Bakare faction sees itself as suffering political violence, it has in response, held several prayer vigils in and around Harare encouraging their followers not to despair. Since women were most affected by political violence, on one occasion, Mrs Ruth Bakare, the wife of Bishop Sebastian Bakare organized a prayer meeting (attended by Anglican women from various dioceses countrywide), whose goal was to encourage women church followers to soldier on despite political persecution they were facing.<sup>37</sup> In her message, she read from the book of Isa 43: 1-2 and 10 and the theme was, 'You are my witnesses,' which was cited from verse 10, 'You are my witnesses!, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.'<sup>38</sup>

In the following elaboration on the text, Ruth understood their plight, persecution as almost the fulfillment of the scripture. In other words, she argued that the Anglican Church, Harare diocese was being comforted by the words of God in the Bible in the midst of hopelessness and despair. I will cite here her sermon at length. She said,

During these times of uncertainty and manifold challenges in our life as a church and a nation, the Bible seems to have come alive to us in a new way. You are my witnesses – what does this mean to us in Zimbabwe in 2008? Indeed we have witnessed and continue to witness many things: we see so-

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Eunor Guti, address to 'Today's Woman'.

<sup>36</sup> 'Supporters of pro-Mugabe bishop blockade cathedral', ZW News, 4 February 2008, From Associated Press, available online, accessed on 3 February 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *The Times*, 'The events of Lady Day 2008 celebrated on 19 April 2008 at St Michael's Mbare', 23 April 2008. She made her speech on 19 April 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *The Times*, 'The events of Lady Day'.

called priests beat up innocent people who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, we see some of our Mother's Union members arrested and taken to court because they stood up for their church. But the message from Isaiah is a message of consolation for those who are tempted to give up all hope for a better future. Isaiah comforts God's people with the words:

"But now says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have called you by name, you are mine." (v.1) Let us therefore take this opportunity of meeting here today from different parts of our diocese to share our stories and to comfort and reassure one another that God has called each one of us by name, that he is with us in the midst of the difficulties we are experiencing in our church and in our nation. Let us encourage each other to be witnesses to the one God who alone can redeem us and who is already ahead of us.<sup>39</sup>

Women gospel artists also had to be creative and sang their songs to communicate hope through music. They composed songs which addressed the socio-economic and political difficulties that were prevailing. For them it was part of Christian virtue to stand firm, in patience for God's time. Shingisai Suluma, for example, composed a song *Mirira Mangwanani* (Wait for the Morning) which became popular in early 2000. It encouraged Christians to persevere and wait on God. The song is an inspiration from the biblical passage, 'Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning' (Psalm 30:5).<sup>40</sup> In other words therefore, Shingisai understands the problems that Zimbabwe faced to be temporary as well as caused by God and not leadership or any other human being.

### ***The Bible and women with political ambitions in Zimbabwe***

During the crises, some women with political ambitions also found the Bible as a ready source for communicating their political ideology. Knowing that presenting oneself as a God fearing or Bible-believing individual is highly regarded in Zimbabwe, Tsitsi Dangarembga as soon as she was appointed Secretary for Education in MDC faction led by Prof Arthur Mutambara, presented herself as a woman who fears God and who gets inspiration from the Bible for her political path. She, in an

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<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 'The events of Lady Day.'

<sup>40</sup> Chitando, 'In the beginning was the land': The Appropriation of religious themes in political discourses in Zimbabwe; Cf. Gadziro Gwekwerere, 'Gospel Music as a Mirror of the Political and Socio-Economic Developments in Zimbabwe, 1980-2007', *Exchange* 38 (2009) 329-354.

interview argued that when she talks about injustice, she is basically referring to all the things that are forbidden in the Bible. When she was asked why she has been always critical of President Mugabe's government, her response was,

I have not always been a vocal critic of President Mugabe's government. I have always been a vocal critic of injustice, backwardness, intolerance, brutality, selfishness, greedy, you name it; all the things that are listed in the Bible as deadly sins...<sup>41</sup>

It is most likely that Dangarembga cited the Bible in order to appeal to the ordinary people especially women given that as an academician, she has always been writing in favour of women. Now as a politician, she knows that women are the majority in church and in society hence significant for votes. This is critical in the Zimbabwean situation because politicians usually appeal to the Bible and the church to advance their political careers.

Promoting forgiveness throughout the country, in her address on the occasion of the Official Opening of the Seventh Day Adventist National Women's Ministries Congress held in Bulawayo, Vice President Joyce Mujuru appealed to all mothers, sisters and all Christians who were present to spread the word of national healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. She realized that her message needed biblical support to be more appealing. As such she said, 'the Bible teaches us to forgive. Hard as it may be, we need to learn to forgive each other and God will bless this nation and unlock its great potential.'<sup>42</sup> Although she did not quote a specific biblical text, it is no doubt that she had in mind, Matthew 18:21-22 which encourages followers of Christ to learn to forgive their adversaries as many times as is possible. This is most credible considering that Francis Machingura has observed that during the call for na-

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<sup>41</sup> 'Dangarembga's New Venture', News24, 21 June 2010, available online, <http://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/Dangarembga-new-venture-20100621>, accessed on 30 June 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Speech by the Vice President Hon. J.T.R. Mujuru at The Official Opening of the Seventh Day Adventist National Women's Ministries Congress: Solusi Univ.: 22 April 2010, Available online, [http://www.vpmujuru\\_office.gov.zw/index.php?option=com\\_](http://www.vpmujuru_office.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_), accessed on 26 July 2010.



tional reconciliation and integration in Zimbabwe, around 2009, Mat 18:21-22 has been the central biblical text.<sup>43</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has demonstrated the centrality of the Bible in Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political spheres. It has argued that as women are the majority in the country and in various churches, the effects of the difficult socio-economic and political situation of the period between 2000 and 2010 affected them more than men. Facing many difficulties such as food shortages, homelessness and political violence, women of Zimbabwe turned to the Bible to seek consolation, hope and encouragement. Other women Christian leaders saw it as their responsibility to encourage and give directions to women of Zimbabwe to positively contribute to national political, economical and social affairs through the Bible. The chapter has also noted that although a majority of women who turned to the Bible were ordinary women, some women with political ambitions made references to the Bible as an attempt to appeal to the majority of the people. The Bible was in other words, consulted to give religious justification to political ideas.

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<sup>43</sup> Francis Machingura, 'The Reading and Interpretation of Matthew 18:21-22 in relation to Multiple reconciliations: The Zimbabwean Experience'. *Exchange*, Vol 39 No. 4, 2010, pp331-354.

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*Tapiwa Praise Mapuranga*

***An analysis of the Application of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14: The Politics of Pentecostalism and Women's Ministries in Zimbabwe<sup>1</sup>***

***Introduction***

Pentecostalism has brought with it an influx of women pastors and preachers in the church. This new (or rather revived) phenomenon of women and leadership roles has sparked fierce social debates. The central question being, 'should women be allowed to preach and teach in the church?' The discussion of women's participation in the church and ministry has been quite a controversial phenomenon within and outside the church. This has been attributed to cultural, historical, theological reasons. Unlike most mainline churches, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements have accorded women leadership roles as they interrogate missionary Christianity. This study takes the discussion on women's status in the Pentecostal churches as a political issue. It takes the assumption that if politics belongs to the public sphere; and the female body is political, then the role of women in the church becomes a political issue. With particular reference to Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, this chapter discusses the political debates of women preachers and church leaders with particular reference to selected texts in the New Testament. It simply illuminates larger societal perceptions about the politics of women preachers in Pentecostalism. As such, this study examines the various views that have emerged due to women's notable rise to influential leadership within the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, it contends that these women must be accepted as pastors and preachers in their own right. It argues that they have appropriated the religious significance of women in indigenous culture and have applied it to the Pentecostal movement. On the other, it lays bare the societal perception that women should not preach because the Bible tells us so, with reference to 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35.

This chapter utilises interviews, newspaper articles and scholarly views to locate contesting interpretations of selected biblical texts. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Appreciation for the support received in the form of an IAHR African Trust Fund Grant 2011 for this research.

the study does not undertake an exegesis of the selected texts, but highlights how these readings have been applied by the larger society against the backdrop of the emergence of women preachers through Pentecostalism. For interpretations of Biblical texts with reference to women, this is available elsewhere, for example, (Phiri and Nadar eds. 2005) and (Dube 2001) amongst other texts.

The next section illuminates on the politics of naming. It focuses on what a church is in this study, and what the term politics refers to.

### ***The politics of identity: Who/what is the church in Zimbabwe?***

For the purposes of this article, the church shall refer to all adherents of Christianity, which is the presumably the fastest growing religion in Zimbabwe, apart from the already existing African traditional Religion(s). As Frans J. Verstraelen (1998) has argued, Zimbabwean Christianity is hugely diverse. One finds the Catholic Church, Protestant churches, African Instituted/ Independent/ Initiated Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches. It is important to note that as Christianity expands, it is not exactly homogeneous on views on all issues which could be relating to dress, food, and particularly for this article, to women preachers in the church. This chapter particularly focuses on Pentecostalism as an aspect of the church. But, just how political are the issues of women preaching in these Pentecostal churches?

### ***How political are women's issues: redefining 'politics'***

It is a common phenomenon that when one thinks of politics, it is only formal office such as being a prime minister, a minister, a president or councilor, or formal elections and voting that come to mind. There is a general assumption that politics should evolve around that which concerns offices of the nation or state. This is erroneous. Anything that involves decision, and usually characterised by diversity and conflict, can be identified as political. Resultantly, the issue of women preachers in the church has brought a lot of disagreement in the society at large and may thus be labelled political. This is one aspect that falls into the broader category of what is called feminist politics. According to Mary Holmes, 'feminist politics is an attempt to represent women's interests in order to overcome the gender inequalities which disadvantage women' (Holmes 2007: 110).

Politics has often been assumed to belong to the 'public sphere'. What is 'private' is not political. According to Holmes,

The division between 'public' and 'private' is artificial; the terms only make sense through opposition to each other. The public is that which is not private and vice versa (Pateman 1988). For feminists, 'the private' usually referred to the domestic sphere, but there were other usages of the term which refer to civil society... The public, in other words, was the non-domestic... The slogan, 'the personal is political'... Some feminists took it as an insistence on the need to see women's everyday experiences put on the political agenda... However, they did not always agree on which 'personal' issues were in need of political attention, or in what form that attention should take... Feminists challenge the point at which, to paraphrase C. Wright Mills (1959), personal troubles became political issues. By seeing everyday aspects of women's lives as being political, feminists were challenging representations of the 'personal' in patriarchal society. (Holmes 2007: 113).

From the above quotation therefore, women's issues, which may be considered 'private', can be political as well. If concepts such as child-care, menstruation and abortion and reproduction (Holmes 2007:114-116), were not 'personal troubles, but public issues', then why not would less personal and more public issues like leadership in the church not be political? It is from this argument that this study on the role of women in the church finds space in a discussion of politics.

In its basic form, politics implies the contestation for power between individuals and groups. Within Pentecostal churches, politics is played out around the question of ordination. In this contestation, the Bible plays an important role. As I shall illustrate below, despite the fact that the Bible has been used to justify the non ordination of women in many other churches, in Pentecostalism, the same Bible is appealed when justifying their ordination. As such, movements such as Pentecostalism in Christianity have thus brought with them 'problems with women's empowerment' (Soothill 2010), which are categorised as political in this chapter.

Having illuminated how women's space in the Church can be defined as politics, the next section highlights some of the historical and colonial influences that have contributed to the debate around women participating in the church with high positions such as being preachers or pastors.

### ***No women pastors in the church: Historical influences***

The status of women in the 'public' sphere has been highly compromised in contemporary society and this has been attributed to history

and culture. Apart from the theological reasons that this article deals with which emerge through perceptions stemming from the selected biblical texts, culture and history have also immensely contributed to the negative views about women preaching in the church by society at large. Historically, in the churches, there was no space for women in the church's leadership positions, as they had been denied the opportunity to do so, through lack of the requirements, that is: necessary education and qualifications, as was dictated by missionary education. This is noted by L. Lagerwerf (1990: 43) when she argues that, 'financially, spiritually and socially women in Africa are the backbone of the church...however, this fact is not reflected in the official structures of the church, with all its consequences, e.g. in the field of decision making'. As such, women lagged behind in the leadership roles of the church because of a lack of access to the prerequisites, and this was highly likely to have been informed by patriarchy and sexism.

Whereas in traditional African cultures women had enjoyed considerable space and freedom, Christianity was promoting domesticity. The missionary emphasis was on developing "respectable and responsible women" (Hinfelaar 2001) who were subordinate, passive and humble to their husbands. Such women were to be confined to the household, while men were to go out and become 'breadwinners.' This was a new development as in traditional cultures both men and women had the responsibility 'to win bread' (Lindsay 2007). The combination of Church teachings and the colonial economy altered the existing gender relations decisively in favour of men. Women have therefore struggled to find leadership roles within the church and in contemporary society in general; including in politics, the academia, among other sectors of the society. However, despite the fact that it has been an uphill task for women to be preachers in the church; this has not made them completely inactive. The society has accommodated some roles for women, as is discussed in the upcoming section which highlights women's accepted roles in the Bible, in mainline churches, and in African Independent churches. This broad analysis lays bare the status of women in the church in general: for the sake of comparison with the status that Pentecostalism has brought to its women leadership in Zimbabwe; the discussion that comes up thereafter.

***Roles accepted by the society at large for women in the Church: but strictly no preaching!***

Many people who endorse what is written in 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35, would rather accept any other positions that can be accorded to women in the church, but not preaching! As such, one would find quite a number of roles for women in the church, and preaching remains a preserve acceptable only for men. The church in general, and Pentecostalism in particular, as will be highlighted later, has exposed women's initiatives and assertiveness as healers and leaders of the churches they have founded, in addition to their increased involvement and participation in gender discourses and social change (Sackey 2006).

As briefly illustrated in this section, the 'acceptable' women's roles in church included singing and dancing, cleaning the church and its surroundings, and becoming prophetesses.

Beginning from the Bible, there are records of female prophetesses who were called to do God's mission, and this is a yardstick that is used by those conservationists who strictly adhere to what is written in the 'good book'. These prophetesses include the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), Anna (Luke 2:36-38), Huldah (2Kings 22:14), (Isa 8: 3), Elizabeth (Luke 1:41-45), Noadiah, (Neh 6:14), and the greatest prophetesses; Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Miriam (Exo 15:20). Thus, the bible, in as much as it becomes a trendsetter for not allowing women to preach in the church, others would not mind having female prophetesses, for they also existed in the bible.

Most mainline churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, have not given space to women in the church up to the highest levels. Women ordination remains a highly political issue in the church. Women can become nuns, and perform some roles which are not as significant to that of the bishop, and at a larger level, the pope. Because of the status accorded to them, women in the Catholic Church eventually cannot preach. The larger chunk of mainline churches as well such as the United Church of Christ (UCCZ), Anglican, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ), amongst many others, have not heard of women getting to the highest level in charge, though of course, in some cases, women have been allowed to preach, but not as the preacher in charge. In other words, in as much as mainline churches have allowed women to be ordained, this has not been to the highest positions in these churches. Male leaders remain at the helm.



With particular reference to AICs, women have been allowed to speak in the church through the role of prophecy. Mabhunu (2010) describes this role of women in AICs in Harare. Prophecy has allowed women to be heard in the church. However, with particular reference to the selected biblical texts in question, Mabhunu says,

Despite the inroads that women have had in AICs in Harare, consideration of personal testimonies and observations have indicated that they still have limited roles in leadership positions. Women are recognized as healers, midwives and prophetesses. But all women in AICs, even prophetesses, are excluded from the church hierarchy. The expression of equality in leadership is denied for women...AICs forbid women from preaching in line with the Pauline Instruction...1Timothy 2: 11-14. Prophetesses are also excluded from positions of authority and influence such as occupying positions of secretary general or treasurer (Mabhunu 2010:82).

As such, the idea of women preaching in both AICs and mainline churches is still minimal, as they argue that the bible tells them that women are not allowed to preach. In AICs, as Mabhunu argues, women are not in leadership positions, though they can have other roles. In Zimbabwe, however, women in one strand of Christianity: Pentecostalism, are defying the odds. AICs and Pentecostal churches have accorded greater space to women's leadership than the Catholic Church and Protestant churches. With AICs, women are more of prophetesses and less of preachers, but with Pentecostalism, more women are emerging as both preachers and prophetesses. Consequently, this article focuses on women Pentecostalism. This is because it is largely with Pentecostalism that one can notice a clear paradigm shift in many dimensions of the church; and it appears Pentecostalism has gone the furthest in promoting women's leadership in the church. Furthermore, Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has tended to attract the young and even the upwardly mobile social class (Togarasei 2010). As such, it represents the fastest growing brand of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa (Kalu 2008). The next section discusses how women in Zimbabwean Pentecostalism have defied the historical and colonial trends to set some new standards for themselves as leaders, preachers and prophetesses in the church.

### ***Women called to be fishers of men? The Zimbabwean Pentecostal scenario***

It has been exceedingly difficult for women to access public space in Zimbabwe (Lynette Jackson 1999). Zimbabwean women have gathered

the guts, the education and the know how to represent themselves and others in areas where they were commonly represented by men. With Zimbabwean society making some strides towards gender equity, women have begun to attain some high degrees of visibility. Although Zimbabwean society remains male-dominated (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007), women have refused to accept male dominance without putting up a fight. A significant number of women are now occupying influential positions within the political arena and in the corporate sector. In the literary sphere, women have decided to speak for themselves (Mguni-Gambahaya and Magosvonge 2005: 16). Women have even dared to access leadership roles within the church. They have become fishers of men: they have become leaders and preachers, particularly in the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe.

The issue of women preachers in the church in Zimbabwe is currently stirring a fierce debate countrywide, from various sectors of the society. The media is awash with women Pentecostal ministries and ministers. One can find invitations and headlines such as:

- Grace Unlimited Ministries: Rizpah 2011 Explosion. Ladies Day out with Jesus. Apostle F. Kanyati (*The Sunday Mail*, May 15-21 2011: 10).
- Woman Limited: It's your time, Let Faith speak. Pastor Maureen. (*The Sunday Mail*, May 15-21 2011:L6).
- 'Should women Preach?' (*The Sunday Mail*, May 15-21 2011:D5).

Such articles in the newspapers illustrate the impact that women have as preachers. There now exist a paradigm shift, where it was only heard of men in such positions of the church. In and around Harare alone, one can come across more names of women preachers of the gospel in Pentecostal ministries such as the following:

- Dr Eunor Guti of Gracious Women's Fellowship
- Dr Rutendo Wutawunashe of Precious Stone's Ministry
- Prophetess A.C Manjoro of Women of Virtue Ministries
- Pastor Grace Kanyati of Grace Unlimited Ministries
- Bishop Patience Hove of Elshaddai Ministries International
- Pastor Victoria Mpofu of Women Weapons of Warfare
- Prophetess Veronica P. Mwela of Intercessors International
- Pastor Bonnie Deuschle of Celebration Ministries
- Pastor Delia Mandisodza of Trinity Deliverance Ministries, and
- Pastor Barbara Bassie of Women of Hope and Honour Ministries (Dete 2011:D5).

It is also significant to note here that these women are not all identified by one title. References such as pastor, prophetess, Apostle, and Bishop, amongst others are all identities of these women. Whatever titles applied to them, the point here is, these women are preachers as well in their churches. Their titles do not in any way strip them off their role as preachers and teachers of the gospel. As the popular adage says, 'a rose, by any other name, would smell a sweet'. In another forthcoming article, Tapiwa P. Mapuranga argues that 'with these other male power –oriented titles',

Are these women not trying to be like 'men'? Such identities are meant to install power and authority in these women as leaders, just as their fellow male leaders would appropriate the same titles to bestow the same identities and get authority from other men and women in the church. Some of these titles have been coined from Christ himself. By adopting such identities, figures in the church want to be associated with the identity, character and authority that Jesus had, some of which were passed on to his disciples. The earlier males to get leadership in the church then adopted these titles as well, and thus, women follow suit. Some of these titles, one can argue, stem from colonial mentality where there were hierarchies of master and servant, King and servant, etcetera. (Mapuranga 2011: 14-15).

Resultantly, the appropriation of such titles as women identify themselves in Pentecostal Christianity is there to reinforce power and authority, as was/is the case with male Pentecostal leaders. Rieger (2007: 198) says modern theology therefore has been found with a 'colonial structure', where authority was defined in terms of master and servant.

Whatever titles they use, the point is that Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has thus offered a new and unique space for women in the church leadership. With such names increasingly emerging in the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, one can thus argue that Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has become 'a strong forum for social change' (Sackey 2006: viii) for women, and also 'an exit from the shackles of patriarchy' (Kalu 2008: 161). Pentecostalism has thus presented a paradigm shift by accessing women to power in the church. This is supported by J.E.Soothill when she argues that,

What makes Pentecostal Hermeneutics unique at this time is the vital role played in Biblical Interpretation. Pentecostals argue that women have an experience of the Holy Spirit that is identical to men and therefore are able to minister. (Soothill 2007: 54).

Regardless of the emergence of such names of women preachers as given above, some have argued that these women are mere appendages

of their husbands. The argument is that these women Pentecostal leaders tend to be married to charismatic founders of these churches, with notable examples such as Apostle Eunor Guti, Apostle Petunia Chiriseri, Dr Faith Wutawunashe and others. This implies that these women preachers never have full authority in a church, unless supported by their husbands. For J.E.Powers,

This ambiguity has meant that Pentecostals have expanded the traditional ecclesiastical roles of women and allowed them to preach as ministers empowered by the spirit and at the same time, have never been certain of this spirit empowering ability to assume positions of authority (Powers 1999: 317).

As such, some would argue that these women still have that patriarchal power controlling them, and they are not totally in charge. For Soothill, 'While Pentecostalism may empower women as 'mouthpieces of the Lord', it does not empower them as women (Soothill 2007: 54). One may begin to doubt really if Pentecostalism accords these women leaders with 'sustainable female power' (Sackey 2006: 196) in the church. One questions their authority if there is a total absence of male leadership. As asked by Kalu, would these women be able have the capacity to confront society in these churches? (Kalu 2008: 154).

It is because of this notion that Mavis Muguti (a worshipper in Pentecostalism Interview: June 2011), expressed how sad she felt because from her church, she has observed that it is only men who play most of the leading roles, and only men perform gifts of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:1ff). For example when the deliverance service is ongoing, wives of Pastors are there only to take care of those congregants who are overpowered by the Holy Spirit and fall. Never has she seen a wife to a pastor (nor does the church have female pastors) who actually 'do' the deliverance. This means it is a preserve for men. This assumes that women are either too weak or too defiled for the Holy Spirit to work through them and perform the same miracles that males do. However, despite this observation that may be appropriate in some instances, names such as listed above have shown that women are indeed preaching and prophesying in most of the Pentecostal churches.

As highlighted in this section, women have made great strides in creating space for themselves in an area which was predominantly masculine. But does the larger society wholly accept this phenomenon? The forthcoming section looks into the politics behind women preachers, with special reference to 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35.

### ***The Bible and women preachers:***

#### ***The larger society's application of 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35***

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1Cor 14:34-35 RSV).

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (1Tim 2:11-15RSV).

The issue of women's participation in the church can be rightly categorised as political. It has stirred so stiff a debate both in and outside the church's circles. In the preceding section, this study has highlighted some of the prominent names of women preaching in the church in Zimbabwe. The upcoming section lays bare some of the responses by the larger society through their interpretation of the given scriptures. As will be unfolded, the society is not homogenous in this regard, as part of it feels that the bible forbids women from preaching, and yet, on the other hand, others feel that to have women preachers in the church is a sign of upholding women's capacity and abilities.

#### ***The Bible says so: 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35***

This section highlights the views by the larger society about women preachers in the Pentecostal movement, and not necessarily the views in the movement itself. Some members of the larger society, especially those stereotyped by patriarchy, feel that it is not any responsibility of women to preach in the church, as is being practiced in Pentecostalism, because the bible declares so. This is evidenced by responses such as that of an elderly man who belongs to a mainline church identified as Tongai who argues, 'I would never allow my wife to stand in front of a congregation, as it is the responsibility for men' (Tongai, Interview: 2011 June). This notion had enormous support from members of the larger society. For them, a women's responsibility is solely to manage the kitchen only and have no say in public areas like the church. This has led to some female stereotypes who also find it odd to have women preachers in the church as one lady identified as Tambudzayi says, 'I do not support a fellow woman to speak in church because Jesus did not have female disciples' (Tambudzayi: Interview, June 2011). For such people, the female body belongs to a gendered sphere/space in the kitchen,

bedroom, and in the home with children. The same sentiments are echoed by F.H. Chimhanda when she says,

The patriarchal church distinguishes between men's vocation patterned on the Petrine symbol of priesthood and woman's vocation patterned on the Marine symbol of motherhood. This relegates women to the biological role of reproduction and thus negates her from other important roles regarding decision making (Chimhanda 2010: 5).

In response to a debate of this nature, Denver Cheddie says,

Is it possible for a woman to teach without usurping authority? If it is, then there is no problem. It is clear that from scriptures like Hebrews 13:17 and I Peter 5: 1-5 that pastors carry a huge amount of spiritual authority. It is impossible to be a pastor without being in spiritual authority over the members of your congregation. Of course, that authority is not to lord the people, but to serve them... (bibleissues.org).

This study's interpretation of the above sentiment is that, since it is difficult to separate being a pastor with having authority, that is, it is impossible to be a preacher without amassing authority from the congregants, then; Cheddie feels that women should not be preachers in the church. For him, it would only be permissible for women to teach in the church, without carrying any authority over them. Since this is not the case with most of the women preachers in Zimbabwe, particularly in the Pentecostal ministry, it then follows, according to Cheddie, that they are practicing a forbidden vocation.

Using other Biblical references, this patriarchal mentality was also expressed by Bernard Mlambo (a pastor in a Pentecostal church and a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe). He clearly expressed how he doubts the ongoing sprouting of women church leaders, and who gives them the authority to stand and preach the word of God. He says,

Unfortunately for the women, I quote the Bible which for me is the only authentic source of what God tells me to follow. It instructs women to be silent in church and never speak in front of a congregation. In addition, Jesus Christ himself never chose women amongst his disciples (Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11). Furthermore, after his resurrection, Jesus commanded the eleven disciples who were left, to 'go and make disciples of the nations' (Matthew 28:17 -20). There was no woman amongst the sent. So where are these women church leaders getting their authority from? (Mlambo, 2011 June Interview).

Like Mlambo, some have strongly argued against the idea of women being preachers in the church because, being a preacher or pastor involves leadership in official functions such as baptism, marriages, burying the dead, and unveiling of tombstones, which all fall under the realm

of the minister's duties and responsibilities in the church. Mlambo had to ask,

How would a wife and a mother afford to create time for all this, despite her 'natural' obligations in the home? Such callings are meant to be for men only. For your own information, I would never marry a pastor, and neither would I allow any of my sisters to be. Their role should be to serve their husbands or brothers at home (Mlambo).

Such is the power of patriarchy. Some men (and women with a stereotyped mentality) interpret the Bible to suit their own expectations. Such an interpretation as above will definitely not give women pastors the credit which might be theirs. This notion is not peculiar to Zimbabwe alone. Writing on the churches in Nigeria, Bolaji Olukemi Bateye (2008:114-115) says,

The Bible was used authoritatively by the Western Orthodox Churches to silence women and prevent them from assuming administrative pastoral roles in the church hierarchy. There was therefore ambivalence in the stance of Western Christian mission pertaining to women. On the one hand, they claimed to liberate and empower women, while on the other hand there was a rigid rejection of women from taking up leadership roles in the church, and in some cases even the larger secular Western Society.

As illustrated, one school of thought uses the selected references to argue against the preaching of women in the church. However, using the same Bible, one can equally support the leadership roles of women in the church, including preaching as well. This is the thrust of the upcoming section, to illustrate how the same bible that carries 1Tim 2:11-14, and 1Cor 14:34-35, can be used to support women preaching in the church.

### ***Women can preach too: The bible as a tool for such a declaration***

E.C. Stanton (1974:14), argues says in the Bible there is representation of both the masculine and feminine elements'. As such, one could use the Bible to argue either for or against women's leadership roles in the church in contemporary society. One critical position by feminism is that it calls upon for a re-interpretation of the texts to accommodate women, for all are equal before God (Gal 3:28). Through re-interpretation, one would argue that women were also part of the disciples chosen by Jesus '...the 12 accompanied him, and also some women...Mary called Magdalene, ...Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, Susana and many

others...'(Luke 8:1-5). Even though, one could still ask, did these women preach?

Memory Dete approves and appreciates the space for women leadership in the church. She says:

Some women have become leaders of large corporate companies, while others head the government, health and other institutions. It is pleasing that also in the Kingdom of God, women have taken an admirable lead by grasping Christian leadership positions, which is evidence that God is working through them in amazing spiritual ways. These women have demonstrated that if a woman is equipped by God to lead, she possesses the same qualities of Christian leadership that a Christian man possesses. After all, God does not call the equipped but he equips the called. It is clearly evident that God has equipped women to take up Christian leadership in Zimbabwe and that Pentecostalism has given them admirable lead. In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of Christian women who have taken up the mantle in God's ministry (Dete 2011: D5).

There is need to interpret the scriptures in more redemptive ways that promote social justice and the full emancipation of women. Rose N. Uchem, a Catholic nun from Nigeria, puts it across forcefully:

Thus, there is need for Christians to translate into practice what they say in theory about the equal human dignity of women and men. For instance, if we agree in principle that women are human, then women should not be restricted in roles in the family, Church and community. Roles should be assigned or regulated according to individual giftedness of women and men and not according to sex. If we say that women and men are equal in humanity and dignity, then women must be allowed equal opportunities and must be seen ministering in the Christian assembly without restrictions (Uchem 2001: 242-243).

From feminist politics, one would critically question the authority of the bible when it disregards the authority of women as preachers. One could ask, 'by what physical or biological differences can men preach and women cannot? Is there anything that men possess that is used for preaching that women do not possess? Is it not through inspiration, ability and capacity that one can preach, and is any of these a preserve for men only? Only can preaching be done through penises and scrotums that women would be declared incapable of preaching, because these, they do not possess!



## **Conclusion**

A feminist interpretation of the recurrent biblical passages requires that one appreciates the paradigm shift that Pentecostalism has brought about in relation to women preachers in the church. Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has done a sterling job in upholding the right for women to preach ‘openly and unhindered’. From the foregoing discussion, it emerges that the bible is amenable to multiple and conflicting interpretations. Those Pentecostals (and members of the larger society) who are opposed to women preaching appropriate the bible in defense of their position. Those Pentecostals who support the ordination of women appeal to the same bible to back up their stance. The politics of the female body seems to be a continuous battle. With the current concerns raised by women pressure groups and the vigorous worldwide concerns for equity between sexes, the problem of women’s representation persists, not only in Zimbabwe, but world over. This debate, from the divergent views regarding women preachers, will take some time for ideas to converge and to see meaningful change of attitudes. The female body remains highly contentious with regards to this issue and many more to be unveiled with the passage of time. It remains a matter of preferred political standpoints: that which allows women to preach or that which forbids them. Notwithstanding, credit must be given to Pentecostalism which has given space to women who have dared to enter into a predominantly male terrain: that of preaching in the church. The Bible is therefore an open text that has the capacity to generate politics within the church. Its reading is never neutral: it will always be political.

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Mlambo Bernard, Pastor in a Pentecostal Church and Lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, Interview, 22 March 2011.

Muguti Mavis, a young woman who goes to a Pentecostal Church, June 2011.

Tambudzayi, an elderly woman who goes to a Pentecostal church, June 2011.

Tongai, an elderly man in one of the Mainline churches, Interview, July 2011.

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## On the Series

*"I do not know of any positive association with bias in English but I think it is ironical and I would suggest we keep it. My reasons are simple, first; there is indeed a lot of bias in the manner the Bible has been used in Africa, and Europe etc. BiAS would be an interesting series title for us. Second, the series is taking a deliberate decision to focus more on the Bible in Africa, which essentially is a bias also. I therefore think this title should clearly explain the core of what we are going to do, and maybe at the end of the series people will realise bias is not always bad."*

(M. R. Gunda)

With this series of essays collections and monographs on Bible in Africa and Africa related Biblical Studies we want to open up a forum of academic exchange on an international level. This exchange is usually not quite easy, especially between scholars in Africa and in the West. The reasons are lack of library sources on one side, lack of interest on the other. Presenting a book series which is published in Germany but available all over the world via internet we hope to improve communication a bit. We invite all Biblical scholars dealing with Africa related topics to bring their best studies into the BiAS series. Online publication is without any costs; only printed exemplars need to be funded.

*Joachim Kügler – Lovemore Togarasei – Masiwa R. Gunda*



This volume is based on the International Bible Symposium “The Bible and Politics in Africa” which was held in summer 2010 in Kloster Banz (Germany). The IBS 2010 was organised by Prof. Kügler’s team at the Chair for New Testament Studies at Bamberg University and was generously funded and hosted by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Munich/ Kloster Banz. Some of the articles published here are based on papers presented at IBS 2010. The editors, however, added some articles to broaden the discussion and to also give a voice to those who could not be present at the symposium. The topic of Biblical influence on politics and of political uses of the Bible is of course not merely an African topic. Christian tradition has always stressed that it not only wants to show ways to heaven but also to reconstruct this world according to God’s will. However the topic seems especially relevant in African societies as many of them ascribe a paramount role to the “Word of God” and thus the Bible seems to be used most directly as a handbook for political actions. With their critical analytical approach the contributors of BiAS 7 try to meet this special challenge for Contextual Biblical Studies which has to be taken more seriously than it used to be in academic research.

### The Authors

BiAS 7 contains articles written by established and budding scholars from Botswana, Germany, Kenya, Namibia, Netherlands, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe: Phillemon **Chamburuka**, Ezra **Chitando** (Prof. PhD), Stephanie **Feder**, Rev. Jephthah Kiara **Gathaka**, Masiwa Ragies **Gunda** (PhD), Jannie **Hunter** (Prof. PhD), Joachim **Kügler** (Prof. Dr. theol. habil.), Francis **Machingura** (PhD), Tapiwa Praise **Mapuranga** (PhD), Canisius **Mwandayi** (PhD), Moji **Ruele** (PhD), Eliot **Tofa** (PhD), Adriaan **van Klinken** (PhD), Elizabeth **Vengeyi**, Obvious **Vengeyi**, Pieter **Verster** (Prof. PhD), Gerald **West** (Prof. PhD).

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